

# Developing the Competence of Organizing Experiential Activities for Pre-service Teachers – The Case in Vietnam

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**Abstract---** Investing on human capital via enhancement of educational quality as one of the important factors to promote economic development all over the world. Basically, it is important to enhance pre-service teachers of primary education with necessary professional competences to implement teaching activities at primary schools. Based on relevant research on experiential activities, professional competence development for pre-service teachers of primary education and the general education curriculum in the case of Vietnam, the article develops a competency framework for organizing experiential learning activities for pre-service teachers of primary education in the context of education curriculum innovation; and simultaneously suggested fundamental solutions to improve pre-service teachers' competence in organizing experiential activities. To achieve these above-mentioned goals, some research methods are used by the researchers including document analysis, pedagogical observation, and educational experience summarizing method.

**Keywords---** Competence, Experiential Activities, Human Capital, Pre-service Teachers, Vietnam.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Experiential activity in which theory and awareness are associated with practice and action is closely linked to teaching activities and contributes to the formation of students' appropriate feelings and beliefs (Clark et al., 2010). This activity as the best condition to train students' fundamental skills is also helpful in promoting students' role, engagement and activeness so that educational goals could be accomplished.

Many psychologists and educators have been doing research into experiential activities and emphasized the important role of these activities in teaching and education. The first researcher to mention is Leonchev's activity theory: psychology is formed through activity (Leonchev, 1989) while Vygotsky's theory on social interaction indicated the necessity of appreciation towards supported discovery in classroom education, and Piaget's theory in the development of creative thinking stated that learning activities are self-supported and creative thinking activities (Piaget, 1996). Further discussed, Kolb et al. (2001) in the experiential learning theory, point out that learning from experience is a learning process whereby knowledge and competence are created through the transformation of experience. Learning through participatory experiences is viewed as opposed to teacher-led interactive learning

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(Clark et al., 2010). According to (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2001), career and technical education (CTE) serves the purpose of providing learning experiences that help student explore career areas and prepare for employment and independent living. Therefore, in learning and education, if learners are independent, they can transform their knowledge and social experience into their own experience. However, these studies mainly refer to experiential activities as a path for mastering the lesson. To put it more specific, learning is through experiencing.

Based on these arguments, this aim of this study is to analyze the effects of the competence development and building in organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers in a developing country in Asia. Regarding the methodology, this study is to employ qualitative methods, in which the study will analyze the competence enhancement through organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers in Vietnam. This paper is organized as follows. Following this Introduction, Section 2 presents briefly the literature review. Section 3 discusses methodology development. Further, Section 4 indicates the empirical findings and discussion, followed by Conclusions in Section 5.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the trend of global economic integration, focusing on human resources quality and enhancement of educational system by developing competence of organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers has been considered such a major resource of economic growth for each country's economy (Nguyen, 2020a). This process have expected to support more resources about capital, technology as well as modern management skills in particularly developing country (Tran & Van; 2013; Nguyen, 2020b; Van & Do, 2020). Vietnam has been known as one of the dynamic emerging countries with great achievement in Asian Pacific region. In association with the political and economic integration, Vietnam has robustly advocated more education and highly-skilled workforce in order to catch up the development of the economy (Tran et al., 2020).

Further discussed on experiential learning teaching approach, Schreck et al. (2019) indicate that experiential learning teaching approach will be beneficial in recreation graduates' preparation. Lam et al. (2020) based on an interview of a sample of 23 children, and parents joined in one-to-one, and 25–30-minute period, and describe that the program supported children by enhancing knowledge of physical activity of parents and children, increasing confidence in physical activity, and generating physical and psychological wealth. Not only that, the program also relieved children's contribution in physical activity as well as increased perceptions of physical activity.

Discussed on the competence of pre-service teachers through organizing experiential activities, numerous empirical studies have focused. As suggested in Clark et al. (2010) studied on the nature of experiential activities and classified them while some others explored creative experiential activities such as Dinh (2014) with the work 'Creative experiential activities – a perspective' from the theory 'Learning from experience' based on or Le (2014) in the study 'Some issues on creative experiential activities in the new education curriculum. These studies have predominantly contributed on clarifying creative experiential activities from the perspective of educational activities, applying the achievements of different subjects and considering social requirements to formulate the activity program for students.

Inheriting the views of these researchers, some other studies have significantly supported more specific work into experiential activities in pedagogical universities' training such as (Nguyen, 2018) with the study 'A study on the methods of organizing experiential activities in extra-curriculum activities for the Ethics subject at primary school. According to (Tran, 2016) with 'training on the skills of organizing creative experiential activities for pre-service teachers of primary education faculty at Hanoi Capital University', these works mention the organizing of experiential activities and presented a system of skills for pre-service teachers in organizing experiential activities. However, there has been little research on developing the competence of organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers of primary education. For this, the study on developing the competence of organizing experiential activities by the researcher is regarded of great significance.

In order to well implement experiential activities in the current education curriculum, it is important that teachers should have adequate competences, especially the competence of organizing experiential activities because experiential activity is a compulsory subject at primary school level in the new education curriculum. Pedagogical universities, therefore, have the mission to train qualified pre-service teachers to meet with the requirements of the comprehensive educational reforms.

It is shown from the past training period, especially during practicum and practice sessions that pre-service teachers of primary education in third and fourth school year have hardly guided primary school students in educational activities in general and experiential activities in particular. Besides, they are found to not only lack profound awareness about experiential activities but also be inexperienced in planning and organizing these activities. To overcome these drawbacks, it is necessary for pedagogical universities to conduct relevant studies and have specific measures so that the effectiveness of developing students' pedagogical competence in universities could be improved.

To support the aim of the study discussed above, this research will conduct to answer these following questions:

- What is the competence of organizing experiential activities?
- What component competences do pre-service teachers need?
- How can this competence be developed for pre-service teachers of primary education in the current situation?

This work, therefore, is the initial study on the issue of developing the competence of organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers of Primary education.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### ***3.1. Experiential activity***

##### ***Definition of activity***

Activity theory is associated with the works by Leonchev (1989) and Piaget (1996). In Vietnamese Dictionary, activity is the conducting of different kinds of work which have a close relationship with each other to achieve a certain social goal' (Hoang, 2007). Therefore, we hold that activity is the conducting of a certain work for a specific purpose.

### ***Definition of experience***

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, ‘experience is understood as ‘trải nghiệm’. While ‘trải’ means ‘used to undergo, know or suffer’, ‘nghiệm’ means ‘undergo practical study to realize something is true’ (Hoang, 2007). In English, ‘experience’ is used to mention ‘knowledge or skills from doing, seeing or feeling things’ and ‘something that happens to someone who affects how they feel’. As a verb, experience is the action that learners interact with the object. As a noun, it means knowledge or skills gained from doing, seeing or feeling.

Dewey (1986) who had many in-depth studies into experience indicated that only through experience can children find out the values of the things they have experienced. In Vietnam, since the use of ‘experiential activity’ is not popular, there are a variety of definitions of this term as follows. In addition, experiential activity is the organization of educational activities for students through their practical activities in science and technology, community service, social humanity, culture, arts, aesthetics, sports, recreation and entertainment, etc. to help them form and develop their personality qualities (Dang, 2016).

It is evident that experiential activities are educational activities that every individual student, with the instruction and organization from educators, directly performs in schools or in the society to develop their feelings, morality, personality qualities, competence and accumulate personal experiences as well as promote their potential creativity (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

According to Tran (2018), experiential activity is the action in which the subject directly participates in an event or directly interacts with a certain object to form knowledge, skills or feelings about that event or object. Furthermore, Dinh (2014) has used the term ‘creative experiential activity’ because she believed that creative experiential activities are educational activities through personal experiences and creativity that students connect their experiences gained from school and real life to accumulate more experiences and transform them into competences.

Experiential activity is the activity in which the subject directly participates in an event or interacts with another subject to form knowledge, skills and feelings about that event or subject. In teaching, experiential activity means that students perform their learning tasks with direct and active participation or interact directly with learning subjects to form knowledge, skills and feelings of those subjects. Further investigated on this, the nature of experiential activities is that in a narrow meaning, they are educational activities which are designed and organized to enhance learners’ experiences and creativity and meet with the required educational goals. This is also the direction that we followed in our study of experiential activities.

In conclusion, experiential activities are educational activities of which the content and organization are to enable students’ direct participation into different exchanging activities so that students can, on the one hand, form and develop their qualities, thoughts, will, feelings, values, life skills and other necessary competences that people should have in the modern life; and on the other hand, improve the ability to create new valuable things for individuals and the society as a whole.

In the General Education Curriculum, indicating that ‘experiential activities are designed into different topics and that students can choose the modules and topics which are suitable to their aspiration and also their school’s ability to organize the activities’ (Nguyen, 2018). As to the time allocation, each class normally has 105 periods for these experiential activities and these activities are compulsory at primary schools.

### **3.2. Methodology**

Following the previous studies, the discussion of organizing competence development of experiential activities for pre-service teachers has been investigated in a large amount of developed and developing countries, and countries in transition (Тлегенова, 1978; Dinh, 2014; Le, 2014). In the case of Vietnam, we will follow in the following methods:

- The methods of analyzing and synthesizing were used for materials related to experiential activities at primary education level and those related to methods of organizing experiential activities to generally study theoretical issues of the articles. Besides, the primary education curriculum of several universities was also studied to evaluate its updating in comparison with the General Education Curriculum.
- Interviewing was used to investigate pre-service teachers’ awareness of experiential activities, and the preparation of pedagogical universities and lecturers in applying the General Education Curriculum.
- Pedagogical observations were used during pre-service teachers’ practicum to evaluate the overview of developing the competence mentioned above for them.
- Educational experience summarizing was used to evaluate the general situation and initially draw necessary measures or solutions for developing such competence for pre-service teachers.

### **3.3. Competence of organizing experiential activities and its development**

In this study, it is strongly supported that the competence of organizing experiential activities is as the implementation of actions based on the flexible coordination of knowledge, skills and experience about the organization of experiential activities, the attitude and professional values as well as unique physiological and psychological factors to successfully and effectively organized experiential activities for students to accomplish educational goals under suitable conditions. Furthermore, developing the competence of organizing experiential activities is the process of transforming and improving different component competences structured in the competence of organizing experiential activities more profoundly, diversely in a higher level.

Developing the competence of organizing experiential activities for pre-service teachers is a continuous process in which purposeful and systematic activities are constantly designed to act on different structural components of the competence of organizing experiential activities. Following educational rules, these activities interact, develop and change the quality of those structural components to help students effectively fulfill their educational goals in schools. Additionally, the process of forming and developing the competence of organizing experiential activities is required to be associated with the accumulation of not only knowledge and practice but also actual experiences of performing the work that primary school teachers need to do in reality and guarantee its effective implementation.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

#### *4.1.1 Significance of developing the competence of organizing experiential activities in the context of education renovation*

Organizing experiential activities is considered as essential part of the current fundamental and comprehensive education reforms in developing Vietnamese students' comprehensive personality qualities. Schools should be the places where students are supported in the best conditions and systematic instructions about the social life so that they can experience and practice to become real citizens of the society even when they are at schools.

The new general education curriculum puts forward high requirements about the organization of experiential activities which emphasize not only the importance of these activities but also the requirements of primary school teachers' competences. Primary school is the first level of education in which specific experiential activities are applied with the new general education curriculum. For this reason, teachers need to have adequate competence in organizing experiential activities in accordance with the requirements of education innovation. This means that pre-service teachers of primary education need to approach, form and develop necessary competences for organizing experiential activities even when they are in university. It is further discussed that developing the competence of organizing experiential activities is regarded significant in the process of developing pedagogical competence for students which is to:

- Contribute to achieve the objectives for the new period as presented in the Education Development Strategies of training human resources who not only have creativity competence, independent thinking, civic responsibility, professional morality and skills, foreign language competence, and labor disciplines but also are capable of creating jobs and flexibly adapting to the fluctuations in the labor market. One of the objectives, besides, is to train people who have adequate ability to compete in the region and the world.
- Form and develop other competences such as pedagogical communication competence, activity designing competence, and the competence to solve problems occurring in educational settings, etc.
- Help students expand their awareness scope in almost social areas such as culture, arts, traditional customs, social etiquettes, economy, politics, etc. when they are asked to study the topics which can be organized into the activities.
- Develop professional sentiment for university students regarding their love for career and education; their professional responsibility, fairness, humanity, tolerance, love, and respect to have a good relationship with future primary school students. By this, their intrinsic motivation of self-training and cultivating could also be developed.
- Form students' learning interests especially when students take the units of training pedagogical skills. This is fundamental for students to apply what they have learned into practice and examine the effectiveness of the ways that such knowledge has been delivered in teaching. Moreover, students can also self-evaluate their achievement in organizing educational activities.

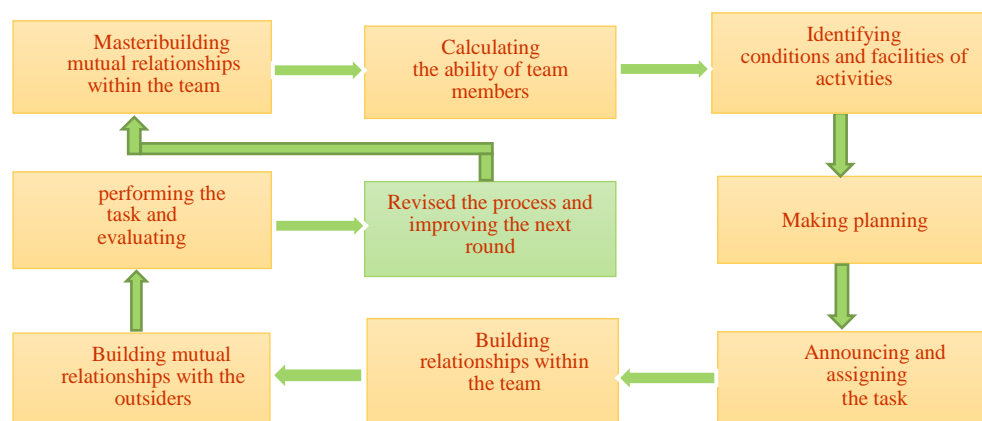
#### 4.1.2. Competency framework of organizing experiential activities

##### 4.1.2.1. Determining the competence of organizing experiential activities

The competence of organizing experiential activities is a complex-structured competence and consists of different component competences.

##### Structure of organized activities

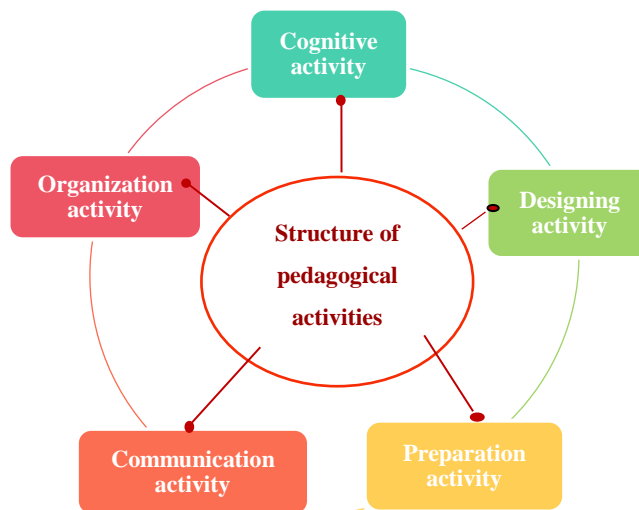
According to Umanxki (1986), an activity is effective or not that depends on the ability of the activity organizer. By this, the study outlined a general structure of organized activities of 9 steps in Vietnam. Figure 1 describes the steps of organized activities:



Source: Synthesis of the authors (2020)

Fig.1: Structure of organized activities

Further discussed on structure of organizing experimental activities, it is very important to recognize that a suitable structure will support for the quality of experiential activities for elementary pedagogical students. Depending on specific situation, teachers need to follow the following activities as in the Figure 2:



Source: Synthesis of the authors (2020)

Fig.2: Structure of pedagogical activities

Figure 2 describes the structure of pedagogical activities in Vietnam. It includes cognitive activity, designing activity, preparation activity, and communication activity, organization activity. Firstly, cognitive activity includes some actions related to the knowledge accumulation, the purpose, conditions and ways to perform the activity. Secondly, designing activity depicts the actions related to the planning to optimize the task performing process. Thirdly, preparation activity describes the selection and arrangement of task contents before the task is performed. Finally, communication activity includes the action related to the formation of mutual relationships between members when participating in the activity. And, organization activity includes task-performing actions.

### *Steps in organizing experiential activities*

To successfully organize an activity, it is normal that a specific procedure with necessary steps in an appropriate order would be provided and that the subject needs to have equivalent component competences for each step to accomplish that procedure. The steps in a procedure for organizing an activity normally include organizing cognitive activities, planning activity organization, implementing the activity and evaluating it. In addition, by studying the structure and steps in organizing activities carefully, a solid basis for developing a competency framework for pre-service teachers in organizing experiential activities could be resulted.

#### *4.1.2.2 The competency framework of organizing experiential activities*

Based on relevant research and the structure of organized activities and pedagogical activities as well as steps in the procedure of organizing activities, the researchers concluded that in order to have the competence of organizing experiential activities, students need to have these following component competences as Table 1:

Table 1: The competency framework of organizing experiential activities

Competency	Content
<b>Cognitive competence about the experiential activities</b>	
<b>The competence to learn about experiential activities</b>	Before organizing experiential activities, students are required to have adequate knowledge about experiential activities. This helps students not only understand the nature of experiential activities but also distinguish experiential learning and experiential activities in teaching their future primary school students.
<b>Competence in determining the conditions and means of organizing experiential activities</b>	This competence requires students to have the ability to actively access the resources, expand their knowledge of different fields such as economy, politics, culture, society, and tradition not only in Vietnam but also in the world so that they can design suitable experiential activities according to different local conditions.
<b>Competence of designing experiential activities</b>	
<b>Competence in determining the educational goals of experiential activities</b>	In organizing and implementing experiential activities, students need to have profound awareness about the role of these activities in developing future students' qualities and abilities. Besides, students are also required to figure out the qualities and abilities that organizing experiential activities could result in so that specific actions could be appropriately oriented afterwards.
<b>Competence in determining the content and selecting the ways of organizing experiential activities</b>	Competence in determining the content and selecting the ways of organizing experiential activities: The content of experiential activities is usually originated from educational topics and designed in close accordance with other activities in schools, the seasonal cycle and the logical development of students' social experiences. To develop this competence, students need to be active, flexible and creative in selecting the content for experiential activities which are associated with the local needs and practical conditions.
<b>Competence in establishing the procedure of organizing experiential activities</b>	Competence in establishing the procedure of organizing experiential activities: Students need to have the ability to visualize clearly the overall organization of the activities which is helpful for them to be more active and confident in their work.
<b>Competence in implementing experiential activities</b>	
<b>Competence in instructing future students to implement experiential activities</b>	Students have the ability to instruct their future students to respectively participate in the activities in a clear order as planned.
<b>Competence in managing and controlling experiential activities</b>	
<b>Competence in solving problems in experiential activities</b>	Students can be flexible, active and creative in different situations arising when organizing experiential activities.
<b>Competence in evaluating experiential activities</b>	
<b>Competence in developing evaluating criteria and evaluating scale</b>	Competence in establishing the procedure of organizing experiential activities
<b>Competence in summarizing the experience of organizing experiential activities</b>	Students are able to assess the effectiveness of the activities, or aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each step as well as the corresponding reasons for the achieved results so that they can gain experience for organizing other experiential activities afterwards

Source: Synthesis of the authors (2020)



## **4.2. Discussion**

From the relevant research into the significance of developing the competence of organizing experiential activities in the new method of education and practice in the context of making contribution to develop the competence of pre-service teachers of primary education in organizing experiential activities in the case of Vietnam, we suggest these following discussion.

### ***4.2.1. Improving students' awareness about the importance of the competence in organizing experiential activities***

Helping students to have appropriate awareness about the role and significance of developing the competence of organizing experiential activities and provide them with adequate knowledge about the relevant content and procedure so that they can be educated to be more self-disciplined and active in developing their competence of organizing experiential activities to meet with the teacher training requirements nowadays.

Since the new General Education Curriculum has not been applied into actual teaching, students are found not to adequately approach and be aware of the importance of experiential activities as well as the organizing of these activities in teaching. The mission for teachers in university, therefore, is that they need to allow their students' access to the new requirements so that they could be trained to be qualified human resources for education innovation. Throughout teaching, frequent professional skill training, practicum and other practical educational activities, the university always focuses on educating students about their professional awareness not only to help them notice the significance of organizing experiential activities in future teaching's career but also to motivate them in learning and practicing.

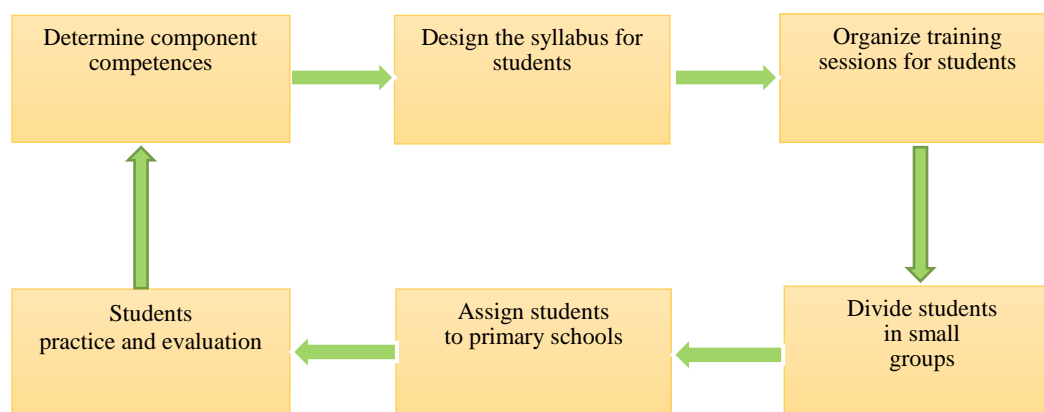
### ***4.2.2. Developing the standards for the competence of organizing experiential activities as a compulsory requirement for students' graduation***

This is the basis for teacher-training institutes to develop and adjust the curriculum for developing students' competence in organizing experiential activities. By this, it is possible for them to develop the syllabus, curriculum and organize training activities to develop pedagogical students' competence of organizing experiential activities. The standards for the competence of organizing experiential activities, on the one hand, help learners to have clear ideas about the goals they need to achieve for the competence of organizing experiential activities and thus have appropriate plans in learning and practicing. On the other hand, they help teachers to have appropriate orientation in specifying their teaching objectives, selecting effective teaching methods and assessing students for graduation (during their teaching and students' practicum).

### ***4.2.3. Establishing the procedure to develop students' competence of organizing experiential activities in accordance with the practical teaching at schools***

This solution requires the university to establish a procedure of necessary steps to help subjects participate in the developing of students' competence in organizing experiential activities reasonably and effectively. Besides, in following the steps in this procedure, it is necessary that theory should be associated with practice. The solution is also considered to be completely consistent with the process of acquiring knowledge in education because the

formation of any competence is not limited to either theoretical learning or assumed practice but needs to be implemented in educational practice. Below is the procedure to develop students' competence of organizing experiential activities that we suggest in relation to practical teaching at primary schools.



Source: Synthesis of the authors (2020)

Fig.3: Steps to develop students' competence of organizing experiential activities

#### 4.2.4. Providing professional training for lecturers who teach pre-service teachers of Primary education

This suggested solution is to improve lecturers' professional competence in organizing experiential activities by which the quality of pedagogical skill training in university could also be improved.

- Enable lecturers to approach and learn about the teaching content of experiential activities at schools by inviting them to participate in training courses held by the Ministry of Education and Training, or inviting experts and researchers who have profound knowledge to their university and train lectures on experiential activities organizing, etc.
- Organize seminars or workshops to help lecturers approach professional knowledge from different perspectives and exchange their experiences with experts of relevant fields to improve the quality of lecturers' teaching in general and the effectiveness of developing the competence of students in organizing experiential activities.
- Organize effective professional activities for groups or teams specializing in experiential activities.

These specialized groups or teams should have appropriate views about experiential activities and the importance of equipping students with the competence in organizing experiential activities to establish specific plans for their meetings and discussion. Each lecturer, on the other hand, not only needs to be aware of the importance of self-improvement, but also is required to constantly update new achievements in the development of students' competence of organizing experiential activities.

#### 4.2.5. Promotion of students' activeness in their practice and developing the competence of organizing experiential activities

This solution suggests that it aims to maximize pre-service teachers' intrinsic motivation to participate in the process of developing their competence of organizing experiential activities in the most effective way. The

university, therefore, needs to educate pre-service teachers to have awareness, activeness and self-discipline in learning so that they can be aware of the importance of developing the competence of organizing experiential activities with which their sense of self-study and self-practice could be stimulated for the development of other necessary competences. Accordingly, pre-service teachers need to be given with favorable conditions in their self-study and other developing activities (i.e. materials, study space, learning facilities, playground, etc.) so that they can actively and effectively participate in their learning and developing the competence of organizing experiential activities.

## V. CONCLUSION

Focusing on human resources quality as well as enhancement of educational system by developing competence of pedagogical teachers has been considered such a major resource of human resources in specific and economic growth in general. In the process of training pre-service teachers of primary education in university, it is essential to develop the competence of organizing experiential activities to meet with the requirements of current education innovation. However, due to the limit of time on the content for developing the competence of organizing experiential activities, there should be adequate attention from the university to these educational activities. Besides, each lecturer should have their plans to implement and give pre-service teachers opportunities to practice and achieve educational goals so that the requirements of the society on teacher training in the new period could be met. Despite its advantages, experiential activities have not become popular in Vietnam's educational system. Currently, experiential activities exist in the General Education Curriculum Project have not been officially used in the teaching practice.

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