



Case Management Service Quality in Social Work in Primary Schools (Case Studies of South Central Coastal Provinces, Vietnam)

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Abstract

Case management is one of the social work services that is meaningful in supporting the resolution of difficult personal problems at school, especially for primary school students who are in the process of forming and developing their personalities. The study applied the SERVQUAL model to assess the satisfaction level of primary school teachers with the quality of case management services in social work in the South Central Coast region, Vietnam. Data were collected from 238 primary school teachers in 3 provinces and cities in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam, namely Da Nang, Quang Ngai and Phu Yen. The assessment model includes 5 factors: reliability, responsiveness, service capacity, empathy and service implementation conditions, measured by a 5-level Likert scale. The results showed that the satisfaction level with case management services was quite good ($M = 3.78$), in which "service capacity" and "empathy" were rated the highest. However, "trust" scored the lowest, reflecting some limitations in implementing commitments. Satisfaction levels differed significantly by locality and area of residence, with urban teachers and teachers in Da Nang and Quang Ngai being more satisfied than those in Phu Yen and rural areas. Correlation analysis showed that "responsiveness" and "trust" were the strongest influencing factors. From there, the study proposed recommendations to improve the quality of case management services in school social work.

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1. Introduction

Social work services aim to ensure equitable educational opportunities; ensure that students are mentally, physically, and emotionally present in the classroom; and promote respect and dignity for all students (Franklin, 2009; NASW, 2012; Allen-Meares *et al.*, 2013) ^[12, 18, 2]. There are many factors that influence the need for social work services in schools including: the students themselves, their families and friends, facilities, staff, teachers, and laws and policies (Do Van Trai *et al.*, 2019) ^[11]. School social work interventions and services are directed at students in need to improve their social, mental/behavioral health and academic outcomes, followed by primary and secondary prevention activities to promote school climate, school culture, teacher-student-parent interactions, and parent well-being (Ding *et al.*, 2023) ^[10].

In the development of social work service models, case management is considered appropriate in social work activities in hospitals, schools, in the community, in home visits with coordination of services and the need to coordinate services, as well as being widely applied in models of improving the quality of social services in the community today (Tran Van Kham, 2016) ^[27]. Moore (1990) ^[17] emphasized that case management focuses on helping individuals and groups to develop their full potential, thereby facilitating more effective interaction with the wider social environment. Case management as a process of social workers on behalf of clients planning, searching and monitoring services from social organizations (Barker, 1999) ^[4].

NASW has also issued 10 standards of case management in social work related to the qualifications, expertise, and professionalism of social workers when conducting case management services in general (NASW, 2013) ^[19].

In Vietnam, case management is institutionalized in Decree 111/2024/ND-CP of the Vietnamese Government. Accordingly, case management is a service to manage users of social work services at the grassroots and in the community. Furthermore, case management in schools is a social work service that is important in contributing to significantly improving and enhancing students' learning outcomes, and students who access this service have higher learning outcomes than students who do not use case management services in schools (Aziz & Salih, 2023; Young *et al.*, 2020) ^[3, 29]. This is also demonstrated in the research results of Bates and Zhang (2024) ^[15].

However, school-based programs aimed at addressing students' social needs have not yet been fully implemented to support the learning and well-being of all adolescents, and the provision of case management services has shown positive significance for students' social healthcare (Keeton *et al.*, 2024) ^[15]. Through archival data analysis of school social workers, Thompson *et al.* (2019) ^[26] identified the influence of various factors on school social work practices. Specifically, higher levels of professional qualification and practice experience are associated with greater likelihood of utilizing assessments, evidence-based programs/practices, and regular participation in universal school-wide prevention efforts.

Additionally, the coordination in the provision and exchange of support information for each case, as well as the assignment, supervision, and evaluation of managed cases within these services, remains unclear at the primary school level (Aaron, 2017; Okayasu & Iida, 2024) ^[1, 24]. Consequently, school social workers serving as case managers are key agents of change in students' educational processes. Moreover, the effectiveness of school social work interventions through case management services can be maximized when social workers collaborate closely with students' families (the clients), and establish cooperative support networks among school stakeholders. Such collaboration can help school social workers overcome challenges encountered during the implementation of case management activities (Blackmon & Cain, 2015) ^[6].

Service quality is reflected in the quality of the product or service itself, as perceived through client satisfaction (in this context, clients include students, parents, and teachers). Clients form perceptions of service quality based on performance evaluations at multiple levels, ultimately integrating these assessments into an overall perception of service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001) ^[7]. Accordingly, user satisfaction is considered a key indicator of service quality (Cronin, 2000) ^[9]. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is also assessed post-purchase and is influenced by the actual

experience of consuming the service (Yi & La, 2004; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2006) ^[28].

Thus, to meet learners' needs, social work services in general and case management in particular require continuous improvement in quality within the context of school social work. Although there have been notable developments in the provision of school social work services in Vietnam, case management services still face certain limitations related to human resources, infrastructure, and implementation conditions (Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen, 2020) ^[21, 23]. Therefore, this study aims to assess satisfaction with the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools in the South Central Coast of Vietnam, serving as a foundation for improving and enhancing the quality of these services, thereby contributing to the holistic development of students.

2. Methods

Service quality plays a crucial role in generating customer satisfaction, including within the context of social work services in educational settings. One of the most widely used models for evaluating service quality is the SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985. This model is designed to assess service quality from the customer's perspective, emphasizing that quality cannot be measured in an abstract or generalized way, but rather depends on the customer's perception after experiencing the service.

Developed from the "Five Gaps Model" of service quality, SERVQUAL posits that service quality is determined by the comparison between customers' initial expectations and their actual experiences. The model evaluates service quality across five core dimensions, using a set of 22 observed variables. These dimensions include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL has thus become a useful tool for assessing and improving service quality, contributing to enhanced customer satisfaction across various sectors, including school social work services (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) ^[25].

Based on this theoretical foundation, the present study measures teachers' satisfaction with the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam. The assessment is conducted using a model composed of five main dimensions with a total of 21 observed variables: reliability, service responsiveness, service competence, and empathy, each dimension includes 4 measurement items. In addition, the dimension related to service implementation conditions comprises 5 measurement items. Data collected from the study were processed using SPSS software, version 26. These components of service quality in school-based case management are evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, with the mean score ranges interpreted as follows:

Table 1: Interpretation of Mean Score Scale

Score	Mean Score Range	Evaluation Level
1	1.00–1.80	Completely dissatisfied
2	1.81–2.60	Dissatisfied
3	2.61–3.40	Slightly satisfied
4	3.41–4.20	Satisfied
5	4.21–5.00	Completely satisfied

In order to evaluate the quality of case management services in social work in primary schools in the South Central Coast region, Vietnam, Quantitative research was conducted on the basis of simple random sampling method from 240 teachers of 3 provinces in the South Central Coast region, including: Da Nang city, Quang Ngai and Phu Yen. In which, Da Nang is the central city of the Central region, with strong socio-economic development conditions, a synchronously invested education system, representing the urbanized and highly developed area. Quang Ngai is a province with an average level of development, combining urban and rural areas, representing the transitional development area. Phu Yen is a province with many difficult areas, mountainous areas, ethnic minorities, representing the rural and more difficult areas in the South Central Coast region. This selection creates a balance in development characteristics, reflecting the diversity of the region. After the data review and cleaning process, 238 valid survey forms were included in the analysis. The survey sample consisted of 238 teachers, with a majority being female (70.2%), while males accounted for 29.8%, and no participants identified as another gender. Most respondents resided in urban areas (52.9%), with the remaining 47.1% living in rural areas. In terms of ethnicity, the vast majority were Kinh (98.3%), and only 1.7% belonged to ethnic minority groups. The participants were distributed across three provinces: Da Nang (37.4%), Phu Yen (31.5%), and Quang Ngai (31.1%). The age of respondents mainly ranged from 25 to 55 years, with the 35–

45 and 45–55 age groups being the most represented (each accounting for 31.1%), followed by the 25–35 age group (28.6%). Regarding work experience, most participants had over 15 years of teaching experience (37.4%), followed by those with 5–10 years (32.4%) and 10–15 years (22.7%), while only 7.6% had less than 5 years of experience. In terms of educational attainment, the majority of teachers held a bachelor's degree (93.7%), while 6.3% held a master's degree; none had obtained a doctoral degree.

3. Results and Discussion

To evaluate the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools in the South Central Coast provinces of Vietnam, a pilot survey was conducted with 100 teachers to test the measurement scale. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis indicated that the scale, with 21 observed variables, had a reliability coefficient of 0.931 (> 0.60), demonstrating high reliability (Hoang & Chu, 2008). Furthermore, all 21 observed variables had item-total correlation coefficients greater than 0.3 (ranging from 0.336 to 0.792), indicating that no items were removed from the scale.

The study assessing the level of satisfaction with the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools in the South Central Coast provinces of Vietnam was conducted across five dimensions. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Satisfaction with the Quality of Case Management Services

Dimensions	N	M	SD
Service reliability	238	3.82	0.72
Service responsiveness	238	3.88	0.76
Service competence	238	3.90	0.77
Empathy	238	3.89	0.77
Service implementation conditions	238	3.86	0.63
Overall satisfaction with case management services	238	3.78	0.87

The survey results on the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools indicate that teachers rated the service relatively high, with a mean score of $M = 3.78$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 0.87$. However, this overall satisfaction score is slightly lower than the mean scores of most individual service quality dimensions, which range from 3.82 to 3.90. Among the five dimensions, service competence received the highest mean score ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 0.77$), followed by empathy ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 0.77$) and service responsiveness ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.76$). These results suggest that the personnel responsible for delivering case management services in schools are highly regarded for their professional qualifications, empathetic understanding, and ability to respond flexibly and promptly to student needs. This is also consistent with the study of Okayasu and Iida (2024) when affirming the role of social workers as well as school teachers in supporting students through case management. The dimension service implementation conditions also received a relatively favorable evaluation ($M = 3.86$; $SD = 0.63$), and the lowest standard deviation among all factors indicates a relatively high level of agreement among respondents concerning the adequacy of school infrastructure and supportive environment. However, service reliability received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.82$; $SD = 0.72$), suggesting persistent concerns regarding the consistency, transparency, and ability of the case

management service to fulfill its commitments within the school social work context.

On the other hand, ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels with case management services across teachers' residential areas, with $F(2, 235) = 37.53$, $p = 0.001$. This result indicates that the geographical location in which teachers reside significantly affects their satisfaction with the service. Specifically, teachers in Da Nang and Quang Ngai reported notably higher satisfaction levels ($M = 4.08$) compared to those in Phu Yen ($M = 3.16$). This suggests that geographic disparities are associated with differing perceptions of case management service quality. It implies that local conditions or the manner in which services are implemented in each province may be influencing teachers' levels of satisfaction.

The t-test analysis also indicated a statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels with case management services based on teachers' residential areas, with $t(236) = -7.54$, $p = 0.001$. Specifically, teachers living in urban areas reported higher satisfaction ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.52$) compared to those in rural areas ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.99$). These results suggest that the place of residence significantly influences teachers' perceptions of the quality of case management services. This disparity may reflect differences in service implementation conditions, accessibility, and available support resources between urban and rural settings. This

finding is consistent with both international and domestic research on service inequalities between urban and rural areas. For example, Chen *et al.* (2016) ^[8] found that urban teachers in China generally report higher satisfaction with student support services due to better access to resources, availability of on-site specialists, and more favorable working environments. Similarly, a study by Le Thi My Dung (2020) ^[16] on primary schools in the suburban areas of Ho Chi Minh City highlighted shortages of specialized

personnel, support materials, and coordination mechanisms in rural schools, causing rural teachers to feel "left behind" in accessing student support services.

To gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing teachers' satisfaction with case management services, the study conducted a correlation analysis between satisfaction levels and the constituent components of service quality (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations Between Satisfaction with Case Management Services and Service Quality Factors

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Case Management Service	1					
2. Service reliability	.811**	1				
3. Service responsiveness	.821**	.911**	1			
4. Service competence	.791**	.932**	.924**	1		
5. Empathy	.766**	.895**	.915**	.924**	1	
6. Service implementation conditions	.738**	.864**	.890**	.882**	.898**	1

The table presents the correlations between teachers' satisfaction with case management services and the five constituent factors of service quality in primary schools. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, indicating that these factors significantly influence teachers' overall satisfaction with the quality of case management services. Among them, service responsiveness ($r = 0.821$) and service reliability ($r = 0.811$) showed the highest correlations, reflecting that in the primary school environment, where students are young and vulnerable timeliness and flexibility in response, along with reliability in the support process, are key factors. Service competence also exhibited a strong correlation ($r = 0.791$), indicating that the professional capacity of the service providers is an important component in teachers' evaluations. The remaining two factors, empathy ($r = 0.766$) and service implementation conditions ($r = 0.738$), also positively influenced satisfaction, albeit to a lesser extent. This suggests that emotional factors and the supportive environment play a complementary role in the overall effectiveness of case management services within school social work in primary schools.

These findings are fully consistent with numerous previous studies in the fields of social services and education, especially those applying the SERVQUAL model. For example, Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao (2019) ^[22], in her evaluation of the quality of support services for students with special circumstances in schools of the Mekong Delta region, also found that responsiveness had the highest correlation with beneficiary satisfaction ($r = 0.79$), followed by reliability ($r = 0.75$). This result is explained by the need for rapid and timely responses in contexts where students are vulnerable, particularly in resource-poor areas such as rural regions. Additionally, the study by Nguyen Hu Minh *et al.* (2021) ^[20] emphasized the role of service competence with a high correlation coefficient ($r = 0.78$), reflecting the importance of professional skills and the ability of social workers to collaborate effectively with teachers during service implementation. Although empathy and service implementation conditions showed somewhat lower correlation coefficients (ranging from 0.65 to 0.70), they still demonstrated a positive influence on enhancing the overall effectiveness of services within the school environment.

Based on the correlation results, it can be affirmed that satisfaction with case management services in primary schools is strongly influenced by factors related to

responsiveness and reliability, alongside professional competence and service implementation conditions. This provides a crucial foundation for primary schools and organizations delivering school social work services to enhance workforce quality, improve work processes, and invest in physical infrastructure there by strengthening the effectiveness of student support within the context of modern education.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study evaluated the quality of case management services in school social work at primary schools in the South Central Coastal region of Vietnam, using the SERVQUAL model with participation from 238 teachers. The results indicate that overall teacher satisfaction with the service was moderate to high, with service competence, empathy, and responsiveness rated the highest. This reflects the crucial role of the service providers, particularly their professional expertise and ability to offer flexible and timely support in the primary education setting.

Furthermore, ANOVA and t-Test analyses revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction levels based on teachers' residential areas and localities. Teachers in urban areas and provinces such as Da Nang and Quang Ngai rated service quality significantly higher than those in rural areas and Phu Yen province. This highlights inequalities in access to services and support resources, underscoring the urgent need to standardize and more equitably distribute resources across regions.

Correlation analysis also confirmed that factors such as responsiveness and reliability have the strongest impact on overall teacher satisfaction. These findings provide a critical foundation for educational management units and social work service centers to develop improvement strategies focused on enhancing the professional capacity of service providers, ensuring transparency and accountability, and improving service implementation conditions within schools.

From these findings, the study recommends that there should be policies to increase investment in school social work, especially in rural areas and provinces with difficult conditions. On the one hand, the state and schools should increase in-depth training for teachers, school social workers as well as the capacity to implement case management services. At the same time, the state should have policies to increase investment in facilities and technological

infrastructure to ensure effective implementation of case management services. In addition, enhancing coordination among stakeholders in implementing student case management is important to bring about the effectiveness of this service.

Although the study has partly reflected the current situation of case management service quality in primary schools in the South Central Coast region, there are still certain limitations. Firstly, the scope of the survey is limited in terms of geography and number of schools, not fully representative of the entire region. Secondly, the information collection is mainly based on quantitative methods and subjective opinions of teachers, leading to the possibility of bias in the assessment. Thirdly, the theoretical framework applied is still general, not completely suitable for the characteristics of the local educational context. These limitations are the basis for orienting subsequent studies, aiming to improve the comprehensiveness and practicality in assessing the quality of case management services in primary education institutions.

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