

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THAI UNIVERSITIES: EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT. This research looks into the perceptions of forty-five Thai EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers serving in both private and public universities in Thailand regarding the need for and the provision and quality of teacher professional development in their universities. According to the teacher development programs offered, all universities served by the participants provide prospects for teachers to have in-service education. However, findings indicate that the process of application and the criteria set for qualified teachers vary, subject to the administrative policy of each institute. In relation to professional development, nearly all participants pointed out the strong need for obtaining a higher degree specifically at master and doctoral levels as career advancement in their cognate field and interestingly as a tool for salary increment. Teacher collaboration and student learning also emerged as possible factors motivating teachers to strive for self-improvement. Although undertaking research is referred to as an important and for some a required element for English teaching jobs, the time-consuming nature and the sophisticated process discourages its instigation right from the outset. Regarding views about quality of university teacher development, more than half reported being satisfied with the overall universities' strong emphasis on improving English teaching and learning by accentuating teachers as a key. However, teachers' lacking motivation to progress professionally due to the high demand of teaching workload and the internal politics embedded in some universities could be reason that prevents teachers from securing educational growth. In-depth interviews were employed as the method for gathering data, allowing the participants to provide profound insights vis-à-vis the issues under investigation. Implications from the study have shed light on the significance of an uplift of the quality of university teachers through furnishing sufficient opportunities of professional development and what Thai EFL university teachers aspire to accomplish most to develop themselves resourcefully. The study ramification is also implied towards decision makers in the university setting to be impartial in allocating teacher development support grants.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Owing to the fast growing nature of education worldwide, Thai universities are making efforts to upgrade know-how and expertise of their working educators. The obvious gain is to augment the universities' reputation and acceptance academically. This is also compulsory to satisfy the level and standard set by the CHE (The Commission on Higher Education) under the Ministry of Education of Thailand and the ONESQA (The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment). Specifically, as one of the determined requirements, officially known as the Key Performance Indicators, the focus lies in the significance of the teaching and learning process (CHE, 2008). Within this indicator, its constituents include the necessity of a systematic education delivery process, which stipulates that teachers must be prepared and expert in the subject matter, being intellectually developed, skilled in teaching, and facilitating and assessing learning. The capability of applying technical knowledge to conduct research on improving teaching and learning with proper systems and mechanisms of encouragement and the ability to produce reports about the learners' progress are also members of the standard criteria. In line with this, indicated as the required quality of education at tertiary level, is the proportion of the full-time teachers holding higher degree qualifications as well as academic titles equivalent to the total number of full-time teachers. From these strong emphases on teachers as resources that play an important role in quality management and the planning system in learning, it is deemed crucial to consider the importance of teacher professional development. The need for and the provision and quality of teacher professional growth in universities in Thailand requires investigation if it is qualified and capable educators being the target at this level of education.