

## ครุศึกษาไทยเพื่ออนาคต: โอกาสและความท้าทาย

### Thai Teacher Education for the Future: Opportunities and Challenges

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#### บทคัดย่อ

ครูมีบทบาทสำคัญในการสนับสนุนหรือหยุดยั้งการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียน ในการปฏิรูปการศึกษา เพื่อให้เกิดการเรียนรู้แบบใหม่ที่มุ่งพัฒนาการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตและทักษะที่จำเป็นสำหรับอนาคตที่ไม่แน่นอนของผู้เรียนประเทศที่ประสบความสำเร็จสูง ได้แก่ ฟินแลนด์ สิงคโปร์ และเกาหลีใต้ ให้ความสำคัญอย่างมากกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงในครุศึกษา ในขณะที่ร่างการปฏิรูปการศึกษาระดับล่าสุดของประเทศไทยกล่าวถึงเรื่องการเตรียมครูเพียงคร่าวๆ ดังนั้น บทความฉบับนี้จะอภิปรายเกี่ยวกับโอกาสและความท้าทายที่ครุศึกษาไทยกำลังประสบในการเตรียมครูสำหรับศตวรรษที่ 21 และเมื่อพิจารณาจากระบบการบริหารจัดการหลักสูตรครุศาสตร์ศึกษาศาสตร์ในปัจจุบันและจำนวนผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทั้งหมด พบว่าครุศึกษาไทยต้องการความชัดเจนในเรื่องของระบบบริหารจัดการ การพัฒนา นโยบายทางการศึกษาที่อยู่บนฐานการวิจัย และการสร้างเสริมความร่วมมือระหว่างสถาบันผลิตครูและโรงเรียน ทั้งนี้ เพื่อให้เกิดนโยบายและการปฏิบัติที่มีความเชื่อมโยงเป็นระบบและอยู่บนฐานงานวิจัยของภาคีผู้มีส่วนร่วมทั้งหมด

**คำสำคัญ:** การศึกษาในศตวรรษที่ 21 / ครุศึกษา / ครูก่อนประจำการ / นักครุศึกษา / การปฏิรูปการศึกษา / การผลิตครู

## Abstract

Teachers play a key role in supporting or suppressing students' learning. Regarding the needs for new kinds of instruction to enhance lifelong learning and the skills necessary for the learners' unknown future, educational reform in high performing countries like Finland, Singapore, and South Korea has been given close attention to make changes in their teacher education, while Thailand has vaguely addressed the issues related to teacher preparation in its recent draft of educational reform. This article therefore seeks to provide an understanding of the opportunities and challenges that Thai pre-service teacher education is facing in the preparation of 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers. Given the existing management system of teacher education programs and a large number of stakeholders-government offices, teacher education institutions, teacher educators, and student teachers, Thai teacher education needs a clear governance system, research-based policies, and close collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools in order to achieve coherent policies and practices that are informed by research and implemented by collaborative partnership among all parties.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education / Teacher Education / Pre-service Teachers / Teacher Educators / Educational Reform / Teacher Preparation

## Introduction

To survive in this globalized world, Thailand needs high quality education for its citizens (Keeratikorn, 2015; Ministry of Education (MoE), 2014, 2015; Sinlarat, 2014; The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2014). Regarding the low performance of Thai students constantly shown on a few standardized tests nationally and internationally, i.e. O-NET (National Institute of Educational Testing Services (NIETS), n.d), PISA (OECD, 2014), TOEFL (Educational Testing Service (ETS), 2015), and EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2014), and a relatively large number of “functionally illiterates” in the society (World bank, 2015), politicians and media

has turned their attention to the education provision of the country, especially at the basic education level (Education Reform Assembly, 2014; Loima, 2014; MoE, 2014, 2015; Sprouts School, 2014; TDRITV, 2013; ThaiPBS, 2014). In addition, the lifestyles and advanced technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century bring new challenges and opportunities to the educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hämäläinen & Välijärvi, 2008; Samutthai, 2013; Schleicher, 2012; Siritharangsri, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2015). Young generations, or the so called ‘generation z’, “live in an open book environment-just a few clicks away from any information, they

connect in a borderless world-across countries and cultures, and they communicate in a post-literate community where texts and tweets are brief, and where visuals and videos get the most cut-through” (McCrinkle, 2015, para 1).

With the fast development of technology, learners in this century have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills that are necessary for the ‘unknown’ future careers and lifestyles (Caena, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Schleicher, 2012; Zhao, 2010). These societal changes in turn ask for different kinds of learning and instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2010; Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Zhao, 2010). This article therefore aims to seek an understanding of the existing teacher education system-how Thai teachers are prepared in the light of these societal changes-and address the opportunities and challenges it is facing.

## Teacher Education and Educational Reform

In response to the needs for 21<sup>st</sup> century education, many countries around the world have initiated a reform in their teacher education since teachers are the people at the front row who can make immediate changes to students’ learning (Cho, 2012; Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Roberts-Hull, Jensen, & Cooper, 2015; Tan, Liu & Low, 2012; Loima & Vibulphol, in press). It is widely accepted

that “the quality of an education cannot exceed the quality of its teacher” (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010, p. 5). Countries that are recognized as having high quality education such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea are well regarded as countries with high quality teachers (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010) and literature addressing their educational success always refers to the strategic plans for teacher education (see Hämäläinen & Välijärvi, 2008; National Institute of Education, Singapore (NIE), 2009; Niemi, 2013; OECD, 2010; Tan, Liu, & Low, 2012; Tan & Dimmock, 2014). Studies have also shown that teachers’ abilities have an impact on students’ outcomes in their adulthood such as higher study opportunities and salary (Chamberlain, 2013; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hanushek, 2011). These evidences suggest that investment on teacher preparation and development is necessary to ensure the quality of education in the nation. Interestingly, recent discussions on educational reform in Thailand minimally address the role of teacher education (see MoE, 2014).

Even though the Draft of the Roadmap for Educational Reform (B.E. 2558-2564) includes ‘teacher reform’ as one of the six reform areas (see MoE, 2014), the roadmap barely discusses changes in teacher education specifically. The ‘teacher reform’ plans focus mainly on issues related to in-service teachers

such as human resource management-how to recruit and maintain high quality teachers in the profession, compensation system, teacher professional development plans, teachers' license system, and workload-how to reduce non-teaching tasks that takes teachers from classrooms (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2014). On the other hand, signs of skepticisms about the qualities of graduates from teacher education programs are repeatedly shown. New teachers, even after a long five-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program, are under probation with no salary raise for two years when being employed in public schools. Also, every now and then, discussions about requiring an exit exam for B.Ed. graduates would be proposed. In addition, attempts have been made to propose alternative ways of teacher preparation, for example the proposals to withdraw the regulations about teachers' license-arguing that anyone can be as good a teacher as those with a B.Ed. degree, 'the two-year master of education study project' funded by the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST), 2013) to produce teachers of science, mathematics, and computing, or a volunteer teacher project called the 'Leader for Change' project that produces teachers for mathematics, science, and English subjects in a two year on-the-job training program (Teach for Thailand,

2015). These movements urge society to have an understanding about the importance of teacher education and the roles that teacher education institutions play in improving the quality of education. The following sections present an observation of Thai teacher education with a focus on how pre-service teachers are prepared, particularly in the five-year undergraduate programs.

### **Thai Pre-service Teacher Education: Five-year B.Ed. Program**

To be eligible to teach at basic education level, teachers must obtain a teacher's license issued by the Teachers' Council of Thailand (Teachers' Council of Thailand (TCT), 2013a, 2013b). The main entry to this is to obtain a Bachelor of Education from an accredited five-year B.Ed. program even though there are other options for those without the B.Ed. degree (TCT, 2013a, 2013b).

The five-year Bachelor of Education programs are now offered by 112 higher education institutions (176 faculties/campuses/colleges) around the country, public and private (Silatham, 2015). Pre-service teachers study four years of coursework and have one year of practice teaching in networking schools (TCT, 2014). The educational institutions providing the B.Ed. studies must comply with two main sets of standards: Thailand Qualifications Framework for 5-year B.Ed. Programs (TQF-BEd) (MoE,

2011) and Teacher's Council of Thailand Program Accreditation Standards (TCT-PAS) (TCT, 2014). The two standards set minimum requirements for the curriculum structure, the knowledge and competencies that the B.Ed. programs need to provide, the characteristics that the graduates have to develop, the number of practice teaching hours, and program management regarding the number and qualifications of the instructors and supervisors in the program (see MoE, 2011; TCT, 2014). Overall, B.Ed. students study the minimum of 160 credit hours which consist of four main groups of courses: general education, pedagogical courses, major study courses and free elective courses. They are also required to have 240 hours of teaching practice in two semesters in schools, gain direct classroom experiences during the coursework period, conduct classroom action research during the practicum, and attend 'teachership enhancement activities' during the five years' study.

The B.Ed. programs that meet the requirements in these two standards will be accredited by the Teachers' Council of Thailand and the graduates from the programs will be eligible for the license automatically (TCT, 2014). All B.Ed. programs offered in Thailand now have developed their curriculum according to these standards. With the implementation of these two standards, the quality of each B.Ed. program in the country is hoped to be

'standardized'. Considering that TQF-BEd has become effective since 2011 and the TCT-PAS since 2003, it is high time to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the standards are put into practice. To my knowledge, no studies have been conducted to investigate the implementation of the two standards yet; therefore, it is difficult to gauge whether all the 112 institutions are offering the 'same' quality teacher education program, as expected by the standards. Without alignment in policies and practices among these institutions, quality teacher education may not be achieved as intended in these national frameworks. Furthermore, research on the competencies and skills that the students gained from teacher education programs should be conducted to see whether they have the necessary competencies to teach the learners of this 21<sup>st</sup> century (European Commission, 2013; Niemi, 2012; Krzywacki, Maaranen & Lavonen, 2012; Vibulphol, Loima, Areesophonpichet, & Rukspollmuang, in press).

### **Admission into Pre-service Teacher Education**

Currently most candidates are admitted into the B.Ed. program based on their performance on the university entrance examination—paper based and interview. The candidates sit for the same written exam as those entering most undergraduate programs in each university. The main difference is

that B.Ed. applicants take one additional examination-the so called Teacher Aptitude Test (NIETS, 2015). The aptitude test and interview are employed to assess the applicant's competencies for and attitudes towards teaching. With a longer study time than most undergraduate studies, one would think that the number of B.Ed. candidates would be smaller after the five-year B.Ed. program policy became effective in 2004, but this is not the case. The number of new B.Ed. candidates in all universities in the country rose significantly, from 25,333 students in 2008 to 48,133 students in 2014 (Silatham, 2015). Some institutions with approximately 100 faculty members have a few thousand candidates entering their B.Ed. programs each year. The issues regarding the admission are then two folds-quality and quantity of the candidates. First is whether the applicants who enter B.Ed. programs possess adequate competencies and the right attitudes for this important profession. In high performing countries, the teacher education institutions set high admission standards to select only those who are ready for the 'highly attractive profession' (Lim, 2013; Niemi, 2013; Roberts-Hull, Jensen, & Cooper, 2015). Second, with the high number of admission in several programs, to what extent the institution would be able to support their pre-service teachers to gain the knowledge and competencies necessary to become a teacher of the future. The new

regulations in TCT-PAS about the student-faculty ratio (30:1) and the number of students per class (maximum of 30 students per class) then reflect the concerns about these issues (TCT, 2014). Little is known about the current practices in teacher education regarding the instructional practices during the coursework and the mentoring during the practicum.

### **Persons in Charge of Thai Teacher Education**

Considering the impact of teacher education on the quality of education of the country, coherent policies and practices of all stakeholders are highly significant. However, if organizing a seminar on issues related to teacher education in Thailand, one would be surprised to whom the invitation would go, not to mention who will have the final say. The governance in Thai teacher education seems to be very fragmented both at the national level and institutional level.

#### *National Policies*

Structurally administered under the Ministry of Education, various offices are partly involved with the standards, program accreditation, program approval, and program implementation for pre-service teacher education (MoE, n.d.). These offices include the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), the Teachers' Council of Thailand (TCT), and the Office of the

Education Council (OEC), to name a few. The other important stakeholders are the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and schools since they are the users of the graduates from teacher education programs. In addition, OBEC is responsible for basic education core curriculum and implementation, which in turn affects how new teachers should be prepared for the nation. However, no single office oversees the policies and strategies regarding teacher education, taking a comprehensive view. 'Diversity' can be at times preferable but in this context, the country needs coherent and integrated policies and practices regarding the goals of education and teacher education (see also DeMonte, 2013). Countries with high performance have shown that consistent educational policies and congruence among all parties involved are significant in assuring education quality (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; European Commission (EC), 2013; OECD, 2010; Niemi, 2013).

#### *Program Management*

The picture at the institution level, even though not as complex, shows challenges in collaboration as well. In general, each teacher education program is managed by a program committee consisting of five full-time faculty members, as in any higher education degree programs (MoE, 2005). This committee is in charge of the curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

But regarding the course management and student support, Sombat Noparak-a former Chairperson of Thailand Education Deans Council-presented in 2010 that four management models are implemented. In the first model, the program is under the Faculty of Education and most courses are offered by Faculty of Education staff. In the second model, the program is managed by the Faculty of Education but the courses are offered by staff from both the Faculty of Education and content subject faculties (related to students' majors). The Faculty of Education is mainly responsible for pedagogical courses and the content subject faculties are responsible for content subject courses in each major. In the third model, the pedagogical courses are designed and managed by the Faculty of Education whereas the content subject courses are under content subject faculty-independent from each other. The fourth model manages the program as a dual degree program. The Faculty of Education offers a B.Ed. degree and content subject faculties offer a degree of the student's major. In three out of the four models, the B.Ed. programs are managed by a number of parties. Without regular discussions and close collaboration among all the faculties involved, it will be almost impossible to ensure that the teacher education programs are coherent in theories and practices.

As required by TQF-BEd and TCT-PAS, each teacher education program must have a set of learning outcomes and share the same ideology of the graduates' desirable characteristics; therefore it is important that all faculties involved in teacher education programs work closely together. TQF-BEd has actually required all institutions offering B.Ed. programs to set teacher education as a 'Campus Agenda' and establish a 'Teacher Education Board' to coordinate with all faculties and departments involved in assuring the quality of teacher education (MoE, 2011). The challenge is however the autonomy of higher education institutions and faculty members. Similar to what DeMonte (2013) described in the U.S. teacher education system, Thai teacher education programs are managed by universities and colleges with their own governance for program approval and faculty members have academic freedom to decide what to teach and how to teach the courses they manage (see also Ellis, McNicholls, 2015; Roberts-Hull, Jensen, & Cooper, 2015). As a consequence, it is not an easy task for any policy implementation that requires changes in classrooms and instructional practices. To make pedagogical changes in teacher education will first require that all the parties share the same vision and 'willingness to change'.

#### *Teachers of Teachers*

Apart from effective management at

the national level and program level, teacher educators play a key role in improving and maintaining the quality of teachers, which in turn impact the quality of learning of the students in the country (EC, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013). Apparently, this "hidden" profession did not receive much attention in previous educational policies regardless of their significant roles-teaching teachers how to teach, facilitating their professional learning and development, linking theories with practices, supporting students' wellbeing, introducing innovations to schools, and conducting educational research (EC, 2013; see also Dengerink, Lunenberg, & Kools, 2015).

In Thailand, the question of "Who should be the teacher of teachers?" has not been seriously discussed. The narrow definition of the term "teacher educators" is commonly used, referring to education faculty members specifically (see TCT, 2014). Given the broad definition of teacher educators (EC, 2013, p. 7) and the four management models of teacher education programs in Thailand (Noparak, 2010), the qualifications of both university-based teacher educators, i.e., pedagogical course instructors, content course instructors, and faculty supervisors, and school-based teacher educators, i.e. mentors, should be addressed in TCT-PAS. Another noteworthy issue, the qualifications specified for pedagogical

course instructors gives importance to educational degrees-requiring the minimum of a master's degree-over teaching experiences (TCT, 2014). Considering that their task in teacher education programs includes not only teaching the coursework but also supervising student teachers during the practicum, lacking direct teaching experiences of their own may hinder their mentoring abilities or the abilities to link theories with practices (Caena, 2014; EC, 2013; Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013; Krzywacki, Maaranen, & Lavonen, 2012).

Solutions for this may not be simple. In some major areas, recruiting someone with a doctoral degree background who is available and willing to teach is almost impossible. If requiring both a high academic background and teaching experiences as recruitment criteria, education faculties may not be able to find anyone for some positions. Therefore, professional development programs for university-based teacher educators may be a solution, as seen in many countries (Caena, 2014; EC, 2013; Ellis & McNicholl, 2015). This kind of professional development will also be needed for school mentors. Having up-to-date pedagogical and content knowledge as well as mentoring skills is necessary (Caena, 2014; EC, 2013; Ellis &

McNicholl, 2015) so that mentors can provide bridges between theories and practices as well as support the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity.

### **The Way Forward**

In order to improve the quality of education in Thailand, policy makers, teacher educators, and schools have to work more closely together. First of all, a clear governance structure for teacher education is needed. Who sits at the decision making table both at the national and institutional levels must be identified, so accountability can be achieved. Secondly, research-informed policies with concrete goals for education and teacher education have to be developed and communicated with all stakeholders. If sustainable country development is sought, research on and for teacher education must be supported and used to inform educational policies and practices. And last but not least, close collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools needs to be established so that there will be a smaller gap between policies and classroom practices and between the intended and the actual teacher education curriculum.

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