

## EFL University Teachers' Professional Development in the Thai Context

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the perceptions of 30 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers serving in public universities in Thailand regarding needs, challenges and quality of teacher career development in their universities. A questionnaire and an interview are employed to gather data. According to the teacher development programs offered, all universities served by the participants provide prospects for teachers to have further in-service education. In relation to professional development, nearly all participants point out a strong need for obtaining a higher degree as career advancement in their field and interestingly as a tool for salary increment. Teacher collaboration and student learning also emerge 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, time-consuming nature and a sophisticated process discourage its instigation. Regarding views about quality of university teacher development, most report being satisfied with the overall universities' emphasis on improving English teaching and learning by accentuating teachers as a key. However, teachers' lacking motivation to progress professionally due to excessive teaching workload and internal politics embedded in some universities can be reasons preventing teachers from securing educational growth. Implications from the study shed light on the significance to support 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 efficiently.

**Key words:** challenges, EFL teachers, needs, perceptions, professional development

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## 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 OHEC or The Office of the Higher Education Commission under the Ministry of Education of Thailand. 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, 2017). 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 elements 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. It is thus 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 instructors being the target at this level of education.

## Rationale

In English language teaching and higher education, teachers are a significant key to learners' success as well as failure (Williams, 2002). Hence, a strong intention prevails to find out to what extent Thai EFL university teachers necessitate professional development and the effectiveness and the quality of the development programs provided by their universities.

Also, as evidenced in a recent report in 2016 (The Nation Newspaper, 2016) stating that English language teachers from schools over 40 provinces in Thailand had scored well below 50 percent in an English test, it is in fact disturbing news for the national educational system. This has raised awareness of university teachers to introspect their teaching and English proficiency and reflected the need for a serious upgrade in the way the language is taught countrywide. Language teachers no matter at which level need to realize that they themselves hold the key to the collective achievement of any plan implemented by the government and to improve the standard of English-teaching in schools and universities.

From these justifications, the issue of teacher professional development in Thai universities should never be overlooked and more emphasis should be placed on how teachers can excel in teaching English and what can facilitate their learning and teaching process.

For this reason, the research questions are shaped: (1) *'What are the perceptions of Thai university EFL teachers of the need for teacher professional development?'* and (2) *'To what extent are they satisfied with its provision and quality?'*

Qualitative in nature, this study utilizes an interpretative approach focusing on the researcher's responsibility to engage in transactions with the participants. Indeed, in this research, the participants and the researcher share a common culture, in the sense that they are all part of the same educational system, serving as Thai teachers of English at university level. Given this common culture, the issue of gaining entry into the particular environment of the research participants and initiating a rapport is essentially unproblematic. The researcher also ensures that the participants are listened to without prejudice. This establishment of a trustworthy basis is important for this study as it would encourage the participants to articulate what they really feel and the researcher would also be able to revisit the participants to develop the research by feeding back findings for discussion and clarification.

### Literature Review

Teacher development is basically the process of becoming the best kind of teacher that one can personally be. When teachers ask themselves how they can be better and enjoy their teaching more, they are actually thinking about ways of developing. It is sensible to claim that teacher development draws on inner resource for change. It is centered around personal awareness of the possibilities for change and of what predisposes the change process. It builds on the past, as recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present and future. It also draws on the present, in encouraging a fuller awareness of the type of teacher one is now and of other's people responses. Therefore, it is a self-reflective process, since it is through questioning previous practices that alternatives of being and doing are able to emerge.

### Teacher Development versus Teacher Training

According to Williams (1989), the pre-service phase of teachers' professional lives comprises training and its main purpose is to prepare the participants for classroom teaching. In fact, the learning needs for teacher training are usually defined by an apparent deficiency in the participants' knowledge and skills (James, 2001). Training programs are characterized by short-term learning aims which lead towards predetermined outcomes. These aims usually involve the "learning" (Williams, 1989, p. 3) of theory and techniques and they are pursued through the demonstration of a limited number of desirable behaviors presented as models to be imitated. Trainees are expected to acquire skills through practice and through a combination of observation, practice and discussion of know-how. The above aims are highly likely to be specified by the institution which is funding the training so training in this sense is sometimes referred to as "top-down" (James, 2001, p. 152).

Unlike teacher training, *teacher development* involves the continuous professional and personal growth of qualified and experienced teachers (Williams, 1989, White, 1986). Teacher development programs are directed towards the teachers' intellectual, pedagogical and personal improvement. This requires a particular type of methodology which draws on the participants' own experience where teachers consider new ideas, work out how to use them, and theorize from the results. This process is expected to stimulate thought about choices and to enable participant teachers to become autonomous learners and to help them fight a feeling of jadedness and to develop their careers.

Teacher development may also be initiated partly or wholly by the teachers and thus has a more individualized and flexible nature than teacher training, with respect to the particular teachers' needs. This means that both learning aims and outcomes are not predetermined. Teacher development in this sense is sometimes referred to as "bottom-up" (James, 2001, p. 152). Particularly for teachers whose native language is not English, teacher development is not just to do with language teaching or teaching, it is also about language development (Head & Taylor, 1997). This also includes counseling skills, computing, confidence building and cultural broadening and more.

For this research study, the term teacher development is used as it is understood that teacher education programs can pursue both equipping and enabling aims with emphasis on the latter. Education, as Williams defines it, "is concerned with educating the whole person to enable him/her to meet the demands of a world of continuous and unpredictable change" (Williams, 1999, p.11). Similarly, the aim of teacher education is to enhance the continuous professional as well as personal growth of teachers, since the teaching/learning situation is of a dynamic nature itself. The learners and their needs, the requirements of the community and the society, as well as cultural values and views about teaching and learning, all these aspects of the teaching/learning situation are continuously evolving and developing (White, 1988).

However, as Williams (1999) points out, any theoretical approach to the education of teachers is deep-rooted in the view of learning that the educator espouses. It is the teachers themselves decide what they are going to do. His/her beliefs about the nature and development of learning will ultimately determine the practices used with such teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss at this point the researcher's view of learning, and especially teacher learning in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT).

## **Teacher Learning**

### **ELT and Background Issue**

Although teacher education programs have been in existence for a long time, second/foreign language teacher education is a relatively recent development. According to Day (1991), in the past language teachers were either been native speakers or had some recognized expertise in the language usually based on their knowledge of the literature and culture of the target language. However, in the last forty years there has been an explosion in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, both in the actual classroom teaching and in the education of second/foreign language teachers and this has been particularly rapid in the field of ELT. There are several significant background issues to be discussed.

### **Knowledge Base**

Second/foreign language teachers have specific needs that are not always addressed by generic teacher education programs; nor are they easily described by generic teacher standards. Sullivan (2001) underlines one fundamental aspect that differentiates second/foreign language teaching from other subject areas: the fact that second/foreign language teachers attempt to teach the target language while using it as a mode of instruction. Therefore, while many subject area teachers try

to speak less themselves and organise more student-centred activities, second/foreign language teachers try to create activities for students, in which both the content and the language to talk about the content compliment and supplement the lesson.

According to Johnston and Irujo (2001), it was not until the '90's that consideration was to be given to the question of what constituted the knowledge base of language teaching. Until this point, the assumption that what language teachers needed was purely theoretical knowledge about the language which they were teaching went largely unchallenged. This assumption is encapsulated in the term "applied linguistics" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 127), which was used to refer primarily to the training of language teachers, even though its use could be clearly extended to many other domains. The implication was that what teachers need to know is the structure of the language they teach and also some largely mechanistic theory for transferring that knowledge to students.

### **Subject Matter Knowledge**

For second/foreign language teachers, subject matter knowledge includes phonetics and phonology, English grammar/syntax, second language acquisition, curriculum and syllabus design, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics (Richards, 1998). Day and Conklin (1992) add two more elements to the above: literary and cultural aspects of the English language.

### **Pedagogical Knowledge**

#### **Methodological Skills**

Methodological skills, defined by Richards as 'activities, tasks and learning experiences used by the teacher within the [language] teaching and learning process' (Richards, as cited in Ur, 1996, p. 5), are of obvious importance to "effective educating, teaching and learning" (James, 2001, p. 6). Components of general teaching methodology are, for example, classroom organization and management techniques; provision of input; student evaluation; provision of constructive feedback; and effective interaction with students. Elements specific to second/foreign language teaching include: preparation of communicative interaction activities; organization and facilitation of communicative interaction; balancing between fluency and accuracy work; awareness and treatment of learners' errors; language presentation; elicitation of dialogues and narratives; use of dialogues; use of texts.

#### **Communication Skills**

Communication is one of the most significant factors affecting classroom learning. Apart from general communication skills, which are closely related to teachers' personality and general style, language teachers should be able to perform a variety of communication tasks in the language classroom. Therefore, for teachers who are non-native speakers, language proficiency belongs to the core of generic skills that underlie competence in the teaching of English (Richards, 1998).

#### **Contextual Knowledge**

A teacher's context extends beyond classroom boundaries to embrace further levels of the local, regional, national and international communities. Richards (1998) emphasizes that an important component of language teachers' knowledge is an awareness of the effect on teaching of contextual

factors such as language policies, community factors, sociocultural factors, administrative practices, school culture, curricular requirements level and age of class, teaching resources.

### **Foreign Language Teachers' Personal Theories**

For second/foreign language teachers, their personal theories concern their feelings and beliefs about the target language, language teaching and learning, their learners, the context they work in, their job as well as themselves both as professionals and as persons. Since teachers' personal theories influence the reasoning behind their decisions, this understanding is considered crucial for the development of in-service programmes for language teachers.

### **Previous Studies**

Research studies into teachers' preferences and needs regarding in-service education, and especially research studies with ELT teachers as participants, are somewhat limited compared to other topics (e.g. teachers' beliefs).

Latham and Locke (2002) investigate the development needs of six EFL private teachers at two private language institutions in Greece. The results indicate that participants' needs are related to their beliefs about teaching and learning, to their previous experiences and to their classroom context.

Guefrachi and Troudi (2000) report on the evaluation stage of teacher education for ELT teachers' supervisors in the United Arab Emirates. Part of the evaluation addresses the future professional development needs of the supervisors, as well as the needs of their teachers. The findings are based on the supervisors' perceptions and show that as far as their content needs are concerned, they believe that all topics are important. However, they express their preference for more course work in the areas of supervision, computer assisted language learning (CALL), and action research. However, they do not mention topics such as critical thinking and learner autonomy, which were suggested by the university-based educators during the course development stage. In terms of methods, the participants prefer the use of workshops, role-plays, demonstrations, group-work and elicitation techniques. Finally, they recommend more workshops on methodology, testing and self-development for their teachers.

Lavender (2002) also evaluates an in-service education course for EFL teacher educators. She investigates the perceptions of six Thai EFL teacher educators' perceptions after they attended a course in the United Kingdom; the aim of the course was to support them in their own in-service work. Her investigation reveals that participants' content needs form a hierarchical structure, with language at the lower level, ideas for teaching on the second level and ideas for educating teachers at the upper level. It is interesting to mention here that participants perceive the lower level as a prerequisite for the higher. Finally, Lavender's results indicate that participants adopted from the course elements only up to the level for which they felt themselves sufficiently skilled and that was the reason that quite a large number of them remained at the level of language improvement.

## Methodology

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions Thai EFL university teachers of the need for and the provision and quality of teacher professional development. Thus, it appears that adopting an interpretive approach using mixed methods of investigation makes a lot of sense as researching an educational context. Educational contexts are part the social world which, as Radnor (2002) describes, is “ fundamentally different from the natural world because in the social world people have their own intentions, their feelings and emotions, impacted by each other as well as by the context in which they live” (p.17). Therefore, there is the need for an approach which allows the researcher to approach and explore the complexities of the social world. The interpretative approach also highlights the ability of individuals to construct, reconstruct and give meaning to the world in which they live. From this perspective, social reality is constructed and reconstructed by individuals (Blaikie, 1993). As a consequence, social phenomena do not have a simple, unproblematic, objective existence but they have to be interpreted and given meanings by those who encounter them.

As this study is concerned with subjective meaning in specific contexts, the research questions are contextually developed and the obtained data examined inductively. The findings are derived from an open-ended questionnaire and interviews in which the participants are offered an opportunity to express their ideas, feelings and perspectives about the issues studied. The semi-structured interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to make on-the-spot assessments and follow up on specific responses in the narrative or sequence provided by the participants.

## Participants

Thirty Thai EFL teachers teaching at tertiary level in public universities were the primary target of this study. The sampling was purposive due to the fact that EFL university teachers are scattered around the country and the researcher considered that the targeted sampling number was large enough. Twenty three were females and five were males. They had teaching experience ranging from two to twenty years. Their ages varied from 29 to 62. Out of the total, ten had a doctoral degree in Linguistics, Education, or Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) while the rest had a Master's in Education, Communication, Language and Communication, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Teaching English as a Foreign language (TEFL), Linguistics, English Literature, Curriculum and Instruction and English. Ten participants also reported teaching at Master's and doctoral levels. More than half had spent time overseas studying for a higher degree or traveling on vacation.

## Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The data in this mixed-method study was initially derived from open-ended questionnaires. Cohen et al. (2000:255) indicate that an open-ended response ‘puts the responsibility for and ownership of the data much more firmly into respondents’ hands. Moreover, it is an open-ended questionnaire that ‘can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour, which are the hallmarks of qualitative data’ (Cohen et al. 2000). Considering these strengths, the use of an open-ended questionnaire was taken into account. The results from the pilot study confirmed that using all open-ended questions allowed responses to flourish. Therefore, open-

ended items in the questionnaire were used.

Semi-structured interviews were employed afterwards. With the semi-structured format, the participants were able to expound on the topics asked and the researcher could prompt the interviewees to expand their ideas when necessary. During the interview conducted in Thai, the interview questions congruent with the research questions were allowed to flow naturally, based on information provided by the respondents. The researcher, while listening, tried to interpret and seek clarity and a deeper understanding from the respondents throughout the interviews. All responses were recorded, with an audiotape and field notes. Non-verbal behaviors were also observed and recorded on the field notes as they occurred. The researcher also documented his reflections showing his views and feelings immediately after each interview. Questions asked included the participants' personal data and English teaching history. To analyze the data from both the questionnaires and the interviews, the main constructs were developed. Also, the coding for interview data was discussed with two TESL researchers to provide validity with the responses.

### Data Analysis

Data from both methods were analyzed to determine themes, as suggested for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher allowed for double coding, meaning that more than one topic could be recognized as being discussed by one participant. Twenty-five percent of the scripts were coded by two coders (the researcher and his assistant) to approximate inter-rater reliability. Inter-rater agreement was 95%, and Cohen's Kappa was .80, which is in the acceptable range.

### Findings and Discussion

To answer the research questions, this section describes and discusses the results from the mixed methods used.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Thai university EFL teachers of the need for teacher professional development?

In attempt to seek answers to this question, the researcher first asked all the participants whether they recognised what teacher development was. Almost all participants provided quite diverse yet parallel responses ranging from: *it is how teachers find ways to improve themselves; having academic works published, presenting works at conferences; improving more positive student feedback and evaluation; doing research in their relevant disciplines and furthering their qualifications by attending training workshops, taking short courses and pursuing higher degrees.* A few specifically pointed out better interaction with colleagues and students and the importance of having an academic title: assistant professor; associate professor and professor as indications of teacher professional development.

When asked what would be needed for EFL university teachers to improve themselves professionally, the majority of the participants referred to their own universities' teacher development programs as playing a very important role in teacher professional life. Many of them

(n=18) shared this view: *“The university needs to give all necessary support for teacher development in terms of upgrading teacher knowledge in their discipline.”* One even added that *“though teachers may be inspired to be better, this would be difficult without the assistance of the institution at which teachers serve”*. Teacher support as most referred to included scholarships, training sessions, workshops, paper presentation grants, conference or seminar attendance grants, research funds, book and textbook production sponsorship as well as up-to-date teaching and learning resources. However, most participants addressed supplying sufficient financial grants for higher degree education as what appeared to be most demanded, reasoning that having a higher degree showed a clear growth in teacher life and enhancement in social acceptance and status and that their monthly and other additional remuneration would also increase to some extent. About one fourth of all the participants also remarked that conducting research was vital as a way of increasing teachers' knowledge in their areas of expertise and that some of them were even forced by their universities to do yearly research as part of the work requirement. However, due to its high demand and complex procedure to get it complete, research made a lot of university teachers feel unmotivated and somewhat stressed out.

Interestingly, eight participants argued that to develop themselves, teachers just needed to be self-reliant and aimed for what they intended to achieve and that there was no need to ask for support from any party. This suggests that teachers should not subject to their university help for teacher development but rather pursue their own determination to progress.

The participants generally perceived that teacher development focuses on individual needs and it takes on different specific meanings and forms depending on where teachers work and what their desired direction for development is (Head & Taylor, 1997). However, universities and their teacher development schemes are viewed as having a great effect on teachers' motivation for continuous career growth. According to Charaam (2004), whose study focused on new context of Thailand's professional teachers in relation to the guidelines of teacher education reform, after her thorough investigation she proposes a new practical model for professional teacher education as the tripartite collaboration between university, school, and teachers themselves. Schools and universities thus become a key factor for teacher progress and professionalism. This is in line with the findings in this study in that from most participants' viewpoints, teachers and their universities are to be mutually dependent and complementary if teachers need to further develop and universities need quality teachers.

As mentioned by several participants, teacher professional development can also be ascribed to teachers' own conviction to improvement regardless of external university support. Kwakman (2002) investigates the factors that affect teachers' participation in professional learning activities in schools in the Netherlands. Her results indicate that the teachers' main motive in participating in the activities depends largely on personal factors such as professional attitudes and burnout rather than factors relating to tasks and work environment including management and university support. Maley (1990) also suggests that teachers set themselves a development agenda, irrespective of whatever external constraints are operating as an important way of acknowledging teachers' inner needs and desires.

From the findings in this study, funding adequate financial support grants for teachers to study for higher degree qualifications is found to be in need most in comparison with other forms of support available. According to the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1996), a study was conducted to investigate teachers' main motivating factors for growing as professionals. The results were then based on the participants' perceptions. It was revealed that the main reason for their professional development was the improvement of student achievement, the improvement of teaching skills as well as an increase in their knowledge. In contrast to what is discovered in this study, factors such as, opportunities for career advancement, the maintenance of professional certification and a rise in salary happen to be considered less important. This shows that in the Thai context there may be positive value given to those regarded as highly educated individuals, justifying the drive behind teachers' need for obtaining higher educational degrees. In addition, as reported by a number of participants, getting a certified degree is a clear proof of one's academic success, opening doors for greater opportunities. Also, it is rather explicable that Thai university teachers' salaries are on average lower than those of other professions related to higher education, thus remuneration increment can be a motive for teachers for their professional development.

Research Question 2: To what extent are they satisfied with its provision and quality?

The vast majority of the respondents (N=26) reported that they were quite satisfied with overall university provision for teacher development. Most agreed that universities put an effort to be better in education. This can be illuminated in the following response: *“Generally what the university provides is quite satisfactory to teachers; there is usually at least a unit that is in charge of teacher or faculty development. Most universities want to upgrade their teachers, students, and facilities.”*

Still, they mostly emphasised the need for more scholarships and support grants in addition to being strenuous and consistent in providing funds. One of them reasoned: *“Financial aids to study further, to support research work, and to promote teachers' academic interests are in need, but universities have to be persistent in allocating resources. This cannot be stopped.”*

Some participants additionally advised that universities need to take into account what teachers would need for professional growth. This can be achieved through conducting case studies, surveys, or small-scale research studies.

Almost all respondents realised that the application process and the regulations pertaining teacher development programs differ from university to university as well as the predetermined conditions applied to teachers obtaining university educational support. However, more than half urged the university to be attentive to objectivity and transparency in awarding such educational support grants to qualified and suitable teachers. Many of them justified that they have seen the power relations in the administrative system in their universities resulting in biases and inequality when it comes to the selection process for teacher development program application.

With regards to the quality of the university teacher development, most reported being complacent with the overall universities' focus on driving English teaching and learning by building up teachers as a learning resource in the long term. More than half also pointed out there is still more to improve in terms of teacher professional development especially on teacher collaboration and more effective student learning.

Another important finding emerging from the study is the argument from a number of participants indicating that teachers' lacking motivation to improve professionally is probably due to the high demand of teaching workload and obligation as university teachers these days. Judging from the responses provided, most participants are quite content with what their universities have provided in terms of teacher professional development and support. According to the Ministry of Education in Thailand, educational assistance is offered in many forms at Thai universities. Almost all Thai universities maintain an active faculty development program administered by a responsible committee or unit. Most of the faculty development includes attending seminars and conferences, undertaking professional training programs, presenting research papers, attending higher degree programs and other forms of development.

The findings have revealed that most participants view the education system in their settings as the top-down approach considering the teachers' substantial reliance on and compliance with their university teacher development procedure. According to White (1997), two views of education are perceived. The top-down, goes hand in hand with bureaucratisation and is characterised by "specialisation, a hierarchy of authority, a system of rules and impersonality" (White, 1997, p. 135). The other, the bottom-up, is associated with professionalism, within which teachers are given the maximum space to exercise their skills and judgement. Thus, any education systems which adopt the former approach are reported to favour top-down practices to teacher education, whereas more teacher-centred approaches, the latter, have usually been adopted by smaller, less authoritative organizations.

Many participants also highlighted the importance of teacher teamwork and improved student learning as part of teacher professional development. This is in accordance with Harland and Kinder (1997)'s investigation into British teachers' learning preferences in in-service education programmes. The results of their study highlight the participants' need for time to meet with colleagues, to discuss current issues and concerns and to engage in practically orientated workshops relating to curriculum development. Interestingly, these participants reasoned that the greatest influences on their professional development are their own experience and beliefs as well as the beliefs and experience of their colleagues.

Similarly, Harris and Anthony (2001) investigate teachers' perceptions of the nature of collegiality and its role in teachers' professional development. The results indicate that it is important for teachers to have opportunities for interaction with colleagues, either in formal or informal situations as this interaction promotes professional and personal growth. Teacher development through collaboration is also demonstrated in Farrell (1999)'s study on promotion of reflective thinking through teacher regular group discussion. He focuses on a group of experienced

Korean EFL teachers who get together in weekly meetings to reflect on their own work. His results show that the teachers' favourite topics are their personal theories and the problems they face in their everyday classroom life. Moreover, although remaining very much at a descriptive rather than a critical level, reflection seems to form a good basis for further development.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study lead to some implications. Firstly, Thai university EFL teachers appear to rely heavily on their university for teacher professional development. In this regard, universities do play an important role in EFL teachers' career growth. Thus universities need to be aware of what kind of programs would most benefit teachers and consider allocating adequate funds to support those interested or have career-driven potential. This also includes the promotion of teacher collaboration and curriculum development. Universities also have to find ways to make research bearable and realistic for teachers and especially in facing with their demanding teaching load. Secondly, when it comes to the specific needs most teachers require, most Thai EFL university teachers attribute the focus onto furthering higher degrees, reflecting on the vitality of having high education in the Thai context and on making universities realize what Thai EFL teachers need most in terms of professional growth. Finally, there is a message sent to decision makers of teacher professional development programs in the university setting to be fair and provable in their decision making.

In line with the results of this study, most literature has shown that on-the-job professional development programs are most beneficial when they are long-term, focused on students' learning, and linked to the curricula (Bates, 2008; Tran, 2008). According to Nir and Bogler (2008), in their findings, they noticed that in fact the higher the control teachers have over job professional development processes, and the greater the resemblance of these processes to the typical teaching culture in classrooms, the greater the teachers' satisfaction with job professional development processes. This might not be the case in the Thai context though, as previously discussed, due to the participants' perceived education system as top-down.

The issue of EFL teacher professional development and its movements should be raised in a university conference or seminar recognised as a medium for academic exchanges. In this way, various new outlooks on this issue would be given greater consideration.

### **Conclusion**

Development can mean many different things and take many different forms, as teachers find ways of responding to the inner desire that motivates them to learn. The researcher concurs with Head and Taylor (1997) that teacher development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance, a process that is never finished. All participants realize that teacher development is about dealing with the needs and wants of the individual teacher in ways that fit that individual. Indeed, almost all participants in this study did perceive the need for teacher professional development in practice by largely depending on their university development programs, justifying that what is most needed is support grants for further education. This can be implied that there may have already been instances indicating a paucity of available financial

resources and that teacher development in their settings does not appear to be bottom-up. As found in the investigation, the existing teacher development programs are perceived to be generally satisfactory while some remarks are made regarding the integrity of the selection procedure.

Although realizing the vitality of carrying out research, most participants express much less need for support on attending teacher short training programs and specialized workshops and professional seminars. This could be attributed to greater perceived worthiness of higher degree qualifications possessed by university teachers in the Thai context, leading to numerous gains.

The finding also suggests that teachers who have the capacity to go on seeing and conducting things in new ways are a powerful example to their students as many participants pointed out the significance of improved student learning in conjunction with teacher improvement. Undoubtedly, it is also beneficial for developing more effective course design and planning. This is in line with Underhill (1988)'s remark that teacher development is keeping on the same side as students, keeping alive a sense of challenge and adventure in a teaching career, otherwise learning is slow, tedious and uninspiring. In sum, as long as the world moves on, it is essential for university teachers to find ways of managing and responding positively to change. Not only is this for teachers themselves to keep on progressing, but also they have a responsibility to prepare their students to cope with a world in which change is the norm.

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