



Proposed policy for preparation of high-quality primary school teachers in Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Successful countries in education show that the reform process to improve teacher quality begins by answering fundamental questions about the current problems and the needs of the schools. The research objective of this study was to evaluate these answers, describe the current situation and put forward recommendations to policy makers to prepare high-quality primary school teachers in Thailand. The study was based on future research design using the methodology of the Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) as a way to reflect the needs of the organizations. Based on the opinions of 160 interviewed participants, 14 experts in education provided consensus ideas for policy development with the aim of improving teacher quality in primary education. All organizations involved in education need to cooperate to set up standards for high-quality primary school teachers. A roadmap is given to set up a new policy.

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Introduction

Education reforms often focus on teachers, since it is generally believed that the quality of teachers defines the quality of an education system. Countries that have successfully managed a high standard of education by defining a clear teacher preparation policy are among many others: Finland, USA, Canada, Japan, Singapore, and China. For instance, in the United States, the Foundation of Thomas B. Fordham has done research on teacher quality in different American schools. The study of the [Office of the National Education Commission \(ONEC\) \(2002\)](#) showed that qualified and motivated teachers are the foremost requirement to achieve that goal. However, in Thailand the process of recruiting qualified teachers is widely considered unattractive and cumbersome and consequently

prevents potentially qualified people from choosing a teaching career. The author of the study concludes that there is a need to adapt policies to facilitate the process of finding and hiring qualified teachers with the required knowledge and skills. School principals should have the necessary instruments to evaluate potential candidates in accordance with and an emphasis on the educational goals of their school.

In China, when Li Lanqing was a vice premier, he placed strong emphasis on the development of a modern education system in accordance with his vision ([Li, 2009](#), p. 12):

“... With a population of 1,300 million people, we are taking care of the biggest education system in the world under budgetary constraints that are disproportionate to the real needs. We must strive for and make every effort to be highly effective in education even if it means to set other priorities. No matter how poor a nation might be, a sufficient budget for education must remain a top priority. The basis of national growth and prosperity is education, which requires qualified teachers.

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We must appreciate the high value of education and consequently the importance of skilled and motivated teachers. Furthermore, giving priority to basic education is the foundation for the restoration of a great nation. To increase economic strength does not come easily, but we will eventually succeed. The theory of work as a factor of production states that graduates of primary education increase the productivity of the workforce up to 43 percent. This suggests that development of schools for our citizens will be the foundation of sustainable development ...”.

Consequently, policy is an important tool to make educational progress in the desired direction by guiding teacher preparation. That the findings are consistent is mirrored by successful countries. The process begins by reforming teacher training in order to get high-quality teachers. Strain (2007, p. 3) stated that a definition of “**High-qualified teachers**” is given by the United States Department of Education. The term refers to teachers who are teaching more efficiently, resulting in better student achievement. This includes the following important features: 1) a minimum of teacher training in undergraduate courses, 2) passing a test of knowledge and teaching skills in mathematics, science, reading, writing, and basic knowledge in all subjects to be taught in the curriculum of primary and secondary education, as appropriate, 3) teaching practice and experience, and 4) full teacher certification from the state. Apart from the teacher’s advanced and up-to-date knowledge of the subjects to be taught, practical teaching skills are of utmost importance in order to facilitate learning. This includes, among other teaching techniques, lesson planning skills, skills for assessment, and strategies to provide feedback to students (Glatthorn, Jones, & Bullock, 2006, pp. 3–9).

Therefore, to obtain high-quality teachers, it is necessary to stipulate specific features and provide a definition of high-quality primary school teachers by all those involved in the process. This can be achieved by defining a policy in the form of legislation or regulation which then has to be implemented at all levels.

In Thailand, the issues of inadequate education are often blamed on a shortage of teachers (Atagi, 2011, pp. 13–25). Therefore, former governments provided policies that implemented counter measures against the alleged low number of teachers. In 2013, the Secretary General of Basic Education presented a comprehensive study of the teacher recruitment process within 79 Primary Education Service Areas (PESA) and announced the results in all areas of education. Only 5,074 examinees of 83,930 candidates passed the recruitment exams, representing 6.05 percent of the eligible candidates (Anonymous, 2013). These data show that there is no shortage of potential teachers but, on the contrary, as a result of this selection process, a high number of teacher students are left unemployed or go into a different trade. This indicates that the government cannot dictate a policy to provide sufficient capable teachers for schools. Another issue which is related to the former one and also leads to low quality education is that teachers often teach subjects they have not studied and are not qualified for. This situation is predominantly found in

primary schools. Since Thailand has more than 28,000 schools, it is often difficult for all of them to have teachers in every classroom that are qualified to teach all the required subjects. The study of Tangchuan (2011) found that many rural primary schools do not have enough teachers in every class and that more than 90 percent of primary school teachers do not teach subjects they have graduated in. He also examined the teaching and learning of Mathematics in primary grade 4 in six provinces in the North and Northeast of Thailand. The results showed that most of the teachers who teach Mathematics have graduated and majored in Thai, Physical Education, Agriculture or Social Sciences, but not Mathematics. Apart from the lack of specific teacher training, this is a key factor that has a lasting negative effect on the quality of education.

The consulting firm Barber, Mourshed, and McKinsey (2007) did research based on PESA results, to find an explanation for why students in some countries such as Finland were more successful. Their report showed that Finland’s teachers could be divided into two groups: class teachers and subject teachers. The two groups had different obligations in teaching: class teachers would teach at the elementary level and subject teachers would teach at the secondary and higher education level. In addition, teachers in both groups followed a different training system. When considered carefully, we argue that the quality of education depends on the quality of primary teachers as a key factor. A study in Dallas (USA) showed that school achievement strongly depends on teaching quality. The academic progress of students who were continuously taught by three good teachers progressed 49 percent better than students who were taught by three bad teachers. The elementary students who studied with bad teachers for several years suffered an educational back lag that could not be caught up later on. Consistent with these results, research in England showed that only 25 percent of 11-year-old students with poor academic performance will get a chance to score a benchmark level when they reach 14 years and only 6 percent will have graduated according to the minimum qualifying standard. Different research studies have shown that if students do not get the opportunity to learn with qualified teachers from the beginning of their school time, they will be less likely to be academically successful, even if they later enroll in a school with better teaching staff (Barber et al., 2007). If Thailand continues to let the process of teacher training continue without a clear perspective, regardless of necessity and the real needs of the school, there will be no improvement and things may even get worse. The results of many studies found that normally, primary students in grade 2 are fluent in reading in the second semester and have the ability to do simple calculations. If struggling students are not brought up to the expected standard, then this group of children will continue to have learning difficulties until the sixth grade or higher school level.

This argument is in compliance with Kitrataporn (2011) who has expressed views on the development of learners at the primary level. He referred to the theory of cognitive development by Jean Piaget who describes the development of the primary students in order to recognize and understand the process of self-realization. The study marks

the first phase of compulsory education as important, especially with a focus on the basic skills of reading, writing, and numeracy, thinking skills, communications, social learning and basic humanity. If education policy cannot lead to a significant improvement in the current situation, it will inevitably entail very severe damage that will be extremely difficult to resolve. To prevent this, some policies must be implemented to prepare high-quality primary school teachers, consistent with the requirements of schools and according to international standards. This will lead to an increased ability to compete at an international level for the sustainable development of the country. It seems that the reform of basic education over the past years has benefited everyone except the children (Thongroj, 2008).

The objectives of this research were to study current problems and desirables for preparing high-quality primary school teachers and to recommend policy for preparing high-quality primary school teachers of Thailand.

Research Methods

This study was based on a future research design by using the methodology of the *Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR)*. EDFR is a way of normative forecasting and exploratory forecasting (Textor, 1990, p. 139) to reflect the needs of the organization by focusing on the goal-oriented and future needs and entering basic information followed by statistical analysis of the data.

The research was divided into two steps. 1) The research studied recent problems and needs for preparing high-quality primary school teachers using the directive interview technique with a structured interview format and data collection. The data were collected between November 2014 and January 2015. With multi-stage random sampling, 160 participants were distributed from seven geographic regions (Northern, Northeast, Central, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Metropolitan). They included the deputy directors PRSA, the directors of primary school, primary school teachers, administrators, and lecturers of the Faculty of Education. 2) The EDFR technique (Poonpatarachevin, 1997) was used to develop policy options and policy recommendations.

The research was conducted between May and August 2015 using the in-depth interview technique with a semi-structured interview format for the first round. There were 17 participants who were purposively selected including educational experts who had been and/or were still senior executives in policy making in the Ministry of Education (MOE) and educators who had an established reputation in Thailand. The interview data were analyzed using content analysis and synthesis techniques. The data were organized, keeping the original words of the experts as much as possible to show the frequency of issues. The opinions of the experts were used to create a cumulative questionnaire based on the Likert scaling technique for the second round of interviews. The results were analyzed using the percentage, median, and inter-quartile range for classifying

consensus opinions. Then, a draft for the scenario of the policy recommendations to prepare high-quality primary school teachers was set up.

Research Findings

Current Problems and Needs to Prepare High-Quality Primary School Teachers

The current problems that were mentioned most often were: the state policy encourages teacher training in subjects that are not appropriate for primary schools, the number of teacher job positions does not correlate with a general shortage of teachers, the recruitment process is largely determined by government budget and policy and does not necessarily match the needs of schools, and the current teacher's licenses are not subject or level specific and give teachers the credentials to teach any subject at all levels.

The current needs most frequently listed were: the state policy for enhancing specifically the production of primary school teachers should be given a high priority, the employment conditions of primary school teachers have to appreciate the specific features of teaching at this level and the workload to be performed, and a coordinated and joint effort of all institutions involved under a commonly accepted system of rules and regulations will enable the preparation of high-quality primary school teachers.

Proposed Policy Recommendations to Prepare High-Quality Primary School Teachers

This step was divided into two aspects as mentioned in the methods for developing the policy options and policy recommendations in two rounds of interviews.

In the first round of interviews, the results presented opinions with the highest frequencies summarized for four feasible policy options as listed by the experts: 1) to raise the admission standards; 2) to implement a preparatory program for primary school teachers with high standards; 3) to raise the licensing standard; and 4) to improve the management of organizations involved in preparing high-quality primary school teachers.

In the second round of interviews, the results were based on consensus opinions from the experts and are shown in Table 1.

Discussion

The study found an important problem was that the leaders of MOE have never specifically created a policy for the systems of production, recruitment, appointment, and qualification of primary school teachers. Atagi (2011) supported this by noting that Thailand has set clear policy goals in secondary education in order to improve the academic performance of Thai students, while primary education is nearly universal. In this case, the results suggested that the leaders of MOE should rigorously establish policies directly into the role of the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), the Office of the Higher Education

Table 1

Proposed policy recommendations to prepare high-quality primary school teachers

| Key Findings/Key Components |
|--|
| <p>To raise the admission standards for teacher preparation programs at universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admission must require a high score in tests of teacher attitudes, of academic proficiency, and assess criteria for reading, writing, and mathematics skills. - Scholarships will further motivate excellent pupils to enroll in teacher preparation programs. - A formal promise at the beginning of their study might be considered a commitment for their future teaching career. |
| <p>To implement a preparation program for primary school teachers with high standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Universities with a Faculty of Education must adapt and improve their curricula for high-quality primary school teachers. - This includes close cooperation with primary schools offering compulsory internships during teacher training. - These measures will lead to professional teachers who are responsible for a high standard of education at the primary level. |
| <p>To raise the licensing standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Teachers' Council of Thailand (TCT) must raise the standard of the teacher's license to ensure that primary schools will have high standard teachers who have good qualifications not only in the various subjects but also in pedagogical and teaching skills. - It is recommended that the TCT also use the result of the internship at a primary school as part of the assessment before issuing a teacher's license. |
| <p>To improve management of organizations involved in preparing high-quality primary school teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MOE must evaluate initiatives to enable and expand access to state education and teacher's data. The need to develop a database that integrates data collected from different systems and from every level of education is to be finally used as a cross-organization data management tool. Also they must work out a master plan within MOE dealing specifically with the preparation for primary school teachers. - The policy makers must draw up a specific definition for "high standard of preparation for high-quality primary school teachers" and ensure that all organizations involved accept and use this definition to strive to reach the common goal. - The MOE must take the initiative and play the leading role in the drafting and the implementation of the policy to prepare high-quality primary school teachers. In partnership with the MOE and the other involved institutions, the Office of Council Service and Educational Personnel Commission (OTPEC) will concentrate on improving the current recruiting system, correlated with the teacher production programmes and criteria of the teacher's license. - Policy must ensure that the public primary schools have sufficient additional human resources to prepare high-quality primary school teachers. In addition, the directors of primary schools must ensure that the workload of the teachers is adapted in a way that they can concentrate more on teaching. Professional teachers will be needed with both the competence and the resources to coach and supervise the new teachers. The experts stressed the important role and high responsibility of the primary school practicum programs in the process of the preparation of high-quality primary school teachers. - There should be a federal organization established or the Office of the Education council (OEC) should become a center for coordination and evaluation in accordance with the aims of the state for the preparation of high-quality primary school teachers. |

Commission (OHEC), the OTPEC, the TCT, and the OEC to unify the definition of high-quality primary school teachers and ensure that all organizations have insightful understanding of the definition. They must coordinate with each other to improve the laws, rules, regulations, measures, or principles of directing monitoring, controlling, evaluating, and improving the systems of admission for teachers, teacher production, recruitment of primary school teachers, teacher licensing, and using teachers at primary schools. This approach is consistent with the American Federation of Teachers that defines "high-quality teachers" as "teachers who are teaching more efficiently, resulting in better student achievement" (ONEC, 2002).

It is likely that the MOE could take the initiative and play the leading role in drafting and implementing the policy to prepare high-quality primary school teachers. Barber et al. (2007) pointed out that when considered carefully, the quality of education depends on the quality of primary teachers as the key variable. For example, Finland is more successful because Finnish teachers are divided into two groups and have different obligations in teaching: 1) class teachers will teach at the elementary level and 2) subject teachers will teach at the secondary and the higher education level.

However, the teacher's license is one important key variable for raising teacher quality and monitoring standards in the Faculties of Education (as pointed out by the experts in the results), which is related to [The National Council on Teacher Quality \(2012\)](#) with the requirement

to raise licensing standards to eliminate the generalist license and to encourage elementary teachers and candidates to pass a subject-matter test designed to ensure sufficient content knowledge of all subjects, and to pass a rigorous math assessment and reading instruction. Furthermore, it is required that teacher preparation institutions are accountable for the quality of the teachers they produce. The experts believe that screening the candidates when issuing the teacher's license should become a standard practice. This would raise the quality of primary teachers as mentioned before. A higher value attached to the license and sounder data to measure the standard of the educational institutions would be a positive side effect.

Finally, this study did not find any researchers who argued the effect of the factors of high-quality teacher preparation on education quality. However, this study found that some research argued that a specific definition of a highly qualified teacher of reading is sometimes hard to find. This may be due to the fact that students in various classrooms at various levels and types of schooling have so many different needs. Furthermore, the leaders seemed unsure of the specific meaning of the phrase: "highly qualified teachers" although they used it frequently during their presentation. This is often the case when everyone assumes a meaning is so clear that everyone knows it without actual definition (Strain, 2007, pp. 2–3). Consequently, all the parties concerned should be more aware of this.

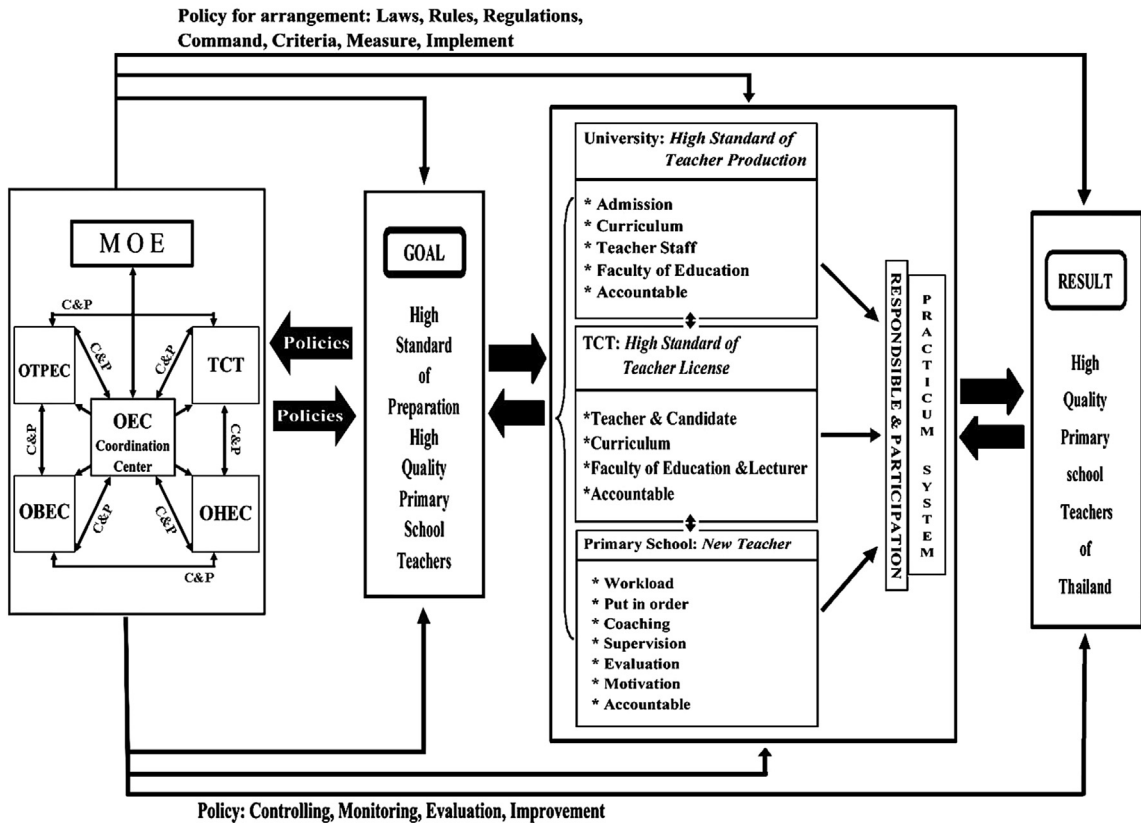


Figure 1 Roadmap of policy for preparing high-quality primary school teachers. Note: C&P means coordination & participation

Conclusion

The research results showed that if the state wants to improve education to be internationally competitive, MOE must be attentive to the primary school level as described in this study. Furthermore, MOE must coordinate efforts to increase the quality of education in a group of organizations including OEC, OTEPC, TCT, OHEC and OBEC. In aiming for standards of high-quality preparation of primary school teachers, it is necessary to rearrange the participation and focus on the duties of all organizations involved so that they can work and support each other. Universities who produce teachers must comply with the process of setting quality standards while preparing primary school teachers and place special emphasis on the practicum process. Faculties of Education and the primary schools must work together on the practicum process. OHEC, OBEC and OTEPC together should improve the recruitment systems for the admission of selected pupils into teacher production. The appointment of teachers into primary schools should focus on the high performance and competence of the candidates. TCT must take action to improve the image of the teacher's license to ensure that the license has a high value and endorses teachers to be high-quality primary school teachers. In the policy-making process, OEC should take responsibility for the coordination of the efforts of all institutions involved, as shown in Figure 1.

Recommendations

Before using an applied policy, an adjusted paradigm must be available, based on the psychology of learning. If pupils have low basic knowledge and skills as tools for learning—especially in the areas of reading, writing, and numeracy—they tend to be unsuccessful at higher education levels. Several organizations are involved in establishing a policy for the preparation of high-quality primary school teachers. Therefore, it is critical that joint policy legal mechanisms are used, thus including all parties involved. The timing of the implementation of the policy is part of an important strategy. Considering the fact that the foundation for learning starts from the early childhood education level and takes up to three years, the primary level is not the first stage of formal learning. However, since the scope of this research aimed at the primary level only, this study did not refer to the field of early childhood and children with special needs.

Recommendations for Further Studies

In this study, several questions on how to improve education in Thailand could not be treated. To follow up the topic, more research projects are needed on the following issue: Which factors determine the quality of

teacher production (that is, curriculum, teaching staff, quality and methods of teaching, the number of professors in the teaching institutes, the number of teachers for each course, and the measurement and evaluation of teaching)?

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflicts of interest.

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