HOW ENGLISH TEACHERS PERCEIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THEIR TEACHING CAREER: A CASE STUDY OF RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES IN BANGKOK AND SUBURBAN AREAS

การพัฒนาวิชาชีพของครูภาษาอังกฤษในอาชีพของตน: กรณีศึกษาของมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏในกรุงเทพและใกล้เคียง

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ABSTRACT

Professional development is a long-term knowledge and skill conduct and commitment in English teaching career. Currently, English teachers at Rajabhat Universities (RUs) in Thailand have been very active in their professional development both from self-encouraging and the universities’ promoting. This paper investigates perceptions of RUs English teachers towards their professional development (PD) in teaching career. Participants were 67 teachers from 6 RUs in Bangkok and suburban areas. A mixed-methods approach was employed for data collection. A set of questionnaire was distributed to the respondents, and 6 English teachers purposively selected from 6 RUs participated in an individual interview. Frequency, means, and standard deviation were employed for quantitative data analysis, Data analysis employed frequency, means, and standard deviation, while Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) was used for interview data analysis. Findings revealed that English teachers at these RUs were highly aware of the importance of their PD. However, data gained from the in-depth interview indicated that despite involving in various kinds of PD activities, RUs English teachers faced unavoidable obstacles for their progress in teaching career.

KEYWORDS: Professional development, English teachers, and Rajabhat Universities

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Introduction and Background

Rajabhat Universities all over the country are directly responsible for teachers’ education. At the moment, there are 38 Rajabhat Universities (RUs) in Thailand. Originally, RUs were Teachers Colleges, which were then transformed into Rajabhat Institutes, and were finally changed to Rajabhat Universities in 2004 (พระราชบัญญัติมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏ พ.ศ. 2547, B.E.2547). The name “Rajabhat” was given by King Rama IX, which means “People of the King.” The changes from Teachers Colleges allow RUs to provide more fields of the studies than education. However, they still keep the original role in providing teachers education including English Education Program.

Regarding professional development, it was internationally recognized that professional development (PD) is the key success in teacher education, particularly for English language teachers. In Malaysia, the study indicated that 99% of English language teachers needed professional development at some level (Khandehroo, Mukundan, & Alavi, 2011). For non-native English teachers, becoming professional takes time, effort, and commitment. This is because not only pedagogical skill is required but English knowledge as well. On the other hand, Leung (2009) argues that professionalism refers to three areas of “knowledge, skills, and conduct” (p. 49). This could refer to as what teachers should know, what skills they should have, and how they should conduct in their profession. Thus, in order to be professional, teachers’ professional development plays a significant role in what and how they conduct. Professional development can be referred to activities as well as roles and responsibilities that teachers take part for their long-term commitment. This is an ongoing process in teacher education (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 1), particularly for in-service teachers who need to expand their knowledge and teaching experiences over time after they started their work as a TESOL, EFL, ESL or EIL teachers. In the past ten years, as a teacher of English and a used-to-be committee of Thailand TESOL Association, I have witnessed a lot of Thai teachers of English regularly joined an annual Thai-TESOL Conference; they also attended regular trainings or workshop on particular areas of interest for their PD.

To define the meaning of PD, there are several aspects of PD to discuss, particularly in the “how” manners. For example, Richards and Farrell explain that PD involves teaching
training in six aspects. This includes learning to start effective lesson, adapting the textbook into good practice, using group activities, questioning and giving feedback techniques, as well as creating teaching aids and resources (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 3). However, in this research study, the investigation outlined the scope of PD of English teachers at Rajabhat University (RU) in two main areas; they are: 1) PD activities, and 2) roles and responsibilities in PD.

To begin with, PD activities are what English teachers take part the most in various aspects. In her article, Wichadee (2011) describes six aspects that account for PD activities English teachers in Thailand use. This includes self-mentoring, individual and group readings, going to training and seminar, doing classroom observation, conducting action research, and giving sessions. Similarly, Richards and Farrell (2005, pp. 3–4) point out that teacher training is a kind of PD that should enhance teachers’ knowledge and skill. The training could include teaching strategies, using teaching aids and learning resources, and techniques for providing learners feedback of their learning performance. On the other hand, the challenge of language proficiency is definitely important in teachers’ PD as it is a requirement of the institutes (Barduhn & Johnson, 2009, p. 63) where English teachers work. In other words, teachers’ competence and competencies are expected and required.

Although PD activities could be beneficial and Thai–English teachers realize its importance in their teaching career, prove evidently to Thai–English teachers in their teaching career, the question is how much and to what extent they have been taking part? And how effective it is? This leads to the second area of investigation in PD of English teachers at RU. This leads to roles and responsibilities of PD at RUs all over the country.

Relating the roles and responsibilities in PD, there are two kinds of professionalism involved. One is sponsored professionalism or the institutional professional development and the other is independent professionalism or the individual professional development.

Firstly, sponsored professional development (Gurney & Liyanage, 2016) is regarded as the institutional needs to promote their staff in their own institute. This was clearly seen in various kinds of support from the university; for example, providing financial support to get higher degrees, participating in the conferences, forums, or arranging visits to other universities...
(Gurney & Liyanage, 2016; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Moreover, promoting being independent learners by conducting action research and publishing research papers are highly needed by the universities. Relating to this, conducting research studies and publications are one of the indicators that indicates qualified universities and accredited by Accreditation Unit of Ministry of Education. To be exact, being an experienced researcher reflects that teachers have demonstrated the qualities of knowledge, skills and learning experience in TESOL (Kirkpatrick, 1988 cited in Richards and Farrell, 2005, p.20).

Secondly and lastly, PD deals with the independent professional development that plays as much important role as the institutional professional development. To be particular, the independent professional development could demonstrate teachers’ motivation, aspiration, and learning advancement in their English teaching career. In other words, teachers need to set their goal in professional development as they continue their teaching career. It is a kind of career commitment. However, Gurney and Liyanage (2016) argue in their study that English teachers’ agency as learners is as critical for “institutional efficacies” for professional development.

In brief, both types of professional development for English teachers would empower the universities’ efficacies and teachers’ qualifications in knowledge, pedagogical skill, particularly in conducting action research (Burns, 2009). Both types of PD are overlapped and need cooperation from each other. However, external expectations from MOE, individual values and professional goal constitute difficulties in professional development for both the universities and the teachers themselves. This study examined how the two domains of PD played roles and responsibilities in empowering and supporting each other.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate English teachers’ perceptions on their professional development. The researcher employed only one research question to guide the study, that is, “In what ways do English teachers in Rajabhat Universities perceive their professional development in their English teaching career?”
Research Method

Participants
A total of 67 English teachers filled in the questionnaire. Thirty-one teachers taught at Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok and 36 teachers worked at Rajabhat universities in suburban areas. As for the interview, totally 6 interviewees were purposively selected to participate in an individual interview. One teacher represented each university.

Research instruments
This study employed 2 research instruments for data collection which are a set of the questionnaire, and an individual interview. Firstly, the questionnaire was used for quantitative data collection as this was a kind of survey research. However, a semi-structured interview was conducted individually for qualitative data collection. The purpose of the interview was to gain an in-depth data (Nunan, 1992, pp. 149-153) in particular areas of professional development.

Data collection and analysis
This study employed mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 179) for data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to collect quantitative data whereas the individual interview was conducted for qualitative data in supporting reliability of quantitative data from the questionnaire. The research sites of this study were 8 Rajabhat Universities (RUs) in Thailand, 5 RUs in Bangkok, and 3 RUs in suburban areas. Seven Rajabhat Universities provided English Education Program, while the other one did not. Most of the participants in this study were English teachers who taught English to students in English Education Program.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics of percentages, means, and standard deviation (S.D.) were employed for quantitative data from the questionnaire. In addition, the researchers employed Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) for qualitative data analysis from the interview by transcribing and using color coding procedure to categorize the themes and interpret the meanings of data gained.
Findings

Findings gained from the study were reported in accordance to the types of data, that is, quantitative and qualitative data. Data from the questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed and summarized. On the other hand, qualitative data from the individual interview were analyzed and coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). The report were presented in two aspects of data collection; the questionnaire and the interview.

The Questionnaire

Data analysis from the questionnaire was divided into two parts, the participants’ background information and their perspective views on professional development in their English teaching career.

Participants’ background

Findings reveal that most of the respondents were female, and the majority of them aged between 25–45 years (74.6%), the rest were between 46–60 years. Most of the teachers earned master degrees (74.6%), and most of them were in Bangkok. Results also reveal that most respondents worked in Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (73.1%) and only 26.9% worked for Faculty of Education. Regarding their teaching, 71.7% of the respondents were responsible for 1–3 subjects, only 26.8% taught more than 3 subjects each semester. In addition, findings show that 17.9% of the respondents used English and Thai in classroom teaching at the ratio of 30/70 %, 35.8% used 50/50 %, 23.9% spoke 70% English respectively. It was interesting to find that only 9 % of the respondents spoke 80% of English compared to Thai (20%).

Concerning professional development, 53.7% of the teachers had participated between 1–3 times in national and international conferences. Moreover, 43.3% went to the conferences more than three times, and it was interesting that 3% of the respondents never had these experiences. Regarding conducting research studies, 46.3% of teachers had conducted 1–3 research projects, and 14.9% had carried out more than three research studies whereas 38.8% of the respondents never conducted a research project except their thesis studies. Relating to publication, 37.4% of them had published 1–3 times, 10.4% had done this more than 3 times
whereas 52.2% never had this experience. However, the results indicate that most of them were invited to be speakers (76.1%), only 23.9% never had this experience.

**Professional development in English Teaching Career**

The second part of the questionnaire investigate teachers’ perceptions on their professional development. Likert 5-rating scale was applied. The mean scores were interpreted as strongly agree (4.21 – 5.00), agree (3.41 – 4.20), not sure (2.61 – 3.40), disagree (1.81 – 2.60), and strongly disagree (1.00 – 1.80). Findings from the questionnaire were presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1** Perceptions on professional development in English Teaching Career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Bangkok N=31</th>
<th>Suburb N=36</th>
<th>Total N=67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You believe that professional development is important for career improvement as a university lecturer.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>You consider participating in professional workshops/trainings helps collaborating with colleagues in teaching improvement.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You always attend national/international conferences in the country if you have a chance.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You consider producing teaching materials for students important for university lecturer.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You consider conducting a classroom action research is necessary to find the real problems of students in learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You consider conducting a classroom action research can reflect your teaching problems and help find the solution.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You consider being invited to be a presenter/speaker indicates development in professional profile.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1  Perceptions on professional development in English Teaching Career (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>You consider writing a journal article published is necessary for a university lecturer as a career path for professional development.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>You consider teaching pre-service teachers requires professional updating knowledge and experiences in TESOL/EFL fields.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>You are aware that your students in Teaching English Program expect you to be their role model in TESOL/EFL fields.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Your university has clear and concrete policy and practice for teachers’ professional development.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Your university provides support and chances for teachers’ professional development.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Your university always provides help and financially support for attending workshops/trainings/conferences organised by external organisations.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Your university always provides you help and support in conducting a research project in finding an external academic consultant.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Your university always provides you data sources and technology support in conducting a research project in.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Your university always provides help and financial support in conducting a research project.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>You consider teaching load prevent you from producing academic teaching materials.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>You consider administrative work prevent you from producing academic teaching materials.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1  Perceptions on professional development in English Teaching Career (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Personally, you find it difficult to ask for help/support from an expert or consultant in reading your teaching materials.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Personally, you find it difficult to ask for help/support from an expert or consultant in conducting a research project.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>You consider language skills be your personal problem in conducting a research project.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>You consider not having enough research knowledge and experience be your personal problem in conducting a research project.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>You consider using technology be your personal problem in writing a research report.</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>You consider seeking collaborative support from peers be problematic for you.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above shows that all respondents strongly agreed that professional development (PD) was important for career progress as a university lecturer. Moreover, their universities always provided help and support in conducting a research project in finding an external academic consultant. In addition, most of them agreed that their universities had clear policy for their PD, they also supported their PD activities concerning attending conferences, joining training and workshop including conducting classroom action research and journal writing. Interestingly, they agreed that their universities provided them various kinds of support for PD like financial support, data sources, technology, and assistance from experts.

On the contrary, findings indicated that teachers agreed their teaching loads, administrative work, and seeking experts were problematic for their PD. Regarding conducting research projects, the respondents agreed their universities provided help and support in
conducting the research projects; while they agreed their insufficient research knowledge and experiences were their personal problem. However, they were not convinced about seeking expert’s assistance, language skills, using technology, their universities’ technology support in conducting research projects. However, the salient findings revealed the respondents agreed they were aware of being their role model to their students, and teaching pre-service teachers required professional updating knowledge and experiences in TESOL/EFL fields.

The Interview

An individual interview was conducted to gain an in-depth perceptions of English teachers on their professional development. Six interviewees individually participated in the interview at their work places. All of them had TESOL, TESL, or EFL degrees, and had experience of one or two kinds of English proficiency exams like IELTS, TOEFL, or TOEIC; but no one had applied for the CEFR exam. Moreover, most of them are holding or used to have administrative positions, for instance, being Chair of English Teaching Program. Findings from the interview revealed four major arenas of teachers’ perceptions on their teaching career. These were: 1) understanding about professional development, 2) professional development involvement, 3) university support, and 4) barriers. This was discussed and elaborated below:

1) Understanding about professional development

Results showed that all participants clearly understood how important professional development was as a path of their career progress. They also discussed lively and actively about how they started their PD. Data analysis indicated three aspects of PD they perceived. These are 1) changing working places, 2) endless learning, and 3) university requirement.

Firstly, data analysis revealed all participants viewed their changing work places provided them opportunities in professional development including changing levels of teaching, and fields of work. For instance, Dr. Aom who moved from eight-year of a secondary school English teacher to Rajabhat University explained, “All experiences made me to become professional; from readings and self-learning as well, I selected what I could apply and be suitable for me.” Similarly, Ajarn Snow, a young teacher of 4 year-experience in secondary school who got scores of 930 of TOEIC, and level 7 of IELTS, described that, “It was very
necessary for University teacher in seeking knowledge for professional development. The world always changes, and we need to keep up with students.” On the other hand, regarding changing filed of work, Dr. Kiti was an example. He explained that, “I used to work as a flight attendant for 3 years. And my first M.A. was Environment from Mahidol University.” Listening to him, it could be concluded that he was very self–inspirational and interested to seek new experiences and knowledge.

Secondly, some participants viewed PD as endless learning. For instance, Dr. Wipa said, “It’s endless learning. We need to exchange and create new things, and listen to other people.” Dr.Kiti also supported this idea as he said, “We need to develop ourselves, not only to improve the knowledge of English but also to broaden your mind.” Meanwhile Dr. Pla expressed another view of PD as being a speaker or trainer. “Being a speaker, one must prepare both of English knowledge and teaching methodology.” Similarly, Dr. Wipa explained, “Being a trainer, we need to do a good homework about the participants’ background, and learn to adjust to real situation.”

And thirdly, the university requirement was the other demand for RUs’ teachers to keep up with their PD. For example, Ajarn Nina said, “I plan to further my Ph.D. at a university in Auckland. I am also writing a textbook. It was the university’s requirement. And there is a deadline.” It was noticeable that Dr. Wipa showed her concerns about conducting a research project and writing textbooks since it was the university requirement. In brief, all participants were aware PD was very essential and critical for them all. It was endless learning and PD was required both for individual and the university goal (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 17)

2) Professional development involvement

Three major types of PD involvement emerged from data analysis which are 1) conducting action research, 2) joining conferences and seminars, and 3) being invited as trainers/speakers as discussed below:

Firstly, as expected, all participants had been conducting action research as well as community–based projects. For instance, Dr. Kiti said, “I do it every year. Currently, I was developing local wisdom lessons for Bang–Plee local residents; and another research project is about English for communication in tourism in Bangkok. Participants are my students.”
Meanwhile, Ajarn Snow was conducting an action research about using multimedia. She said, “I was interested in using YouTube in teaching English grammar and conversation.” Similarly, Ajarn Nina expressed that, “I found from my research study that using E-mail in a writing course could reduce students’ stress. It helped student’s encountering with teacher. It helped avoiding face-to-face with teacher, and they write more.” However, it seemed that Dr. Aom was not confident about conducting action research as she confessed that, “My last research project was 3 years ago.”

Secondly, participating at conferences and seminars both at national and international levels were frequent PD activities all the participants joined. For instance, while Dr. Wipa had joined an international conference in Turkey for her research presentation, Dr. Kiti joined the national conference as he said, “I went to Chiang- rai, and attended a conference held by Rajabhat University Network.” And I’m going to Japan this year for my research presentation.” However, he observed that the critical problem of English teachers at RUs was their occasional conference attendance rarely attending the conference. On the other hand, Dr. Pla had been developing her PD to the final stage required by the University, “I have published two research papers this year,” she humbly told the researcher. To confirm about this requirement, Dr. Wipa elaborated that, “We have to produce textbooks. My university has a project to promote teachers in writing small booklets. It seems not too difficult to make. I have written two.”

And lastly, results showed that organizing trainings and being trainers/speakers were common PD activities all the participants involved. For example, Ajarn Nina explained that she and her English staff were contacted by MOE supervision section to provide CEFR training to English teachers at schools close to nearby her university as discussed in the previous section (see the CEFR and the MOE policy). Moreover, she also provided other trainings to school teachers, “We provided session on task-based learning, however; most trainings focused on brushing up teaching methods as well as organizing an English camp.” Similarly, Dr. Wipa was regularly invited as an expert by Basic Education Testing Office to provide help for teachers who were responsible of making Indicator-based Tests (I-B Test) for school students. She elaborated that, “They conduct this seminar every year and produce many sets..."
of this IB tests.” Another example was Dr. Pla as she was regularly invited by external organisations providing English trainings, “Twice a year ka, English training at Institute of Community Development Department and Department of Tourism and Sports.” Even a young teacher, Ajarn Snow, who had high potential in English was invited to be a trainer about TOEIC training. She said, “They contacted me through the University.”

To conclude, it was obviously seen that all participants involved and participated in three major types of activities for their professional development. And all of the three activities included conducting research projects, participating national and international conferences, and holding trainings and seminars as well as being trainers and speakers themselves.

3) University Support

Interestingly, data analysis revealed that all participants accepted they got university support in assisting them for their PD. This was supported by Richards and Farrell (2005, p. 9) who state that PD is not only teachers’ destination in career development but also the institutions’ goal. Findings indicated three kinds of PD support; that are 1) organizing PD activities, 2) financial support, and 3) materials and data- based resources.

Firstly, most universities at the research sites organised seminars/trainings for their own teachers. For instance, Dr. Wipa said that, “This year the theme of the training was Active Learning. They also invited a speaker from the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) to provide knowledge and comments about research projects.” Similarly, Dr. Aom expanded that, “The University invited external speakers to provide TOEFL training this year.” On the contrary, Ajarn Nina said her university rarely held the seminars/trainings; instead, they sent the teachers to trainings/seminars held by external organisations at least three times per semester, ka.”

Secondly, regarding financial support, findings revealed that all RUs strongly provide financial support to their teachers. For example, Dr. Wipa described she went to present her research paper in Milan. “The University provided both money and helped organise my travelling. The university gave give research grants at least 20,000 Baht for one project.” Meanwhile, Dr. Kiti strongly agreed with this as he said, “This is why I like this university. They give a lot of support, particularly in conducting research projects.” Also, Ajarn Nina supported that her university give scholarship for travelling aboard at international conference, “At least
of 30,000 Baht.” In addition, Dr. Pla explained, “Research funds are given to us by the University for sure.”

Lastly, results showed that the final support RUs provided to their staff were materials and data–based resources for research projects. Every university provided electronic data–based resources to their staff. Moreover, some universities provided help and support by inviting external professional experts. For instance, Dr. Wipa said, “Having mentors is very necessary in giving us advice and comments to produce textbooks.” However, in spite of availability of data–based resources provided by the university some participants did not use them. For instance, Ajarn Nina described that, “I used the university’s on–line data sources from the library such as Wilson, ProQuest, and ThaiLIS.” Similarly, Dr. Aom explained that, “I used to access the university on–line data sources but I am not keen on this even though they try to encourage us to use them.” In contrast, Dr. Pla, argued that, “To be honest, I never use data–base resources from my university. They never informed or encouraged us. I would go to Srinakharinwirot University where I finished my master degree, and sometimes I asked for help from my friend who work at a different university.”

To sum, the interview findings indicated outstanding institutional support from all Rajabhat Universities in the study as they provided many kinds of help and support to their academic staff. The major assistance was in three aspects which included holding conferences/seminars, funding and giving scholarship for research and higher education, and on–line data sources as well.

4) Barriers of professional development

In spite of all necessary support from the university, data analysis showed English teachers encountered two main difficulties in their professional development. These are their teaching loads, and administrative work. This was not surprising since they were common problems found from every RU at the research sites.

Findings firstly indicated that over teaching loads were major problems for RUs’ participants to proceed on their career progress. For example, Dr. Aom said that “There are lots of work to do.” Similarly, Ajarn Nina confessed that, “I have never published a paper due to time limitations and not enough teachers. There are lots of students we are responsible for;
beside this, we also have to visit students during their teaching practice to give supervision.” This was similar to Dr. Wipa as she confessed that she was responsible for more than 20 teaching hours and had two-day school visits to give supervision to her fifth-year students. The fifth-year students or pre-service teachers in English Education Program are required to have one-year practicum as a part of graduation requirement. As a result, school visits and on-site supervision are conducted by their English teachers. Too many teaching hours and time spending for school visits were critical problems. And secondly, administrative work assigned to teachers was another critical PD barrier. For example, two of the participants were Chair of English Program, and one was Vice-Director of Art and Culture Institute. For instance, Ajarn Nina explained that, “Our teachers come in and go out. I have to substitute their teaching classes as well as my staff in the department.” In brief, the common problem that obstructed the participants from PD was time limitation. This was caused by over teaching load and administrative work. And this was a great barrier for their professional development.

In conclusion, data analysis from both the questionnaire and the interview supportively revealed all participants were aware of the importance of PD in their teaching career path. They also involved in various kinds of PD activities, for example, joining the conferences, trainings, and being trainers/speakers. In particular, conducting research/action research projects emerged as their major PD interest since all the interviewees have being conducted more than one research projects. On the contrary, in spite of all the university support, results revealed that the major barriers that blocked their PD progress evidently were their unavoidable teaching responsibilities which were their over teaching loads, and administrative work.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study investigated teachers’ perceptions on their professional development at Rajabhat universities in Bangkok and suburban areas. Overall, all participants absolutely understood and were highly aware that professional development was essential in their teaching career. This involved many kinds of activities they participated and attended including conducting research projects. Moreover, the findings revealed multi-areas of help and support
of Rajabhat Universities in the study provided to their academic staff. This included research funding support, teacher training, providing academic assistance, supporting external expertise, and on-line data resources provision. However, the problems that obstructed the teachers from carrying out their PD progress mainly concerned with their teaching overload, and other administrative work. Findings from both the questionnaire and the interview indicated four significant areas of professional development at the research sites. They are: 1) PD activities the teachers involved, 2) awareness of professional development, 3) the institutional roles of sponsorship, and 4) the challenges of teachers' PD.

Firstly, data analysis proved that the respondents participated in varieties of PD activities (Leung, 2009; Richards & Farrell, 2005). This included attending workshop, going to and presenting academic papers at national and international conferences, being invited as speakers, and conducting research projects. These PD activities were very important in enhancing the teachers’ knowledge and skills, particularly conducting action research. Burns (2009) advocates teacher’s conducting action research (AR) for six reasons. She argues that firstly, AR can provide solutions for classroom specific problems in teaching and learning, next it helps examine curriculum innovation, followed by reducing the gaps between the academic research results and innovative classroom applications, encouraging teacher’s PD in becoming reflective teachers, promoting teachers’ research skills, and finally enhancing teachers to discover their own practice innovation (p. 291). For instance, Dr. Kiti and Dr. Wipa confirmed in the interview that this was a forcing flight for teachers at RUs. To clarify, this was conducting research projects and disseminating the results.

Secondly, findings indicated that all participants were highly aware of their professional development. In other words, each of them had their individual goal (Gurney & Liyanage, 2016) in teaching career. Findings form the interview could highly highlight how the participants had gone to some extent for their awareness of PD. For example, Ajarn Snow had shifted her role from a school teacher to a lecturer at an RU whereas Ajarn Nina determined to further her studies in postgraduate level soon abroad. In addition, Dr. Wipa, Dr. Pla, and Dr. Kiti favored her PD in conducting AR.
Thirdly, the findings demonstrated salient roles of institutional sponsorship for their academic staff. The universities support came in various strategies (Gurney & Liyanage, 2016). For example, they provided scholarship for furthering postgraduate studies and language training overseas. Financial support was given for research projects. Also, the university online data bases helps facilitate their teachers in searching information for AR. And finally, the universities organised quite a lot of certain kinds of conferences and trainings for their staff (Richards & Farrell, 2005). This was found from the interview from 5 of 6 RUs; however, interestingly only one RU in suburb did not hold any kinds of conferences for their staff.

Finally, the challenges for English teachers’ professional development were unavoidable. Data analysis from the interview revealed three main factors that obstructed and delayed the participants in reaching their PD individual goal. These were: 1) time limitations and the university’s requirements, 2) over teaching load, and 3) administrative work. For example, all interviewees claimed that they found it hard to reach their individual and the university goal due to time limitations, Ajarn Nina for example. Another problem dealt with the teachers’ teaching hours. It was quite a stunning fact to find that all participants in the interview carried almost 20 hours of teaching per week. This was crucial problematic in both individual and institutional efficacies for professional development (Gurney & Liyanage, 2016).

To conclude, the study showed that all participants had high awareness in their individual professional development. Besides, they all had participated various kinds of PD activities, both as the attendees and the presenters. The most important findings revealed the salient role of their universities in promoting and supporting their institution staff. Moreover, findings indicated that both kinds of professional development – sponsorship and independent PD– were entwined to empower the teachers’ knowledge, language experiences, and pedagogical skill as well as the university efficacies. However, the critical barriers emerged from the study appeared to be their teaching loads and administrative work. And this was the challenge for both institutional and independent professional development.
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