

Article

The Professional Development (PD) Paradox: How Policy Shapes English Teacher Identity and Constrains Authentic Learning in Thailand

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Abstract

Better outcomes in English language learning through improving the quality of teaching is a policy objective in Thailand's school system. Mandating continuing professional development aims to support the interaction of teachers' practice, learning, and unique individual strengths and needs in development and refinement of their identities as professionals capable of optimising learning outcomes. The study reported in this paper used data obtained in interviews with five Thai English teachers to investigate how the teachers' understanding of participation in PD influences their conceptions of professional identity in the Thai context. We found teachers view continuing learning and development as integral to their identities as effective teachers, yet they approach PD offerings/experiences with ideas about development as a teacher that are associated with linear relations between learning and practice and with teaching as technical activity. We conclude that policy prescribing mandated PD and association of PD participation with professional status and career structures shifts understanding of PD away from the needs of teachers and learners as unique individuals. Achieving quality English teaching and learning in Thailand through PD needs to focus on the complexity of negotiating identities in local contexts and engaging teachers in identification of their professional needs.

Keywords: teacher identity; professional development; English language teachers; teacher learning



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1. Introduction

In the context of globalisation and the international knowledge economy, the internationalisation of education has become a key policy objective for nations seeking to enhance their competitiveness (Liyanage, 2018). For member states of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) such as Thailand, this has placed a premium on English language proficiency as a crucial skill for workforce participation (Duong & Chua, 2016; Galloway & Sahan, 2021; Phantharakphong, 2025). Consequently, improving the quality of English language teaching and learning is a central pillar of Thailand's national educational strategy, as articulated through successive National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs) (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2023).

Reforms have explicitly targeted the enhancement of English proficiency from basic education through to higher education, with initiatives such as the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches signalling a commitment to aligning Thai education with global standards (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The success of these policy ambitions is understood to be fundamentally dependent on the quality of teachers. As such, continuing professional development (PD) is mandated to support teachers in refining their practice and updating their skills (Phantharakphong & Liyanage, 2021; Liyanage et al., 2021). The underlying assumption is that PD fosters ongoing interaction between teacher learning, practice, and the unique individual strengths and needs of educators, thereby facilitating the development of identities as professionals capable of optimising student outcomes. However, the efficacy of PD is not guaranteed. International research suggests that a significant challenge lies in the frequent disconnect between PD content and the complex realities of teachers' classrooms, often because PD is conceptualised as a linear process of knowledge transfer rather than a dialogic process of meaning-making (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Effective teacher learning is increasingly understood as a complex, non-linear dynamic, shaped by a multitude of factors including socio-political context, school environment, and, crucially, teachers' professional identities, beliefs, values, and understandings of themselves as educators (Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Phantharakphong & Liyanage, 2021; Strom & Viesca, 2021). When PD fails to engage with this complexity, it risks being perceived as an administrative exercise rather than a genuine opportunity for growth.

In Thailand, the PD environment for teachers is shaped by a specific set of structural and discursive practices. Structurally, PD participation is often linked to career advancement, academic standing, and licensure requirements (Office of the Teacher Civil Service and Education Personnel Commission, 2021). Discursively, official emphasis is placed on continuous learning, exposure to the 'latest trends,' and the need for teachers to keep pace with global developments (Institute for Research and Development in Teaching Profession for ASEAN, 2020). This context mirrors broader trends in Thai education policy, where, for instance, the drive for internationalisation in higher education through English-medium instruction (EMI) has highlighted tensions between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities, including issues of teacher preparedness and entrenched ideological preferences for 'native-speaker' norms (Liyanage & Phantharakphong, 2023; Sameephet, 2020). Similarly, in the school sector, PD initiatives may be influenced by a top-down, standardised approach that prioritises policy compliance over the nuanced, context-specific needs of teachers and learners.

This study investigates how this specific PD ecosystem influences secondary English teachers in Thailand. While teachers may express a strong commitment to continuous learning as integral to their professional identity, the structures and discourses surrounding them may channel this commitment towards a linear and accumulative view of development. This view frames teaching as a technical activity and PD as a means of collecting new methods or certificates, rather than as a space for the critical, reflective, and dialogic renegotiation of professional identity. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following research question:

- How do structural and discursive practices within Thailand's mandated professional development system shape secondary English teachers' conceptualizations of their professional identity, and to what extent do these conceptualizations align with a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning?

By exploring this question through interviews with teachers in a provincial city in northeastern Thailand, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how

PD can be reconceptualised to better support the complex relationship between teacher learning and identity development, ultimately fostering the excellence in English language education that Thai policy seeks to achieve.

2. Literature Review

This study is situated at the intersection of Thailand's ambitious educational reforms, the complex nature of teacher learning, and the pivotal role of professional identity. The review first outlines the Thai context, focusing on the state of English language education and the policy-driven PD environment. It acknowledges that the Thai PD system operates within a global trend of performative, neoliberal education governance, which shapes the very structures and discourses teachers must navigate. It then explores theoretical perspectives on teacher learning as a complex, dialogic process and professional identity as an ongoing negotiation, establishing the conceptual framework for investigating how structural and discursive practices shape teachers' conceptualizations of their professional selves.

2.1. *The Thai Context: Policy Ambitions and Systemic Challenges in English Education*

Despite being a compulsory subject in the school curriculum for decades, English language proficiency in Thailand remains a significant challenge. International rankings consistently place Thailand low in global English proficiency indexes ([Education First, 2021](#)), a concern that has driven national policy ([Liyanage & Phantharakphong, 2023](#); [Liyanage et al., 2021](#)). Successive National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs) have explicitly aimed to improve educational quality, with a sharp focus on enhancing English language learning outcomes to equip graduates for regional and global workforce participation ([Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2023](#)). This policy direction mirrors the broader trend in Thai higher education, where EMI has been adopted as a primary strategy for internationalisation, despite facing significant hurdles related to lecturer and student preparedness ([Liyanage & Phantharakphong, 2023](#)).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has enacted reforms centred on adopting the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches ([Ministry of Education, 2014](#)). The goal is to shift classroom practice from traditional, teacher-centred methods to student-centred learning where English is used for meaningful communication. However, this shift is fraught with difficulty. It confronts a deep tension between reform agendas and entrenched educational cultures where teachers are viewed as authoritative figures and masters of knowledge ([Prabjandee, 2019](#)). Furthermore, as seen in the EMI context elsewhere ([Liyanage & Walker, 2019](#)), a gap often exists between policy mandates and classroom reality; the official language of instruction may be English, but issues of lecturer and student preparedness mean Thai is frequently used to facilitate understanding and manage the classroom ([Sameephet, 2020](#)).

Recognising that teacher quality is central to improving student outcomes, the Thai government has instituted a comprehensive PD system. This includes mandatory proficiency benchmarks for pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g., B2 CEFR level for English teachers) and requirements for ongoing PD participation linked to career advancement and licensure ([Office of the Teacher Civil Service and Education Personnel Commission, 2021](#)). Numerous organisations, such as the British Council, Thailand TESOL, and the Human Capital Excellence Centres (HCECs), provide a variety of PD initiatives ([British Council, 2018](#); [Poonpon, 2021](#); [Rohitasthira, 2020](#)) with the stated aim of continuously updating teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

However, the structure of this PD system risks inadvertent promotion of a linear and instrumental view of teacher development. This can be understood as part of a wider

global phenomenon where education systems, influenced by neoliberal principles, adopt performative accountability measures that prioritise measurable outputs over complex processes of professional growth. PD is often delivered as standardised training, workshops, or seminars focused on importing the ‘latest trends’ (Charttrakul & Damnet, 2018). Participation is frequently motivated by the need to accumulate certificates and hours for academic standing and promotion, echoing the preference for standardised knowledge and the ‘native-speakerism’ observed in EMI policies (Liyanage & Phantharakphong, 2023). It is unsurprising that teachers, having been educated and now working within such a system, might internalise and reproduce its logics, viewing PD as a performative act of credential accumulation. This creates a PD environment where development is seen as an accumulative process of collecting new techniques rather than a dialogic process of adapting practice to local needs. Consequently, teachers often report challenges in applying PD learnings to their specific classroom contexts, pointing to a misalignment between the generic nature of PD offerings and the complex realities of their teaching lives (Baker, 2016; Ulla & Winitkun, 2018).

2.2. *Teacher Learning, Practice, and Identity: A Complex, Dialogic Relationship*

The challenges Thai teachers face highlight a critical issue in professional development globally: the nature of teacher learning. Traditional PD often operates on a linear ‘transmission’ model, assuming knowledge gained in training will be directly applied in the classroom (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Preminger et al., 2024). However, contemporary research reconceptualizes teacher learning as a complex, non-linear dynamic system (Kiss, 2012; Strom & Viesca, 2021). From this perspective, learning is not a simple cause-and-effect process but an unpredictable interplay of multiple factors, including teachers’ prior knowledge, beliefs, school culture, socio-political policies, and classroom constraints (Garner & Kaplan, 2021). Effective learning occurs through ‘highly salient experiences’ (Bonner et al., 2020, p. 380) that create disequilibrium, prompting teachers to critically reflect on and negotiate their existing practices.

This process of negotiation is fundamentally tied to the development of professional identity—teachers’ evolving understanding of themselves as professionals, encompassing their beliefs, values, and perceptions of their roles (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Berbegal Vázquez et al., 2024). Identity is not fixed but is dialogically (re)negotiated through social interaction and lived experience (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). Scholars drawing on dialogical self theory suggest that teachers hold ‘multiple I-positions’ (Assen et al., 2018, p. 132) (e.g., ‘the caring mentor’, ‘the curriculum implementer’, ‘the language expert’) that are activated and renegotiated in response to new learning. When teachers encounter new ideas in PD that conflict with their dominant I-positions, a process of de-positioning and re-positioning can occur, leading to identity transformation (Arvaja, 2024).

Therefore, PD is not merely about skill acquisition; it is a key site for identity work. As Wenger (1998) argues, learning transforms who we are. When teachers engage in PD, they compare new knowledge with their existing beliefs and practices (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016) in a dialogue that (re)shapes their professional identity, which in turn directly influences their classroom actions, their teaching principles, and their interactions with students (Richter et al., 2021). Importantly, a teacher’s identity affects their agency, and their capacity to make meaningful choices and adapt PD content to their local context (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008; Molla & Nolan, 2020). When PD systems ignore teacher agency and identity, treating teachers as passive recipients of knowledge, they limit the potential for deep, sustainable change in practice (Trent, 2012; Mohammad Nezhad & Stolz, 2025).

2.3. Synthesising the Gaps and Leading to the Present Study

In the Thai context, a significant gap exists between the policy intention of PD to develop high-quality professionals and the likely reality of its implementation. The structural practices (e.g., linking PD to promotion) and discursive practices (e.g., emphasising ‘latest trends’ and standardised proficiency) appear to encourage a conceptualization of professional identity as something achieved through the accumulation of credentials and exposure to external knowledge (Phantharakphong, 2025). This reflects a broader, global performative culture in education, where success is often defined by measurable outcomes and compliance with external standards. To move forward, PD reform in Thailand must therefore grapple not only with local policy but also with the pervasive influence of these global performative and neoliberal logics that teachers have internalised. This aligns with a linear view of learning and contrasts sharply with a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning and identity as an ongoing, context-sensitive negotiation.

This study therefore seeks to investigate this disconnect. It aims to explore how the current PD system in Thailand shapes secondary English teachers’ own understandings of their professional identity.

By answering this question, the study will provide critical insights into how PD in Thailand can be reconceptualized to move beyond a technical, compliance-oriented model and towards one that genuinely supports the complex process of teacher learning and the ongoing, dialogic renegotiation of professional identity essential for achieving educational excellence.

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the complex relationship between Thailand’s professional development (PD) system and secondary English teachers’ conceptualizations of their professional identity, as it demanded a methodological approach designed to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of teachers themselves. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants’ lived experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attribute to PD within their specific socio-cultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research site is a major educational hub in Northeast Thailand where the first named author is a university academic. This setting is particularly relevant as it hosts one of Thailand’s centres for PD, the Institute for Research and Development in Teaching Profession for ASEAN, and is under the jurisdiction of six Educational Service Area Offices (ESAOs) that oversee the provision of PD for teachers in the region (Institute for Research and Development in Teaching Profession for ASEAN, 2020; Khon Kaen Primary Educational Service Area 1, 2023; The Secondary Educational Service Area Office Khon Kaen, 2023). As a key driver of regional education policy and a recipient of numerous government-led PD initiatives, Khon Kaen provides a typical case (Yin, 2018) of the mandated PD environment in Thailand. The challenges and policy responses discussed in the broader Thai and EMI context, such as the push for international standards and the focus on teacher proficiency (Liyana & Phantharakphong, 2023), are actively operationalized in this setting, making it an ideal site to examine how these structural and discursive practices are experienced by teachers.

Participants were five English language teachers from public secondary schools under the Khon Kaen ESAOs. Purposeful sampling was used to select information-rich cases (Patton, 2015) based on two criteria. First, a minimum of five years of teaching experience, ensuring participants had substantial experience with the PD system and a developed sense of professional identity. The second, active participation in more than five MoE-sponsored PD initiatives, confirming their engagement with the mandated PD structure under investigation. The participants comprised one male and four female teachers, all

native Thai speakers for whom English is a foreign language. All held bachelor's degrees in TESOL, with three holding master's degrees and one a PhD. Their teaching experience ranged from 7 to over 10 years. Pseudonyms (P1–P5) are used throughout to ensure confidentiality. This small, focused sample allowed for deep, case-oriented analysis, which is essential for understanding the complexity of individual identity conceptualizations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee. Prior to participation, all teachers received an information sheet and provided written informed consent. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Thai to allow participants to express their views comfortably and nuancedly (Josselson, 2013). The interview guide was designed to elicit narratives about teachers' PD experiences, their perceptions of its purpose and value, and their understanding of themselves as professionals. The interview questions explored several key areas. These included the participants' personal histories and motivations for becoming teachers, as well as their specific experiences with various professional development initiatives including the content, format, and perceived usefulness of those programs (See Appendix A). Additional questions investigated their views on the relationship between PD, teaching practice, professional development, conceptualizations of a 'good teacher', and their current and imagined future professional identities. Interviews, which lasted 45–75 min, were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English by an experienced translator. The translation was carefully reviewed to preserve the original meaning and nuance of the participants' expressions.

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA) following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This method was chosen for its flexibility in identifying patterns of meaning across a dataset that relate to a specific research question, making it ideal for exploring the complex and potentially implicit ways teachers conceptualise their identity in relation to PD structures and discourses. The analysis process was iterative. It began with familiarisation through repeated reading of the translated transcripts. The next phase involved generating initial codes by systematically identifying interesting features across the entire dataset, which included both semantic and latent coding. Examples of initial codes included 'PD for certificates,' 'native speaker ideal,' and 'linear application of knowledge.' These codes were then collated and grouped into potential themes, searching for broader patterns relevant to the research question. The emerging themes were thoroughly reviewed and refined by checking their coherence against the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' narratives. This was followed by defining and naming each theme to capture its essence clearly. Finally, the analysis was woven into a narrative report, using vivid extracts from the interviews as evidence. Throughout this process, the analysis was guided by the theoretical understanding of teacher identity as dialogical and teacher learning as complex (Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Strom & Viesca, 2021), which provided a lens for interpreting the extent to which teachers' conceptualizations aligned with a complex, dialogic view.

This methodological approach ensured that the findings presented in the next section are grounded in the detailed experiences of the teachers, providing a robust basis for discussing how the Thai PD system shapes their professional identity.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the analysis of interview data, organised around four central themes that address our research question. The findings reveal a significant tension. While teachers express a strong commitment to continuous learning as integral to

their professional identity, their understanding of development is predominantly shaped by a system that promotes linear, instrumental, and accumulative views of learning, often at the expense of a more complex, dialogic negotiation of practice and identity.

Theme 1: The Rhetoric of Lifelong Learning Contrasted with Vague, Externally Defined Goals

The teachers in this study consistently voiced a commitment to ongoing professional learning, aligning with the official discourse that effective teachers must continually update their knowledge. Participants described a professional obligation to keep pace with change, with statements such as “we cannot stay still” (P1, Lines: 414–415) and “teachers need to keep learning and updating their knowledge” (P2, Lines: 226–228). This suggests that engagement in PD is a core component of their self-perception as competent professionals.

However, this commitment was characterised by goals that were notably vague and oriented towards external, often generic, benchmarks rather than specific, reflective needs arising from their classroom practice. For instance, P1’s development ambitions focused on areas like “educational technology” and “materials design” (Lines: 199–204), with a future vision centred on using tools like Canva for “colouring and decorating the materials” (Lines: 488–490). Similarly, P4 framed the value of PD in terms of avoiding being “boring” by having “something new to share with the students” (Lines: 351–356). While a desire for new ideas is not inherently problematic, the lack of specificity and the focus on novelty over deep pedagogical reasoning indicates a conceptualization of development as staying current with trends, rather than engaging in a critical dialogue with one’s own practice. This aligns with the broader policy environment described by [Liyanage and Phantharakphong \(2023\)](#), where the importation of external standards and methods is prioritised. The teachers’ goals appear to be shaped more by this discursive emphasis on “the latest” than by a dialogic process of identifying personal and contextualised areas for growth.

Theme 2: Linear and Accumulative Perceptions of Learning and Identity

A predominant theme in the data was a linear perception of the relationship between PD and classroom practice. Teachers frequently described PD as a source of input for direct application, conceptualising learning as a straightforward transfer of knowledge from training to classroom. P4 valued hands-on activities because she could “try what I’ve learned in my class immediately” (Lines: 102–107), and P1 sought PD that could be “applied right away” (Lines: 125–131). P3 aptly summarised this view by comparing knowledge to tools collected for a toolkit: “the more knowledge we have, the more tools we have at our disposal” (Lines: 345–347).

This linear view of learning feeds directly into an accumulative perception of professional identity. Development is seen as a process of acquiring more skills, techniques, and certificates, which collectively constitute a more effective teacher. P2’s imagined future identity illustrates this linear progression, envisioning herself as a “happy teacher” who imparts knowledge using “techniques accumulated over the past ten to fifteen years” (Lines: 446–449). Likewise, P5 desired a “teaching management method that is consistent in each period” (Lines: 405–408), implying a search for a stable, perfected identity rather than one that embraces the constant (re)negotiation and adaptation inherent in complex, dialogic learning. This perspective contrasts sharply with the view of teacher learning as a non-linear dynamic system ([Strom & Viesca, 2021](#)) and identity as a dialogical process of multiple I-positions ([Assen et al., 2018](#)). Here, identity is perceived as an end-state achieved through accumulation, not an ongoing dialogue.

Theme 3: The Dominance of Structural and Instrumental Motivators

The findings strongly indicate that the Thai PD system’s structural practices powerfully shape teachers’ motivations and, consequently, their conceptualizations of a successful professional identity. Participation in PD is heavily influenced by its direct link to career

advancement and compliance with Ministry of Education requirements. P1 explicitly stated that teachers want certificates “to be used in the promotion of an academic standing” (Lines: 166–172), and P2 confirmed that certificates are “crucial for maintaining academic standing” (Lines: 233–239). For P5, the potential for PD to shorten the time for “academic standing” was a key criterion for participation (Lines: 396–401).

These structural incentives distort the fundamental purpose of PD, shifting it from a space for professional growth to a mechanism for credentialing. This is exacerbated by systemic barriers, such as the complex bureaucracy described by P4, who noted the difficulty of accessing funded PD and the need to “talk to many departments” (Lines: 163–175). When PD is primarily a hoop to jump through for career progression, it encourages a transactional approach. Teachers’ identities become tied to the accumulation of evidence for promotion such as certificates, photos, and hours rather than to their identity as practitioners engaged in the dialogic negotiations of learning/practice. This reflects a system that values the performance of development over the complex reality of it.

Theme 4: Glimmers of Dialogic Practice within a Constraining System

Despite the overwhelming influence of linear and instrumental discourses, the data contained glimpses of an understanding that aligns more closely with a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning. Some teachers recognised the value of sustained, collaborative, and context-sensitive PD. P2, for example, highlighted the importance of PD with “reflection and follow-up processes” (Lines: 119–126), and P3 critiqued one-off trainings, arguing that reflection on application “becomes more beneficial” (Lines: 110–117). Furthermore, teachers expressed a clear preference for PD that was relevant to their specific school context, with P5 stating that without contextual relevance, “I can’t really use it with students” (Lines: 130–135).

These insights point to an underlying awareness of the conditions necessary for meaningful professional learning: collaboration, reflection, and contextual adaptation. However, these glimmers of dialogic practice remain isolated and are not supported by the prevailing top-down PD model. The dominant system, as P1 noted, is about helping teachers “understand how the world is going and developed” (Lines: 413–414) by importing external knowledge from ‘experts’ or ‘native speakers.’ This reinforces a power dynamic where valid knowledge is external and standardised, leaving little room for the bottom-up identification of needs or the collaborative knowledge generation that is central to a dialogic view of identity negotiation. The teachers’ expressed preferences for relevance and follow-up thus highlight a critical gap between what they intuitively understand as valuable for their growth and what the system provides.

The analysis demonstrates that the structural and discursive practices of Thailand’s mandated PD system which emphasises credential accumulation, exposure to external trends, and linear application, promotes a conceptualization of professional identity that is accumulative and instrumental. While teachers strive to be developers of their practice, the system shapes their efforts towards becoming collectors of knowledge and certificates. This largely misaligns with a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning, which sees identity as continually renegotiated through reflective practice and collaborative engagement with contextual challenges.

5. Conclusions

This study set out to investigate how the structural and discursive practices within Thailand’s mandated professional development system shape secondary English teachers’ conceptualizations of their professional identity, and to evaluate the extent to which these conceptualizations align with a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning. While we acknowledge limitations inherent in both the scale of the study, and the unique nature of

individual participants' identities, the findings indicate that the current PD environment, shaped by national policy agendas for educational improvement and internationalisation, encourages teachers to adopt a predominantly linear and instrumental view of their own development. While teachers express a strong commitment to continuous learning as a core tenet of their professional identity, their understanding of what this entails is heavily influenced by a system that prioritises the accumulation of credentials, exposure to external trends, and the direct application of new techniques.

Findings also reveal that teachers' professional identities are being shaped to value development as a quantifiable process. The structural need to collect certificates and training hours for academic standing and promotion reduces PD participation to a transactional activity, a means of 'ticking administrative boxes' rather than engaging in deep professional growth. This is compounded by a discursive emphasis on 'latest trends' and standardised knowledge, which positions teachers as passive recipients of pre-packaged knowledge rather than active agents in their own learning. Consequently, teachers like P1 and P4 conceptualise development in vague terms of novelty and avoiding boredom, and their imagined future identities, as seen with P2 and P5, are often static end-states of accumulated expertise rather than visions of ongoing, dialogic negotiation with their practice.

The profound misalignment between these dominant conceptualizations and a complex, dialogic view of teacher learning is the central problem identified in this study. A complex view understands learning as a non-linear process shaped by the unique interactions between teachers, their contexts, and their experiences, leading to an identity that is constantly renegotiated. In contrast, the Thai PD system, as experienced by these teachers, promotes an identity built on accumulation and compliance. The occasional glimmers of recognition for the value of collaboration, reflection, and contextual relevance, such as P2's appreciation for follow-up processes, only serve to highlight the gap between what teachers intuitively need and what the system provides. More research is needed to confirm our findings, but this gap underscores a fundamental disconnect between the policy objectives of improving teaching quality and the mechanisms deployed to achieve it.

Therefore, achieving the goal of excellence in English language teaching in Thailand requires a fundamental transformation in the understanding and organisation of teacher PD. Simply providing more training is insufficient. What is necessary is a shift away from a model of generic, prescriptive learning towards one that is genuinely responsive to the complexities teachers face in their local contexts. This entails creating structures that support bottom-up identification of needs, foster professional learning communities for collaborative inquiry, and value reflective practice over the mere demonstration of technique implementation, all supported by further research to explore the shift in the dynamics of the relation between teacher learning and professional identity that underpins this study. Ultimately, for PD to be effective, it must recognise and support teachers not as technicians implementing external mandates but as sophisticated professionals capable of dialogically negotiating their identities and practices in response to the real-world challenges of their classrooms. Only then can PD truly contribute to the development of the reflective, adaptive, and effective teachers that educational systems seek to cultivate.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

PD	Professional development
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EMI	English Medium Instruction
NESDPs	National Economic and Social Development Plans
MoE	Ministry of Education
HCECs	Human Capital Excellence Centres
ESAOs	Educational Service Area Offices
TA	thematic analysis

Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Section 1: Background

1. According to your academic qualification(s), why did you choose to study in this program/university? (Thai/Overseas University)
2. After completing the degree(s), did you start your teaching career immediately afterwards? Why?
3. Have you ever taught a level other than secondary level? Please explain.
4. From your experience, which skills are you most concerned about in your teaching and students' needs? Why?

Section 2: TPD preferences

5. Why are you interested in participating in TPD initiatives?
6. Thinking about your experience with TPD on a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for teachers to have this opportunity?
Follow-up questions: Depending on the rating e.g. high or low: Is there a particular reason for your rating relatively low/high or rating in the middle of the road?
Follow-up questions: In your opinion, what can the organisers of TPD learn from this? (e.g., What to do and what not to do?)
7. What are the opportunities for participating in TPD initiatives?
Prompts: Very limited, limited, a small range, a great range?
Prompts: Generally free, quite costly? – Please tell me more.
8. How many times in a year do you attend TPD initiatives?
9. Did you choose TPD initiatives yourself? How?
10. What kinds of TPD initiatives do you prefer? Why?
Prompts: Online? In-person?
Prompts: Organized by experienced Thai? Native speakers?

Section 3: Current TPI

11. How do you assess/see yourself as an English language teacher? Can you please describe?
Prompts: Do you think you are a good/effective teacher of English? Why? What do you think are your strengths as a teacher? Is there anything you would like to know more about?

Prompts: Does your school conduct a teacher needs analysis before deciding on which TPD opportunities are needed?

12. Is there a 'skill' (reading/writing/listening/speaking) you are good at teaching? Why do you think you are good at teaching that?

13. Would you mind telling me how you think your colleagues see you as a teacher?

Prompts: Similar to how you see yourself? Different? Why do you think that? On what basis do you think that?

14. Would you mind telling me how you think your students see you as a teacher?

Prompts: Similar to how you see yourself? Different? Why do you think that? On what basis do you think that?

15. The survey results showed that school support, TPD participation, and collaboration were significant factors for teachers to grow professionally.

a. Can you please describe how 'school support' helps you grow professionally?

Prompts: Budget? Facilities? School policies? Teaching resources? Choice of TPD opportunities? Frequency of TPD opportunities? Assessment of teachers' needs?

b. Can you please describe how 'participation in TPD initiatives' helps you grow professionally?

Prompts: Knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or perspectives? Approach to TPD and Frequency, Opportunity for teachers input and choice?

c. Can you please describe how 'collaboration with others' helps you grow professionally?

Prompts: Share experience? Peer-observation? Support? Constructive/non-threatening feedback on performance?

16. In your opinion, how do TPD initiatives make you a better teacher?

Section 4: Imagined TPI

17. Five years from now, what kind of teacher would you like to be? Please give an example.

18. Why would you want to be a teacher like that?

Prompts: Improved specific teaching skills, and assessment skills, able to take a leadership focus/opportunities, improving student participation and achievement, support to change pedagogy, collaborative work with colleagues?

Follow-up questions: What current perceived problems will be overcome or diminished by your actions – what actions and why?

19. How do you think 'school support' will help you become a teacher like that?

Prompts: Budget/extra teaching resources? Facilities? School policies? Constructive/Non-threatening feedback on performance? Better access to digital communication technology to support students' learning? Facilitating opportunities for students to speak English with first language teachers?

20. How do you think 'participation in TPD initiatives' will help you become a teacher like that?

Prompts: Knowledge? Skills? Attitudes or perspectives? Provision of exemplars of good pedagogy (e.g., videos, lesson dialogues? Making connections with other teachers to discuss the challenges involved and potential solutions? Opportunities to observe good teaching practice? Opportunities to put new knowledge/skills into practice and reflect upon your teaching with a colleague or via journal or both?

21. How do you think 'collaboration with others' will help you become a teacher like that?

Prompts: Share experience? Peer-observation? Support/share and discuss common challenges/issues?

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