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Quality, Equity, Inclusion and Lifelong Learning in Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. One of the three means of implementation of SDG 4 targets is SDG 4c which calls on countries and donors to significantly increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing and underdeveloped countries. This emphasis on the supply of teachers is in recognition of the fact that the quality of education ultimately depends on teachers. In general, there is widespread agreement that teacher education has an important role to play in the achievement of the SDG 4 targets. However, there has been limited attention in the literature to SDG 4 in a context of teacher education. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on SDG 4 and teacher education. The paper first presents a conceptual framework pertaining to quality, equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning. Next, the framework is applied to the case of Thailand to identify examples of progress the country is making in support of realization of SDG 4 in teacher education. The framework with the four concepts can be applied by researchers to identify examples of progress on SDG 4 in teacher education in other countries and contexts.

Key words: teacher education, sustainability, equity, inclusion, quality, lifelong learning

Introduction

The Chinese philosopher Confucius purportedly once argued, “If your plan is for one year, plant rice. If your plan is for ten years, plant trees. If your plan is for one hundred years, educate children.” His argument confirms those of sustainability advocates who recognize the need for long-term, complex solutions to the challenges facing humanity in this early part of the 21st century. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (UNESCO, 2019a) is premised on the same argument as that of Confucius. SDG 4 focuses on quality education as a core solution because it is a key enabler and strategy for the other 13 SDGs (ibid.). SDG 4 is as follows: “Ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (ibid.). As with each of the 17 SDGs, SDG 4 is articulated in terms of targets, progress and indicators. For example, SDG 4.3 is as follows: “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men

to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (UNESCO, 2019a). There are seven targets and corresponding indicators for SDG 4 (ibid.). There are three additional targets (4 a, b, c) considered as a means to reach the seven other targets. SDG 4 a, b, c refer to inclusive and effective learning environments, increased availability in developing countries to scholarships and supply of qualified teachers and teacher training. An example of an indicator is SDG 4.3.1: “Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex” (UN, 2017a). Figure 1 summarizes SDG 4 and its targets.

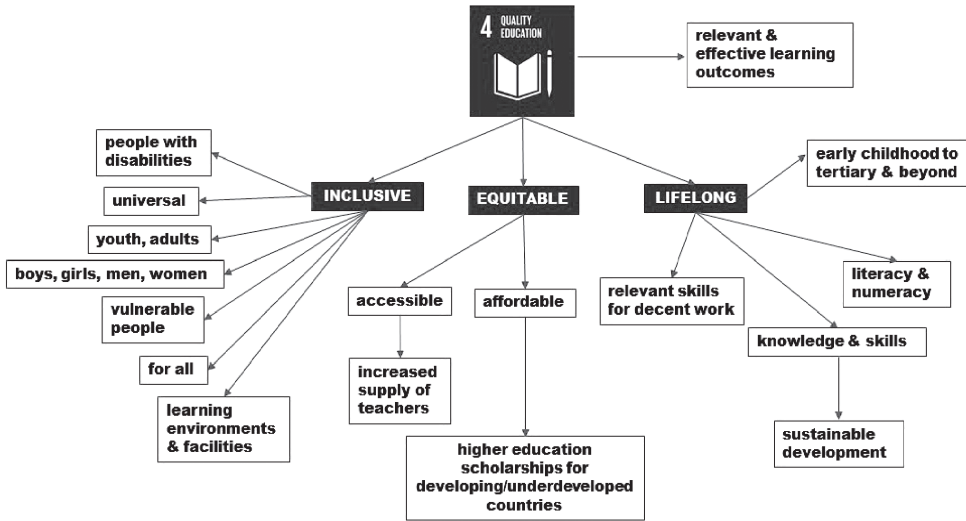


Figure 1. SDG 4 summary

SDG 4 and Teacher Education in Thailand

One of the three means of implementation of SDG 4 targets is SDG 4c which calls on countries and donors to significantly increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing and underdeveloped countries (UNESCO, 2019a). This emphasis on the increase is in recognition of the fact that the quality of education ultimately depends on teachers (ibid.). In general, there is widespread agreement that teacher education has an important role to play in the achievement of the SDG 4 targets. For example, UNESCO’s (2005) guidelines regarding teacher education to address sustainability described teacher-education institutions as “key change agents” (p. 11) in ensuring a sustainable future. SDG 4 highlights the importance of quality, equity and inclusion in learning, as well as lifelong learning. However, there has been limited attention paid to the relevance of these four concepts in a context of teacher education. This paper provides a conceptual framework around SDG 4 that can be applied to the analysis of contexts of teacher education. A conceptual framework uses an inductive process to bring together related concepts to “give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest” and create a “map of possible relationships” (Imenda, 2014, p. 189). The paper first analyses the four concepts in relation to teacher education in general. Next, the paper focuses on these concepts in relation to one country, i.e., Thailand. Thailand is a relevant context in which to ground the concepts. It is a developing country where education has the

potential to play an important role in its evolution to a developed country. It is also a country where the uniqueness of culture influences higher-education policy and practice (Crocco, 2018). For each of the four concepts, the paper identifies examples of progress that Thailand is making in teacher education in support of SDG 4.

Reporting Progress

Data on progress towards SDG 4 in relation to teacher education is normally reported in terms of participation rates in pre-service training and in actual in-service teaching. For example, the United Nations (UN) (2018a) SDG report highlighted the need for more trained teachers. Another report (see Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018) showed that tertiary participation in South Asia (including Thailand) is low compared to the rest of the world with the exception of the lowest participation rates which are in sub-Saharan Africa. More generally, a UN (2017b) report revealed the amount of spending on scholarships related to teacher training. The UN also reports country progress on the SDGs. However, this progress may be only partially reported in relation to teacher education depending on available data. Thailand's report (see UN, 2018b) merely notes that the country is making progress on advancing the quality of education. In general, reports of progress on teacher education in specific countries are relatively limited (see, e.g., UNESCO, 2019b).

The approach to measuring progress on SDG 4 in this paper is to contextualize it narrowly in relation to the units of analysis of quality, inclusion, equity and lifelong learning. The contextualization is also narrowed, not only to post-secondary (tertiary) education but, to teacher education and in one specific country. The aim is to provide examples of progress in terms of each of the four concepts. Evidence of progress is cited from the relevant literature on teacher education in Thailand. Where evidence has not been identified specifically for teacher education, it is provided in relation to post-secondary education in general for which teacher education is a subset. The evidence is meant to be illustrative as opposed to definitive and is presented as examples. In some cases where the literature makes evident a particular issue or challenge related to progress, the paper reports this. Figure 2 highlights the focus of the paper.

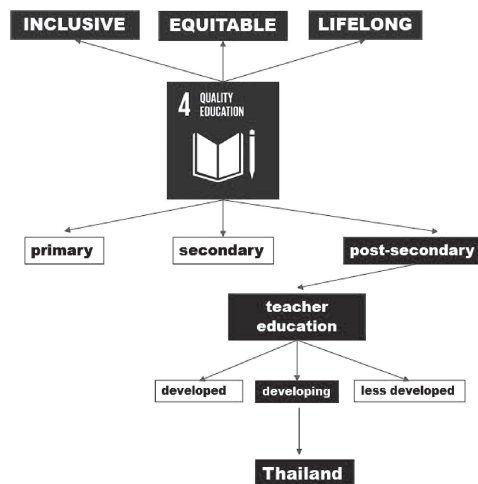


Figure 2. SDG 4 and teacher education in Thailand

SDG 4: Quality, Equity, Inclusion and Lifelong Learning

This section of the paper qualifies each of the concepts related to SDG 4: quality, equity, inclusion and lifelong learning. For each concept, a figure summarizes the main, related concepts.

Quality

In teacher education, quality can be promoted through measures such as independent, external accreditation (Eurydice, 2006) and licensing or certification of graduates (Imig & Imig, 2007). It can also be promoted through emphasis on accountability (Sachs, 2016) monitored by independent, external agencies (Jasman, 2016). Quality can be promoted through quality assurance focused on professional teaching standards leading to certification and licensing (Sachs, 2016). Other measures to ensure quality include reliance on performance-based assessments (Horne, Monaco, Cannon, & Roberts, 2019). Recruitment and selection of teachers play a role in quality of teacher education through, for example, preference in admission to candidates with high academic achievement (Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017). However, recruitment of high-quality candidates may depend on salaries and whether they perceive teaching as an attractive career option (Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017). Quality is also affected by supply and demand. An alternative perspective on quality in teacher education focuses on closer links between preparation and practice through field experiences and school placements (see Jensen, Klette, & Hammerness, 2018). Such experiences offer teachers an opportunity to rehearse teaching (Jensen, Klette, & Hammerness, 2018) and observe students' learning (Jensen, Canrinus, Klette, & Hammerness, 2018). Other perspectives focus on the quality of teaching in terms of linking theory with practice and having shared visions of what constitutes good teaching to inform curriculum and pedagogy (Hammerness & Klette, 2015). Quality in teacher education also involves learning to include all learners and on having the necessary knowledge and skills (Imig & Imig, 2007). Figure 3 summarizes the concept of quality.

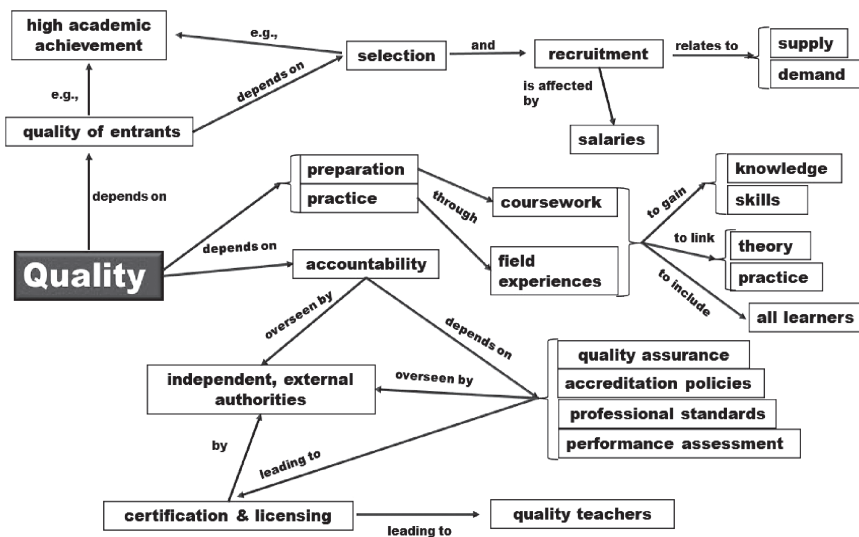


Figure 3. Quality in teacher education

Equity

In a context of teacher education, equity can be understood from the perspective of equity of access, participation and opportunity for program applicants or as equity for those taught by graduates (i.e., students) (Childs et al., 2007). Promoting equity in terms of admission of program applicants would involve approaches described by Gunier (2003) such as sponsored and structured mobility and democratic merit to promote opportunity and democratic values instead of favouring those with an inherited privileged. Equity promotes fairness by overcoming disadvantage through inclusion of those typically marginalised. Equity can be promoted through admissions that favour applicants who are equity minded, can mirror students’ realities, serve as role models of equity and represent the diversity of those they will teach (Childs et al., 2007). Applicants should have a capacity to promote fair and just distribution of and access to opportunity and resources as an outcome of learning. In this regard, they need a commitment to promote social justice (Dyches & Boyd, 2017) in terms of class, race, disability or other forms of marginalization. They should promote vulnerable, marginalized students’ learning and have a capacity to teach for equity that improves opportunity for those typically not well-served (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016) and that can lead to a more equitable society. Approaches to teacher education for promoting equity include culturally relevant pedagogy for marginalized learners, connecting with students’ experiences and challenging inequities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Figure 4 summarizes the concept of equity.

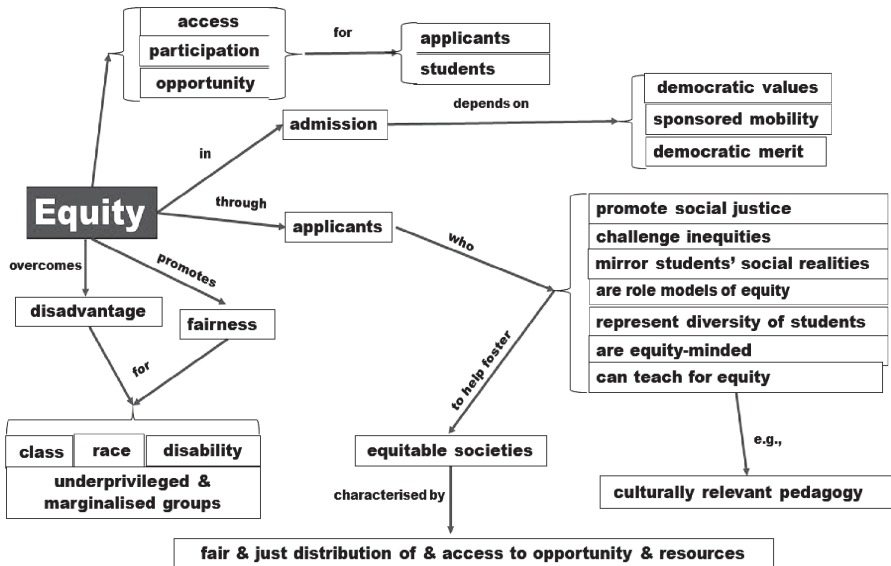


Figure 4. Equity in teacher education

Inclusion

Inclusion in teacher education involves valuing diversity (Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010). It means learning about inclusive practice and “teaching in ways that are inclusive” such as modeling inclusive practices (Florian & Pratt, 2015, p. 5). It is reflected in policies and practices such as admitting teacher candidates with disabilities. Inclusion

depends on equality and requires equal treatment, access and benefits for males and females (UNESCO, 2015) regardless of socio-economic background (UNESCO, 1990). Equality in teacher education is characterised by programs, curricula, and policy that are gender responsive (UNESCO, 2015). Responsiveness goes beyond awareness to encompass changed perception and action. Race equality can also be promoted through targeted measures that go beyond anti-discriminatory approaches to engage in active promotion of equality (Wilkins, 2014). Such measures may involve promoting race equality through professional standards, institutional cultures, policies, practices and even legislation (Wilkins, 2014). Conceptualized more broadly, equality and inclusion in teacher education means moving beyond gender to include attributes such as disability (Florian & Pratt, 2015). Inclusion means access to education and training for the “vulnerable, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations” (United Nations, 2015D, p. 17). Equity can serve as a means to achieve inclusion in cases where “targeted measures” such as affirmative action are needed to overcome disadvantage (UNESCO, 2015). Figure 5 summarizes the concept of inclusion.

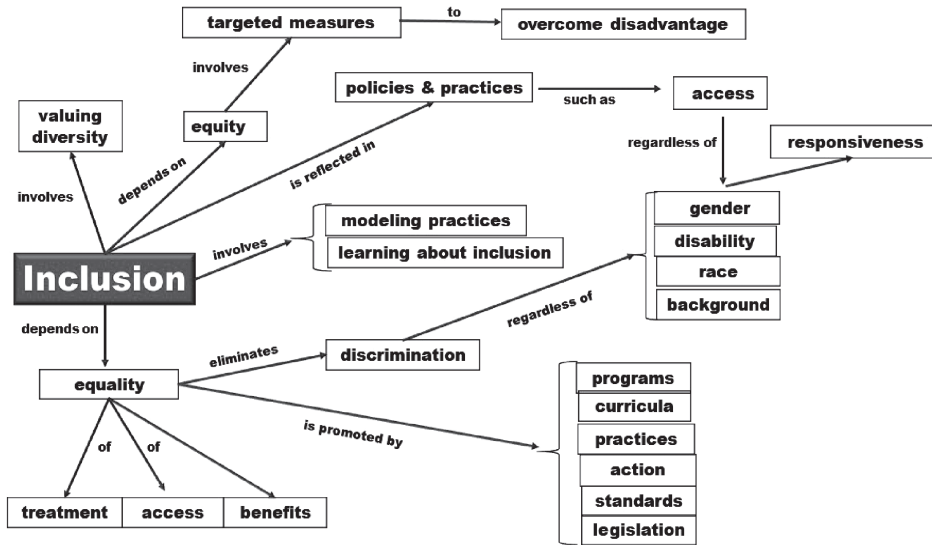


Figure 5. Inclusion in teacher education

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning (LLL) represents “the master concept for education policies” (English & Carlsen, 2019, p. 207). This is because LLL is critical for achieving other SDGs including those related to gender equality, decent work, well-being, responsible consumption and production and climate change mitigation (English & Carlsen, 2019). It is key to sustainability because it can empower people and communities to continuously learn, solve problems and adapt to their social and physical environments. LLL is a driver of development and transformation (Vargas, 2017). For teacher education programs, it involves candidates learning to teach students “to be committed lifelong learners and to learn on their own” (Siribanpitak, 2018, p. 471). It also involves candidates being committed to LLL and to student-centered learning and constructivism (Siribanpitak).

LLL in teacher education includes candidates experiencing “systematic support” in their own LLL as well as being prepared and trained to “promote LLL competencies among their pupils” (Finsterwald et al., 2013, p. 144). Teacher competences for LLL include knowledge and beliefs for promoting LLL in themselves and their students (ibid.). Figure 6 summarizes the concept of LLL.

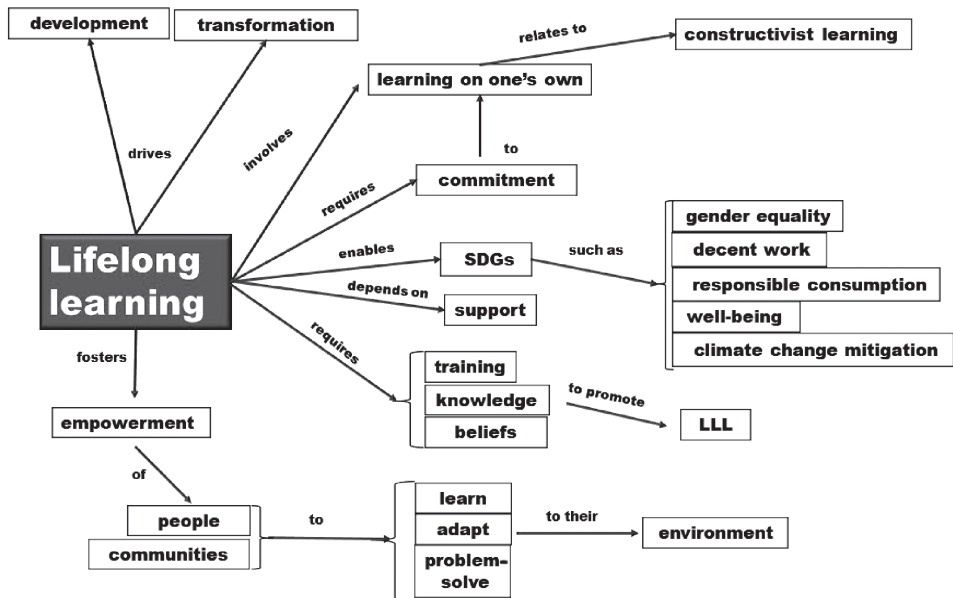


Figure 6. Lifelong learning in teacher education

The Case of Thailand: Progress on SDG 4 in Teacher Education

Quality

In general, in higher education in Thailand, there is an emphasis on quality assurance (Dhirathiti, 2018). In fact, the National Education Act 1999 requires all educational institutions to conduct quality assurance exercises, both internal and external (see Porntip & Chotima, 2018). The Office of the Education Council (OEC) (2017) promotes teacher-education policies focused on quality. These policies include recruitment of “qualified and virtuous persons,” compliance with international standards, solving problems related to teacher shortages in core areas, improving salaries and benefits, and reliance on a performance evaluation system (pp. 101–102). Admission into B. Ed. programs is based on a university entrance exam combined with an interview (Vibulphol, 2015). Admission requirements can vary depending on region and institutions (OECD/ UNESCO, 2016). The Teacher Council of Thailand closely oversees certification, number of practice hours and standards for the profession which includes a Teacher License Test covering 11 topic areas such as educational innovation, classroom management, and measurement and evaluation (Thongthew, 2014). Although Thailand has professional standards and criteria for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs, there exists a problem related to supply and demand (Siribanpitak, 2018). This problem

includes a lack of teachers in core areas, doubles the supply of graduates compared to the demand and teachers without majors in the field in which they are assigned to teach. Similarly, the OEC (2017) reported difficulties in recruitment of qualified teachers for core subjects (e.g., mathematics & language) in remote areas with candidates opting to teach in urban areas. Thailand has undertaken measures to improve teaching quality. These include instigating various projects to combat shortages such as the Professional Teacher Project designed to prepare and produce teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitude for the profession (OEC, 2017). Other initiatives include extending the length of its pre-service programmes, reliance on scholarships to attract high-achieving students and addressing subject- and region-specific shortages (OECD/UNESCO, 2016).

Equity

Equity in non-formal and formal education in Thailand is explicitly promoted through an act of government (see Sungstri, 2018). Considerable progress has been achieved in gender equity in higher education from 3% of females in 1976 to 60% of all students in 2015 (Crocco, 2018). Education reform efforts have focused on quality and equity (Promboon, Finley, & Kaweevijmanee, 2018). The demand for access to pre-service teacher education in remote areas was met partially by the conversion of post-secondary institutes into universities or *Rajabhat* (Crocco, 2018). Government has introduced various loan schemes to make higher education more equitable and accessible. However, equity is challenged by broader inequalities in social class and cultural capital resulting in higher performance in urban versus rural areas and among those with higher household income (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2018). Government per capita spending on education, “is not pro-poor and does not appear to mitigate regional inequality differentials” accompanied by “a very skewed, pro-rich pattern of tertiary spending” (Cuesta & Madrigal, 2014, pp. 246–252). Inequality is a feature of Thai culture and society and manifests itself in a “differential distribution of wealth, power, authority, privilege and other status prerogatives within the Thai social order” (Scupin, 1988, p. 333). Mounier and Tangchuang (2018) observed that privatization and commodification worsened educational inequalities by making available private forms of education of “higher quality to the rich minority” versus “open public institutions providing cheap education of mediocre quality to the poorer majority” (p. 486).

Inclusion

Education policy in Thailand promotes access to and equality of higher education (Dhirathiti, 2018 p. 268). The country adopted an Education for All strategy. The *Persons with Disabilities Education Act* promotes “equality of access to quality education for people with all levels of disability” (OEC, 2017, p. 128). To support disabled students in higher education in general, *Disability Support Services Centres* have been established (OEC, 2017). However, enrolment rates in academic programs at the tertiary level reveal increases in inequality of access that favour those from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Lathapipat, 2018). Various projects have been implemented to support inclusion in teacher education programs. For example, one project offers students from poor families enhanced opportunities to enrol in Bachelor of Education programmes.

The *Returning Home Graduate Program* encourages rural youth to return to their local communities following graduation (see, OEC, 2017). Kantavong et al. (2012) found that pre-service teacher education universities in northern Thailand demonstrated a very clear practice related to human rights education, special education, and inclusion of marginal groups in education. They also found that all of the 16 pre-service teachers' training institutes in their study included special education and inclusive education courses. However, it is not clear how knowledge translates from these courses to actual practice. For example, Bualar's (2018) interviews with 12 blind students enrolled in higher education revealed barriers to inclusive higher education in Thailand.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong, student-centered learning and a learning society have been a consistent target of educational reform efforts in Thailand. LLL has been in existence in Thailand "for a long time in the form of informal learning" (Sungsri, 2019, p. 192). It is supported through 3200 public "learning sources" such as museums, libraries, science and technology parks, etc. (Jangdecha & Larpsorn, 2018). In Thailand, the concept of LLL involves "a holistic approach integrated into people's way of life and aimed at developing people's capacity" (Sungsri, 2019). LLL means teachers are encouraged to teach less but motivate students to learn more, through a student-centered approach (Fry & Waraiporn, 2018). The National Education Act of 1999 drove learning reform towards more student-centered forms of learning from primary to higher education (Phungphol, 2005). However, the emphasis on student-centered learning conflicts with some aspects of Thai culture. Thai culture reinforces the requirement for respect for authority which can promote passivity in learners (Foley, 2005). The Thai learning environment that fosters rote learning contrasts sharply with approaches that rely on learners' self-motivation and self-regulation. In terms of continued learning, after graduation, teachers are required to complete a minimum of 20 hours per year of professional development (PD) to maintain their licence and be eligible for promotions and are entitled to up to 50 hours of PD (OECD/UNESCO, 2016). LLL in Thailand also encompasses autonomous, holistic learning that includes moral education (Fry, 2002).

Conclusion

This paper presented an SDG 4 conceptual framework which was applied to the case of teacher education in Thailand. The application to Thailand revealed progress particularly at the level of governmental policy and legislation and attempts at educational reform. There was some evidence to show that the policy did not always translate into practice. In terms of quality, while there are quality assurance and accreditation measures in place, there is a mismatch between teachers' initial education and the needs of schools. The mismatch results in teachers teaching in areas for which they may not be qualified and a shortage of teachers in particular areas e.g., science. In relation to inclusion, policies support inclusion of marginalised populations such as those with disabilities but that policy may not translate into practice in admissions or in teachers' practices. Similarly, while equity has figured prominently in reform efforts, there is evidence that teachers from urban areas and high socio-economic backgrounds have better access to

quality teacher-education programs than do those from remote areas and lower socio-economic backgrounds. LLL is a core, longstanding principle of all levels of education in Thailand. However, Thai culture and values may interfere with efforts to promote more autonomous, student-centered forms of learning.

The paper was limited in scope in that it did not make comparisons with any other countries. Such comparisons would have provided a means to interpret the evidence from Thailand. For example, a Canadian study (see Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010) identified shortages of specialist teachers in science, mathematics and special education in remote and rural areas with “few incentives for teachers to go to those areas.” Another Canadian study found that pre-service teachers with disabilities were marginalised in their programs (see Wilson, Sokal, & Woloshyn, 2018). A study in Ontario, Canada revealed that although there was recognition of the need for diversity in teacher education, “various groups – including first-generation students, students with disabilities, students of Aboriginal descent, and other racialized minorities – are underrepresented in Ontario’s colleges and universities” (Holden & Kitchen, 2018, p. 45). In relation to student-centred learning as it relates to lifelong learning, Sheridan (2016) argued that best practices such as student-centred pedagogy required “comprehensive and sophisticated pedagogy” to help pre-service teachers link personal beliefs and practical teaching experiences.

The paper was also limited in terms of the scope of literature that was reported. This was because of a smaller quantity of literature that reports specifically on teacher education in relation to SDG 4. Regarding the literature on Thailand, Mounier and Tangchuang (2010) observed that there was relatively little scholarly attention to Thailand’s education system. These limitations in the literature point to possibilities for future research. Other researchers can make use of the framework with the four concepts to apply to contexts of teacher education in other countries and contexts.

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