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

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### ABSTRACT

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

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### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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