

FIVE-YEAR CURRICULUM OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN THAILAND; GAIN OR PAIN?

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of the study were to (1) explore the advantages or disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education program in English, General Science, Math, Thai, Social study and Early childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, and (2) to explore participants' opinion whether the participants prefer five-year curriculum of teacher education to four-year curriculum of teacher education and why. The research sample, selected by volunteer sampling technique, comprised 12 internship student teachers program in English, General Science, Math, Thai, Social study and Early childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The data collection was conducted by using semi-structured interview which covered 2 main questions. The qualitative data analysis was conducted with the data obtained from semi-structured interview. It was found that there are both advantages and disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education. The main advantage was providing one-year internship and disadvantages were describe in many aspects. Student teachers' selection of teacher education curriculum were both five-year and four-year curriculum with different reasons.

Keywords: five-year curriculum, four-year curriculum, teacher education, teacher education in Thailand

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that the quality of teacher defines the quality of Education. This could be the reason why most educational reforms often focus on teachers. Moreover, well-trained and high qualified teacher trainee are essential for the quality of education as it leads to the educational development. To be specific, the educational development depends on students' learning outcomes. Consequently, it can be said that teacher is one of the most important factors that influences students' learning outcomes [1] [2].

In the context of Thailand, teacher training programs were taught exclusively at dedicated teacher-training colleges in the past, the former Rajabhat colleges, which have since been upgraded to universities. Nowadays, teachers can enroll in teacher training programs at wide variety of universities. Since the mid-2000s, Thailand has had a formal licensing process that requires teachers to hold an educational qualification accredited by the Teachers' Council of Thailand and have completed one year of in-service training at a school [3].

By 2004, most of Thai higher-education institution with teacher education degrees began offering extended five-year curriculum instead of the traditional four-year curriculum not only to meet the new requirements and to improve teacher quality but also to promote the prestige of teaching profession. At present, a five-year Bachelor of Education degree is the standard academic prerequisite for teachers in Thailand at all levels of education. The curriculum includes four years of coursework and one year of practical experience and this additional year of education was seen as a positive development as it is believed that this year provides student teachers an intensive academic and expert in teaching as advanced profession which affects the faith of teaching profession in Thai society [4] [5].

However, recently it has been discussing about the issue of the new policy of teacher education curriculum; the duration of the teacher-education curriculum will be shortened from five-year curriculum back to four-year curriculum again in the following year (2019) which in a way that will reverse the trend that began in 2004, in response to the Education Ministry's policy. This transition will firstly apply with Rajabhat universities which they will have to rush to adjust their curriculum' content in order to inform their applicants in advance and other teacher education institutes will follow the same curriculum later.

Based on the review of literature, reasons for the duration of the teacher-education programs being shortened back to four years are as follows; first, the quality graduates delivered faster to the country's classrooms. Second, teachers can graduate in four years with a curriculum focused on a competency and practical content,

new ways of teaching, evaluation and more intensive classes. The last, to response to needs of student teachers who can save one year and related expenses [6].

Nevertheless, many educators and experts have been arguing on this popular issue as there are inadequate reasons and information to support this decision making whether it is worth making this transition or not. Moreover, some educators said there are a few research that prove the quality of four-year curriculum whether it is practical and effective. Besides, the policy of teacher education curriculum has been changed for many times recently. This obviously shows that the decision of the related education organization for shortening the curriculum from five-year to four-year curriculum in the following year seems unreasonable and unreliable. This may lead to the less trustworthiness of people on the educational organization. Some educators disagreed with the shortening of the programs as they believed that the five years program teachers had already proved very active and professional and they believe that students have received much more from the five years curriculum than their procedures did in four years.

Teacher Education in this study is defined as a pre-service teacher education curriculum for training the persons to teach at any level in school from pre-primary to higher education level. The curriculum was designed to provide teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behavior and skills required for teaching profession.

In the context of Thailand, teacher education has had the crucial role toward Thai education development. It can be seen as most Thai education reforms has emphasized on the policy of teacher education. Teacher education in Thailand has been conducted by teacher training colleges called Rajabhat Universities, as well as faculty of education at other universities. Similar to Japan Turkey and Taiwan, Teacher education has been conducted by the faculty of education at the university level and colleges [7] [8] [9] [10] [11].

The main type of teacher education curriculum for educating professional teachers in Thailand is a five-year bachelor's degree curriculum. This curriculum is for basic education teachers (pre-primary to higher education level) and comprises four years of coursework and one year of internship in an educational institution which guaranteed by the Teachers' Council of Thailand. This five-year curriculum of teacher education is similar to Pakistan and Turkey in the year before 1993. Since then, teachers in Pakistan and Turkey had been trained in four-year at all levels which is same as Japan; the instructional management system for teacher education in Japan is four-year curriculum included teaching practice in the institution for three months while Taiwan provides six months of internship for their student teachers [5] [12] [9] [10] [8] [11].

Five-year curriculum of teacher-education in Thailand emphasizes learner-centered teaching methods and the scopes of the curriculum include courses in teaching methods, special field education, curriculum development in schools, learner development activities, school administration, research in classroom settings and general education subjects, as well as optional specialized courses, and a supervised practical teaching experience. A teaching license is conferred upon graduation [7] [8].

In order to teach at basic education level in Thailand, teachers must obtain a teacher license issued by the Teacher Council of Thailand. The main entry to this is to obtain a Bachelor of Education from an accredited five-year Bachelor of Education curriculum. The five-year Bachelor of Education curriculum are now offered by 112 higher education institution (176 faculties/campuses/colleges) around the country, public and private. Teacher students in this curriculum study the minimum of 160 credit hours which consist of four main groups of courses: general education, pedagogical courses, major study courses and optional specialized courses. They are also required to have 240 hours of teaching practice in two semesters in schools, gain direct classroom experiences during the coursework period, conduct classroom action research during the practicum, and attend teachership enhancement activities during the five years study. While teacher students of four-year curriculum in Turkey study the minimum of 136 credit-hours and a maximum of 150 credit-hour through courses mainly in three different fields: a) Knowledge and skill on general culture b) Special field knowledge c) Pedagogical formation and methodology and 8 hours of teaching practice [13] [14] [9] [10].

Several Research has proved that five-year curriculum has created much satisfaction compared to the four-year curriculum. Students are happy with teachers educated in the extended curriculum because they stand cooperative, effective and better prepared than their fellows trained in traditional four-year curriculum. Furthermore, graduates of five-year curriculum of teacher education are more likely to enter the teaching profession and more satisfied with being teachers than graduates of four-year curriculum of teacher education [15] [16]. However, some research pointed out that the short terms of teacher education curriculum have some advantages for instance economical, career teachers, less time consuming [17].

Nevertheless, based on the researcher's review of literature, most policy of teacher education curriculum reforms in many countries including Thailand have been changed from five-year to four-year curriculum or reverse without any fruitful information and public hearing. Furthermore, a few supported research were provided.

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this, the researcher would like to conduct the study which aim to explore the advantages or disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education program in English, General Science, Math, Thai, Social study and Early childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University and to explore participants' opinion whether the participants prefer five-year curriculum of teacher education to four-year curriculum of teacher education and why by using semi-structured interview.

In order to achieve those objectives, these research questions try to seek for answering the following questions; (1) what are the advantages or disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education from student teachers' perception program in English, General Science, Math, Thai, Social study and Early childhood Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (2) do the participants prefer five-year curriculum of teacher education to four-year curriculum of teacher education and why?

METHODOLOGY

The research sample, selected by volunteer sampling technique, comprised 12 internship student teachers from Early childhood, Science, Math, Thai, Social and English major, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. They were selected regarding to their status as the five-year curriculum student teacher with the knowledge of five-year curriculum and their maturity.

The data collection lasted five days using semi-structured interview which covered two main questions: (1) In your opinion, what are the advantages or disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education in Thailand? And (2) if you had a chance, what curriculum would you prefer to enroll between five-year curriculum of teacher education to four-year curriculum of teacher education and why?

The interviews were conducted for 12 times in three ways; Facebook messenger, Voice call via Facebook messenger and Phone call due to the participants' convenience regarding to their work as an internship, long distance, the cost of transportation and their working hour. The researcher interviewed the participants by using Thai language as it is their native language and to avoid language barriers.

The procedure of data collection; first, the questions were sent to the participants in advance and ask for the interviewing time due to their convenience. Second, the participants were to answer the main aforementioned questions. Third, some further questions were provided for some points depending on participants' answer and the last was participants' suggestion towards this study. The data obtained from semi-structured interview were analyzed by qualitative content analysis.

The qualitative data analysis was categorized into four main categories: (1) advantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education; one-year internship. (2) disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education; economical, more time consuming and content of the course study. (3) student teachers' selection of four-year curriculum of teacher education with the reason as follows; economical, career teachers and less time consuming. (4) student teachers' selection of five-year curriculum of teacher education with the reason as follows; providing a lot of experiences due to one-year internship and teaching practice.

RESULTS

Findings in this chapter consists of four categories: (1) advantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education in Thailand (2) disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education in Thailand (3) student teachers' selection of four-year curriculum of teacher education. (4) student teachers' selection of five-year curriculum of teacher education. The first two categories answered the first research question; what are the advantages or disadvantages of 5-year curriculum of teacher education program in English, General Science, Math, Thai, Social study and Early childhood, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. And the other two categories answered the second research question; do the participants prefer 5-year curriculum of teacher education to 4-year curriculum of teacher education and why? The findings from semi-structured interview were presented as follows:

The first question asking student teachers' opinion toward advantages or disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education in Thailand. It was found that nine student teachers said that one-year internship is beneficial to them. Nada, Pakorn, Siripa, Praewa, Somsak and Sunee stated that one-year internship is beneficial to them since it provides a lot of experiences as the examples of Nada, student teacher program in General Science.

Ex.1 "...This five-year curriculum provided me a lot of time in an internship year. The more internship year you have, the more experience you will get. It the profits!"

(Nada, student teacher program in General Science)

Besides, Jakkrit, Pongpat and Pathipan stated that one-year internship is beneficial to them not only providing experiences but also helping to know themselves and adjust themselves as the examples of Pathipan, student teacher program in Math.

Ex.2 "...The advantage of five-year curriculum for me is one-year teaching practice duration due to the fact that teaching practice is the process of changing the status as student to teacher. It takes time in order to get used to with the school contexts and there is a lot of things in school you need to learn."

(Pathipan, student teacher program in Math)

In conclusion, the main advantage of five-year curriculum of teacher education is providing student teachers a lot of experience due to one-year internship. It helps them to be expert in the future teaching profession regarding to teaching, classroom management, assessments and evaluation and classroom research. It also helps them get used to the school context, know themselves and adjust themselves.

However, three student teachers pointed out some disadvantages of five-year curriculum in the aspects of economical, more time consuming and content of the course study as follows:

Ex.3 "...As the duration of five-year curriculum is five year, the expenses such as the cost of living, food, transportation and others has cost me a great deal of money."

(Nada, student teacher program in General Science)

Ex.4 "...There are 2 disadvantageous points of five-year curriculum for me. First, the course study hour and teaching practice time take too long. Second, some subjects in the course study are not practical."

(Chanon, student teacher program in Math)

In conclusion, the disadvantages of five-year curriculum are the expenses as the duration is longer than four-year curriculum which means that more time consuming as well. Salary is not provided for an internship student teacher. Moreover, some subject is not practical for them.

The second question asking student teachers what curriculum would they prefer to enroll between five-year curriculum of teacher education to four-year curriculum of teacher education and why. It was found that nine student teachers would enroll four-year curriculum of teacher education and reasons involving economical, career teachers and less time consuming. As Sunee, Nada, Praewa, Siwakorn, Pakorn and Jakkrit stated that they would enroll four-year curriculum since it saves one year and reduces their parents' expenses as the example of Sunee, student teacher program in Early Childhood Education.

Ex.5 "...I would choose to study four-year curriculum as the study time is reduced, the expenses are reduced too."

(Sunee, student teacher program in Early Childhood Education)

Besides, Praewa not only said that four-year curriculum helps reducing expenses but also emphasized that she would choose four- year curriculum if it included one-year internship as follows.

Ex.6 "... I would choose four-year curriculum if it provides one-year internship like five-year curriculum. It also helps reducing expenses and the quality may be compared to five-year curriculum."

(Praewa, student teacher program in Early Childhood Education)

In addition, Siripa, Anuwat and Chanon also stated that they would enroll four- year curriculum of teacher education as it will help them get the career, earn money and take care of their family faster than before, study other courses more due to more time they have as the example of Siripa, student teacher program in English.

Ex.7 "...I would choose to study four-year curriculum as I can get to work early.

(Siripa, student teacher program in English)

In conclusion, four-year curriculum was chosen by nine student teachers with the reason of reducing parent's expense, getting to work faster as it is less time-consuming compared to five year. Moreover, they can earn money, take care of their family faster and study more other interested courses.

However, three student teachers would choose five-year curriculum of teacher curriculum. The main reason was five-year curriculum providing a lot of experiences due to one-year internship and teaching practice. The example are as follows:

Ex.8 "...I would choose to study five-year curriculum program. I could practice teaching in school for one year and gain more experience from this year. This one year, I can learn, see and know the individual students more, including colleges, student's society and teacher society."

(Pongpat, student teacher program in Science)

In conclusion, Five-year curriculum was chosen by three student teachers with the same reasons: providing a lot of experiences regarding to one-year internship in school. It gives them an opportunity to see how things work in school and get to know students which will be beneficial to them in the near future.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

Five-year curriculum of teacher education is beneficial to nine student teachers as it is providing them a lot of experience due to one-year internship. The internship year has influenced them a lot regarding to the teaching career. It helps them to be professional in the future teaching profession due to the experience they have got in school in an internship year. It also helps them get used to the school context and know more about themselves throughout this year. However, the disadvantages of five-year curriculum of teacher education were also pointed out by three student teachers. It was found that five-year curriculum cost a lot of expenses, the unpaid teaching position was also considered as disadvantage. Moreover, some subjects in the five-year curriculum are not practical.

It was found that nine student teachers chose to enroll four-year curriculum of teacher education due to the shortening duration that helps reducing expenses, getting to work faster and spending less time to study which coherent with some research, stating that the short terms of teacher education curriculum have some advantages for instance economical, career teachers, less time consuming. While three student teachers chose to enroll five-year curriculum with the reason providing a lot of experiences regarding to one-year internship in school. The internship year provides not only the practical teaching experience but also outside classroom knowledge which will be beneficial to the teaching career. This obviously shows that a yearlong internship gives students more time to practice profession and become more comfortable with teaching classes.

The researcher hopes that this research will be beneficial to some further studies about teacher education in Thailand or teacher education curriculum reforms. It may not be generalized but worth considering.

Results from the study have led to recommendations for pedagogical implications and recommendations for future studies as follows.

1. As student teachers concern about the duration of one-year internship. For further studies, research should study about what should one-year internship curriculum be.
2. As this study was implemented with the internship student teachers, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. it is interesting to conduct this research with the last group of student teachers who enroll in the five-year teacher education curriculum.

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