

teachers, professional development opportunities, practical experience, and adaptation to change. In the twenty-first century, the field of EFL has seen changes that have sparked changes in teachers' standpoints and conceptualisations of professionalism (Neupane, 2024). Modifications to policy that call for the renovation of professionalism serve as a professional development mechanism (Evans, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to explore the perceptions of stakeholders on EFL teacher professionalism (Neupane, 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To explore Thai novice teachers' understanding and perceptions of professionalism in the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).
2. To identify the implications of these perceptions for the design of TEFL teacher education programs in Thailand.

Literature Review

Professionalism is a fundamental concept for professional development. According to Hargreaves, professionals go through phases of development of teacher professionalism (Janssen, 2020). These include the pre-professional age, the autonomous professional age, and the collegial professional age (Janssen, 2020). Pre-Professional Phase predates the 1960s and is characterised by a lack of formal professional identity for teachers. Teachers were often seen as mere implementers of prescribed curricula with limited autonomy or professional development opportunities (Ganser, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000). The focus was primarily on maintaining discipline and delivering content, with little emphasis on pedagogical innovation or teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 2000). Beginning in the 1960s, the autonomous professional phase marked a shift towards recognising teachers as autonomous professionals. Teachers gained more control over their instructional methods and classroom management, reflecting a growing emphasis on teacher expertise and decision-making (Ganser, 2001; Day, et al., 2023). This era saw the rise of teacher unions and professional organisations advocating for teacher rights and professional standards (Ganser, 2001). Collegial professional phase, emerging in the mid-1980s, emphasises collaboration and peer networks among teachers. Teachers began to engage more in professional learning communities, sharing knowledge and practices to improve educational outcomes (Day, et al., 2023; Hargreaves, 2000). This phase highlights the importance of collective professional development and the role of teachers as reflective practitioners who contribute to educational reform (Chen, 2002). While these phases outline a progression in teacher professionalism, it is important to note that elements of each phase coexist in modern education systems. The dynamic nature of teaching means that teachers today often draw on aspects of autonomy and collegiality, while also navigating new challenges and expectations in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

Professionalism in TESOL is a multifaceted concept encompassing a teacher's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ethical standards, which collectively contribute to effective language instruction and student learning (Neupane, 2024). Professionalism for English language teachers encompasses intellectual, behavioural, and attitudinal functions that are essential for effective teaching in the 21st century. This multifaceted concept includes not only mastery of subject matter but also the ability to engage students and adapt to evolving educational contexts. Regarding intellectual functions or matter mastery, teachers must possess a deep understanding of the English language and literature, enabling them to teach effectively and inspire students (Ulfa, et al., 2024; Roskvas, 2019), and they are expected to stay updated with innovative teaching methods and digital tools (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024; Ulfa, et al., 2024). For example, a professional English teacher is perceived as a person who

is competent at speaking to native English speakers (NES) and writing English (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Behavioral functions focus on classroom management skills, fostering a conducive learning environment (Ulfa, et al., 2024). Additionally, effective teachers actively engage students and motivate them to participate in their learning process (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). Attitudinal functions involve a commitment to ethical standards and a positive outlook towards teaching and learning (Murphy, n.d.) and building relationships with peers and supporting fellow educators enhances the overall teaching quality (Ulfa, et al., 2024).

Evans (2008) established two parameters of the term 'professionalism', namely quality and inferior status. Hoyle (1975, as cited in Evans, 2008, p. 22) has stated that the parameter of quality refers to skills and knowledge utilised by professionals for the advancement of their careers: individuality, income and position. Teachers' commitment to professional development is a required practice under the 'suppressing alternatives' to become successful (Beck, 2009). Ozga (1995 as cited in Evans, 2008, p. 22) has considered that 'professionalism' is socially constructed through the lens of powerful people in organisations. Phongploenpis (2013) researched realistic and idealistic mentor teachers of English, showing no consensus on perceptions of mentor teachers' qualities regarding their roles and responsibilities. Accordingly, the definition of professionalism is socially constructed and changed over time. Especially in the digital age, the skill set for digital competency is essential. Kaewrattanapat (2023) proposed the conceptual framework for developing university manpower's digital skill set, including collaboration working on digital workspace, data analytics and data visualisation, presentation and interaction design, information retrieval from digital data sources, knowledge management with digital technology, and using artificial intelligence in performing duties. This provides a gap in the required digital skill set for the teacher development programmes.

Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

Professional development is a continuous process and involves self-reflection, leading to more effective actions. According to Adams & Pierce (1999 as cited in Wichadee, 2011, p. 13), more experienced teachers are not defined as teaching experts without having the ability to reflect on their teaching and, by this self-reflection, the teachers can discover new theories and practices of teaching. Loughran (2002, p. 33) has defined reflective practice as "thinking about the notion of a problem". Through a well-constructed reflection, particular problems are responded to or solved by critical decisions (Romano, 2006). Reflection helps professionals have a deeper understanding of what they know and do through reconsidering and questioning what they learn in practice. Loughran (2002) has suggested that the link between reflection and practice minimises possible routine problems at work. As such, reflective practice tends to be central to teacher professionalism in particular to teacher preparation programmes and development.

Reflective practice is increasingly recognised as a vital component for enhancing the effectiveness of English language teachers. Reflective practices enable teachers to assess their strengths and weaknesses, leading to informed decision-making in their teaching approaches (Chaudhary, 2024). Teachers who engage in reflective practices, such as action research and reflective journals, report improved lesson planning and student engagement (Rauteda, 2024). Teachers who reflect on their practices can create more effective learning environments, ultimately benefiting student performance (Hashim & Yusoff, 2021).

In primary education, teachers utilise reflection to adapt their teaching methods, ensuring they meet diverse student needs and improve overall instructional quality (Hashim & Yusoff, 2021). Incorporating reflection into teaching has been shown to enhance students'

English language skills, particularly at the tertiary level (Yoke & Jamil, 2023). Reflective practice fosters professional growth by encouraging teachers to engage in self-analysis and continuous improvement (Rauteda, 2024). Many teachers, however, lack awareness and engagement in reflective practices, indicating a need for professional development programs to bridge this gap (Korau, et al., 2024).

Reflective journals serve as a significant tool for English language teachers, enhancing their professional development and teaching effectiveness. A reflective journal is based on the idea of reflective practice in the form of the narrative reflection (Levette-Jones, 2007). These journals facilitate self-analysis, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt teaching strategies based on reflective reasoning. According to Bailey (1990 as cited in Farrell, 2001), in a teaching journal, teachers can show feelings such as satisfaction, irritation and bewilderment and in such journals they can reflect on teaching problems that arise. Reflective journals promote self-awareness among teachers, allowing them to critically assess their teaching practices and identify their strengths and areas for improvement (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Rauteda, 2024), which is crucial for professional development. For example, teachers report that reflective journals help them refine their teaching attitudes and strategies, leading to improved classroom performance (Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018) and bridge the gap between teaching and learning, fostering a deeper understanding of pedagogical effectiveness (Talib, 2016).

Reflective journals can take various forms, each contributing uniquely to the reflective process. Personal reflective journals allow teachers to document their thoughts and feelings about their teaching experiences, fostering deeper self-awareness and personal growth (Talib, 2016). Dialogue journals involve a written dialogue between teachers and students, promoting communication and reflection on learning experiences (Quirke, 2009). Collaborative journals allow groups of teachers to share insights and reflections, enhancing collective learning and support (Quirke, 2009). Online journals, utilising digital platforms, facilitate broader communication and networking among educators, allowing for real-time feedback and reflection (Quirke, 2009).

Researchers have indicated that the effectiveness of reflective journals requires openness of the writers' minds and a trusting relationship between writers and readers (Loo & Thorpe, 2002, p. 135; Thorpe, 2010, p. 328). Additionally, two elements, namely reflective and critical thinking aspects, are essential (Loo & Thorpe, 2002), and these aspects emerged through structured journals in the early stage of writing (Moon, 1999). The structured journals include questions to respond to as guidance to cover and reflect on the issue being investigated (Moon, 1999), and the structure can be in the form of 'double entry journals' where writers firstly describe their experience and are followed by critically reflecting on it. O'Connell and Dymont (2013) state that specific prompts or questions guide reflection, helping teachers focus on particular aspects of their practice. According to Smith (1999, 2006, p.5), a basic framework for writing a reflective learning journal consists of four elements, namely 'description', 'additional material', 'reflection' and 'things to do'. Smith (1999, 2006) explained that writers recount a particular experience and describe their feelings at that moment at the description stage. The 'additional material' refers to possible unconscious thoughts or feelings toward the experience (Smith, 1999, 2006). To enhance the quality of the story and describe writers' real feelings, Cunliffe (2004) has suggested that writers can start by listing their 'unpleasant' experiences. During the process of 'reflection', writers must have special interest in the occurred experience and concentrate on the existing feelings (Smith, 1999, 2006). According to Cunliffe (2004), the 'reflection' can be processed by writers, indicating the reason for the listed (un)pleasant experience and feelings and its essence as

questionnaire and write a structured journal. The questionnaire was sent to the participants' email addresses. It consisted of eight open-ended questions covering demographic information and the participants' perceptions toward the term professionalism and professional development (Moon, 1999). Their answers to the questionnaire were emailed back to the researcher at their convenience. All of the interpretations and translations of the answers to the questionnaire were then reviewed by the participants.

Then the participants were asked to write at least one journal for one week reporting any issues and feelings arising during significant teaching activities e.g. lesson planning, classroom management, marking and giving feedback to students and assessment and revealing any unpleasant teaching experiences, concerns, or doubts (during the period of them taking on this responsibility), particularly in content and pedagogy knowledge. Four questions listed below were used to help them write reflective journals. The questions corresponded with the four elements (description, additional material, reflection and things to do) suggested by Smith (1999, 2006).

1. What was the teaching experience and my feelings at that time?
2. What have I learned after the teaching session, and how did I learn it?
3. Was I pleased or frustrated with what I learned? What are the teaching problems in this session and what are the cause(s) of the problem(s)?
4. What action(s) will I take to solve the problem(s) or what attitudes, expectation and values will I change to learn better about teaching?

Their written journals were translated from Thai to English and were emailed back to the participants in order to discuss for necessary clarification. All the written data gained from the questionnaire and reflective learning journals were analysed through content analysis by mainly focusing on the meaning in context.

Research Results

Two main themes were established corresponding with the two research questions, which included: the meaning of professionalism and desired professional development. Regarding the perceived meanings of 'professionalism', the answers to open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the reflective journal entries were codified into three codes as follows: intellectual functions, attitudinal functions, and behavioural functions (Evans, 2011).

Relating to the intellectual functions, professionalism was defined as a knowledgeable teacher, mentioned by Tia, who stated, "Professionalism represents skilful and knowledgeable professionals who understand problems, solve them wisely and introduce changes for self-improvement." In line with this, Pip mentioned, "Professionalism also refers to a skilful person in his/her field." Furthermore, professionalism was referred to as a teacher who is good at the subject he/she teach. Pop said, "In my opinion, professionalism means something very important for occupations. For instance, accountants should be good at mathematics. Farmers should be able to do every step of planting." Similarly, Tan said, "Classroom discipline was perceived important ability in addition to knowledge of subject matters (English)." Likewise, San mentioned, "...the knowledge of subject matters would be enough to become a professional teacher."

Concerning the behavioural functions that form an appropriate professionalism, the participants described essential teaching skills and competences to achieve their career as a professional teacher of English. Mat said, "Professionalism is a teacher who is good at teaching". This was explained by Pat, saying "Professionalism is defined as a professional's teaching skills or competencies enabling teachers to solve the occurring problems effectively

and to extremely enhance students' learning development." Likewise, Nat stressed solving problems in the classroom and doing the job with great care, saying:

"Professionalism is paying attention to a person's work and doing it with great care and his/her potential... Likewise, a professional teacher should be able to handle all problems in classrooms in terms of subject matter and learners. In my opinion, the person with these qualities is a professional teacher."

Attitudinal functions as a form of professionalism were related to trying to create good citizenship in his/her students. Tin mentioned, "Professionalism means taking responsibility for one's teaching for students with one's full effort." Similarly, Sue mentioned:

"Professionalism does not end with teaching subject matters under a person's responsibility. It means teaching principles of good behaviour for students, as well-qualified citizens of the country, who can think and do right, highly moral and ethical, responsible, knowledge seekers who self-improve continuously."

The additional functions also involved certain aspects of personality, such as being patient, self-disciplined, and open-minded. Pip said:

"In my opinion, professionalism means working with great attention to achieve one's goal. S/he should be patient, self-disciplined, and open-minded to others' opinions. S/he can work carefully. If working outcomes are not good, s/he can fix them, being accepted as a role model by his/her colleagues or others ...and being available to advise about problems."

The meaning of professionalism (Questionnaire data) reported above seems to be related to the research participants' suggestions for the future teaching professional development. An effective programme in developing a professional teacher should first focus on knowledge of English. San said: "English skills were considered important and communication skills were stressed... and the ability to communicate with foreign teachers." The participants revealed professional development program should provide teachers with teaching skills which cover various aspects, such as classroom management, instructional media design, and teaching pedagogy.

The professional development programme should introduce them to new teaching methods or academic work which should be up-to-date. Mat said, "Professional development is to make progress in a person's life and to keep up with the world today." This was regarded as career growth, as Tin mentioned, "Professional development refers to always seeking new knowledge for upgrading teachers' status."

Last but not least, IT skills were introduced. Tan said, "In my opinion, life-long learning and experience in new technologies are very important for me." Likewise, Pat mentioned, "Professional development covers teacher training in various fields e.g. ...technology support..."

Discussion

This study investigated the multifaceted concept of professionalism as defined by Thai novice teachers of English (N=10) and explored its implications for future English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs in Thailand. The findings, derived from both a questionnaire and reflective learning journals (RLJs), offer valuable insights into the contemporary understanding of professionalism in the Thai context, particularly in light of evolving global and local factors, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants' definitions of professionalism, encompassing intellectual, behavioural, and attitudinal functions, align strongly with existing literature on professionalism in TESOL (Neupane, 2024). The emphasis on intellectual functions, such as a deep understanding of the English language and literature, and the need to stay updated with innovative teaching methods and digital tools (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024), underscores the dynamic nature of language teaching in the 21st century. The participants' suggestions for future professional development programs—including content (English), pedagogical, and IT knowledge—directly reflect these perceived intellectual needs. This highlights a crucial area for teacher education design: ensuring that programs not only provide foundational knowledge but also continuously equip teachers with the evolving digital competencies essential for effective teaching (Kaewrattanapat, 2023). The shift towards online education readiness, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Alea et al., 2020), further solidifies the necessity of integrating IT knowledge and digital pedagogy into teacher training.

The participants' recognition of behavioural functions, particularly classroom management skills and fostering a conducive learning environment, points to the practical realities of teaching. Effective classroom management is fundamental for student engagement and motivation (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). This suggests that teacher education programs must go beyond theoretical knowledge and provide robust practical experiences, such as teaching practicums (Imsa-ard, et al., 2021), that allow preservice teachers to develop and refine these essential behavioural competencies in authentic settings.

Furthermore, the inclusion of attitudinal functions, such as ethical commitment and positive outlooks towards teaching and learning, resonates with the broader understanding of a teacher's holistic professional identity (Murphy, n.d.). The participants' reflections, particularly through their reflective journals, revealed that professionalism is not merely about skills but also about a deep-seated commitment to the profession and the ability to build positive relationships within the educational community. This aligns with the "collegial professional phase" described by Hargreaves (2000), emphasising collaboration and peer networks.

The use of reflective journals proved to be a powerful methodological tool, enabling participants to delve deeper into their understanding of professionalism and identify practical barriers and facilitating factors in their journey to becoming professional English teachers. This finding reinforces the growing body of research advocating for reflective practice as a vital component of teacher professional development (Chaudhary, 2024; Rauteda, 2024; Yoke & Jamil, 2023). Reflective journals facilitated self-analysis, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt teaching strategies (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Rauteda, 2024), bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Talib, 2016). The insights gained from their reflections on classroom practice, such as identifying teaching problems and devising solutions, underscore the transformative potential of structured reflection (Romano, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2006). This suggests that reflective practices should not be an optional add-on but a central, integrated element within teacher preparation and ongoing professional development programs.

The study's findings have significant implications for transforming English teacher education design in the ASEAN context. Given that the definition of professionalism is socially constructed and evolves over time (Evans, 2008; Phongplopis, 2013), teacher education programs must be agile and responsive to these shifts. The suggestions from novice teachers regarding the need for comprehensive content, pedagogical, and IT knowledge in professional development programs provide a clear roadmap for curriculum reform. Moreover, fostering a culture of reflective practice through tools like reflective journals can empower teachers to become lifelong learners and proactive problem-solvers, continuously adapting to the challenges and opportunities in the EFL landscape. This holistic approach to teacher education, encompassing intellectual, behavioural, and attitudinal dimensions, supported by robust reflective practices, is crucial for producing highly professional English language teachers who can meet the demands of an increasingly connected and changing world (Todd & Darasawang, 2020).

Conclusion

This study successfully elucidated the multifaceted understanding of professionalism among Thai novice EFL teachers, categorising it into intellectual, behavioural, and attitudinal functions. The findings underscore that professionalism extends beyond mere subject matter expertise to encompass effective classroom management, a commitment to ethical conduct, and a positive disposition towards teaching. Crucially, the research highlights the significant role of reflective journals as a powerful tool for fostering self-awareness, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, thereby facilitating the professional growth of preservice teachers. The insights gained provide a clear impetus for English teacher education programs in the ASEAN region to re-evaluate and redesign curricula, ensuring a comprehensive approach that integrates content, pedagogical, and IT knowledge, alongside the cultivation of reflective practices, to prepare highly competent and adaptable language educators for the future.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of ten novice teachers, while appropriate for a qualitative inquiry aimed at in-depth understanding, limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of Thai EFL teachers. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires and reflective journals, while providing rich insights, may be subject to social desirability bias or individual variations in self-reflection abilities. Thirdly, the study was conducted within a specific educational context in Thailand, and the definitions of professionalism and the barriers/facilitating factors identified may vary in different cultural or institutional settings. Finally, the study provides a snapshot of perceptions at a particular point in time; a longitudinal study would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how novice teachers' understanding of professionalism evolves over their careers.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research are suggested. Future research could employ larger, more diverse samples using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to validate and generalise the findings on the dimensions of professionalism and the effectiveness of reflective practices across different contexts in Thailand and other ASEAN countries. Investigating how novice teachers' perceptions and enactment of professionalism evolve over their initial years of teaching would provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of teacher education programs and the challenges faced during professional development. Conducting comparative studies across different educational systems or cultural contexts within ASEAN could reveal unique and shared understandings of professionalism, informing more context-specific teacher education reforms. Furthermore, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of specific professional

development interventions designed to address the identified needs (e.g., intensive IT training, advanced classroom management workshops, structured mentoring programs) on teachers' professional growth and student outcomes. Finally, further exploration into how emerging technologies, beyond basic IT skills, can be leveraged to support teachers' intellectual, behavioural, and attitudinal development, particularly in fostering reflective practice and collaborative learning, would be beneficial.

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