



# Teacher Professional Development in Thailand: Enhancing Pedagogical Skills for 21st-Century Learners

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**Abstract:** Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Thailand faces numerous challenges, including limited access to continuous, high-quality training, particularly in rural areas, and an overemphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills. As the country strives to modernize its education system, there is a growing need to equip teachers with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and creativity. This paper examines the current state of TPD in Thailand, highlighting key challenges and opportunities for reform. It explores the role of digital tools, blended learning, and international collaborations in enhancing teacher training programs. The paper also provides policy recommendations for improving TPD through continuous learning, hands-on workshops, peer mentoring, and feedback systems. Long-term implications include the development of a globally competitive education system that prepares Thai students for success in the 21st-century economy.

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Development, Thailand Education, 21st-Century Skills, Digital Literacy, Blended Learning, Educational Reform

## 1. Introduction

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Thailand is a critical component of the education system aimed at improving teaching practices and ensuring that educators are equipped to meet the needs of students in an evolving global landscape. The Ministry of Education in Thailand has implemented various initiatives to enhance teacher training, focusing on upgrading pedagogical skills, promoting lifelong learning, and ensuring that teachers remain adaptable in their instructional approaches (UNESCO, 2019). Traditionally, TPD in Thailand has relied on formal workshops, conferences, and training programs provided by educational institutions and government bodies. However, there are still significant gaps in terms of access, particularly for teachers in rural areas, and many programs are criticized for being too theoretical and disconnected from classroom realities (Yiamkham, 2017). This has led to calls for more practical, continuous, and context-relevant professional development opportunities.

In the context of modern education, professional development is essential for ensuring that teachers can effectively respond to the dynamic needs of 21st-century learners. As education systems around the world shift towards fostering critical thinking, creativity,

collaboration, and digital literacy, teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to implement these approaches in their classrooms (Schleicher, [2018](#)). Professional development not only helps teachers stay current with new educational technologies and pedagogical strategies but also enhances their ability to adapt to changing curricula, student demographics, and global trends. Moreover, continuous professional development contributes to teacher motivation and job satisfaction, as it provides opportunities for career growth and personal development (Craft, [2017](#)).

The 21st century presents new challenges and opportunities for educators, with a growing emphasis on skills that go beyond content mastery. In Thailand, the need to enhance pedagogical skills is critical as the country seeks to modernize its education system and prepare students for the demands of a rapidly changing world. Traditional teaching methods, which often focus on rote learning and memorization, are no longer sufficient to cultivate the critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy skills that are essential for students' future success (World Bank, [2018](#)). Therefore, TPD must focus on developing pedagogical approaches that promote active learning, student engagement, and the integration of technology in the classroom (Thamraksa, [2020](#)). This shift is particularly important as Thailand strives to align its education system with international standards and equip students with the competencies needed to compete globally.

This paper aims to explore the current state of teacher professional development in Thailand, identify the key challenges and opportunities for enhancing pedagogical skills, and propose strategies for improving TPD to meet the needs of 21st-century learners. Specifically, the paper will: (1) analyze the existing TPD programs in Thailand and their effectiveness; (2) examine the importance of integrating 21st-century skills into teacher training; (3) discuss the role of technology in improving teacher professional development; (4) provide policy recommendations to strengthen continuous professional development for educators in Thailand.

## **2. Current State of Teacher Professional Development in Thailand**

2.1. Existing TPD Programs and Structures: Teacher professional development (TPD) programs in Thailand are offered through various channels, including universities, educational agencies, and government organizations. These programs aim to improve teachers' knowledge, teaching methods, and professional competencies. Common TPD formats include workshops, short-term courses, and in-service training sessions, often focusing on curriculum changes, teaching strategies, and content knowledge (UNESCO, [2019](#)). Universities and teacher training institutions also provide pre-service and in-service professional development, though the emphasis is frequently on theory rather than practical application (Yiamkham, [2017](#)). Despite the availability of these programs, the quality and relevance of the training provided often vary, with many teachers reporting that the professional development they receive is not sufficiently aligned with the realities of their classrooms (Boonpram, [2018](#)).

2.2. Challenges Faced by Thai Teachers in Professional Development: Thai teachers face several challenges in accessing and benefiting from professional development opportunities. One significant issue is the limited availability of high-quality TPD, especially in rural areas where resources are scarce, and logistical difficulties make attending training sessions difficult (Boonpram, [2018](#)). Many TPD programs are also short-term and focus heavily on theoretical knowledge, with little emphasis on practical, classroom-based strategies that teachers can immediately implement (Yiamkham, [2017](#)). Additionally, the lack of continuous professional development means that teachers may struggle to keep up with changes in curriculum and pedagogical practices, especially as the demands of 21st-century

education shift towards critical thinking and digital literacy (OECD, [2016](#)). Another challenge is the lack of personalized professional development. Many TPD programs are generalized and do not take into account the specific needs of teachers working in different contexts, such as urban versus rural schools or those teaching students with special needs (Schleicher, [2018](#)). As a result, teachers may feel that the training they receive is not applicable to their specific teaching environments, reducing its overall effectiveness.

**2.3. Government Initiatives for Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development:** The Thai government has recognized the need for improving teacher quality and has launched several initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher professional development. The Ministry of Education has introduced policies that encourage lifelong learning among teachers, including a framework for continuous professional development and a competency-based teacher evaluation system (Office of the Education Council, [2019](#)). One of the key initiatives is the Teacher Development Fund, which provides financial support for teachers to participate in professional development activities, particularly in under-resourced areas (UNESCO, [2019](#)). The government has also focused on improving digital literacy among teachers, offering training programs in the use of educational technology to enhance teaching and learning (Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, [2018](#)). However, while these initiatives demonstrate a commitment to improving teacher quality, challenges remain in implementation, particularly in ensuring that TPD is accessible and relevant to all teachers across Thailand. The government's focus on top-down policies has also been criticized for failing to incorporate feedback from teachers themselves, leading to a disconnect between policy objectives and the practical needs of educators (Thamraksa, [2020](#)).

**2.4. Comparison with TPD Practices in Other Countries:** Compared to other countries, Thailand's TPD efforts still lag behind in both scope and impact. In countries like Singapore and South Korea, teacher professional development is a central component of the education system, with a strong emphasis on continuous, collaborative, and practice-oriented training. In Singapore, for example, teachers are required to complete 100 hours of professional development annually, with a focus on pedagogical innovation, leadership, and the integration of technology (Ng, [2019](#)). South Korea, similarly, invests heavily in teacher training and has established a system of regular performance evaluations linked to ongoing professional development opportunities (OECD, [2018](#)). In contrast, Thailand's TPD programs are less structured and lack the same level of investment. While Singapore and South Korea emphasize the importance of continuous professional learning throughout a teacher's career, Thailand's approach is more sporadic, with many teachers relying on one-off workshops or training sessions that may not provide sustained support or skill development (Yiamkham, [2017](#)). Additionally, the collaborative nature of TPD in countries like Singapore, where teachers are encouraged to engage in peer learning and mentorship, is less prevalent in Thailand, where professional development is often seen as an individual responsibility rather than a collective effort (Schleicher, [2018](#)).

### **3. Key 21st-Century Skills Needed for Thai Educators**

**3.1. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** In the 21st century, critical thinking and problem-solving skills have become essential for educators, not only for their own professional growth but also for fostering these abilities in their students. Thai educators need to develop and apply these skills in order to create learning environments that encourage students to think independently, analyze complex situations, and develop solutions. Traditional methods of rote learning that focus on memorization do not prepare students for

the complexities of the modern world, where critical thinking is a key to success (Schleicher, 2018). Thai teachers must shift towards fostering inquiry-based learning, where students are encouraged to ask questions, engage in discussions, and develop problem-solving strategies. Incorporating real-world problems into the classroom helps students connect theory to practice, a vital skill for success in the global economy (Yiamkham, 2017).

3.2. Digital Literacy and the Use of Technology in Classrooms: As the world becomes increasingly digital, educators must be proficient in the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning. Digital literacy is essential for Thai educators as they integrate various technological tools into their classrooms, from interactive whiteboards to online learning platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for digital competencies as schools shifted to online learning (Thamraksa, 2020). Teachers must not only be able to use these tools effectively but also teach their students how to navigate and critically assess information in a digital world. Furthermore, the use of technology in classrooms supports personalized learning, allowing educators to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students and enhance student engagement (Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, 2018). Continuous training in digital literacy is crucial for teachers to keep up with rapidly evolving educational technologies.

3.3. Collaboration and Communication Skills: Effective communication and collaboration are critical 21st-century skills that educators need to model and foster within the classroom. Thai educators must be skilled in both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to effectively engage with diverse student populations and create a supportive learning environment (Schleicher, 2018). Additionally, collaboration is essential not only in classrooms, where students must learn to work together, but also among educators themselves. Teachers who collaborate with colleagues, share resources, and engage in professional learning communities are better able to refine their teaching practices and improve student outcomes (Ng, 2019). Educators need to embrace collaborative approaches, such as co-teaching, peer mentoring, and interdisciplinary projects, to create a more integrated and dynamic learning environment.

3.4. Creativity and Innovation in Teaching Methods: The 21<sup>st</sup> century demands creativity and innovation, not only from students but also from teachers. Thai educators need to embrace creative teaching methods that foster curiosity and imagination in students. Innovative approaches, such as project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and gamification, can make learning more engaging and relevant for students (Thamraksa, 2020). Creativity in teaching also involves adapting instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of learners, including those from different socio-economic backgrounds or with special needs. Encouraging creativity and innovation in the classroom not only makes learning more enjoyable but also prepares students to think outside the box, a skill highly valued in today's workforce (Schleicher, 2018). Teachers themselves must be lifelong learners, continually seeking new ways to innovate and inspire their students.

## **4. Enhancing Pedagogical Skills through Continuous Professional Development**

4.1. Integrating 21st-Century Skills into Teacher Training Programs: To prepare educators for the demands of modern classrooms, integrating 21st-century skills into teacher training programs is essential. In Thailand, teacher professional development (TPD) programs must shift from traditional methods that emphasize content knowledge and focus instead on equipping teachers with skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, collaboration, and creativity (Schleicher, 2018). Integrating these skills into training programs can help educators

adapt to the changing educational landscape, fostering environments that promote active learning and innovation. By focusing on these competencies, Thai teachers will be better prepared to engage students in deeper, more meaningful learning experiences that reflect the skills needed in today's global economy (Thamraksa, [2020](#)).

4.2. Practical Approaches to Improve Pedagogical Skills: To effectively improve pedagogical skills, teacher training must include practical, hands-on approaches that allow educators to apply new techniques in real-world contexts. For instance, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and student-centered teaching strategies can be incorporated into training sessions so that teachers experience firsthand how these methods work (Yiamkham, [2017](#)). Providing opportunities for teachers to practice lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional strategies during training ensures they are better equipped to implement these approaches in their classrooms. Additionally, encouraging teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and identify areas for improvement helps them continuously enhance their pedagogical skills.

4.3. Role of Hands-On Workshops, Peer Learning, and Mentoring: Hands-on workshops, peer learning, and mentoring are vital components of effective professional development. Workshops that focus on practical skills, such as integrating technology into the classroom or developing critical thinking activities, offer teachers the chance to learn by doing, which enhances retention and application of new techniques (Schleicher, [2018](#)). Peer learning, where teachers collaborate and share best practices, promotes a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth. This collaborative approach can be fostered through professional learning communities (PLCs) where educators work together to address common challenges. Mentoring, particularly for novice teachers, provides personalized guidance and support, enabling them to develop their skills under the supervision of experienced educators. In Thailand, mentoring programs could be expanded to create a more structured, supportive environment for teachers to thrive (Thamraksa, [2020](#)).

4.4. Utilizing Feedback and Self-Assessment for Teacher Growth: Effective feedback and self-assessment are crucial for continuous teacher development. Providing constructive feedback through classroom observations, peer reviews, or student evaluations allows teachers to understand their strengths and areas for improvement (Boonpram, [2018](#)). Feedback should be specific, actionable, and aligned with teachers' professional development goals to be effective. Encouraging self-assessment, where teachers reflect on their practices and evaluate their progress, fosters a growth mindset and helps educators take ownership of their development. Teachers who regularly assess their teaching strategies, student engagement, and learning outcomes can make informed decisions about how to improve their practice, leading to better student outcomes (Yiamkham, [2017](#)). In Thailand, developing a structured system of feedback and self-assessment could enhance the impact of professional development initiatives.

## 5. The Role of Technology in Teacher Professional Development

5.1. Digital Tools and Online Platforms for Teacher Training: Technology has transformed teacher professional development (TPD) by providing educators with access to a wide range of digital tools and online platforms. These tools offer flexibility and convenience, allowing teachers to participate in training programs at their own pace and on their own schedules (Thamraksa, [2020](#)). Platforms such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), webinars, and online certification programs have become increasingly popular for TPD, providing teachers with access to up-to-date instructional strategies and best practices. In Thailand, platforms like Coursera and edX are becoming more accessible, offering courses in



pedagogy, classroom management, and digital literacy (UNESCO, [2019](#)). Additionally, mobile learning applications enable teachers in remote areas to engage in professional development without the need to travel to central locations, addressing one of the main barriers to continuous learning.

**5.2. The Impact of Blended Learning and E-Learning on Teacher Professional Development:** Blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face instruction, has emerged as an effective approach to professional development. In Thailand, blended learning can be particularly beneficial in reaching teachers in rural and underserved areas, allowing them to access high-quality training while still benefiting from face-to-face interactions during workshops or in-service training sessions (OECD, [2016](#)). E-learning, or fully online learning, has gained traction in recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educators to rely on digital tools for training and instruction. E-learning provides opportunities for continuous development by offering teachers a flexible, scalable, and cost-effective way to stay current with new teaching methods, subject content, and technology (Thamraksa, [2020](#)). This mode of learning also encourages self-directed learning, where teachers can explore content at their own pace and choose courses that meet their specific needs.

**5.3. Virtual Communities and Online Resources for Collaborative Learning:** Virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) and online collaborative learning spaces have become important avenues for teacher professional development. These communities enable teachers to connect, share resources, and collaborate on problem-solving, regardless of geographical boundaries (Boonpram, [2018](#)). Online forums, social media groups, and professional networks like LinkedIn offer teachers access to a global community of educators where they can exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and share innovations in teaching. In Thailand, online communities are slowly emerging as a valuable resource for teachers, particularly those in rural areas, who may feel isolated in their professional journey (UNESCO, [2019](#)). These virtual communities offer a platform for peer learning and mentorship, which are key to continuous growth and development.

**5.4. Case Studies of Successful Technology-Driven TPD Programs:** Several case studies highlight the success of technology-driven TPD programs around the world, offering valuable lessons for Thailand. For example, Singapore's Teacher Work Attachment Program leverages digital tools to provide teachers with professional learning experiences linked to real-world industry practices (Ng, [2019](#)). This program helps educators incorporate practical knowledge into their classrooms while staying updated on current industry trends. Similarly, South Korea's Cyber Learning System for Teachers provides online professional development courses, enabling educators to enhance their skills without attending in-person training (OECD, [2018](#)). Thailand has also begun to explore technology-driven professional development programs, such as the Thailand Cyber University (TCU), which provides online training for teachers across the country. These programs demonstrate how technology can effectively broaden access to professional development and foster continuous learning, particularly for educators in remote areas (Boonpram, [2018](#)).

## **6. Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Teacher Professional Development**

**6.1. National Strategies for Continuous TPD Improvement:** To improve teacher professional development (TPD) in Thailand, the government must prioritize the creation of a comprehensive, long-term strategy that emphasizes continuous learning for educators. National policies should focus on integrating 21st-century skills into TPD programs, making

them more relevant to current global educational demands (Schleicher, [2018](#)). The Thai Ministry of Education should develop a nationwide framework that ensures consistent, high-quality professional development across both urban and rural areas. This framework should include mandatory annual professional development hours, a certification process for professional growth, and support for teachers to access digital platforms for self-directed learning (OECD, [2016](#)). Importantly, the national strategy should encourage teacher autonomy, allowing educators to choose from a variety of TPD programs that best suit their individual needs and teaching contexts.

6.2. Collaborations with Educational Institutions, the Private Sector, and International Organizations: Collaboration between educational institutions, the private sector, and international organizations is essential for enhancing the quality and reach of TPD in Thailand. Universities can play a significant role in providing research-based professional development programs, while private sector companies, particularly those in technology, can offer valuable resources and training in digital tools (Ng, [2019](#)). Public-private partnerships can ensure that teachers have access to cutting-edge technologies and innovative teaching methods, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, Thailand should continue to engage with international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD to align TPD initiatives with global best practices and standards. These collaborations can help Thailand adopt successful TPD models from other countries and incorporate new ideas into its professional development frameworks (Thamraksa, [2020](#)).

6.3. Funding and Resource Allocation for Effective TPD: Adequate funding and resource allocation are critical for the success of TPD programs. The Thai government must increase its investment in professional development, particularly in rural areas where teachers often have limited access to training opportunities (UNESCO, 2019). Funding should be allocated to provide scholarships and financial support for teachers to participate in national and international TPD programs. Additionally, resources should be directed toward improving access to digital tools and internet connectivity in schools, ensuring that all teachers can benefit from online professional development platforms (Boonpram, [2018](#)). Local education offices can be empowered to manage these resources effectively, providing targeted support where it is needed most.

6.4. Monitoring and Evaluating the Effectiveness of TPD Initiatives: To ensure the effectiveness of TPD programs, the Thai government must implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems. These systems should include regular assessments of TPD programs based on teacher feedback, student outcomes, and classroom observations (Schleicher, 2018). Data collected from these evaluations can inform future improvements to TPD programs and ensure they are meeting the evolving needs of educators. Additionally, teachers should be actively involved in the evaluation process, providing insights into how professional development impacts their teaching practices. Performance-based assessments can be used to track teachers' progress and identify areas where further training is needed. Regular evaluations will help ensure that TPD programs remain relevant, practical, and aligned with the goals of improving student outcomes and preparing teachers for the challenges of modern education (OECD, [2016](#)).

## 7. Conclusion

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Thailand faces several significant challenges, including insufficient access to high-quality, continuous training, particularly in rural areas. Existing TPD programs often emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical classroom application, limiting their effectiveness. Furthermore, many teachers lack

opportunities to engage with 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and creativity. However, there are promising opportunities for reform through the integration of digital tools, blended learning models, and collaboration with educational institutions, the private sector, and international organizations. Effective TPD must include hands-on workshops, peer learning, mentoring, and continuous self-assessment to enhance pedagogical skills and adapt to modern educational needs.

The future of TPD in Thailand hinges on the government's ability to implement a cohesive, nationwide strategy that emphasizes continuous learning and professional growth for educators. As the country seeks to modernize its education system, Thai educators will need to embrace digital literacy, innovative teaching methods, and collaboration. By investing in technology-driven TPD programs and fostering partnerships with both domestic and international organizations, Thailand can develop a teacher workforce that is equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Importantly, the Thai government must ensure that TPD is accessible to all teachers, regardless of their geographic location, through online platforms and other flexible learning opportunities.

Effective TPD has long-term implications for the overall quality of education in Thailand. By enhancing teachers' skills, particularly in critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, Thai students will benefit from more engaging and relevant learning experiences. This, in turn, will prepare them to compete in the global economy, where 21st-century skills are increasingly essential. Furthermore, improving teacher quality will contribute to reducing educational disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas, ensuring that all students receive a high standard of education. Ultimately, investing in teacher professional development will support Thailand's broader efforts to create an innovative, globally competitive workforce.

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### Originality & Body of Knowledge

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*Originality:* This paper offers an innovative examination of teacher professional development (TPD) in Thailand, addressing its critical role in equipping educators with the skills needed for 21st-century learning. It uniquely integrates theoretical analysis and practical strategies, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities in enhancing pedagogical skills, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Unlike prior studies that focus solely on training programs, this research highlights the transformative potential of integrating digital tools, blended learning, and international collaborations to improve teacher training. Its originality lies in providing a comprehensive framework that aligns TPD with global educational standards while addressing the specific cultural and logistical challenges of Thailand's education system.

*Body of Knowledge:* This study significantly contributes to the understanding of professional development for educators in Thailand by exploring the interplay between traditional and modern training approaches. It advances knowledge by analyzing the effectiveness of existing TPD programs and identifying key gaps in accessibility, relevance, and sustainability. The paper underscores the importance of integrating critical 21st-century skills—such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and collaboration—into teacher training. By offering practical policy recommendations and drawing on successful international models, it provides actionable insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders. This research adds value to the broader discourse on educational reform by emphasizing the role of teacher quality in achieving global competitiveness and fostering equitable learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical treatment of experimental subjects (animals & human):** The research was conducted in compliance with the principles of the Helsinki Declaration regarding human subjects, so formal ethical approval was not required.

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