

A Study of Characteristics of Graduates in a Master's Degree in ELT Based on the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF)

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Abstract

The Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education has competencies and skills as required by the labor market. In response to the needs of the job markets and the quality assurance in higher education, the purpose of this study was to determine how satisfied employers were with their staff's characteristics based on the Thai Qualifications Framework after graduating from the targeted university in Thailand. The participants were 19 employers and supervisors of the graduates. This descriptive survey study collected data through an online questionnaire asking the levels of satisfaction with the learning outcomes across all aspects, including ethics and morals, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, numerical communication and information technology skills. The descriptive statistics used in this study were mean and standard deviation. The results showed that a majority of the participants were highly satisfied with their staff who graduated with a Master's degree in English Language Teaching. The results demonstrated the high levels of satisfaction in ethics and cognitive skills as they expressed dedication, professional integrity, and strong problem-solving skills.

Keywords: employer satisfaction, English language teaching, graduate competencies, learning outcomes, Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

Introduction

Institutions in higher education in Thailand develop new curricula or improve the current ones, emphasizing knowledge construction and innovation. With high expectations of student quality, the educational institutions help improve undergraduates' and graduates' qualifications

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and professional integrity. Consequently, the quality of higher education is one among many issues that have caught the policymakers' attention (National Qualifications Framework, 2017; Ngamkanok, 2024). In line with the National Qualifications Framework, the principles establish associations between learning outcomes of the graduates from educational institutions and working competencies as required by the production and service sectors. The core competencies and occupational competencies which are accepted by related sectors and organizations are used in curriculum development to serve the needs of the changing economy, politics, and society (National Qualifications Framework, 2017).

The Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education serves as the standard for developing or improving undergraduate and graduate programs. It is important for all higher education institutions in Thailand to maintain quality and standards. Regarding the five aspects of the TQF, higher education institutions follow the framework by focusing on providing quality education and ensuring that graduates meet the required standards (The Higher Education Commission, 2009; Nuangchalerm, 2020; Putsom, 2024; Orses, 2025). For these reasons, the present study investigated employers' satisfaction with graduates as part of the internal quality assurance to endorse graduates' quality and the program of study.

In line with the importance of the Thai qualifications framework, the present study mainly determined employers' and supervisors' satisfaction with their staff who graduated with a Master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT). The results of the present study could contribute to teaching and learning management as well as improving the quality of the degree program.

Literature review

A framework for Thailand's higher education qualifications system is called the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd). This framework includes learning outcome standards for each level of qualification. In order to encourage lifelong learning, it also describes the features of the curriculum at each level, the amount of learning corresponding to the allotted time, and opportunities to identify prior learning from experience (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017).

1. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd) is associated with the Curriculum Level Internal Educational Quality Assurance System as they were set up to follow the same direction as evaluation for the purpose of showing curricula that meet quality standards announced in the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education of 2009 (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). Graduate students should have opportunities to develop and reach their full potential. Additionally, the process of the 21st century learning and teaching must emphasize the development of graduate students who are knowledgeable in harmony with the structure of the curriculum, the Thai Qualifications Framework, moral and ethical values, and the 21st century learning skills (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2015; Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017;

Watcharinrat et al., 2024). These learning skills could predict academic achievement and professional growth of graduates, as well as relate to employer satisfaction with those graduates.

2. The 21st Century Learning Skills

In terms of the 21st century learning skills, the Basic Education Core Curriculum seeks to enhance students' quality based on the United Nations Education Declaration (UNESCO) in four domains: 1) Learning to know, 2) Learning to do, 3) Learning to with others, and 4) Learning to be (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2015; Watcharinrat et al., 2024). Education is therefore no longer restricted to traditional classrooms. Several Thai universities have developed new curricula or enhanced existing ones with knowledge to develop innovations to serve communities, society, and the nation to meet the needs of students with competencies. For example, a study carried out by Orses (2025) revealed that both internal and external QA processes were aligned with the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They were used for improving curriculum design, teaching quality, and student assessment. Furthermore, Boromarajonani College of Nursing in Chiang Mai designed and developed new instructional methods for adult nursing practice subjects for students. The instructional designs and pedagogical methods support six learning outcomes of the TQF: H.Ed. (Thanaphakawatkul et al., 2023).

Besides, special interests and skills are essential to the quality of graduates, such as self-directed learning skills, language skills (Thai and foreign languages), participatory work skills, or the ability to use technology. Therefore, graduate programs should include modern learning and teaching that give students opportunities to use technological media, allowing them to learn at their own pace (Chanchang, 2020; Watcharinrat et al., 2024). In particular, teaching techniques will emphasize research-based learning and problem-based learning for graduate programs. In doing so, the teaching and learning methods and practice in research-based learning are valuable for graduates, employers, and supervisors. Researchers investigated the 21st century skills of graduate students. For example, the study conducted by Watcharinrat et al. (2024) found that the most frequently selected skills were media literacy, social skills, and information literacy. Participants also reported most selected needs of the 21st century skills were cooperation, creative thinking, and communication skills.

Preparing graduates to meet their developmental needs is essential to meaningful preparation and professional development. With the current emphasis on the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd), ethics and morals, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, numerical communication and information technology skills are used to purposively endorse graduates' quality and programs of study across Thailand (The Higher Education Commission, 2009; Putsom, 2024). The Thai Qualifications Framework has established the preferred characteristics of graduates that are stated in curricular documents (TQF 2). In order to meet the quality standards of learning outcomes, the framework also describes the systems and procedures that guarantee the accomplishment of

implementing the national higher education qualifications framework at the tertiary level (The Higher Education Commission, 2009). In order to ensure that graduates of every degree level and field meet the standards, learning outcomes must address at least five aspects as follows:

1) *Ethics and morals* are determined by the ability to form both group and individual habits of moral accountability as well as adjusting to one's lifestyle during conflicts, and practice societal and personal morality.

2) *Knowledge* is demonstrated through the ability to comprehend, conceptualize, present, and analyze facts, principles, or theories.

3) *Cognitive skills* are expressed as the ability to evaluate circumstances and apply concepts, principles, or theories through critical thinking and problem-solving skills in specific contexts.

4) *Interpersonal and responsibility skill* is the ability to work in groups, show leadership, and accept accountability for oneself and society.

5) *Numerical communication and information technology skills* are the abilities to analyze numerical data, use mathematical and statistical techniques, communicate effectively in speaking and writing in Thai and English, and utilize information technology.

Several studies have investigated the characteristics of the graduates according to the Thai Qualification Framework for Higher Education (Poonputta, 2020; Thanaphakawatkul, Isarangura Na Ayudhaya & Pusopa, 2023; Ngamkanok, 2024; Putsom, 2024).

For example, Poonputta (2020) investigated undergraduate students' characteristics according to the Thai Qualifications Framework in General Education at Mahasarakham University based on the five aspects, including 1) ethics and morals, 2) knowledge, 3) cognitive skills, 4) interpersonal skills, responsibility and numerical analysis, 5) communication and information technology skills. The participants were undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University. The research instrument was a questionnaire. The results of this study showed that undergraduate students reported high levels in all aspects. The participants' opinions about interpersonal skills and responsibility were at the highest level, followed by ethics and moral behavior, cognitive skills, numerical analysis, and knowledge. Likewise, Thanaphakawatkul, Isarangura Na Ayudhaya, and Pusopa (2023) investigate how students viewed their own learning outcomes in relation to the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: H.Ed.) as well as the relationship between learning outcomes and academic achievement. The participants in the study were nursing students. The results showed that the moral and ethics domain was the most frequently selected, while the knowledge domain was the least frequently selected. Additionally, there was no significant relationship between their learning outcomes and academic achievement. According to Ngamkanok's study (2024), this research aimed to investigate graduate competencies under the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) for higher education, develop indicators for graduate competency development in educational administration, and create a competency development manual for graduates under TQF. The results showed that there were four competency components of graduates, including knowledge, skills, ethics, and characteristics. The overall evaluation was found to be at the

highest level, as were each of the measured items. Putsom (2024) investigated students' opinions on the learning outcomes according to the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The results of this study showed that students in different years of study had different cognitive skills, as well as different skills in aspects such as cognitive, knowledge, interpersonal, and responsibility, depending on their cumulative grade point average (GPA).

In accordance with the literature review, this research examined employers' and supervisors' satisfaction with their staff after they graduated with a Master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT). The study also pointed out the key issues about the quality assurance in higher education and the 21st century learning skills that the graduates should have. The results of this study may benefit the development of teaching and learning methods to achieve learning outcomes under the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and meet job market needs.

Research Objective

The main objective of the present study was to determine how satisfied employers were with their staff's characteristics based on the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education after graduating with a Master's degree in English Language Teaching.

Methodology

1. Participants

The 27 participants in this study were purposively selected as they were employers and supervisors of the graduates in the master's degree program in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the targeted university, Thailand. There was participant attrition, with 27 beginning the survey, and 19 completing it. These participants voluntarily participated in the present study. They came from business sectors and educational institutions.

2. Research Instrument and Data Collection

In the present study, an online questionnaire was distributed to the employers of graduates. The questionnaire had three sections designed to collect information from employers and supervisors regarding types of businesses and job positions, satisfaction with staff (graduates), and other comments or feedback. To preserve anonymity and ensure ethical research practices, no identifiable personal information was collected. The responses were stored in a secure database accessible only to the researcher. To validate the questionnaire, the questions were assessed by experts in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The researcher called upon three experts who have taught at a tertiary level for over ten years to evaluate the questionnaire. After the questionnaire was revised according to comments and feedback from the experts. The questionnaire was distributed to employers and supervisors in the pilot testing process. The overall reliability was .71 considered in the acceptable range. After undertaking a pilot study, the questionnaire was administered in the actual study. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms. Access to the form was provided via the LINE messaging application, which served as the communication channel for teacher-students in several courses.

The responses from the participants were aspects of characteristics of graduates based on the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education: 1) *Ethics and morals* (4 items); 2) *Knowledge* (3 items); 3) *Cognitive skill* (5 items); 4) *Interpersonal and responsibility skill* (4 items); and 5) *Numerical communication and information technology skill* (5 items). The questionnaire was a five-point Likert's scale with the learning outcomes. Options of strongly agree, agree, moderate agree, less agree, the least agree received scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively, and scores of agreements were calculated. According to Thanaphakawatkul, Isarangura Na Ayudhaya, and Pusopa, (2023), the interpretation of the satisfaction is based on the average scores as follows:

- 4.50-5.00 indicates the highest level,
- 3.50-4.49 indicates high level,
- 2.50-3.49 indicates moderate level,
- 1.50-2.49 indicates low level, and
- 1.00-1.49 indicates the lowest level.

3. Data Analysis

The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to summarize the data. The overall number of employers' and supervisors' satisfactions of their staff was also used to determine their opinions about the graduates' qualifications.

Results

The questionnaire was sent out to 27 graduates' employers electronically, and over 70 % ($n = 19$) were returned. The participants were assigned to strictly adhere to the questions concerning the five aspects of characteristics of graduates based on the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: H.Ed.). The results of the frequency and percent of the responses are shown in Table 1. The means and standard deviations of the five characteristics are shown in

Table 1

The Five Aspects of Characteristics of Graduates ($n = 19$)

Characteristics	Level of Satisfaction				
	5	4	3	2	1
1. Ethics and morals					
The graduate has shown his/her characteristics of being...					
1.1 accountable and patient	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
1.2 disciplined and working with integrity	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
1.3 kind, compassionate, and helpful to others	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
1.4 public-minded and socially responsible	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-

Table 1 (Continued)

Characteristics	Level of Satisfaction				
	5	4	3	2	1
2. Knowledge					
The graduate has shown his/her ability to ...					
2.1 apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-
2.2 apply their knowledge into practice at work	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-
2.3 integrate prior knowledge with new learning	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-
3. Cognitive skill					
The graduate has shown his/her ability to ...					
3.1 integrate existing knowledge with new information	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-
3.2 apply academic knowledge for effective problem-solving	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
3.3 apply academic knowledge to solve problems under pressure	14 (73.68%)	5 (26.32%)	-	-	-
3.4 analyze with systematic thinking skills and provide data-driven recommendations for decision-making	16 (84.21%)	3 (15.79%)	-	-	-
3.5 be a resourceful and a forward-looking planner	15 (78.95%)	4 (21.05%)	-	-	-
4. Interpersonal and responsibility skill					
The graduate has shown his/her characteristics of being/having...					
4.1 open to suggestions/opinions	17 (89.47%)	2 (10.53%)	-	-	-
4.2 polite and humble, always respecting his/her colleagues	17 (89.47%)	2 (10.53%)	-	-	-
4.3 dedicated to work	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-
4.4 strong interpersonal and communication skills	18 (94.74%)	1 (5.26%)	-	-	-

Table 1 (Continued)

Characteristics	Level of Satisfaction				
	5	4	3	2	1
5. Numerical communication and information technology skill					
The graduate has shown his/her ability to ...					
5.1 use modern technology to find information and communicate	15 (78.95%)	4 (21.05%)	-	-	-
5.2 effectively use electronic devices/equipment for work.	16 (84.21%)	3 (15.79%)	-	-	-
5.3 use Thai language fluently in listening, speaking, reading, and writing	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
5.4 use English language fluently in listening, speaking, reading, and writing	15 (78.95%)	4 (21.05%)	-	-	-
5.5 apply statistical or mathematical techniques to work	19 (100%)	-	-	-	-
Overall satisfaction	15 (78.95%)	4 (21.05%)	-	-	-

According to Table 1, the results showed the employers and supervisors' levels of satisfaction with the graduates' characteristics are as follows:

1. Information from Employers or Supervisors

The results show that a majority of the respondents were from the government sector ($n = 16$, 84.21%), followed by companies ($n = 2$, 10.53%), and international organizations ($n = 1$, 5.26%) respectively. Seventeen out of 19 respondents (89.47%) were from educational institutions, and most of the participants were principals or school administrators ($n = 16$, 84.21%).

2. Satisfaction with Graduates

The survey included a series of questions asking about employers' and supervisors' satisfaction with the graduates regarding the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

2.1 Ethics and Morals

The participants reported that they were satisfied with the graduates across all aspects in the ethics and morals domain ($n = 19$, 100%). They reported that the graduates demonstrated integrity, discipline, punctuality, and accountability to both themselves and colleagues.

2.2 Knowledge

A majority of the employers and supervisors ($n = 18$, 94.74%) were satisfied with the graduates' ability to apply their knowledge at work across all aspects in this domain. They reported that the graduates could express deliberate practice, including identifying challenges in the field and solving problems.

2.3 Cognitive skill

The responses indicated that the graduates could apply academic knowledge for effective problem-solving ($n = 19$, 100%) and integrate existing knowledge with new information ($n = 18$, 94.74%). Fourteen responses (73.68%) showed that the graduates were apply academic knowledge to solve problems under pressure.

2.4 Interpersonal and responsibility skill

Eighteen participants ($n = 18$, 94.74%) reported that the graduates have dedicated themselves to work and shown strong interpersonal and communication skills. Besides, the employers reported that the graduates were active listeners and effective communicators.

2.5 Numerical communication and information technology skill

The results showed that the graduates had the ability to analyze numerical data and use mathematical and statistical techniques ($n = 19$, 100%), as well as utilize information technology ($n = 15$, 78.95%). They could also communicate effectively in speaking and writing in Thai ($n = 19$, 100%) and in English ($n = 15$, 78.95%). Overall, the employers and supervisors were satisfied with the quality of the staff (the graduates) from the Master's degree program in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the targeted university.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Five Characteristics

Characteristics	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Ethics and morals	5.00	0.00
2. Knowledge	4.95	0.23
3. Cognitive skill	4.85	0.21
4. Interpersonal and responsibility skill	4.92	0.24
5. Numerical communication and information technology skill	4.89	0.18

In conclusion, the employers and the supervisors were highly satisfied with the graduates' characteristics across all aspects. The results expressed that the graduates were benefited from the teaching and learning methods, the academic supervisions, and the courses offered in this Master's degree program, aligning with the five aspects of the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF) that graduates must meet upon completing all courses. These results are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

The results of this study not only confirm the similar findings of previous research, but also reveal specific factors associated with the characteristics of graduates in higher education. They allow us to increase our understanding of the employers and supervisors' perceptions and satisfactions with the graduates and the degree program at the targeted university.

1. Ethics and Morals

The findings show that the employers and supervisors were satisfied with the graduates' professional ethics and respect diverse opinions. Likewise, Thanaphakawatkul, Isarangura Na Ayudhaya, and Pusopa's study (2023) found that the highest average score was in the morals and ethics domain. This could be that the graduates were well-trained and educated in the principles and professional integrity. The employers and supervisors also reported that the graduates had comprehensive knowledge of the principles, theories, and research methods in the field of English language teaching.

2. Knowledge

The employers and supervisors' responses expressed their satisfactions with the graduates' abilities to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations and their work as well as integrate background knowledge with new learning. This could be that graduates possessed research-proficient skills in data analysis, seeking to apply their knowledge to complete tasks with methodologies. Likewise, Lookkham (2012) found a relatively high satisfaction level of graduates' ability to use their knowledge at work, including both theoretical understanding and practical application of knowledge that keep up with research and professional developments.

3. Cognitive skill

The graduates were able to integrate existing knowledge with new information and apply academic knowledge for effective problem-solving. To support this finding, the master's degree program in ELT offered at the target university has provided courses with practical implications using the academic knowledge and their abilities to think critically to solve problems in various scenarios. This could lead to enrich the graduates professionally and academically. Gonzalez (2012) found that the teachers had a vital responsibility to create a teaching technique that could assist students' creative thinking and critical problem-solving. Lookkham (2012) also found that the graduates could share perspectives leading to better problem-solving and new ideas with their colleagues.

4. Interpersonal and responsibility skill

The results of the present study showed that the graduates had responsibilities for their assigned tasks, accountability, and the ability to work in team environments. Additionally, the graduates were reported to show strong communication skills, including the Thai and English language proficiency. This could be that every course offered in this degree program was taught and conducted in both Thai and English. The graduates' English language competencies were also equipped for the demands of teaching professionals through English language courses such as

English in teaching profession, world Englishes, or phonology. Consequently, the graduates had opportunities to deliver their discussions and presentations using both languages.

5. Numerical communication and information technology skill

Besides, the courses in the educational subjects were designed to prepare the graduates with morals, innovation and technology in English language teaching, and research methodologies. These courses could improve graduates' characteristics and their abilities to work responsibly and utilize modern information technology tools for professional tasks.

In summary, this study may contribute to the understanding of the characteristics of graduates in degree programs that could respond to the job markets and stakeholders' needs. The qualifications of the graduates, such as ethics and morals, knowledge, or interpersonal and responsibility skills, could expand existing theoretical concepts and offer practical solutions relevant for English language teaching.

Conclusion

A survey of 19 employers' and supervisors' satisfaction with the characteristics of graduates based on the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) showed high satisfactions across five aspects, with 100 percent satisfaction in ethics and cognitive skills. Employers reported that graduates, who were mostly employed in education, demonstrated high levels of dedication, professional integrity, and strong problem-solving skills.

Recommendations

Future research may compare employers' levels of satisfaction with those of graduates to see the similarities or differences among the aspects of the characteristics and academic qualities. Limitations of this study were the small number of participants. For researchers in this field to analyze larger samples and be able to generalize in ways that the researcher could not, better methods of collecting and returning of the responses may also need to be investigated.

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