

Professional Development Provision For Primary Teaching Assistants: The Case Of One International School In Laos

By

Satitphone Phommahack

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management

Unitec Institute of Technology 2014



DECLARATION

Name of candidate: Satitphone PHOMMAHACK

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: “**Professional Development Provision for Primary Teaching Assistants: The Case of One International School in Laos**” is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management.

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2014-1034

Candidate Signature:Date:

Student number: 1416118

ABSTRACT

There are a growing number of professional development provisions in many educational institutions. This is because professional development is regarded as the key learning opportunity to enhance work performance for teams, individuals and organisations. However, problems arise when professional development may not be adequately provided, despite the awareness of educational institutions and senior leaders about its importance and the benefits it brings. Leaders play a vital role in ensuring that professional development is appropriately provided to meet the needs of everyone in the organisation. Senior leaders have also become a significant force in the professional learning context as their expertise and knowledge are widely utilised as the key elements to build an ongoing development climate and learning community.

This research study examines the professional development provision for primary teaching assistants at one international school in Laos. The role of teaching assistants is becoming increasingly important and more complex because today's classroom is functioning in a more demanding environment than in the past. Teaching assistants, therefore, are the key people who play pastoral and pedagogical roles to assist many stakeholders in achieving teaching and learning outcomes. However, the literature and the study on professional development for teaching assistants are less recognised and targeted. Although teaching assistants are asked to perform multiple roles, there is a lack of clarity around their professional development.

This research takes the form of a qualitative case study that employs three research instruments: semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and an open-ended questionnaire. This study is guided by three research questions below.

1. What comprises the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants at one international school in Laos?

2. What are the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for teaching assistants?
3. What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in professional development provision for teaching assistants?

The study shows that there is a need for an investment in professional development provision for teaching assistants if senior leaders want to promote the quality of teaching assistants in teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am truly grateful to many professional people who contributed so much of their generous time, effort and expertise to support this research project.

I would firstly like to thank my principal supervisor Alison Smith for her support, guidance and constructive advice throughout this research project, along with my associate supervisor, Dr. Josephine Howse who has always been encouraging, caring and timely with her fruitful feedback. It has been valuable and much appreciated because their challenging feedback has enhanced me as a person and as a professional in many ways than this project reflects. I would secondly like to thank all Unitec staff I have met during the course, particularly the staff in the Te Puna Ako Learning Centre, the library and the Postgraduate Centre for their genuine support through this study.

I would further like to express my gratitude to the director of the school in Laos who allowed me to do research with the staff members and in their voluntarily spare time to participate in the interviews, focus group and questionnaires when it was clear that as busy practitioners that they had many other more pressing demands. I must also extend my sincere appreciations to NZAID that provided me with this honorable opportunity to study at Unitec Institute of Technology in New Zealand - without their support this project may not have been completed.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents, Dr. Savengkith Phommahack and Soumaly Phommahack for their understanding, guidance, encouragement and unconditional support and love throughout my two year study in New Zealand; alongside my husband, Phoonsab Thevongsa and my sister Alichit Phommahack who has always been supportive of my study and encouraged me when times were tough throughout the year. I truly treasure their patience and all the sacrifices that they have made for me. Thank you for being there when I needed you the most.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	10
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	11
RESEARCH RATIONALE	14
RESEARCH AIMS	18
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	18
ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS	18
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW	20
INTRODUCTION	20
RESEARCH THEMES	20
Defining professional development	20
The roles of support staff	22
Professional development opportunities	26
Professional development experiences of support staff	29
Professional development for leadership and management	32
Professional development impacts	37
The effective work performance of support staff	41
CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	47
INTRODUCTION	47
Methodology	47
Research paradigm	48
RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DESIGN	50
Research aims and questions	50
Rationale for using a case study	50
DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS	51

Sample selection.....	54
RESEARCH PROCESS	55
Ethical considerations.....	55
Ethical issues	57
The researcher’s role.....	58
RESEARCH METHODS.....	59
Method 1: Semi-Structured Interviews	59
Method 2: Focus group interviews.....	61
Method 3: Questionnaire.....	63
DATA ANALYSIS.....	65
Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.....	65
Questionnaire.....	67
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY.....	68
CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND FINDINGS.....	70
INTRODUCTION	70
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FINDINGS	71
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW FINDINGS	83
QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS.....	91
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
.....	101
INTRODUCTION	101
KEY CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS	101
RESEARCH LIMITATIONS.....	114
RECOMMENDATIONS TO SENIOR LEADERS	114
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	116
CONCLUDING STATEMENT.....	116
REFERENCES	118
APPENDICES.....	127
DOCUMENTATION FOR PERMISSIONS	127
Appendix A.....	127
Information sheet for senior leaders.....	127

Information sheet for Primary teaching assistants	129
Information sheet for primary teachers	132
APPENDIX B	135
 Consent form for the senior leaders	135
 Consent form for primary teaching assistants	137
APPENDIX C	139
 Confidentiality agreement form for primary teaching assistants	139
APPENDIX D – Senior Leaders’ Interview Schedule.....	140
APPENDIX E – Teaching Assistants’ Focus Group Schedule.....	142
APPENDIX F – Open-Ended Questionnaire.....	144

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

- Figure 2.1 The effective interaction of TAs, teachers and learner(s)
- Table 3.1 The data analysis process
- Table 4.1 Research questions and accompanied sub-questions
- Table 4.2 Perceptions of senior leaders regarding professional development provision
- Table 4.3 Key themes in response to research questions
- Table 4.4 Sub-questions regarding professional development provision for TAs and their professional development experiences
- Table 4.5 Professional development experiences of TAs in the past and present
- Table 4.6 Professional development experiences of teachers in the school

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

IB	International Baccalaureate
IT	Information Technology
MRISA	Mekong River International Schools Association
PD	Professional Development
PGE	Professional Growth and Evaluation
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PYP	Primary Years Program
TAs	Teaching Assistants
UREC	Unitec Research Ethics Committee

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Professional Development (PD) is inevitably needed in every organisation, either large or small. PD plays a significant part in enhancing the human resources within the organisation. In particular, PD is even more crucial in a school institution where every staff member at all levels including teacher aides, can have the opportunity to experience PD throughout their work lives. PD directly contributes to a positive outcome within the classrooms. The skills of teacher aides need to be kept current and well developed beyond their existing knowledge, similar to any educators. Besides teachers, teacher aides also play an important role in students' learning. In addition, insufficient PD provision may encourage individuals to take initiative for their own development. It would be more effective if senior leaders provide additional support and guidance to help them become professional practitioners. Individuals can then have a clearer understanding about PD and the benefits it brings to their academic career. Rudman (2003) points out that in order to improve staff capability in education, it is imperative that a leader considers not one but all staff as valuable resources, so that everyone can work hand in hand to achieve task-related goals. The barriers that could slow the development of a school's teaching and learning system can be resolved. Importantly, a leader is a key person to authorise whether or not PD provision in their organisation is suitable and practical for individual staff to apply into their own teaching and learning practice. Therefore, what matters most is the perspective of senior leaders, who can observe the skills and talents of staff and have the confidence in the staff they employ (Balshaw, 2010).

This chapter will firstly study the leadership and educational leadership background by looking at several literature reviews internationally, as there are not many sources written from my country, Laos. Then, the leadership of professional development settings is investigated. Also, the role and responsibility of senior leaders as well as support staff in relation to PD provision

is studied, including the explanation of the research rationale. The research aims and questions will be explored in the following section. Finally, the structure and contents of the thesis will be outlined.

Generally speaking, leadership is an important factor in every organisation. It directs and guides members in the organisation to development and change. In most definitions, theorists have proposed diverse meanings of leadership depending on the issues that concerned them most. Several researchers argue that leadership identifies as procedures where people are influenced to think and to act differently, so that their work objectives can be accomplished (Elkin, Jackson, & Inkson, 2008; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). In a similar view, it is recognised that leadership is a process of influencing people to work willingly towards group objectives; a process giving meaningful direction to collective effort and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose (Jacob & Jaques, 1990; Saville & Higgins, 1994). In educational contexts, educational leadership can be described align with its own setting. Bush (2011) reasons that although there is no generally accepted definition of educational leadership, it covers the ideas of purposeful provision of direct pedagogy and knowledge within educational contexts. This contributes to the important guidance to maintain leadership of educational organisations (Bush, 2011). Similarly, Robinson et al. (2009) refer to educational purposes as leading in teaching and learning, which largely emphasise on instruction. Furthermore, Elmore and Burney (1999) describe educational leadership as the way to enhance instructional capacity, while Weber (1987) claims that it is a type of how the instructional program is led.

Commonly, these definitions have the idea that effective educational leadership has the main focus concentrating on pedagogy, supplying educational resources strategically, applying professional growth and evaluation, fostering a learning environment, building rapport, organising and directing tasks (Robinson et al., 2009; Starratt, 2003). From these activities mentioned, effective educational leadership can be accomplished when they are interconnected. It is concluded by several researchers that educational leadership can shape individuals' academic

knowledge and skills to boost the positive outcomes of young learners (Bush, 2011; Robinson et al., 2009; Southworth, 2004; Starratt, 2003; Weber, 1996). Therefore, it can be recognised that managing educational leadership is an important factor to influence the development of individuals.

Developing the performance of an individual to reach professional levels relies upon the professional visions and accountability of senior leaders. Blandford (2000) argues that educational organisations need a PD framework as a guide for leaders to seek appropriate training and provide educational support to the staff they manage. Cardno (1996) points out that it is the responsibility of educational leaders to recognise individual needs and make the most appropriate provision for them. She further explains that educational leadership functions best when individuals manage and identify their developmental needs through a performance appraisal system (Cardno, 1996). However, in some schools, the earlier form of PD provision has interchanged with various types of development support to improve the PD offered (Blandford, 2000; French, 2001; Fullan, 2007). In fact, the people who are responsible for PD provision seem to neglect many issues concerning the annual PD budget and the availability of PD (Blandford, 2000; Bolam, 2002). Some educational organisations tend to provide less support in the PD due to financial constraints, the needs of staff, limited courses available, technical advancement, changes in the PD system and the growing number of staff responsibilities, which results in limited development opportunities for individuals (Bolam, 2002; Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001). Looking at all sides of the learning organisation, it is obvious that issues to do with establishing effective PD appear to be less (Blandford, 2000). Other researchers maintain that schools tend to be in the stage of rapidly moving forward towards the sense of adaptation and progression of quality work (Barth, 2001; Stoll & Fink, 1996). There seems to be some doubt as to whether all staff members have access to adequate PD needs and resources (Bolam, 2002).

RESEARCH RATIONALE

This research focused on identifying the approach that senior leaders currently employ in relation to PD provision and the conditions that exist within the school itself that are perceived to enhance or challenge the effectiveness of staff work performance. Also, the research focuses on examining the opportunities and experiences of teaching assistants in response to PD offered by the school. Since this research was conducted in one international school in Laos, my home country, the specific context needs to be considered.

My personal work experience at this school in Laos influenced me to conduct this study. My previous role showed there was an ambiguous role description of teaching assistants and limited PD provision. Although my role as teaching assistant (TA) was increasingly challenging, there was little acknowledgement from the senior leaders to promote the role and a lack of professional development for TAs. This situation was concerning because knowledge is not only beneficial in the long term for individuals, but is also a significant element to enhance individuals' career prospects and living standards (Duderstadt, 2002). Also, one of the proudest moments for every educator is to be recognised as a professional and to make the ongoing learning opportunities possible (Earley & Bubb, 2004).

At the school where this research took place, each primary classroom consists of one homeroom expatriate teacher and one Lao teaching assistant or "TA". To be specific, TAs have the role of mainly working with small groups of students and individuals on a regular basis, helping students who have trouble understanding English, planning lessons with the class teacher, as well as assisting expatriate teachers and international students to build an understanding of Lao culture. Their role is somewhat similar to that of the "Teacher Aide" in New Zealand primary schools. It is evident that they, as assistants, play a vital role in this school similar to other teaching staff. Also, they are responsible for assisting in supervision, ensuring the safety of students, and fostering students' engagement in learning activities. Earley and Bubb (2004) describe the importance of

assistants in the classroom as servicing support, which is in the form of teaching assistants. Therefore, with the support of TAs, teaching and learning can be accomplished more efficiently.

In the light of this, the role of support staff has become more significant in taking the support role and most importantly using their abilities and skills to support not only teachers, but also pupils. From this, it is evident that as the role of TAs has become more demanding, the management of their time and skills also has become more complex (Balshaw, 2010). Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, and Bassett (2010) assert that though the roles of TAs involve a minimum level of clerical tasks to support teachers, TAs considerably play more of a pedagogical role to support pupils directly. In this case, an interesting concern is raised where TAs may interact with pupils in the classrooms differently from teachers due to an insufficient knowledge, particularly in transmitting learning to students (Balshaw, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). This is because teachers, who have more knowledge, control and awareness of students' learning are more likely to perform professionally in many ways; whereas TAs may have less control and skills to perform these tasks. It is worthwhile to consider whether the support that TAs provide to students is effective (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Therefore, it is very important that TAs have the opportunity to participate in PD in order to prepare them for any potential roles they may play so that they can have an impact on the teaching and learning as well as school development (Burgess & Mayes, 2007).

In my previous school organisation, PD has been shown to produce a number of positive benefits for TAs including competence enhancement, better teaching and learning outcomes and the acquisition of employment skills. However, PD that is offered to TAs is quite different in scope and amount than what is provided to expatriate teachers. Due to the fact that their teaching experience is less likely to be recognised as being of an international standard, a lower level of training is offered. Therefore, TAs often independently pursue their own development

without professional direction, as opposed to the past when PD programmes were supported and led for them by the school development management team. Though TAs are supported in their professional learning. This can be inadequate because the training is so minimal to upgrade their professional competence to a higher level, compared to expatriate teachers who receive considerably more training.

The literature highlights the inadequate PD provision in a work environment. Research studies have previously shown that PD is only significant to those who would like to apply for new roles (Rudman, 2002). In this sense, TAs should have the opportunity to develop not only to prepare them for new roles, but also to support the complexity of their existing roles (Blandford, 2000; Chapman, 2002). The work of Bourke (2009) also indicates that teacher aides are encouraged to take part in PD to keep them up to date with educational change and their roles. However, little is known about the PD needs of TAs that are usually under-researched (Bignold & Barbera, 2012). This can be a disadvantage for TAs who can rarely keep up with the other educators, facing significant issues and adapting to the new teaching and learning system. This may contribute to a lack of awareness of senior leaders about PD provision, which may not only be a concern to staff, but may also be an incompatible match between the description of task work, capabilities of staff and expectations on the job. Therefore, what is needed is more research to meet the PD needs of support staff. According to several educational researchers, there is no fixed role for these specific staff as they are employed in a range of roles within and outside classrooms (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Tarry & Cox, 2013; Trent, 2014). From this, TAs are more likely to work beyond their professional levels and the requirement of their organisation. For instance, Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) maintain that there are very few qualified teachers with limited resources in small size schools, where they often rely particularly on 'para-educators' to help with teachers' work, making the roles and responsibilities of support staff even more complex. Therefore, teacher aides tend to face greater challenges in regards to role clarity and the PD being offered

since there is no specific PD provided to them. This lack of clarity may be seen as a factor in terms of them failing to meet the expectations of their colleagues and senior leaders.

To tackle such issues, a number of considerations regarding PD provision should be taken into account by senior leaders. A number of researchers suggest that to be an educational leader is to be an active learner or innovator (Burt & Davison, 1998; Mulinge & Munyae, 2008). It is suggested that senior leaders should set PD activities, focusing on improving an individual's and group routine, solving problems, underpinning the implementation of policy, and fulfilling the educational programmes objectives (Blandford, 2000; Mulinge & Munyae, 2008). In this respect, there is no doubt that PD is a key tool for senior leaders to prepare and administer their schools' human resources. Therefore, senior leaders can be considered as a lead instructor who directs professional advancement of staff, as a team and individuals. Senior leaders can manage the learning community to prevent possible pressures or bias, which can occur in unpredicted events – for instance when there is an imbalanced PD provision where some staff have more access to PD and others have little access to PD (Blandford, 2000; Piggot-Irvine, 2003). Understandably, it is less likely that the goals of the organisation can be matched with the individuals' goal (Blandford, 2000; Piggot-Irvine, 2003).

Additionally, when PD provision is conducted poorly, issues concerning the job satisfaction of staff are likely to occur, reducing the positive impact on teaching performance (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2004). In this case, TAs could deal with the problem alone regarding their roles and education support. This matter is less likely to be resolved since individuals' ideas regarding their development needs are often set aside. Cardno (2007) explains that when individuals confront the conflicting needs, the demands of the individual and organisation can never be met. Despite the complexities of individuals' roles and responsibilities, it is crucial that they deeply understand their roles and how they could perform teaching and learning more effectively through PD participation

(Blandford, 2000).

RESEARCH AIMS

- 1.To investigate the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants (TAs) in one international school in Laos;
- 2.To explore the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for TAs in one international school in Laos; and
- 3.To critically examine the challenges or difficulties that senior leaders face in professional development provision for TAs in one international school in Laos.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.What comprises the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?
- 2.What are the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for teaching assistants?
- 3.What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in professional development provision for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?

ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organised into five chapters as follows:

Chapter one briefly provides the research background, the rationale and research aims and questions. The chapter also provides a thesis outline.

Chapter two critically reviews the body of literature from a range of international contexts. This chapter looks at defining the concept of PD and describing the PD opportunities for TAs. After that, the role of TAs and their PD experience is described. Additionally, several themes emerged from the literature reviewed including PD for leadership and management, the impact of PD and the effective work performance of TAs.

Chapter three provides an overview of methodology, research strategy, methods,

data analysis processes, the sample selection and the ethical consideration, along with a brief description of the researchers' role. Finally, the reliability and validity of results will be examined to conclude this chapter.

Chapter four provides the data results and findings gathered from interviews with senior leaders and teaching assistants and from questionnaires with primary teachers. The data results and findings are organised according to the themes identified.

Chapter five contains a discussion of key findings in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two. Key conclusions are then presented along with recommendations for senior leaders and recommendations for further research. Limitations of the research and concluding statement are outlined.

SUMMARY

This opening chapter provided the foundation for the subsequent thesis. It introduced a research background and rationale for the research topic. The research aims and questions were outlined. The role of senior leaders was described as significant since they are the main influence in supporting professional development training for teaching assistants.

In the next chapter, the literature was critically reviewed on the definition of professional development, the roles of support staff, professional development opportunities and experiences of support staff, the impact of professional development and the effective work performance of support staff.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter initially examines the meaning of professional development (PD) and the role of the teaching assistants as support staff. Also, the professional development opportunities and PD experienced by TAs are discussed. Secondly, the leadership and management of PD are examined. Finally, the impact of PD on teaching and learning, as well as the long-term impact that PD has on the effective work performance of TAs is considered.

RESEARCH THEMES

Defining professional development

Professional development or PD is defined by researchers in a range of ways. While Earley and Bubb (2004) describe PD as a training program or an educational experience of individuals, Blandford (2000) claims that PD is seen as a learning process which needs to be established as part of any organisational development plans. Similarly, Kay (2002) identifies PD as an activity or a process that individuals are involved in to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding of their roles. Moreover, researchers note that PD has a range of names including 'professional learning', 'in-service', 'continuing education', 'training', 'workshops', 'development courses' and 'sessions' (Hirsch, 2011; Mizell, 2010). Therefore, throughout this study, these terms will be used interchangeably in reference to PD. Furthermore, these forms of professional development can be either formal or informal learning processes, which can take place internally or externally (Craft, 1996; Kay, 2002). Formally, this might include attending a conference, seminar or workshop, or gaining qualifications at colleges or universities, whereas informal PD processes can include discussions between colleagues, independent learning and research, and observations of others' work (Craft, 1996; Kay, 2002). Nevertheless, any form of PD can be seen as an important opportunity in regard to the learning and practice of individuals (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003).

Despite the range of terms used when referring to PD, all have similar purposes. Mizell (2010) claims that, whichever forms of PD that are used in a learning institution, the objective and purpose remains the same. The purpose of PD can be viewed as 'change', 'development', 'promotion' and 'growth' that aims at leading to better teaching and learning practices and prepares educators with the essential knowledge to develop oneself and the community they are in (Blandford, 2000; Bolam, 2002; Mizell, 2010). In educational contexts, it is recognised that no matter how effective the learning organisation is, there often seems to be something more that can be achieved (Hill, et al., 2001). Hill, et. al., (2001) note that educators experience ongoing development and changing contexts through not only formal PD participation, but also by working collectively within their own organisations. The school is considered as a learning community where young learners would only learn from those who are learning. It is maintained by Barth (2001) that when educators are learning, so do the students.

There are many learning institutions that invest a great amount of PD funds annually and allocate many hours for members to participate in PD. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider whether these investments make any changes in classroom practice, and most importantly, whether it makes a difference in students' learning outcomes (Hirsch, 2011). Also, an organisation consists of a mix of senior and newcomers, whose roles are increasingly demanding everyday, and there is a need for an organisation to ensure that the PD needs are met and adequately provided to support the roles of individuals (Hill et al., 2001; Mizell, 2010). It is recognised that when individuals experience effective professional development, their knowledge, skills and understandings can be further developed which results in better outcomes (Earley & Bubb, 2004). In practice, some studies reveal that PD can contribute to both schools' and individuals' development if relevant PD is provided regularly.

Professional development is an effective tool or strategy that is used to strengthen the performance of individuals. When training is supported by the organisation, individuals can keep up with what is happening in today's learning

environment (Scott, 1999). Bolam (2002) asserts that individuals can up-skill themselves with new learning trends and can learn fresh techniques, strategies and methods to overcome problems and complex tasks occurring in the classroom. When knowledge is applied to practice effectively, PD participation is worth the time and money invested in it (Earley & Bubb, 2004). Therefore, when schools have well-trained staff, it not only influences on the development of the school, but also impacts on individuals' capabilities and performances. However, when PD is not clearly planned by the organisation or the PD is not well provided, problems can occur for both the organisation and the individuals. As a result, professional development provision is less likely be effective – for example: PD provided may be irrelevant to the specific roles of individuals and can be complex; some people may learn in isolation rather than as a team where participants can learn from colleagues' expertise and experience; no one will know whether or how well an individual applies his or her learning if there are no follow-up sessions and most importantly, PD can be costly and time consuming (Boyle, Brown, & Boyle, 2002).

It is suggested by Mizell (2010) that if a school wants to overcome these problems, there is a need to consider these main following questions before conducting PD, which not only includes the 'what', 'when' or 'who' in regard to PD, but also the 'how' in order to overcome challenges. In light of this, as professionals become more specialised, the importance of keeping up to date with the latest learning development increases (Hill et al., 2001; Mizell, 2010). The need for development usually relies on the view that job roles are not static or 'set in concrete', but they grow and change over time. Staff must grow and change with them as well (Craft, 1996; Kay, 2002). Therefore, PD whether it is formal or informal or is for different purposes, can be an effective strategy in order to stay competitive in an ever-changing PD environment (Mizell, 2010; O'Neill, 1994).

The roles of support staff

As mentioned in the first chapter, the support staff who are known as teaching

assistants or TAs play small, yet important roles in a learning organisation. Support staff are described with various terms including 'learning support assistants', 'teacher aides', 'special support officers/staff', 'schools service officers', 'integration aides', 'special needs assistants', 'paraeducators' and 'paraprofessionals' (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Kerry, 2005; Lee, 2002). Although the responsibilities of TAs often remain the same, their roles can be extended over time. In some contexts, researchers interpret the role of support staff in a generic way with no particular job specification (Fisher & Pleasants, 2011; Tucker, 2009). Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) explain that these terms have similar meanings as they all refer to the provision of 'support', 'aid' or 'service', which can differentiate support staff from teachers and possibly also from teaching. In this case, separating TAs from teaching is quite evident when looking at how their roles are described and positioned. Likewise, Butt and Lowe (2012) describe TAs as "non-teaching staff that provide classroom support to both students and teachers" (p. 208). In terms of employing TAs in 'non-teaching' capacities, Giangreco and Doyle (2007) use the term 'teacher assistants' instead of 'teaching assistants'. Their responsibilities are discussed in many ways depending on the employment of TAs in each school. In terms of their academic role, TAs are mainly employed to assist teachers with the classroom routines and with students with learning difficulties (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1999; Trent, 2014).

Due to the change and demand in educational systems, TAs became an important part of the 'No Child Left Behind' initiative in the United States where they worked with children who need additional support, marked children's work and led small groups (No Child Left Behind, 2001). The "No Child Left Behind" Act was established in most schools in the United States, where TAs often took a minimum level of college accreditation, consistent PD and workshops in order to support their roles (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Also, in other countries such as Hong Kong, a TA requires high school attendance and perhaps some college training (Rose & Forlin, 2010). However, these standards vary by national and school district (Kay, 2002). Therefore, initiatives like "No Child Left Behind" which

places emphasis on educational quality and accountability is likely to lead to a growing demand for TAs. Therefore, TAs should be viewed as a part of the professional learning that takes place in schools. Overall, the acknowledgement of the role of TAs is increasingly recognised in the learning organisation since TAs play a crucial part in the classroom.

In most countries, there has been an increasing number of locally hired TAs, where their roles are not well defined (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Tarry, 2012; Webster et al., 2011). Butt and Lowe (2012) and Quicke (2003) claim that there has been misperception about the roles and responsibilities of TAs within schools. Similarly, Bignold and Barbera (2012) and Kay (2002) recognise that the titles of TAs have changed and this has often led to confusion and hindered professional visibility as a group and as individuals. In recent years, one of the greatest educational changes in many developing and developed nations has been the increasing number of TAs employed (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Trent, 2014). As a result, it has created unclear roles and responsibilities for TAs. However, in general, TAs are employed to ease teachers' workloads as well as provide additional instruction to students (Blatchford et al., 2012; Trent, 2014). For instance, schools in large countries like Hong Kong, England, Australia and the United States have allocated diverse tasks to TAs and have lately expanded their tasks to include responsibility for direct instruction and pedagogy (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Trent, 2014).

The work of Patterson (2006) indicates that the roles of TAs are not only to assist, but also to service, monitor, teach and administrate simultaneously in order to achieve key tasks. Similarly, Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) and Edmond (2003) claim that the responsibilities of TAs range from clerical work to housekeeping tasks to providing instructions. In addition, TAs require technical skills when they have to use computers to do work. They are viewed as 'paraeducators' and are expected to be well aware of the classroom routines, students and parents, as well as being crucial assistants to teachers (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001). Therefore, it can be considered that TAs have a varied role to

play in addition to their regular work as the main supporter of teachers and students in the classroom (Trent, 2014; Webster et al., 2011). One way to clarify the role of TAs is to reflect through job descriptions and performances. To elaborate, Cardno and Piggot-Irvine (1997) define job descriptions as a tool to identify the role that an individual is accountable for and it is a milestone base for performance management.

It may be that the term 'teaching assistant' is used interchangeably with the term 'support staff' in some schools (Earley & Weindling, 2004). Earley and Weindling (2004) continue that this change in terminology reflects the core belief about the roles, which is often thought to be more about supporting than teaching. As a result, the controversial discussions about the key roles of teacher aides continue when institutions conceptualise TAs' roles as supporting rather than teaching (Trent, 2014). However, this does not mean that assisting is insignificant; rather it needs to have more emphasis on teaching so that the higher-level status of TAs is achieved (Balshaw, 2010). Nonetheless, support staff in every educational organisation should have a chance to perform as a teacher or leading class activities at certain occasions, particularly when there is an absence of homeroom teachers (Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005). In this instance, Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) maintain that it may be a better option to allow TAs who are familiar with the classroom routine to lead classes for a short time under the direction of another teacher known as substitute teachers, who may lack continuity and knowledge of the students.

Research has pointed out an issue regarding collaborative working between teachers and TAs where individuals might feel uncomfortable while performing a task (Palma, 1994; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). From a teachers' view, it seems that they cannot work effectively when they have to prepare lessons and collaborate with TAs. However, if this was not the case, both TAs and teachers would not be able to deliver the work effectively (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). It is argued that establishing teamwork between teachers and TAs can be "limited if untouched relations of power remains" (Creese, 2005). It is also suggested that

power differences between teachers and TAs can effect collaboration and interaction, which may lead to distancing TAs from having professional discourse and alienating their roles (Bedford, Jackson, & Wilson, 2008; Parker et al., 2009; Rouse & Devecchi, 2010). It seems that TAs are less likely to be in the supportive environment, where they could learn from teachers with whom they work (Patterson, 2006). When looking at students' perspectives, it is likely that they could misinterpret TAs as unqualified staff in comparison with the teachers who teach them. Bedford and Wilson (2008) point out that students can perceive TAs as supporters rather than as invalid teachers. This may have contributed to uncertainty over the professional roles and responsibilities of TAs (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Doyle & Giangreco, 2007; Wilson & Bedford, 2008).

TAs have delivered so much within the classrooms and to schools throughout their work lives, so schools would be unlikely to let them go since they are part of the teaching team and students' learning achievement (Blatchford et al., 2012). It is also stressed by Blackmore (2005) that because students receive teaching service directly, students' development and their learning experience must come first when supervising the quality of education. Lewis and McKenzie (2010) suggest that there is a necessity to outline the role structure of TAs clearly, including promoting their unique role and identity through work performance and PD. In doing so, this study addresses the need for TAs to have their say and for their senior leaders and colleagues to understand their points of view in response to their professional roles as support staff (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the role of TAs through professional development opportunities for TAs and their PD experiences.

Professional development opportunities

In most learning organisations, there is a range of PD opportunities provided to staff members both as teams and individuals, depending on the policy, goals and expectations of an organisation (Blandford, 2000). However, PD opportunities given within the organisation can be disproportionate due to many reasons. One

of the most common reasons found in the work of several authors is the diversity of positions and roles that staff members play in the organisation (Craft, 1996; Earley & Bubb, 2004). To be specific, it seems that staff with more complex and demanding roles tend to have more opportunities to participate in PD, while other staff with minimum roles receive less PD opportunities. When there is an imbalance of PD funding allocation, one can have more PD budget than another. Leighton et al. (1997) recognised that almost one third of teachers received PD opportunities annually while only one tenth of TAs were allowed to participate in PD. However, the PD quality is much more significant than the amount of PD provided.

In most international institutions, there are teachers who are internationally hired and TAs who are locally hired with different abilities and knowledge. Although teachers might have more accountabilities than TAs, they both are cooperatively responsible for supporting student learning and success (Dufour, 2004; Leighton et al., 1997; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2011; Tarry & Cox, 2013). Understandably, TAs might not play an active role in the teaching, but they are always there to support students when teachers have other commitments. This could be one of the cases where TAs have to step up beyond their assisting roles in order for the students to achieve. Moshoyannis, Pickett, and Granick (1999) emphasise that it is necessary to boost professional development opportunities for TAs in order for them to provide instructional support in a way that is closest to the teachers' techniques. Therefore, it is important that the opportunity for PD is provided to all levels of staff throughout their teaching career in order to keep up with the unexpected circumstance and educational change.

When opportunities for development are continuously provided, positive changes to the learning organisation can be achieved. The ongoing development is a vital part in every professional responsibility (Kwakman, 2003). This is because the basic skills of professional work rely on the effective new knowledge, which focuses on continuous improvement (Craft, 1996; Kwakman, 2003). Furthermore, providing regular PD opportunities can bring about new understandings and

updated knowledge to shape the professional field, including new units of inquiry, new teaching techniques, new pedagogical approaches, and new social and cultural developments, which can have an impact on teaching and learning in general (Moshoyannis et al., 1999). In addition, for a TA or a group of TAs to perform well in their work and to be recognised as professionals, it is important that their job requirements involve ongoing PD opportunities so they can apply theory to their practice (Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Dean, 1991). To reinforce this claim, Boyle, While, and Boyle (2004) believe that the extensive knowledge and skills is essential in any working environment. For instance, Cardno (2005) recognises that PD provision can give the chance for an individual to self-sustain and self-develop as a professional. Therefore, when best practice and knowledge is shared, individuals can have competence in development and exchange learning and teaching experiences to help the school grow (Blandford, 2000). Also, Fishman et al., (2003) argue that PD can strengthen the skills of individuals, and they can take with them and apply it to any learning organisation. This is because PD is considered the focal opportunity for individuals to be able to gain valuable knowledge and appropriate learning (Fishman et al., 2003).

In some cases, the opportunity given to develop personally is not always adequate. Brown and Devecchi (2013) claim that when opportunities for learning are poorly conducted, it is unlikely that staff can develop professional skills and keep up with the others within the organisation. For example, Pickett (1999) claims that some TAs have limited opportunities to be trained professionally to support their instructional roles. Pickett (1999) continues that PD could include certain topics for TAs to experience instructional activities. From this, the people involved in the success of school improvement deserve the opportunity to learn and grow. Since everyone in the organisation relies on the ability and strengths of one another to achieve tasks, individuals should be treated equally in experiencing learning opportunities. Therefore, it is likely that working together at a professional level can be achieved. Furthermore, Blandford (2000) maintains that when PD activity is facilitated, discussions can be made in order to finding

possible solutions and alternatives collectively. For this reason, a strong characteristic of PD is to advocate individuals' advancement so that they can comprehend and acknowledge professional learning as an advantage to grow further (Fishman et al., 2003). Also, PD offers the opportunities for staff to prepare for their new roles and responsibilities through their own teaching and learning practice and self-reflection (Genzok, 1997).

Bush and Middlewood (2005) emphasise that PD cannot proceed without the support and opportunity given by senior leaders. In order to operate effective PD and achieve the needs of the organisation and individuals, the performance management process should link to PD (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Earley & Bubb, 2004). Adding to performance management, there is a direct linkage between performance appraisal and self-reflection because they can produce a great deal of information and suggestions for development planning (Leighton et al., 1997). This could be beneficial when senior leaders identify the PD needs of individuals. Senior leaders do not just act as a professional leader in the school, but also a 'head learner' or 'instructional leader' who plays an active leadership and management role in the provision of PD (Earley & Bubb, 2004). As a result, their knowledge, experiences and expectations is contributed and widely understood by the staff.

Professional development experiences of support staff

Several research studies indicate that school development management teams may have failed to seek continuous PD opportunities for teacher aides (Bourke, 2009; Mansaray, 2006; Rhodes, 2006; Takala, 2007). There is limited acknowledgement of TAs as professional practitioners, though TAs support students and teachers daily (Farell & Balshaw, 2010). Mansaray (2006) asserts that the growing nature of the role of TAs tend to be misinterpreted in the school development policy. Mansaray (2006) argues that this is due to the type of PD available with more focus on teachers instead of TAs. For this reason, the professional identities of TAs are isolated and at a lower level than the professionals (Mansaray, 2006).

Although TAs playing a supporting role, Vadasy, Sanders, and Tudor (2007) argue that TAs have gradually contributed so much within and beyond classroom routines and most importantly to school improvement. However, TAs tend to have limited PD because the school does not have sufficient budget to support them in development (Stockall, 2014). Nonetheless, if the amount of training for TAs is a constraint, a TA can consider their work routines as a learning practice. In spite of TAs performing a secondary role, working with experienced teachers in itself could be a good learning opportunity and considered as on-the-job training where TAs are aware of the professional working routine (Blandford, 2000; Leighton et al., 1997; Palma, 1994; Trent, 2014). Even in one of the most developed countries like England and Wales, only 21% of TAs expertise was gained through PD training, while 67% of TAs knowledge was experiential or provided via communication with the teachers (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2011).

It is understandable that there may be difficulties in finding the specific PD that fits the role of TAs. Even though PD seems pivotal to continuous innovation and change, the pathway for TAs to be appointed for new roles in the future is uncertain (Webster et al., 2011). A lack of recognised training for TAs is emphasised by Stockall (2014) who states that there is no question that TAs are less likely to receive PD to prepare them for new positions. Therefore, when there are fewer opportunities for TAs to experience PD, it could lead to difficulty in performing tasks. This can add further tension to the roles of TAs as they learn to tackle complexities in their jobs (Boyle et al., 2002). From this, it is argued by Lewis and McKenzie (2010) that as TAs take up the challenge and responsibility for teaching and learning, careful observation is expected in their work, along with self evaluation and the courage to think and act beyond their typical roles. TAs have to seek alternatives to improve their teaching and learning.

It is inevitable that there may be some difficulties that could stop TAs from experiencing sufficient PD. Bredeson (2002) points out that continuous PD to enrich and refine professional skills and knowledge is often challenged by the

lack of time, budget, appropriate training structures and support. Generally, PD experience by TAs comes in the form of short-term workshops and courses that are delivered within the organisation run by outside and inside experts (Guskey, 2000). However, there is no question whether TAs can absorb the learning from short term PD when there are more guidelines and instructions to follow, more curriculum content to complete and more standards to meet every school year (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003). As a result, TAs are less likely to integrate what they have learned into their work when they return to their workplaces, as they do not clearly understand or receive additional support to apply new knowledge and skills to their roles (Hargreaves, 2000). Interestingly, Mansaray (2006) claims that teacher aides were given pay rises, which perceives to support their self-development rather than providing formal PD.

It is advisable for the learning organisation to consider development planning and structure for TAs to experience PD. Mansaray (2006) argues that, because of the complex processes that are involved in restructuring school systems, the complexity of tasks performed by TAs need to be given more attention in designing and implementing PD initiatives. Similarly, research by Ghere and York-Barr (2003) indicate that higher wages are less likely to save teacher aides from leaving their organisation. Rather, the qualifications gained through PD, better communication and greater understanding of the complex task that TAs confront are more significant features in increasing the retention rates of TAs (Bourke, 2009; Gunter et al., 2005). To support this, researchers and educators have identified the above features as one type of effective TAs (Edelman, Broer, & Giangreco, 2001; Ghere & York-Barr, 2003; Gunter et al., 2005). Therefore, Takala (2007) and Bourke (2009) agree that more studies are needed regarding the importance of PD for TAs. That way, the professional work collaboration between teaching teams can be achieved through combining new and existing knowledge to the practice and setting accessible learning to meet the needs of TAs (Riggs, 2004). Hence, all the above topics show that there is a need to investigate the important concept of PD leadership and how PD provision can be

managed to enhance the role of support staff.

Professional development for leadership and management

In any learning organisation, professional development provision cannot be established without support. Senior leaders and managers play a vital role in making the PD provision accessible to staff (Blandford, 2000). Therefore, it is imperative that a leader is able to recognise the importance of the role that everyone plays, and decide how sufficient PD opportunities can be provided in order to encourage lifelong learning and promote achievement (Blandford, 2000). This PD however, should focus not only on the achievement of individuals or organisations, but also on the improvement in leadership and management performance as a whole (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). Interestingly, Burgess and Mayes (2007) claim that not every staff member is being provided with PD, particularly teaching assistants (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). Therefore, teaching assistants are missing out on training events. The school policy needs to place more emphasis on providing a higher level of PD support for TAs, from helping with classroom tasks, to providing direct pedagogical support to teachers (ATL et al., 2003; Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Edmond, 2003).

Prior to decision-making about PD provision, there is a need for senior leaders and the management team to set a clear PD policy, strategic management plan, and provide financial PD support and staff assessment in order to promote equal opportunities in professional learning and exchange with deep learning (Blandford, 2000). In order to identify whether PD in educational institutions is properly led and managed, it is imperative to consider the educational institution's PD policy, purposes and the staff involved (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fullan, 2001). In educational leadership contexts, it is vital for educational leaders to understand and set some kind of policy framework about where policies come from, what they seek to achieve, how they impact on the learning practice and the consequences of application (Stevenson & Bell, 2006).

Education policies have their specific features, which aim to identify the scope

and content of educational provision and provide a set of principles and objectives for practice (Codd, 2005). When establishing PD policy, it is important that the learning organisation has clear guidelines, which includes views from all levels in order to meet the needs of people with different roles (Blandford, 2000). When policy and regulation are well understood, it can influence the understanding and development of individuals and their practice (Cardno, 2005; Fullan & Mascall, 2000). In addition, Fullan and Mascall (2000) state “PD is the key to the success of any change initiative, providing links to ongoing learning of individuals, to school improvement and to related policy and program implementation” (p. 33). However, when a policy is being set without clear explanation and acknowledgement of the staff members, there is a likelihood that the learning stemming from staff development could be limited. Therefore, it is concurred that good leaders communicate through sharing knowledge and dialogue before making decisions on the development needs of their staff (Fullan, 2001). To be specific, Groom (2006) recognises that setting policy development needs to put TAs in the forefront of development and to recognise that there is potential for TAs to be involved significantly in the teaching and learning process. The work of Balshaw (2010) identifies that one of the key principles for setting effective policy in the employment of TAs is staff development received by TAs through training and support appropriately. Nevertheless, it is essential that policy makers are able to recognise the need for a PD structure that values the contributions of TAs to pupils and the school (Brown & Devecchi, 2013).

Apart from setting clear policy, it is essential that PD is directed through strategic management. Strategic management is viewed as one of the key leadership tasks in relation to present and future concerns (O' Shannassy, 2003). Cardno (2012) describes strategic management as an act of leadership because one of its purposes is related to change and improvement. Cardno (2012) further describes strategic management as a dynamic and collaborative process involving the active association of numerous people with and through a leader

who achieves strategic change. Morden (2007) views strategic management as the character and direction of the organisation as a whole with basic decisions about what the organisation is now and what it will be in the future. There is a need for discussions among senior leaders and management teams regarding the needs of staff, listening to concerns and taking notice of the problem, seeking better alternatives and making professional decisions in a fair way (O' Shannassy, 2003). In doing so, senior leaders should allow representatives from different sectors in the school to be consulted about their PD concerns individually or in teams, which not only allows for communication, but also allows the issues to be taken into consideration.

It is possible that leading and managing PD can come from staff themselves, authorised and allocated by the senior managers. Maynard (2000) claims that a leader should be able to recognise the ability of staff members who can work well and have the aptitude to lead and mentor others in professional training events. As previously mentioned, a teacher with specific skills and an experienced background can be delegated to lead a PD course for TAs within the school so that knowledge is shared and distributed (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). PD does not always have to be a formal training event led by experienced experts, but there can be cases where the same workshops can be established in an accessible manner to achieve understandings of the learning, roles and availability (Bingham, Spooner, & Browder, 2007). This can be another strategic and effective way for development because shared best practice may be discussed and relationships are built throughout the organisation (Bingham et al., 2007). The literature notes that working collectively and interacting cooperatively comes in many different forms and these are one of the major effects of PD (Cardno, 2005; Desimone, 2009; Piggot-Irvine, 2006). This is supported by Fishman et al., (2003) and Craft (1996) who claim that any form of continuous PD can help to create a practical knowledge base that links various forms of PD to active learning. It is also argued that for any PD to be successful, professional learning must be taken into practice (Farell & Balshaw, 2010).

The PD budget and allocation of resources are another important factor when leading and managing PD. However, setting a budget and allocating resources for PD can be challenging since different forms of PD require a considerable amount of money to be distributed at various levels (Blandford, 2000). Since conducting PD can be considered costly and time consuming, a leader should consider the likelihood of a positive outcome of the PD, and whether it will upgrade the organisational learning system to a more effective level and bring more successful use of human resources (Frank & Miles, 2008). Therefore, it is important to ensure that the annual PD budget is adequate to meet the needs of staff. However, it is inevitable that setting the PD budget appropriately can be difficult if senior leaders and managers do not have a strategic management plan as previously described. Senior leaders need to be creative in setting PD through using the existing resources as some workshops for specific staff can be arranged through in-service training and save budget (Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Groom, 2006; Groom & Rose, 2005). Besides, PD does not always need to be dependent on the budget available, but rather utilising the existing expertise to conduct PD in an appropriate manner. Typically, the budget will not be adequate to meet all of the identified development needs. Therefore, it is believed that PD budget constraints can be a restriction to personal development (Wilson & Bedford, 2008).

A further role for senior leaders and managers in provision of PD is staff assessment. Kwakman (2003) emphasises that discussion and interaction as a group or with other people can develop opinions, new information or ideas, as these do not always have to come from one person's knowledge. Rudman (2002) states that PD is a specific form of development with the responsibility to cater for all staff in the learning organisation. Some staff may be trained to attain skills and develop the necessary abilities in order to manage themselves and others, whereas others can be expected to increase their self-development (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Rudman, 2002). Furthermore, Hargreaves (1995) and

Cardno (2005) suggest that the act of performance appraisal can produce positive outcomes with the provision of feedback for professional learning - a means of guiding one another professionally to get the job done. In this case, effective educational leadership and management practices create not only a culture of learning to support specialised growth, but also to allow others to self-reflect, evaluate others and have follow up sessions so that the existing PD is supported (Cardno, 2005). From this, one of the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and managers is to set strategic management plan, clear policy, appropriate funding and assessment to establish how PD should be developed and planned for it.

Based on the review of literature, PD is more likely to be significant when it involves inclusive approaches and a responsive provision (Bourke, 2009; Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Piggot-Irvine & Cardno, 2005). Effective PD enables to give specific information and references to promotions, and broaden career development and opportunities (Blandford, 2000). In a broader sense, Cardno (2005) states that “leadership is the key to lead positive change for the school, for teams, for individual staff and ultimately for the benefit of students” (p. 293). From this, it is evident that senior leaders and managers need to focus on improving PD provision as a long-term goal in order to maintain sound teaching practice. However, it may be impossible to fulfill the needs of everybody because it takes time, money and effective planning to enhance PD processes.

It is important that senior leaders inspire others to work together and believe in the ability of each staff member. For instance, class teachers can play a critical role in the PD and training of TAs as part of teacher training known as mentoring (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). In brief, this programme is specified as a ‘critical friend’ mentoring model which includes training, support and formative assessment (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). For example, Burgess and Mayes (2007) maintain that this programme has been operating in schools in England where TAs are mentored by experienced teachers as required by the school authority. It is a common view as Bourke (2009) says that teaching teams and individuals

can deliver the job more effectively and accomplish the set goal. Therefore, it can be seen that cooperation between staff members allow opportunities to provide and receive feedback that is helpful regarding practices and professional learning (Guskey, 2000). However, it is essential to bear in mind that since the role of TAs is unique, some teachers themselves may not be prepared for mentoring (Burgess & Mayes, 2007).

To sum up, there is evidence shown in the literature that TAs are considered a significant resource to teaching and learning development. Since the role of TAs is increasingly important in today's ongoing education development, TAs are highly dependent on the investment senior leaders make (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). However, a significant number of studies have shown that the nature of PD for TAs is diverse due to a lack of recognition of contributions and opportunities to grow. It is suggested by Brown and Devecchi (2013) that, if senior leaders or managers want to compete in this competitive learning environment, they need to be knowledgeable in PD provision for TAs. Adey and Jones (1997) maintain that everyone within an organisation can be advantaged if they receive ongoing PD for them to be prepared for the professional roles and changes. This review of literature has confirmed some important factors in conducting PD for TAs. Therefore, more consideration is needed in order to bring about positive impact on staff development. This is explained in the next section.

Professional development impacts

The impact of PD is considered a further critical theme. Understanding the main impact that may occur in a professional teaching and learning environment is vital, since PD may have a short-term impact, a medium impact or a long-term impact. In this case, two main long-term impacts will be described. Within any learning institution, there is no question that everyone in the organisation should attend PD in order to develop themselves and the organisation as a long-term process. For instance, class teachers who often attend PD have had great impact to support their workforce as well as their career prospects, especially promotion. According to Rubie-Davies et al., (2010), teachers believe that the

specific PD they have attended has had a meaningful impact on professional working abilities. In this sense, PD provides advanced thinking and learning where staff can obtain higher positions and opportunities when they have studied education continuously either in formal or informal settings (Craft, 1996).

However, TAs may not bring as much impact or it may be almost impossible for them to become more than who they already are. This is evident in the work of Davies and Preston (2002) who argue that it takes a long-term approach and effort for a TA to be in a position of becoming a qualified or higher level staff member. However, what is known for certain is PD could influence TAs personal development and their work development at a level where they can perform more effectively to support children, teachers and perhaps parents. Within this, two long-term impacts are described, including the benefits PD brings to the professional workforce as a whole and the benefits it brings to TAs personally.

When TAs experience PD, it is likely that their work performance with students and teachers can largely be improved. Although the importance of PD for TAs has not been raised as a necessity in the past, the roles of TAs currently is needed in educational institutions (Broer & Giangreco, 2005). This is considered one of the essential facets where PD has influenced the work of TAs. Brown and Devecchi (2013) argue that if TAs are to influence the educational provision for students and teachers positively, there is a need for a general review of opportunities for TAs' training events as well as understanding the variety of roles that TAs perform beyond what may be considered normal. However, there are other studies that have implied that the presence of TAs can have a negative impact on students' learning (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). Giangreco (2010a) and the OFSTED (2010) appear to consider that TAs tend to keep students, particularly slow learners, away from teachers, reducing connections of higher-qualified teachers with students. Giangreco (2010a) further states "no literature to date have offered a compelling rationale in support of assigning the least qualified school personnel, namely teacher assistants, to students with the most

complex challenges” (p. 341).

From this point however, TAs have no intention to take students away from the teachers, rather to be supportive whenever there is a need by the teachers and students (Blatchford et al., 2009). Moreover, there may be times when TAs are less likely to interact with students due to the belief that TAs may not do the work as well as teachers. Although more research evidence is needed, there seems to be some agreement on the fact that TAs can have a positive impact on the emotional well-being and behaviour of students (Blatchford et al., 2009). Given that, teachers and TAs are encouraged to seek feedback through sharing observations, collaborating on projects, formal and informal reviews of practice (Devecchi, 2007). Typically, teachers often have the capacity to offer coaching and advice, which could influence TAs who wish to use their intellectual understandings to develop themselves and others (Arthur, Marland, Pill, & Rea, 2006).

Specifically, there is an issue raised in both England and America regarding the impact that TAs may have in classrooms, which is under increasing study (Blatchford et al., 2009; Giangreco, 2010a; Webster et al., 2010). However, there is a lack of studies that have looked at the relationship between TAs’ training and its impact, or that have considered the relationship between schools’ organisation – how a school initially affords training and professional development for TAs and benefits from a trained and qualified workforce. Therefore, there is no doubt that once TAs are trained, they become a part of the teaching and learning success as they are another important people who support teachers, students and the school (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). To support this, Burchell, Dyson, and Rees (2002) agree that PD training impacts on the staff development plan continuously for staff members to become more knowledgeable in the specific content.

Apart from the impact of PD on TAs’ work performance, it is worthwhile to consider whether PD has impact on TAs personally and professionally. One of

the influences PD has on TAs is the wealth and depth of professional training TAs received (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). Dean (1991) and Guskey (2000) describe that TAs can foster their professional aim through education and development with PD. This could be an advantage for TAs to use the knowledge gained within their own learning institutions. Also, when TAs gain a higher advanced level of knowledge, they can transfer this knowledge to those who have a minimum level of understanding (Scott, 1999). However, TAs need to be aware of their own development whether it fits with the educational system as part of the big picture. This is echoed by Davies and Preston (2002) who note that setting a long-term PD plan with the support from the organisation is believed to effect the ability of individuals in order to maintain changes in the teaching and learning.

Concerns regarding the matter of PD provision can occur within the learning organisation when not everyone is receiving PD. As mentioned, satisfying the staff needs requires a great amount of time, money and planning to ultimately meet the expectations of individuals. Brown and Devecchi (2013) concern that despite those who had no opportunity to be trained, past educations of individuals did not seem to matter when deciding which TAs should be given the PD opportunities. Consequently, there may be unfavourable feedback that the development support is insufficient, resulting in feelings of unimportance and dissatisfaction (Cremin, Thomas, & Vincett, 2005). While several researchers imply that when an organisation fails to support staff PD, the capability and knowledge of staff and work performance is decreased (Farell & Balshaw, 2010; Giangreco, 2010a). Therefore, the organisation can consist of untrained staff. Rhodes (2006) views the impact of poor supervision by senior managers and a lack of general direction and guidance as contributing to ongoing problems in this area.

Through participation in PD, there may be some positive emotional impacts on abilities when TAs attain skills, knowledge and emotional intelligence, making

them feel they are part of the school community and the school's success (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2011). Whereas Desimone (2009) recognises that PD impacts on individuals' behaviour when they are involved in discussions, policymaking, team development, applying changes in teaching and leadership roles. The argument being presented here is similar to that of Bolam (2002) and Hargreaves and Evans (1997) that individuals can teach with confidence when a balance and fairness of needs between school and individuals is achieved. In addition to confidence building, it is recognised that individuals who attend PD have greater confidence in their own practice (Farell & Balshaw, 2010). Similarly, individuals perceived PD participation as a positive effect to the workforce. In light of this, boosting the confidence of staff can brighten their views on educational matters from both national and international perspectives (Farell & Balshaw, 2010). It is worth considering how the school organisation and its management can create both barriers and opportunities for TAs to be trained and apply the knowledge they have gained to the workforce effectively (Brown & Devecchi, 2013).

The effective work performance of support staff

According to several researchers, for TAs to become successful practitioners, they initially have to be self aware of their own knowledge and capabilities (Balshaw, 2010; Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Webster et al., 2011). Alongside the teachers they support, TAs can create a teaching and learning environment not only for teachers and pupils, but also for themselves (Webster et al., 2011). An effective TA should be aware of their own understandings and uncertainties about allocated tasks. Teaching assistants need to have the courage and confidence to communicate with their supervisors, to report any issues and to ask questions immediately when they encounter fresh challenges or are in doubt about their work (Blalock, 1991; Miramontes, 1990). Miramontes (1990) states that when the concerns of TAs are clarified and understood, teachers can have more time to work, teach and plan class lessons with creativity and more effectiveness. It is, therefore, noticed that good collaborative teamwork can lead to good working outcomes for TAs and teachers at a professional level (Dufour,

2004).

Open communication among the teaching team can bring about effective work when colleagues support one another collectively to achieve best practice. This is supported by Dufour (2004) and Groom (2006) who allege that professional learning relies upon the quality of working in collaboration and communication. When roles and expectations are clearly identified, team management and support within the classrooms, the awareness of achieving cooperative goals, and learning for all can be established (Dufour, 2004; Groom, 2006). In addition, effective TAs need to be assertive and able to learn through observation and adaptation about teachers' working styles and teaching techniques simultaneously. This is supported by Burgess and Mayes (2007) and Pickett (1999) who indicate that, an effective TA has to be active and skillful in picking up new knowledge while performing tasks, rather than merely following the scope of roles assigned to them. From this, teachers and the school will be able to acknowledge the ability of TAs who perform beyond their roles (Vadasy et al., 2007). However, this may be dependent upon TAs whether or not they recognise learning as an opportunity to grow further because not every TA can become effective practitioners (Overall, 2007).

When the abilities of effective TAs are well acknowledged by teachers they work with, there is potential for the TAs to be promoted by their organisations, so that the quality of their work can be appropriately upgraded (Likins, 2002; Trent, 2014). This can be beneficial when TAs show their inner capabilities and apply these to allocated tasks in order to create an interesting learning environment for teachers and students (Black, 2002). This is well supported by the work of Brown and Devecchi (2013) who claim that TAs should be encouraged to undertake further study as well as to take up professional learning specifically to support their roles. In addition, when the ability of TAs is recognised, teachers have the confidence to allow TAs to lead a class activity from time to time, which is known as co-teaching, besides the instructional routines that they perform (Giangreco, 2013b). For this reason, sharing of teaching may bring better planning and a

more extensive understanding of work (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). However, co-teaching can be permitted in some schools for TAs to run class activities under the supervision of the teacher, particularly in international schools where some cultural knowledge can be delivered better by the local staff (Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005; Tarry & Cox, 2013).

Besides TAs playing their part to support teachers within the classroom, TAs are often there to support students in any way possible to improve student achievement (Patterson, 2006). According to the TAs guidebook developed by Okanagan (2008), “an effective teaching assistant will allow students to explore their intellectual capabilities in a supportive environment” (p. 9). It is further claimed that, before individuals can achieve such goals beyond their current professional standing, one of the important facets of teaching is the interaction of TAs with students, building a learning climate that is effective (Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008; Okanagan, 2008). However, if the school does not allow TAs the opportunity to approach students in a way that enables them to identify and understand the learning needs of individual students, it can result in limiting TAs from assisting students in an appropriate manner (Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005). Nevertheless, this is dependent upon how the school authority and teachers view the role of TAs as to how TAs are employed (Overall, 2007). The partnership of teachers and TAs can together enhance the learning experience for pupils and also increase their own enjoyment of the job. Watkinson (2010) maintains that if the learning experience in the classroom is seen as ‘tripartite’ instead of just one-way teacher or teacher/TAs to learners, the sense of achievement for all stakeholders can be increased. From this, Watkinson (2010) illustrates a diagram to show how the interaction of all involved in the classroom can be effective.

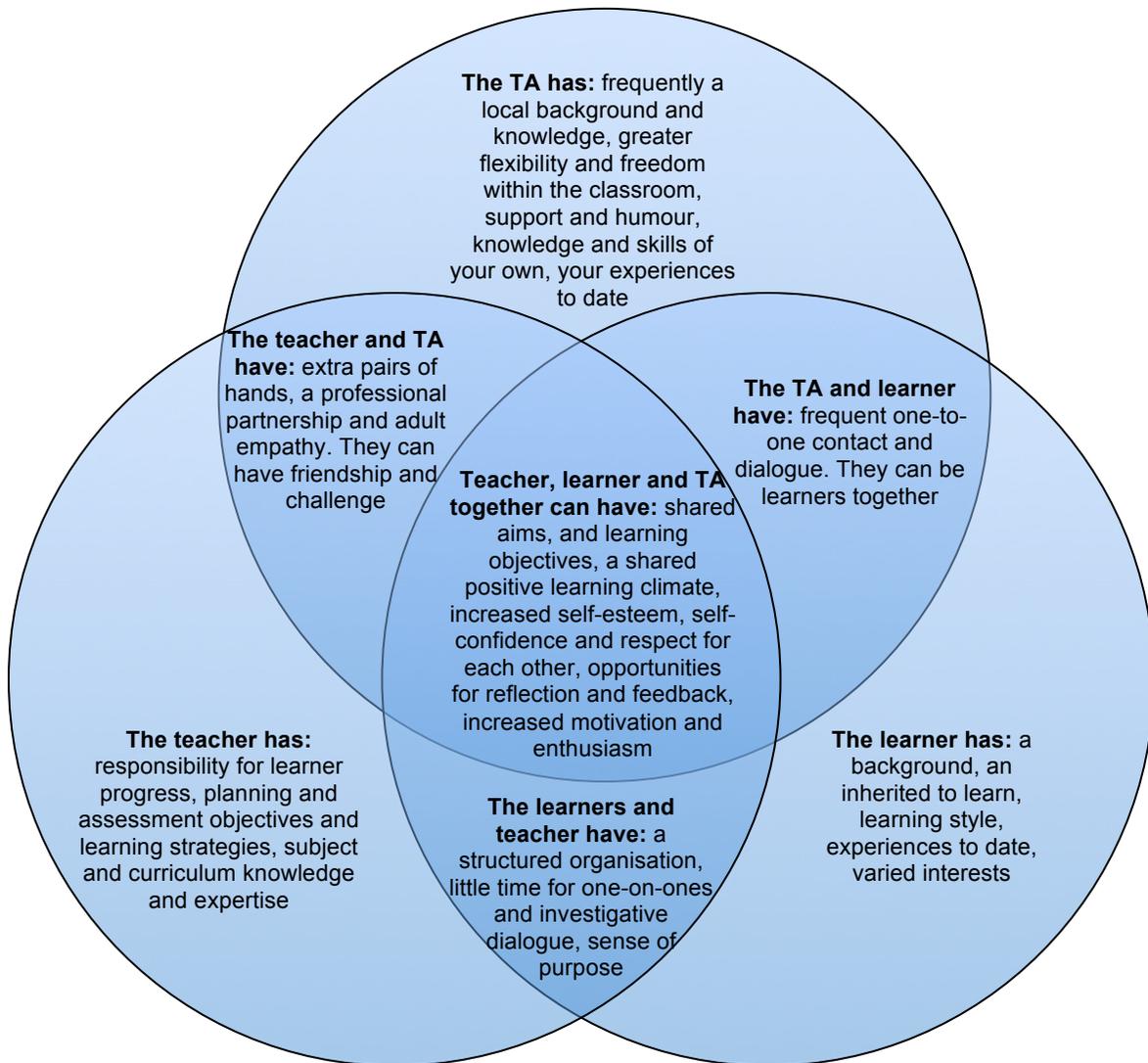


Figure 2.1 *The effective interaction of TAs, teacher and learner(s)* (Watkinson, 2010).

Additionally, apart from engaging in the work, a good TA should be well aware of the teacher's interactions with pupils for them to follow and produce similar teaching styles. That way, TAs can gradually perform their roles to support and guide students in the same directions and understandings as teachers. To elaborate, an example in Okanagan's guidebook (2008) describes a number of interactions which effective TAs can utilise as techniques to promote class participation. An effective TA is able to use the teaching language to

communicate with and approach students in an appropriate way, including the ability to get students' attention to show their interest and curiosity; avoid blaming students directly when they make mistakes; compliment and appreciate students for good ideas and contributions; ask queries in class and with individual pupils; merge students' ideas to put on display; establish exciting and inspiring ideas and use a range of media and activities (Okanagan, 2008). Therefore, head teachers or senior leaders need to be informed and knowledgeable about individual's roles, behaviours and performances to bring trust and safety in the school to all stakeholders and to direct them in the right path (Cardno, 2012).

Nevertheless, when considering the actual effectiveness of TAs, there is less likely to be a universal standard to measure quality. Some schools are likely to have set standards at different stages where TAs can be called an effective practitioner (Parker et al., 2009). Samson and Daft (2003) consider that the effectiveness of TAs is based on the knowledge, competencies, proficiencies and opportunities. These criteria affect the work performance of TAs, their self-development as well as the progress of the organisation. In addition, Balshaw (2010) says that effective TAs can become specialised in their roles, follow the essential values and become highly competent in the organisation. Nevertheless, these characteristics of TAs can be meaningful if teachers, students or parents recognise and value the work of TAs (Tucker, 2009). Therefore, it is noticed by Bedford et al., (2008) that TAs need very similar skills, qualities and opportunities to join training and development in areas that would be significant to build their relationship with teachers, and particularly students. As a result, students can value what TAs do in terms of supporting the teacher to organise an effective learning space (Tucker, 2009).

Summary

Professional development provision is essential for teaching assistants to keep up with the changes and expectations held by the organisation, colleagues and society regarding the quality of education received by students. Also, PD is

believed to be more effective when it is continuous in order to build ongoing professional teaching and learning, and when it is designed to accommodate the learning needs of students as well as staff. To achieve this, attention needs to be given to processes of staff development planning and other possible enhancement factors. Hence, the themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the literature reviewed in relation to PD provision for TAs have shaped the design of this research study. The themes covered in the literature include the definition of PD, PD opportunities and PD experiences of TAs and their roles, PD for leadership and management and its impact on teaching and learning, and finally the effective work performance of TAs. This review of literature has confirmed the significance of the research topic that will contribute new knowledge on the teaching assistants within the Laos primary education context.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology, the epistemological position of a qualitative or an interpretive approach. Then, the research strategy and design is discussed by drawing on the research questions of this study and its aims, with a brief explanation for choosing a case study. After that, a description of the data analysis process, sample selection and the ethical considerations is provided, with a brief discussion of a researcher's role.

The next section describes the three research instruments and how the data collected from each instrument is analysed including semi-structured interviews, one focus group interview and an open-ended questionnaire. Finally, reliability and validity related to the study conclude this chapter.

Methodology

Prior to commencing a research study, it is imperative to have a better understanding regarding the meaning of 'methodology' in order to have a clearer idea about which approach researchers would use. Trochim (2000) asserts that methodology is a system of methods used in a particular area of study to understand how we come to know. Similarly, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013) refer to 'methodology' as a technical exercise to understand the world that is formed by our world(s), where we take our understanding to, what is the purpose of understanding and what is considered valid. Therefore, when doing research, we should have in our mind the science behavior about the issues within the contexts when we talk about social research (Cohen et al., 2013). Educational research takes place in a wider context of social research as an academic approach to study social issues or problems within education through the resources of social science. In terms of social science, Abbott and Mckinney (2013) assert that it is not the same as any other science because social science uses the experience and reasoning of people to find patterns. The process of

social science, therefore allows us to follow the universal approaches to understand the world around us better (Abbott & Mckinney, 2013).

Generally, there are two main primary research methodologies that are used. They are known as the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. For this research, the qualitative approach was chosen. These two approaches are briefly defined prior to discussing the selected approach. While Bryman (2012) maintains that quantitative research depends on a positivist social science approach, presenting the connections between theory and empirical research, Bell (2007a) and Denscombe (1998) claims that it gauges variables and tests propositions through figures and statistics with precise measurement. A qualitative approach, however, does not have strict procedures, but they are defined in diverse ways about findings and understanding truth (Michael & Freebody, 2014). Michael and Freebody (2014) continue that a qualitative research applies basic theory, case studies, narrative and phenomenal research that concerns with investigating human experience. For this purpose, the qualitative approach is the most appropriate approach as the research aims and questions of this study will generate descriptive and narrative information from the people involved. Therefore, the qualitative approach was selected as the core of this study, building an understanding of the research topic through the viewpoints and experiences of the people (senior leaders and staff members).

Research paradigm

Initially, the word 'paradigm' comes from the Greek word 'paradeigma', meaning pattern (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). A paradigm simply means a way of looking at phenomena, a world view of what counts as accepted knowledge (Cohen et al., 2013). Therefore, when knowledge, views and beliefs shape research behavior, they also shape a research paradigm. Similarly, Tracy (2012) maintains that a paradigm is "a preferred way of understanding reality, building knowledge, and gathering information about the world" (p. 37). A researcher's paradigm can be set according to their ontological (the natural reality), epistemological (the nature of knowledge), axiological (the values associated

with areas of research and theorising) or methodological (strategies for gathering and analysing data) assumptions to recognise how the world is formed and what its functions are (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Tracy, 2012). In this respect, this research is based on epistemological norms as reality and knowledge are created and produced through communication, interaction and practice. Furthermore, two distinctive paradigms are described within the literature, namely, the 'normative paradigm' and the 'interpretive paradigm'. A normative paradigm comprises two major ideas: "the human behaviour that is basically rule-governed first and the methods of natural science that should be examined second" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 17). An interpretive paradigm however, is featured by individuals' concerns and understanding the subjective world of human understanding (Cohen et al., 2013). In this study, the interpretive paradigm is applied in connection with the qualitative approach. The reason this approach is chosen is because of its suitability in a range of ways: it is a small-scale research; recreates social life of human actions; involves the researcher individuals' perspectives, personal constructs, negotiated meanings and defines situations; interprets the specific and practical interests (Cohen et al., 2013).

To conclude, this research project adopts an interpretive paradigm or qualitative approach, using an epistemological approach to gain an understanding of how individuals understand their roles, interpret their experiences and their perspectives about certain topics (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Tracy, 2012). Therefore, the three research questions of this study seek information from a group of people: senior leaders, TAs and teachers within one international school in Laos in terms of their roles, perspectives and their approaches to professional development provision for TAs.

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DESIGN

Research aims and questions

It is suggested by Yin (2009) that the first component to be included in research design should be a statement of research aims and research questions.

The research aims are:

To improve professional development provision for TAs will:

1. Identify the current professional development for TAs and their opportunities for development
2. Examine the approaches and perceptions of senior leaders regarding PD provision for TAs
3. Explore the challenges and difficulties faced by senior leaders in regard to PD provision for TAs

The following research questions are the focus of this study:

1. What comprises the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?
2. What are the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for teaching assistants?
3. What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in professional development provision for teaching assistants in one international in Laos?

Rationale for using a case study

In addition to the qualitative approach or interpretive paradigm chosen, a case study approach is used in this study. This was chosen because it allows in-depth investigation of perceptions of involved participants about certain topics in a particular location (Creswell, 1994). In terms of its meaning, a case study is a “realistic, unique and dynamic study that examines a current situation and human relationships within its actual state, allowing rich examination of the event to understand ideas more clearly than presenting theoretically” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 289). Yin (2009) claims that a case study permits readers to recognise how theories and ideas can fit together. Bush (2002) recognises that a case study has the merits to allow an activity to be explored, using data bases and research

methods. It is carried out by one researcher and less costly because there is no need to use expensive equipment. Also, it constantly creates experiential data, which takes place in an actual organisation within a natural setting; it has the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence documents, interviews and observations (Cohen et al., 2013).

This study recognises the limitations of examining a single case study in terms of validity and generalisation. This can cause complexity when using a case study approach because it is sometimes tightly restricted to a single case (one international in Laos). Yin (2009) claims that the limit between the phenomenon and its context can be unclear. Yin (2009) continues that it can be difficult to make a general statement in a case study. Furthermore, Abbott and Mckinney (2013) claim that a case study can only be generalised to the group of people being studied. Notwithstanding, it still has its value as it holds several features that are helpful to this research when collecting and analysing data. It allows researchers to observe things in real contexts and organise the unique features through in-depth understanding and critical thinking in order to clearly justify the case.

A case study that uses a qualitative approach is seen as 'field research' and 'content analysis', providing descriptive data processes (Cohen et al., 2013). While field research refers to the natural setting in which research takes place, content analysis simply means the process of reporting written data with careful data organisation to avoid messiness (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, the researcher is able to identify both the strength and limitations that come with direct interactions and observations.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

This case study research focuses on one international school in Laos where the researcher was previously employed. Although the study involved a small number of TAs, senior leaders and teachers in this school, various data was

gained from each group of participants. Therefore, careful consideration is needed to understand how the data can be best analysed. There are several key strategies to consider when analysing the data including data organisation and data approach.

Firstly, it is suggested that a useful way to organise the data is to turn the verbal data into written data. From this, a researcher can manage the data and be familiar with the context. Once the data was transcribed, it was sent to the research participants (interviews and focus group) to check for accuracy and confirmation of the data gathered before analysing. During this stage, a few emails and online chats with interviewees occurred in order to confirm points being said and add any updated points from the research participants. However, it is important to bear in mind that data analysis is not a linear process and that one part of the process often intersects another. A 'framework analysis' is also used to organise the data. This helped the researcher to manage the amount and analyse the qualitative data more easily (Krueger, 1994). The stages included getting familiar with the data; identifying themes and concepts; indexing and charting; and mapping and interpretation (Krueger, 1994).

When the data is organised, it allows themes and linkages to develop, using the research questions and narratives of research participants as directions to inform the study (Krueger, 1994). That way, a researcher can have a clearer understanding of how to approach each set of data. This leads to the second step of the data analysis process. A researcher uses several key strategies, including: memoing, coding, data reduction and summarising to approach the data. Memoing is used as the broad process of analysing from the beginning of data collection to data analysing. This is because a researcher writes down notes, thoughts and reflections, either in the field or during and after an interview or observation, that also become data for analysis. This helps to clarify basic codes and adjust and fine-tune methodological issues and processes. Then, coding is used to label the data, so that a researcher can recognise the data immediately. Coding is used to label a piece of text containing ideas or a piece

of information before interpretation. From this, a researcher can specifically categorise question responses and respondents for data analysis purposes (Cohen et al., 2013).

Researchers use data reduction to describe the nature of the research process. It is essential that the researcher can recognise which data are relevant to the study and which data are irrelevant. Most importantly, the research process requires the researcher to feel comfortable cutting and pasting similar quotes together (Creswell, 1994; Krueger, 1994). This can be established by comparing and contrasting data in order to build categories within the data selected (Creswell, 1994; Krueger, 1994). Because qualitative research produces quite a large amount of data, it can make a novice researcher and perhaps also experienced researchers feel overwhelmed. Therefore, one aim of the research process is to reduce data (Krueger, 1994). Given this, the research questions are used to guide the data collection process to achieve data reduction purposes (Ary, Jacob, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Creswell, 1994; Miles & Humberman, 1994).

Lastly, summarising and interpreting the data collected is carried out. From the use of this strategy, researchers can see links between each perception and identify the main points and commonalities that emerge from the data. As data are collected for each research question, the data is put into categories, allowing for easier interpretation. Therefore, to ensure the data are adequately interpreted, the following processes should be considered by researchers. According to the work of Tesch (1990) and Henderson (1995), organising different information into categories is essential because data only become manageable when they are organised. It is also suggested that researchers should analyse key points that will support decision-making, remove self from findings as well as report negative findings as good data for decision-making (Tesch, 1990; Henderson, 1995).

Overall, the data analysis process used in this study is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Data analysis process

Activities	Methodology		
	Semi-structured interview 1,2,3	Focus group interview	Questionnaire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turning verbal data into written data - Verification of the data collected (member checking) 		N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoing..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noting during the data collection process until the data analysing for interviews - Identification of basic codes 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labeling words/phrases/names - Identification of themes and concepts - Identification of connections/commonalities 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data reduction..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification relevant data to the questions asked - Comparing and contrasting data to put into categories 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation..... • What has been achieved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making connections of relevant data to the three research questions - Connecting to previous data of the research questions 		

Sample selection

Sample size was determined by applying a purposive sampling approach. The criteria for participants selection were based on their roles and positions in the school. In this study, due to the small size of the school, the researcher was able to involve all three senior leaders; eight primary teachers and six primary teaching assistants who volunteered to participate. The semi-structured interviews were arranged with the three senior leaders and one focus group interview was prepared for the six TAs. As the sample size was quite small, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview allowed the researcher to collect sufficient 'rich' data to meet the requirements of this thesis work. For the additional stage of data collection, the researcher decided to use the

questionnaire with all primary teachers who work alongside TAs in the classroom. The questionnaire was conducted ahead of the interviews and had a low response rate of eight (40%). Nevertheless, the intention of using the questionnaire as a research instrument was to supplement the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview sessions for verification.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Ethical considerations

As this study used a qualitative research process, it was important that ethical considerations be taken into account in this research (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative researcher must ensure that their research is ethical in terms of its design, methods, data analysis, presentation and conclusions because ethics is a vital aspect in educational research (Wellington, 2000; Wiles, 2012). Research ethics needed to focus on protecting participants involved in the research from any possible harm either physically, mentally, emotionally, or financially in the research process. In this matter, it is cautioned that researchers must be mindful of ethical issues and think thoroughly the dilemmas and challenges that may occur when conducting the research (Wiles, 2012). Ethical obligations to respect the rights, values, identities and desires of the informants were of particular concern to the researcher because the informant's position and institution may be identifiable. The researcher has the responsibility to protect the anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms to identify informants or organisations without revealing their real identities (Wiles, 2012). Davidson and Tolich, (2003) and Cohen et al., (2013) suggest a number of key principles to maintain moral behaviour of researchers when conducting qualitative research. Initially, the researcher should avoid places where participants may feel forced to contribute to the research and researchers should provide only essential information. Respecting privacy of participants' rights, interests and desires when choices should be made clearly when reporting the data. Securing the identities of research subjects and all the data in a safe place and treating subjects with

respect and seeking cooperation from them in the research are also the key principles for researchers to consider. These principles were carefully applied to this study. The researcher established and maintained professional yet personal interactions in a role as a researcher participant from the beginning until the end. In doing so, the researcher negotiated consent to do the research by setting clear agreement terms and accepting to the contract. Most importantly, the researcher made sure of honesty and precision exists throughout writing the findings, transcribing, writing interpretations and reporting processes. Finally, copies of the research thesis (when completed) will be made available to the informant if desire.

This research study complied with the ethical requirements of the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC). These following guidelines were employed in order to meet the ethical matters:

- Participants were told the purpose of the research and how the data gathered would be used through the information sheet provided (refer to appendix A);
- The use of a consent form for the participants who were interviewed (refer to appendix B);
- The use of a confidentiality form for the participants who were interviewed in the focus group session (refer to appendix C);
- The identities of participants were not disclosed in this study. Different codes were allocated to protect their true identity; and
- Interview participants were encouraged to check and verify the transcripts before they were used in the research process.

A further primary principle of all research is informed consent and this is based on the 'subjects right to freedom and self-determination' (Cohen et al., 2013). Bryman (2012b) considers that informed consent encompasses both the aspects of voluntary and informed participation. This indicates that relevant and full information is provided and understood by the subjects and that they agree to

participate without force, and by respecting participants' decisions about whether or not they would participate (Bryman, 2008a; Wiles, 2012). Cohen et al., (2013) emphasise that informed consent is related to access and acceptance; access to any specific organisation that gives the context for the research and permission of the appropriate personnel. Therefore, whenever there is a likelihood of obtaining information of a sensitive nature, it is vital to gain written consent rather than just verbal consent (Denscombe, 2007; Wiles, 2012).

Confidentiality agreement forms were used with the focus group participants. Though this focus group interview method is confidential, in this case it can be really stretched, as there are only a few staff members in a small size school, and that everyone knows everyone. Therefore, the participants of the focus group interview signed a confidentiality form to certify that they will keep others opinions confidential and will not to be said elsewhere. In doing so, consent forms together with confidentiality forms were explained and handed out to participants. The participants had the opportunity to re-read the two forms and ask questions immediately before participating and have these questions answered. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research study at any time up to ten days after receiving their interview transcripts.

Ethical issues

This study gained approval from the school director to conduct research in this international school in Laos. Cohen et al., (2013) explain that a good preparation is required by a researcher to gain permission for entry. Primarily, the researcher contacted the school director in person and through emails to ask permission to do this research at his school. Also, staff members in the school were requested to participate in the interviews by providing them with information sheets, consent forms and confidentiality forms. The information sheet was used to describe the study when the researcher approached the school leader to invite the chosen participations. In that discussion, the researcher guaranteed the school director that the data collected would be kept confidential and also assured him that the

researcher would accept all the terms agreed before proceeding to the next stage.

The forms of communication involved emails, face-to-face meetings and formal writing. From an ethical perspective, questions that are carefully planned, and effective coordination of the questionnaire distributions and interviews are vital concerns. An ethics submission is required before research can be carried out. Such research design can be less harmful to participants while still achieving the research aims (Bryman, 2012b; Wiles, 2012). Therefore, a researcher's role is important to be professional and to maintain confidentiality when conducting qualitative research in a school setting.

The researcher's role

As a former staff member in the primary sector in the school, the researcher has the knowledge of the schools' characteristics and nature, and has maintained a good relationship with senior leaders and staff members. The researcher experienced several training events supported by the school in the role as teaching assistant from 2006 to 2009, and as the assistant to the primary principal in 2010. Specifically, from 2006 until 2009, the researcher served as an assistant in this school as a classroom TA, as the specialist TA in primary Art and then as the administrative assistant. The teaching, assisting and administrative skills of the researcher have, therefore, been recognised.

All of the above work experience as an assistant, plus the desire and commitment to propose a better approach to performing the identified tasks, are key drivers in conducting and eventually completing this research. It is also unavoidable that the researcher, as the former staff, brought to the study a certain bias, which may shape the way the researcher views and interprets the data. However, every effort was made to ensure objectivity. The researcher began this study with the expectation of bringing a new perspective and new knowledge that will eventually help improve PD provision for TAs in this school.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and a questionnaire were chosen as the main methods to collect evidence for this research. Each tool used in this study was carefully selected to produce rich and substantial data within the set timeframe. An explanation for choosing these methods is provided in the following sections as well as the collection of data and data analysis.

Method 1: Semi-Structured Interviews

An in-depth semi-structured interview was adapted as one of the instruments because it allowed the researcher to gain a wealth of data and to examine issues for further clarification. According to Cohen et al., (2013), the use of semi-structured interviews is appropriate for researchers who know what information they want to receive from the participants. Bryman (2008a) suggests that researchers use research questions to help form the interview questions in a way that make the most use of the study. Similarly, Bell (2010b) maintains that interviews give the interviewer adaptability as they can get questions answered and examine interviewee's objectives and viewpoints. In this case, the interviewee managed to ask additional questions from the researcher as the need arose. Also, Cohen et al., (2013) maintain that one purpose for selecting a semi-structured interview is its ability to collect data from direct responses to the research questions.

An advantage of a semi-structured interview is the flexibility that is provided to ask pre-planned questions but also probe for further in-depth information in order to get substantive answers. Another advantage is that the response rate can obviously be enhanced because of the researcher's face-to-face contact with the participants (Check & Schutt, 2012; Tracy, 2012). Furthermore, the respondents' understanding of the questions can be clarified and enhanced when necessary (Check & Schutt, 2012). In addition, the process of transcription was a further advantage. Turning verbal data into transcription can be time consuming, but is very helpful for further data analysis purposes. Bryman (2012b) describes

transcription as “the written translation of a recorded interview or focus group session” (p. 717). It is important that this transcription is true to what has been said by the participants. Recording an interview can be a further advantage when analysing as you need to be able to listen several times in order to classify, code, summarise and note comments about relevant data without having to worry about doing this during the actual interview (Bell, 2010b).

Conversely, there are some drawbacks when using a semi-structured interview. Bryman (2012b) reveals that any unexpected behaviour of an interviewee in the interview process or environmental interruptions could slow down the data-gathering process. The researcher struggled to find the right time to stop the interviewee from taking too much time answering one question because the researcher did not want to miss the important points. To limit this, having clear instructions and key questions which are of a high quality can control these challenges and follow-up questions can be prepared as guides to support the interview process (Bryman, 2012b; Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen et al., 2013). Another downside was the accuracy of data transcription. Bell (2010b) claims that within the data collected using an interview method, it is impossible for a researcher to hear everything in the recorded interview and they could misinterpreted the information. This potential bias can be limited by ensuring that the participant has the right to review the data transcript. If some data could not be heard, the researcher can leave codes or numbers to show that it was not heard.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews with three senior leaders who are all English native speakers. This research included interviewing the school director, the primary principal and the secondary principal by employing similar interview questions and some related discussions to seek their perceptions about PD provision for TAs. The researcher was able to have all three semi-structured interviews done on the same week right before the end of their school break. The researcher managed to arrange a schedule that allowed her to interview all three

senior leaders during school hours, which were held in the office of each participant at a time that suited them. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed and, in order to maintain confidentiality, aliases of SD1, PP2 and SP3 were used throughout the transcription, data analysis and reporting processes. Participants in the semi-structured interviews were asked eight questions (refer to Appendix D) that focused on a range of topics from general to specific regarding PD provision in their school. In practice, the participants' responses established that the choice of the semi-structured interview was a good fit with the research purpose because it concentrated on the answers and focused on the research topic. It also allowed flexibility for the participants to describe their views. The semi-structured interview questions were also linked with the focus group and questionnaires, which allowed the researcher to look for connections between the data collection sets.

Method 2: Focus group interviews

A focus group is defined by Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale, and Bond (1995) as a purposive method, concerning a group interview of the selected participants, though they are not necessarily representative of the whole group. It only forms a sample of a specific population of one group being focused on a given topic. Therefore, a focus group method is appropriate in this study to interview a specific group of TAs, allowing them to develop ideas in relation to their professional development experience, drawing shared viewpoints from the dialogue. This links to the study of Krueger and Casey (2000) that researchers can observe reactions of individuals in real time between the participants themselves using questions supplied by the researcher. Cohen et al., (2013) maintain that focus groups rely upon the interaction within a group as a collective view instead of an individual view. This allowed the participants to discuss with each other about each question asked without the researcher's involvement in the discussion. Therefore, focus groups work best where people can share common faces, including cultural affinity, shared attitudes, or similar consumption patterns (Cohen et al., 2013).

The main reason the focus group was adopted were the advantages it provided for discussions to occur between participants that hold the same standing. A strength of a focus group interview is that they allow the researcher to provide follow up comments and final checking in a more cooperative manner with the participants and explore in-depth responses because individual statements and answers can stimulate ideas from others in the group (Krueger, 1994). In contrast, there were some weaknesses when using the focus group in terms of multiple lines of conversation, especially to those who find face-to-face interaction 'overwhelming'. Some individuals may feel comfortable and natural with self-disclosure, whereas others require trust from the interviewer (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Since the researcher has a good relationship with this group of TAs, trust already existed. Another drawback found was the inevitable overlapping in discussion. This made it quite challenging for the researcher when trying to listen for the important points and to transcribe later. To limit this, clear instructions and introductions can be established at the beginning, asking the participants to take turns in the discussion and offering them a friendly atmosphere where everyone could openly express ideas, beliefs and attitudes (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

It is important that the interview questions asked were well prepared and ordered. In this research, the researcher used certain questions that required general and specific answers and other questions required open discussion. Also, the research questions informed the choice of the questions asked as this can be seen in the 'Focus Group Interview Questions' (refer to Appendix E). Furthermore, the researcher conducted a focus group interview of TAs who are all local staff from Laos and they were asked to participate in the focus group individually via email. The researcher also asked for a volunteer by asking one TA to be the main contact and to help inform other TAs about the process. The researcher then emailed these staff to see how many respondents were willing to participate in the focus group interview. Cohen et al., (2013) suggest that the group size should not be too small or too large. Morgan (1988) suggests between

4 to 12 people per group, while Fowler (2009) recommends between 6 to 8 people (cited in, Cohen, et al., 2013, p. 437). In this case, the researcher managed to have 6 TA participants join the interview who were from different class levels within the primary sector. The researcher was also aware that the TAs might have different PD backgrounds; therefore the experiences of participants may be varied. Before starting the interview, the researcher initially presented an outline of the research rationale and process as well as handing out the consent forms and the confidentiality agreement forms for them to sign. Also, the interview was recorded and transcribed from Lao into English, since Lao language was mostly used during the interview. As well as maintaining confidentiality, aliases of 1J, 2T, 3P, 4D, 5K and 6N were used throughout the transcription, data analysis and reporting process.

Method 3: Questionnaire

Since this is a case study with a qualitative approach, the questionnaire needed to be well planned and prepared. Cohen et al., (2013) suggest that the questions asked need to be less structured, word-based and open-ended in order to capture the main point. For this reason, questionnaires was chosen with simple structure and word-based (refer to Appendix F) as the first research instrument. This was easy to manage and the researcher could collect rich data from each respondent. A questionnaire was chosen because of the convenience it provided and the researcher did not have to be there to do the questionnaire, which saved time. However, the researcher made sure that the self-completion questionnaire was easy to complete by the respondents themselves. As mentioned earlier, the intention of using a questionnaire was to gather more data from the overall perceptions of teachers about professional development provision. It was clear that the questionnaire for this study was designed and used to add to the data collected from the interview sessions.

A questionnaire has a number of advantages. It can be completed in a short period, and the data can be easy to manage. Generally, the respondents (teachers) have a very busy routine. The researcher believed that employing a

questionnaire helped to collect as much data as possible from them as they could complete the questionnaire in their own time (Bryman, 2008a). Adding to its appropriateness, Cohen et al., (2013) claim that the use of open-ended questions allows the respondents to “write a free account in their own terms, to explain and qualify their answers and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of response” (p. 382). To support this, Bryman (2008a) considers that open-ended questions can get the participants to respond freely in their own ways; it allowed honest, personal comment from respondents. In contrast, there were some limitations when using this instrument. Without the researcher’s attendance, the responses of the participants cannot be encouraged (Bryman, 2008a), and this may limit the data gathered.

Furthermore, questionnaires were used to gain data from teachers who are all English native speakers to identify their experiences and opinions about professional development offered in their school. As there were only twenty teachers overall, the sample size for the questionnaire was quite small. The use of the self-completed questionnaire was conducted with only primary teachers in this school as they have worked closely with the TAs, which were the main focus for this research. The questionnaires were conducted in June 2014 and there were twenty copies of questionnaires distributed using the SurveyMonkey website for the teachers to complete voluntarily.

Within the questionnaire, the information sheet was provided as an introduction about the research purpose. To make sure all questionnaires were sent back, the researcher included the specific date when the completed questionnaires would be collected. Also, there were four sections in the questionnaire. Generally, the first section required the respondents to answer a closed question to produce information whether or not they have experienced PD in the past years. The second section of the questionnaire was comprised of open-ended questions that were designed to bring out the respondents' responses on their overall PD experiences. The third section was designed for the participants to be specific

about the differences and similarities between PD provision for TAs and for teachers. Since the focus of this research is on TAs, the researcher can clearly identify the PD provision of TAs from these questions. The final section was designed to seek personal opinions from the participants in regard to PD provision and speculation about how PD offered to support staff can be developed. Also, in order to maintain confidentiality, aliases of T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, PT6, T7 and T8 were used throughout the data collection, data analysis and reporting process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Since the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were designed in a similar way, the researcher decided to use similar approaches to analyse the data. At the very first stage, Cohen et al., (2013) suggest that the verbal data collected must be transcribed before it can be analysed. Firstly, the researcher transcribed all the interviews in detail to become familiar with the content. After that, each page of transcription was numbered in order to keep track of the data easily. Then, the transcripts were emailed to the respective participants for checking. They were told that if the researcher did not get any feedback from them after one week, the researcher would presume they were happy with the content of the transcripts and continue to the next process. The researcher also highlighted the key ideas in the transcription in order to form themes around them. For this study, the researcher utilised several techniques to analyse the raw data.

Initially, the researcher took notes during the interview and this helped the researcher to record ideas about different coding, categories and interconnections. Also, memos are basically conceptual focused, helpful when considering on all facets of clarification and improvement in the study (Miles & Humberman, 1994). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), three memo types which include code memos, theoretical memos, and operational memos. Code memos clarify the assumptions and codes underpinning them; theoretical memos are concerned with theorising in writing the researchers' ideas about their codes

and relationships while operational memos comprise the notes the researchers write to themselves, regarding the whole range of procedural challenges, issues, and strategies (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is important to recognise that coding and noting can be seen as the main strategies for data analysis in the qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2012b; Lofland et al., 2006; Miles & Humberman, 1994; Tracy, 2012). Cohen et al., (2013) caution that many qualitative researchers who do not take notes become lost in mountains of data and cannot make sense of the data.

In addition to memoing, coding was used while the researcher took notes. Coding data means researchers organise the raw data into conceptual categories, themes or concepts that link to the main themes identified in the literature review (Tracy, 2012). Bryman (2012b) recognises that coding assists and identifies the emerging theories or categories. Coding is an integral strategy for qualitative data analysis. It includes revising transcriptions and notes, and cutting them into components that seem to have potential significance or be essential to the social context being studied (Bryman, 2012b; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). In a similar view, Tracy (2012) maintains that qualitative coding “frees a researcher from entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages higher level thinking about them” (p. 441). Tracy (2012) goes on to assert that coding also moves researchers toward theory and generalisation, while Miles and Humberman (1994) observe that codes often involve word chunks, phrases, paragraphs or sentences, related or unrelated to a specific setting.

While the researcher could identify links, common themes and categories using memoing and coding, the researcher also reduced the data and cut down unrelated data simultaneously as the next phase of data analysis. After the analysing is done, the researcher could see categories develop where the same coding elements were put together. Then, the researcher started to explore links from different categories and identify the major themes (Ary et al., 2006).

Hence, coding helped the researcher identify common themes, and search for the data or items that are the same code related to the research questions and themes, allowing for easier interpretation.

The final phase of data analysis is summarising and interpretation. This technique enables the researcher to visualise the key points from the data gathered and to look for commonalities. It is about linking the ideas together in the themes found. To support this, Ary et al., (2006) suggest looking at outlines received. Summarising information is about extracting knowledge and viewpoints about the topic and interpreting the information of the participants. At this time, the researcher plays an important part as mentioned earlier. In order to interpret the data gathered successfully, it relies on the knowledge, perspective, experience and the cognitive skills that researchers carries to the task (Ary et al., 2006). Since the researcher can be intimidated by the large amount of data, the researcher needs to have the ability to identify the unwanted information and important information emerge without risking the chance of missing the main points.

Questionnaire

There are several useful analytical programmes, which help researchers examine and extract meaning for the questionnaire data. However, most programmes are suitable for analysing a large amount of data and complex data. Although using questionnaires often relate to an extensive survey, its application in a case study is still acceptable. Cohen et al., (2013) assert that researchers are likely to use a less structured questionnaire in a small sample. The questionnaires were given to all primary teachers in the school who agreed to participate in the research. The use of questionnaires helped the researcher to shape ideas about teachers' overall view of PD provision, their PD experiences as well as PD for TAs. Since this research project is a case study, the questionnaire data are similarly analysed as the interview methods, using memos, codes, data reduction and summarise approach.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Validity and reliability is an important key to effective research. Researchers should consider the reliability and validity of the data found because a good piece of research depends on the ability to exhibit its rigour. In the case of qualitative data, Cohen et al., (2013) recognise that validity can be addressed through “the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved...” (p. 179). Abbott and Mckinney (2013) describe validity as “the measure of interest, we are interested to know if it is accurate, does the measure, measure what it is supposed to measure?” (p. 45). However, Cohen et al., (2013) maintain that validity is a complicated matter, which can lead to bias due to the subjectivity of respondents, their attitudes, opinions and perspectives. Therefore, to ensure the validity of information gathered and information analysis, Cohen et al., (2013) caution that a researcher needs to minimise invalidity and maximise validity.

In addition, validity is classified into two main types to address both quantitative and qualitative research: internal validity and external validity. In the case of qualitative research, Cohen et al., (2013) define internal validity as the “truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, dependability, and/or creditability of interpretations within the underlying setting” (p. 143). To ensure internal validity, this research employed several strategies. First, data were collected through methods including interviews and questionnaires and then transcribed (semi-structured interviews and focus groups). After that, the data were sent the research participants for transcription check. An ongoing dialogue regarding the researcher’s interpretation of the informant’s perspectives and meanings ensured the validity of the data. The final strategy was the clarification of the researcher’s bias, which has been articulated in this chapter under the heading of ‘the researcher’s role’.

External validity, however, is described to which the results can be generalised in the wider population such as cases, settings, times or situations (Cohen et al., 2013). Nonetheless, qualitative research intends to form a unique interpretation,

so the limited generalisability of findings from the study can be ensured via descriptive data (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, in terms of validity and reliability, this study concentrates on the original data recorded and secure transcripts and memos with confidentiality.

In addition to qualitative research, reliability is regarded as what data researchers recorded and what is being researched is actually what happened in the natural setting (Cohen et al., 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in, Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 148) however, prefer the terms 'credibility', 'neutrality', 'conformability', 'consistency', and 'dependability' rather than 'reliability'. Bryman (2012b) asserts that reliability can be achieved in the study when explicit reviews and researcher's position is created. This means that the process and practices of research are clearly reported, together with methods of selecting respondents, practices for data collection and the data analysis techniques used (Bryman, 2012b; Tracy, 2012). This study would ensure that interviews are digitally recorded and transcribed for participants to check for precision and their responses will be requested so the reliability level can be maintained.

Summary

This chapter examined the data collection methods used as the qualitative approach to study on perceptions of senior leaders, TAs and teachers in one international school in Laos regarding professional development provision for TAs. Using a qualitative methodology allowed in-depth data to be collected. Data gathering such as one-to-one semi-structured interviews; a focus group interview and questionnaires was explained through data analysis. The important aspect of ethics has also been considered, that is, the recognition that social researchers should show their commitment to the principles of respect for privacy rights, integrity and honesty, and most importantly, safety to others. Finally, consideration of each method has included an examination of the strengths and limitations as well as the vital issue of ensuring rigor through validity and reliability. Questions asked were prepared to gather the data and the findings and results of the data collection is facilitated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of the data gathered throughout the research on professional development (PD) provision for TAs in one school in Laos. Three methods were used to gain both general and specific information based on the research questions. The semi-structured interviews provided data from senior leaders within the school; the focus group interview provided data from a group of TAs; and the primary teachers completed the open-ended questionnaire. The findings provided the participants' perspectives on PD provision for the teaching staff in general and for TAs in particular. The data were collected by the researcher.

Structure of Data Presentation

The data is presented in the following manner:

1. The data collection questions for semi-structured interviews, one focus group and questionnaires are stated. These can be found in Appendix D, Appendix E and Appendix F;
2. The key sub-themes identified from the data are noted and presented in tables; and the responses from the participants (senior leaders, TAs and teachers) of one international school in Laos are categorised under the research questions and sub-questions; and
3. A commentary discussing the data collected is to follow, which includes the perspectives of the senior leaders, TAs and teachers regarding PD provision for TAs.

There were three research questions with related sub-questions under each. Common responses to the questions became the topics specifically explored in semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and questionnaires. To explain how the data was collected, the researcher categorised the related sub-

questions with the research questions in order to identify the themes and sub-themes emerged as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Research questions and their accompanied sub-questions.

Research questions	Operational questions or sub-questions	Method
What comprises the current provision of PD for TAs?	What support does the school currently provide PD for teaching staff? How does your school support PD for TAs?	Semi-structured interviews
	Tell me about the professional development programmes/training/courses that you have recently undertaken.	Focus group
	What forms of PD support/teacher training/teacher education do you receive from the school? What form of PD do you think TAs receive from the school?	Questionnaire
What are the perceptions of senior leaders concerning PD provision for TAs?	What are the key roles of senior leaders in providing/supporting PD and specifically for TAs?	Semi-structured interviews
	What are the important capabilities for senior leaders to: - Develop and effectively communicate the vision to all employees? - Build and maintain an effective learning culture?	
What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in PD provision for TAs?	As a school leader/principal, what do you think are the barriers to provide regular PD for TAs? How might this be resolved to meet the needs of individuals?	Semi-structured interviews

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Professional development provision for teaching staff

When asked about development policy used for teaching staff within the school, the three senior leaders reported similarly that the development policy is set under the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework, job descriptions, school and individual goals and what needs to be improved. They also indicated that all teaching staff members are to be qualified and well trained under the IB context.

For example, this is evident from a comment made by leader SP3 that:

“... The policy is that we provide development for our teaching staff and that the PD is focused directly to their professional goals and the areas that they want to grow in, but it’s also for us connected to requirements that we have to meet with the IB framework and that is connected to professional growth. It’s about enabling our teachers to do their jobs better.”

Specifically, senior leaders were then asked in more depth whether any of the TAs had taken part in the ‘IB’ training or were included in any formal workshops. Leader SD1 mentioned that the whole school PD included TAs and some other in-service PD that are related to the roles of TAs including inquiry based education, in-service training and other essential learning. Leader SD1 explained:

“... It’s really important that everybody in the classroom knows the enquiry based education. So we have provided our own learning groups and readings and we’ve brought in some experts and both teachers and TAs have been involved in the PD there....”

From this, it can be summarised that TAs are included in several workshops. Leader SD1 said PD provided to TAs is suitable for TA’s level of understanding, necessary for them to know and to support their roles. However, this seems to be a general response regarding what comprises the current provision of PD for TAs. Therefore, in-depth questions were asked and two senior leaders reasoned that:

(SD1): For TAs, we don’t have, within the regular year, the overwhelming majority of time, where it is an education based PD, TAs are part of it. They are in a session, working with the teachers and giving the same advice as others.

(PP2): For a class teacher in this case, the language teachers ... is that provision for giving them post rated home integration. For the TAs it’s not of the same level as for a teacher...

From this, it was clear that PD for TAs is mostly done within the school. Although leader SD1 mentioned that there is no specific PD for TAs, TAs are included in

some other training events authorised by the school. In addition, senior leaders were asked in more depth about their insights on PD provision for TAs in their school. In the next section, senior leaders described aspects on how the school provided PD for TAs and expressed their views in regard to PD provision.

Perceptions on PD provision for TAs

To gain data from senior leaders regarding their perceptions of PD provision for TAs, three related sub-questions were asked. When the three senior leaders were asked about their views regarding PD provision, they similarly pointed out some aspects of what professional learning should look like. The researcher categorised the data collected according to the interview questions in order to identify the themes as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Perceptions of senior leaders in the school regarding PD provision

Sub-Questions	Senior leader participants		
	SD1	PP2	SP3
What are the key roles of senior leaders in providing PD and specifically for TAs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To engage the person in being committed to PD. - To communicate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pitch timetable for TAs to take part in PD (for TAs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the teams members and knowing their strengths - Senior leaders' ability to communicate with their staff - The school done some workshops but not enough for TAs
What are the important capabilities for senior leaders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and effectively communicate the vision to all employees? - To maintain an effective learning culture? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning support individuals can get is from colleagues - To have patience, 'real change takes real time' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building an understanding of the school community - Building an understanding why certain decisions are made - Looking at where the school is heading - Provision of language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allowing time to put the learning into practice - Not every model that fits everybody

From this point, there were some common themes raised in response to these sub-questions. The researcher then summarised into three key themes including: commitment to learning and changing of individuals; open and professional communication between colleagues; and realistic timeframe for implementation and development. Through the views of the three senior leaders, three key themes were identified and explained below.

Commitment to learning and changing of individuals

In response to the semi-structured interview questions about senior leaders' perceptions on staff development, leader SD1 explained that the role of senior leaders is to encourage the staff to be active in their self-development. This leader also added that it is up to the individuals to be committed to learning or wanting to reflect and improve their practice. This was evident as leader SD1 explained that:

“I think the most important thing is engaging the person in being committed to PD and professional growth. It's really important that the person who is wanting to change is helped to make good decisions about how quickly you should change, what things you should learn while you are changing...So that's one very important element.”

From this point, leader SD1 suggested that individuals need to have strong motivation to participate in any form of PD activities to enhance and reflect their knowledge and skills.

Open and professional communication between colleagues

Furthermore, two senior leaders described that individuals should be motivated to have open and professional communication between colleagues as part of their learning process. These senior leaders suggested that this is the most effective element in improving individuals practice. Two senior leaders for example described that:

(SD1): It's really important that everyone have somebody that they can talk to.... It can be that you talk with a group of people who are all doing the same thing or it could be with your supervisor only. Learning is about two people sharing a concept and deciding on a new piece of that concept...

(PP2): ...The concept of our PD is that the best level of support that you can get is from your colleagues. It's really something that we believe in strongly that if you have got the opportunity to be working with a group of people who have similar needs then conversations are about the same thing.

Leader SD3, however, claimed that the leader's ability to communicate with their staff to get everyone involved in the learning so that staff can share and bring what they learned to the school community is also important. This leader explained that:

"So I think, as a leader to be able to build and encourage the vision. I think it is those communication skills and I think it's also the skill of having an idea of where it is that you want to go to but not being caught up in the small things about how to get there...."

Realistic time frame for implementation and development

In addition, two senior leaders said that to get a person to understand what they learned takes time for an individual to adapt and put learning into practice, particularly when the form of PD is in another language. This formed another key aspect, which two leaders expressed the view that:

(SD1): I really strongly believe that real change takes real time, if you say to somebody "read this, now be like that", people aren't going to really be able to do that, particularly doing it in a second language... You are asking to change the way that you are educating others is really difficult....

(SP3): It is about having patience and its about knowing that not everything happens today and it's about knowing that we all have different capacities which means that we all grow at different paces and there isn't one model that fits everybody.

Overall, based on leader SD1 and SP3 responses, the data suggest that staff need to have the initiative to be willing to commit to learning, to improve or change and understand the purpose of professional learning. In addition, the senior leaders indicated that, besides the individual's responsibility to pursue their PD goals, senior leaders need to be knowledgeable and understandable about staff capacity. Leader SP3 commented that:

"I think the role of the leader is to ensure that you understand each of your team members to know where their strengths are, where their dreams and ambitions are, to be able to work or identify with them the areas for growth and then help them find the professional learning which is going to enable them to grow."

Leader SP3 also stated that senior leaders need to be supportive of the surroundings when seeking suitable PD opportunities for individuals to participate and giving the time for a person to discover their own development skills. Leader SP3 added that:

"I think my role as a leader is to help support the staff myself and build their capacity but also to be very aware of what's happening in the region and when there are opportunities advocate for them so that they can take part."

The challenges and complications

As the three senior leaders specified in the interviews, meeting TAs' specific development needs can be a challenge for senior leaders in the school. This theme is linked to the third research question: What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in PD provision for TAs? Due to its significance to this research study, this finding will be further discussed in the following chapter. Table 4.3 below lists the overall challenges found in the data collected from the three senior leaders.

From this point, the researcher categorised the challenges senior leaders faced in PD provision into four key themes, including budgetary limitations, time limitations, PD opportunity limitations, and level of understanding.

Table 4.3: Key themes in response to research questions and their accompanied sub-questions.

Sub-Questions	Themes emerged from leader participants		
	SD1	PP2	SP3
As a school leader/principal, what do you think are the barriers to provide regular professional development for TAs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The isolate location of the school - Limited PD available for TAs outside the school - The difference between Lao and western organisations adds another level of complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of understanding - Allowing individual time to participate in PD - TAs working hours did not allow them to attend PD due to the thought of lower wages, so some TAs did not bother attending PD - High academic language used in PD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget limitation - In-service PD provided by the school is limited, short time and quick - Not sure if TAs can gain much of the learning - Busy school life

Budgetary limitations

Initially, it was quite interesting that only one leader thought that budget for staff development is limited, whereas two senior leaders have not mentioned that budget is a challenge. Leader SP3 expressed the view that:

“I think the challenge here is that our PD budget until recently has been very small and it’s been mainly consumed with meeting our IB requirements. So I don’t think there has been a very good balance of PD budget.”

From this, leader SP3 was aware of specific PD needs. Leader SP3 feels that the school failed to address PD needs for staff, and focused on IB PD too much. As a result, there was a limited amount of budget to support other essential training. However, leader PP2 and SD1 commented that the school has made the effort to seek some forms of PD in the areas they believe would help staff do their jobs better.

Time limitation

Another finding related to challenges or difficulties is that of time. The three

senior leaders pointed out that time constraints can be an obstacle. They believed that it takes time for individuals to understand the knowledge and to implement the learning. It also takes time to find the suitable period to get people together and share ideas and their own learning. Leader SP3 commented that:

“I think the obstacles are money and time and I would also say capacity, in a school life is really busy and we need to have the brain space to be able to learn, so it’s being able to create those spaces where people can step outside of the race of daily life and breathe and be in a place that they’re ready to learn....”

Leader SP3 previously stated that the PD budget is IB focused and there was not enough PD to support other essential training. Therefore, it became clear that the time and money spent on IB related PD had obstructed staff from being involved in PD.

PD opportunity limitations

In addition, leader SD1 pointed out the school location is a challenge for PD provision for TAs. Leader SD1 commented that:

“I think the challenge that we have in school its isolated from many of the places that larger cities there are other similar schools, similar organisations and much greater access to expertise. The level of teacher training that has been part of the Lao experience has some real flaws...”

“...There is probably not a high level of expertise in some of the professions and the institutions where people have come through. The difference between Lao and the western organisations I think adds another level of complexity to it...”

Leader SP3 claimed that the school itself has provided PD for TAs in such a limited way. Also, TAs were involved in PD training that this leader thought was not so useful. Leader SP3 responded that:

“I think with the TAs its been some scattergun workshops which haven’t been sustainable, they’ve been dependent on some people who have decided that

they want to do that and they think there's a need but I don't think it's ever been systemic..."

This was contradicted by leader PP2 who mentioned that some TAs were included in the training alongside teachers within the school and reasoned that that there were not training available outside the school. Leader PP2 said that:

"For the TAs it's not of the same level as for a teacher. They are not given opportunities to go and, go out to PD an area but they are provided for within the school. So it's mainly because of the lack of opportunity. There is no training for TAs outside the school. So we have to really do that in house."

Leader SP3 however, continued that:

"With the TAs. I know that there has been some things which have happened this year, but I don't believe that we've done enough. TAs have been involved in the enquiry focused, so they've attended the whole school workshops. However, I am not sure how effective that PD was for them. It was delivered very fast, very short time, there wasn't the opportunity in those whole school sessions for the Lao staff to unpack."

From this, it can be seen that leader PP2 was aware that the training outside school is quite different than what the school offers for TAs. Therefore, TAs mainly received training held by the school. However, leader SP3 was not certain whether the TAs would get any benefits from the training the school offered since the session was delivered very quickly and in a short time. This leads to another challenge that seems to concern the three senior leaders most about their TAs' level of understanding of the learning.

Level of understanding

Leader PP2 and SD1 raised an important factor in regard to the academic language and tools used in PD, and commented that TAs have different backgrounds of English language proficiency and knowledge. The two senior leaders explained that:

(PP2): I think the TAs are at a disadvantage in that the level of English needed to undertake the IB training is pretty high. ... the complexity of languages, it's very hard for someone to do that level in a second language, it is demanding for a first language learner or a second language learner, it's really difficult.. ...some of the tools and strategies that the teachers uses might be a little bit too demanding for a TA.

(SD1) Where we find some difficulties is that there needs to be a follow up session where those that have got higher language skills can assist those that don't have quite such high language skills to do that transfer of understanding and that is a more difficult process that I don't think we've got quite right yet.

It is evident that leader SD1 and PP2 were conscious of the language level that each TA has, and that the school is trying to improve in-house PD so that TAs can use the learning tools, take part and easily understand the learning. However, leader SP3 argued that though there has been some PD going on within the school for TAs, there were still areas on which the school needs to put more emphasis. Leader SP3 stated that:

“For the TAs, I understand that there have been some workshops on some topics that have been offered to them. I think in the time that I have been in the school in eight years, it's an area that we have done very, very poorly at. I think our TAs are not given the time or the PD which would really empower them to do their jobs and I don't think the expat teachers have been given the PD to know how to work with the TAs so that those relationships can be more co-teaching relationships.”

How participants resolve those challenges

Regarding the challenges mentioned, the senior leaders suggested ways to improve in the area of PD provision for TAs. From the interview discussed, it can be summarised that PD provision for TAs was still under improvement. Though there were no particular PD provided to TAs, TAs were involved in general training and few TAs were involved in the IB PD. Leader PP2 suggested that:

“We try and pitch the timetable so TAs will get access to some of the understanding that's going on. For instance, we have Kath Murdoch coming in and doing workshops in the school, we did include TAs in some of those but not all of those.”

In addition, leader SP3 mentioned that senior leaders need to be creative in using internal resources and experts within the school. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five regarding the perceptions of senior leaders, since it is an important element for senior leaders to consider. Leader SP3 recommended that:

“If the pot of money is a constraint, how can we as senior leaders be creative and looking at peoples’ professional goals and then finding ways to be able to support them to move forward to find the commonality between needs and potentially bring those people together so they can be a learning community... become more creative and use our own experts and create opportunities in our busy lives for us to learn from our experts.”

Furthermore, leader SD1 and PP2 explained that the school now put TAs into different levels (level 1, 2 and 3). These senior leaders believed that putting TAs into these levels could help identify each TAs’ strengths and skills as well as those who could take part in PD that is more academic and those should only work within their responsibilities. For example, leader SD1 explained that:

“One of the things that we have done as a structural change is that we have got level one, level two and level three TAs. Level one TAs will be a person who is responsible just for the simple tasks. Level two TAs have the ability to make some changes to the things that they have been asked to do and so they have to understand the concept and level threes are the ones that are able to take responsibility for a group of students and actually provide them with ideas and take assessment.”

Although leader SD1 and PP2 identified that each level is differentiated by the roles and responsibilities of TAs, the PD provision for all levels of TAs were not mentioned. This can be inferred that TAs from all levels received similar PD. However, leader SD1 added that having set levels is still a preference of

individual TA. Some TAs may be happy at the level they are at, even though moving to a higher level means greater responsibility and more pay, as leader SD1 said:

“People need to make the choice about what it is that makes them feel happy and fulfilled in their work. So we have people who could be level three but they have chosen to be level two. We have people who are choosing to be level three and have to work a little bit harder but they make the personal choice and I think that’s a really important part of what we do.”

This suggests that leader SD1 and PP2 believed that this level structure could help TAs to feel that there is progress in their roles, so that level one TAs can have the opportunity to upgrade to level two or three. Leader SD1 commented that:

“I think what we’ve tried to do is to have opportunities for people who come in as a TA to be able to move from level one to level two to level three and now actually hopefully become a coordinator so they feel that there’s progress and change and new things in their career.”

The three senior leaders indicated possible solutions to overcome the challenges of providing PD for TAs. They believed that if TAs have higher-level English skills, TAs would likely to understand what is going on in the PD. From the information gathered. It can be noticed that this school was still in the process of improving PD for TAs and because time, money and specific courses was an important factor, follow up sessions were needed in this area.

Overall, what the three senior leaders suggested were that colleagues need to collaborate and help those who have a minimum understanding of the learning. However, there were still some doubts over the PD offered to TAs because of the senior leaders’ awareness of the training available in Laos and the PD training provided within the school for TAs.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW FINDINGS

According to the questions asked with a group of TAs in the school, the related responses became the themes. As senior leaders SD1 and PP2 commented in the interview, each TA in the school is put at a different level. Therefore, the researcher was told that four TAs involved in the focus group are at level three and two TAs are at level two. The researcher has put related questions into categories in order to find themes as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Sub-questions regarding PD provision for TAs and their PD experiences

Research question number one	Sub-questions	Themes emerged from the focus group interview
What comprises the current provision of PD for TAs?	Tell me about the PD programmes/training/courses that you have recently undertaken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short term workshops - Whole staff training - On-the-job training
	What was PD training for TAs in the past like compare to now?	Past: more training support Present: less training support
	Were there any difficulties or challenges that stopped you from attending the program? Why? Why not?	PD budget limitation
		Timeframe
PD availability internal and external		
	Face-to-face communication limitation	

Professional development experiences of TAs

The overall findings regarding the PD experiences of TAs was that most PD for TAs were arranged within the school. TAs provided mixed responses when asked about their PD experiences as they said it was up to the types of PD that were offered by the school annually. The researcher then asked TAs to describe the PD they experienced in the past and the PD they have recently taken.

TAs 2T and 3P mentioned that the PD they received in the past has had a lot of positive impact compared to now. These two TAs have been working in this school longer than other TAs who were there, so they were able to identify the

PD offered to them in the past. This is evident as they both commented that:

(2T): As I've been working here longer than any TAs here, I could tell that the PD for TAs in the past was well supported by the school. I attended training courses outside the work area at several institutions...I took a TESOL course and teaching techniques... that we could actually attend during staff workdays.

(3P): I think PD in the past was better. PD was arranged regularly once every week or once a month held by the teachers here. It was effective as I actually applied it into my own work. I learnt about many things..... how to approach students appropriately and the language we use to communicate with them, etc.

This indicates that TAs were satisfied with the PD in the past, which was provided to them from time to time. TAs were able to work better from attending those training events both internal and external PD. Additionally, TA 3P commented that some TAs who experienced PD in the past gained more practical skills because they were tailored to their specific needs. TA 3P expressed the view that the PD TAs recently had received is quite limited in a range of ways. TA 3P stated:

“Now, we mostly have to seek for our own PD from outside, which is quite difficult because as we know there are not many courses out there that are particularly for TAs. The only course I know and I think fits to our job most is English course, just to upgrade our English skills...”

TA 6N commented that some current in-house PD was not specifically for TAs, but related to all teaching staff as a whole, which this TA thought was not so effective and had less impact on their work. TA 6N added that previous PD was more practical because it fitted the development needs of TAs. TA 6N pointed out that although senior leaders were aware of TAs' specific PD needs, often TAs ended up experiencing something that was not helpful. TA 6N commented that:

“TAs were included in the PD course with the teachers once in a while, run by experienced speakers from abroad, which I think was quite challenging for us as TAs. We felt like we were far behind. We didn't understand and we cannot take

into practice. It was a waste of time for them and for us ... “

TA 2T and 5K described briefly about the latest PD TAs had undertaken called Destiny and Google Docs. TAs found it quite interesting and practical, though it was run as short-term workshops. They each explained that:

(2T): The latest training we took is called Destiny 'barcode textbook cataloging'... where we record books in our class into the computer, with labels, numbers, and colored code. I think it is part of the PD that all TAs have to take part in order to understand the process and take them into practice to individual class, and it's more convenient to keep track of books.

(5K): I remembered we all did training with the senior secretary about using Google Docs too, but it was only a short session though.

From the focus group findings, it can be identified that TAs in the school experienced a range of PD including short-term workshops, whole staff training and on-the-job training. These forms of PD experienced by TAs have impact on their teaching and learning practice to some extent. While the whole staff PD has less impact on TAs personally, TAs feel short term workshops and on-the-job training actually have a positive impact on their work. The following table categorised the points TAs made in relation to the past and present of their PD experiences as shown in Table 4.5.

In addition to this finding, the researcher identified that PD opportunities that TAs in the school received is quite limited due to a range of difficulties. Therefore, the researcher outlined the data collected into themes relating to obstacles that stops TAs from attending PD.

Table 4.5: PD experiences of TAs in the past and present

PD experiences of TAs	
Past	Present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular and continuous - Arranged within and outside school campus as a separate course - Led by school teachers with experienced knowledge and the ability to teach adults - Practical - More PD opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short training courses - Inclusive staff training staff - TAs individually seek external PD - Limited PD fund - Limited PD opportunities - On-the-job training (learn as they work)

Difficulties and Complexities

From the data findings, TAs highlighted some of the challenges and difficulties in relation to their PD experiences and opportunities, which they believed is stopping them from receiving sufficient PD. Below lists the main challenges faced by TAs. This includes PD budget limitations, timeframe, internal and external PD opportunity limitations and face-to-face communication.

PD budget limitation

According to the findings of the focus group, all TAs said that the development fund that the school provided to TAs is quite limited. Two TAs expressed the view that:

(2T): Very little PD budget to be honest,... not enough,... sometimes feels like as if we're paying for our own PD. ...

(1J): I think it is quite imbalance.... Expat teachers have more PD fund than TAs, I don't understand why is that?

In this case, the researcher did not respond to this question, but rather asked TA 1J about what she thought might be the cause. TA 1J then responded quite emotionally that:

“I think the school wants to develop staff profession as an individual, but not as a group. Teachers get to do training abroad, attend formal PD, online training, etc. most of the time. They got the knowledge and they move to new places. We as local staff only stay here and our knowledge remains the same when compared to teachers...We work at an international environment, our PD suppose to be provided at least a bit better than what we have received now... “

(2T): it seems like our job is to only help teachers and students.... and the PD we were offered was locally provided to help our working routine, with limited budget, while teachers were provided with a large amount of PD and funding.

Interestingly, TA 3P pointed out that though the PD for TAs seemed to be limited, their wages have increased because of the realisation on the part of the school about how complex and demanding the TAs jobs are. TA 3P commented that:

“The school seems to have reduced PD fund to support TAs development. However, our wages increased based on the level and responsibility of TAs.”

This indicates that the school increased TAs pay, but did not increase the PD fund for TAs. Most TAs pointed out that it was difficult for them to have sufficient PD with such a limited budget.

Timeframe

PD arranged by the school sometimes does not match with TAs time availability, but rather matches with the teachers' timeframes. While several TAs highlighted PD funding as one of the major barriers, another main barrier identified in the TAs interview is time. Two TAs stressed that:

(3P): Sometimes the duration and time of PD doesn't fit with our working time, without considering whether or not we can attend PD during that hours, because it would be times when TAs need to stand by and help teachers and students in the classroom mostly....

(4D): Also there were times when PD course took place within the school, after student left., from 3:30-5pm..I think... But, we TAs, finish work at 4pm as stated

in the contract and most of us prefer to go home, whereas, teachers can surely attend because they finish work at 5pm.

Internal and external PD availability

Another issue that stops TAs from attending PD was other commitments after work. Therefore, the PD opportunities that TAs have internally and externally seem to be limited and not in line with their timelines. Two TAs commented that:

(2T): Teachers are welcome for TAs to join though, we can join if we like, but again we don't have to as some of us have other commitments, like picking up our children or doing grocery shopping.

(3P): Even external courses we can attend after working hours is limited. From what I see is mostly English courses that seems fit for our job and our time availability. Also, some TAs want to take vocational training but it was difficult for them to apply because the schedule course runs the same time as TAs working hours.

It is clear that there were few courses available in Laos within the context of TAs. There was a constraint on the TAs who had to have professional development authorised by the senior leader within the school. Two TAs commented that:

(3P): We do allow to propose PD to study a specific course we like, but the school only approve courses that they think are related to our work field. However, there aren't many courses related to our field as I mentioned.... It will be under our own cost, and ..if that's the case...the school only supports very little of it.

(4D): Also when compare local schools and the international school here, there are different techniques and systems used. Our job here is just to make sure we can handle the kids, we can direct them and that kids are in a safe environment.

From the interview, all TAs agreed that their PD experiences and opportunities were limited in many ways that slowed down their professional and personal development.

Face-to-face Communication

TAs identified professional discourse as an important form of PD so that best practices is shared among TAs. However, four TAs pointed out that they had problem finding suitable time to formally meet and discuss issues related to their practice with their colleagues, supervisors and most importantly with their senior leaders. Three TAs said that:

(1J): I heard one TA went to see the director to inform him that she will form a group meeting with all TAs so they can discuss about their PD concerns and issues. And the director said “ you cannot have any meetings without my permission”..... One time the director said he will have a proper meeting with all TAs but, nothing happen, always postpone.

(5K):It would be nice if we have a chance to talk to the leader to support our PD more, but the time never meet or enough.... I feel that the communication is missing in our school...that’s why our voices or concerns are not heard as much.

(1J): ..they never allow enough time for us to communicate face to face, sometimes we ask for 10 minutes, they give us 5 minutes.

Three TAs indicated that they had little opportunity to communicate face-to-face with the seniors leaders and teachers. Most of the communication was done through written evaluation to determine their professional development needs. TA 3P commented that:

“I think we mostly communicate through evaluation, what we did in our PD through survey and feedback, where we can fill in our thoughts and what we want to improve in our work, but we can or cannot return the survey...they don’t really keep track. We also used to get information and news about PD and news updated through emails from teachers. Now, I think they stop sending to us because it is more relevant to teachers than TAs.”

Overall, the TAs raised the main challenges for professional development quite often in the focus group interview session. For example, two TAs explained that they learned most through hands-on working as compared to attending training or workshops organised by external experts. Two TAs commented that:

(2T): What we can do, as TAs is only learn from the teachers we work with, adapt and use their teaching techniques and styles to support our roles as we go and assist students and teachers at the same time.

(1J): When I was working with one teacher, she directed me while I was working, which I quite like it and it was practical. When I monitored the kids, the teacher remind me not to turn my back on the children, we need to be in a space where we can see them..... And when I praise or use language to kids, I make sure to use the right words

From this, it can be seen that some TAs may need in-class direction while they are working, whereas other TAs may be more independent to adapt their working styles quickly in the classroom. Nevertheless, TAs believed they should receive more support for professional development from the school and more opportunities to attend PD.

Suggestions on PD provision from TAs

The issues raised by TAs are interrelated as when one problem occurs, often another arises. Therefore, the TAs' voices and recommendations were recognised through the focus group session about how PD for TAs can be managed and meet their development needs. Four TAs suggested that:

(6N):....my suggestion is that when school run PD for all teaching staff, they should run that session with us TAs again, and make it into a simpler version, but I'm not sure if the school can do that, because it may be expensive or use up more time ...

(1J): I'd like the school to arrange a short tripfor us to have the opportunity to go see how other TAs work at their international schools, how the rooms are decorated, discussing and sharing views with other TAs from different schools...if possible.

(2T): For me, I would propose PD that is specifically for TAs, it could be arrange within the campus here, where teachers have the knowledge to teach and transfer the knowledge, something we can practically apply to our work.

(3P): The school is a member of the MRISA (Mekong River International Schools Association). It is an organisation of international schools within the Mekong region, providing social connections and opportunities for sports and cultural exchanges for students and provides a forum for PD among faculty and administrators for school members, only specialist TAs took part, like music, art and sports... I want it to have cultural exchange for teaching and learning too, so classrooms TAs can join, to see other international schools, not just for special subject. At least, we can feel proud that we get to go here and there and to be working at an international community.

From the overall findings, it can be seen that few TAs were satisfied with current PD they received, yet some TAs hoped it would be improve in the future. In addition, comments made by all TAs indicated that being given more opportunities for TAs to experience a range of PD is an important factor to support their roles and widen their knowledge. This implies that PD provision for TAs needs to be taken into careful consideration by the school if they want to have not only qualified teachers, but also well-trained TAs, in order that both groups can deliver positive teaching and learning outcomes.

QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

The questionnaire was conducted using the online tool Survey Monkey and divided into sections. The data provided information about the primary teaching staff overall PD experiences, their PD opportunities and their perspectives about PD for TAs in the school. There were eight out of twenty respondents to the questionnaire across the primary department. Nonetheless, the intention of this survey was to gain additional data and verify the information collected from the interview sessions.

General information

The general information section was used to gain an understanding of the respondents' PD experiences and the forms of PD they attended in the past three years. The purpose in obtaining a range of data across the primary

teaching staff was to allow an understanding of PD importance and its benefits as well as to recognise the amount of PD opportunities teachers received in comparison to TAs. In addition, as teachers were aware of their PD, another purpose in using this method is to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding TAs' PD whom they work with.

Primary teachers PD experiences

All respondents answered that they have been involved in a range of PD in the past three years. This indicates that teachers attended a lot of PD throughout their teaching career. Three teachers described their overall PD experiences are as follow:

(T1) Workshops both at school and at other locations. PYP-workshops and other Inquiry-learning workshops (e.g. workshop with Kath Murdoch). PLC-groups started this year as well.

(T4) 1) Inquiry through inquiry (2years provided by external expert) 2) inquiry as a mindset (Kath Murdoch) Cognitive coaching (Bangkok) 3) introduction to Reggio Emilia Approach (Chiang Mai) 4) Diploma of Management (ETAS) 5) Advance Diploma of Management.

(T7) In-school PD". "Experts" have been brought in or experienced staff have run workshops. This has been more inclusive for all staff. This has included Assessment, Inquiry Learning, IT systems, Differentiation. These have been done over a number of designated PD days and have included the Lao teaching staff...

From this, the researcher identified the forms of PD teachers attended into categories as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Professional development experiences of teachers in the school

PD programmes	
In-service training	External training
Whole staff training	IB PYP focused
PLC	Self-chosen workshops
Assessment	Peer-taught workshops
IT systems	Cognitive coaching
Inquiry based learning	Diploma and advance management
Differentiation	

Teacher T7 mentioned that TAs were included in few workshops mentioned above. In relation to the variety of PD made available to teachers, most teachers responded that their PD experiences had positive impacts on their teaching practice. Teachers described their overall experience attending various PD as 'very positive'. Several positive comments in response to PD experiences of teachers are as follow:

(T1) Mostly the content has been very appropriate to my teaching practice. When several schools are involved, they also provide as a good way to connect with other teachers from the region.

(T4) Oh very positive. I love learning. This makes the participation quite easy for me. I have the privilege of choosing most workshops that I would like to participate in so the intrinsic motivation is already in place before I begin.

(T7) I am always open to continued learning and discussion that comes out of PD. So, I commence with the idea of learning. I like to hear the current and up-

dated thinking from "experts". It is important to exchange information with other teachers. Overall, I find PD very informative and inspiring.

Overall, PD experienced by teachers was very positive because they believed that PD is important to support their roles and to exchange knowledge with teachers from different nations. Seven out of eight teachers had no problem attending a lot of PD annually, as the training they took was informative and a good opportunity for them to learn continuously and to keep up with the change. In contrast, a couple of teachers found PD quite time consuming, though understandably useful. Two teachers argued that it takes time to implement on what they have learned to their practice. Two teachers said that:

(T3)... Often we do not have time to implement the new learning and ideas. To incorporate new learning into your already existing curriculum and routines takes time and continues collaboration. Sometimes we are snowed under and overwhelmed.

(T6) IB ones, a lot of time wasted. PD based from people who have a specific skill to give - much better.

Perceptions on effective PD

In addition, one of the themes that emerged from the findings in the questionnaire is that of effective forms of PD. From the questions asked, the researcher identified the commonalities from the data collected. For example, four teachers suggested effective PD are as follow:

(T1) PD should always be practical, aligned with the curriculum you are teaching and engaging.

(T3) Mini lesson, discussion, modeling, opportunity to practice and reflect, application/more reflection.

(T6) Have to know the programme so you need to do that first, then once you feel confident find PD to suit how you would best like to teach.

(T7) New methodologies. PD related to whole school improvement plans. Being updated on how students learn; especially new research. I also think there should always be an element of individual PD

From this, the researcher identified key points that teachers expect how effective PD should look like. The teachers suggested that effective PD forms should include practicality, collaborative and dialogue, curriculum related, reflective assessment, meeting the needs of individuals and understanding of the program involved.

In addition, teacher T4 raised an interesting point. This teacher said that, before an individual can decide to take part in PD, it starts with the willingness to change and learning of a person. Teacher T4 commented that:

“I think development first begins with you. Understanding yourself and where you are with your development. I believe one would first need a mindset of a lifelong learner in order to see the development one is making and enjoy the benefits deriving from the learning... “

In the next Section, one theme raised regarding the perspective of teachers on PD for TAs is presented. This is to collect opinions specifically from the teaching staff as they work closely with TAs. Here, some teachers described clearly about the sorts of PD provided to TAs, whereas a few teachers had no idea if TAs take any specific PD since only six out of eight teachers responded to the question. Two teachers for example, strongly pointed out that:

(T1) The TAs received hardly any, apart from support from the teachers they work with.

(T2) I don't know what TAs receive, but I do know that we have made suggestions that have not been implemented.

In addition, two teachers mentioned differences and similarities between teachers' PD and TAs' PD.

(T6) Differences: TAs are rarely offered PD outside Laos. This is understandable as it is often at an advanced level of educational theory and practice. There has been a positive move to include TAs in as much PD as possible when it happens at school. They need to be supported with this. There is also some specific PD directly related to training for the classroom role for TAs.

(T4) Similarities: we all are given opportunity for PD. To make access, easier the school brings the experts to the school. In addition, the PD committee has an extensive budget, which is shared across the school levels. Anyone can apply for PD that they see suitable and needed in order to perform well within their roles.

(T4) Differences: ultimately the differences boiled down to language needs. PD for teachers who are required to develop learning engagements for an English-based curriculum is provided in English. This fact often inhibits the learning for many of the TA's depending on that personal level of English proficiency.

This indicates that teachers noticed that TAs are included in several staff training and specific workshops, which was essential to TAs and that TAs are given the same opportunity to take PD. However, there are some doubts reflected in teachers' comments as to whether the PD that TAs have received meets their needs, since some PD contains advanced and higher level of English.

Specific information

TAs' effectiveness through the eyes of teachers

In this section, teachers were asked to describe the TAs who they work with and how TAs performed effectively to meet classroom needs. Most teachers specified similarly that, a good TA needs to have a good command of English skills to work effectively with teachers and students in the classroom. Three teachers said that an effective TA should have:

(T1) Organisational skills, fair command of English, ICT-skills.

(T2) A basic understanding of an inquiry classroom as compared with Lao classroom. They need to have adequate spoken and written English to work with the students...

(T3) A good level of English flexible - is able to prioritise tasks carries out work THOROUGHLY

One teacher has worked with many TAs with different abilities and knowledge background. Teacher T4 explained that:

“...I have experienced working with 13 Different TAs. Only three have had a level of English that I would consider 'advanced' meaning that they could follow instructions beyond the everyday tasks,.. along with a high level of English proficiency.”

Two teachers described in detail about what an effective TA should be and should have in order to work effective, apart from English competencies. These two teachers believed that TAs are in need of continuous support in their professional roles. They both pointed out that:

(T6) Planning to support the management of the classroom and students. They need to be taught how to observe students and interact with them. They need to be supported with understanding the curriculum. They need training in tutoring small groups of students. Each classroom teacher should support TAs with weekly training to advance their skills.

(T7) TAs need training in practical skills of IT, photography, resources, ordering, arranging field trip, making contact with the Local Community. TAs should be supported with the context to articulate how they need help. TAs should feel confident to run workshops for each other; especially to new TAs. English language development should be offered each week.

This indicates that, apart from the ability to communicate well in English of TAs, teachers also suggested TAs should have a range of skills and knowledge in order to handle multiple classroom tasks. Therefore, these teachers were aware of the need to support PD for TAs.

Teachers' perceptions on PD provision for TAs

The next question then asked if teachers noticed the insufficiency of PD for TAs

or the current PD that TAs experiencing in the school. Several teachers explained that PD for TAs needs to be more systematic to better understand teaching and learning systems, particularly for those who have minimum level of English understanding. They suggested that:

(T4) PD in English will always be provided and is easy to come by; however, I think access in Lao to the same material and learning outcomes will facilitate their understanding and support the teachers better in the classroom.

(T2) basic understanding of the precepts and expectations of the PYP (Primary Years Program) as well as basic pedagogy.

(T3) Language classes, which are rigorous and measurable (an internationally recognised qualification)

This suggests that teachers agree that TAs should experience understandable PD for them to gain the knowledge quickly. The teachers believed that the TAs need to extend their knowledge of classroom activity and their ability to observe teaching. Three teachers reasoned that:

(T6) Understanding the expectations of the curriculum and each teacher. Part of the PD for TAs should include observations in other classes. PD in photography, multi-media, IT, relating to parents and confidence with students. Also, English writing and speaking.

(T1) Set up (optional) ICT workshops. Have proper reviews with both assistants and teachers to determine where they see a need for further development. Have assistants change grades more regularly to provide for more growth opportunities.

(T3) A language course which was measurable and had an action component whereby the TAs would be required to demonstrate their language skills in their work setting.

In addition, there were suggestions from three teachers in relation to implementing changes in PD for TAs. They recommended that this school is the only international school in Laos with IB accreditation and it can take a while for local staff to understand the system. So, they believed that it might be better if TAs with different levels of knowledge and diverse work experiences could work together. They suggested that:

(T2) I would put a mentoring system in place. There are some Lao staff who are very knowledgeable. They should be paired with new staff to better share their understanding and learning.

(T4) I would provide opportunity for PD to be held in Lao language. But, it gets complicated when we have to consider the cultural dimensions involved in peer teaching, which it would need to be in the case of this school. It has taken years for some TAs to gain an understanding of how it works and what it means.

(T4) TAs should be empowered to facilitate workshops alongside an expat to support further development among TAs and hopefully avoid some of the possible hierarchy issues that occur among the TAs team.

(T6) Implementing PD where TAs have stages where they visit other classes and observe the work practices of other classes and feedback in PD. Implement designated IT skills, multi-media and English classes.

To conclude the overall findings, the responses gathered from senior leaders concluded that the school is trying its best to meet everybody's PD needs, particularly TAs' PD needs. While the teachers mostly have sufficient or more PD support and overall found this to be very helpful to them, TAs concluded that PD for TAs should be improved. However, despite the overall positive feelings associated with PD provision and experiences, all the participants in the school highlighted that there are a considerable number of challenges or difficulties in PD provision for TAs. Since the senior leaders in the school are mainly responsible for PD provision for TAs, the challenges faced by them will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Summary

Analysis of the findings identified key issues that emerged from all the participants' point of views including: PD opportunities and PD experiences of TAs; PD leadership and management; and PD impacts. These key issues found in the data collected are linked to the literature review in Chapter Two.

The data collected from semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and questionnaires revealed that PD provided by the school is under improvement to meet the needs and performances of TAs. The improvement of PD provision for TAs will be discussed in the following chapter. The significance of the findings in relation to the literature will be further discussed in Chapter Five. Also, key conclusions, research limitations, recommendations for senior leaders in the school and recommendations for future research will be explained.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study. Three key conclusions are presented based on the following three research questions that have guided this study.

1. What comprises the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?
2. What are the perceptions of senior leaders concerning professional development provision for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?
3. What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders face in professional development provision for teaching assistants in one international school in Laos?

The discussion for each research question is supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This chapter also presents the limitations of the research, the recommendations for senior leaders in the school and recommendations for future research.

KEY CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: What comprises the current provision of professional development for TAs?

The research study identified that PD provided to TAs is varied within the school and outside the school campus. The findings indicate that the current PD offered to TAs is necessary to support their daily routines as well as to develop and extend their knowledge and skills. The school should consider seeking PD alternatives so TAs have the opportunity to experience more professional learning and to continue their professional growth either within or outside the

school campus, focusing on the quality rather than the quantity.

The findings further revealed that TAs' understanding of subject knowledge could be improved through exchanging ideas and experiences among teachers and TAs and sharing constructive feedback given by others. It is suggested that when TAs have a better understanding of the subject content, they will be able to support teachers and student learning more effectively (Fishman et al., 2003). This is supported by Kay (2002) who notes that TAs could gain more confidence in their work performance once they receive more knowledge. Since the TAs in the school are local staff who work fulltime with both international staff and students, self-confidence is very important for them to be able to work in an international working environment more effectively. In addition, PD allow TAs to become better instructors as they become more aware of their own teaching and learning practice (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2000).

Based on the data collected from the focus group of TAs, one of the PD events that TAs experienced seemed to be minimal and short-term organised by the local staff in the school. This is aligned with the view of Groom and Rose (2005) that while PD for TAs is identified as important, PD for TAs is often restricted to short courses provided by the local education authorities and informal training opportunities. Although the short-term workshops were quite new, TAs could readily apply the learning to their work directly, because they understood the purpose, process and benefits of PD. This is similar to the view of Bingham, Spooner, and Browder (2007) that PD that is distributed in a practical manner, can enhance comprehension and knowledge. Furthermore, it was fortunate for TAs to be trained by the local staff within the school, making the training more understandable. This indicates that it is more effective when PD is introduced and delivered on site in a less complicated way and is specific to the role of certain groups.

Even though informal training was a series of short-term workshops, it helped TAs to understand the concept of teaching and learning and they were learning

to improve their roles. This is because the workshops that TAs participated in were specifically structured to support their roles. This is reinforced by the work of Steckelberg et al., (2007) who assert that any forms of PD individuals take can be successful if individuals can apply the learning to their work. This is recognised by Giangreco (2013b): “establishing a small pool of highly skilled TAs allows for their temporary assignment to address specific needs” (p. 10).

Another model of PD provided for TAs in the school is whole staff training. TAs were included in the whole staff training annually. When the school contracts outside experts to facilitate training with all teaching staff. Teaching assistants not only found it difficult to understand, but also very challenging to access the concepts of this form of PD. It seems that the school neglected to consider the groups of participants who attended the PD as there were a mixture of local and international teaching staff. Besides, the training was delivered very quickly and was academically beyond the level of some TAs’ understanding and language. This supports Hargreaves (2000) assertion that individuals with a minimum level of academic knowledge are less likely to incorporate the learning into their work if they do not understand or receive support that has been scaffolded.

However, it is possible that inclusive PD can enhance the working relationship between teachers and TAs so that the learning can be shared and facilitate a common understanding. This is supported by Hirsch (2011) who uses the terms ‘working collaboratively’, ‘sharing what you know’, and ‘problem-solving as a team’ to identify the skills that today’s educators are expected to learn. The inclusive PD allows TAs to gain learning experiences through exchange and discussions amongst themselves and also allows teachers to access TAs views. This is further confirmed by the study of Earley and Bubb (2004) who concluded that shared professional learning allows more opportunities to discuss practice and therefore, enhance knowledge and skills. In addition, this type of PD can be seen as a learning process where teachers and TAs are not only working together, but also learning together; making TAs feel included and valued to be part of the teaching and learning outcomes. The role of teachers, who know not

only how to work with TAs, but who are also supportive in developing and guiding them is imperative, especially when teachers are committed to TA training as part of their professional goals.

The teachers interviewed commented and recognised that a lot of the learning of TAs happens in the classroom context. Teachers provide modeling and guidance for TAs during classroom interaction and they have expressed that this is a very important and relevant part of their professional learning. One TA shared her experience working with two teachers where one teacher was unhelpful, whereas another teacher was very supportive and guided her when needed. This may be understandable, especially when some teachers may not have had training or experienced working with TAs. This supports the point made by Levine (1997) that on-the-job training can only be effective when two people in different roles can work closely together so one person can learn from the other. Also, when the work environment is subject to change is complex or demands advance knowledge and therefore creates a need for highly skilled workers, this contextualised form of training is very effective (Lawson, 1997). TAs who have the ability to manage, observe and learn from experienced teachers, under their supervision can learn very quickly. This is an effective learning outcome for TAs so that they can adapt to changes and interact with the teachers.

In practice, TAs can benefit through observing the teaching styles of teachers, and adapting their own work to the new teaching and learning situation. This view is aligned with the work of Steckelberg et al. (2007) who maintain that teachers are to guide TAs and share effective teaching styles for TAs to work well with students in the classroom. Furthermore, Lawson (1997) asserts that this type of training can be best used in situations when individuals do not know how to apply themselves to work procedures or learning tools that may be new and challenging. As the role of TAs is mainly to instruct students under the supervision of teachers, TAs should consider themselves as learners by actively asking questions when they encounter difficulties or uncertainties (Blalock, 1991). However, the findings from the interviews showed that there are some

uncertainties about whether or not TAs are committed or eager to engage in self-development. This depends on the preferences of TAs to be active or not in the learning. This is recognised in the studies of Lawson (1997) and Steckelberg et al., (2007) and Morgan and Ashbaker (2011) who found that, training can be a burden when individuals do not have the commitment, or capabilities, to perform or when the situation has a high level of control, complexity or can be sensitive.

Overall, it can be noticed that any types of PD TAs experience would be more meaningful and effective if they were given more support, opportunities and feedback from their peers and teachers with whom they work and most importantly from the senior leaders. It was clear that PD opportunities and PD experiences for TAs in the school are provided differently to that provided to teachers. What is known for certain is that the professional working status that teachers hold is more internationally recognised when compared to TAs who are locally hired. Nevertheless, the teachers in this school will often receive more opportunities in attending PD than TAs. This may be due to the difference in position, job descriptions and qualifications. However, this is not to say that TAs expect to receive the same amount of PD as the teachers, but rather be supported continuously and have follow up sessions for development.

If TAs were given more opportunities for PD than what they currently receive, it would make them feel even more active in the learning without having to independently strive for their own learning and understanding, which sometimes can be challenging. As a result, when TAs disregard the things that become too complex for them, this tends to limit their commitment to challenging themselves and their capabilities. Therefore, senior leaders need to take into consideration the ways in which TAs are trained, supported and encouraged to develop as individuals and as groups. Involving TAs into the school activities can impact not only on their individual development, but also upon the learning of teachers who work with them (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). As well as the teachers, Kay (2002) claims that PD for TAs is paramount as their role changes and develops and, therefore, offering diverse PD opportunities for learning and personal

development is needed. The current PD offered to TAs in the school either short-term, whole staff training or on-the-job training need to be improved. The findings also showed that senior leaders need to allow TAs to have their say regarding their PD and their development needs.

Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to providing PD for TAs?

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the research findings reported in Chapter Four concur that senior leaders perceived that PD for TAs can be effective if the school considers the following elements: commitment to ongoing learning of individuals, open and professional communication between colleagues, realistic timeframe for implementation and development, and creativity of senior leaders in PD provision for TAs.

The perceptions of senior leaders in the school about what could be effective professional learning and development depends on several elements. One of the most important elements is the commitment to ongoing learning of individuals. It is important that individuals consider themselves as active learners by learning through others and through the environment they are in. Therefore, apart from the support and encouragement of the organisation, individuals are responsible for their own professional learning and personal motivation. (Macky & Johnson, 2003; Pickett, 1999).

In addition, senior leaders commented that TAs can learn better from day-to-day communication as better understanding and knowledge can be achieved through interaction with colleagues as part of active learning (Boyle et al., 2004). Whereas, Kay (2002) maintains that good working relationships between teachers and TAs can be built on and maintained through the use of effective communication skills. Therefore, local staff like TAs not only have the chance to work with experienced teachers who come from diverse international education backgrounds, but also to learn from teachers through professional liaison and collaboration.

Timeframe is also identified by senior leaders that it is an important element to the success of the professional growth of individuals. It is imperative that individuals are given adequate time to embed the new knowledge and skills into their practice; ensuring that the changes made to teaching practice are sustained (Birman et al., 2000).

The literature reviewed and the research findings acknowledged the perceptions of senior leaders in the school, that the creativeness of senior leaders is the key attribute when it comes to sufficiently supporting staff development. Creative leaders can identify what works best to support their staff members' learning. It is important for senior leaders to be able to recognise the different position levels of staff, to build a learning community and to maintain the ongoing learning development for staff members.

From the findings, the researcher identified four key themes that senior leaders perceived to be important for them to action and understand when it comes to managing PD for staff. These themes include commitment to ongoing learning, communication between colleagues, realistic timeframes for implementation and development and creativity of senior leaders.

Initially, the findings from the interviews of senior leaders showed that PD could never be effective without the commitment and enthusiasm of individuals. The learning begins with the individual's understanding about where their own professional standpoint is and whether or not they would consider themselves as an active learner. A person should set clear goals for what they want to learn, develop and continue from there. This supports the point made by Pickett (1999) that it depends on individuals to be responsible for their own learning engagement, knowledge, development of abilities and skills to become active learners.

Furthermore, an educational leader needs to be supportive and committed to understanding each member's strengths, weaknesses and professional goals in order to help seek PD that provided personal growth. Bolman and Deal (2008)

recommend that senior leaders assist their teams to develop a shared sense of direction and commitment in order to guide teams to where everyone agrees. It is believed that, with the encouragement and guidance to develop from senior leaders, individuals can have the motivation to grow further in order to become more prepared and confident to deliver quality work. Therefore, PD can help build confidence and preparedness of individuals in relation to teaching and learning practice (Birman et al., 2000).

The school is an international school, and each classroom consists of one non-Lao teacher and one Lao TA. It is very important that there is open and professional communication occurring in the teaching team and staff community all the time, through both English and perhaps in Lao language communication among TAs. From the interview findings, senior leaders held the view that communication is perceived to be the most effective practice that enhances understanding. This supports the point made by Steckelberg et al. (2007), who indicate that demonstrating, supervising, professional discourse and discussion among staff is known to bring the most positive learning outcomes in developing clear understandings. In this sense, communication allows individuals to share knowledge and concepts while working or in training. Therefore, Maynard (2000) comments that staff can have a mentor or peer support network where they could share ideas and reflect verbally.

The senior leaders noted that, it is very important that senior leaders have the ability to communicate with the staff they manage. It is important that senior leaders have the confidence not only to speak up and direct others, but also to be open-minded and able to listen to the needs as well as concerns of individuals. This point is similar to Schein (2010) who indicates that senior leaders embed and transmit their beliefs, values and assumptions to staff members through open communication. Kay (2002) identifies that individuals need to have these abilities to develop communication skills, which include: “listen carefully and respond to others’ communications; consider responses to

achieve the communication desired; vary communication style and approach depending on the audience; use language clearly and effectively and vary the language used to meet the needs of the listener; and be careful, sensitive and maintain confidentiality” (Kay, 2002, p. 150).

Furthermore, senior leaders need to be able to communicate with their staff in a way that helps staff build and encourage the vision and goals. Interestingly, leader SP3 has metaphorically described this trait as painting a picture in which “leaders starting to paint parts of it and then allowing the staff to paint the rest of what the picture would look like together”. This suggests that senior leaders should believe in the ability of their staff and allow those staff to put new practice in place. However, trust is also the most important element in communication. Trust in the workforce is one of the most crucial traits for professional colleagues if they are to participate in learning conversations with each other (Cardno, 2012). Therefore, where there is open communication, there is trust.

The findings from the interviews of senior leaders showed that adequate time to put the learning in place and sufficient time to participate in PD are two important factors. Time is an important factor for a person to adapt and understand the new knowledge, particularly when the learning is highly academic and in another language (Birman et al., 2000). It is important that the learning process allows time for individuals to continuously build their new knowledge and combine it together with their existing skills so that the quality of work can be improved. This view aligns with the study of Riggs (2004) who states that the combination of new and existing skills can be put into classroom practice over time so individuals can build their understanding and recognise the connections that are applicable to their roles.

Senior leaders need to be knowledgeable about the capacity of the staff they manage. Senior leaders should be aware that staff have different background knowledge and that there is no single professional learning that fits everybody (Birman et al., 2000). For example in the school study, when TAs are involved in

inclusive training with the teachers, it seemed useful when teachers and TAs who work together learn from one another and support TAs who may be in need. In this case however, it may take time for TAs to comprehend as the training may include a range of academic terms. This view is similar to that of Brown (2005) who asserts that implementing learning can be difficult to sustain if individuals are not given a sufficient amount of time to combine the new knowledge and skills and to embed new practices. This was not surprising as some PD can be difficult to understand even for English native speakers. It is important that individuals constantly reflect on knowledge gained and have additional support in gaining full understanding before application, and keep up-to-date with all the changes taking place in educational systems (Hirsch, 2011; Wilson & Bedford, 2008).

Creativity is perceived to be the most important factor a leader should demonstrate when it comes to staff development provision. The researcher sees this as the most important attitude for a leader in order to be able to seek alternatives and potential solutions in a creative way and to overcome barriers. If time, money or other obstacles are a constraint, senior leaders should be creative and imaginative in their thinking and approach problems and dilemmas professionally. However, there were some current PD provision to TAs that was effective, whereas other external training events were less effective. In this case, Groom and Rose (2005) and Groom (2006) support the view that the school should focus on using the pool of internal expertise before contracting external providers for assistance.

It is important that senior leaders are knowledgeable in identifying commonalities in staff needs and provide opportunities for these staff to meet in order to share understanding and learning. This aligns with the view of Blandford (2000) that sharing learning and teaching experience among staff is considered a valuable process in helping individuals grow at a more professional level. Also, the teachers in the school evidently received more professional learning, as a result of their knowledge and experience being continuously shared throughout their

teaching career. However, TAs experienced limited opportunity to share their learning with other TAs from different schools. This is not surprising as it was evident that TAs were not given the opportunity to go training abroad or domestically as teachers are. This was rather unfortunate since not every TA, especially classroom TAs have the opportunity to experience or exchange learning externally, apart from sharing with TAs within the same school. This results in narrowing the growth of TAs in that school. Bolam (2002) and Bourke (2009) support this finding as they identify that most PD that is less effective is usually that which involved external experts.

It is the responsibilities of senior leaders and the management team to set clear policies in regard to providing PD for TAs. Senior leaders should understand the concepts and purposes of professional learning before involving TAs in the training that is not familiar to them. Although the PD policy in the school for teaching staff applies to everybody, the school seems to put more responsibility on teachers and TAs to make decisions about PD, rather than the decision come from the senior leaders. This is reflected in the views of some researchers who claim that PD is not solely the responsibility of the organisation, but also the responsibility of all staff members (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Rudman, 2003). Nevertheless, senior leaders seemed to give a general view about the overall PD for teaching staff in the school. Fortunately, senior leaders recognised that there is a need for improvement in meeting the development needs of TAs. Therefore, when the researcher contacted one TA during this study, the researcher was told that the school arranged new training for TAs called “Professional Growth and Evaluation” in September 2014, which took place two months after the interview. Effective PD planning for TAs can be established if the senior leaders and management team set a clear PD policy, develop a strategic management plan and give financial support in order to promote equality of opportunity for professional learning and exchange of learning.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges or difficulties senior leaders faced in PD provision for TAs?

According to the findings, senior leaders in the school identified four challenges they faced when providing PD. Firstly, PD funding is one of the challenges faced in relation to the overall staff PD provision. PD funds are generally controlled, allocated and decided by the school director and the PD committee in the school. As a result, PD funding can be a challenge if there is a limited budget given to support staff development. However, there has been an imbalance of PD budget distributed to the staff, which could be valid since there was not a large amount of funds to support other professional learning. According to Wilson and Bedford (2008), the amount of PD budget distribution can be restrictive for staff development. For TAs in particular, there seemed to be considerably less PD budget available than for the teachers. The findings showed that there was a fixed PD budget available yearly for staff development and this budget needs to be reviewed annually to ensure adequate allocation for both teachers and TAs.

Secondly, another challenge raised by senior leaders in the school is time. According to the findings, senior leaders understand that giving up the time to take part or putting extra time into PD can be challenging for TAs. Due to school life being very busy, it is hard for individuals to dedicate more time and energy to learn. However, it is recognised that a person needs not only to devote their time, but also to have the desire and mind space to be able to learn (Birman et al., 2000). Apart from spending full hours working, individuals need to sacrifice more time for self-development and learning. It is suggested that to become reflective practitioners, the TAs need to be committed to ongoing learning and willing to give up extra time for further development. This is reasonable because for a person to be working and learning simultaneously requires activeness, interest and passion in order to become a reflective practitioner. To support this point, Watkinson (2010) stated that “the brain is not an empty jug into which knowledge can be poured” (p. 31).

Thirdly, the availability of PD within and outside the school seemed to be another factor that senior leaders believed is limiting TAs from learning and personal development. Internally, there seemed to be a lack of continuity and follow-up

sessions for TA training. Poor planning was said to be affecting the ability of TAs to relate their learning to their responsibilities. From this, it is important that TAs experience PD constantly so they are able to relate it to their previous learning practices and make it a meaningful practice. Externally, there were very few training courses for TAs to participate in. This is something that the school cannot change. However, the school could learn from other international schools with the same international learning systems to develop a professional learning environment for their TAs.

The limited level of knowledge and understanding of TAs is another challenge for senior leaders concerned with the development of TAs. The findings showed that often the training was delivered too quickly, which did not allow TAs to understand the content and/or concepts being put across. This suggests that TAs experienced limited levels of, and benefits from internal PD because the school was likely to place less emphasis on the PD for TAs. If this is the case, senior leaders in the school should concentrate on supporting professional training for TAs step by step. The provision of an English training course for TAs within the school campus could develop their language facility and understanding. This could lead to TAs gaining the confidence and academic understanding to participate in any form of PD. The findings revealed that if TAs have the advanced knowledge and skills in hand, they would not have to struggle with language issues when attending a higher level of training. This aligns with the study of Watkinson (2010) who claims that “learning is complex and only partly understood even by those who spend their life trying to make sense of it” (p. 31).

Overall, the findings suggested that PD that is in a form of in-service training and informal training are more favoured by the group of senior leaders in this school. Senior leaders believed that staff both teachers and TAs should be able to communicate the knowledge effectively when working. Also, they should provide feedback to one another in order to keep up with the changes happening within classrooms and around the school.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

One limitation about the research includes the size of this research study as well as the size of the school. Due to the small number of research participants, it is possible that the findings and conclusions may not be an accurate representation of the perceptions and experiences in all schools in Laos. Hence, generalisations cannot be made to a larger population or to other state or private schools. Despite this, every effort was made to ensure reliability and to protect the validity of the research findings. Therefore, further similar studies and time for re-conducting the study with more varied participants is recommended. Also, small-scale qualitative studies can be applied to other settings if the readers see appropriate links clearly (Brown, 2005). This means that it is up to the readers to evaluate the degree to which the findings and conclusions can be practical to their own settings (Cohen et al., 2007).

In addition, time was the main challenge for conducting this research study. Specifically when doing the one-on-one interviews, the time spent on transcribing the data collected was very prolonged due to some of the interviews taking longer than expected. Furthermore when doing the focus group interview, although the number of TAs in the school was small, it was impossible to have all TAs participate and have their voices heard since the number of participants requires no more than six or eight people. With only six participants being interviewed, the findings may not be a complete representation of the overall professional development experience of TAs in the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SENIOR LEADERS

The findings of this study have led to the development of five recommendations. It is worth noting that these recommendations may be only relevant to this one international school in Laos. From the findings and results of this research, plus the working experience from the researcher, the following recommendations are made regarding the professional development provision for TAs that can be integrated into the existing development planning process in the school:

1. This study (PD provision for TAs) should be considered by the PD committee and the senior leaders of the school. They are responsible for PD planning and funding to further validate the study. The validation process should demonstrate how the study could improve PD for leadership and management for local staff (TAs) through setting strategic development management goals as the school's main priority.
2. When developing a comprehensive study or method, which normally requires a lot of effort and resources, the school organisation (e.g. development management team) should use the strategic management processes suggested by this study to make the approach workable not only for the overall professional development planning, but also for other personal development training functions for individuals or specific groups of staff.
3. While it is the responsibility of an individual to take charge of their ongoing development, support from the school is also important. Senior leaders need to consider and understand the following elements when providing or planning PD for TAs in the school. This includes:
 - The purpose of the PD for TAs and the practicality of the proposed PD programme
 - The systematic process of PD management for TAs needs to be considered, allowing TAs to discuss concerns and express their views in response to their development needs with the management team and senior leaders
 - A professional development policy, specifically for TAs as separate from teachers should be developed.
4. The importance of managing PD effectively can never be stressed enough. Competitive and rapid developmental changes means that organisations need to ensure that the school has the right mix of PD provision and support for their TAs to be motivated and fully prepared to carry out the job effectively.

5. Therefore, if the senior leaders want their TAs to become more advanced in the skills and knowledge required, training provision for TAs must be meaningful, systematic and have clear development purposes, rather than being a quick and one-shot workshop (Gaylord, Wallace, Pickett, & Likins, 2002). Although such workshops may be provided either formally or informally at some stages, PD should be continuously supported with clear follow-up sessions so that the learning gained by TAs can be further improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research, follow up sessions and assessment on how this study can be used in development training opportunities specifically for TAs should be carried out, ideally with a case study approach in order to obtain measurable results. The following are suggestions for building on this research:

- Examine the roles of TAs and training across the school in Laos
- Inclusion of students and parents in the future research
- Investigate the change and development occurring in Lao schools today and new teaching and learning methods
- Investigate the TAs classroom practice through interaction with students, parents and teachers
- Investigate the professional development funding and staff development support systems for TAs

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The research was conducted in one international school in Laos. The research interviewed senior leaders who were responsible for the professional development provision for TAs in the school. The research identified that the current PD offered to TAs in the school regarding their PD opportunities and PD experiences were limited. There are few opportunities for professional development within the school and within the country, Laos. The process of employing, training and supervising of TAs was less systematic than for

teachers. Therefore, sustaining ongoing professional development needs time, money, understanding and commitment as they are the main elements for educational leaders to be supportive in these areas (Macky & Johnson, 2003; Pickett, 1999).

The perceptions of senior leaders in response to PD for leadership and management recognised four important factors including commitment to learning of individuals, open and professional communication between colleagues, allowing time for implementation and development, and creativity of leaders. The research found that senior leaders have a direct impact on the concepts of building a professional learning environment for the staff; identifying the staff expertise to share best practices and knowledge; ensuring that staff are given appropriate time to participate; and allowing staff to absorb and understand the knowledge before implementation.

It is significant that this research identified that senior leaders have been obstructed in their efforts to improve PD for TAs due to several challenges as previously mentioned. Senior leaders, TAs and teachers identified similar challenges in providing professional development to TAs. They identified that it is important to reconsider the kind of PD that can be utilised to meet the unique needs of TAs in the school. A “one-size fits all” approach may not always be the solution to those who come from diverse background knowledge, understanding, learning experiences and developmental needs (Gaylord et al., 2002). Certainly, the end result that any learning organisations can hope to achieve is to prepare their staff members with extensive knowledge and skills in order to continuously deliver better learning services for students.

This study has explored the professional development provision for TAs in one international school in Laos. The findings and recommendations relating to professional development provision for TAs will be made available to this school. Recommendations for future study may help replicate the approach and eventually strengthen and confirm the results of the study.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, L. M., & Mckinney, J. (2013). *Understanding and applying research design* New York: Willy.
- Adey, K., & Jones, J. (1997). The professional development co-ordinator: Obstacles to effective role performance. *Educational Management and Administration*, 25(2), 133-144.
- Arthur, L., Marland, H., Pill, A., & Rea, T. (2006). Postgraduate professional development for teachers: motivational and inhibiting factors affecting the completion of awards. *Professional development in education*, 32(2), 201–219.
- Ary, D., Jacob, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education (7th ed.)*
- Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2001). Growing Roles for Teachers' Aides. *Education Digest*, 66 (7), 60.
- ATL, DfES, GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NEOST, . . . WAG. (2003). Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement. (Time for standards, 15 January 2003. Available online at: http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/na-standards_workload.pdf.)
- Balshaw, M. (2010). Looking for some different answers about teaching assistants *European Journal Of Special Needs Education*, 25, 4, 337-338.
- Barth, R. S. (2001). *Learning by heart*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bedford, D. C., Jackson, C., & Wilson, E. (2008). New partnerships for learning: teachers' perspectives on their developing professional relationships with teaching assistants in England. *Journal of In-service Education*, 34, 7-25.
- Bell, J. (2007a). The trouble with questionnaires. In A. Briggs & M. Coleman (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 224-236). London: Sage. *Research methods in educational leadership and management*, London: Sage. 224-236.
- Bell, J. (2010b). *Doing your research project (5th ed.)*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.
- Bignold, W., & Barbera, J. (2012). Teaching assistants and teacher education in England: meeting their continuing professional development needs. *Professional Development in Education*, 38(3), 365-375. doi: 10.1080/19415257.2011.621967
- Bingham, M. A., Spooner, F., & Browder, D. (2007). Training paraeducators to promote the use of augmentative and alternative communication by students with significant disabilities. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 42(3), 339-352.
- Birman, F., Desimone, L., Porter, C., & Garet, S. (2000). Designing professional development that works. *Educational Leadership*, 28-33.
- Black, S. (2002). Not just helping hands. *American School Board Journal*, 189(5), 42-44.
- Blackmore, J. A. (2005). A critical evaluation of peer review via teaching observation within higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(3), 218-232.
- Blalock, G. (1991). Paraprofessionals: Critical team members in our special education programs. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 26(4), 200-214.
- Blandford, S. (2000). *Managing professional development in schools*. London, Routledge.
- Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., & Webster, R. (2009). Deployment and impact of support staff in schools. The impact of support staff in

- schools (results from strand 2, wave 2). London: DCSF: Report for Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Blatchford, P, Russell, A, & Webster, R. (2012). Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants. How research challenges practice and policy. London: Routledge.
- Bolam, R. (2002). *Professional development and professionalism*. In T. Bush & L. Bell (Eds.) London: Paul Chapman.
- Bolman, L. G, & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organisations: Artistry, choice and leadership (4th ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Bourke, P. E. (2009). Professional development and teacher aides in inclusive education contexts: where to from here? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(8), 817-827. doi: 10.1080/13603110802128588
- Boyle, B, Brown, M, & Boyle, T. (2002). Professional development and management training needs for heads of department in UK secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(1), 31-43.
- Boyle, B, While, D, & Boyle, T. (2004). A longitudinal study of teacher change: What 100 makes professional development effective? . *Curriculum Journal*, 15(1), 45-58.
- Bredeson, V. P. (2002). The architecture of professional development: Materials, messages and meaning. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(8), 661-675.
- Broer, S. M, & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Questionable Utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: Are we addressing symptoms or causes? . *Focus on Autism and Other Development Disabilities* 20, 10-26.
- Brown, A. (2005). Implementing performance management in England's primary schools. *International Journal of Productivity & Performance Management* 54(6), 468-481.
- Brown, J, & Devecchi, C. (2013). The impact of training on teaching assistants' professional development: opportunities and future strategy. *Professional Development in Education*, 39(3), 369-386. doi: 10.1080/19415257.2012.762720
- Bryman, A. (2008a). *Social research methods (3rd ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012b). *Social research methods (4th ed.)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burchell, H, Dyson, J, & Rees, M. (2002). Making a difference: a study of the impact of continuing professional development on professional practice. *Professional development in education*, 28(2), 219-230.
- Burgess, H, & Mayes, A. S. (2007). Supporting the professional development of teaching assistants: classroom teachers' perspectives on their mentoring role. *Curriculum Journal*, 18(3), 389-407. doi: 10.1080/09585170701590056
- Burt, E, & Davison, L. (1998). Teacher professional development: then, now and the future. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Administration*, (December, 13), pp. 44-52.
- Bush, T. (2002). *Authenticity-reliability, validity and triangulation*. In M. Coleman & A. R. J. Briggs (Eds.) *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 59-72).
- Bush, T. (2011). *Theories of educational leadership and management. (4th ed.)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bush, T, & Middlewood, D. (2005). *Leading and managing people in education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Butt, R, & Lowe, K. (2012). Teaching assistants and class teachers: Differing perceptions, role confusion and the benefits of skills-based training. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16(2), 207-219.
- Campbell, A, & Fairbairn, G. (2005). *Working with support in the classroom* (pp. 182).

- Cardno, C. (1996). Professional development: A holistic approach. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Administration*, 11, 25-28.
- Cardno, C. (2005). Leadership and professional development: The quiet revolution. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(4), 292-306.
- Cardno, C. (2007). Leadership learning: The praxis of dilemma management. *International studies in Educational Administration* 35(2), 33-50.
- Cardno, C. (2012). *Managing effective relationships in education*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Cardno, C, & Piggot-Irvine, E. (1997). *Effective performance appraisal: Integrating accountability and development in staff appraisal*. Longman: Auckland.
- Carrington, S, & Robinson, R. (2004). A case study of inclusive school development: A journey of learning. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*(8), 141-153.
- Chapman, D. (2002). Management and efficiency in education: Goals and strategies. *Manila: Asian Development Bank*.
- Check, J, & Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Research methods in education*. Boston: Sage.
- Chopra, R. V, Sandoval-Lucero, E, Aragon, L, Bernal, C, De Balderas, H. B , & Caroll, D (2004). The paraprofessional role of connector. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(4), 219-231.
- Codd, J. (2005). Education policy and the challenges of globalisation or citizenship? In J. Codd & D. Sullivan (Eds.). *Education policy directions in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Southbank: Dunmore Press., 1-17.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L, & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education (6th ed.)*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L, & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education (7th ed.)*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Craft, A. (1996). *Continuing professional development* London, Routledge.
- Creese, A. (2005). *Teacher collaboration and talk in multilingual classrooms*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cremin, H, Thomas, G, & Vincett, K. (2005). Working with teaching assistants: three models evaluated. *Research papers in education*, 20(4), 413-432.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Davidson, C. N, & Tolich, M. (2003). *Competing traditions*. In C. Davidson & M. Tolich (Eds) *Social science research in New Zealand: Many paths way to understanding* (pp. 23-38).
- Davies, J, Hides, M. T, & Casey, S. (2001). Leadership in higher education. *Total Quality Management*, 12(7&8), 1025-1030. doi: 10.1080/09544120120096197
- Davies, R, & Preston, M. (2002). An evaluation of the impact of continuing professional development on personal and professional lives. *Professional development in education*, 28(2), 231-254.
- Day, C. (2011). Uncertain professional identities: Managing the emotional contexts of teaching. In New understandings of teacher's work. *Emotions and educational change (ed.)*. C. Day and J. Lee., 45-64.
- Dean, J. (1991). *Professional development in school*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Denscombe, M. (1998). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide*. Birkshire, England: Open University Press.

- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Towards better conceptualisation and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.
- Devecchi, C. (2007). *Teachers and teaching assistants working together: inclusion, collaboration and support in one secondary school*. (Thesis PhD), University of Cambridge
- Doyle, M. B, & Giangreco, M. (2007). Teacher assistants in inclusive schools *In the Sage handbook of special education*, ed. L. Florian, 429-439.
- Duderstadt, J. (2002). The future of higher education in the knowledge-driven. *Global economy of the 21st century*.
- Dufour, R. (2004). What is a " Professional learning community?" *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- Earley, P, & Bubb, S. (2004). *Leading and managing continuing professional development: Developing people, developing schools*. London: Sage Publications Company: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Earley, P, & Weindling, D. (2004). *Understanding school leadership*. London: Sage Publications.
- Edelman, S. W, Broer, S. M, & Giangreco, M. F. (2001). Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children* 67, 485-498.
- Edmond, N. (2003). School-based learning: constraints and limitations in learning from school experience for teaching assistants. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 29(2), 113-123.
- Elkin, G, Jackson, B, & Inkson, K. (2008). *Organisational behaviour in New Zealand (3rd ed.)*. Rosedale: Pearson Education New Zealand.
- Elmore, R, & Burney, D. (1999). *Investing in teacher learning: Staff development and instructional improvement*. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Skyes (Eds.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Farell, P, & Balshaw, M. (2010). The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils' academic achievement in mainstream schools: a review of the literature *Educational Review*, 62(4), 435-448.
- Fisher, M, & Pleasants, S. L. (2011). Roles, responsibilities, and concerns of paraeducators: Finding from a statewide survey. *Remedial and Special Education*, 20(10), 1-11.
- Fishman, B. J , Marx, R. W , Best, S, & Tal, R. T. (2003). Linking teacher and student learning to improve professional development in systemic reform. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 19(6), 643-658.
- Frank, S, & Miles, K. H. (2008). *The strategic school: Making the most of people, time and money*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press and National Association of Secondary school Principals.
- French, R. (2001). Negative capability: Managing the confusing uncertainties of change *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, , 14(5), 480-492.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *Organisational Learning; improving learning, teaching, and leading in school systems*. Thousand Orks: Sage Publications.
- Fullan, M, & Mascal, B. (2000). *Human resource issues in education* Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education
- Gaylord, V, Wallace, T, Pickett, A, & Likins, M. (2002). Impact: Feature issues on paraeducators supporting students with disabilities and at-risk. 15(2). <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/152>.

- Genzuk, M. (1997). Diversifying the teaching force: Preparing paraeducators as teachers. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education and American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education*, 96(2).
- Ghere, G., & York-Barr, J. (2003). Employing, developing, and directing special education paraprofessionals in inclusive education programs: Findings from a Multi- Site Case Study.
- Giangreco, M. (2010a). Utilization of teacher assistants in inclusive schools: is it the kind of help that helping is all about? *European journal of special needs education*, 25(4), 341-345.
- Giangreco, M. (2013b). Teacher assistant supports in inclusive schools: Research, practices and alternatives. *Australasian journal of special education* 1-14.
- Groom, B. (2006). Building relationships for learning: the developing role of the teaching assistant. *Support for learning, Education Research Complete*, 21(4), 199-203.
- Groom, B., & Rose, R. (2005). Supporting the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the primary school: the role of teaching assistants. *Journal of research in special educational needs*, 5(1), 20-30.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, 195-220.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2002). *Handbook of interview research context & method*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Gunter, H., Rayner, S., Thomas, H., Fielding, A., Butt, G., & Lance, A. (2005). Teachers, time and work: Findings from the evaluation of the transforming the school workforce pathfinder project. *School Leadership & Management*, 25(5), 441-454.
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (1995). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning. *Teachers & Teaching: History and Practice*, 6(2).
- Hargreaves, A., & Evans, R. (1997). *Teachers and educational reform*. In A. Hargreaves & R. Evans (Eds.). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hauerwas, L. B., & Goessling, D. P. (2008). Who are interventionists? Guidelines for paraeducators in RTI *Teaching exceptional children*, 4(3), 1-13.
- Henderson, N. R. (1995). A practical approach to analysing and reporting focus group studies *Qualitative Health Research* 5(4), 463.
- Hill, J., Hawk, K., & Taylor, K. (2001). *Professional development: What makes it work?* Paper presented at the NZARE Conference, Christchurch.
- Hirsch, S. (2011). *NSDC is learning forward* Vol. 5. (pp. 92).
- Jacob, T. O., & Jaques, E. (1990). Military executive leadership. In K. E. Clark and M. B. Clark (Eds.). *Measures of leadership*. West Orange, NJ: *Leadership library of America*, pp. 281-295.
- Kay, J. (2002). *Teaching assistant's handbook*. London: British Library Cataloguing Publication
- Kerry, T. (2005). Towards a typology for conceptualising the roles of teaching assistants. *Educational Review*, 57(3), 373-384.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Kwakman, K. (2003). Factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(2), 149-170.
- Lawson, K. (1997). *Improving on-the-job training*. M. Silberman (Ed.)
- Lee, B. (2002). Teaching assistants in schools: the current state of play. *Slough: NFER*.
- Leighton, M. S, O'Brien, E, Walking Eagle, K, Weiner, L, Wiraberly, G, & Youngs, P. (1997). *Roles for education paraprofessionals in effective schools*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education
- Levine, C. (1997). *On-the-job training: Tips, tools and intelligence for trainers*. C. Sharpe (Ed.)
- Lewis, S, & McKenzie, A. (2010). The competencies, roles, supervision, and training needs of paraeducators working with students with visual impairments in local and residential schools. . *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 104(8), 464-477.
- Lieberman, A. (2001). The professional lives of change agents: What they do and what they know. In F. O. Rust & H. Freidus (Eds.). *Guiding school change* 155-162.
- Likins, M. (2002). Effective training for paraprofessionals. 15(2), 6-7.
- Lincoln, Y. S, & Guba, E. G. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*.
- Lofland, J, Snow, D, Anderson, L, & Lofland, L. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont: Wadsworth: Thomson learning.
- Macky, K, & Johnson, G. (2003). *Managing human resources in New Zealand (2nd ed.)*. Australia: McGraw-Hill.
- Mansaray, A. A. (2006). Liminality and in/exclusion: Exploring the work of teaching assistants. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 14(2), 171-187.
- Maynard, T. (2000). Learning to teach or learning to manage mentors? Experiences of school-based teacher training, Mentoring and Tutoring. 8(1), 17-30.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Michael, A, & Freebody, K. (2014). *Partnership in education research: Creating knowledge that matters* London Bloomsbury Publishing
- Miles, M. B, & Humberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miramontes, O. B. (1990). Organising for effective paraprofessional services in special education: A multilingual / multiethnic instructional service team model. *Remedial and Special Education*, 12(1), 29-36.
- Mizell, H. (2010). *Why professional development matters* V. v. Frank (Ed.)
- Morden, T. (2007). *Principles of strategic management*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Morgan, J, & Ashbaker, B. Y. (2011). TAs JOIN the TEAM *Journal of staff development*, 32(3), 38-41.
- Moshoyannis, T, Pickett, A. L, & Granick, L. (1999). The Evolving Roles and Education/Training Needs of teacher and Paraprofessional Teams in New York City Public Schools: Results Survey and Focus Group Research. *Center for Advanced Study in Education*.
- Muijs, D, Harris, A, Chapman, C , Stoll, L, & Russ, J (2004). Improving schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas: A review of research evidence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15(2), 149-175.
- Mulinge, M. M, & Munyae, M. M. (2008). Managing organizational change in higher education: Lessons from the University of Botswana. *Journal of African Business*, 9(1), 167-190.

- National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1999). Learning disabilities: Use of paraprofessionals *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 22(1), 23-30.
- No Child Left Behind. (2001). Public Law: United States Code sections 9201-9204. 20, 107-110.
- O' Shannassy, T. (2003). Modern strategic management: Balancing strategic thinking and strategic planning for internal and external stakeholders. *Singapore Management Review*, 5(1), 53-67.
- O'Neill, J. (1994). Managing professional development in Bush, T. and West'Burnham, J. (eds) *The Principles of Education Management*
- OFSTED. (2010). The framework for school inspection. London: Ofsted. Opfer, V.D. and Pedder, D., 2011. Conceptualizing teacher professional learning. *Review of educational research*, 81(3), 376-407.
- Okanagan. (2008). *A guide to effective practices for teaching assistants. the Centre for Teaching and Learning*
- Overall, L. (2007). *Supporting children's learning: A guide for teaching assistants* (pp. 161).
- Palma, G. M. (1994). Toward a positive and effective teacher and paraprofessional relationship. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 13(4), 46-48.
- Parker, M, Lee, C, Gunn, S, Heardman, K, Hincks, R, Pittman, M, & Townsend, M. (2009). *A toolkit for the effective teaching assistant*. (pp. 241).
- Patterson, K. B. (2006). Roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals: In their own words. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus*, 2(5).
- Pickett, A. (1999). *Strengthening teacher/provider paraeducator teams: Guidelines for paraeducator roles, preparation and supervision*
- Piggot-Irvine, E. (2003). Key features of appraisal effectiveness. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 17(4), 170-178.
- Piggot-Irvine, E. (2006). Establishing criteria for effective professional development and use in evaluating an action research programme. *Journal of In-service Education*, 32(4), 477-496.
- Piggot-Irvine, E, & Cardno, C. (2005). *Appraising performance productively: Integrating accountability and development*. Auckland: Eversleigh.
- Quicke, J. (2003). Teaching assistants: students or servants? *Forum*, 45(2), 71-74.
- Rhodes, C. (2006). The impact of leadership and management on the construction of professional identity in school learning mentors. *Educational Studies*, 32(2), 157-169.
- Riggs, C. G. (2004). To teachers: What paraeducators want you to know 36 (5), 8-12. . *Teaching exceptional children*, 36(5), 8-12.
- Robinson, V, Hohepa, M, & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- Rose, R, & Forlin, C. (2010). Impact of training on change in practice for education assistants in a group of international private schools in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(3), 309-323.
- Rouse, M , & Devecchi, C. (2010). An exploration of the features of effective collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants in secondary schools. *Support for learning* 25(2), 91-99.
- Rubie-Davies, C. M, Blatchford, P, Webster, R, Koutsoubou, M, & Bassett, P. (2010). Enhancing learning? A comparison of teacher and teaching assistant interactions with pupils. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, 21(4), 429-449.
- Rudman, R. (2002). *Human resources management in New Zealand (4th ed.)*
- Rudman, R. (2003). *Human resources management in New Zealand*. Auckland: Pearson Education.

- Samson, D, & Daft, R. L (Eds.). (2003). *Management (Pacific rim ed.)*. Southbank: Thomson.
- Saville, J, & Higgins, M. (1994). *A first line perspective*. Australian Management, MacMillan, Melbourne.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organisational culture and leadership (4th ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, G. (1999). *Change matters: Making a difference in education and training*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Southworth, G. (2004). *Primary school leadership in context: Leading small, medium and large sized schools*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Starratt, R. J. (2003). *Centering educational administration: Cultivating meaning, community, responsibility*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Steckelberg, A. L, Vasa, S. F, Kemp, S. E, Arthaud, T. J, Asselin, S. B, Swain, K, & Ellen, F. (2007). A web-based training model for preparing teachers to supervise paraeducators. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 30*(1), 52-55.
- Stevenson, H, & Bell, L. (2006). *Education policy: Process, themes and impact*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Stockall, N. S. (2014). When an aide really becomes an aid: Providing professional development for special education paraprofessionals *Teaching exceptional children 46*(6), 197-205.
- Stoll, L, & Fink, D (1996). *Changing our schools: linking effectiveness and improvement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Strauss, A, & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Strauss, A, & Corbin, J.M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Swann , W, & Loxley, A. (1998). The impact of school-based training on classroom assistants in primary schools. *Research papers in education, 13*(2), 140-160.
- Takala, M. (2007). The work of classroom assistants in special and mainstream education in Finland. *British Journal of Special Education 34*(1), 50-57.
- Tarry, E. (2012). Teaching assistants: Providing support for the IPC in Hayden M. and Thompson, J. (eds) Taking the IPC forward. *Engaging with the international primary curriculum, 125-133*.
- Tarry, E, & Cox, A. (2013). Supporting the professional development of teaching assistants in an international context. *International Schools Journal, 33*(1), 19-25.
- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools* (pp. 139).
- Thomas, L, MacMillan, J, McColl, E, Hale, C, & Bond, S. (1995). Comparison of focus group and individual interview methodology in examining patient satisfaction with nursing care. *Social Science in Health 1*, 206-219.
- Tracy, J. S (2012). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. The Atrium, Southern Gate: Chicester, Wiley.
- Trent, J. (2014). 'I'm teaching, but I'm not really a teacher'. Teaching assistants and the construction of professional identities in Hong Kong schools. *Educational Research, 56*(1), 28-47.
- Trochim, W. (2000). *The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition*. Cincinnati, OH: Atomic Dog Publishing.
- Tucker, S. (2009). Perceptions and reflections on the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom environment. *Pastoral Care in Education, 27*(4), 291-300. doi: 10.1080/02643940903349294

- Vadasy, P. F , Sanders, E. A, & Tudor, S. (2007). Effectiveness of paraeducator-supplemented individual instruction: Beyond basic decoding skills. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(6), 508-525.
- Watkinson, A. (2010). *The essential guide for new teaching assistants* (2 ed.). Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge
- Weber, J (Ed.). (1987). *Instructional leadership: A composite working model*. University of Oregon: Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
- Weber, J (Ed.). (1996). *Leading the instructional programme*. In S. C. Smith & P. K Piele (Eds.). University of Oregon: Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
- Webster, R, Blatchford, P, Bassett, P, Brown, P, Martin, C , & Russell, A. (2011). The wider pedagogical role of teaching assistants. *School Leadership & Management*, 31(1), 3-20.
- Webster, R, Blatchford, P, Bassett, P, Brown, P, Martin, C, & Russell, A. (2010). Double standards and first principles: framing teaching assistant support for pupils with special educational needs. *European journal of special needs education*, 25(4), 319-336.
- Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. London: Continuum.
- Wiles, R. (2012). *What are qualitative research ethics?* . London: Bloomsbury Publishing
- Wilkins, R. (2004). Developing school support staff through practice development groups. *Education Today: Journal of College Perceptors* 54, 24-48.
- Wilson, E, & Bedford, D. (2008). New partnerships for learning: Teachers and teaching assistants working together in schools – the way forward. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34, 137-150.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

DOCUMENTATION FOR PERMISSIONS



Information sheet for senior leaders

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.
--

My name is Satitphone Phommahack, and I am a postgraduate student at Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand, studying the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree. To fulfil the programme's requirements, I would like to seek help from you in meeting the requirements of a research study for the Thesis course, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

Teaching assistants, expatriate teachers and senior leaders, including the school director and the principals are invited to take part in this research. I request your participation in the following way. As I will be collecting data using a semi-structured interview with each school leader, I would appreciate being able to interview you at a time that is mutually suitable. The interview should take no longer than one hour.

What I am doing

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate the current provision of professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To explore the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To critically examine the challenges or difficulties that senior leaders face in professional development provision for primary teaching assistants in your school.

I have a desire to make this research practical and constructive for the school - therefore the emphasis will be on using senior leaders', expatriate teachers', and local teachers'

voices to explore their experiences and perceptions. This may lead to improving professional development programmes in the future. By taking part in this project you will help me understand more about the current professional development programmes that exist in your school. Finally, this study will explore the key factors that may be influencing the provision of professional development.

What it will mean for you

If you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form – this indicates your willingness to be involved in the research. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed by myself. After that, I will send a copy of the transcript to you to check for accuracy and to amend as you see fit. You may withdraw yourself and the data you have provided at any time up to ten days after you receive your transcript for checking. You also have the right to receive a digital copy of the final thesis if you wish.

All information collected from you will be stored on a password-protected file on my computer and only my supervisors and I will have access to this information. It is possible that some of your work colleagues or fellow interviewees could identify you through their knowledge of your views or of your specific role in the school. However, the interview questions will not cover any potentially sensitive topics and you may amend the transcript you receive accordingly if you have any concerns. Your comments will not be identified in the thesis as coming from you individually. Additionally, all information that I collect from you will be treated confidentially.

If you have further queries about the research, please feel free to contact my principal supervisor at Unitec: Alison Smith, + 64 (09) 815 4321 ext 8411 or email: asmith@unitec.ac.nz; or my associate supervisor Dr. Josephine Howse, +64(09) 815 4321 ext 8348 or email: jhowse@unitec.ac.nz.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: +64 (09) 815 4321, ext. 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.

My name is Satitphone Phommahack, and I am a postgraduate student at Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand, studying the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree. To fulfil the programme's requirements, I would like to seek help from you in meeting the requirements of a research study for the Thesis course, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

Teaching assistants, expatriate teachers and senior leaders, including the school director and the principals are invited to take part in this research. I request your participation by inviting you to participate in a focus group interview with Lao teachers. The focus group participants have all volunteered to take part in the focus group discussion, and have been randomly selected from the total group of volunteers.

What I am doing

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate the current provision of professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To explore the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To critically examine the challenges or difficulties that senior leaders face in professional development provision for primary teaching assistants in your school.

I have a desire to make this research practical and constructive for the school - therefore the emphasis will be using senior leaders', expatriate teachers', and local teachers' voices to explore their experiences and perceptions. This may lead to improving professional development programmes in the future. By taking part in this project you will

help me understand more about the current professional development programmes that exist in your school. Finally, this study will explore the key factors that may be influencing the provision of professional development.

What it will mean for you

I would like you to participate in a focus group about teacher professional development provision. A focus group is a group discussion where the members will be able to discuss my questions with one another while I act as a facilitator. This will take 45 minutes to 60 minutes. I will visit your school at a convenient time as pre-arranged between us.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form – this indicates your willingness to be involved in the research. I will also ask all members of the focus group to sign a confidentiality agreement so that the information given by each member will remain confidential to the group and myself.

The focus group will be digitally recorded and then transcribed by myself. After that, I will send a copy of the transcript to you to check for accuracy and to amend as you see fit. You may withdraw yourself and the data you have provided at any time up to ten days after you receive your transcript for checking.

You also have the right to receive a digital copy of the final thesis if you wish.

All information collected from you will be stored on a password-protected file on my computer and only my supervisors and I will have access to this information. It is possible that some of your work colleagues or fellow interviewees could identify you through their knowledge of your views or of your specific role in the school. However, the interview questions will not cover any potentially sensitive topics and you may amend the transcript you receive accordingly if you have any concerns. Your comments will not be identified in the thesis as coming from you individually or reported back to your school.

If you have further queries about the research, please feel free to contact my principal supervisor at Unitec: Alison Smith, + 64 (09) 815 4321 ext 8411 or email:

asmith@unitec.ac.nz; or my associate supervisor Dr. Josephine Howse, +64(09) 815 4321 ext 8348 or email: jhowse@unitec.ac.nz.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Information sheet for primary teachers

Research event: Questionnaire

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.

My name is Satitphone Phommahack, and I am a postgraduate student at Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand, studying the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree. To fulfil the programme's requirements, I would like to seek help from you in meeting the requirements of a research study for the Thesis course, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

I request your participation by inviting you to complete an open-ended questionnaire that has been sent to all expatriate teachers at your school. I would greatly appreciate you giving some of your time to complete the questionnaire.

What I am doing

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate the current provision of professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To explore the perceptions of senior leaders in regard to supporting professional development for primary teaching assistants in your school;
- To critically examine the challenges or difficulties that senior leaders face in professional development provision for primary teaching assistants in your school.

I have a desire to make this research practical and constructive for the school - therefore the emphasis will be using senior leaders', expatriate teachers', and local teachers' voices to explore their experiences and perceptions. This may lead to improving professional development programmes in the future. By taking part in this project you will help me understand more about the current professional development programmes that exist in your school. Finally, this study will explore the key factors that may be influencing the provision of professional development.

What it will mean for you

I would like to invite you to complete the questionnaire. This is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to do this or participate in the project if you do not wish to do so. The questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

All responses will be anonymous and you will not be personally identifiable in the final thesis. All information collected from you will be stored on a password-protected file on my computer and only my supervisors and I will have access to this information.

If you have further queries about the research, please feel free to contact my principal supervisor at Unitec: Alison Smith, + 64 (09) 815 4321 ext 8411 or email: asmith@unitec.ac.nz; or my associate supervisor Dr. Josephine Howse, +64(09) 815 4321 ext 8348 or email: jhowse@unitec.ac.nz.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

GAINING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION

Template for an organisation to provide a letter giving permission to conduct research

[Organisation's letterhead]

Date:

Address letter to:
Satitphone Phommahack
69H Woodward Road, Mt Albert
Auckland, New Zealand, 1025.

RE: Master of Educational Leadership and Management

THESIS TITLE: Professional Development Provision for Primary Teaching Assistants: The Case of One International School in Laos.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project and I give permission for research to be conducted in my school. I understand that the name of my school will not be used in any public reports.

Signature: _____

Name of signatory: _____

Title of signatory: _____

APPENDIX B

Consent form for the senior leaders

Research event: Semi-structure interview

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of the project if I don't want to and that I can withdraw from the project at any time up to ten days after the receipt of my interview transcript. I also understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me. The only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and her supervisor. I understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on the researcher's computer for a period of five years, and thereafter will be destroyed.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be digitally recorded and transcribed. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review and amend a transcript. I understand that I can see the finished thesis if I request this. I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name:.....

Participant Signature:

Researcher Name:

Researcher Signature: *Date:*.....

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Consent form for primary teaching assistants

Research event: Focus group interview

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of the project if I don't want to and that I can withdraw from the project at any time up to ten days after the receipt of my interview transcript. I also understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me; the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher, her supervisor and the other focus group participants. I understand that I am also required to sign a confidentiality agreement that states that I will not disclose any of the information shared by the focus group participants to any other person.

I understand that the focus group discussion will be digitally recorded and transcribed. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review and amend my transcript. I understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on the researcher's computer for a period of 5 years. I understand that I can see the finished thesis if I request this. I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Researcher Name:.....

Researcher Signature: *Date:*.....

Please return the consent form to a sealed box in the staffroom, and then the box will be collected by the researcher.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



APPENDIX C

Confidentiality agreement form for primary teaching assistants

Professional development provision for primary teaching assistants: The case of one international school in Laos.

Participant’s Name:.....

I _____ (participant’s full name-please print) agree to treat in absolute confidence, all information that I become aware of during the course of participation in this focus group as part of the above research project. I agree to respect the privacy of those involved and will not divulge in any form, information that has been given by other participants or their identities. I also agree to not retain or copy any information involving the above project.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(participant’s signature)

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2014-1034

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from May 15 2014 – May 15 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX D – Senior Leaders' Interview Schedule

Interviewer Introduction, thank you and purpose for 2 minutes

Hello. My name is Satitphone Phommahack and I would like to thank you for taking the time to be part of this research. The focus of this interview is to gain your opinions regarding the professional development provision at your school and your perceptions on professional development that teaching assistants received. I want to know how you, as a leader, promote professional development for teaching assistants and how you might want the program to be improved in the future.

This interview should take a maximum of 50 minutes.

General questions (15 minutes)

- Could you tell me in brief about staff development policy in your school, particularly for teaching staff?
- In your opinion, what are the key roles of senior leaders in providing/supporting professional development in your school specifically, teaching assistants?
- How does your school develop teachers' teaching and learning to sustain their professions?

Specific questions (30 minutes)

- What are your perspectives on the role of support staff in your school? How would you describe an effective support staff? How does your school support their professional development?
- What are the important capabilities for senior leaders to:
 - Develop and effectively communicate the vision to all employees?

- Build and maintain an effective learning culture?
 - Develop and implement balanced controls of professional development funds?
- What comprises the current provision of teacher professional development for teaching assistants? How is it different from the previous professional development provision? What support does the school currently provide for professional development?
- As a school leader/principal, what do you think are the barriers to provide regular professional development for teachers? How might this be resolved to meet the needs of individuals?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add that I have not specifically asked you about? Closing (3 minutes) Thank you for coming today and discussing these issues. Your opinion has given me an excellent insight into performance appraisal in relation to your school.

APPENDIX E – Teaching Assistants' Focus Group Schedule

Introduction, thank you and purpose (2 minutes)

Hello. My name is Satitphone Phommahack and I would like to thank you for taking the time to be part of this research. The focus of this interview is to gain your opinions regarding the professional development provision at your school and your perceptions of professional development that teaching assistants received. I want to know what you like, what you do not like, how you feel about professional development that you have experienced and how you might want the program to be improved in the future.

In the discussion today, please respect the privacy of colleagues with whom you work. I would ask you not to use the names of specific staff members nor refer to specific examples from your workplace that may identify individual staff members. I won't use any names in my report. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

My expectation is that you discuss general themes that you have observed rather than specific examples. There are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your views even if it differs from what others have said. I will take back the discussion to New Zealand and analyse them as well as applying them as part of my final thesis.

I am going to lead the discussion today. My job is to ask you the questions and then encourage and moderate the discussion. It is not my job to try and influence or change your opinion.

Ground rules (2 minutes)

To allow everyone an opportunity to express their opinion, I'd like to go over some ground rules:

- The discussion should take approximately 50 minutes
- Please only one person speaks at a time and avoid side conversations
- Please allow everyone the opportunity to answer each question
- Please keep what is discussed confidential, we encourage this so that everyone feels that they can express their opinions freely.

General questions (15 minutes)

- Tell me about the professional development programmes/training/courses that you have recently undertaken.
- What was professional development training in the past like compare to now?
- What do you think of the current professional development fund that the school provides?
- What do you think are the benefits from attending professional development?

Specific questions (30 minutes)

- Were there any difficulties or challenges that stopped you from attending the program? Why? Why not? (e.g. time, money, courses)
- In your opinion, would you prefer to seek your own professional development from outside or would you rather have the PD arranged by the school? Why? Why not?
- How do you feel about the development support that you have received from the school now?
- Has any teaching assistant ever communicated any concerns about professional development to the school leader or the management team?
- Suppose that you had a chance to talk to the school director about teacher professional development. What would you say? Closing (5 minutes)

Thank you all for coming today and discussing these issues. Your opinions have given me an excellent insight into professional development in relation to your school.



APPENDIX F – Open-Ended Questionnaire

Completion of this questionnaire is voluntary. The information that you provide in this questionnaire is anonymous and will only be accessed by one researcher. Individual teachers will not be identified anywhere in this research study and you are not required to provide your name in the questionnaire. This questionnaire is carried out as part of a Master Thesis study by a postgraduate student at Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand.

I would like to invite you to complete this questionnaire. This is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to do this or participate in the project if you do not wish to do so. The questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. All responses will be anonymous and you will not be personally identifiable in the final thesis. All information collected from you will be stored on a password-protected file on my computer and only my supervisors and I will have access to this information.

Instructions: Please complete this questionnaire and email it as an attachment back to my thesis supervisor Alison Smith (asmith@unitec.co.nz) by 12.00 noon on Friday (13th June 2014).

Section A

Please provide the following information:

1. Have you participated in any form of professional development in the past three (3) years? Please circle your answer.

YES / NO

If you have circled “YES”, please continue to complete this questionnaire. If you

have circled "NO", please indicate here why you have not participated in any form of professional development.

Section B

2. What forms of professional development support/teacher training/teacher education do you receive from the school?

3. What is your overall experience from attending the professional development programmes?

4. In your view, which forms of professional development do you believe are essential for your effective performance as a teacher?

Section C

5. In your opinion, how would you describe the similarities and differences between the professional development you receive and the professional development that teaching assistants receive?

Similarities: _____

Differences: _____

6. As you are working closely with your teaching assistants, what would you say are the skills and knowledge that they need to be effective in their work?

Section D

7. What do you believe is lacking in the professional development teaching assistants are currently experiencing?

8. If you were the head teacher, what changes would you implement (if any) to the current provision of professional development for teaching assistants?

9. Please make any other comment regarding professional development needs in your school for both teaching assistants and primary expatriate teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.