Exploring the need to contextualise professional development programmes for university lecturers: A case study in Thailand[1]

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ABSTRACT

Although the literature on the professional development (PD) of university lecturers is growing, few studies have highlighted the importance of contextualising PD programmes to reflect universities' idiosyncratic contexts and the specific combination of national and institutional cultures impacting pedagogical practices. In order to investigate how lecturers' learning needs are shaped by the national and institutional cultures of universities, this study focused on one English-speaking university in Thailand. Data come from a focus group and interviews with 10 lecturers to understand: (i) their PD needs; and (ii) how these needs related to the university context. We compared the findings with themes identified in the literature and highlighted the importance of contextualising PD programmes to meet lecturers' specific PD needs while responding to the national and institutional cultures of the university.

Keywords: university lecturer professional development, professional development needs, contextualisation, Thailand.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the learning needs of university lecturers have been extensively researched (Avalos, 2011; Collins & Halverson, 2010; Matsubayaski, Drake, Shaw & DeZure, 2009; Toth & McKey, 2010), generic recommendations sometimes lack elements of contextualisation ignoring the national and institutional cultures in which lecturers work (Geldenhuys & Oosthuizen, 2015; Noor Azmi, 2016). Professional Development (PD) needs are dependent on the national and institutional contexts of universities as these are shaped by the teaching and research requirements imposed on faculty, the student population, and the site's pedagogical culture (Leibowitz, Vorster & Ndebele, 2016; Naidoo, 2016; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality [NCCTQ], 2011). Hence, this article aims to scrutinise the learning needs of lecturers in one international university in Thailand to understand how they are related to the national and institutional contexts of the university. More specifically, the research examined the learning needs of university lecturers at an international university in Thailand where lecturers originated from 15 different countries and students from 92 different nations. The article addresses the following questions:

1. What are lecturers' learning needs in this particular university environment?

2. To what extent are these needs shaped by the context of this international university in Thailand?

3. How do these needs differ from or converge with themes found in the current literature on faculty development?

Firstly, we reviewed the literature on faculty development across a wide range of higher education contexts to elicit how generic PD needs could relate to global changes affecting the majority of higher education institutions (technological changes, academic mobility) before focusing on contextually-anchored PD needs and programmes. Secondly, we analysed qualitative data from lecturers teaching in one university in Thailand and compared the findings to the current literature on faculty development. We show how some PD needs are common to the literature while others are specific to the idiosyncratic environment of the university, arguing for the promotion of contextualised PD programmes.

2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

In this section of the paper, we examine some generic PD needs arising from the changing contexts of higher education worldwide before taking a closer look at how these needs are contextually anchored. We used the following keywords to seek for relevant literature on Google Scholar and major databases in education (EBSCO, ERIC): *Faculty professional development needs, university lecturer/teacher continuing education, faculty training, and combined them with context-contextualized program, developed and developing countries.*

2.1. Global trends and generic PD needs

Global trends, including the internationalisation and the digitalisation of higher education, have forced a reconsideration of the roles of university lecturers (Jõgi, Karu & Krabi, 2015). Perhaps most notable among these changes are innovations in learning technology such as e-learning, online simulation, gamification, requirements related to pedagogy and curriculum reforms, and the increasing student diversity that comes with the massification of access to higher education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). These changes have made it an imperative for lecturers to become lifelong learners and update their technological skills and knowledge continuously (Burns & Lawrie, 2015).

PD needs reported in the recent literature cover a wide range of domains including technology, skill development in teaching and research, student engagement, class diversity and disciplinary content knowledge (Collins & Halverson, 2010; Matsubayaski et al., 2009; Toth & McKey, 2010). For example, in a needs assessment study with 239 participants in 17 American colleges, Matsubayaski et al. (2009) found that lecturers wanted to learn more about critical thinking, syllabus design, technologies to enhance teaching effectiveness, effective assignments, how to learn effectively, and student motivation.

Collins and Halverson (2010), and Jennings and Weatherly (2013) analysed the educational changes brought by technology. They argued that teachers should better prepare students to interact through the use of communication technologies, but also help them analyse complex problems, devise relevant questions, identify credible information, and design collaborative solutions. As a result, 21st century lecturers need to be prepared to create learning environments that are conducive to the development of these generic skills.

The development of online learning platforms has created new ways of interfacing pedagogy, content, and technology that challenge lecturers to develop new pedagogical practices and attitudes (Lehiste, 2015; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Ng, 2015). For example, Lupton (2014) highlighted issues with social media usage pertaining to privacy and the risks they can pose to the credibility and careers of faculty members. More fundamentally, the increased use of technologies challenges the traditional roles of university lecturers as the source and dispensers of knowledge (Dogan, 2014; Downes, 2012). As an

example of new roles, Dogan (2014) and Downes (2012) advised lecturers to guide students through the continuous flow of information issued online to develop their information literacy and real-life problem-solving skills. However, these changes in the roles of lecturers require abundant self-reflection, training, and coaching in order to succeed (Jõgi et al., 2015).

The internationalisation process of higher education has created additional challenges for teachers who need to adapt to the different cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and expectations of their students (Gopal, 2011; Mizzi, 2017; Smith, 2014; Walker, 2015). Indeed, the growing mobility of students and educators and the massification of access to higher education have led to greater diversity in the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students studying together in the same classrooms (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Shafaei & Razak, 2016). Hence, Lee, Poch, Shaw and Williams (2012) argued that teachers urgently require intercultural competency in order to accommodate the increasing diversity of students in their classes. Gopal (2011) advocated combining Deardorff's cultural competency model with other cultural models, including adaptational models, to support faculty members in the development of their cross-cultural competency and adjust to the context of branch campuses.

Mizzi (2017) and Walker (2015) acknowledged that teaching in diverse classes can be disturbing for unprepared teachers who are unaware of their students' expectations and ways of learning. Both host and international lecturers may feel unprepared for the wide diversity of learning needs and preferences in their classes (Gopal, 2011; Mizzi, 2017). They may lack previous experiences with diversity and they may feel disoriented when faced with diverse students' expectations and needs (Bertrand & Lee, 2012; Lee et al., 2012). Hence, PD programmes for inclusive teaching are increasingly promoted in the literature (Amzat & Padilla-Valdez, 2017; Banks, 2016) and complete the other generic needs identified earlier, such as technological changes and active pedagogies for 21st century students. However, lecturers' PD programmes should also take into account the idiosyncratic contexts of universities, as highlighted in the next subsection.

2.2. Contextualised PD needs

If all lecturers are potentially in need of continuing skill development and subject content updates (Geldenhuys & Oosthuizen, 2015), the implementation of PD programmes must be handled with care. Issues of disconnection between the content of training and lecturers' working contexts have been reported in different environments. Lewin and Stuart (2016) reviewed educational changes in developing countries and emphasised the risk of implementing standard training models that do not take into account lecturers' specific constraints and intrinsic motivation. Preparing faculty members to teach in a culturally-sensitive way is actually crucial for international lecturers confronted with new sociocultural environments (Barkhuizen, 2002; Gopal, 2011; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014). Kainzbauer and Hunt (2014) highlighted the expectations attached to the Thai educational culture that can constitute a disorienting experience for non-Thai lecturers, such as the high respect for teachers' words that discourage students from questioning or debating their opinions (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014).

In Noor Azmi's (2016) case study on in-service training in Malaysia, the teacher programme was under-effective. Courses 'were too highly standardized, giving little latitude to trainers to respond to teachers' needs; there was too little time and no follow-up' (Lewin & Stuart, 2016: 93). On the contrary, Stuart (2016) reported a case study in Lesotho where action research methodology was highly effective, raising the question of the implementation level that is best suited to spur changes in lecturers' practices. Lewin and Stuart (2016) suggested that local actions at school level could be more effective than national programmes that are too disconnected from schools' idiosyncratic contexts. These case studies complemented the body of literature promoting teachers' needs assessment on site to understand their overlooked learning needs and motivational drivers (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Murphy & de Paor, 2017). In addition, participatory

action research, mentoring and reflective communities of practice have been reported effective to help lecturers learn relevant skills through discussions with well-informed peers and networks (Amzat & Padilla-Valdez, 2017; Gaible & Burns, 2005; Stuart, 2016).

The call for renewing lecturers' technological and pedagogical skills is strongly impacted by national and institutional imperatives. Governmental and political agendas impact the mission assigned to universities, and thus influence the budget allocated to faculty PD programmes. Leibowitz et al. (2016) encouraged researchers to study the PD needs of lecturers in resource-constrained environments taking into account 'post-colonial contexts or in neo-liberal times' (Leibowitz et al., 2016: 2). PD needs are indeed anchored in the university's context and depend on the student population and the institutional culture and structure (Leibowitz et al., 2016; NCCTQ, 2012). More specifically, these needs are shaped by the mission of the university and the teaching framework used to assess lecturers' teaching and research performances (NCCTQ, 2012). In South Africa, for example, students' demand for decolonising the curriculum creates a strong incentive for university lecturers to revise their courses' content and pedagogical practices (Le Grange, 2016). The remaining high economic inequalities in the post-apartheid context and the socio-linguistic diversity of South African students create demand for academic staff training that accommodates such diversity of learning needs (Council on Higher Education, 2016).

The content of PD programmes must be relevant to the national and political contexts of universities necessitating to contextualise the pedagogical activities used to train lecturers (Geldenhuys & Oosthuizen, 2015). For example, Naidoo (2016) argued for the conceptualisation of PD that would creatively combine theories to fit into the local and national contexts of universities on the one hand, and to promote social justice on the other hand. PD programmes that ignore the characteristics of the student population in the institution and do not meet the specific needs of lecturers can indeed provoke resistance and jeopardise their long-term effectiveness (Quinn, 2012).

Finally, as shown in this literature review, university lecturers' needs for PD are diverse and contextual, influenced by international and national trends, and institutional cultures, missions and teaching evaluative frameworks (CHE, 2016; NCCTQ, 2012). It is therefore crucial to assess faculty members' learning needs before organising PD programmes (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). For these reasons, a needs assessment has been carried out in an international university in Thailand with the aim of offering tailored PD programmes.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research study draws on situated learning and situated cognition theory (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Lecturers' PD is approached as influenced by the situated context (including students' characteristics, the private university's environment and the community of colleagues). Lecturers can learn informally from peers or formally through PD programmes (Eraut, 2011; Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy & Kyndt, 2015) and this study aims to explore to what extent their PD needs were anchored in this Thai-American university's context.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Setting

The research took place in a Thai-American university in Thailand where students and teachers originated from 92 and 15 countries respectively. On its Bangkok campus, 70% of lecturers and 35% of students in the undergraduate programmes were not from Thailand. The university mission was to provide interactive learning opportunities in an English-speaking environment and to equip students with the practical skills they needed in internationalised professions. Hence, active learning pedagogy was promoted by the

university's administration. The uniqueness of this educational setting arose from the fact that the university belonged to an American educational network but complied with the Thai educational quality and employment regulations.

4.2. Qualitative design

The objective of this research study was to examine to what extent the lecturers' PD were influenced by the Thai-American context of the university. The research questions were presented in the introduction and focused on lecturers' perceptions of PD needs. To investigate teachers' perceptions in this bounded educational setting, a descriptive case study design was chosen (Yin, 2013). We were interested in understanding how the cultural-institutional context of the university might have shaped the learning needs of lecturers, and the exploratory nature of the case study was appropriate for this objective. More precisely, focus groups and interviews were considered a useful approach for data collection.

A needs assessment was undertaken in undergraduate departments in 2016 (Jeannin, 2016) after a presentation of the research objectives, all lecturers were invited to sign a consent form before partaking in the research. Five faculty members attended the focus group (90 minutes), and eight teachers participated in individual interviews (35 to 40 minutes). Three lecturers participated in both the focus group and the individual interview. The 10 faculty members who participated in the research included five female and five male lecturers from either Thai or international backgrounds. Participants represented diverse profiles in terms of cultural backgrounds, academic subjects, years of experience in the university and gender. The informants came from eight different countries including Asian, North American and European countries. We argue that this sample diversity contributed to the quality and richness of the qualitative findings.

The focus group provided a first insight into teachers' constructed realities (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). The individual interviews provided more detailed information, as probes were used to prompt elaboration, illustration or clarification (Creswell, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were used to enrich and confirm the interpretive thematic framework (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Hence, combining the data from the focus group and individual interviews aimed at increasing the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

As some faculty members were non-native English speakers, providing immediate in-depth answers might have been challenging; therefore, all lecturers were offered the opportunity to choose an e-mail interview instead of the face-to-face interviewing modality. As reported by Meho (2006), well-designed e-mail interviews enabled participants to take the time to reflect and express their experiences, emotions and opinions with appropriate words. As a result, six participants chose asynchronous e-mail interviews while two lecturers selected face-to-face interviews. In the e-mail interview procedure, a follow-up e-mail was sent to clarify informants' answers when it was needed. In practice, the e-mail interviews led to rich and meaningful responses as it gave participants more time to reflect on their experience and formulate their responses (Opdenakker, 2006). We thought that this double collection method was appropriate to reduce the time burden of participating in the research while enabling participants to choose what was the most convenient for them.

4.3. Data analysis

Interpretive data analysis was performed on transcripts through hand coding, by labelling each sentence and gathering them under codes, categories, and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A coding journal was used to keep track of the interpretive process. No predetermined theory was use to analyse the data, as the codes and themes emerge throughout the iterative coding process. After organising the 45 codes and 19 categories that were identified in the data, five themes emerged with regard to lecturers' PD needs. These themes included:

- Pedagogy for university-level students
- Classroom management techniques in culturally diverse classes
- Differentiated instruction
- Fair but effective assessments
- Instructional technology.

Finally, we ensured that all segments labelled under the same code constituted a coherent whole and that the interpretive framework was consistent and comprehensive to embrace the richness of the data. The qualitative findings are reported below using pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. The learning needs reported by lecturers

Throughout the interviews, lecturers reported their desire to develop their knowledge and skills with regard to pedagogy for university-level students, including differentiated instruction and classroom management in culturally diverse classes. They also wanted to increase their ability to develop *fair but effective* assessment techniques and learn more about instructional technology. The evidence of these PD needs is presented below.

In terms of pedagogy, participants highlighted their strong desire to learn pedagogical practices to increase their effectiveness and better meet the learning needs of university-level students. George explained,

> [my] background is not primarily in pedagogy. I would enjoy attending (in-house) seminars in classroom management and teaching methods.

He continued:

> I think that most teachers are experiencing the same obstacles and hurdles in ensuring- that the students meet the learning outcomes. How to motivate students to learn? How to ensure that everybody (not only the strong students) participate? How do you foster analytical proneness in a cross-cultural setting?

As the student population was very diverse, the scope of students' learning needs and preferences was wide. This cultural diversity could also create cross-cultural communication issues. Some lecturers indeed reported a need to learn more about classroom management to better manage student behaviours in a cross-cultural setting. Steve explained:

> I have found myself at times in arguments with students, which has caused (…) emotions (….) I have first-hand knowledge that many students are very skilled at using their native language and culture to rally support for themselves. Having knowledge about human behaviour, or having psychology tactics could create better communication strategies and defuse volatile situations.

As a consequence, faculty members intended to gain psychological and multicultural knowledge to maintain a respectful atmosphere in class and diffuse potential contentious situations.

To accommodate students' diversity in class, lecturers noted that differentiated instruction could help them provide different activities. Teachers reported students' diversity in terms of English language and technology proficiency levels, previous knowledge, ages, and experiences. Lee stated:

I would like to join differentiated instruction course [and] classroom management course. Since in all of my classes, students are very diverse, I would like to learn/know how to manage these diverse classes effectively from an expert or share experience with other lecturers.

In the e-mail interview, Mary reported a desire to

learn more about different innovative teaching methods in order to adapt [her] teaching style.

She thought it could enable students

to learn through different techniques that would allow [them] to open [their] mind and understand the teachers' ideas from other perspectives.

The desire of lecturers to expand their pedagogical skills aimed at meeting students' diverse learning needs. It was corroborated by their interest in assessment design to better evaluate students' various learning styles.

Regarding assessment, lecturers in this university were responsible for designing their tests individually. They expected to develop effective and fair examinations to better structure their tests in accordance with their subjects, students, and teaching methods. In the focus group and individual interview, Ann, Luke and Peter raised questions relating to the design of tests and assessments, questioning the effectiveness of multiple-choice questions.

Different types, different structures of questions have different objectives. So, in which case, which type of questions should be used? And in what mixture? (….) How to assess objectively?

Some lecturers reported that students were not performing as they had expected. They wondered if problems were arising from their methods of teaching or from their assessment techniques. Referring to his last assessment, Luke stated:

It's basically the same practical exercise that we have done in class, just for slight changes. But even then, it seems like a large percentage of the students aren't able to perform. Maybe my expectations are too high based on what I am teaching in the classroom? If I had some formal training on designing the proper assessment based on class materials, (…) that may help.

As a consequence, teachers expected to improve their skills in test design to assess students effectively and objectively, but also to align examinations with their own teaching practices. This was particularly important in this context as the faculty and student populations were highly diverse (in terms of cultural backgrounds) which necessitated to assess and grade students fairly knowing that they had been accustomed to different teaching philosophies, pedagogical practices and grading expectations in their countries of origin.

Some lecturers mentioned that the increasing number of students enrolled in class could be detrimental to student engagement knowing that the university advocated for student-centred teaching. Ann emphasised,

the number of students is growing day by day (…), so it is hard to get things done and hard to engage students all of them at the same time.

In this context, participants also mentioned their desire to gain knowledge in learning management systems in order to increase their students' access to learning materials and facilitate teacher-student communication outside the classroom. For example, Ann considered attending a workshop on learning management systems to be able:

to provide information to the students outside the lecture time. This will enable me to be in contact with students outside the contact hours, and enable them to read background information beyond the content of the two-hour lecture that I provide twice a week.

Participants wanted to learn more about adult pedagogy, differentiated instruction, classroom management, assessment design and instructional technology which were related to the university's mission to teach practical skills and contribute to the development of job-ready professionals. The connections between these learning needs and the university context are scrutinised in the next subsection.

5.2. Relationship between lecturers' PD needs and the university context in Thailand

The learning needs reported by lecturers were deeply rooted in the context of the university. As international students represented an average of 35% of the undergraduate student population, lecturers were interested in differentiated instruction in this context of diversity. Additionally, as one of the strategic objectives of the university was to develop blended and online teaching methods, lecturers were encouraged to consider new instructional technologies. Therefore, lecturers' demand for an increased knowledge in learning management systems might have been a consequence of the university strategy for blended learning.

In the university, an active learning pedagogy was promoted by the Western administration encouraging lecturers to use class debates and problem-solving discussions. However, this active learning pedagogical approach collided with the traditional Thai teaching culture, based on knowledge transfer and memorisation in a context of high respect for lecturers' authority (Biggs, 1994; Hallinger & Lu, 2012; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014). As the Thai teaching culture has been shaped by Buddhist tradition and to a lesser extent by Confucianism, lecturers were revered for their ability to nurture their students but were also held responsible for their students' success (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014; Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006).

In the PD needs assessment, lecturers explained they wanted to promote students' critical-thinking skills, without always knowing how to do it in classes where students' critical habits differ. This elicited teachers' difficulty in merging different conceptions of learning and teaching as the Thai culture and the university discourse were not easily reconciled. In addition, the fact that lecturers raised questions about the best ways to assess students revealed their awareness of difficulties in assessing students from diverse pedagogical cultures. Lecturers pinpointed the limitations of multiple-choice questions and perceived the need for a diversification of their assessment methods to embrace students' diversity in terms of learning habits and preferences.

In this private international university, with modest to high admission fees, one of the authors (who taught in the university) noted that families were expecting students to pass smoothly from one term to another until the successful completion of their degree. Participants in the research mentioned their desire to learn how to assess students fairly and effectively in a context of stakeholders' pressure for *good marks*. Assessment and grading could indeed be points of tension for the stakeholders of private universities as conflicting objectives interplay: students demand high marks, the universities' administration expects high pass rates but also high-quality teaching, and lecturers end up having to find a balance between students' satisfaction and the high educational standards of their institutions.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Similarities and differences with the literature on PD

Commonalities between our findings and the literature include differentiated instruction, classroom management, assessment design and technological learning. For example, managing emotions in cross-cultural classrooms has been emphasised by van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman and Wubbels (2009)

through the enforcement of clear classroom rules. There are however minor differences between our findings and the literature that we discuss below.

Consistent with our findings, differentiated instruction has been presented in the literature as a tool to better accommodate students' diverse learning needs and preferences. Santangelo and Tomlinson (2009) suggested that lecturers offer diverse opportunities for learning as well as learner-centred modes of assessment. In addition to developing differentiated instruction, learning new instructional practices, such as culturally responsive teaching (Bertrand & Lee, 2012; Gay, 2010) and inclusive instruction (Glowacki-Dudka, Murray & Concepción, 2012) could help lecturers become more effective in international contexts (Gay, 2010). For example, Merriam and Kim (2011) encouraged teachers to recognise that learning could take on different meanings and modes in different cultures. They emphasised the importance of recognising the holistic and experience-based learning approaches in non-Western cultures, supporting a balanced development of the mind, the body, the spirit and the emotions (Merriam & Kim, 2011).

Instructional technology was mentioned by lecturers in our study, but no one raised the question of the interconnection between technology, content and pedagogy, revealing that it was not a major concern for lecturers. Participants approached technology as a way to improve their communication with students, without mentioning how they expected to transform their pedagogical practices and content to fit into the online or blended environment. This finding echoed the approach of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Lehiste, 2015; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Ng, 2015) which encouraged lecturers to explore the relationship between the technology that is used, the content that is taught and the pedagogy that is implemented to ensure that the three components interface consistently and serve the learning purposes effectively.

Like in other universities hosting many different nationalities, participants in this research reported facing challenges to make teaching materials and instructional strategies relevant to diverse students. Host and international students have indeed been accustomed to different teaching styles and cultural perspectives (Bertrand & Lee, 2012; De Vita, 2001; Merriam & Kim, 2011; Mizzi, 2017; Pimpa, 2009). Therefore, teachers and students do not share the same habits with regard to teaching and learning: There are differences in the perceptions of what students' and teachers' roles should be (Hallinger & Lu, 2012; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014), what should be taught in class (Merriam & Kim, 2011; Pimpa, 2009) and what constitutes appropriate instructional practices (Ma, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2006; van Tartwijk et al., 2009).

Aligned with the findings, the literature highlighted that different expectations between international lecturers and Thai students could be disorientating (Deveney, 2007; Hallinger & Lu, 2012; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014; Pimpa, 2009). International universities host a variety of expectations as students and lecturers have been socialised in different institutional and national cultures (McNaught, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2006; Shafaei & Razak, 2016). Regarding the Thai cultural perspective on student-teacher relationships, Kainzbauer and Hunt (2014) showed that students were expected to respect their teachers and avoid questioning or contradicting them. In return, Thai learners expect their teachers to take responsibility for their learning and for maintaining students' face in a context that values harmony and mutual respect. To an outsider, these perspectives may seem inherently conflicting. On the one hand, teachers receive extremely high levels of respect (somewhat unusual in a Western educational setting), while simultaneously being allotted more than expected responsibility for students' learning success. Hence, staff discussions and mentoring could help international lecturers decode the expectations and behaviours of their students, as required by the participants in this study and promoted in the literature (Schleicher, 2012).

6.2. Contextualising faculty PD programmes
Contextualising PD programmes has to take into account the budget and human factors constraining the universities, but also to accommodate the diversity of staff learning needs and the specificity of the student

population (Leibowitz et al., 2016). Discourses pertaining to the development of relevant curriculums for the Asian contexts (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014; Pimpa, 2009) encourage lecturers to reflect on the content and the pedagogical approaches they use in class. These demands for culturally relevant curriculums are rising in the global South where Western mainstream knowledge might prove less relevant to their socioeconomic contexts. This requires to prepare lecturers for renewed pedagogical practices that could match students' learning needs (Banks, 2016; Gay, 2010). Hence, instead of offering inappropriate PD programmes (Noor Azmi, 2016), it is crucial to assess the learning needs of lecturers to meet their specific needs (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Stuart, 2016) and help them better accommodate the learning needs of their diverse students.

As Thailand expects to become an educational hub in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, it requires lecturers to be ready to meet the learning needs of students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. For example, the 2008-2022 plan for education of the Thai Ministry of Education (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2013; Thai Ministry of Education, 2004, 2008) considered PD as a tool to increase the quality of education in the context of internationalisation of higher education. It is indeed envisioned that faculty development could contribute to the attractiveness and the international competitiveness of Thailand. This call for contextualising PD for university lecturers resonates with other countries' national debates regarding the contextualisation of higher education. In South Africa for example, there is a strong demand for the decolonisation and the Africanisation of Higher Education (Le Grange, 2016; Vorster & Quinn, 2017), leading faculty members to search for renewing their syllabus and participate in contextualised PD programmes (Leibowitz et al., 2016).

7. CONCLUSION

This paper described the PD needs of 10 lecturers and showed how they related to the specific context of an international university in Thailand. These learning needs revolved around pedagogy for university-level students, differentiated instruction, classroom management, assessment design and instructional technology. The paper stressed how these learning needs were contextually rooted: the specificities of lecturers' PD needs arose from the multicultural student population which brought about diverse learning needs and preferences. The paper revealed the dichotomy between the Thai context and the Western background of the university that impacted expectations related to student-teacher interactions. The characteristics of this private university, its mission, and the diversity of the student population contributed to the specific PD needs reported by lecturers in this setting. By showing how PD needs are contextual, we highlighted the importance of organising needs assessment prior to designing PD programmes to tailor them to distinctive cultural, political and institutional contexts.

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