

Roles, Characteristics and Professional Needs of Instructional Assistants in an International School

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Abstract

This research studied the roles, characteristics and professional needs of instructional assistants in an American school in Nonthaburi. This mixed methods research employed the use of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews of three groups of the key informants. The population of this study was 69 instructional assistants of the school who were questionnaire respondents for their views of the roles, characteristics and professional needs. Three groups of the key informants in in-depth interviews consisted of 2 administrators, 4 teachers and 13 instructional assistants. The statistics used in data analysis was percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the qualitative data analysis methods were grounded theory and content analysis. The results revealed details in four major categories. First, the most important roles of the instructional assistants were in supporting 1.1) students--in taking good care of them 1.2) teachers--mainly in arranging the teaching and learning materials and sorting them into groups for easy use at all times and 1.3) the school by always keeping information about the students confidential. Second, the best characteristics of instructional assistants are in 2.1) working behavior-enthusiasm in working 2.2) teamworking skills: ability to work as a team and 2.3) knowledge of teaching: having teaching techniques for effective delivery. Third, the highlighted professional needs are to update knowledge about ICT all the time, to learn about the teaching techniques and to be well-versed in their main subjects. Fourth, the three skills that the instructional assistants needed to develop were 4.1) the knowledge skills 4.2) the teacher skills and 4.3) the problem-solving skills of children behavior. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that international schools should professionally develop their instructional assistants to academically benefit from their qualified personnel.

Keywords: *Roles, Characteristics, Professional needs, Instructional Assistants, International Schools*

1. Introduction

The international schools have a clear goal to promote education in an international environment, not connected to the system of education of any particular country. According to Sylvester (2002), the first establishment of the international school in the late 19th century was to support children of multinational business people, private organization volunteers and embassy staff who worked outside their own countries. International schools facilitate the transfer of credits earned from the subjects taken for further studies back in their home countries. International schools in the early periods used English or French as the language of instruction and communication in schools. In brief, the market for international education

was thus in providing continuing opportunities for uninterrupted education of children who had to follow their families abroad. Previously, not many people took advantage of this service

When the world becomes borderless as it is now today, people can move from one side to the other side of the world much more easily, resulting in international schools becoming increasingly popular. In addition, the importance of education and the needs for English lead to the popularity of the international schools. In Thailand, they get strong support from the government, the private sector and foreign investors (Warich, 2007). In Malaysia, the international schools have increased from 66 in 2010 to 126 schools in 2017, and the number of students studying in international schools are a total of 61,156 among whom are 39,161 Malaysian students and 21,995 foreign students. These students mainly aim to study in universities abroad (Nasa & Pilay, 2017). Expatica (2018) claims that at the present time, the countries which have seen a rapid increase of the international schools are China, India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Thailand.

International schools in Thailand are under the Office of Private Education, Ministry of Education. Most teachers come from countries where English is the mother tongue and the countries that have a reputation as a leader in education and teacher professional development such as England, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA and South Africa. Brummitt, the Executive Director of the ISC Research (Expatica, 2018), said that the demand of expert teachers will increase from 350,000 to 500,000 in 2020 when the international schools continue to increase. This is a threat to international schools today as they must maintain high standards and quality while coping with an increasing number of students who wish to enroll in international schools.

However, a group of educational staff who play a key role in the international school context and no less important than native speaker teachers are “Instructional Assistants”. There are many names in English for this group such as Teaching Assistants, Teacher Assistants and Classroom Assistants. In teaching and learning management at international schools, it is essential to have an instructional assistant to help teachers look after students while in classes. Review of the international literature (Groom & Rose, 2005; Stephenson & Carter, 2014; Wren, 2017) indicates that the roles and responsibilities of the instructional assistants are often associated with assisting teaching and learning of students with disabilities, children with special education needs, and those with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Most international schools in Thailand hire instructional assistants to support teachers so that they can do a better job of teaching. In comparison with local public and private schools in general, instructional assistants are not listed as positions in schools. According to international research in this area in the last ten years, hiring instructional assistants has been found to be on the rise. However, the roles and functions of these instructional assistants may not be explicitly stated. Wren (2017) interviewed 11 students about the roles of instructional assistants. The interviewed students stated that the instructional assistants had academic roles

in supporting student learning. However, the 16 instructional assistants who were also interviewed in the same topic saw themselves as working harder in the area of student behavior management. In conclusion, from this study, it can be said that the roles of teaching assistants were not yet clearly defined. Involved parties might look at them in different ways. For many, dealing with children with difficult behavior should be the priority in terms of roles. Wren (2017) adds that the number of instructional assistants in schools in England are increasing, mostly at the primary level but the roles vary depending on the school context. It could be that the responsibilities of instructional assistants overlapped with those of the teachers. Further studies are needed on how necessary instructional assistants in classes and what roles they should take. Similarly, Warhurst, Nickson, Commander and Gilbert (2014) said that in Scotland, the number of instructional assistants has increased a lot to work in support of teachers, but the role of instructional assistants is not clear in how they should be working to fully support teachers, students or teach classes and what the scope of work of the instructional assistants should be.

It is generally believed that the instructional assistants in international schools should support teaching and help with the work in the classroom as well as students so that teachers can work most effectively. However, the instructional assistants in international schools must have high English proficiency, excellent teamwork and communication skills, ability to use technology, computer equipment and software capabilities, management skills as well as problem-solving skills. They can help and support teachers in teaching and preparing teaching materials (Stephenson & Carter, 2014).

Chanchairassamee (2011) studied the factors that influence parents' choice of schools for their children, at kindergarten and elementary levels. She found that in addition to the prestigious school reputation, the environment, the curriculum and teaching and learning, "personnel" was one decisive factor for the parents. The findings concluded that staff who parents preferred were the teachers and the instructional assistants who provided genuine care for their children, focused on effective interaction and communication as well as showed respect for them. The last requirement was that foreign teachers who were not native English had to speak English very well. These findings were aligned with what Makchiew (2015) found that the most significant marketing mixture that influenced the decision of parents in choosing the schools was the teachers and staff. The decision of the parents in choosing education for their children lay in the quality of teaching and learning. Age, marital status, occupation, educational level, the relationship of children with parents and the number of students under each teacher's charge do not genuinely affect parents' decision. Sex and average family income per month only affect the decision in choosing the school at the average level. Similarly, Nakekum (2016) stated that the decision to put their children at Yothinburana was mainly made by parents who emphasized academic strength followed by the academic staff relationship, relationship of parents with the school, Yothinburana, the administration and the buildings and the school environment respectively. All three studies showed that the parents regarded highly the academic strength of the school and the staff quality because they believed that their children needed to be groomed academically, while being showered with the greatest care that they could possibly get.

It can be said that the instructional assistants are key personnel in teaching and learning at international schools as well. But in reality, the instructional assistants are treated as having much less important than the teachers who are native speakers. The elementary school instructional assistants shoulder diverse jobs and responsibilities. Giangreco (2010) states that sometimes the duties and responsibilities assigned to the instructional assistants are inappropriate. In some countries, instructional assistants are given added responsibilities to help teachers work in the area of classroom management, in some cases, teaching the whole class when the teacher is absent. But the labor unions do not agree with such assignments of duties saying that it is like asking nurses without true expertise in the matter to do brain surgery. This is an issue that should be investigated. If the instructional assistants are not able to do certain tasks as criticized by the union, the school employers are obligated to identify a clear list of duties or adopt a standard, especially in an international school in Thailand that is the site of this study.

Researches on the roles and importance of teachers are abound but there were a small number of researches on the roles and importance of the instructional assistants, especially in the context of international schools in Thailand. Research on instructional assistants in the context of Thailand is necessary because of the rising popularity of international schools. In particular, the school where this study was conducted, was expected to provide a genuine source of data. It began with only 50 students. Currently, there are 1,966 students with 226 native teachers and 70 instructional assistants. Even though the instructional assistants are only a group of people who support teaching and learning, they are close to students, especially students who need extra help. That is why a study on the roles, characteristics and professional needs of instructional assistants is worth investigating so that all the parties concerned know and are prepared to handle this group of staff, who can become a major attraction of international schools.

2. Research Objectives

2.1 To investigate the roles of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand

2.2 To find out the characteristics of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand

2.3 To explore the professional needs of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand

2.4 To propose a framework for the development of instructional assistants in an international school in Thailand

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the roles of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand?

3.2 What are the characteristics of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand?

3.3 What are the professional needs of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand?

3.4 What should be the framework for the development of professional effectiveness of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand?

4. Literature Review

In today's world, International schools are increasing at a rapid rate in each country because it is generally accepted that those who graduated from the international school got a good education through the use of a foreign language as a means of instruction, a major one being English. International schools are increasingly popular among parents because it increases choice to parents, in addition to attending local government school or a boarding school in abroad which is far from their families (ISC News, 2018).

4.1 The International School Staff

The staff of the international school consist of 3 groups: 1) executives, who oversee the implementation of the school's vision and mission, 2) teachers who have been selected according to their abilities to teach a number of school subjects, and 3) instructional assistants who will support the teachers in developing the learner's learning potential.

4.2 The Meaning of Instructional Assistants in International Schools

In general, “instructional assistants” refers to individuals who help teachers in core subject teaching in the classroom by specially supporting children who need special care. Sometimes, class size may be too large for the teacher to do his or her best and there may be many cases of special educational needs students. Most schools see the importance of having an assistant teacher in the classroom work together with the primary teacher. However, in certain contexts these instructional teachers may be assigned special tasks. In others, instructional assistants may be allowed to team-teach with the principal teachers.

4.3 The Roles of Instructional Assistants

The literature review on the roles and responsibilities of instructional assistants revealed that their main tasks are associated with providing support in teaching students with disabilities, children with special educational needs, or those with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties but the instructional assistants at an international school may be required to have other related abilities, especially in terms of their English proficiency, teamwork skills, the ability to communicate, the ability to use technology, i.e. computer equipment and software capabilities, management skills and the ability to solve problems so that they can help and support teachers in teaching and preparing teaching materials for effective lessons (Stephenson & Carter, 2014).

4.4 The Importance of Instructional Assistants

The instructional assistants have important roles in teaching and learning in a classroom in the international school. However, the roles and responsibilities of these instructional assistants are not clear. Warhurst et al. (2014) stated that in Scotland, the number of instructional assistants has increased a lot for the duties of supporting teachers, but

it was found that the roles of these instructional assistants are unclear in how they should be working in support of the teachers, or they should be assigned to teach the students, and what the scope of work of the instructional assistants are. Based on the interviews of 11 students in Wren (2017)'s study on the role of instructional assistants, it was found that students thought that the role of instructional assistants was in dealing with academic tasks. However, 16 instructional assistants who were interviewed commented that they offered their students behavior-based support. In conclusion, the role of instructional assistants is not clear. It depends on the views of each involved party.

4.5 Characteristics of Instructional Assistants

UBC Okanagan (2011) stated that the good characteristics of instructional assistants in teaching and learning should be in both their personality traits and their ways of doing things as explained in the table below:

Table 1: Characteristics of Instructional Assistants

| Characteristics | Explanation |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Clarity | Explaining clearly, giving simple examples for easy understanding, answering questions fluently and having good advice. |
| 2. Enthusiasm | Using verbal and body language for improved learning and increased attention of students, learning and making eye contact with students. |
| 3. Interaction | Using techniques in taking care of students in class, encouraging students with questions and suggestions, avoiding criticizing children when they do wrong, praising students when they have good ideas and asking students questions both individually and whole class. |
| 4. Organization | Having presentation skills and skillfully using office equipment, clearly explaining the topic that is being taught, continuing from the previous lesson and drawing conclusions |
| 5. Pacing | Asking students whether they understand clearly before starting a new topic |
| 6. Disclosure | Knowledgeable in the subject and assessment methods, able to give suggestions for the details of subjects, learning purposes, advice in the preparation for examination as well as caution students for punctuality in assignment submission |
| 7. Rapport | Giving advice and talking with students both inside and outside class. |

Source: UBC Okanagan, 2011

4.6 The Principles of Professional Needs

The meanings of professional needs are explained by experts below.

Nufeldt & Guralnik (1998 cited in Wongwanich, 2015, p. 33) define "Need" as a lack of something or something in need or desired.

Sayan (2015) states that “professional needs” means the differences or gaps between the real condition or the virtual condition or the standard condition. This gap must be revised for the advantages of the people or the workplace. The gap can be measured from the comparison of the difference between the expected condition and the real condition.

Wongwanich (2015) classifies “needs” into 3 large categories.

1) Personal Needs

Individuals certainly have different needs such as the needs of each student based on the condition of an individual.

2) Group Needs

A collective need of a group of people such as the needs of math teachers, the needs of children with disabilities.

3) Organizational Needs

The needs of organizations, such as the needs of a school in the teaching and learning that emphasize student-centered approach, the needs to develop a new generation of teachers of the Ministry of Education.

This research is aimed at finding out the needs for professional development areas of instructional assistants with an emphasis on helping the organization to achieve success. However, the study was designed to explore significant data from three groups of key informants. If the instructional assistants must help support the learning of the students with different ability levels and the learning outcomes expected, they should be professionally developed, so their supportive roles can be more effective.

4.7 The Learning Theories of Learners in the 21st Century

Learning of the learners in the 21st century differs from that of the 19th century or the 20th because the world has changed in many ways and so are learning and learning management.

The Emphasis on the Learning Process More Than Content Memorization

In a world without borders and with remarkable information overflow, learning management must be directed towards effectiveness in instilling students with the abilities and skills to live in a challenging world that is changing rapidly. In other words, the focus of education in the 21st Century is on the building the ability of students to survive amidst the unpredictable global changes. Besides, the curricula focus on the learning outcomes rather than what knowledge of facts and figures that students should have.

The Learning Management That Emphasize the Practical Skills

The Current National Education Plan aims to provide all students with the skills, attributes and learning in the 21st century, focusing on 3Rs (reading out includes - Reading, Writing -Writing The calculator -Arithmetic) and consisting 8Cs--1) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, 2) Creativity and Innovation, 3) Cross-Cultural Understanding, 4) Collaboration, Teamwork and Leadership 5) Communications,

Information and Media Literacy 6) Computing and ICT Literacy 7) Career and Learning Skills 8) Compassion.

Learning management for the learning outcomes that emphasize 3Rs and 8Cs cannot be achieved if a teacher still prepares the content and teaching in the traditional style aimed solely at transferring contents to students. Most international schools hire instructional assistants to allow students the opportunities to learn and get the full attention from both the teachers and the assistants. It is undeniable that the instructional assistants work closely with the students and they are expected to also support the teachers in developing student learning potential. Thus, the findings from this study are expected to be useful for international schools in how to train this group of staff members.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education gives an opportunity for students with limited abilities to learn together in regular schools. It enables all learners to access education in the same way with mutual respect for one another. When children with special needs study together with normal children.

5. Research Methodology

The design of this study was mixed methods research. This study was conducted at an international school in Nonthaburi, Thailand. This school was chosen as the site because it matched the criteria for the target school. First, it uses the American curriculum. Second, it is located in Bangkok and the suburban areas. Third, it has over 1,000 students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12. Fourth, it has been accredited by the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment. It was the only school that gave its consent for this study.

The total participants (the research population) were 69 instructional assistants who were questionnaire respondents and among them, 13 instructional assistants volunteered to be interviewed. In addition, the interviewed data were collected from 4 teachers and 2 administrators.

The statistics used in questionnaire data analysis consisted of percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Each item was a range of 5 (Likert Scale). The average is used with the following criteria (Best, 1977, p. 190).

| Level | Interpretation |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| 4.50-5.00 | → The most important |
| 3.50-4.49 | → Important |
| 2.50-3.49 | → Average |
| 1.50-2.49 | → Little important |
| 1.00-1.49 | → The least important |

The questionnaire went through the processes of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) with the score of 0.735 and pilot testing. based on the criteria of item selection that questions from the IOC score of 0.50-1.00 will be selected, while the items with a lower score will not be used or revised (Ongiam & Wichitwejpaisal, 2018; Suwatanpornkul, 2018). The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.834 by Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.

For semi-structured interview data, the qualitative data analysis methods used were grounded theory (Creswell, 2007, p.39; Lichtman, 2013:14) because rich and thick data can be more effectively collected. Grounded theory was in three steps. First, all the interviewed scripts belonging to 13 instructional assistants were analyzed by thought units in the Open Coding Step and next, similar ideas were grouped in the process of data reduction in the Axial Coding Step before the themes that emerged in the second step went through Constant Comparative Approach until the central theme emerged, ready for the researcher to construct a data-driven theory in the Selective Process. As for the interviewed scripts of 4 teachers and 2 administrators were analyzed with a simple content analysis technique of categorizing the raw data into topics which later were grouped together to derive at major categories for interpretation. To legitimize the qualitative data analysis process, two Thai debriefers, who are experts in qualitative research and education were asked to recheck the topics derived.

6. Findings

All the data collected by the instruments of the study were analyzed and presented in four areas—the roles, characteristics, professional needs and suggested framework in enhancing the instructional assistants' potential.

6.1 From the analysis of questionnaires shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4, the following findings on the roles of instructional assistants in supporting students, principal teachers and the school were obtained.

Table 2: Roles of Instructional Assistants in Supporting Students

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | Mean | S.D. |
|---|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|------|------|
| 1. One-to-One Teaching | 24 | 25 | 17 | 2 | 1 | 4.00 | 0.92 |
| 2. Teaching small groups | 30 | 22 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 4.14 | 0.91 |
| 3. Support all students | 46 | 17 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 4.57 | 0.69 |
| 4. Support only students that the principal teacher has assigned | 20 | 22 | 18 | 8 | 1 | 3.75 | 1.04 |
| 5. Giving students advice about work | 30 | 24 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 4.16 | 0.91 |
| 6. Evaluate student behavior both in and outside the classroom | 19 | 18 | 13 | 8 | 11 | 3.38 | 1.40 |
| 7. Watch over students at the playground | 50 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 10 | 4.07 | 1.56 |
| 8. Give first-aid support or send the injured to the health care unit | 16 | 13 | 17 | 12 | 11 | 3.16 | 1.38 |

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | Mean | S.D. |
|---|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|------|------|
| 9. Solve problems about student behaviour | 21 | 12 | 24 | 7 | 5 | 3.54 | 1.22 |
| 10. Treat students with great care | 57 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 4.70 | 0.75 |
| 11. Motivate and inspire students | 46 | 13 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 4.48 | 0.84 |
| 12. Watch over students when students move from one classroom to the next | 21 | 10 | 10 | 15 | 13 | 3.16 | 1.52 |
| 13. Walk students to their cars | 10 | 6 | 10 | 17 | 26 | 2.38 | 1.43 |
| 14. Take care of students' hygiene | 22 | 12 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 3.26 | 1.52 |

The instructional assistants in the study believed that their major roles in supporting students are Item 10: Treat students with great care (Mean=4.70, S.D.=0.75) to be followed by Item 3: Support all students (Mean=4.57, S.D.=0.69) and Item 11: Motivate and inspiring students (Mean=4.48, S.D.=0.84) but instructional assistants rarely do these: Item 13: Walk students to their cars (Mean=2.38, S.D.=1.43), Item 12: Watch over them as they change classrooms (Mean=3.16, S.D.=1.52) and Item 8: Give first aid support or send the injured to the health care unit (Mean=3.16, S.D.=1.38). To sum up. The instructional assistants see themselves as a mechanism for taking great care of students and for raising students' academic potential.

Table 3: Roles of the Instructional Assistants in Supporting the Principal Teachers

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | \bar{X} | S.D. |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| 1. Prepare to teach with the principal teachers | 20 | 20 | 16 | 11 | 2 | 3.65 | 1.14 |
| 2. Prepare for the next lesson after teaching | 20 | 16 | 17 | 9 | 7 | 3.48 | 1.30 |
| 3. Prepare teaching and learning materials in advance | 53 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4.65 | 0.80 |
| 4. Collect all the used teaching and learning materials | 48 | 13 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 4.55 | 0.79 |
| 5. Organize an outing for students | 10 | 12 | 19 | 10 | 18 | 2.80 | 1.38 |
| 6. Place order for teaching and learning materials | 21 | 14 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 3.38 | 1.42 |
| 7. Substitute when the teacher is absent | 12 | 18 | 25 | 6 | 8 | 3.43 | 1.27 |
| 8. Collect all students' folders for future teachers | 22 | 12 | 17 | 12 | 6 | 3.46 | 1.33 |
| 9. Clean up and wash all the learning and teaching materials | 44 | 12 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 4.41 | 0.89 |
| 10. Decorate and keep the classroom in order | 44 | 13 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 4.39 | 0.95 |

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | \bar{X} | S.D. |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| 11. Sort all materials into groups for easy use. | 52 | 12 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 4.68 | 0.60 |
| 12. Arrange board displays of the lessons taught | 37 | 16 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 4.09 | 1.26 |
| 13. Arrange board displays of students' assignments | 36 | 10 | 15 | 5 | 3 | 4.03 | 1.19 |
| 14. Keep records of all students for their future teachers | 20 | 13 | 10 | 10 | 16 | 3.16 | 1.55 |
| 15. Ensure that students do not disrupt the teacher while teaching | 33 | 19 | 13 | 1 | 3 | 4.13 | 1.05 |
| 16. Keep students with problematic behavior under control | 29 | 13 | 23 | 0 | 4 | 3.91 | 1.13 |
| 17. Watch out for difficult students who cannot work with others. | 28 | 13 | 22 | 2 | 4 | 3.86 | 1.16 |

What the instructional assistants did the most were Item 11: Sort all the materials in groups for easy use (Mean=4.68, S.D.=0.60), followed by Item 3: Prepare all the used teaching and learning materials in advance (Mean=4.65, S.D.=0.80) and Item 4: Collect all the teaching and learning materials (Mean=4.55, S.D.=0.79). What most instructional assistants did least were Item 5: Organize an outing for students (Mean=2.80 S.D.=1.38), Item 14: Keep records of all students for their future teachers (Mean=3.16 S.D.=1.55) and Item 6: Place order for teaching and learning materials (Mean=3.38 S.D.=1.42). The findings reveal that the principal teachers do need the support of instructional assistants as they take care of material preparation and arrangement so that it is easy to pick them up for class teaching and the materials will be sorted and put back to their proper places. That means the teachers can spend all their time in teaching the class.

Table 4: Roles of Instructional Assistants in Supporting the School

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | \bar{X} | S.D. |
|---|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| 1. Able to apply regulations and policies appropriately | 40 | 23 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 4.49 | 0.65 |
| 2. Ensure safety of the students | 48 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.70 | 0.46 |
| 3. Keep students' profiles confidential | 56 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4.80 | 0.44 |
| 4. Be a good role model for students | 50 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 4.59 | 0.71 |
| 5. Keep a good image and reputation of the school | 49 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.71 | 0.45 |
| 6. Attend school meetings | 44 | 18 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4.54 | 0.67 |

| Issues | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | \bar{X} | S.D. |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| 7. Attend workshops or raining programs organized by the school | 42 | 18 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 4.46 | 0.75 |
| 8. Help and take good care of students both in and outside school time | 38 | 14 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 4.19 | 1.08 |
| 9. Keep school properties in good conditions | 55 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4.77 | 0.49 |
| 10. Attend to Self-development | 41 | 22 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4.41 | 0.95 |

The findings showed that keeping confidentiality of students' profiles was the most important requirement: Item 3 (Mean=4.80 ,S.D.=0.44) to be followed by keeping school properties in good conditions: Item 9 (Mean=4.77 ,S.D.=0.49) and keeping a good image of the school: Item 5 (Mean=4.71,S.D.=0.45). To support the school, the instructional assistants believe that their duties are to protect the school image, reputation as well as properties and the students of the schools.

6.2 Characteristics of instructional assistants are presented in 3 aspects: the personality, the work skill and the knowledge aspects to reveal what the teachers are expected to be like in terms of personality and quality.

Table 5: The Personality Aspect of Instructional Assistants

| Issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | % |
|---|----|----|----|---|----|--------------|
| 1. Enthusiastic | 26 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 18.74 |
| 2. Observant | 0 | 26 | 26 | 2 | 5 | 5.66 |
| 3. Having a good memory | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 26 | 1.53 |
| 4. Witty | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 3.38 |
| 5. Having Problem-solving skills | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 7.84 |
| 6. Enjoy working with children | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 9.04 |
| 7. With a good heart | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 3.92 |
| 8. Love children | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 5.45 |
| 9. Kind | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 4.03 |
| 10. Generous | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 2.18 |
| 11. Open to others' ideas | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 5.66 |
| 12. Fast learner | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 5.34 |
| 13. Good Attitude | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 7.30 |
| 14. Fair and just | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 2.61 |
| 15. Adapt oneself fast to colleagues and organization | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 8.06 |
| 16. Punctual | 0 | 20 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 4.79 |
| 17. Always smiling | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 4.47 |

For instructional assistants in the study, the most important characteristics in their beliefs are work enthusiasm: Item 1-Enthusiastic (18.74%) to be followed by Item 6: Enjoy working with children (9.04%) and Item 15: Adapt oneself fast to colleagues and workplace (8.06%) but the least important characteristics were Item 3: Having a good memory (1.53%), Item 10: Generous (2.18%) and Item 14: Fair and Just (2.61%). This shows that to work as an instructional assistant, one needs to have great work enthusiasm, enjoy working with children and adapt oneself easily to colleagues and the workplace. In other words, the most important qualities are to be ready to work with others and enjoy the work.

Table 6: The Workplace Skill Aspect of Instructional Assistants

| Issues | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|
| 1. Fluent in the four English skills | 77.05 | 22.95 |
| 2. Working in teams | 93.44 | 6.56 |
| 3. ICT Skill at a high level | 65.57 | 34.43 |
| 4. Individualized work | 81.97 | 18.03 |

The findings reveal that the instructional assistants should work well in teams: Item 2 (93.44%) followed by the ability in individualized work: Item 4 (81.97%) and fluent in the four English skills: Item 1 (77.05%) and ICT Skill at a high level: Item 3 (65.57%). At school, the most important factor is the ability to work in teams. This is very true for such a context where there are several parties working together.

Table 7: The Aspect of Knowledge of Instructional Assistants

| Issues | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|---|---------|--------|
| 1. Teaching Techniques for easy understanding | 93.44 | 6.56 |
| 2. Keep oneself updated | 86.89 | 13.11 |
| 3. Exchange knowledge and sharing | 78.69 | 21.31 |

In the aspect of knowledge, the teaching techniques knowhow: Item 1 is the most important (93.44%) to be followed by Item 2: Keep oneself updated (86.89%) and Item 3: Exchange knowledge and sharing (78.69%). This means instructional assistants must also know how to teach and although they are not the principal teachers, they are expected to teach. By this, “teaching” does not mean to tell or to give information but to know how to raise the potential of students in their care.

Additional comments show that instructional assistants prefer to work in teams from the open-ended question. The responses from the questionnaire respondents show a similar idea about the significance of teamwork skills.

- Teamwork is very important – I’m keen to be a team player and encourage my team-mates to be updated with our work responsibilities.

- Do it once, do it right. Work always take times.

6.3 Like people in other jobs or careers, instructional assistants need to be trained so that they can do the work at the best of their ability. From the questionnaires and the interviews, the following information was obtained.

Table 8: The Aspects of Professional Development Needs

| Issues | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|--|---------|--------|
| 1. Updated knowledge on ICT | 86.89 | 13.11 |
| 2. Teaching techniques such as special education need students, slow learners or gifted students | 78.69 | 21.31 |
| 3. Additional knowledge such as maths and science | 72.13 | 27.87 |
| 4. Additional knowledge and skill in team teaching techniques | 40.98 | 59.02 |
| 5. Support for further education | 50.82 | 49.18 |
| 6. Training in first-aid support | 49.18 | 50.82 |
| 7. Training programs, workshops and study visits in other places | 55.74 | 44.26 |
| 8. Development of working English skills | 49.18 | 50.82 |

For professional development needs, teachers need to keep themselves always updated with ICT skill: Item 1(86.89%) followed by teaching techniques in core subjects teaching special education needs students, gifted learners and slow learners (78.69%) as well as knowledge of the core subjects (72.13%) and knowledge of team working (40.98%) first aid and preliminary care, using English in the workplace(49.18%), and support for further studies (50.82%).

Additional List of Professional Development Needs from Open-ended Questions

- Understanding and organizational leadership
- General teaching techniques to stimulate the willingness to learn in maths and English
- Skill in integrated content
- Application of knowledge in various situations
- Games for learning and how to design teaching materials
- Understand diverse cultures to understand students
- Other languages to communicate with International Students
- Foreign languages in order to make Int'l students more at ease and comfortable because being at a school in a foreign country may be a cultural shock
- Better payments can be a positive drive for hard work on their part.
- Workshops or training programs on children behavior to understand difficult students in class and ways to support them
- English at the work place

- Training for foreign teachers to understand the diversity of culture (among Thai) and not stereotyping. Talk clearly rather than assuming and to give respect and not make subordinate feel like they are being checked all the time
- Be alert and well-prepared

The Analysis of the Interviews from three groups of key informants revealed that the three groups share both similar and different ideas in responding to the research questions.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Similarities | 1.The roles of instructional assistants: inside classroom 2.The characteristics of instructional assistants: Knowledge and personalities 3.The development of instructional assistants: Teacher, knowledge and solving problems with behavior of students 4.The obstacles in working together: The different cultures and the working styles. |
| Differences | 1.The expectation of instructional assistants 2.The criteria in employing instructional assistants 3.Working together 4.The roles of instructional assistants |

7. Conclusion and Discussion

The discussion will be based on the research questions and the data collected from the questionnaires and interviews.

1) What are the roles of instructional assistants in Thailand?

Responses to the two instruments-- the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview revealed the same findings in that the most important role of instructional assistants is to support the teacher inside the classroom although they are expected to help outside the classroom. Outside the classroom duties include monitoring progress, preparing materials before school, working after school, , plan the lessons plans with teachers but with flexibility allowed, observe students' behavior to improve the teaching plan, follow the plan, prepare the activities, prepare the displays, read books to students, check homework, coordinate with the parents, check the assignments, record the score and monitor progress These results are affirmed by the other studies (Williems and Williems (2001), Groom and Rose (2005), The School Run (2019).

2) What are the characteristics of instructional assistants?

Studies into the characteristics of instructional assistants are scarcely available. Responses from all the key informants support various studies in the area of qualified teachers for students. These studies point out that society expect that the teacher must have sufficient knowledge for the teachers but personality and behavior play a more important role. They need to have both faith in their teaching career, believing that their major duty is to support students by grooming them into virtuous citizens with a deep sense of ethics and morality also. This is in line with UBC Okanagan (2011) which explained that instructional assistants must be able to explain the lessons clearly with an emphasis on organization and pacing. They must be enthusiastic in their teaching as well as develop a good rapport and

give good advice to students. Studies about the qualities of qualified teachers show similar findings. In a study by Chayanuvat and Limsakul (2019), values and characteristics of teachers are most important. The teacher must help and support their students to develop to full potential. In addition, the teachers must have faith in what they are doing as the most important job of teaching is to protect or nurture them (Phanich, 2016; Savekkarn, 2019; Phromkarn, 2019; Ckalakbang; 2016; Scrivener, 2005; SERC, 2016).

3) What are the professional needs of instructional assistants?

Data from the questionnaires showed that the professional needs of instructional assistants are to gain more knowledge about ICT and always be lifelong learners. They stated that they wanted to know more about teaching children techniques such as children with special needs, gifted learners and slow learners besides more knowledge of the main subjects to help children like mathematics, science and English.

Instructional assistants would like to be trained in various fields with an emphasis on the use of appropriate teaching techniques, integration of multiple subjects together, learning through games, learning foreign languages other than English and raise an awareness of the significance of ethics and morality. Data from the interview showed that the potential development of the instructional assistants should focus on three areas: 1) teacher skills: teaching techniques and psychology, 2) the necessary skills: the knowledge of English and technology, and 3) the skills to deal with behavioral problems in children.

4) What should be the framework for the development of professional effectiveness of instructional assistants in an American international school in Thailand?

The questionnaires and interviews of all key informants showed that instructional assistants must have outstanding knowledge skills, teacher skills and the skills to deal with children's behavior. If an instructional assistant has been developed as such, the school will benefit from having qualified personnel. This was reflected by McConkey and Abbott (2011, pp. 1419-1424) in their research on the needs of instructional assistants who care for children with special needs. The interviewed data were collected 3 times. It was found that although the instructional assistants have qualifications and experiences in education, they may not be able to carry out the assignments, so instructional assistants need to be trained to understand special children, such as children with ADHD, Autism, and etc. Secondly, they need to be trained to deal with the children's behavior and help them learn. The third is to care for the wellbeing of children in general. The training courses should be organized outside the school Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree, and Budiyanto (2017, pp. 291-296) conducted a comparative study of instructors in Thailand and Indonesia in the inclusive classrooms, they found themselves without special knowledge or techniques to help these children. Both teachers in Thailand and Indonesia should receive ongoing support and training to work and meet the needs of children. The policy must be clear about teaching children with special needs. Teachers and instructional assistants should receive training on teaching techniques. The policy of education for all (Education for All) must be taken up seriously.

8. Limitations of the Studies

This research aimed to study the roles, the characteristics and the professional needs of instructional assistants in an American international school in Nonthaburi only. The findings of this research cannot be generalized to other contexts. It cannot be concluded that instructional assistants in other contexts will have the same roles, characteristics and professional needs revealed by the study. However, the data is rich enough for the research site in this study to make full use of the findings in the development of their instructional assistants and in the design of their career paths.

9. Recommendations for Further Studies

For future studies, other types of international schools such as ones using British curriculum or Singapore curriculum can be studied for better understanding of the roles, characteristics and professional development needs of instructional assistants. In addition, schools not located in Bangkok or its suburban areas can also be valuable research sites. The findings from these studies can be compiled to fill in the gap in the literature about instructional assistants.

10. Conclusion

Recommendations for research consumers are 1) An awareness that instructional assistants are doing an important job although they may be seen as supporters of the principal teachers. Indirectly, they help support special education needs students and other students to grow to their full potential. They are closer to the students than the principal teachers 2) It is the greatest benefit for the school if instructional assistants are trained and developed professionally based on what they need.

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