NARRATIVES OF LEARNER-CENTRED EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY:

A CASE OF THAI UNIVERSITY TEACHERS TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)

Aunyarat Tandamrong, 
Monash University, Australia

Abstract

‘Learner-centred education’ (LCE) is often referred to as one of the most popular approaches, particularly in foreign language teaching since these approaches not only provide student engagement activities, but also promote learner autonomy. LCE is also known as a travelling policy because it has been introduced across the world. Nonetheless, this westernize constructed idea has been contested in many countries, particularly in the east. For example, in Thailand, although LCE has been mandated for all educational sectors since 1999, several studies have found that many Thai teachers were less confident in implementing the concept. This qualitative case study presents three narrative accounts of Thai EFL university teachers’ beliefs about LCE and perceptions of their professional identity from three different universities. The study involved interviews and classroom observations. The qualitative data included critical narratives of teachers’ experiences and critical incident analysis. The findings demonstrate that ‘learner-centredness’ is understood differently by the three teachers as well as perceptions of their identities. Yet, these two perceptions are related within an EFL teaching career, which I present the data into three categories: 1) a role model of English language user; 2) a creator of students’ positive attitudes towards English; and 3) a second parent.

Keywords: Learner-centred Education; EFL teachers; Professional Identity; Narratives

Introduction

Learner-centred education (LCE) has been one of the most popular pedagogical practices chosen by many teachers around the world. LCE not only advocates a student-oriented teaching and learning environment, but also fosters learners’ experiential learning where learners can effectively acquire new knowledge (or even a target language) from authentic learning materials as well as collaborative learning environments. Nevertheless, LCE in reality has not been succeeded as many teacher educators thought it would be, particularly in Thailand where LCE mandated in all classrooms regardless of teachers’ level of understandings of LCE (Phairee, Sanitchon, Suphanangthong, Graham, Prompruang, Groot and Hopkin, 2008). In fact, several problems and critiques have emerged as results of LCE implementation, particularly in the East. Not only English language is perceived as a language
Narratives of learner-centred education: Thai EFL teachers

Author Name: Aunyarat Tandamrong
Contact Email: aunyarat.tandamrong@monash.edu

barrier for the East, but LCE emerged from the westernized cultural aspects and theories is also regarded as one of the potentially obstacles in relation to cultural translation issues. For example, a developing country like Thailand, despite the fact that English has been spoken and taught in Thailand for more than 100 years, several empirical studies have revealed critiques of English teaching in schools and universities (see Forman, 2005; Pattapong, 2010; Phairee et al., 2008). Under the discourses of LCE, a number of studies have investigated the relationship between teachers and learners in past decades. Some studies explore teachers’ beliefs and the implementation of the learner-centred curriculum and pedagogies, while other studies critique factors that point to ‘mis-implementation’ of learner-centred pedagogies.

Interestingly, most of the studies listed in relation to these ‘findings’ have been based on similar data collection methods – ‘pencil and paper’ questionnaires – and there is little nuanced, qualitative research that explores beyond the most ‘common sense’ explanations, for instance, of teachers’ lack of knowledge of LCE and their ‘unwillingness’ to learn new ideas. What is needed is a richer and more complex picture of the teaching and learning landscape if feasible recommendations are to be made that might help to solve the problems. My study addresses this gap in the existing literature by collecting data based on in-depth interviews with teachers along with multiple classroom observations. This paper not only identifies the different groups of Thai EFL university teachers’ current attitudes to LCE who represent different teaching contexts across the country, but their current attitudes also reveal factors that mediate their beliefs towards the levels of LCE implementation in their day-to-day teaching practices.

The first aim of this present study is to inquire into the ways in which eleven Thai EFL teachers understand what ‘learner-centredness’ is, by focusing in particular on teachers’ stories of their classroom teaching and beliefs. The second aim is to investigate, using narrative inquiry methods and semi-structured interviews (pre-and post-observation interviews), how these perceptions impact on their classroom practices. The study also explores factors contributing to the development of teachers’ professional identity and their sense of ‘self’ in teaching roles (EFL teachers) as well as ‘EFL
learners’. With a hope to develop a richer understanding of Thai EFL teachers and to help improve teacher education practices, this study provides great insights into teachers’ capacity and willingness to critically and meaningfully engage with LCE pedagogies.

**Literature review: Critiques of LCE Implementation**

Before the turn of the century, Nunan (1999) pointed out that the concept of ‘learner-centred education’ was open to ‘multiple interpretations’ (p. 10), and that even at a theoretical level the concepts of LCE had different meanings for different people. This situation has only become more complex in the intervening years. In the realm of LCE and the literature related to LCE implemented in Asian countries, four critiques have been identified. These include: 1) a gap between theory and practice in implementing LCE theory (e.g. the high level of freedom expected to be given to learners can sometimes not suit learners’ individual needs, interests, and skills); 2) teachers’ negative perceptions toward the LCE; 3) difficulties in implementing LCE associated with diverse learners’ characteristics; and 4) mismatches between teachers’ and students’ opinions on what is important for teaching and learning English (see, Phan, 2014; Schweisfurth, 2013). In addition, several studies have been conducted in Eastern settings that identify and expand these problems (Cheng, 2004; Dang, 2006; Pham & Renshaw, 2013; Schweisfurth, 2011). In Asian countries like Thailand and China, the concept of LCE has been talked about more than twenty years, and yet it is still problematic for most teachers to implement and most classrooms remain unaffected by government policies that mandate it (see, Clarke, 2010; Phungphol, 2005; Thamraksa, 2003).

When it comes to the practicality of applying LCE theories in the teaching of English as a foreign language, teachers across the world have often found it very challenging to create curriculum and to plan lessons. This is partly explained by the fact that many EFL teachers have relied in their teaching on textbooks, most of which have been written by English language teachers or native speakers who themselves have not been educated about LCE. That is to say, most existing curriculum materials and textbooks are not informed by LCE theories, at the same time teachers are not used to thinking for themselves, and so they are less likely to explore new ideas that are not supported by a textbook. This
Conventional approach has been premised on the assumption that one can treat all learners as basically similar, and so the teachers’ pedagogy can be mainly ‘one-size-fits-all’. LCE makes it clear that one should not assume this. In fact, LCE teaching pedagogy suggests that language learners are very different in terms of cultural backgrounds and experiences (e.g. differences between Western styles of teaching to Eastern, see Clarke, 2010), and they bring different levels of knowledge of the target language. LCE theory says that one must respond to these differences in ways that respect these differences. Teachers who are not used to approaching their teaching in this way, and have not engaged in sustained professional learning that will help them to develop new approaches to their teaching, are not likely to quickly or easily implement LCE ideas. Some students, too, are not used to being asked for their views and opinions, and they are not used to making choices in their learning. As Nunan (1999) states, it is nearly impossible for learners who are not used to think independently to make informed choices of what they want to learn in class. Several studies conducted in Asian contexts, for example, Cheewakaroon (2011), Phungphol (2005), and Thamraksa (2003) in Thailand; and Dang (2006) and Phan (2014) in Vietnam show that the implementation of LCE is not as straightforward as the policy makers hoped it would be.

One of the main reasons why I chose teachers’ beliefs as an important dimension of my inquiry is because the literature across the world suggests that teachers seem to know classrooms better than other stakeholders like policy makers (e.g. Barcelos, 2000; Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2000; Dang, 2006; Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006; Mtika & Gates, 2010). We perhaps can claim that when teachers strongly believe in the underlying concepts of LCE, then they would tend to promote LCE strategies in staffrooms and classrooms. In order to investigate teachers’ roles, identities, professional learning, and factors contributing to certain beliefs and actions, I chose Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) ideas of a ‘pedagogic device’, particularly, his notion of ‘the field of reproduction’ that explores the reality (or current situation) of teachers’ implementation of educational policies prescribed by policy makers, and in this case, the mandated LCE policy of 1999 and the teaching of EFL in Thai universities. At the same time, Gee (2000, 2001)’s ideas of teachers’ multiple identities also helped me to explore Thai teachers’ perceptions of their EFL teaching roles.
Methodology

This case study inquires into the ways in which Thai EFL teachers have been exposed to learner-centredness from their earliest childhood memories; this is aimed to provide a better understand the relationship of their present beliefs and past experiences to their professional learning and development in their careers and current practices. I employed a constructivist research paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) to explore teachers’ individual construction of knowledge, the meanings they construct from these experiences and beliefs, and their interactions with various professional and social settings.

In this qualitative study, I chose narrative-based inquiry as a research tool to access and make sense of teachers’ life stories (individuals’ life experiences/biographies) (Atkinson, 2007; Denzin, 1989), teachers’ voice and teacher identity (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Gandana & Parr, 2013), and teaching and learning experiences (Schaafsma, 2011). In this data gathering, I followed Clandinin and Connelly’s ideas on narrative inquiry that it is “a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative inquiry (NI) has been widely used since 1990 (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) and has come to be understood as involving processes of storying and re-storying individuals’ experiences in multidimensional ways (Leavy, 2009). In my study, this storying and re-storying will particularly focus on teachers’ reflection, knowledge, and empowerment to speak about their daily lives and educational experiences as educators and learners (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

By implementing narrative-based approach to inquiry, it helped me to generate insights into teachers who, as learners in schools, experienced learner-centred education, until a point when they became teachers who were/are expected to apply this concept in their teaching. I was particularly interested to see whether and perhaps how they are still learning about how to teach with LCE.

Creating conversations
Many scholars (e.g. Atkinson, 2007; Bell, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cortazzi, 1993; Creswell, 2005) believe that narrative inquiry practices in generating data often help researchers to create a close bond with participants as in a form of trust, familiarity, and collaboration. Additionally, when the form of inquiry happens, participants are more likely to share their micro-analytic pictures or individual stories with researchers (Mishler, 1986).

In this study, I employed similar approaches and applied the ‘contextualised approach’ (Barcelos, 2000), narrative-based interviews with teachers (see Manara, 2012; Parr, 2010), and ‘critical narrative accounts’ (see Cortazzi, 1993; Webster & Mertova, 2007). At the same time, I also seek to better understand the sociological, cultural and institutional context of teachers’ stories (Doecke & Parr, 2009; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Yandell, 2014). Particularly, I adapted a combination of multiple sources of data collection (e.g. narrative interviews/conversations (Schaafsma, 2011), structured-classroom observations (Best & Kahn, 1986), and diaries/documents (Creswell, 2005). In order to contribute to a multifaceted account of these teachers’ professional practice as well as individuals’ dialogue with a range of voices expressed by the teachers, my data were gathered not only from teachers’ interview responses, but also artefacts, especially my reflective notes from class observations that were strongly underpinned by ‘a reflexive dimension’ (Etherington, 2004; Parr, Doecke, & Bulfin, 2015). Over a period of four months of data collection (January to April, 2015), I conducted two semi-structured interviews – pre-observation interviews (approximately 30 minutes) and post-observation interviews (1 hour)– with 11 participants from four different universities in different geographic regions of Thailand, who all agreed to be recorded. During the data gathering, I also explored topics of teachers’ individuals’ opinions on factors contributing to their levels of LCE implementation, and also perceptions of their students.

This study have taken the view that the data analysis and interpretation I engaged in are processes of ‘making senses of teachers’ stories and experiences’ (Mishler, 1986). Kim (2006) mentions that narrative analysis is a process where the researchers generate themes from accounts of lived experiences. Likewise, Webster and Mertova (2007) state that “narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty but is concerned with the research being well-grounded and supportable by
data that has been collected” (p. 90).

**Presenting Data: some examples of teachers’ narratives**

My approaches are to construct critical narrative accounts of teachers’ experiences, and occasionally present excerpts of my conversations with participant teachers through analysis of critical incidents. By closely looking at the interview transcripts and my notes, the data indicated that the 11 Thai EFL teachers’ beliefs and levels of understanding of LCE can be divided into three different categories, which I referred to as: (1) ‘On the margins of LCE’; (2) ‘Toward richer understandings of LCE’; and (3) ‘LCE taught by engaged professionals’. These three categories represent three broad groupings of teachers’ understandings of LCE and their classroom practices. During my interviews with the teachers, many of them claimed that they did not have a good understanding of LCE, they often commented that they have never had a sufficient support in terms of educating about theories underpinning LCE. Examples of teachers’ narratives from the three categories are represented below:

I am not sure when was the first time that I heard about LCE, but I am sure that it is always presented in Thai media like TV, newspaper, and educational documents. I remember that everybody used to talk about it all the time, like Thai policy makers, teachers and university lecturers. Basically everybody talks about it. (Artitaya, Pre-observation interview, 28/01/2015, my translation)

The first time that I have heard the word LCE is from public domain, like everyone talks about it… just like public speaking. However, I like to become master at something and I always want to learn more about this Westernised idea, so I try to get access to all international journal articles and read all available textbooks everyday. (Kittikorn, Pre-observation interview, 13/02/2015, my translation)

I am not sure how much I know about LCE, but I have been hearing about the concept since I was a student. I think LCE goes by word of mouth which can be either good or bad notions… The best way for me to learn about LCE is through a self-study which has allowed me to understand something in details. For example, I would like to read articles and I talk to people so that help me get a wider information. (Kanjana, Post-classroom observation interview, 24/03/15, my translation)
The examples above represented the three categories of teachers respectively. While the first teacher, Artitaya did not express her further comment beyond LCE spread by word of mouth, the other two teachers (Kittkorn and Kanjana), who represented the second and third categories of teachers respectively, appeared to developed better understandings of LCE such as through their self-study or independent learning. However, the most significant notion of LCE commented by all three teachers are their first exposure of LCE through public spaces.

At the same time, I also recorded my reflections as a researcher and an outsider, who walked into the classrooms. My notes also helped me to reflect my current thoughts of the classrooms I observed and reflections of factors contributing to teachers’ LCE implementations. An example of my daily reflection is:

A minute after Kittkorn (pseudonym), walked into the classroom, he prompted all of the 20 students in the classroom to chorus a ritual greeting in English: ‘Good morning teacher. How are you?’ Kittkorn replied promptly, ‘I’m fine. Thank you. And you?’ All students in turn responded, ‘I’m fine. Thank you’. When I heard this small English talk between the teacher and his students, I was reminded of the time when I was an EFL learner in school in Thailand. (my dairy on 25/03/2015)

From my reflection notes, it not only helped me to capture a classroom teacher’s practices, but also record factors such as a number of students that prevent or support teacher’s willingness to apply LCE elements, and in this case, a teacher’s practice was a mimicking native-like conversation.

My preliminary findings suggest that the first category of teachers appeared least developed their understanding of LCE; whereas the other two categories of teachers appeared to have a higher level of LCE understanding. Particularly, the first category of teachers appeared to be reluctant to express their opinions about LCE and some teachers did not even make a further conversation beyond a comment of LCE as ‘public speaking’, which I later referred to this idea as ‘a commonly invoked concept in the public domain’. At the same time, the other teachers from the last two categories acknowledged of the fact that LCE emerged from the Western concepts is currently ‘working in progress’ and adjusting
itself to fit into all Thai classrooms. Furthermore, the teachers from the last category claimed that their real understanding of LCE, indeed, have developed and deeply grounded in their everyday classroom practices rather than acquiring knowledge from the West. Therefore, the teachers’ conceptions of LCE knowledge were intensively varied and divided into three types according to the three categories of teachers.

To be more precise, the first category of teachers appeared to develop a lowest level of their conceptions of LCE knowledge as ‘teachers’ common sense’ where they can easily acquire LCE and use it in their classrooms regardless of their real understanding. In contrast, the second category of teachers believed that LCE knowledge is often required a particular practice from teachers such as an ability to translate the western ideologies to fit into a certain context of Thai classrooms to what they called as ‘half-and-half cultural hybrid LCE practice’ or ‘half teacher-centred and half learner-centred’. At the same time, the third category of teachers strongly believed that the best LCE practices in Thailand in fact are embedded within their own everyday practice, and also mediated by Thai culture and history.

Data Analysis

It is necessary to mention that during multiple conversations that I had with the individual teachers, there was a common story told by all teachers about their first exposure to LCE through what they referred to as ‘public speaking’ or ‘public knowledge’. Their reference of ‘public speaking’ might give an unusual meaning or an awkward sense in a direct translation from Thai to English since the Thai phrase ‘public speaking’ does not have an equivalent expression that can be translated directly to English. In a similar discourse, the Thai phrase of ‘public speaking’ can also refer to other alternatives English phrases such as ‘a common knowledge’, ‘a widely recognised idea’, and ‘broadly and shared knowledge’. However, I kept the original word, ‘public speaking’, because this direct Thai expression strongly represented a common story told by all teachers. Particularly, when all teachers referred to how they had heard about the concept using phrases like ‘everybody talks in public domains’ such as in media, universities, official documents and teacher educators. At this point, I define ‘public
speaking’ as discourses or ideas that have been spoken by everyone in Thai society, but it does not necessarily mean that Thai people know about the concept in any depth. In this case, I refer to the knowledge of LCE as teachers’ comprehensive understanding of underlying ideologies and theories of LCE and its application such as student-oriented teaching and learning activities and a learner autonomy.

To answer to the central points of my inquiry, teachers’ levels of understanding of LCE and how LCE is conceptualised and become their knowledge and beliefs, especially an individual perception or a conception of LCE knowledge which corresponding to each category of teacher are summarised in a table below.

Table 1: A summary of teachers’ levels of understanding of LCE and their conceptions of LCE knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of teacher</th>
<th>Levels of Understanding</th>
<th>Conceptions of LCE knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the margins of LCE</td>
<td>LCE as a commonly invoked concept in the public domain</td>
<td>Knowledge as either innate or easily acquired –‘common sense’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards richer understandings of LCE</td>
<td>LCE as ‘work in progress’, in transition</td>
<td>Knowledge as ‘translated’ from western concepts –resulting in ‘half and half’ cultural hybrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCE taught by engaged professionals</td>
<td>LCE as deeply grounded, situated in teacher’s practice</td>
<td>Knowledge embedded within practice, mediated by culture, context and history</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table above, it is worth pointing out that in each category of teacher, there was no clear boundary between their levels of understanding and conceptions of LCE. Rather than being restricted to a certain type, my data showed that the ways in which teachers perceive LCE are flexible and
dynamic. To some extent, the evidence from teachers’ interview responses and their classroom practices have separated them into three categories as mentioned above. In addition, the stories told by teachers frequently threw up two notions: problems and factors of LCE. All eleven teachers repeatedly reverted back to ‘problems and factors’ that prevented them from comprehending and applying LCE in their individual classrooms in the way they would have liked to. Upon looking closely at these two words (problems and factors), I further categorised them into three sub-categories: (1) student-related factors (such as students’ English proficiency level, students’ certain behaviours, and students’ negative attitudes toward English); (2) teacher-related factors (such as teachers’ lack of real understanding of the LCE, and teachers’ workload); and (3) other external factors (such as the Thai educational system, and various institutional and cultural factors). Therefore, the relationship between teachers’ understandings of LCE and their conceptions of LCE which influenced by mediating factors can be summarised in a diagram below:
Narratives of learner-centred education: Thai EFL teachers

Author Name: Aunyarat Tandamrong
Contact Email: aunyarat.tandamrong@monash.edu

Diagram 1: A summary of the relationships: teachers’ understanding of LCE and mediating factors

Field of Reproduction
The national education act of 1999
(learner-centred education)

On the margins of LCE
LCE as a commonly invoked concept in the public domain

Towards richer understandings of LCE
LCE as ‘work in progress’, in transition

LCE taught by engaged professionals
LCE as deeply grounded, situated in teacher’s practice

Mediating factors

Student-related factors:
- student’s low English language proficiency
- student’s different background knowledge
- student’s certain attitudes towards English
- student’s certain characteristics:
  - a lack of their own responsibility, a lack of confidence, a lack of enthusiasm in learning,
  - a use of social media in classrooms, a collectivist culture of learning, unmotivated,
  - a lack of a determination
- a lack of exposure of English outside the classroom
- a lack of confidence in English proficiency

Teacher-related factors:
- teacher’s workload
- an inadequate understanding of LCE (knowledge of LCE)
- teacher’s level of LCE implementation
- teacher’s certain attitude towards students
- an overreliance on textbooks
- a less confidence in a practicality of LCE
- a slow-life society among teacher

Other-related factors:
- Thai education system e.g. a grading system that heavily relies on a factual test (grammatical structures) rather than communication skills
- Institutional factors: a large number of students in classrooms, a prescribed subject guide, classroom arrangement (e.g. a arrangement of student desk) and insufficient support to teachers (e.g. for professional development, incentives for career and continuing learning, further supports for in-service teachers)
- Cultural factors: a need of spoon-feeding style of learning

Teachers’ levels of understanding of LCE

AARE Conference 2016 – Melbourne, Victoria
The diagram above is developed from Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) notions of the ‘field of reproduction’. The field of reproduction, in fact, helped me to understand the complex relationships of how a set of rules that constituted in the NEA of 1999 were produced and employed by Thai teachers. Therefore, the diagram represents the complex relationships between an educational policy of learner-centred education and how it was employed by the eleven Thai EFL university teachers. From the diagram, it is apparent that there is a complex relationship between an ideal policy made by educational authorities versus a reality of the policy implementation by teachers (their practices) as well as teachers’ understanding of the policy (or teachers’ beliefs). In other words, the field of reproduction represented in this diagram revealed the fact that Thai EFL teachers did not enact the policy of LCE in the only one particular way. Instead, my data showed that the teachers’ understanding and conceptions of LCE are divided into three distinctive ways as mentioned in the table above. According to the interview responses, their every day practices of LCE were influenced and mediated by various surrounding factors which can be separated into three types: student-related, teacher-related, and other-related factors which are also illustrated in the diagram.

My findings also showed that teachers’ LCE implementation and interpretation are different among Thai university-based teachers in accordance to their individual circumstances such as certain perceptions and individual beliefs regardless of the institutions where they worked and lived. From the diagram, the jagged and curvy arrows not only represent the inconsistency relationship between the educational policy and teachers’ understanding of the policy, but also suggest contradictions, tensions and teachers’ dilemmas of the LCE interpretation into their individual classrooms. While the jagged and curvy arrows represent difficulties of LCE implementation and a lack of understanding among teachers, the normal straight arrow suggests a more comprehensive understandings and an easy implementation of LCE principles into practice, particularly for the last category. In other words, the third category of teachers showed their sophisticated understandings of LCE and were able to apply LCE principles in their own ways successfully. Regardless of the three different names labelled teachers’ levels of understanding of LCE, the three conceptions are somehow related and flexible rather than rigid and restricted to an only one type. This means that teachers’ understandings and
conceptions of LCE can change from one to another over time, which is represented by small jagged arrows that interconnected between each category of teachers.

At this stage, my study rejects the claim from some studies the past suggesting that it is nearly impossible to employ LCE principles in Thai classrooms due to different reasons; instead, my participant teachers in the third category showed that they have successfully implemented LCE policy in accordance with their classroom contexts. To sum up, the field of reproduction has helped me to understand these three insights: 1) how did Thai EFL teachers learn about LCE; 2) what are their levels of understanding of LCE; and 3) how did LCE influence their classroom practice. From the analysis above, the teachers’ levels of understanding and conception of LCE are shaped by educational policies, and a certain context where these teachers currently lived and worked, and therefore, their levels of understanding are negotiated differently.

The finding of this section suggest that regardless of how the notions of LCE have been frequently referred to as ‘a public discourse’ in media and all educational sectors, however, it does not follow that most of the Thai teacher educators have a developed understanding of the concept or that their understandings are consistent across the diverse geographic regions and institutional settings of contemporary Thailand. This is borne out in the data from my interviews with the eleven Thai university EFL teachers, together with my observations of their classroom practice in the case of classrooms in four very contrasting institutions. Furthermore, my qualitative data from multiple sources also helped to illuminate some of the explanations for this, such as variations in the opportunities that university EFL teachers had to engage in meaningful professional learning about the concept, the level of support for and resourcing of university teachers’ ongoing professional learning, teachers’ workloads and a range of physical and logistical factors. The following sections focus on teachers’ perceptions of their professional identity or multiple identities.
Teachers’ multiple identities

The literature suggests that an emergence of one’s identity often comes from one’s beliefs which consequently guiding one’s certain actions. From this assumption, the individual’s action is varied according to different circumstances and situations. According to Gee (2000), one’s identity is closely related to a surrounded environment or a wider context, these contexts may include multiple aspects of cultures, historical backgrounds, experiences and workplaces. Therefore, rather than see one’s identity being static, indeed, it is multifarious, evolving and consistently shifting. By looking at teachers’ identity, it can also be seen as multiple, adaptable and negotiable; this is because their identity is often intermingled with various aspects of their lives such as social factors, personal beliefs, professional opinions, theoretical (and practical) knowledge, work experiences, and institutional cultures and work ethics.

For teachers ‘On the margins of LCE’, the data revealed that teachers appeared to view their identity as a more rigid (restrictive) to a certain extent, particularly, they saw themselves as a ‘strict role model of English language user’, whereas the other two teacher categories perceive their identities differently. During the conversations with teachers ‘On the margins of LCE’, two out of three teachers somehow articulated their perceptions of themselves in a similar way in which they addressed the importance of the ideas that a language teacher should be a good role model for students. Particularly, the contexts where they taught, the two teachers coincidently identified themselves as ‘a perfect role model of English user’ who performs correct grammatical structures in both writing and speaking skills. For example, Anon (one of the teachers) said:

“...I see myself as a role model of English language user or a good example for my students. I mean my job is not only to teach them [students] English, but also to provide them good examples for them to follow.”
From this statement, Anon described himself as a good role model of English language user who explicitly and frequently deliver right English grammar. Likewise, the other two teachers perceived their roles as a Thai word of ‘[‘mae-pim-kong-chart’ = a ‘mould’ of the Thai Nation], which gives a direct translation to English as a ‘moulder’ or a person who moulds students to become a certain kind of person that s/he wanted. With a direct translation of the word, ‘mould’, may provide an odd meaning, but in Thai, the word ‘mould’ provides ‘the senses of being the replica of teachers’ or ‘the good copy’ of the teacher. For example, during my conversations with Artitaya, (one of the teachers), she said: “a teaching career is an act of being a mould of the Thai Nation, everyone expects us to produce a good citizen of Thailand who have good knowledge and skills”.

By contrast, the second category of teachers, ‘Towards richer understandings of LCE’ perceived their roles as a ‘creator of students’ positive attitudes towards English’. For example, one of the teachers confidently stated that she is “not a native speaker of English”, and therefore, she did not convince that the students can always look up to her as a perfect model of English language user at all time. In a general sense, the teachers in this category believed that they have multi-identities as a ‘creator’ and ‘a producer of good attitude towards English’ where students feel motivated to further acquire English in their lifelong journey.

Similarly, the third category of teacher, ‘LCE taught by engaged professionals’, they not only perceived their multi-identities as ‘a facilitator of teaching and learning’ and ‘a facilitator of cultural studies’, but they also saw themselves as ‘a second parent for students’. For instance, during the interviews with two teachers (Orapa and Titima), they addressed their perceptions of their roles in many similar ways, precisely they identified themselves to multi-roles such as ‘a second parent’, ‘a moral guide’, and ‘a person who helps a child’s (and teenagers) development’. Examples of teachers’ comments are:
Although I still believe in the idea that teachers should be a good role model for students, but being a role model for me means being a moral guide just like their parents. I think I am a model for them in terms of good morals such as be punctual and be responsible, so that my students can use the good morals in their future careers. (Orapa, Post-classroom observation interview, 28/04/15, my translation)

My job as a teacher, I also feel like I am a second parent too. I usually teach my students good morals, such as how to be good citizens who can sacrifice themselves for others and how to be a good person in the society who do not hesitate to share things. (Titima, Post-classroom observation interview, 06/04/15, my translation).

From the teachers’ narratives above, being ‘a role model’ in Orapa’s statement actually means that she saw her identities as an equivalence of being ‘a second parent’ and ‘a moral guide’ for her students. To support this claim, during my conversations with her, she often stated: “my feeling to my students is like my own children. I care about their feelings, I feel like I am responsible for their development in both intellectual and mental abilities”. Additionally, by looking closely at the teachers’ interview responses above, it seemed that the two teachers appeared to be emotionally attached to their students. Precisely, they not only referred to their students as their own children, but they also hoped that these children to become good citizens of Thailand.

Therefore, it is apparent that teachers from the last two categories appeared to believe that they have multiple identities which are more engaged with being ‘a facilitator of students’ learning’ rather than being a strict role model of a giver of content knowledge as perceived by the first category of teachers. In fact, the teachers from the last two categories viewed their identities as a person who facilitates students with an application of English language in aspects of good morals, culture, society, and relevant content knowledge more than just a teacher of English grammar.

Conclusion
Overall, the data suggested that teachers’ understandings of LCE intensively varied and divided into three categories. Ultimately, there is a mismatch between the prescribed LCE policy and teachers’ implementation levels, particularly in the first category of teachers which is caused by deficit constructions of what is sometimes called ‘gaps’ in teachers’ knowledge and teacher learning (more details see Vermunt, 2014; Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). However, there is some evidence suggesting that LCE is somehow suitable and feasible for Thai classrooms as seen in the last two categories of teachers. In addition, this paper showed that the teachers’ perceptions of their identities also varied and unique.

At this stage, this study not only represented the current Thai EFL teachers’ levels of understandings of LCE, but it also seeks to better understand the ways in which teachers are making sense of and enacting the LCE concepts which hope to influence the policy maker levels, particularly to listen to teachers’ voice about factors that mediated their developing understandings and practices of LCE. Lastly, I call for a pedagogical reform in EFL teaching in Thailand to take into account that it is a crucial step for all teachers to acquire substantial knowledge of LCE as well as theories underpinning before they can effectively apply LCE elements in their classrooms. Otherwise, these teachers might feel reluctant to apply LCE pedagogies due to their inadequate understanding of the concept.
References


School of Secondary & Post-Compulsory Education database.

Israsena, V. (2007). *Thai Teachers' Beliefs about Learner-Centered Education: Implications for Success for Life Thailand*. (Doctorate), University of Texas.


