ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore the soft skills acquisition of lecturers and to thus determine the importance of soft skills in the teaching profession. A mixed method was employed utilizing a questionnaire and interview protocol as research instruments. In total, eight lecturers and 163 students from four programs of an international college in Khon Kaen, Thailand were selected using a purposive sampling method. The quantitative findings indicated that teamwork and lifelong learning skills were the most important soft skills acquired by lecturers from all of four programs, except for tourism management. In addition, the qualitative findings revealed the importance aspects of soft skills acquisition are: (i) delivery of effective and quality teaching; (ii) career development and enrichment, and (iii) managing student skills. In summary, the findings contribute to and substitute for training and provide significant pronouncements towards the knowledgeable and dexterous development of the country as a total.

Introduction

Soft skills are personal traits that enhance a lecturers interactions, job performance, and career viewpoints. Pachauri and Yadav (2014) soft skills as personality traits, social gracefulness, fluency in language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism to varying degrees. Soft skills should be adopted as an ordinary feature of a lecturers selection of community skills and character traits (Tang & Tan, 2015). A good lecturer is expected to be committed to his or her work and to have the ability to take the initiative. Teaching is a multifaceted performance, demanding a wide range of knowledge and skills containing hard and soft skills to successfully accomplish the burdens of the class room (Tang, Hashim, & Mohd Yunus, 2014a). Teaching is a social activity that comprises communal collaboration between lecturer and students (Lim, Tang, & Tan, 2013).

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Teaching style can be considered as the sum of behaviors. As a result, the talent of teaching does not only comprise a modest transmission of knowledge from lecturer to students. In its place, it is a multifaceted procedure that eases and affects the process of student learning (Prasertcharoensuk & Tang, 2016). Soft skills are relational and social skills are a necessity for lecturers who toil in a high performance setting, ultimately promoting (Tang, Ching, & Mohd Shahid, 2015a).

Soft skills are considered to boost competency and to consequently upsurge ones ability in subsidizing communal progression and transformation (Duncan & Dunifon, 2012; Romedios, 2012). As stated by Salleh, Sulaiman, and Talib (2010), soft skills are the most operative instruments and methods for higher education institutions to appraise the future capabilities of lecturers and students. Therefore, recognizing and evolving the importance of soft skills acquisition has been a thoughtprovoking task for curricu lum designers (Hodges & Burchell, 2003). A cautiously designed and wellorganized education system is perilous to

the emergence of such human capital. Thus, higher educa tion institutions play a significant part in yielding human capital to meet the requests and expectations of society and the nation by producing skills for uptake by the respective students (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014).

Soft skills acquisition is often viewed as something that happens in the normal course of events and it has the po tential to transfer and to create knowledge based on the local requirements (Tang, Nethanomsak, & Ariratana, 2014b). Subramaniams (2013) study indicated that lec turers have acknowledged the associated role of the soft skills in the curriculum amalgamation, but they fail to integrate them in their instructions. Subramaniam empha sized that soft skills acquisition is relevant for students; intrinsically the lecturers should undertake more wide spread preparation and progression to successfully impart soft skills acquisition in their teaching. The understanding of soft skills itself is vital for lecturers to vary their teaching approaches for the students. As teaching becomes a two way process, it will convert to being organized and opera tive depending on the understanding, talents, and attitudes of the teachers (Adediwura & Baba, 2007).

According to Schulz (2008), lecturers play a vital part in

constructing the soft skills of a student. Intrinsically, a well versed and designed education system is desired to culti vate such human capital (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). This study addressed an urgent need to take on the contest of globalization which is heavily reliant on the capacity of a nations inhabitants to be exceedingly rational and skilled.

Literature Review

Tang, Mohd Yunus, and Hashims (2015b) study showed that the absence of excellence among lecturers is related to the idea that lecturers have not sufficiently obtained soft skills during their own learning in higher education in stitutions. In addition, the qualitative results from 15 novice teachers revealed that soft skills were identified as essen tial and pertinent to their teaching assignments and were significant to teaching tasks. These skills are communica tion, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning and management of information, ethics (moral and professional), and leadership skills.

Tang et al. (2015a) examined the association between

soft skills learned by teachers directed to their excellence in teaching. Their findings indicated that 190 teachers from three HighPerforming Primary Schools in Penang, Malaysia possessed the four soft skills namely teamwork/ collective work (X 3.42, SD .39), communication (X 3.29, SD .39), critical thinking and problemsolving (X 3.21, SD .37), and leadership skills (X 3.20, SD .45). Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis showed that all four soft skills were significantly and positively related to excellence in teaching. Finally, the result also disclosed that critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork/collective work skills are significant predictors which added 40.3 percent and 3.5 percent, respectively, to the variance of excellence and effective teaching practice. Tang et al. (2015a) concluded that soft skills should be instilled in teachers with the intention of creating excellence and effective teaching practice.

According to Tang et al. (2015b), soft skills supplement hard skills and have a substantial effect on the capability of teachers to organize their work. Their study was intended to explore the breach related to soft skills gained from instructional professional exercise compared to soft skills required in schools amongst the 250 novice teachers pur posively selected from all the secondary schools in Malaysia. Their findings showed that teamwork and communication skills were the two significant soft skills not only desper ately desired in their work but also extended from their teaching exercise package. Furthermore, ttest analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between the gained and desired level of soft skills. All the mean scores of soft skills desired in the work were greater than what they had gained from their teaching exercise package.

Tang and Tan (2015) examined the ethics, moral and

professional skill of novice teachers in secondary schools of Malaysia from the opinions of their superintendents. Their results were triangulated with the selfrating data completed by the novice teachers themselves. Tang and Tan employed a qualitative method involving focus group in terviews to gather data from 31 superintendents and a quantitative technique involving a selfrating questionnaire by the 250 novice teachers. Their quantitative findings indicated that ethics, moral and professional skill were the second leastdesired soft skills after entrepreneurship skill as stated by the 250 novice teachers. Nevertheless, their quantitative results appeared to be opposed to the quali tative findings. The 31 superintendents stated that the most desired soft skills that the majority of the novice teachers were missing was ethic, moral and professional skills.

Tang, Tan, and Vetriveilmany (2015c) investigated the

critical problems of soft skills development through teaching specialized exercise. They employed an indepth interview method to collect data from two teacher educa tors who had more than 15 years of operational practice in a public university, Malaysia. The collected data was analyzed consistent with the three main themes, namely, soft skills that need to be emphasized, or abandoned, and the critical problems. Their results revealed that the factors associated with the failure of soft skills development were large class size, academic focus, and insufficient period of exercise. Therefore, they suggested that the embedded model would be a solution to guarantee incorporation of soft skills in every course scheme.

Tan and Tang (2015) explored the levels and processes of

soft skills development through the Diploma in Business Studies (DBS) program in a private college situated in Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia from the viewpoints of two educators and six finalyear students. A mixed method was engaged. The results from the selfrated quantitative investigation and focus group interviews indicated that the DBS students were not giving adequate effort to all the vital soft skills. In addition, the results showed that teamwork skill arose steadily as the utmost appraisal soft skill aptitude, followed by information management skill. The lowest soft skill was ethics, moral, and professional skills. On the other hand, the results of qualitative methods either through in terviews or observations indicated that soft skill acquisition was channeled from both the curriculum and non curriculum aspects, mainly through entrenched events,

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curriculum, classroom communication, and campus setting. On top of that, the qualitative results from educator discussions presented that the progress of soft skill development in the college greatly hinged on the educators inventiveness and inspiration in functioning events allowing soft skill development.

Tang et al. (2015a) inspected the association concerning the soft skills attained by teachers toward their excellence teaching. They employed a quantitative method using a 76 item questionnaire to collect data from 190 teachers from three HighPerforming Primary Schools. Their findings showed those teachers possessed the four soft skills, namely, teamwork/collective work skill (X 3.42, SD .39), communication skills (X 3.29, SD .39), critical thinking and problemsolving skills (X 3.21, SD .37), and leadership skill (X 3.20, SD .45). In addition, the overall soft skills (X 3.28, SD .36) and excellence teaching (X 3.22, SD .35) were at the high level. Pearson correlation analysis showed that the soft skills attained (r .61, p < .01) and the other three soft skillsdcritical thinking and problemsolving skills (r .64, p < .01), teamwork/collective work skill (r .60, p < .01), and leadership skills (r .51, p < .01)dwere significantly and positively linked to excellence teaching. Their findings also disclosed that critical thinking and problemsolving skills, and teamwork/collective work skills are significant pre dictors contributing 40.3 percent and 3.5 percent, respec tively, to the variance in excellence teaching.

The variables in the current study comprised the soft

skills acquisition of lecturers and its importance in their teaching profession. The independent variable was soft skills encompassing communication, critical and problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning, and leadership skills which are derived from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education Model (2016). On the other hand, the impor tance of soft skills in the teaching profession was the dependent variable. Communication skill refers to the ability of lecturers to practice oral and written language efficiently in the English language. It also includes skills that allow the lecturer to obtain and relay evidence as well as to deliver opinions with simplicity and selfreliance. Lecturers are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. Critical thinking and problemsolving skills are as the capacity to distinguish and describe problems, to create and imple ment resolutions, and to see the constructions among un connected knowledge components. These skills include the capacity to discover resolutions to problems requiring the lecturers creativity, reasoning, and past experiences along with the obtainable evidence and sources. Elements that they must possess as part of this soft skill are the ability to identify and analyze complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable.

Teamwork skill means the capacity to graft and collab

orate with individuals from numerous social and cultural experiences in order to accomplish a collective objective. It subsidizes backup for others and the self in acclimatizing to modifications and forming the tasks of lecturers. In order to build a good working relationship with their peers, it is essential that they are respectful toward others attitudes, behavior, and beliefs. Likewise, lifelong learning skill refers

to the capacity to discover and achieve pertinent evidence from numerous causes thus obtaining novel impressions to achieve independent learning. It contributes the capacity to mature an inquiring mind to pursue understanding. Lead ership skill refers to the knowledge of the basic theories of leadership so that lecturers are able to lead a project at the school level. In addition, lecturers are able to comprehend and take turns as a leader and follower alternatively if they possess this skill. Finally, lecturers also have the ability to supervise members of a group.

The above wideranging research including expert opinions indicates that current research has to apply effort to regulate the precise soft skills acquired by lecturers in the tertiary education program. Based on the proposed soft skills model from the Ministry of Education in either Thailand or Malaysia, the researcher identified five soft skills to be investigated. The studied soft skills consisted of: communication, critical and problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning, and leadership skills.