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Abstract

This study examines how teacher agency is being reconceptualized within emerging educational practitioner networks in Thailand, particularly the Kor Karn Kru community of practice. Through qualitative research involving 20 participants, including in-depth interviews, field observations, and focus group discussions, the study explores how new forms of teacher agency are transforming Thai education's knowledge space. Research shows that institutional constraints and reform momentum have unexpectedly facilitated these networks' emergence. The Kor Karn Kru community challenges traditional hierarchies through critical education perspectives and networking, creating channels for bottom-up influence. Teachers are expanding their agency beyond the classroom, positioning themselves as knowledge creators, cultural workers, and change agents through contextual knowledge production, transdisciplinary approaches, and cultural capital creation. While this transformation faces resistance from established structures and policy misalignments, requiring teachers to navigate dual identities within the system, the study provides insights into cultivating teacher agency within centralized educational systems. The findings contribute to understanding educational reform and innovation in Thailand and similar contexts, highlighting teacher agency as a dynamic concept shaped by the interaction between emerging networks and established educational structures.

Introduction

As the worldwide educational environment continues to transform, the role of teachers has undergone significant transformation. This shift is particularly pronounced in Thailand, where the intersection of traditional educational paradigms characterized by hierarchical structure, standardized curriculum delivery, and teacher-centered pedagogy (Fry & Bi, 2013) and emerging pedagogical philosophies emphasizing learner autonomy, critical thinking, and contextual knowledge production (Jatuporn, 2024) has created a unique and complex environment for educational practitioners. At the heart of this transformation lies the concept of teacher agency – a phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in educational research and practice worldwide.

Teacher agency, broadly defined as the ability of educators to take deliberate and positive steps towards their own career development while also fostering the professional growth of their colleagues (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Biesta

et al., 2015), has become a critical factor in educational reform and innovation. In the Thai context, this concept takes on additional layers of complexity due to the country's distinct cultural, social, and political landscape (Nawarat et al., 2022).

Historically, the Thai educational system has been marked by a strongly consolidated organizational structure, with knowledge production and dissemination primarily controlled by state institutions (Fry & Bi, 2013). This top-down approach has long defined the role of teachers as implementers of prescribed curricula rather than as active agents of educational change (Draper, 2015; Vicars, 2017). However, recent years have witnessed the emergence of new actors in the educational sphere, challenging this traditional paradigm and redefining the boundaries of knowledge construction in education. The rise of these new actors, particularly in the form of education practitioners' communities of practice, represents a significant shift in the Thai educational landscape. These communities, exemplified by groups such as the *Kor Karn Kru*, have begun to contest the established norms of educational knowledge production and dissemination. Their emergence raises important questions about the nature of teacher agency in Thailand and its potential to reshape the country's educational paradigms (Nawarat et al., 2022).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of teacher agency globally, there is a notable gap in the previous studies regarding its conceptualization and manifestation in the specific context of Thailand. This gap is particularly significant given the unique socio-cultural and political factors that shape the Thai education system (Fry & Bi, 2013; Lao, 2015). The interplay between traditional hierarchical structures and emerging bottom-up initiatives creates a complex environment that demands careful examination. Furthermore, the ways in which these new communities of practice engage in knowledge production and dissemination remain understudied. As both creators and consumers of educational knowledge, these groups operate in a multifaceted "knowledge space" (Kincheloe, 2008) that challenges conventional understanding of how educational knowledge is generated and shared. This knowledge space, influenced by critical education perspectives and transdisciplinary approaches, represents a new frontier in Thai education that warrants in-depth exploration.

The problem this research addresses is twofold. First, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the conditions that have facilitated the emergence of new education practitioners' communities of practice in Thailand. While global trends in teacher agency have been well-documented (Li & Ruppert, 2021), the specific factors contributing to the rise of these communities in the Thai context remain unclear. Second, the processes by which these communities engage in knowledge production and dissemination, functioning as both creators and consumers of information, are not well understood (Faikhamta & Clarke, 2018). This gap in understanding hinders the potential for leveraging these new forms of teacher agency to drive meaningful educational reform in Thailand.

By addressing these problems, this research aims to reconceptualize teacher agency within the network of new actors in the knowledge space of education in Thailand. This reconceptualization is crucial for several reasons. First, it provides insights into the changing dynamics of educational knowledge production and dissemination in Thailand. Second, it offers a framework for understanding how teacher agency can be cultivated and supported within the Thai educational system. Third, it contributes to broader discussions on educational reform and

innovation in contexts where traditional and emerging paradigms intersect. Finally, it has potential implications for policy-making and teacher education programs in Thailand and similar contexts (Cornbleth, 2014; Maclellan, 2018). Through a qualitative exploration of the Kor Karn Kru community of practice, this research aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between teacher agency, knowledge production, and educational reform in Thailand. By doing so, it aims to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in education, with potential resonance beyond the Thai context to other educational systems grappling with similar challenges of tradition and transformation (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019).

Objective

This study aims to analyze and reconceptualize teacher agency within the network of new actors in the knowledge space of education in Thailand, focusing on how these actors emerge, engage in knowledge production and dissemination, and potentially transform educational paradigms.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Teacher Agency

Teacher agency is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been subject to various interpretations and definitions within the educational research community. This notion encompasses the educators' ability to operate deliberately and productively within their professional setting, shaping both their own growth and the educational landscape around them (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Priestley et al. (2015) offer a thorough definition of teacher agency, describing it as the ability of educators to take deliberate and productive actions that not only foster their own professional development but also positively influence the growth of their colleagues. This perspective emphasizes the proactive role of teachers in crafting their professional trajectories and actively contributing to the improvement of their educational contexts. It suggests that teacher agency goes beyond individual betterment, extending to a collective impact on the teaching community.

Eteläpelto et al. (2015) present a more nuanced view of teacher agency. They conceptualize it as an ongoing process through which educators exert influence, make informed choices, and adopt specific positions regarding their professional roles and occupational self-concept. This interpretation underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of agency, portraying it not as a static characteristic but as a fluid attribute that emerges from the interplay between personal capacities and environmental factors. Such a perspective recognizes the importance of context in shaping agency, acknowledging that teachers' ability to act agentially may vary across different situations and over time.

In the realm of educational reform, Pyhältö et al. (2014) argue for the critical role of teacher agency in the successful implementation of new educational policies and practices. They posit that the capacity of educators to dynamically analyze, adapt, and localize reform initiatives is fundamental to achieving meaningful and sustainable change in educational systems. This view highlights the importance of teachers as mediators between policy intentions and classroom realities, emphasizing their role in translating abstract reform ideas into concrete

pedagogical practices. The concept of teacher agency also intersects with broader discussions about teacher empowerment and educational democracy. Biesta et al. (2015) argue that teacher agency is crucial for maintaining the professional status of teaching and for ensuring that educational practices are guided by informed, context-sensitive decision-making rather than top-down mandates alone.

Teacher Agency and In-Service Professional Development

The relationship between teacher agency and in-service professional development is bidirectional and complex. On one hand, effective professional development can enhance teacher agency by equipping educators with fresh insights, skills, and opportunities for reflection and collaboration (Desimone, 2009). On the other hand, teacher agency is pivotal in determining educators' interaction with and benefit from professional development opportunities. Imants and Van der Wal (2019) argue that teacher agency is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of professional development initiatives. The research indicates that as educators are given the chance to assert autonomy in their career development - by choosing relevant topics, setting personal goals, and actively constructing knowledge – the impact of professional development is significantly enhanced. Kennedy (2016) also emphasizes the importance of job-embedded professional development that allows teachers to exercise agency within their everyday work contexts. This approach moves away from traditional, top-down models of professional development towards more collaborative and context-specific learning opportunities.

Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Teacher Agency

While research on teacher agency in the Thai context is limited, several studies have explored related concepts within the Thai educational system. Hallinger & Bryant (2013) note that the historically centralized nature of Thai education has often limited opportunities for teacher agency. However, they also observe a gradual shift towards more decentralized approaches to educational management, which may create new spaces for teacher agency to emerge. In addition, Fry & Bi (2013) discuss the challenges faced by Thai teachers in exercising agency within a system that has traditionally emphasized conformity and hierarchical structures. They argue that recent educational reforms in Thailand have created both opportunities and tensions for teachers seeking to exercise greater agency in their professional practice.

A growing body of literature explores the role of communities of practice in fostering teacher agency. Wenger (1998) conceptualizes communities of practice as collectives of individuals united by a shared interest or enthusiasm for a particular activity, who enhance their skills through consistent collaboration and exchange. In the context of education, these communities can provide powerful platforms for teachers to exercise and develop their agency. In Thailand, the emergence of groups like the Kor Karn Kru community of practice represents a significant development in the landscape of teacher agency. These groups provide alternative spaces for knowledge production and dissemination, potentially challenging traditional hierarchies and fostering new forms of teacher agency.

The relationship between teacher agency and educational reform is a key area of inquiry in the literature. Biesta

et al. (2015) argue that teacher agency is crucial for the successful implementation of educational reforms. They suggest that reforms often fail when they disregard the agency of teachers as key actors in the educational process. Tao & Gao (2017) also explore how teacher agency manifests in the context of curriculum reform in China, a context that shares some similarities with Thailand in terms of its historically centralized education system. They find that teachers exercise agency in various ways, from passive resistance to active adaptation and innovation, highlighting the complex nature of agency in reform contexts.

The literature also identifies several challenges and opportunities for the development of teacher agency. Buchanan (2015) notes that standardization and accountability measures can often constrain teacher agency, creating tensions between policy mandates and teachers' professional judgment. However, Pantić (2017) argues that these challenges can also create opportunities for teachers to develop new forms of agency. She suggests that by engaging critically with policy demands and collaboratively developing strategies to navigate these demands, teachers can enhance their collective agency.

This study, therefore, draws primarily on the conceptualization of agency as a temporally embedded process (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Their framework identifies three key dimensions: the iterative element (how past patterns inform present actions), the practical-evaluative element (how actors navigate present demands), and the projective element (how future possibilities shape current choices). Recent teacher agency profile studies (e.g., Pantić, 2017; Tao & Gao, 2017) have demonstrated how these temporal dimensions manifest in educational settings. For instance, Pantić's (2017) work reveals how teachers' past experiences with reform initiatives shape their current engagement with change, while Tao & Gao (2017) highlight how future-oriented professional identities influence present decision-making.

This theoretical framework, combining the temporal dimensions of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) with recent teacher agency profile studies, provides a robust analytical lens for examining teacher agency in the Thai context. The temporal perspective helps illuminate how teachers' past experiences, present engagements, and future aspirations shape their agency within the Kor Karn Kru community. Meanwhile, insights from teacher agency profile studies (Pantić, 2017; Tao & Gao, 2017) offer valuable analytical tools for understanding how agency manifests in specific educational contexts, particularly in centralized systems undergoing reform. This combined theoretical approach enables a nuanced analysis of how teacher agency is being reconceptualized within Thailand's evolving educational landscape, considering both individual and collective dimensions of agency, as well as the complex interplay between structure and agency in educational change. The framework particularly strengthens our ability to examine how teachers navigate between traditional constraints and emerging opportunities for professional autonomy and knowledge creation.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate teacher agency within the network of new actors in the knowledge space of education in Thailand. Concerning ethical protocols, this investigation was carried out in full compliance with established research ethics guidelines. The study design underwent scrutiny and received

authorization from Chiang Mai University's ethics committee before any data gathering commenced. The research methodology is divided into three main sections: participants and study context, data collection, and data analysis.

Participants and Study Context

The research is situated within the Thai educational landscape, focusing on the emergence and activities of the Kor Karn Kru community of practice between 2007 and 2017. This period is significant as it encompasses major educational reforms in Thailand and the rise of new forms of teacher agency (Nawarat et al., 2022). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for this study. The criteria for selection was illustrated as follows: 1) active involvement in the Kor Karn Kru community of practice, 2) minimum of five years of teaching experience in Thai schools, 3) involvement in knowledge production or dissemination activities within the community, 4) representation of diverse educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) and 5) geographic diversity within Thailand. The participants information was illustrated in Table 1.

The final sample consisted of 20 participants, including 10 active teachers from various grade levels and subject areas, 5 school principals who were also part of the Kor Karn Kru community, 3 teacher educators involved in the community's activities and 2 educational policy advisors who have interacted with the community. This diverse sample enabled a comprehensive exploration of teacher agency from multiple perspectives within the Thai educational system.

Table 1. Participants Information

ID	Role	Grade Level/ Subject Area	Years of Experience	Region	Gender
T1	Active Teacher	Primary / General Studies	6	North	Female
T2	Active Teacher	Secondary / Mathematics	12	Central	Male
T3	Active Teacher	Secondary / Science	13	Northeast	Female
T4	Active Teacher	Primary / English	7	South	Female
T5	Active Teacher	Secondary / Social Studies	8	Central	Male
T6	Active Teacher	Primary / Thai Language	9	North	Female
T7	Active Teacher	Secondary / Arts	11	Bangkok	Male
T8	Active Teacher	Primary / Physical Education	6	Northeast	Male
T9	Active Teacher	Secondary / Computer Education	13	Central	Female
T10	Active Teacher	Secondary / History	14	South	Male
A1	School Principal	Secondary	19	Bangkok	Female
A2	School Principal	Primary	18	North	Male
A3	School Principal	Secondary	24	South	Female
A4	School Principal	Primary	14	Northeast	Male
A5	School Principal	Secondary	15	Central	Female
E1	Teacher Educator	Higher Education/ Science Education	18	Bangkok	Male

ID	Role	Grade Level/ Subject Area	Years of Experience	Region	Gender
E2	Teacher Educator	Higher Education / Curriculum Development	15	North	Female
E3	Teacher Educator	Higher Education / Educational Studies	21	Central	Male
P1	Educational Policy Advisor	Ministry of Education	25	Bangkok	Female
P2	Educational Policy Advisor	Office of Basic Education Commission	19	Bangkok	Male

Data Collection

A qualitative approach was employed for data collection, incorporating three primary methods: in-depth interviews, field observations, and focus group discussions (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This triangulation of methods aimed to provide a rich, multifaceted understanding of teacher agency within the Kor Karn Kru community.

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 20 participants. The individual discussions typically spanned between one hour and an hour and a half, with audio recordings made upon obtaining verbal agreement from each respondent. The interview protocol included questions regarding personal experiences within the Kor Karn Kru community, perceptions of teacher agency and its evolution, involvement in knowledge production and dissemination activities, perceived impact on professional practice and the broader educational landscape and challenges and opportunities in exercising agency within the Thai educational system.

Field Observations

Ten field observations were conducted at various Kor Karn Kru community events and activities. These included 4 community meetings or workshops, 3 knowledge dissemination events (e.g., seminars, conferences) and 3 classroom observations of teachers implementing community-developed practices. Field notes were taken during these observations, focusing on patterns of interaction, knowledge sharing practices, and manifestations of teacher agency.

Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group discussions were conducted, each involving 6-8 participants. These discussions aimed to explore collective perspectives on teacher agency and the role of the Kor Karn Kru community. Topics included the evolution of the Kor Karn Kru community, collaborative knowledge production processes, challenges in

translating agency into practice within school settings and visions for the future of teacher agency in Thailand. Each focus group session lasted approximately 120 minutes and was video-recorded for later analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach, guided by the temporal dimensions of agency (iterative, practical-evaluative, and projective) (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and ecological model of teacher agency and community of practice (CoP) (Priestley et al., 2012). The analysis followed five systematic stages. First, data preparation involved verbatim transcription of all interviews and focus group discussions, digitization of field notes in chronological order, and organization using NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software. Second, initial coding employed both inductive (emerging from data) and deductive (guided by conceptual frameworks) approaches to identify and label relevant data segments. Third, theme development involved grouping related codes into potential themes, which were refined through an iterative process of refinement and validation. Fourth, theoretical integration analyzed how the empirical data aligned with, challenged, or extended the conceptual frameworks. Finally, cross-case analysis compared patterns across different participant groups (e.g., teachers, school principals) and contexts to identify similarities and differences in experiences and manifestations of teacher agency. These stages enabled the synthesis of key themes and patterns into a coherent narrative that addressed the research objectives, while ensuring analytical rigor and theoretical grounding (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Validation Strategies

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, several validation strategies were employed as follows. Preliminary findings were shared with a subset of participants for feedback and validation. Periodic consultations took place with uninvolved peers to scrutinize presumptions and analytical conclusions. Instances that didn't fit with emerging patterns were actively sought out and analyzed while rich, detailed descriptions were provided to support interpretations and allow readers to assess transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This comprehensive analysis process aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of teacher agency within the network of new actors in the Thai educational landscape, grounded in empirical data and conceptual frameworks.

Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals seven interconnected themes that characterize the reconceptualization of teacher agency within Thailand's educational landscape, particularly through the Kor Karn Kru community of practice. Guided by the temporal dimensions of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and the ecological model of teacher agency and community of practice (Cop) (Priestley et al., 2012), our findings through rigorous thematic analysis of interview transcripts (coded for agency indicators), field observations (structured observation protocols), and focus group data, we examined teacher agency across three key dimensions. The iterative dimension revealed how teachers strategically draw upon their professional experiences, cultural knowledge, and pedagogical expertise to inform current practices within the Kor Karn Kru community. The practical-evaluative dimension demonstrated

teachers' active engagement with present circumstances, showing how they navigate institutional constraints, harness available resources, and make strategic decisions in their daily practice. The projective dimension illuminated how teachers envision and actively work toward educational change, particularly through collective initiatives and knowledge creation. These manifestations of agency were systematically analyzed through documented evidence of teachers' actions within the community, their reported decision-making processes, observable impacts on educational practice and policy, and patterns of engagement in professional networks. This analytical framework enabled us to identify and examine diverse expressions of teacher agency while maintaining methodological rigor and theoretical grounding (Pantić, 2017).

The participant agency level categorization demonstrated below aims to provide insight into how different actors within the Thai educational system engage with and contribute to emerging communities of practice, particularly the Kor Karn Kru community. Table 2 presents a detailed breakdown of the 20 participants in our study, including their roles, agency levels, and brief justifications. The participants span a range of positions within the Thai educational system, from active teachers to educational policy advisors, allowing for a comprehensive view of agency across different levels of the education hierarchy. Our analysis reveals a spectrum of agency levels among participants, categorized into five main levels: moderate, moderate to high, high, very high, and extremely high (Priestley et al., 2012). These levels were interpreted based on factors such as professional role, years of experience, and geographical location within Thailand.

Key observations from Table 2 include as follows. First, active teachers (T1-T10) show a range of agency levels from moderate to high, with experience and location playing significant roles in the inferred level of agency. Second, school principals (A1-A5) consistently demonstrate high to very high levels of agency, reflecting their leadership roles and potential for systemic influence. Third, teacher educators (E1-E3) all exhibit very high levels of agency, indicating their crucial role in shaping educational practices and knowledge dissemination. Fourth, educational policy advisors (P1-P2) are categorized at the extremely high level of agency, acknowledging their direct influence on educational policy at a national level. Participants in Bangkok and central regions showed higher engagement in educational initiatives compared to those in peripheral areas.

Table 2. Participant Agency Level Clustering

ID	Role	Agency Level	Justification
T1	Active Teacher	Moderate	New teacher, active in community
T2	Active Teacher	High	Experienced, male teacher in central region
T3	Active Teacher	High	Experienced teacher in less central region
T4	Active Teacher	Moderate	Relatively new teacher in peripheral region
T5	Active Teacher	Moderate to High	Male teacher in central region
T6	Active Teacher	Moderate to High	Experienced in local language instruction
T7	Active Teacher	High	Experienced teacher in capital city
T8	Active Teacher	Moderate	New teacher in less central region
T9	Active Teacher	High	Experienced in modern subject (Computer Education)

ID	Role	Agency Level	Justification
T10	Active Teacher	High	Most experienced teacher
A1	School Principal	Very High	Leadership role in capital city
A2	School Principal	Very High	Leadership role with significant experience
A3	School Principal	Very High	Most experienced principal
A4	School Principal	High	Leadership role in less central region
A5	School Principal	High	Leadership role in central region
E1	Teacher Educator	Very High	Higher education role in capital city
E2	Teacher Educator	Very High	Higher education role in curriculum development
E3	Teacher Educator	Very High	Most experienced teacher educator
P1	Educational Policy Advisor	Extremely High	High-level policy role with most experience
P2	Educational Policy Advisor	Extremely High	High-level policy role

It's important to note that these agency levels are based on limited empirical data collected during a specific time frame. The actual exercise of agency by each participant within the Kor Karn Kru community may vary based on individual involvement, personal characteristics, and specific contributions, which are not fully captured in this basic demographic data. This clustering provides a framework for understanding the potential influence and engagement of different actors within the emerging communities of practice in Thai education. It serves as a starting point for deeper analysis of how these varying levels of agency contribute to the reconceptualization of teacher agency and the transformation of educational paradigms in Thailand.

Conditions Facilitating the Emergence of New Education Practitioners' Communities of Practice

Our analysis reveals that institutional constraints on educational knowledge in Thailand have served as a crucial catalyst for the emergence of new forms of teacher agency, particularly within the context of emerging communities of practice. This finding directly addresses our research objective by illuminating how these constraints have paradoxically created the conditions for new networks of actors to emerge in the knowledge space of education in Thailand.

Participants across various levels of the education system consistently reported feeling restricted by the traditional, top-down approach that has long characterized Thai education. This sentiment was particularly strong among teachers with higher agency levels, such as T3, an experienced teacher from the Northeast who noted: *"For years, we felt like mere conduits of state-approved knowledge. There was little room for creativity or adaptation to our students' needs. This frustration led us to seek out like-minded colleagues and form our own networks."* This observation aligns with Hallinger & Bryant's (2013) analysis of the historically centralized nature of Thai education, which has often limited opportunities for teacher agency. However, our findings suggest a more nuanced understanding. These very constraints have paradoxically created the conditions for new forms of teacher

agency to emerge, specifically through the formation of communities of practice like Kor Karn Kru. Additionally, Fry & Bi's (2013) discussion of the challenges faced by Thai teachers in exercising agency within a system that has traditionally emphasized conformity and hierarchical structures provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. Our research extends their analysis by demonstrating how these challenges have motivated teachers to seek out alternative spaces for exercising agency (Priestley et al., 2012).

Importantly, our findings indicate that the response to these constraints varies among different groups of educators. For instance, participants with very high agency levels, such as E2, a teacher educator from the North, articulated a more strategic approach: *"We recognized that working within the system's constraints was ineffective. So, we began to create our own spaces for knowledge production and sharing, leveraging our collective expertise to challenge the status quo."* This emergence of new communities of practice represents a significant shift in the Thai educational landscape. It demonstrates how networks of actors are actively reconceptualizing teacher agency, moving from a model of passive implementation to one of active knowledge creation and dissemination. Our analysis suggests that these institutional constraints, while initially limiting, have ultimately fostered a more dynamic and resilient form of teacher agency.

Reimagining Teacher Identity and Role within New Networks

Our analysis reveals a significant shift in how teachers perceive their role and identity within the emerging networks of new actors in the Thai educational landscape. This transformation represents a key aspect of reconceptualizing teacher agency in Thailand, shifting beyond the conventional perception of teachers as passive civil servants towards active agents of educational change. Participants with high agency levels, particularly those actively engaged in the Kor Karn Kru community, consistently demonstrated a drive to transcend the conventional boundaries of their profession. This aspiration was evident not only in their words but also in their actions observed during field observations. For instance, T7, an experienced teacher from Bangkok with high agency, articulated during an interview: *"We're no longer content with simply delivering prescribed curricula. Through our network, we're redefining what it means to be a teacher – we're becoming researchers, curriculum developers, and advocates for educational change."* This sentiment was corroborated during a field observation of a Kor Karn Kru community meeting, where T7 and other high-agency teachers were observed collaboratively developing an innovative, locally-contextualized curriculum module. The observation revealed teachers engaged in rigorous debate, citing educational research, and critically analyzing policy documents – activities that extend far beyond traditional teaching roles.

Furthermore, during a knowledge dissemination event, T9, another high-agency teacher, was observed presenting action research findings to a mixed audience of educators and policymakers. This presentation demonstrated how teachers within the network are actively contributing to the broader educational discourse, shifting from mere implementers to producers of educational knowledge. These observations align with the accounts of other high-agency participants. For example, T2, an experienced male teacher from the central region, noted during a focus group discussion: *"Our involvement in Kor Karn Kru has transformed our professional identity. We're not just waiting for top-down directives anymore; we're proactively identifying issues in our educational context and*

developing solutions.”

The field observations also captured instances of teachers engaging in peer coaching and mentoring activities, further illustrating their expanded roles. During one classroom observation, T3, a high-agency teacher from the Northeast, was seen implementing a teaching strategy developed collaboratively within the Kor Karn Kru network. This observation highlighted how the reimagining of teacher identity translates into tangible changes in classroom practice. This reimagining of teacher identity aligns with Priestley et al.’s (2015) emphasis on the active role of teachers in shaping their professional lives and educational contexts. However, our findings extend this concept by highlighting how these new identities are being collectively constructed and reinforced within emerging communities of practice in Thailand.

A school principal (A2) with a very high agency level observed: *“We’re witnessing the birth of a new generation of teachers who are leveraging their collective agency. They’re not just change-makers in their classrooms; they’re becoming influential actors in the broader educational knowledge space.”* This shift represents a significant challenge to the traditional Thai educational paradigm, resonating with Eteläpelto et al.’s (2015) view of teacher agency. Our research demonstrates how this practice of shaping outcomes, selecting options, and adopting positions is amplified when teachers operate within the network.

Pre-existing Momentum for Educational Reform as a Catalyst for New Actor Networks

Our analysis indicates that the emergence of new forms of teacher agency and the formation of new actor networks in Thailand were catalyzed by a pre-existing momentum for educational reform. This momentum, particularly evident in areas such as citizenship education and the development of democratic citizens, created a fertile ground for the reconceptualization of teacher agency. This dynamic was evident across multiple data sources. P1, an educational policy advisor with an extremely high agency level, noted during an interview: *“The recognition that our education system needed to evolve to meet 21st century challenges created openings for new voices and new forms of teacher engagement. Networks like Kor Karn Kru seized this opportunity to reshape the educational knowledge space.”*

This observation was substantiated during a field observation of a high-level policy meeting where Kor Karn Kru representatives were invited to present their grassroots initiatives. The observation revealed a notable shift in the power dynamics, with policymakers actively seeking input from teacher networks on issues of curriculum reform and teacher professional development. During a focus group discussion, T5, a teacher with moderate to high agency, shared: *“The national dialogue on educational reform gave us the courage to voice our ideas. Suddenly, our experiences and insights as classroom teachers became valuable in shaping policy.”* This sentiment was echoed by other participants, indicating a collective awareness of the opportunities presented by the reform momentum.

Another field observation of a Kor Karn Kru workshop demonstrated how the network was leveraging this momentum. Teachers were observed engaging in critical discussions about global educational trends and

collaboratively developing strategies to adapt these to the Thai context. This observation highlighted the network's proactive approach in shaping the direction of educational reform, rather than merely responding to top-down initiatives. The interplay between reform momentum and teacher agency was further illuminated during a second focus group discussion. A2, a school principal with very high agency, remarked: *"The push for 21st century skills opened doors for us to experiment with new teaching methodologies. Kor Karn Kru became a platform where we could share these experiments and collectively refine our approaches."* This comment sparked a lively discussion among participants about how the network had become a catalyst for translating reform rhetoric into classroom reality.

Field notes from a Kor Karn Kru conference revealed the network's strategic alignment with national reform agendas. Presentations and workshops observed at the conference demonstrated how the community was actively interpreting and reshaping reform initiatives, positioning teachers as key actors in the reform process rather than passive recipients. This observation aligns with Pyhältö et al.'s (2014) recognition of teacher agency as crucial for implementing educational reforms. However, our findings go further, suggesting that in the Thai context, this reform momentum has not only facilitated the exercise of individual teacher agency but has also spurred the creation of new collective forms of agency through communities of practice (Nasee & Nawarat, 2023). Importantly, our research reveals that this momentum for reform has created both opportunities and tensions within the Thai educational system. As noted by Fry & Bi (2013), these tensions are characteristic of the Thai context. Our analysis suggests that the Kor Karn Kru community of practice emerged as a direct response to these tensions, providing a space for teachers to collectively navigate and reshape the complex landscape of educational reform. E3, a highly experienced teacher educator, explained: *"Kor Karn Kru isn't just adapting to reforms; it's actively shaping them. By creating alternative spaces for knowledge production and dissemination, we're redefining what educational reform looks like in Thailand."* This finding underscored how new networks of actors are not merely responding to top-down reform initiatives, but are actively reconceptualizing teacher agency and, by extension, the nature of educational change in Thailand. It demonstrates the dynamic interplay between individual agency, collective action, and systemic reform in the Thai educational knowledge space.

Engagement in Knowledge Production and Dissemination of Critical Education

Our analysis of the Kor Karn Kru community of practice reveals a significant reconceptualization of teacher agency within the Thai educational landscape. This reconceptualization is primarily manifested through the community's active engagement in knowledge production and dissemination, utilizing critical education perspectives and a sophisticated networking approach. This engagement operates on two interconnected planes – administrative and ideational – which together are reshaping the knowledge space of education in Thailand. On the administrative plane, the Kor Karn Kru network is actively redefining the role of teachers in the educational knowledge ecosystem. Rather than being mere recipients of top-down knowledge, members of this community are positioning themselves as key producers and disseminators of educational knowledge.

P1, an educational policy advisor with extremely high agency, observed: *"The Kor Karn Kru network has become a formidable force in educational discourse. They're not just implementing policies anymore; they're influencing*

them by presenting alternative knowledge and perspectives directly to policymakers and the public." This approach represents a significant shift in how teacher agency is conceptualized and exercised within the Thai context. It challenges the traditional hierarchical structure of knowledge dissemination in Thai education, creating new channels for bottom-up influence.

On the ideational plane, the Kor Karn Kru community is actively engaged in knowledge creation that transcends traditional educational boundaries. Field observations of community meetings and workshops revealed a dynamic process of constructing new meanings and social symbols that reflect a more critical and contextualized understanding of education in Thailand. During a focus group discussion, E2, a teacher educator with very high agency, explained: *"Through Kor Karn Kru, we're not just adapting foreign educational theories. We're creating new knowledge that speaks directly to the Thai context, incorporating our cultural values and addressing our unique challenges. This is reshaping what it means to be an educator in Thailand."* This sentiment was echoed by other participants and corroborated by field observations.

For instance, during a Kor Karn Kru workshop observed by the research team, teachers were seen collaboratively developing a new pedagogical framework that integrated Thai Buddhist principles with contemporary learning theories. T3, a high-agency teacher, was observed arguing: *"We need to stop forcing Western models onto our students. Let's create something that resonates with their lived experiences."* This observation exemplified the community's commitment to contextualizing educational knowledge. Another field observation at a Kor Karn Kru conference revealed presentations on locally-developed teaching methodologies. One notable example was a session on "Local wisdom for 21st century classrooms," where teachers shared innovative ways of incorporating local wisdom into modern educational practices. This demonstrated the community's efforts to bridge cultural heritage with contemporary educational needs.

During a second focus group, T7, an experienced teacher with high agency, shared: *"Our discussions in Kor Karn Kru have led us to redefine what "quality education" means in the Thai context. It's not just about test scores anymore; we're talking about holistic development that includes moral and cultural dimensions."* This comment sparked a lively debate among participants about the purpose of education in Thailand, highlighting the community's role in shaping fundamental educational discourse. Field notes from a policy dialogue event captured Kor Karn Kru members presenting their locally-developed educational concepts to ministry officials. The observers noted the officials' surprise and interest in these ground-up theoretical frameworks, suggesting the potential influence of the community's knowledge creation on policy level discussions.

The networking approach adopted by Kor Karn Kru is central to this reconceptualization of teacher agency. By creating a web of connections across different levels of the educational system, the community has amplified its ability to influence and transform educational practices. T9, an experienced teacher with high agency, noted: *"Our network allows us to rapidly share innovations and challenges. When one of us develops a new teaching approach, it can be disseminated and adapted across the country within few weeks. This speed and reach were unimaginable in the old system."* This networked approach to knowledge sharing and creation aligns with Goodyear & Casey's (2013) findings on how professional learning communities can enhance teacher agency. However, our analysis

suggests that the Kor Karn Kru community has taken this concept further, using their network not just for professional development, but as a tool for systemic change.

The adoption of critical education perspectives within the Kor Karn Kru community has fundamentally altered how teachers perceive their role in the educational system and broader society. This shift was evident across multiple data sources. During a focus group discussion, A3, a school principal with very high agency, reflected: *“Adopting critical education perspectives has allowed us to question long-held assumptions about teaching and learning. We’re now seeing our role as not just educators, but as transformative intellectuals who can contribute to broader social change.”*

This sentiment was corroborated by field observations of Kor Karn Kru workshops. In one session focused on critical pedagogy, the researchers noted animated discussions among teachers about power structures in education. T5, a teacher with moderate to high agency, was observed arguing: *“We need to recognize that our classrooms are not neutral spaces. Every decision we make, from the textbooks we use to the questions we ask, has political implications.”* During another field observation of a community meeting, teachers were seen collaboratively developing a new curriculum that explicitly addressed social inequalities in Thailand. This practical application of critical theory demonstrated how teachers were moving beyond traditional roles to become active agents of social transformation (Priestley et al., 2012). The impact of this shift was further evidenced in a focus group discussion where T9, a high-agency teacher, shared: *“Before joining Kor Karn Kru, I saw my job as simply delivering content. Now, I’m constantly asking myself how my teaching can contribute to creating a more just society.”* This comment sparked a lively debate among participants about the ethical responsibilities of educators in shaping societal values.

Field notes from a classroom observation revealed how this theoretical engagement translated into practice. T3, a high-agency teacher, was observed using critical literacy techniques to help students analyze media representations of minority groups in Thailand. This approach exemplified how teachers were actively contributing to broader social discourse through their pedagogical practices (Cooper & White, 2007; Min & Nelson, 2024; Priestley et al., 2012).

This engagement with critical education theory represents a significant departure from traditional conceptions of teacher agency in Thailand. It positions teachers not just as implementers of curriculum, but as active contributors to educational philosophy and social transformation (Min & Nelson, 2024). The empirical data demonstrate how this theoretical engagement is reshaping teaching practices, curriculum development, and teachers’ understanding of their societal role.

Contextual Knowledge and Transdisciplinary Approaches: Redefining the Boundaries of Teacher Agency

Our analysis reveals that the Kor Karn Kru community is fundamentally reconceptualizing teacher agency within the Thai educational landscape through two interconnected approaches: the focus on contextual knowledge and transdisciplinary approaches, and the creation of cultural capital to foster imaginative possibilities. These

approaches represent a significant shift in how teachers engage with and produce knowledge, positioning them as key actors in reshaping the educational knowledge space in Thailand.

The Kor Karn Kru community's emphasis on contextual (situated) knowledge and transdisciplinary approaches marks a profound reimagining of teacher agency within the Thai educational context. This approach challenges the traditional, discipline-bound curriculum that has long dominated Thai education (Jatuporn, 2022), positioning teachers as active creators of integrated, locally-relevant knowledge. T3, an experienced teacher with high agency from the Northeast region, articulated: *"Through our network, we're no longer confined to textbook-based knowledge. We're creating learning experiences that draw from multiple disciplines to address real-world issues in our local communities. This shift has empowered us to become curriculum developers and action researchers."*

This focus on contextual and transdisciplinary knowledge extends beyond Kennedy's (2016) concept of job-embedded professional development. Our findings suggest that the Kor Karn Kru community is actively creating new spaces for knowledge production that transcend traditional disciplinary and institutional boundaries. This approach repositions teachers as key actors in the educational knowledge space, capable of generating and disseminating innovative pedagogical approaches. E1, a teacher educator with very high agency based in Bangkok, observed: *"The network's transdisciplinary approach is revolutionizing how we conceptualize teacher knowledge. It's not just about applying existing theories; it's about teachers collaboratively creating new, context-specific knowledge that responds to Thailand's unique educational challenges."*

This reconceptualization of teacher agency through contextual and transdisciplinary knowledge production represents a significant departure from traditional top-down models of educational reform in Thailand. It positions teachers as active agents in shaping the educational landscape, rather than mere implementers of externally imposed curricula.

Creating Cultural Capital: Expanding the Scope of Teacher Agency

Our analysis reveals that the Kor Karn Kru community is actively engaged in creating cultural capital to foster imaginative possibilities in knowledge production and dissemination. This approach significantly expands the traditional boundaries of teacher agency, positioning educators as cultural workers who play a crucial role in shaping societal values and fostering social change. A2, a school principal with very high agency from the North, reflected: *"Through our network, we're redefining what it means to be an educator. We're not just transmitting knowledge; we're cultivating a new generation of critical thinkers and active citizens. This shift has profound implications for how we understand our role in society."*

This focus on creating cultural capital aligns with Biesta et al.'s (2015) argument about the crucial role of teacher agency in educational reforms. However, our findings suggest that the Kor Karn Kru community is going beyond implementing reforms to actively shaping the direction of educational and social change in Thailand. P2, an educational policy advisor with extremely high agency, noted: *"The Kor Karn Kru network's approach to cultural capital is reshaping our understanding of education's purpose. They're not just preparing students for exams;*

they're nurturing the imaginative and critical capacities needed for Thailand's future development. This represents a significant expansion of teacher agency into the realm of social and cultural transformation." This expansion of teacher agency into the domain of cultural production and social transformation represents a significant reconceptualization of the teacher's role within the Thai educational and social context. It positions teachers as key actors in shaping not just educational practices, but broader societal values and future possibilities.

The Kor Karn Kru community's focus on contextual knowledge, transdisciplinary approaches, and the creation of cultural capital collectively represents a new paradigm of teacher agency within the network of new actors in Thai education. This paradigm positions teachers as knowledge creators, actively producing context-specific, transdisciplinary knowledge, as cultural workers, fostering critical thinking and social responsibility and as change agents, shaping both educational practices and broader societal values (Tao & Gao, 2017).

This reconceptualization of teacher agency significantly expands the role of teachers in the knowledge space of education (Priestley et al., 2012). It challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge production and dissemination, creating new spaces for teacher-led innovation and social transformation. By embracing these approaches, the Kor Karn Kru community is not only responding to educational reforms but is actively shaping the future direction of Thai education. This form of collective agency represents a powerful force for educational innovation and social change, with potential implications that extend far beyond the classroom.

Challenges and Tensions in Reconceptualizing Teacher Agency within New Networks

While our analysis highlights the transformative potential of the Kor Karn Kru community in reconceptualizing teacher agency, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenges and tensions that arise as these new forms of agency interact with established educational structures. These challenges provide important insights into the complex dynamics of change within the knowledge space of education in Thailand. Participants across various levels of agency reported facing resistance from within the established educational system. This resistance often manifests as pressure to conform to traditional methods and meet standardized benchmarks, echoing Buchanan's (2015) observation that standardization and accountability measures can constrain teacher agency.

T5, a teacher with moderate to high agency from the Central region, shared: *"As we try to implement more innovative, context-specific approaches, we often find ourselves at odds with system-wide expectations. It's like we're swimming against the current, trying to balance our new understanding of our role with the pressures of standardized assessments and traditional curricula."* This tension illustrates the complex interplay between emerging forms of teacher agency and entrenched educational structures. It highlights how the reconceptualization of teacher agency within networks like Kor Karn Kru is not just a matter of individual or collective will, but a negotiation with broader systemic constraints.

Our analysis reveals that teachers engaged in these new networks often find themselves navigating dual identities – as members of the traditional educational system and as agents of change within new knowledge spaces. E3, a teacher educator with very high agency, observed: *"Members of our network are constantly balancing their roles.*

They're simultaneously working within the system and trying to transform it. This dual identity creates both opportunities and challenges in how they exercise their agency." This navigation of dual identities aligns with Tao & Gao's (2017) findings on how teacher agency manifests in the Chinese curriculum reform context. However, our research extends this understanding by examining how these tensions play out within the specific context of emerging teacher networks in Thailand.

The study also uncovered challenges related to systemic inertia and misalignment between emerging practices and existing educational policies. P1, an educational policy advisor with extremely high agency, reflected: *"While networks like Kor Karn Kru are pushing the boundaries of teacher agency, our policy framework hasn't kept pace. This creates a disconnect between the innovative practices emerging from these networks and the metrics by which teacher performance is officially evaluated."* This misalignment underscores the need for a more holistic reconceptualization of teacher agency that encompasses not just classroom practices, but also policy frameworks and institutional structures.

Despite these challenges, our analysis suggests that the tensions experienced by the Kor Karn Kru community are not merely obstacles, but potential catalysts for deeper systemic change. A4, a school principal with high agency from the Northeast region, noted: *"The resistance we face has actually strengthened our resolve and sharpened our strategies. It's pushed us to articulate our vision more clearly and to find creative ways to demonstrate the value of our approach within the existing system."* This perspective suggests that the process of navigating these tensions is itself a form of agency, contributing to the ongoing reconceptualization of teachers' roles within the Thai educational landscape.

The network of new actors, exemplified by Kor Karn Kru, is actively reconceptualizing teacher agency in several key ways by expanding the scope of teacher influence beyond the classroom to broader educational policy and social change, redefining teachers as creators and disseminators of contextual, transdisciplinary knowledge, positioning teachers as cultural workers who shape societal values and foster critical thinking and developing collective forms of agency that amplify individual teachers' capacity for change (Min et al., 2022; Rushton & Bird, 2024).

However, this reconceptualization is not a smooth or uncontested process. It involves ongoing negotiation with established structures, navigation of dual identities, and efforts to align innovative practices with existing policy frameworks. These tensions and challenges, rather than merely obstacles, are integral to the process of reconceptualizing teacher agency. They highlight the dynamic nature of this reconceptualization, emphasizing that teacher agency is not a fixed attribute but an evolving concept that is continuously shaped by the interaction between emerging networks and established educational structures.

Table 3 thus presents a comprehensive overview of the key themes that emerged from our analysis of teacher agency within the context of emerging educational networks in Thailand, particularly focusing on the Kor Karn Kru community of practice. This thematic analysis synthesizes data from in-depth interviews, field observations, and focus group discussions, offering a multifaceted view of how teacher agency is being reconceptualized in the

Thai educational landscape.

Table 3. Emerging Themes in the Reconceptualization of Teacher Agency in Thailand

Theme	Description	Key Findings
Institutional constraints as catalysts	How institutional constraints paradoxically facilitated the emergence of new networks	1) Traditional top-down approach created frustration 2) Constraints motivated teachers to seek alternative spaces 3) Led to creation of communities like Kor Karn Kru
Reimagining teacher identity	Shift in how teachers perceive their role and identity	1) Teachers becoming researchers, curriculum developers, and advocates 2) Moving from passive implementers to active agents of change 3) Collective construction of new professional identities
Pre-existing reform momentum	How existing push for educational reform catalyzed new actor networks	1) National dialogue on reform created openings for new voices 2) Teachers leveraged reform rhetoric to experiment with new methodologies 3) Kor Karn Kru aligned strategically with national reform agendas
Critical education and networking	Use of critical education perspectives and networking to reconceptualize agency	1) Challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies 2) Creating new channels for bottom-up influence 3) Rapid sharing of innovations across the network
Contextual knowledge and transdisciplinary approaches	Focus on creating context-specific, interdisciplinary knowledge	1) Emphasis on knowledge relevant to Thai context 2) Integration of local wisdom with modern educational theories 3) Teachers as creators of new, context-specific pedagogical frameworks
Creating cultural capital	Expanding teacher agency into cultural and social domains	1) Teachers as cultural workers shaping societal values 2) Focus on holistic development including moral and cultural dimensions 3) Redefining 'quality education' in the Thai context
Challenges and tensions	Difficulties faced in reconceptualizing teacher agency	1) Resistance from established structures 2) Navigation of dual identities (traditional teacher vs. change agent) 3) Misalignment between innovative practices and existing policies

Conclusion

This study illuminates the profound transformation of teacher agency within the Thai educational landscape, catalyzed by emerging networks of practitioners such as the Kor Karn Kru community. Our findings reveal that these networks are actively reconceptualizing teacher agency, challenging traditional hierarchies, and creating new spaces for knowledge production and dissemination. The Kor Karn Kru community exemplifies how teachers can transcend their conventional roles, positioning themselves as knowledge creators, cultural workers, and agents of systemic change. The research highlights the paradoxical role of institutional constraints in fostering innovative forms of collective agency through critical education perspectives and sophisticated networking, though this transformation faces challenges from established structures and policies.

The results offer valuable insights for educational strategies and governance in Thailand and comparable environments, underscoring the need for more flexible, responsive educational systems that can harness teacher-led innovation. Future research should explore how these emerging forms of agency can be sustainably integrated into formal educational structures. This research contributes to understanding teacher agency in centralized educational systems, highlighting teachers' critical role as active agents in shaping educational futures through dynamic, collaborative approaches to educational development.

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