Needs Analysis and Perception of the MA ELT Curriculum: Evaluating the Effectiveness and Identifying Future Risks

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Abstract: This study investigates how current students, alumni, and other stakeholders perceive and evaluate the effectiveness of the MA in English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum at a public university in Thailand. The study, situated in the EFL context, also aims to understand the stakeholders' view of how the programme can prepare students for their professional roles, to identify the key competencies necessary for effective English language teaching, and to assess potential future risks to the programme's relevance and sustainability. With a sample of 106 participants categorised into current and non-current students, quantitative data were collected through a comprehensive questionnaire adapted from established sources in ELT education. Descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U tests were employed to interpret the data. The findings revealed that both groups of stakeholders generally perceived the curriculum as effective in supporting relevant teaching skills and aligning with contemporary educational trends. However, future risks such as technological disruption, competing online certifications, and changes in educational policies were identified as significant challenges within the Thai higher education context. This paper offers recommendations for addressing these risks while ensuring continuous relevance and effectiveness in the MA in ELT programme.

Keyword: needs analysis, perception, MA ELT, curriculum, future risks

Introduction

The United Nations News on 29th February 2024, announced that a global issue regarding the shortage of teachers by 2030 to meet its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for Quality Education in terms of quality education for learning societies, overwhelmed teachers, and support to educators (United Nations, 2024). To address this shortage, all educational programmes, including those of professional organisations such as TESOL Association, are expected to adapt and change their current practice in response to the dynamic global environments (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021;

Imran et al., 2024; Vaishnav, 2024). Within the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession, Mirici et al. (2022) and Holland (2023) argue that language proficiency alone is not sufficient for effective teaching, but pedagogical effectiveness, intercultural communication, and digital literacy are also key elements for programme adaptation.

Given the context of the ELT profession, the Master of Arts in English Language Teaching (MA in ELT) is considered one of the most practical qualifications for both native and non-native English language teachers. In particular, an MA in ELT programme should be able to equip students with theoretical knowledge, practical teaching skills, as well as research competency (TESOL International Association, 2019). However, with the advent of advanced educational technologies (Voudoukis & Pagiatakis, 2022), diverse learner needs (Kanokpermpoon, 2023; Murray, 2010), and alternative online teaching certificates (Vaishnav, 2024), traditional degree programmes now face new challenges in terms of their relevance and value.

In Thailand, there are many professional ELT graduate programmes, which are considered to be specifically tailored to meet the needs of pre-service, in-service, and career-changing teachers. At a public university in Bangkok, the MA in ELT programme is entering a new phase to meet the university's requirements for high quality, internationalisation, and research. Given the current context of the programme, meeting the university's quality and standards while addressing the rapid changes in educational technology, learner needs, and the increasing variety of alternative credentials presents significant challenges for competing in the educational market. These factors are crucial for ongoing curriculum improvements that reflect and respond to these dynamics.

To address these challenges and fulfil the university's quality assurance requirements, a systematic needs analysis through stakeholder surveys was deemed essential, providing an evidence-based foundation for curriculum evaluation and improvement. This approach recognises that effective programme development must be grounded in the perspectives of those most directly affected by the curriculum, ensuring that any modifications are responsive to both institutional standards and the evolving landscape of English language teaching. This study was accordingly conducted as part of a systematic programme evaluation process required for the MA in ELT programme at the researchers' institution. Regular curriculum evaluation through systematic stakeholder surveys is not only a best practice in educational programme development but also a formal requirement for maintaining programme quality and accreditation standards. As Brown (1995) emphasises, curriculum development involves a continuous cycle of needs analysis, goal setting, testing, materials development, and teaching – all of which must be regularly evaluated to ensure programme effectiveness.

The MA in ELT programme in this study aims to produce graduates with strong expertise in English language teaching, linguistics, applied linguistics, and research. Graduates are expected to be ethical, dedicated professionals with high English proficiency, capable of lifelong learning, self-development, and effective knowledge transfer. The curriculum's structure consists of six required courses, consisting quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, ELT methodology, language testing and assessment, second language acquisition, and linguistics for ELT. Research-focused students may opt for three elective courses and a thesis, while a practicum-focused student is required to take the ELT practicum course, choose four elective courses, and pass the comprehensive examination. The elective courses are categorised into ELT and (applied) linguistics streams with courses such as instructional materials, ESP, curriculum and instruction, professional development, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, experimental semantics, syntax, and second language phonology.

This study, therefore, assessed current students, alumni, and other stakeholders' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the MA in ELT curriculum. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following

three research questions:

1. How do current and non-current students and alumni perceive the relevance and effectiveness of the MA in ELT curriculum?
2. What are the levels of current and non-current students, and alumni's perceptions towards key characteristics and competencies of effective English language teachers?
3. What future risks do current and non-current students and alumni perceive for the MA in ELT programme?

In the next section, the literature review on curriculum, needs analysis, curriculum effectiveness, competencies of English teachers, and previous studies are discussed.

Literature Review

Curriculum

A curriculum serves as the backbone of any educational institution. According to Pinar et al. (1995), a curriculum is a systematic plan that focuses on exploring and enhancing educational experiences. It involves research, theory, and practice of a field of academic study. Curriculum serves as a plan for achieving educational objectives, for organising teaching procedures and practice. In order to create a well-designed curriculum, Biggs and Tang (2011) propose the concept of constructive alignment which emphasises that institutions or educators need to ensure that intended learning outcomes that specify what students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do are aligned with engaging teaching and learning activities, as well as with valid, fair and reliable assessment. All of these aspects are interconnected and are crucial in their own right in shaping a coherent and effective curriculum. Additionally, continuous evaluation of curriculum effectiveness is also vital for improving the quality of education and sustaining teaching success. The evaluation process is particularly important because it examines whether the objectives have been met and reflects whether the curriculum has been a success or failure (Norris, 2016).

Curriculum Evaluation

No matter how much thought and effort are put into designing a curriculum, it is unlikely that the curriculum will be entirely flawless in either its design or its implementation, especially in the dynamic changes of modern ELT contexts. Therefore, regular curriculum evaluation is essential in maintaining and developing the quality of education as it can inform stakeholders of areas in need of improvement or change. Brown (1995) outlines curriculum development as involving five essential processes: needs analysis, goals and objectives, testing, materials, and teaching. These processes should be aligned to ensure cohesive educational programmes, and each process should be regularly evaluated in order to cultivate a cycle of continual development to the changing demands of education such as new types of students or changes in learning theories. Among these processes, needs analysis (NA) seems critical as it serves as the foundation that helps ensure that the curriculum meets the diverse needs of relevant stakeholders, namely, learners, teachers and community users.

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis (NA), according to Brown (1995, p. 36), is

> 'the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that
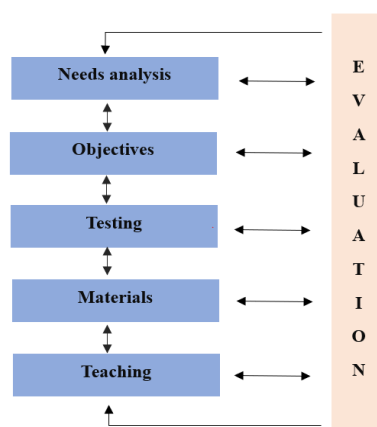
influence the learning and teaching situation'

Long (2005) emphasised that there is 'an urgent need for courses of all kinds to be relevant and to be seen to be relevant to the needs of a specific group of learners and of society at large' (p. 19). This suggests that curriculum should not only be designed to address the needs of learners but also be perceived by learners as relevant to their goals. A curriculum that is informed by a NA is inherently learner oriented as it takes into account the needs and wants of learners and related stakeholders. Consequently, conducting a NA is imperative as it can help ensure that the curriculum is relevant and responsive to learners' goals so that institutions are able to provide learners with knowledge and skills that help them succeed in the course and their future career.

Needs analysis can be considered as an initial step to gather the basis for lesson planning, materials development, syllabus design, instructional design and assessment (Widodo, 2017). This concept is reflected in Brown's (1995) curriculum development model (Figure 1) which comprises five interconnected elements that function in a cycle manner. The model places the needs analysis as the foremost step in identifying what learners need to learn and the gaps in their current knowledge or skills that the curriculum should aim to achieve. Data from NA can inform institutions by providing input for shaping content, design and implementation of learning programmes, by guiding the development of the programme's objectives and content, and by serving as a source of data for reviewers or appraisers of learning programmes (Irfadila & Noprika, 2022).

Figure 1
Curriculum Development Model (Brown, 1995, p. 21)

Scholars hold different views regarding what 'needs' are in needs analysis. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) first classify needs into two concepts: target needs and learning needs. The former concerns "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" (p. 54) which encompasses necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities are what learners need to master in order to function effectively in the target situation. Lacks are the discrepancy between what they need to know and what they already know, and wants are what learners wish to learn. The former, learning needs, involves the actions the learner needs to do in order to learn. For Berwick (1989), needs can be classified as perceived needs and felt needs. It refers to teachers', coworkers', or experts' views about the educational gaps in learners' experiences. This type of needs is considered normative and objective. The latter, Felt needs, on the other hand, involves learners' own needs such as feelings, ideas, and assumptions, so this type of needs is considered subjective. Berwick's classification implies outsider/insider perspectives while Brindley (1989) categorised needs as process-oriented needs, which are learners' needs based on the goal or target situation, and product-oriented needs, which derive from learning situations. All of these classifications outline different perspectives which influence the development of various models in needs analysis. There have been a number of needs analysis

models proposed by scholars. However, a target situation analysis (TSA) and a present situation analysis (PSA) appear to receive considerable recognition.

Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

The TSA identifies knowledge and skills learners need to know in order to function effectively in future target situations (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) put forward a list of practical questions to be asked for target situation analysis as 1) why language is needed, e.g. for study or work; 2) How the language will be used, e.g. speaking, writing, etc.; 3) what the content areas will be, e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate, mathematics, linguistics; 4) where the language will be used, e.g. with native speakers or non-native speakers; and 5) when the language will be used, e.g. in own country or aboard. As this model of needs analysis started with Munby's (1978) model of the Communication Needs Process, the data from NA is often translated into specifications for communicative competence that reflect real-world language use.

Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

While TSA aims to anticipate what learners need to know by the end of the course, PSA attempts to establish what they are like at the beginning of it. In other words, PSA assesses learners' strengths, lacks, and weaknesses in language, skills, and learning experiences before learning takes place (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Robinson, 1991). This suggests that learners' backgrounds are acknowledged as having an influence on how learning is organised. The primary source of information for this type of NA is, therefore, the learners themselves as well as the teaching establishment and the prospective employers (Jordan, 1997; Richterich & Chancerel, 1987). From these sources, data such as learners' social and educational backgrounds, their levels of proficiency, their views on language learning, aptitude, and motivation are gathered.

In practice, the combination of TSA and PSA may be done simultaneously to identify what is needed in order to enhance teaching and learning.

Curriculum Effectiveness in MA in ELT Programmes

International TEFL/TESOL Accreditation Council (2025) provides comprehensive standards for institutions running TESOL programmes. The standards include a precise organisational process and operations; relevant and up-to-date courses; accurate and fair assessment; and qualified staff to provide educational services.

With regard to Adipat et al. (2019), several factors, such as trainers' qualifications, appropriate tuition fees, and a weekend class option, contribute to the effectiveness of the programme by the stakeholders of an MA in ELT programme at a public university in Thailand. In addition, it was found in the study that courses in technology and innovation, as well as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), satisfied the participants' needs. This means that, to run an effective MA in ELT programme, it is important for an institution to consider the relevancy and practicality of courses and operations, thereby satisfying the stakeholders' needs. In contrast, it was found in Mirici et al. 's (2022) study that undergraduates in Turkey perceived practical and content-knowledge courses as effective preparations for pre-service teachers. It could be concluded from the two studies that pre-service teachers consider practical skills in ELT as a contributing factor to programme effectiveness, as the objective of a pre-service teacher training programme is to create teachers from inexperienced students. On the other hand, for in-service teachers or graduate students, innovation and ESP courses and weekend classes, which accommodate working students, are key elements in operating an effective MA in ELT programme.

In addition to course and curriculum design, it is important to consider technology in a graduate programme. Healey (2018) strongly advocated for language teachers to learn and incorporate digital tools and technology, such as online teaching resources, assessment tools, and communication technology, as an integral part of ELT classrooms. Adipat et al. (2019) found in their study that online learning, including relevant online resources, assessment, and communication practices, is considered an additional option for programme operations. This means that, for an MA in ELT programme to operate effectively, courses and modes of operation should be integrated into the curriculum. This is to serve as a standard practice for both in-service and pre-service teachers (Tamronglak, 2020). Furthermore, digital technologies rapidly develop and, with every disruptive technology, their effects are present in language classrooms (Hampel, 2019). The continuous changes in technology bring about another variety in already-dynamic ELT classrooms. Therefore, to stay updated with the current trends in their professions, it is important for language teachers to possess the ability to understand findings from research studies, incorporate the findings of those studies into their classrooms, as well as to write a report on their own research study (Holland, 2023). A regular re-evaluation of the course relevance is, thus, crucial for the effectiveness of the study.

Competencies for English Language Teachers

TESOL International Association (2019) identifies key competences for English language teachers, including language proficiency and pedagogical skills. This means that language and teaching skills are basic requirements for TESOL. In addition, Imran et al. (2024) argue that teachers should be able to demonstrate appropriate cultural awareness in language teaching. As mentioned, Healey (2018) also advocates for the standard use of digital tools and technology in ELT teaching. She argued that teachers and learners should be able to professionally and ethically use relevant technologies to create an appropriate environment for language learning and teaching. The core concept of these competencies is that teachers should be flexible and willing to learn about language, culture, and pedagogy through peer interaction and classroom research. This learning is not only a one-time effort but rather a commitment to ongoing professional development.

In addition to fundamental competencies, Holland (2023) argues that teachers should be able to conduct classroom research to inform themselves of their teaching. However, this practice presents a significant challenge. As reported in Qian (2022), foreign language teachers recognise the importance of research for their professional credentials, yet they often lack sufficient training to conduct research. Furthermore, teachers report not having sufficient time and resources to engage in such activities.

Finally, to thrive in the dynamic ELT world, it is essential for language teachers to be digitally literate. According to Healey (2018), teachers, learners, and technology users must be able to select, implement, and evaluate technology effectively, safely, appropriately, legally, and critically. In particular, language teachers should be able to create personalised language learning experiences for learners and support them in using technology creatively for their language learning (Healey, 2018, TESOL International Association, 2019).

Future Challenges for ELT Programmes

Several studies (e.g., Bailey & Robson, 2002; Merikko & Kivimäki, 2022; Tamronglak, 2020; Voudoukis & Pagiatakis, 2022) propose two major factors that could hinder programme and curriculum management: policy change and technology eruption.

According to Bailey and Robson (2002), educational policies in England have changed how teachers are trained and qualified in schools, colleges, and universities due to tighter government control and

standards. Similarly, Rauteda (2023) found that teachers in Nepal view professional development as essential for maintaining their professional credentials. However, challenges such as inconsistent commuting, insufficient time, and policy centralisation hindered their ability to engage in professional development. In the same vein, Tamronglak (2020) found the Thai Qualification Framework (TQF) for universities in Thailand restricts creativity and academic freedom. This is because the framework only requires all universities to respond to the same standard, thereby increasing a great amount of effort by educators. In addition to this, a recent requirement for Thai quality education called AUN-QA has impacted curriculum development in Thailand and ASEAN countries. For example, according to Refnaldi et al. (2017), a needs analysis for an Indonesian university's B.Ed. in Education identified gaps in ICT mastery, soft skills, and ESP. The curriculum was reformulated to align with AUN-QA criteria, i.e., learning outcomes in the ADDIE learning cycle. These studies suggest that policy changes can play a significant role in curriculum development and revision.

In recent years, technology has transformed education into a new competitive platform. In other words, online certificates and courses are now widely available, and this could become a major competitor to traditional degree programmes. For instance, Voudoukis and Pagiatakis (2022) found that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online TESOL certificate programmes attracted more customers since they are more flexible and cheaper than traditional degree programmes, thereby increasing intense competition to higher education. In addition, according to Merikko and Kivimäki (2022), Finnish teachers have mixed perceptions on adaptive learning technologies. They perceived them as either helpful in designing teaching lessons or challenging in increased workload and decreased teacher-student interaction. This means that technology may have both minor and major impacts on curriculum operations, and it can be a future risk in the ELT profession.

Finally, changes in job opportunity requirements and a decreased demand for undergraduate and Master's degrees are significant challenges for traditional degree programmes. Both Cooper (2023) and Schwartz (2023) argue that degree holders in the US job market are often underpaid and that their degrees offer limited financial returns. This raises questions about the future of MA in ELT programmes and the steps they must take to stay relevant.

Previous Studies

Using needs analysis, educational researchers can identify specific needs, gaps, and expectations of stakeholders. For example, a recent study by Mirici et al. (2022) investigated the needs of stakeholders, namely faculty members, students, alumni, in-service teachers, and employers, in the English Language Teaching department of a university in Turkey with a goal to use the results to redesign its curriculum. The results showed that all stakeholders shared that they would like courses to place more emphasis on practical skills and longer hands-on training experiences. Focusing on employability, representatives from higher education institutions and labour market stakeholders in Portugal in the study of Olo et al. (2022) indicated that there was a mismatch between curricula, which appeared to be heavily theoretical, and the labour market, where soft skills are increasingly demanded by employers. The two studies do not only underscore the importance of integrating practical experiences and necessary skills into curricula to enhance graduate employability but also demonstrate the role of curriculum evaluations in enhancing curriculum relevance and effectiveness. However, in the Thai context, concerns over class hours were emphasised in the study of Adipat et al. (2019), who reported that weekend classes using English as a medium of instructions were preferred by the participants who were a department chair, administrators, experienced teachers, pre-service English teachers, and English Language Teaching (ELT) master graduates from a public university in Thailand. Additionally, including courses such as technology and innovation was also recommended. The findings from these studies from different contexts highlight that incorporating stakeholders' insights through needs analysis

can lead to a more effective and relevant program that meets the expectations of all stakeholders.

Methodology

Participants

This study included 106 participants, representing various types of stakeholders. They include former and current MA in ELT students, teachers, company employees, school administrators, and prospective students. The participants who are followers of the FANPAGE of the Language Institute at a public university (with 1.5k followers) volunteered to participate in an online survey. Since the process of recruiting the participants could not be controlled, the demographics of the participants were explored by categorising them into groups based on whether or not they were current students / alumni at the institute.

As Table 1 illustrates, the majority of current students/alumni (61%) are in the 26-35 age group, while the majority of those not currently in the programme are more evenly spread across age groups. In addition, current students/alumni are primarily Master's degree students and educators, whereas non-current participants include a larger proportion of undergraduate and doctoral students. Finally, a higher percentage of non-current students/alumni (61.7%) work as teachers/lecturers compared to current students/alumni (45.8%).

Table 1

Different Categorisations of Stakeholders (n = 106)

Category	*F*	%
***Group 1: Being a current student / alumni* Age**	**59**	**55.7%**
16-25	8	13.6%
26-35	36	61.0%
36-45	7	11.9%
46-55	6	10.2%
55 and over	*59*	*100%*
TOTAL		
Education	30	50.8%
Bachelor's degree	25	42.4%
Master's degree	4	6.8%
Doctoral degree	*59*	*100%*
TOTAL		
Current status		
Master's degree student	27	45.8%
Teacher / lecturer/ tutor	27	45.8%
Governmental or private company employee	4	6.8%
Administrative team	1	1.17%
TOTAL	*59*	*100%*

Category	F	%
Group 2: Not being a current student / alumni	**47**	**44.3%**
Age	14	29.8%
16-25	13	27.7%
26-35	12	25.5%
36-45	5	10.6%
46-55	3	6.4%
55 and over	*47*	100%
TOTAL		
Education	26	55.3%
Bachelor's degree	14	29.8%
Master's degree	7	14.9%
Doctoral degree	*47*	100%
TOTAL		
Current status	7	14.9%
Undergraduate student	3	6.4%
Master's degree student	2	4.3%
Doctoral student	29	61.7%
Teacher / lecturer/ tutor	2	4.3%
Governmental or private company employee	4	8.5%
Administrative team	*47*	100%
TOTAL		
GRAND TOTAL	**106**	**100%**

Instrument

A questionnaire was used to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire was adapted from standards for the initial TESOL Pre–K-12 Teacher preparation programme developed by the TESOL International Association (2019) and TESOL technology standards by Healey (2018). These questionnaires were designed to assess entry requirements, course content, teaching methods, and the key characteristics of effective language teachers.

The questionnaire consists of 25 items, which are divided into four sections. The first part consists of five questions to gather relevant information regarding the perception and effectiveness of the current MA in ELT curriculum. The questions include the entry requirement process, course relevance, and lecturers' teaching methods. Part Two of the questionnaire includes 14 questions that measure stakeholders' perceptions of the characteristics that language teachers should possess. They consist of questions regarding linguistic proficiency, communicative approach in language teaching, intercultural communication, and digital literacy. The last part of the questionnaire consists of five questions regarding the future risks of the programme. The questions elicited technological disruption, educational policy changes, and online degree competition. An open-ended question was also available at the end of the questionnaire for participants to provide further comments on the programme.

The study used a Likert's scale for responses, where participants rated their level of agreement with the 25 items. The following are measurement guidelines for analysis (Silanoi & Chindarasert, 2019):

4.20 – 5.00	Totally agree
3.40 – 4.19	Agree
2.60 – 3.39	Neutral
1.80 – 2.59	Disagree
1.00 – 1.79	Totally disagree

Before data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by five experts in ELT and curriculum

development. Twenty-five questions were reviewed and revised to ensure that they met the study's objectives, ensuring the content validity. Some questions were rewritten based on their feedback to improve clarity and relevance. An instrument try-out was conducted with 30 samples of the similar characteristics to test the reliability of the questionnaire. It was found that Cronbach's alpha was 0.94, which means that the overall questionnaire was reliable across all sections.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved distributing the questionnaire to all stakeholders, including current and former students of the MA ELT programme, through a Facebook fan page of the institution from 28th May – 30th June 2024. Online participants were invited to complete the survey anonymously to ensure that they could express their opinions freely and without bias. Data obtained from the questionnaire were then transformed into a spreadsheet for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses were employed to interpret the survey data. Descriptive statistics and non-parametric analyses, Independent-Samples Mann Whitney U Test, were performed using IBM SPSS 29.0.2.0 Statistics. Descriptive statistics was used to explore the central tendency of the participant responses, namely mean scores and standard deviations, for each of the key variables measured. Independent-Samples Mann Whitney U tests were employed to explore differences in perceptions based on the participant's status as current students/alumni or not. This is because the participants were not randomly selected and were considered non-parametric.

The open-ended question was thematically coded based on concept-driven analysis, regarding programme operations, professional development, and curricular innovation. The qualitative data were inter-rated with another ELT expert for consistent analysis.

Findings

Perceptions of the MA in ELT Curriculum

To answer research question 1, regarding the current and non-current students/alumni's perception towards the relevance and effectiveness of the MA in ELT curriculum, data from part 1 of the questionnaire was used.

Table 2

Overall Perceptions towards MA in ELT Curriculum (N = 106)

Criteria	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*Mean Difference*
	Current Students/ Alumni		Non-Current Students/Alumni		
Curriculum	*n* = 59		*n* = 47		
The entry requirement is appropriate for the recruitment of M.A. in ELT students.	4.37	0.81	4.21	0.66	0.16
The courses in the M.A. in ELT match the needs of English language teachers and educators.	4.39	0.62	4.32	0.69	0.07
The lecturers deliver the courses in a manner which leads to students' classroom engagement and fosters essential knowledge and skills for English language teachers.	4.27	0.69	4.38	0.61	-0.11

Criteria	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*Mean Difference*
	Current Students/ Alumni		Non-Current Students/Alumni		
Curriculum	***n* = 59**		***n* = 47**		
The courses in the M.A. in ELT match the current trends in English language education.	4.22	0.72	4.21	0.81	0.01
The courses in the M.A. in ELT are up to date and the contents are constantly updated to suit the changing world.	4.17	0.70	4.23	0.73	-0.06
Average	4.28	0.71	4.27	0.70	0.01

Table 2 shows that both the current and non-current students/alumni's perceptions towards the MA in ELT curriculum was positive, with most participants agreeing that the courses were relevant and effective in preparing them for their roles as English language teachers. These views were shared among the current students (*M* = 4.28, *SD* = 0.71) and non-current students/alumni groups (*M* = 4.27, *SD* = 0.70) as suggested by the average means. In particular, the means of perceived match between ELT teachers'/educator needs and the courses are 4.39 (*SD* = 0.62) for current students and 4.32 (*SD* = 0.69) for non-current students, which is relatively high. The participants in both groups show almost identical responses regarding the relevancy of the courses to current situations. The means of the current student group (*M* = 4.22, *SD* = 0.72) and the non-current student group (*M* = 4.21, *SD* = 0.81) suggested that all participants totally agreed that the courses in the programme matched current trends in language education. Furthermore, the non-students/alumni totally agreed that the courses and contents were up-to-date (*M* = 4.23, *SD* = 0.73), while the current students only agreed so (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.17). The findings from these two items pointed to the significance of regular updates of programme courses and curriculum in the constantly changing world. Regarding lecturers' classroom delivery, both groups strongly believed that the lecturers' delivery of the courses fosters essential knowledge and skills. The non-current students, which include alumni, had a slightly stronger mean (*M* = 4.38, *SD* = 0.61) than the current students (*M* = 4.27, *SD* = 0.69). Finally, both current and non-current students totally agreed that the student recruitment requirements were appropriate, indicated by the means of 4.17 (*SD* = 0.70) and 4.23 (*SD* = 0.73), respectively.

Characteristics and Competencies of Effective English Language Teachers

To answer research question 2, the key characteristics and competencies of effective English language teachers, the findings reveal that both current students and non-current students/alumni deemed all aspects of English language teachers' characteristics in the questionnaire items (knowledge about language, English language learning in sociocultural context, planning and implementing instruction, professionalism, technology, and research skill) valuable as manifested in the high average means of all items for both group of participants, 4.63 (*SD* = 0.56) and 4.47 (*SD* = 0.74), respectively. However, several competencies were believed to be essential for effective English language teaching.

Table 3 indicates that the aspect which the participants thought were most important for English teachers was knowledge about language. The ability to demonstrate competent knowledge of the English language had the highest means of all items, with 4.80 (*SD* = 0.41) for current students and 4.74 (*SD* = 0.61) for non-current students/alumni. They also totally agreed that English language teachers should be able to effectively communicate in English, with the means of 4.69 (*SD* = 0.53) and 4.62 (*SD* = 0.64). Understanding of language learning and teaching theories were also considered important for current students (*M* = 4.61 (*SD* = 0.56) and non-current students/alumni

(M = 4.53, SD = 0.72). The small discrepancies between the means of both groups suggest unanimity in their opinions and, hence, can be concluded that knowledge about the language is the core of English language teaching.
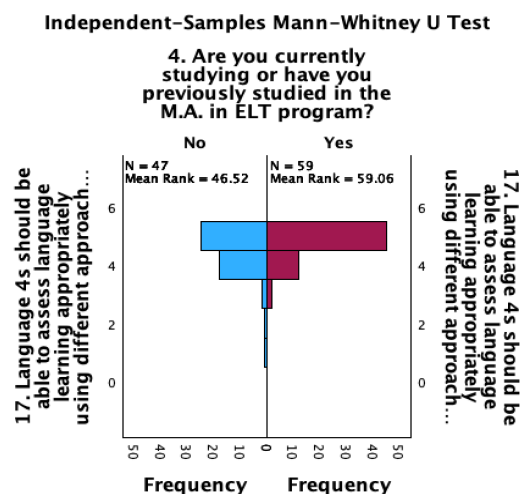
The results also suggest that cultural knowledge was perceived as important for language teachers. Demonstrating knowledge of target language culture is rated highly for both current students (M = 4.63, SD = 0.52) and non-current students/alumni (M = 4.45, SD = 0.75). Implementing intercultural communication is also valued at 4.68 (SD = 0.54) for current students and 4.51 (SD = 0.72) for non-current students/alumni. Another aspect which was found to align with the literature is incorporation of technology. Teachers should be able to develop digital literacy for learning and teaching, 4.58 (SD = 0.62) and 4.43 (SD = 0.71) respectively, and apply relevant technologies for learning and teaching, 4.59 (SD = 0.59) and 4.38 (SD = 0.71), respectively. Interestingly, the findings suggested that research skill, despite being highly regarded, is the least important to the participants. Nevertheless, the current students (M = 4.54, SD = 0.62) and non-current students/alumni (M = 4.34, SD = 0.76) responded that English teachers should be able to search and understand research studies in order to apply those knowledge to lesson design as well as conducting the research study to address classroom issues by themselves, 4.39 (SD = 0.77) and 4.28 (SD = 0.85), respectively.

Table 3
Overall Perceptions towards ELT Characteristics (N = 106)

	Criteria	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*Mean Difference*
		Current Students/ Alumni		**Non-current Students/Alumni**		
	English Language Teacher Characteristics	***n* = 59**		***n* = 47**		
Knowledge about language	Language teachers should be able to demonstrate competent knowledge of the English language.	4.80	0.41	4.74	0.61	0.06
	Language teachers should be able to use communicative English effectively in different contexts.	4.69	0.53	4.62	0.64	0.07
	Language teachers should be able to have a sound understanding of language learning and teaching theories	4.61	0.56	4.53	0.72	0.08
English language learning in sociocultural context	Language teachers should be able to demonstrate the knowledge of target language culture.	4.63	0.52	4.45	0.75	0.18
	Language teachers should be able to implement intercultural communication in a global English context.	4.68	0.51	4.51	0.72	0.17
Planning and implementing instruction	Language teachers should be able to design and implement effective language teaching.	4.68	0.54	4.45	0.80	0.23
	Language teachers should be able to use appropriate materials including digital resources to support language learning and teaching.	4.73	0.49	4.57	0.68	0.16

	Criteria	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*Mean Difference*
		Current Students/ Alumni		**Non-current Students/Alumni**		
	English Language Teacher Characteristics	***n* = 59**		***n* = 47**		
	Language teachers should be able to assess language learning appropriately using different approaches and methods.	4.73	0.52	4.38	0.85	0.35
Professionalism and leadership	Language teachers should be able to participate in professional development activities (e.g. seminars and conferences).	4.49	0.65	4.32	0.89	0.15
	Language teachers should be able to develop professional skills through self-reflection, peer evaluation and collaboration.	4.63	0.52	4.51	0.66	0.12
Technology	Language teachers should be able to develop digital literacies for English language learning and teaching.	4.58	0.62	4.43	0.71	0.15
	Language teachers should be able to apply relevant and updated technologies to language learning and teaching.	4.59	0.59	4.38	0.71	0.21
Research skill	Language teachers should be able to search and understand research studies in order to understand their learners and make informed decisions when designing lessons.	4.54	0.62	4.34	0.76	0.20
	Language teachers should be able to design and conduct a research study in order to examine language learning, language use, and language functions to solve language learning and teaching problems effectively.	4.39	0.77	4.28	0.85	0.11
	Average	4.63	0.56	4.47	0.74	0.16

As seen in Table 3, the item with the highest discrepancy between the groups' means addresses the teachers' ability to appropriately assess language learning. To determine the differences between the two groups of participants in terms of being a current student/alumni or not, Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U tests were performed. The reason for the use of Mann-Whitney U tests is that the number of the two groups of respondents was not equal, nor random (i.e., 59 current students/alumni and 47 non-current students/alumni). After Mann-Whitney U tests were performed, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups at p < 0.05, regarding teacher qualifications. However, the two groups were significantly different in terms of assessment quality. It was found that the mean rank of current students/alumni (Mean Rank = 59.06) was statistically higher than that of non-current students/alumni group (Mean Rank = 46.52, condition *Z* = 1058.5, *p* = 0.012). This demonstrates language assessment as a unique requirement of the programme's teacher qualifications.

Figure 2
Mann-Whitney U Test Result of Language Assessment Qualification

Additional Suggestions for the MA in ELT Programme

With reference to the open-ended question in the questionnaire, there were 26 respondents out of 106 participants who provided written comments. There were twelve alumni/current participants and nine non-alumni participants. After careful consideration, the comments were categorised into three major themes based on the concept-driven approach as follows: programme operations, professional development programmes, and curricular innovation.

Programme Operations

In terms of entry requirements, two participants (one non-alumni teacher and one current student) suggested an extended admission timeline and increased class availability, as well as an existing written exam requirement. These quotes demonstrated that the MA in ELT programme is still in demand, yet the standard practice of entry requirement is preserved. This is allied with International TEFL/TESOL Accreditation Council's (2025) standard in terms of precise programme operations, especially in the entry requirement process.

> *The program should open for more seats and extend the application time to at least June.* (Teacher 4, non-alumni teacher with a BA, aged 26-35)

> *The written exam should still be in the written requirement.* (MA student 2, current student with a BA, aged 26-35)

Besides the standard practice of entry requirement, one non-alumni participant noted that there was a need for international student support. This implies that the programme can attract international students, beyond the local context.

> *More support for international students in relation to the administration process.* (MA student 1, non-alumni student with a BA, aged 16-25)

In addition to the entry requirement, five non-alumni participants suggested extending programme duration to weekdays and the hybrid mode of class delivery. These suggestions mean that there is room for a hybrid regular programme operation on weekdays to increase the number

of students from different parts of the world.

> *Offer weekday classes.* (MA student 1, non-alumni student with a BA, aged 16-25)

> *It's a good idea to have a regular program.* (Undergrad student 1, non-alumni student with a high-school diploma, aged 16-25)

> *The course should provide on-site and online classrooms.* (Teacher 1, non-alumni teacher with a BA, aged 16-25)

Based on the analysis of programme operations, it could be concluded that a hybrid mode of class delivery, the entry requirement, and the extension of classes to weekdays are stakeholders' needs for the programme to take into consideration in the revision and development process.

Professional Development Programmes

Regarding teaching and research practice, three participants (two alumni/current students and one non-alumni) viewed   the MA programme as a platform where pre-service and in-service teachers can excel in their profession in terms of balanced research and practice. This notion supports Qian (2022) regarding the importance of research skills for teachers who lack such skills.

> *The program should encourage teacher practitioners to master both teaching and research skills. A master's degree is a critical point for them to gain insights into their future career paths, beyond just teaching.* (Teacher 5, alumni with a PhD, aged 46-55)

> *An M.A. program in ELT must prepare learners to become researchers, although originally an M.A. program does not have to focus extensively on researching. More and more teachers of English are required to do research for promotion. A rigorous research program (M.Phil.) may be a good alternative for future MA students.* (Employee 1, non-alumni with a PhD, aged 55 and over)

Besides research training, another three alumni/current student participants suggest international interactions either through invited guest lecturers or through field trips and seminar visits. This demonstrates that added-value practices could be regarded as an opportunity for the programme to compete with online certificate programmes.

> *... should invite a guest speaker from famous tutorial schools to show the teaching techniques they use.* (Employee 1, current student with a BA, aged 26-35)

> *Provide more opportunities for students to have international experiences (e.g., short-course training, visits, seminars, and research activities).* (Teacher 6, alumni with a PhD, aged 26-35)

In summary, both research skills and international exposures suggested by the stakeholders could be regarded as the distinctive features of the programme. This makes the MA programme different from existing online TESOL courses, which do not include opportunities for both research and international exposure.

Curricular Innovation

There are four participants (two current students and two non-alumni) recommending the integration of digital and technological skills in the programme. This suggestion means that there is a need for digital literacy skills, as suggested by Adipat et al. (2019) and Healey (2018).

I believe that while learning theories are valuable for teachers, mastering teaching techniques and adapting to digital platforms are even more crucial. Additionally, integrating courses that enable learners to teach their students online, or even assist them in creating an online teaching course, within the curriculum could greatly benefit them. (Teacher 1, current student with a BA, aged 26-35)

...integrating courses that enable learners to teach their students online or even assist them in creating an online teaching course, within the curriculum could greatly benefit them (Teacher 1, current student with a BA, aged 26-35)

To add the course of material design and the course of integrating AI with ELT. (Teacher 3, non-alumni with a BA, aged 26-35)

Also, it should have more subjects that concern teaching through social media platforms to adapt to the wants and needs of Thai and foreign learners within this era. (Teacher 4, non-alumni with a BA, aged 26-35)

In addition to digital skills, one non-alumni participant suggested that there should be a course that addresses special education. This recommendation means that the programme should consider inclusivity in education, which could be an additional strength in the programme.

... My suggestion is that the program may consider offering courses related to ELT and learning differences such as Dyslexia or Disorders of Language Learning since these courses are not prevalent in Thailand, and students can apply the knowledge in special education field as another career path. (Admin 1, non-alumni with a BA, aged 16-25)
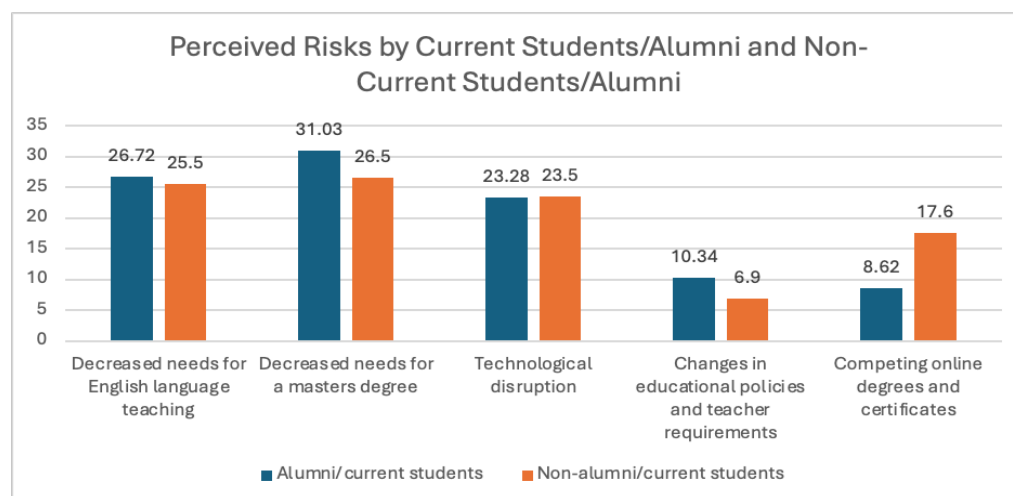
With the emergence of English-medium instructions, there was one current student participant revealing this need, which could be an opportunity for the programme to attract content teachers teaching in English.

There should be more selective courses for ELT students, especially English for specific purposes or teaching real world English because nowadays context-based learning has become a new trend. And many English teachers are struggling when applying this method in their classes. (Admin 1, current student with a BA, aged 26-35)

It could be concluded that updated courses in ELT are the major stakeholders' needs. The programme could reap the benefits of offering these suggested courses so that it remains competitive in the ELT market and provides the best quality education for both pre-service and in-service teachers in Thailand and beyond.

Perceived Future Risks to the MA in ELT Programme

To answer research question 3, data from part 3 of the questionnaire was used. In this section, the participants were allowed to choose more than one option on the potential risks. The total frequency of the former group is 117, whereas the total frequency of the non-current students/alumni group is 102. Figure 3 represents the percentages of ratings from both current and non-current students/alumni groups.

Figure 3
Perceived Future Risks by Current/Non-Current Students/Alumni

Based on Figure 3, the top three risks perceived by both alumni and non-alumni participants consist of decreased needs for a master's degree, decreased needs for ELT, and technological disruption. Firstly, alumni perceived the decreased need for a master's degree higher than the non-alumni group (31.03% and 26.5%, respectively). Secondly, both groups perceived the decreased needs for ELT with the alumni group higher than the non-alumni group (26.72% and 25.5%, respectively). Finally, the non-alumni group perceived the risk of technological disruption slightly higher than the alumni group (23.5% and 23.28%, respectively). It can be concluded from the findings that alumni rated the first two risks higher, likely due to their direct investment in these areas, while the non-alumni group expressed slightly more concern about technological disruption, possibly reflecting a broader uncertainty in future career paths.

In addition to the highest risks perceived by the two groups, it was found that the alumni expressed higher concern with changing educational policy than the non-alumni group (10.34% and 6.9%, respectively). However, the non-alumni group regarded competing online degrees and certificates as a potential risk higher than the alumni group (17.6% and 8.62%, respectively).

It can be concluded from the findings that alumni, who have invested in studying for a master's degree, reflected their risks based on their professional practices in terms of decreasing demands for a master's degree and ELT as well as changing educational policy. In contrast, non-alumni regarded external factors, such as technological disruption and competing online courses, as major risks.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into stakeholders' perceptions of the MA in ELT curriculum, essential competencies for effective English language teaching, and potential future risks. This discussion examines the implications of these results while addressing the challenges and opportunities identified by participants.

Curriculum Relevance and Effectiveness

The findings reveal that both groups of participants generally perceive the curriculum as effective, with courses in the programme positively meeting participants' needs, aligning with TESOL International Association (2019) standards. To elaborate this, courses in linguistics, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills were positively rated to meet the needs of the participants.

However, when analysing the present situation of the programme, current trends and updated courses, such as innovation and technology, received the lowest rating of 4.22. It can be implied that the participants, similar to the findings in studies by Adipat et al. (2019) and Healey (2018), were aware of the need for integration of technology. In an open-ended response, one participant explicitly expressed the need for a course which teaches the students how to teach or build an online curriculum. This means that, for curriculum revision, digital literacy should be incorporated in the programme to address stakeholders' needs and adapt to the rapidly evolving ELT landscape.

The results of the study also demonstrated that the entry requirements and classroom management were highly perceived by the participants. This is in line with the International TEFL/TESOL Accreditation's (2025) standards, which suggest precise organisational operations and standard customer services. For instance, it was found that both groups of participants rated the entry requirements highly for recruiting MA in ELT students. This means that the programme satisfied the standards set by the International TEFL/TESOL Accreditation Council and stakeholders' needs. In addition, both current students and alumni strongly believed that the lecturers' delivery of the courses effectively fostered essential knowledge and skills. This findings align with that of Adipat et al. (2019), who identified lecturers' qualifications as a key contributing factor to the effectiveness of an MA in ELT programme at a public university in Thailand. Overall, it could be argued that the programme operations satisfy quality TESOL standards and stakeholders' needs.

While the current weekend-based, part-time format meets basic accessibility needs, several participants suggested expanding delivery options. As a participant proposed, hybrid or fully online options should be considered to enhance flexibility and competitiveness. This recommendation aligns with findings from multiple studies (Adipat et al., 2019; Bailey & Robson, 2002; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021) emphasising the importance of adapting to online practices to remain competitive in a market increasingly dominated by MOOCs and online TESOL certificate programme. Such adaptation would not only address current stakeholder needs but also position the programme strategically against emerging alternatives.

Characteristics of English Language Teachers

Overall, it was found in the study that both groups of the participants rated positively highly for language proficiency, communicative approaches to language teaching, and digital literacy. These findings are aligned with TESOL International Association (2019) standard, where language proficiency is the prominent requirement for English language teachers. This suggests that both pre-service and in-service teachers should demonstrate a high degree of English competency in the ELT profession. In addition, the findings reveal that English teachers should be able to effectively choose and design appropriate materials for ELT. This is in line with Adipat et al. (2019) and Healey (2018), who suggest that teachers should professionally and ethically use relevant technological tools to create appropriate environments for language learning and teaching in an MA in ELT programme.

It is also important that updated trends, such as social media and AI, be trained in the programme, as one participant recommended adding so. This reflects the growing recognition that digital literacy must evolve to incorporate emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and social media platforms—a significant consideration for curriculum development.

In addition to language and digital knowledge and skills, both groups of participants highly rated four characteristics: appropriate language assessment, intercultural communication, a strong understanding of language learning and teaching theories, and the effective implementation of language teaching strategies. These characteristics are regarded as fundamental competencies of ELT professionals as set by TESOL International Association (2019). Interestingly, an examination of the present situation of the programme revealed that the programme is the only MA in ELT

programme in Bangkok with language assessment as a compulsory course. This means that the programme is the only one that maintains the fundamental characteristics of language teachers regarding language assessment, meeting the standards set by TESOL International Association (2019), presenting a competitive advantage in meeting industry standards.

Regarding intercultural communication and cultural knowledge, the results suggest that cultural knowledge was perceived as important for language teachers. Demonstrating knowledge of target language culture is regarded highly for both current students and non-current students/alumni. Implementing intercultural communication is also valued for current students and for non-current students/alumni. This finding aligns with Imran et al. (2024), who argue that teachers should be able to demonstrate appropriate cultural awareness in language teaching. Participants emphasised the equal importance of valuing one's own culture and understanding other cultures, which is in line with TESOL International Association (2019) and Vaishnav (2024) regarding the dynamic use of the English language in international settings. According to Vaishnav (2024), alongside technological proficiency, intercultural communication is a key skill that English language teachers should possess in today's global English teaching contexts. However, an examination of the present situation of the programme reveals that intercultural communication is absent from the curriculum, indicating a need for its inclusion in future programme adaptations.

Interestingly, the findings revealed that both groups of participants, despite rating research skills the lowest among other characteristics, still value the ability to design and conduct a research study. In terms of research reading, the participants recognised the value of applying research findings to inform them of their teaching practices, aligning with TESOL International Association (2019) regarding using classroom research to enhance teaching. This result is also in agreement with Holland's (2023) recommendation that teachers should engage in their own classroom research. There is a possibility that the low rating of research skill is influenced by the heavy workload of teachers in Thailand, which limits time available for conducting research. This challenge is consistent with Qian (2022), who found that foreign teachers often lack time and resources needed to engage in classroom research.

Future Risks to the MA in ELT Programme

The study identified three primary risks facing the programme: technological disruption, competition from online degrees, and changes in educational policies. These findings provide crucial insights for strategic planning and curriculum development. From the findings, it is apparent that technological advancement was a threat to traditional teaching practice. This is in line with Merikko and Kivimäki (2022), who argue that there is a tendency of automated technology to increase more workload and decrease interaction between students and teachers. To mitigate the risk, it is important for the MA in ELT programme to prioritise digital literacy skills in how to appropriately and effectively choose digital tools, online assignments, and online interaction tools to meet the needs of stakeholders as well as the emerging technologies, such as AI. This is in response to one current participant who suggested this issue regarding more subjects on teaching content through social media. This approach would transform technological challenges into opportunities for innovation.

Another challenge identified by the non-alumni group is alternative online courses. According to Voudoukis and Pagiatakis (2022), MOOCs and online teaching certificates are more affordable and flexible than traditional degree programmes. This could attract more customers who may not have enough time and resources to pursue a master's degree. To compete in this market, the MA in ELT programme may need to reconsider offering a hybrid option, thereby providing flexibility for potential learners in the programme to study both in class and online at their available time.

Finally, policy changes were also identified as a risk. As reported in Cooper (2023) and Schwartz (2023), there is a trend of devaluation of degrees today. What the MA in ELT programme needs to consider is to offer value-added courses, such as ESP (Adipat et al., 2019), or Content-Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses for content teachers teaching in English. In addition, the programme should consider international practical exposure, such as, seminars, outing or field trip, for practical experience (Mirici et al., 2022) as one participant reported this issue. These strategies could override the existing online programmes and add more valuable experience for master's degree students.

Conclusion

This study provides comprehensive insights into the perceptions of MA in ELT programme, English teacher competencies, and the future risks. It was found that, overall, the current MA in ELT programme met the standards set by the TESOL organisation and stakeholders' needs. However, some updated courses and digital options need to be considered in addition to address future risks in terms of technological disruption, alternative online competition, and policy changes. The study offers two implications regarding the curriculum design process and the future of MA in ELT programmes. Firstly, in terms of curriculum design, this study revealed that obtaining the needs from existing, potential, as well as graduates' employers could yield relevant information from the different angles of perceptions. It was found that, after graduating from the MA in ELT programme, graduates demonstrated better assessment skills over those who have not yet enrolled in the programme. It means that, in designing and revising an MA in ELT programme, taking key competencies from TESOL standards might not be enough for the present situation analysis. In fact, course development committee members need to be aware of stakeholders' insights so that relevant courses and curriculum could meet their needs. Besides the process of needs analysis, it is also important to note that, considering the future risks of the programme could yield relevant measures to mitigate potential problems. It was found in the study that technology, online competition, and policy changes could be potential risks perceived by the different groups of stakeholders. This means that programme committee members could take the perceptions of risks into consideration to predetermine changes in the programme to both serve the stakeholders' needs and prevent any potential risks in operating the programme.

This study used only data from the questionnaire, and the stakeholders were various and non-random. These issues might have limited the analysis of stakeholders' needs in terms of detailed information and the validity of the study. Future research should include qualitative methods, such as interviews, to obtain deeper insights from stakeholders. Additionally, the present context of study is a public university in Bangkok. Future studies should include MA in ELT programmes from other institutions to explore unique MA in ELT programmes in Thailand, contributing to the development of national quality standards. Looking ahead, while the MA in ELT programme demonstrates many strengths, its continued success will depend on its ability to evolve in response to changing technological landscapes, competitive pressures, and stakeholder needs. By embracing innovation and flexibility, the programme can thrive in the dynamic future of English language teacher education.

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