



# Reaping just what is sown: Low-skills and low-productivity of informal economy workers and the skill acquisition process in developing countries



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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore the skill acquisition process of informal economy workers and how it affects their current skills and productivity levels. We used a mixed method and multilevel sampling design with the aid of questionnaires and interviews. We found that trainings provided and skill-levels of workers were basic, and this affected their performance and productivity. We recommend that skill development policies for informal economy workers need to be specific, comprehensive, all-inclusive and peculiar to their challenges.

## 1. Introduction

Informal economy workers (IEWs) are faced with a myriad of challenges, but the hydra-headed vicious cycle of low skills-low productivity-low income has truncating effects on their total wellbeing as well as societal and economic contributions (Adams et al., 2013; Palmer, 2008; Johanson and Adams, 2004; Pina et al., 2012). This vicious cycle is obviously a product of the conditions that pervade work in the informal economy (IE) such as lack of representation, registration, regulation, legal and social protection, property rights, access to capital and credit, access to quality training and poor governance visibility, which stifles the voices of these workers and hinders their ability to acquire requisite skills and/or negotiate equitably for better wages and conditions (Adams et al., 2013; dvv, 2011, 2013; Pina et al., 2012; Johanson and Adams, 2004; Palmer, 2008; Chen et al., 2002). The skill acquisition process (SKAQPRO) of most developing countries have failed to deliver on improving the skill levels of the IEWs (ILO, 2008) (those informal workers who own or work directly for enterprises in the IE) and this worsens their fate as they are already highly vulnerable (ILO, 2013a,b, 2012a; Darvas and Palmer, 2014; Bacchetta, 2009; Hussmanns, 2004) and suffer great deficits particularly since their activities are merely subsistence and/or simple products and services delivered at very micro-levels. This probably explains the phenomenon of a high working poor population in the IE (ILO, 2011, 2008; Palmer,

2008, 2009), especially women and young adults (ILO, 2013b; WYR, 2012). It seems that IEWs are not just vulnerable to unemployment, but to underemployment that still leads to the inability to preserve their wellbeing (ILO, 2002a,b,c; Carr and Chen, 2002; Gallin and Jhabvala, 2001).

The informal workforce of most developing countries sometimes make up to 80% of the entire workforce (and 20% in some developed countries) and its growth continues unabated (EC, 2009; Becker, 2004) in spite of decades drive to formalize the sector (ILO, 2013a; Adams, 2008; ADB, 2011). Some aspects of the IE may never formalize and some countries actually have the IE and formal economy co-exist agreeably (ILO, 2014; La Porta and Shleifer, 2009; Chen, 2007; Sparks and Barnett, 2010). Therefore, attention given to IEWs should shift from preparing them for formal jobs to equipping them with potential opportunities to improve their wellbeing, livelihood as well as individual and collective contributions to their society and national economic development. And since skills are increasingly critical in today's fast-growing world of work and regarded as the highest bargaining tool of the worker (OECD, 2013; EC, 2009; Kwon, 2009) that could transform lives, generate prosperity and promote social cohesion (OECD, 2013), governments and development agencies have been pushing for skills development in the IE (ILO, 2008; Palmer, 2008; OECD, 2006; World Bank, 2012a), but skills development alone has not yielded the expected results (Palmer, 2007a,b, 2008; Darvas and

*Abbreviation:* IE, informal economy; IEWs, informal economy workers; IWs, informal workers; SKAQPRO, skill acquisition process; IHBSWs, informal hair and beauty services workers; HBSS, hair and beauty services; SDPA, Thailand Skill Development Promotion Act; DSD, Department of Skill Development

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Palmer, 2014; King and Palmer, 2006a; ILO, 2008).

Most IEWs are caught in the vicious cycle of 'low' what with working and living in the IE (Palmer, 2008; King and Palmer, 2008) as well as additional challenges to acquiring needed skills and so are unable to support a decent standard of living; and these vulnerabilities perpetuate the vicious cycle (Darvas and Palmer, 2014; ILO, 2013b; Palmer, 2008). They are often unable to afford the financial cost of trainings, lack access to quality training, training entry requirements are too high, irrelevance of training available, poor quality of training, weak commitment of training-providers, and poor support incentives from government, difficulty in taking time off work for training (Herschbach, 1989; Silva, 2008; Pavcnik, 2002; Liimatainen, 2002; Hussmanns, 2004), as well as social, economic and legal obstacles (dvv, 2013; Adams et al., 2013; Johanson and Adams, 2004; World Bank, 2014; Pina et al., 2012). These hinder their productive capacity (Palmer, 2008, 2009; King and Palmer, 2006a) and affect their decision to pursue training (ILO, 2013b). They are mostly paid per hour or service and so their income is dependent on how much service they render and how many clients they attend to per day. This indicates a failure of the SKAQPRO for IEWs in developing countries (ILO), which may not be unrelated to policies that isolate skills development from the other drivers of productivity and growth. But, the ability to perform optimally through improved skills for quality goods and services that attract more clients and orders would not only increase income, self-esteem, self-reliance (UNHCR, 2011) and wellbeing, but also the ability to negotiate for better deals. These issues need to be considered in planning SKAQPROs for IEWs with skills training placed in the center of a comprehensive strategy including social, political, cultural, economic and other related elements (Fluitman, 1989; Adams et al., 2013; Pina et al., 2012).

Acquired skills need to be of good quality and within appropriate contextual conditions (World Bank, 2004) to be effective and productive because poorly acquired skills will not result in increased productive capacity (King and Palmer, 2006a). The skill acquisition paradigm should go beyond just equipping the unemployed/underemployed with basic skills for employment in the formal economy to a shift that includes, at a higher degree, assisting IEWs to improve their social and human capital as well as productivity (Brewer et al., 2012; Brisbois and Saunders, 2005; Pieck, 2000). Therefore, SKAQPROs should be synergistic, adaptive, dynamic and exploratory without being rigid, constrained and stereotypical (Mayombe and Lombard, 2015; ILO, 2013c; Taylor and Ivry, 2012; Palmer, 2008, 2007b; King and Palmer, 2006b; Johanson and Adams, 2004; Newell, 1991); and in particular, all-inclusive and occupational domain-specific for IEWs. The SKAQPRO in developing countries' IE and its impact on the IEWs and their performance, especially in work that has to do with trade and craft as well as services outside the formal and industrial economy have never really been studied. Available studies also mainly focus on pre-employment provisions (e.g. traditional informal trainings like apprenticeship and formal training programs), informal employment in the formal economy or industrialized sector, formalization, property rights, poverty alleviation, etc and certainly not on IEWs. A literary search on skills for IWs (on Scopus, ScienceDirect, and SSCI: Terms-skills, skills acquisition, IWs: Language-English: Date- 09/2014-01/2016) yielded no related publications.

Fluitman (1989) recognized the need to plan SKAQPROs based on the perspectives of the people rather than mere assumptions and pointed out the importance of exploring and understanding the SKAQPRO from targeted angles. In this paper, we explore this issue from the perspectives of IEWs in informal hair and beauty services (IHBSs) in Hat Yai, Thailand along with the enterprise owners, customers and training providers to serve as a guide for policy development and training design (Kraiger et al., 1993). We also view skills as a major

driver to improve productivity among others in the peculiar context of the IE as well as human and social capital; and productivity is viewed from the lens of per hour/service or performance quality (ILO, 2008; Gambin et al., 2009). The objective of this paper is to gain insight into the SKAQPRO of these workers and how it affects their current skills levels. The research questions addressed include 'how do they acquire their skills and what are their current skills levels?' The paper structure includes: introduction, methods, results, discussion and recommendations/conclusion.

### 1.1. Skills and productivity of IEWs

Skill acquisition could be seen as a form of prolonged skill learning within the right conditions to perform tasks and abilities (Speelman and Kirsner, 2008) from practice and experience (Rosenbaum et al., 2001) and shrouded in social norms and social class (Green, 2011). This implies that the process of skill acquisition is continuous and iterative giving room to add new skills and improve the performance of old skills (Boyatzis and Kolb, 1995; Newell, 1991; Anderson, 1982). Therefore, any SKAQPRO for IEWs should consider their expectations/desires and the peculiar challenges of their socioeconomic status as well as incorporate practice and experience into its core design. This will require a comprehensive and embrative understanding of skill and its impact on productivity as well as income and wellbeing by extension.

For IEWs, it really doesn't matter how skills are defined as long as they are provided with the kind of capital that they can trade with to improve their income and wellbeing (Ashton and Sung, 2006), whether it be social, physical or human capital. Majority of their earnings directly depend on the quality of their products and services whether as owners of their own informal micro- enterprises and/or waged workers who are paid per hour or service (Mayhew and Neely, 2006). They depend on their customer base for their income and job satisfaction, which affects their livelihood and self-esteem (ILO, 2005). Self-employed IEWs often require multiskills and knowledge (Neil et al., 2002; Johanson and Adams, 2004; Haan, 2006) for their business and so simply increasing skills may not result in improved productivity (Mayhew and Neely, 2006; Leitch, 2006; Gambin et al., 2009) if the prevailing conditions in the IE are ignored (Palmer, 2009, 2007a,b,c; Adams et al., 2013) and skills are taken in isolation (Crafts and O'Mahony, 2001; Gambin et al., 2009).

Palmer (2008) suggests that a SKAQPRO that improves access, relevance and quality of training programs will be better equipped to ensure resulting upgrade in productivity. And so for this research, we define skills as the ability and knowledge (know-what and know-how) embedded in an individual to carry out or perform tasks and duties of a given job or activity in an occupational domain, acquired through learning, experience and practice, in a productive and sociable manner, which can be built upon and mastered to any given level—i.e. the ability and the knowledge to perform. This is drawn from the perspectives of workers, employers and the users of their services and it is based on the findings of a pilot study. Skills level is the progressive placement (high, average and low) of an individual(s) based on ability and performance as well as certifications attained. This study assesses skills collectively rather than individually, therefore, we are referring to the ability of a group of heterogeneous individuals in a social and occupational group of the economy and level of their skills per task, which include practical skills and knowledge.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research design

The study employed concurrent mixed methods (Tashakkori and

Teddlie, 2003a,b; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell, 2009) to explore and understand the perceptions of IHBSWs, customers and business-owners in Hat Yai on the SKAQPRO and its impact on skill levels in order to make empirically based recommendations for change. The design is mixed in data collection and sampling. The rationale for this strategy hinges on its flexibility and allowance of multiple evidences and data sources enabling multiple interpretations for triangulation (Creswell, 2003; Gillham, 2000) and tremendous insights into the IHBSWs' SKAQPRO (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The research was conducted after a pilot study about the skills of IHBSWs in Hat Yai, which identified skill acquisition and performance levels as areas of concern. An in-depth study, which built on the findings of the pilot study, was then conducted. A thorough review of literature and documents/archival records was conducted to understand pertinent and related issues.

## 2.2. Conceptual foundation

The conceptual foundation used for this study is derived from the three stages of skill acquisition (Fiits and Posner, 1967; Taatgen, 2002) and systematically aligned in synergy with the human capital theory (HCT) (Schultz, 1993) and complex dynamic system theory (Thelen and Smith, 2006). The intention is to build a conceptual and theoretical direction that elaborates on the relationship between SKAQPRO and current collective skill levels of IEWs for assessment. This theoretical background indicates that effective skills development requires a synergy between all forces, processes and connections to be able to address the complex dynamics of the IEWs' socioeconomic environment with adaptable solutions relevant to individuals and occupational communities. This, we believe, shall lead to improved productivity (performance) and income through the cyclical flow of learning and relearning (Tough, 1971) through systematic intervention and training programs.

## 2.3. Scope

This study covers informal hair and beauty services workers (IHBSWs), IEWs in the trade and craft sector providing creative and personal care services. They are widespread in urban centers, the profession is unlikely to become formalized in the near future in most developing countries, and the skill sets required and their means of acquisition have not been widely studied. In spite of the perception that salon workers have low skills, customer loyalty is related to technical expertise, continuous learning and workplace culture.

## 2.4. The study area

Thailand's informal workforce is generally challenged by low-skills and productivity (ONESDB, 2012; ADB/TWS, 2013) and these impacts negatively on IEWs (World Bank, 2012) and make up 55.7% of the labor force (ILO, 2012b; NSO, 2016). There is an expedient need to improve their skills, especially those in the services subsector, as they are a major contributor to income generation and national development (ILO, 2013b,c; ONESDB, 2012; World Bank, 2012; Thanachaisethavut and Charoenlert, 2006; Richgter, 2006). Hat-Yai is a major city in the south of Thailand and was chosen based on its metropolitan and heterogeneous population. This is because it is an urban center in a developing nation with a large foreign visitor population, as well as its convenience of proximity (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell, 2009). It is the largest municipality in the Songkhla Province, Southern Thailand with a population of 158, 128 (HYC, 2011) (Fig. 1) and located near the border of Malaysia. It serves as the business heart of

Songkhla, the largest metropolitan area in the South and third largest in the country (Kuncharin and Mohamed, 2014). It is estimated that 357,000 foreigners live, study and work in southern Thailand; considering the number of foreign students and staff in Hat-Yai's universities as well as its tourist population, it can be safely assumed that a good number of these foreigners are in Hat Yai (Sciortino and Punpuing, 2009; IOM, 2011; Tepsing, 2014; Jariyachamsit and Wongleedee, 2012).

### 2.4.1. Skill acquisition process (SKAQPRO) of IHBSWs in Hat Yai

The current SKAQPRO for IHBSWs in Hat-Yai as deduced from this research is represented in Fig. 2. There are three strands of trainings available for the IEWs: formal, informal and self-learning. Each strand has different types of instructional methods available to trainees as well as different categories of training providers as is reflected in Fig. 2.

## 2.5. Data collection

Data collection was mixed and cross sectional taking place simultaneously from October 2015 to February 2016 (Bernard, 2000; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003a,b). In order to discover congruence by converging results through triangulation (Creswell, 2009), intramethods and intermethods were used in this single study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003a,b; Creswell et al., 2003). The primary data collection instruments were mixed and multilevel questionnaires, interviews, observations and documents/records (i.e. secondary data) designed to gain deep and wide understanding without losing inference quality and representation (Kemper et al., 2003).

## 2.6. Sampling

There was no established sampling frame from which a representative sample could be drawn and so we used a multilevel and identical mixed methods purposeful sampling (Onwugbuezie and Collins, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007) by collecting data from IHBSWs, customers, business owners and trainers to increase the power of inferences drawn from the data, and ensured that participants were drawn from the same sample for the quantitative and qualitative investigations (Kemper et al., 2003; Onwugbuezie and Collins, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Kuzel, 1999). The pilot survey revealed that hair and beauty operations were largely clustered in the city center and patronized by locals and tourists and so the sampling field was narrowed down to the city center and other operations suggested from the survey to make sampling easier (Bernard, 2000), reduce bias and increase representation as well as select information-rich samples for in-depth study and convergence (Palinkas et al., 2013, 2011; Patton, 1990, 2002). Only those samples that were strictly connected to hair and beauty services (HBSs) were selected and services included haircare, facecare, nailcare, bodycare and massage. Specific skills assessed were selected based on global requirements (EU, 2013; MES, 2007; RAPS, 2014) (see Appendix A for specific skills assessed).

### 2.6.1. Questionnaire survey

A multi-level survey was conducted concurrently with structured self-administered questionnaires developed by the researcher and containing open and close-ended questions. The surveys covered 71 HBSs-establishments, 120 IHBSWs, 120 customers, 20 business-owners and four vocational skill training institutions. The questionnaires were presented in Thai and English formats, however, different sets of questionnaires were designed for each level of respondents. Likert scale questions were included to determine the perception of the respondents towards the skills acquisition rating and skill levels of the IHBSWs in

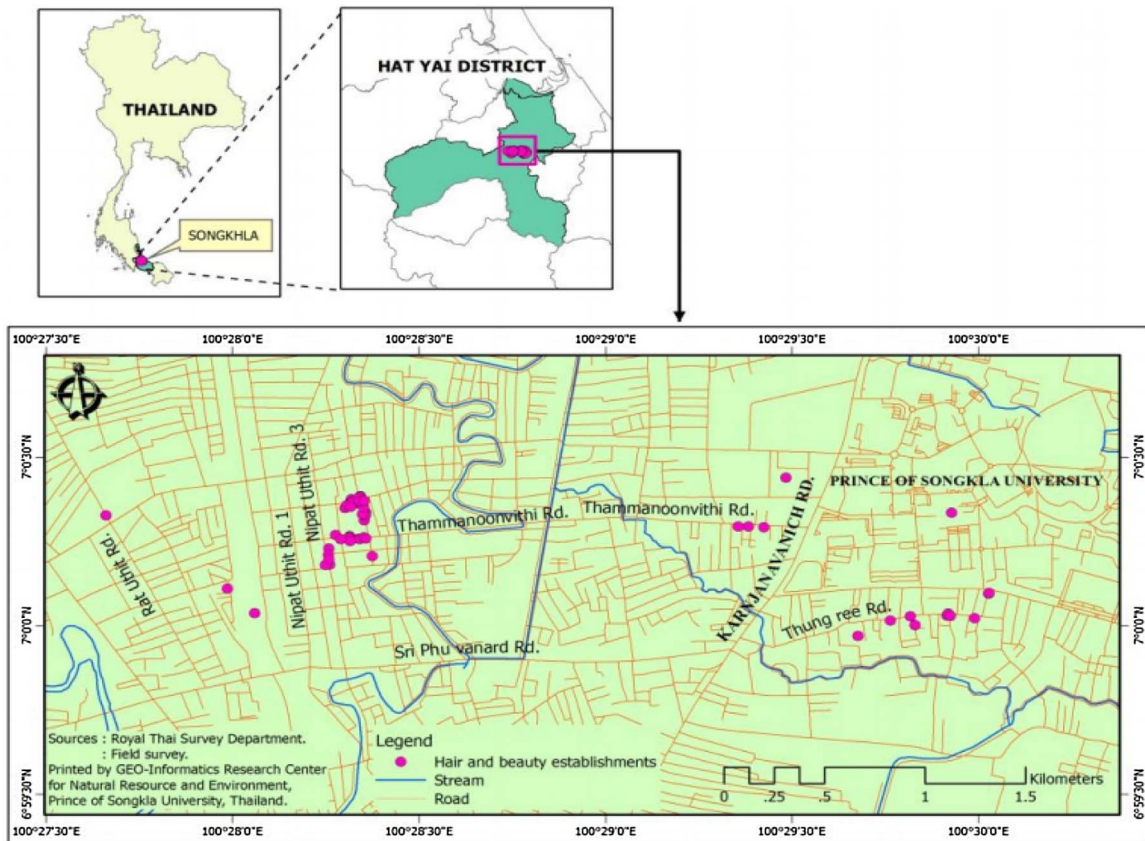


Fig. 1. Map of Hat Yai and the Study's focus areas.

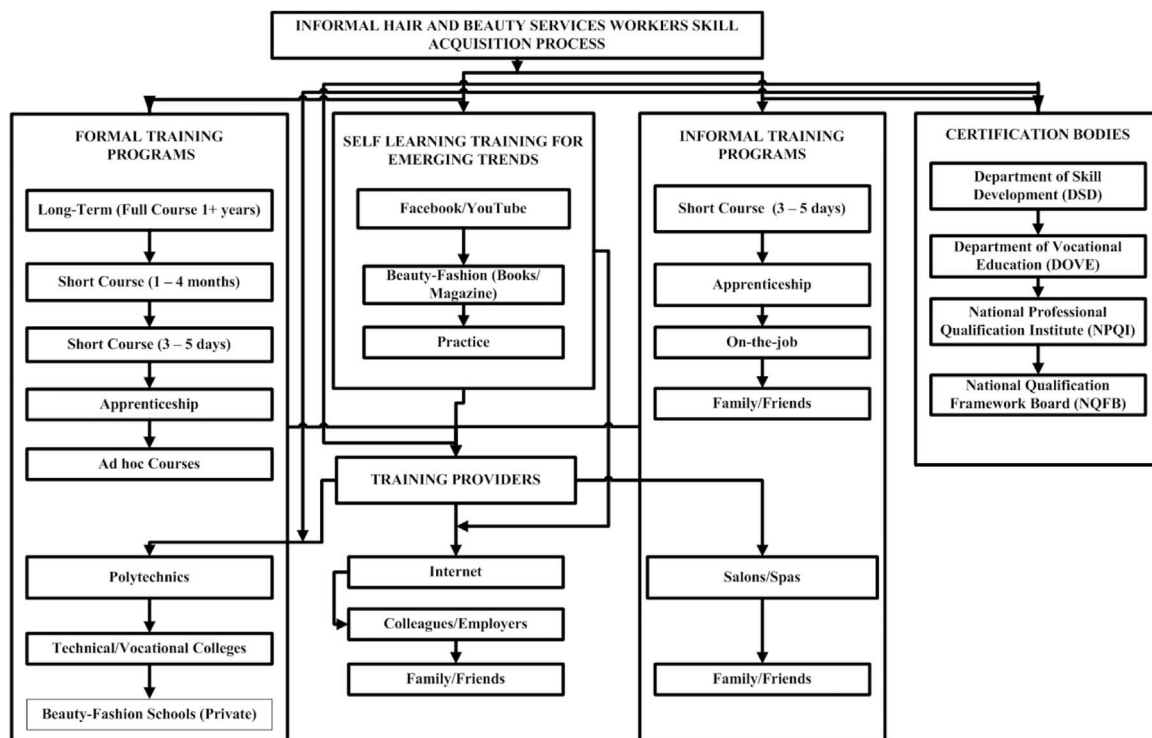


Fig. 2. Current Skill Acquisition Process (SKAQPRO) of IHBSWs in Hat Yai, Thailand.



Hat Yai. The questionnaires were designed based on the results of a pilot study and verified by three-member-panels for each level; corrections were made and confirmed before being administered in the major study. The multilevel survey provided comparable data, which enhanced credibility, trustworthiness and reliability (Bernard, 2000; Johnson and Turner, 2003; Onwuegbuezie and Collins, 2007).

2.6.2. Interviews

15 workers, 15 customers, 2 business-owners and 3 training providers were interviewed. An interview guide was developed for the structured interviews and the questions were exploratory, closed/open and in-depth so that topics could be probed and explored effectively without the interviewer losing focus. Questions covered perceptions and expectations on skill levels, training process, performance and recommendations for IHBSWs in Hat Yai. The closed/open questions were used in order to support descriptive and interpretive validity, credibility and reliability (Bernard, 2000; Johnson and Turner, 2003; Onwuegbuezie and Collins, 2007). The researcher conducted all interviews personally with the aid of Thai native translators where necessary. All respondents were interviewed with prior written consents and in their preferred language and interviews were audio-recorded where possible with note-taking.

2.6.3. Observations and secondary data reviews

Personal observations of the researcher added more insight to the investigations. As a participant or direct observer, the researcher presented herself as a customer in various capacities or sat in while customers were receiving services with permission to record the activities textually and audio-visually. These observations took place concurrently with some interviews and questionnaire administration which reduced time, increased validity and depth of understanding. Also, secondary data like websites, policy documents, training brochures, curricula, qualification frameworks, reports and other documents were reviewed to add credence, validation, corroboration and provide more information.

2.7. Data analysis

We utilized descriptive statistics for quantitative and qualitative analysis (Onwuegbuezie and Teddlie, 2003). The overall perceptual estimation for skill levels was modelled by adding the percentages of all three groups and dividing by the total number of groups then multiplied by 100 (Eq. (1)). The highest score was considered the overall perception of the survey respondents on skill levels.

$$SL = WsP + CsP + BOsP = \frac{\sum (WsP+CsP+BOsP)}{TNG(3)} \times 100 \tag{1}$$

where SL represents skill level, WsP = workers’ perception, CsP = customers’ perception, BOsP = business-owners’ perception, TNG = total number of groups.

The sum percentage mean of responses from each group of respondents were collated separately for ‘available skills’ (i.e. skills the respondents perceive the workers have) and ‘new skills desired’ (i.e. skills the respondents desired the workers to have). The overall perceptual estimation for skills available (Eq. (2)) and new skills desired (Eq. (3)) were modelled by adding the percentages of all three groups and dividing by the total number of groups then multiplied by 100.

$$AS = WsP + CsP + BOsP = \frac{\sum (WsP+CsP+BOsP)}{TNG(3)} \times 100 \tag{2}$$

$$NSD = WsP + CsP + BOsP = \frac{\sum (WsP+CsP+BOsP)}{TNG(3)} \times 100 \tag{3}$$

where AS represents impact of available skills, NSD = new skills desired, WsP = workers’ perception, CsP = customers’ perception, BOsP = business-owners’ perception, TNG = total number of groups.

Thematic analysis was used for interviews, observations and other qualitative data to find common themes and sub-themes, which were then matched and triangulated with the findings of the quantitative analysis (Onwuegbuezie and Teddlie, 2003; Onwuegbuezie and Collins, 2007; Yin, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Erzberger and Kelle, 2003; Cresswell, 2009; Bernard, 2000). Themes were presented under the following headings: respondents’ profiles, skill acquisition process, skill levels rating and customer satisfaction. Results were validated through triangulation of data (around all levels), peer/member examination (by presenting findings to peers and some participants), and external auditing (through an independent/uninvolved investigator) (Cresswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) and the pilot study.

3. Results

3.1. Respondents’ profiles

Table 1 shows the profiles for the workers, customers and business-owners as supported by observations and interviews. There were more females (74%) than males (27%) and the total mean age was within the range of 30– > 40 (70%). Majority entered into work at the age range of 21–30 (58%) while indications show that most customers were either young adults or middle-aged females (20–30 [32%] and > 40 [34%]). The survey revealed that the majority of the respondents had lived in Hat Yai for 1–5 years; most of the workers were from other parts of the country and neighboring countries while most of the non-Thai customers (38%) were tourists. Observations revealed that most of these customers come over the weekend and often times the salons get zero customers during the weekdays. Some of the customers interviewed argued that most people don’t feel the need to visit them because they don’t think their services are necessary since they (customers) can do it for themselves. The survey covered 8 types of establishments (exclusively haircare, facecare, bodycare and massage, full salon, full spa, spa/salon and mobile). Most of the workers surveyed served in haircare only (18%) and full salons (21%) while 25% (haircare) and 21% (full salon) of the customers visited them. Meanwhile, 18% of workers and 10% of businesses were mobile, and 11% of customers used mobile services. Although, 25% of businesses surveyed were spa/salon, only 14% of workers and 7% of customers worked in and visited them. Massage (35%) and haircare (32%) were the commonest skills of the IHBSWs while nailcare (9%) was the least acquired skill; but, most of them worked with two or more of the skill sets. Majority of these workers were fulltime (71%) employees (60%).

3.2. Skill acquisition process

One government skill development center, one polytechnic college, and two vocational colleges were surveyed. They are all registered to provide vocational skills training. 36% of the respondents acquired their work skills through apprenticeship; and interviews revealed that these apprenticeships were done within salons and spas. 19% and 17%, however, were trained on-the-job (OJB) and at a fashion and beauty training school, while government skill training centers provided for only 13% of the survey participants. Only a small proportion learnt their skills from technical/polytechnic/vocational colleges; indicating the small role of vocational institutions in this occupational group

**Table 1**  
Respondent Profiles.

Characteristic	Description	Business Owners		Workers		Customers		% Mean
		#	%	#	%	#	%	
Respondents nationality	Thai	–	–	–	–	80	62	–
	Asean	–	–	–	–	16	12	–
	Asia	–	–	–	–	10	8	–
	Europe	–	–	–	–	6	5	–
	America	–	–	–	–	6	5	–
	Africa	–	–	–	–	12	9	–
Sex	Female	15	75	93	78	89	68	74
	Male	5	25	27	23	41	32	27
Age (years)	< 18	–	–	4	3	–	–	3
	18–20	1	5	24	20	20	15	13
	20–30	3	15	27	23	41	32	23
	30–40	5	25	62	52	25	19	32
	> 40	11	55	3	3	44	34	31
Work entry age	< 16	–	–	14	12	–	–	–
	17–20	–	–	27	23	–	–	–
	21–25	–	–	30	25	–	–	–
	26–30	–	–	39	33	–	–	–
	< 31	–	–	10	8	–	–	–
Educational status	No Formal Education	–	–	18	15	–	–	15
	Primary	–	–	6	5	15	12	9
	Secondary	2	10	69	58	14	11	26
	Technical	5	25	4	5	10	8	13
	Vocational	6	30	8	7	25	19	19
	University	7	35	15	15	66	51	34
Duration of stay (years)	1–5	2	10	59	49	34	26	28
	6–10	2	10	14	12	14	11	11
	11–15	5	25	14	12	15	12	16
	16–20	5	25	11	9	16	12	16
	21–25	2	10	19	16	17	13	13
	26–30	2	10	9	8	18	14	11
	> 31	2	10	3	3	16	12	8
	< 280	2	10	45	38	10	8	11
Monthly income (USD)	280–421	5	25	32	27	16	12	21
	421–701	5	25	25	21	20	15	20
	701–981	4	20	10	8	32	25	18
	981–1121	2	10	4	3	41	32	15
	> 981–1121	2	10	4	3	11	8	7
	< 71	–	–	–	–	67	51	–
Monthly spending (USD)	71–141	–	–	–	–	22	17	–
	141–212	–	–	–	–	10	8	–
	212–282	–	–	–	–	12	9	–
	282–353	–	–	–	–	10	8	–
	> 353	–	–	–	–	9	7	–
	Haircare only	2	20	21	18	33	25	21
	Bodycare only	2	10	4	3	10	8	7
	Facecare only	–	–	10	8	12	9	6
Service establishment available/in-demand	Massage only	3	15	14	12	20	15	14
	Full Salon	4	18	33	27	32	25	23
	Spa/Salon	5	25	17	14	9	7	15
	Mobile	2	10	21	18	14	11	13
	Haircare only	–	–	38	32	–	–	–
	Bodycare only	–	–	13	11	–	–	–
Workers area of service	Facecare only	–	–	13	11	–	–	–
	Nailcare	–	–	11	9	–	–	–
	Massage only	–	–	45	38	–	–	–
	Hourly	–	–	31	26	–	–	–
	Daily	–	–	9	8	–	–	–
	Weekly	–	–	4	3	–	–	–
Workers' Pay Contract	Monthly	–	–	20	17	–	–	–
	Per Service	–	–	56	47	–	–	–
	Fulltime	–	–	85	71	–	–	–
	Part-time	–	–	14	12	–	–	–
Work contract	Freelance/Mobile	–	–	21	18	–	–	–
	Employee	–	–	72	60	–	–	–
	Owner-Worker	–	–	25	21	–	–	–
Work status	Owner-Employer	–	–	23	19	–	–	–

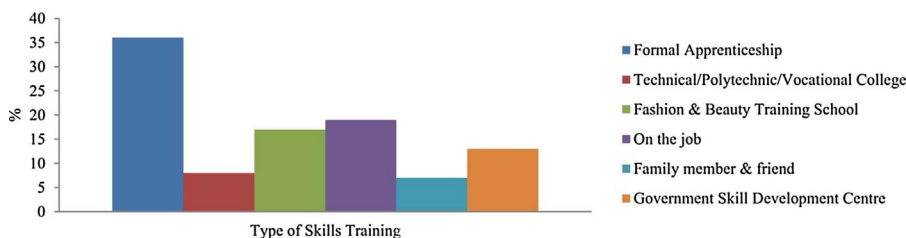


Fig. 3. Skill Training Providers.

Table 2 Available Training Programs in the institutions surveyed.

Training Provider	Available Training	Duration	Level
Provider A	Hairdressing	1–6 weeks	Basic
	Haircutting/Barbering	1–6 weeks	Basic
	Thai/Foot Massage	6–16 weeks (none in 2016)	Basic
Provider B	Make-up	Coming Soon	Basic
	Hairdressing	150 h	Basic
	Haircutting/Barbering	150 h	Basic
	Thai/Foot Massage	6 weeks	Basic
	Make-up/Face Treatment	150 h	Basic
	Nail coating/fixing	150 h	Basic
Provider C	Not Available	Not Available	Basic
Provider D	Hairdressing	1–6 weeks	Basic
	Haircutting/Barbering	1–6 weeks	Basic
	Thai/Foot Massage	6–16 weeks	Basic
	Make-up/Face Treatment	1–6 weeks	Basic
	Nail coating/fixing	1–6 weeks	Basic

(Fig. 3).

It was observed that most of the formal hair and beauty services training providers in the study area and environs only offer basic courses of not more than six weeks duration (majority were short courses of a maximum of 150 h) (Table 2) for pre-employment with the expectation that the candidates will continue to self-learn through practice. This was deduced from documents and website reviews.

One of the institutions had no related programs at all even though their student demonstration hotel provided massage services to the public; and another planned to introduce a short course in facerecare. They had no plans to include advanced and professional trainings in the near future. The trainees from these programs are not professionally certified; they only need to register and pass the skills standard test to qualify to practice. This is a basic certificate with which they often get employment or open their own enterprise.

When it was suggested that they could plan for such programs in the future, they seemed to think it was beneath their status. The other

institutions, especially the government owned, complained of inadequate funding and claimed that they were constrained to settle for short courses with only basic provisions to transfer limited skills. But, they believed that they gave candidates enough introductory skills, which the graduates could then improve through self-learning. Sadly, none of these institutions were interested in providing IHBSs programs in the future, even the ones that currently do, are reducing the number and will not offer advanced programs because there is not enough funding. One of the officers, however, thought that their institution was capable and willing to arrange advanced programs if they got more funding from government. The current funding hindered the recruiting of qualified trainers, provision of quality training materials and tools as well as increase the training duration.

Interviews also revealed that some skills are acquired from online media such as Facebook, YouTube as well as fashion and beauty books and magazines, watching other more experienced colleagues and simple regular practice. These self-learning acquisition processes seem to be more prevalent among the IHBSWs who have practiced longer, while the other options are for learning basic skills. Understandably so, as 61% of the IEWs surveyed only had 1–6 months of cumulative training and 26% had only 18–24 months (Fig. 4) while 60% of them acquired just basic certified training, 23% had no certification at all and only 8% and 9% had intermediate and advanced certified training respectively and these were for Thai-massage skills.

Most of the IHBSWs surveyed obtained their trainings from the institutions surveyed as well as through apprenticeships and on-the-job. When asked about apprenticeships, the workers said there was no formal apprenticeship or on-the-job and system; individual salons determined their process and no certification is granted. The workers desired that the government should help develop these systems so they could benefit as well as increase funding for IHBSs programs.

During interviews and observations, customers' frustrations were so palpable, and sometimes the helplessness of the workers was heart-breaking. The customers were completely fired up when asked about the SKAQPRO of the IHBSWs in Hat Yai. One woman flew into an angry rant for about three minutes as she described the annoyance of having so many IHBS operations in the city and most of them only have basic skills. Then, she took a breath and added that in fairness to the workers, the training available to them were grossly inadequate in quality, content and relevance. Another soft spoken customer praised the

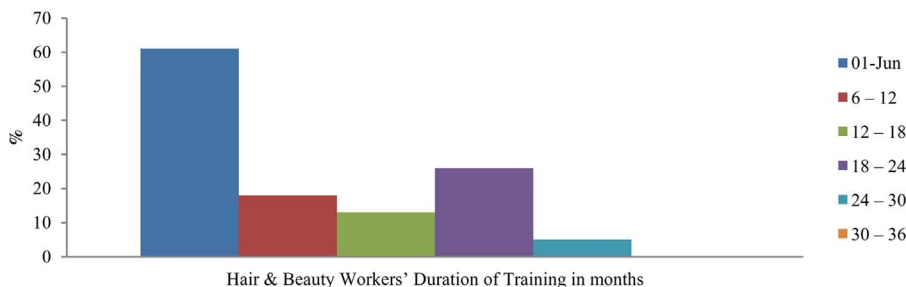


Fig. 4. Cumulative Training Duration.

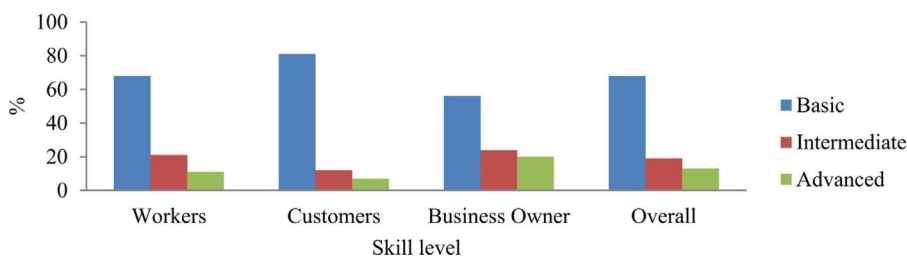


Fig. 5. Workers Skill Levels Rating.

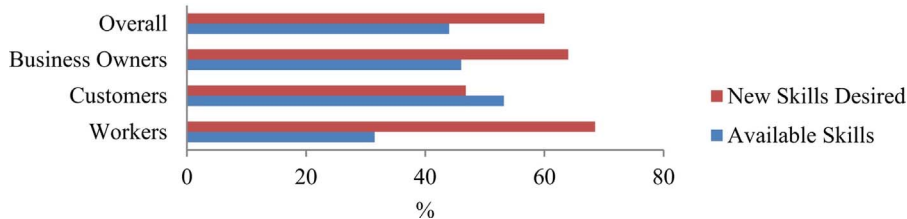


Fig. 6. Available/Desired Work Skills/Services.

workers because she believed they were doing the best with what they had. She however, wished they could learn more and better skills because she hardly ever got anything more than she had always gotten and she was over 40 years and had lived in the city for more than 20 years. A male customer said it was like courting disappointment to expect more from the IHBSWs and so he made do with whatever they could offer. They all perceived that if these workers had better training, they would do even better. There was also a consensus that the SKAQPRO was weak, training duration too short, contents not relevant, trainers not well-equipped and to cap it up, quality trainings were too far away and expensive.

Business-owners also complained that it was difficult to get workers with higher level skills in Hat Yai even though they would be willing to pay more for their services. Furthermore, the own-account workers argued that they could not afford to close down their salons to take time to go for training even if they could afford the cost. They explained that the salons were their only source of income; and the mobile workers felt even more vulnerable because they depended on the salon operations and the goodwill of customers within their location. One of the IHBSWs responded to the above angry customer (because these interviews were conducted during self-administration of questionnaires to workers, customers and business – owners) soothingly and tearfully confessed that she would love to get more and better skills, but there are no advanced skills training available to them.

All the workers interviewed agreed with the customers and business-owners that the SKAQPRO is inadequate, especially in training duration and they were not taught enough about what they needed to know and so had to resort to social media and under studying more experienced colleagues, but not in an apprenticeship. One worker said she wished she could learn better hair color skills and another nail art and enhancement skills, but such trainings were not available in Hat Yai or close by. To learn these type of skills or any advanced skills, they would have to go to Bangkok; and that was just out of the question for them. In addition, learning from social media like Facebook and YouTube was a huge challenge because the materials are mostly in English, which they hardly understand. Customers also added that some of these workers learn on-the-job from people who have only basic skills to transfer and then raise some money to open their own shop.

They recommended that training providers should include

specialized and personalized programs that include in-depth knowledge on how to deal with individual conditions and global trends as well as current technologies and treatment procedures. They also added that government needs to support training providers with funding and supply of qualified trainers as well as financial incentives for workers and business – owners to access and provide training. They added that related and relevant industry should support the training of IHBSWs by providing quality trainers and scholarships, considering that these workers are their regular customers.

### 3.3. Skill levels rating

Fig. 5 supports the notion that skill levels of IEWs are basic and this can be explained by the scarcity of trainings above basic skill levels and the short duration of most of these courses (Table 2). They also bemoaned the slow economy, which they believed affects their clientele and government expenditure on training.

The survey also revealed that the adequacy and availability of skills are weak. For instance, the sum mean for available skills was 44% and 60% desired to gain new skills (Fig. 6). Interviews and observations support these findings as customers mainly had low expectations and so do not really know what they can demand because the servings are slim.

The customers spoke in fairness to the workers, though, and blamed it on the level and quality of their skill training. The workers aspired to increase their skill levels as they argued that more and better skills will help them to boost their clientele, income and self-esteem. However, observations show that hair services salons in the city center were very busy over the weekends when the city is flooded with tourists, but extremely slow during the week. The workers wished that the ‘weekend Rush’ will last all week. This suggests that customers are mainly foreigners and locals hardly patronize these salons, except, of course, during university graduations or wedding ceremonies (as was observed and confirmed during interviews), which are occasional. But, most customers preferred to take care of their hair and beauty care at home since the salons do not offer anything different. One worker painfully described her experience on a daily basis and how hard business was. We were currently in her salon on a Wednesday afternoon; it had been quiet all morning and she confirmed that it would not change until





Fig. 7. Customers Rating of Service Quality.

Friday evening. She said ‘if you come in on Friday evening, I won’t even have time for you’. But, then it is the same for all the other salons and so she only gets a fraction of the crowd, then, it is back to the doldrums of the week day. She believed that if she had higher skills, she would be able to attract more regular and loyal customers who will come during the week also.

Some elite salons were, however, recommended to the researcher as the places to go for specialized and personalized services. It was discovered during observations that the workers in these salons were trained in Bangkok and outside Songkhla and for longer durations such as nine months to three years. These workers refused to be interviewed, but participated in the questionnaire survey. Furthermore, the workers were not aware of any occupational associations relevant to their work even though there is one in Bangkok, which could not be reached on the address obtained from the website. However, skincare and massage services had associations, but they were beyond the reach of the IHBSWs and so could not represent these levels of workers. Nonetheless, these associations generally provide the same common programs to their members. The workers, customers and business-owners perceived that the IHBSWs low skill levels affect their performance, attitude, relationship with customers, self-confidence, self-esteem and even non-work areas; and this in turn affects customer satisfaction and loyalty, which could result in loss of income. The workers lamented that they were always sad to see customers walk away because they could not meet their needs; and one customer claimed that disappointing service will affect his decision to return again. Most of the workers pointed out that those salons with high skill level workers charged more and were busy all week and only work on appointments. Business-owners particularly bemoaned the basic skill levels of workers, but were hesitant in hiring high skill workers (even though they were willing to pay higher wages since it could increase clientele) because these workers do not stay long and often leave with loyal customers. And so, these business-owners sought to increase their own skills as well.

### 3.4. Customer satisfaction

During interviews, majority of the customers expressed dissatisfaction with IHBSWs service quality and attention to standards, arguing that most of them are not professional. Some of the customers claimed that there are a few salons, for instance, with highly skilled workers ‘who know what they are doing’, but these are mostly the franchised salons. In fact, a few of the interviewees were vehement in their protest as they said these IHBSWs just go and get a few days or weeks of training and then open salons/spas without really knowing what they were doing. It was also observed that a lot of foreigners who visited some of these salons left disappointed because they could not receive the service and quality they required. This gives support to the survey results, which indicated that a large number of the customers surveyed sometimes get their hair and beauty services from outside Hat-Yai even though 31% never do. But then, according to 51% of the respondents (customers), Hat-Yai IHBSWs never exceed expectations and 38% believe that their services never match up to global standards while 29% often change their service provider due to dissatisfaction (Fig. 7).

During interviews customers agreed that most of these IEWs do not have an understanding of the intricacies of their work and mostly use tools and materials as well as chemicals without knowledge. An interviewee explained that matching skin tone to color and treatment as well as determining hair treatment per individual condition is a non-available skill. In fact, all interviewees wished that they could receive hair treatment services in Hat-Yai and were willing to pay more, especially for hair treatment, hand/foot/nail treatment and facecare. These closely match the survey results (Fig. 8), which indicated that most of the respondents do not perceive the IHBSWs understand the issues of service quality and standards, but were neutral on overall satisfaction; and while agreeing that the IHBSWs need more and better training, would be willing to pay more for higher quality and standard services.

The customers claimed that for the levels of skills training available to the workers, their services were often satisfactory. They perceived that the workers productivity will increase if they could acquire better skills as they would be able to offer more services, their performance

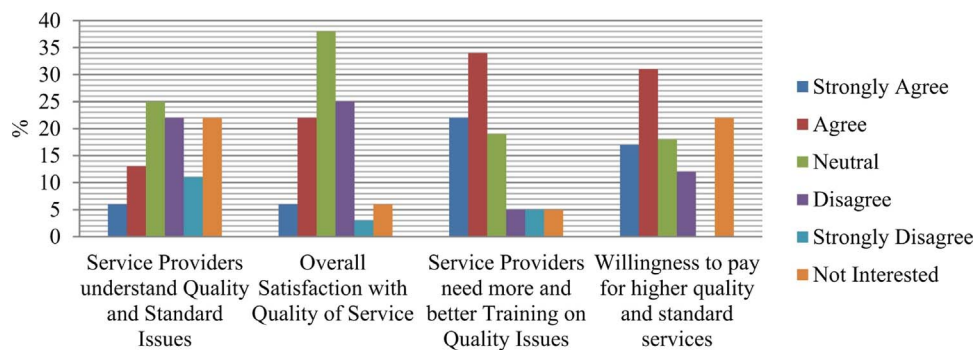


Fig. 8. Customers' perception of IHBSWs' understanding of quality control and assurance.

quality will rise and customers will be regular and bring their friends. This will lead to increased income and self-esteem. But, their current skill level was seen as a hindrance by all the respondents. They were of the opinion that if one did not expect too much then one could be surprised. But, it was difficult to compare performance because most of the workers performed the same type of services at the same skill levels. And so, customers based their loyalty on workers' attitude, salon environment, customer treatment and recognition as well as personal relationships. The workers and business-owners were not happy that they were unable to keep regular customers and all customers interviewed agreed that they got their services from wherever is closest to them at the time since they were all the same. If a service-provider offered more services with higher quality, they all agreed that they would pay more and visit more regularly. Most of the foreign customers were dissatisfied because the workers were often clueless as to how to handle non-Thai hair and beauty conditions. Therefore, they often settled for simple hair shampooing and conditioning or manicure and pedicure; otherwise, they did their business at home. Also, some Thai customers were of the opinion that they would not pay for services like common Thai or Chinese massage that they could easily get at home, but would pay and love to get specialized and personalized massage services that offered health-benefits in specific conditions. Generally, customers complained that the workers did not know the 'why' and 'what' as well as the connections to the 'how', which affects the quality of their performance and skill levels.

Also, results from interviews, surveys, observations and documents/archival records revealed that the IHBSWs desire to receive better quality training, but challenges of training cost, provision, quality and time constraints hold them back (See [Appendix B](#)). Training providers also indicated that they would be willing to deliver advanced and professional trainings if they had the funding to do so.

#### 4. Discussion

The quality of SKAQPRO for IEWs in developing countries is crucial for the workers improved productivity, which in turn affects income and wellbeing to a great extent ([Fluitman, 1989](#); [Singh, 2000](#); [Adams et al., 2013](#)). Understanding the current situation from the perspectives from the workers and their customers, employers as well as training providers could provide key insights for policymakers and training-providers. Most of the IEWs have only basic level skills acquired from basic certified trainings, apprenticeships and on-the-job; and majority of their trainers had no more certification than these except the gains of years of experience. This paper explored the perceptions of four key stakeholder groups on the impact of the SKAQPRO on the skills and productivity of the workers. we found out that the general perceptions are that the IHBSWs surveyed in this study majorly worker with basic skills and their productivity was considered low because of this. It was also perceived that skills were low because the workers did not have access to adequate and appropriate training that exposed them to the kind of skills they required to deliver quality services. This agrees with studies that show the low skill and productivity quality of informal workers in developing countries ([Adams et al., 2013](#); [Pina et al., 2012](#); [Palmer, 2008](#)).

The study revealed that most of the IEWs surveyed had secondary education, but some actually had no formal education while others had up to university education. This indicates that trainings should take cognizance of the diverse levels of comprehension of the candidates and provide curricula that will be effective and practical for all as this could pose a challenge on the willingness of IEWs to attend trainings. In addition, apprenticeship, on-the-job and fashion and beauty schools were the major training pathways for these workers and only few of them

trained with vocational colleges. This supports studies in Morocco where 80.4% of IWs acquired their skills on-the-job, and in Ethiopia, 67.9% through self-learning and 3.54% through apprenticeship/on-the-job training ([dvv, 2011](#)). Most of them are full time employees while 48% of them were self-employed. They are usually paid per hour or service and mainly earn an income of \$280-\$700 dollars per month. These affect their ability to take out time and money for quality further training. This could explain the failure of SKAQPROs in developing countries ([ILO, 2008](#)) as they focus more on the formal pathways.

Training options available are mostly basic short course programs of maximum six weeks duration, except for apprenticeship, which had no standard duration. These limited trainings affect what they can do, offer and earn; and quality of productivity, performance, income and total wellbeing suffer. Furthermore, these basic skill workers become the trainers of the apprentice, on-the-job learner and, even in formal training. Therefore, basic skill 'experts' are training would-be workers; this merely perpetuates the vicious cycle IEWs have to work in. Basic SKAQPRO will only produce low-skilled and low-productive workers, which agrees with the conclusions of one of the hair training schools in Bangkok, "most education providers will only focus on the basic skills – and basic skills will only teach you to become a 'basic' hairdresser" ([Siwakorn, 2013](#)); and is indicative of the fact that in training, we 'reap just what we sow'. On-the-job, social media, experienced colleagues and regular practice are used to improve acquired skills as best as possible through self-learning and a supportive environment. But, these were for those who have practiced longer and so have the confidence to try out on their own and had willing loyal customers.

Our findings also revealed that funding for the training providers were inadequate, which affects training quality ([Mayombe and Lombard, 2015](#); [King and Palmer, 2007](#); [Owusu-Mensah, 2007](#)) due to poor or unavailable training tools, equipment and qualified trainers. There is generally almost no funding for informal/non-formal training options in developing countries and evaluation of their impact is almost non-existent ([dvv, 2011](#)). Adequate funding is required to provide the kind of training that will equip the IEWs with productive and effective skills as they cannot give what they don't have. On top of this, the short duration and quality of trainings, unavailability of quality trainings, high cost of available trainings, rigid time schedules and lack of appropriate skills training were perceived as other obstacles to skill acquisition for IEWs. Also, the fact that there is no formal apprenticeship and on-the-job system for informal workers impacts the quality of the training delivered.

Furthermore, when IEWs are considered to have low education levels and not presumed to be 'not so smart', skill training providers try to get away with unsuitable and inadequate types of training. With the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in the IE, the voices of IEWs are often ignored, their needs not considered and their opinions not sought. Hence, training providers get away with inconsideration, poor quality provisions, unsuitable and inadequate types of training, especially outside the capital city. The IEWs are, then, forced to work with basic skills and branded unprofessional because of the SKAQPRO available to them. This is an even bigger challenge for IEWs like the IHBSWs who offer services in areas that are easy to ignore, but increasingly require higher-level skills to stay in work. Also, SKAQPROs designs are aimed at moving IEWs to the formal economy and do not consider these informal jobs as worthy of attention and so IEWs are left out of SKAQPROs even when they are designed for the IE. The workers have become apathetic and really do not expect the government to come to their aid, thus they try to improve their skills through social media without much success. We believe that this is responsible for the low-skills and low-productivity evidenced in our study. SKAQPROs for IEWs in developing countries should be reviewed because when training is basic then skill

performance and productivity will be low.

#### 4.1. Recommendations

##### 4.1.1. Improve the skill acquisition process

Building from the conceptual lens, we propose a systematic and all-inclusive SKAQPRO with formal, informal, on-the-job and self-learning elements (Adams, 2011; Palmer, 2007b), which provides potential and productive capacities that can positively impact income and total wellbeing. We believe that providing training should not be restricted to any form whether formal or informal or even self-directed since it has been successfully argued that education and experience are blended in our learning process (Sawchuk, 2008; Andersen et al., 1995). In other words, the SKAQPRO for IEWs should be designed to include formal education with classroom instructions, non-formal/further education like professional workshops and courses, informal education/training like apprenticeships/on-the-job training and self-directed/informal learning through experience, practice and all other forms that do not include an external instructor (Livingstone, 2005 as cited in Sawchuk, 2008). In any case, just like Tough (1967) suggested, adults acquire most of their skills and knowledge through self-learning, by experience and/or practice, but even then assistance is sometimes required from an external source indicative that not all learning is formal (Jennings and Wargnier, 2015). This relates to the 70:20:10 rule of Eichinger and Lombardo (1996), which suggests that people acquire 10% of skills and knowledge through formal training and education (classroom instruction, courses, workshops, seminars, reading, professional qualifications/certifications and eLearning), 20% through other people (coaching, mentoring, partnering and social/professional networks) and 70% through practice, on-the-job and other experience-building activities (Jennings and Wargnier, 2015; Vallejo and When, 2016).

For example, graduates of formal training often lack the practical skills gained from apprenticeship while graduate apprentices have no theoretical knowledge of the processes and/or systems of their work (McLaughlin, 1989). Therefore, an all-inclusive approach to training programs will provide both theoretical and practical knowledge and ability needed for proficiency in acquired skills. This is essential when planning training for workers in the IE who often find it difficult to access training due to cost and time constraints. And so, for policymakers and development agencies to design appropriate and effective skill acquisition programs to counter the low skill levels of IEWs, they need to first assess the current SKAQPRO to determine its level of delivery and impact on skills levels and then design a system with a balanced mix of training methods that captures the unique niche of the specific occupational group in view and the peculiar concerns of working in the IE. Ultimately, the voices and opinions of the IEWs, their employers and customers must be factored into any SKAQPRO design as against the former top-down approach because nobody understands the plight of the people more than they do.

##### 4.1.2. Policy and institutional reforms

A foremost vital recommendation is that governments, multilateral agencies and researchers should engage the IEWs directly and in depth in order to understand what is really going on in their complex and dynamic world. Things are different in the IE from the formal economy, and things in the industrialized enterprises are different from things in the micro-enterprises of the IE. Therefore, developing skill policies for all workforces that simply mention the informal workforce without giving them a priority placement and specific focus is not enough. Skill policies that intrinsically appreciate the characteristics of the IE and are synergistically connected to other relevant policies like employment and enterprise development, social security and workers' welfare,

human and gender rights, youth and child protection/rights, access to infrastructure, market and capital, rights of the vulnerable (e.g. people with disabilities, minorities, elderly, migrants, etc.), culture and ethnicity, investment and competitiveness as well as national and citizenship identity among others will be more effective.

Hence, in the long-term, we recommend policy and institutional reforms, which are pivotal to moving IEWs from the fringes of poverty to a higher, if not wealthy, livelihood. These proposed policy reforms should specifically attend to the challenges the IEWs face in skill acquisition and address the concerns of a uniform and acceptable apprenticeship and on-the-job training system for informal enterprises. The policy could also address the issue of quality of training provided, relevance of training content and qualifications of trainers; and this could also be done through the avenue of licensing and certification that would not overwhelm the already shackled IEWs. This policy could also make provisions for funding skill training providers of advanced level programs with criteria that covers the quality and relevance of content and delivery as well as training personnel and materials. Furthermore to this, the policy could also make provisions for financial assistance to IEWs in order to support them to access quality training without losing income or their jobs/businesses, while also supporting micro-informal-enterprises to provide on-the-job training as well as apprenticeship programs. Finally, the policy could also outline a system of collaboration between relevant government agencies, training providers, IEWs occupational associations and relevant industry to support skills acquisition in the IE. In the medium term for Thailand, a Special Unit could be created specifically for addressing issues of IEWs. This Unit will exist to liaise between all departments in the Ministry and other agencies that have something to do with the IEWs as well as coordinating the interactions between the IEWs and government and industry, training institutions, researchers and multilateral agencies.

##### 4.1.3. Funding for skills development of IEWs

Considering that policy and institutional reforms could take a while, we recommend that in the medium term, a budgetary provision (IEWs Funding Scheme) specifically for supporting skills development for the IEWs be provided to aid the IEWs in acquiring needed skills so they could benefit a lot from some organized financial assistance. Such scheme should be designed with the key characteristics of IEWs in mind and not mixed with other forms of workforce training compensation, which IEWs cannot benefit from anyway. One way could be to increase funding to training institutions that cater to IEWs. This proposed funding should specifically target skill training programs that are particularly geared towards work found primarily in the IE. We also recommend that funding should target skills programs in the core work areas of IEWs to encourage training institutions to offer these programs. Also, funding could be directed to paying for quality certified and licensed trainers as well as training materials, content and venue, curricula development and delivery method. And so, training providers will have to meet the above criteria among others to access this fund.

This budgetary provision could also target enterprise-owners to develop and deliver apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings. This will serve as incentive for them to provide these services to their employees and others. Micro-enterprises in the IE already deal with a lot of challenges and cannot afford the cost of training others, especially employees that could eventually leave; therefore, they need incentives to create the needed environment. Enterprise-owners could be paid something for every worker that is given official time off work to get training; and they could be funded and supported to start off their small enterprise training programs. Of course, certain criteria would be necessary to access funding such as license and certification of enterprise-owners' skills, quality of the workforce who will be training, years of

practice and the type and grade of services provided among others. This is much like the incentives given to big companies in the formal economy to train their workforce in the Skill Development Promotion Act 2002 (KOT, 2002), Thailand. Furthermore, allowances could be provided for IEWs who need to leave work for a long period of time to go for training. For example, tax deductions for those workers fully enrolled for courses in accredited training programs as well as allowances within the minimum wage for the financially-challenged (GHK, 2011d), a series of activities and programs that create a market for the products and services of the IEWs could also be organized. This could go a long way to encourage these workers to seek skills training.

This proposed funding scheme should not be the responsibility of government alone. With the challenge of budgetary allocations getting smaller and social needs of citizens on the rise, it will be near impossible for government to carry the financial weight of such a funding scheme alone. Government could source for funding from donor and multilateral agencies, mandate and encourage private companies, especially big corporations, to contribute to the scheme as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and encourage individuals and charity organizations to make contributions to support the empowerment of the IEWs (GHK, 2011d). These partners could support the scheme in areas like paying for trainees' fees, paying for quality trainers and materials, supporting curricula development and delivery design, providing training-the-trainer courses for free or at cost, making donations to the fund, etc. For instance, hair and beauty products manufacturers could support trainings and other experience-building activities (such as seminars/workshops, contests, festivals, etc.). Now, there is the risk of such a scheme being hijacked again by proponents of formalization and corruption, but perhaps allowing the IEWs to take a place in the cockpit might give them some level of control in the process.

#### 4.1.4. Skill certification system

A certification system that enables assessment and certification of skills obtained regardless of form of learning should be set-up, whereby certificates of achievement, experience or practice could be awarded (GHK, 2011a,b,c,d,e,f). To achieve this, occupational and skills standards that are within the scope of the IEWs work should be developed. Using the same standards operative in the formal economy will only shortchange the IE, workers will not be able to afford or attain to the requirements and it will not even be relevant to their context. Clearly, an understanding of work requirements in informal-micro-enterprises and the expectations of their customers would be necessary in developing standards for certification and licensing criteria.

#### 4.1.5. Occupational associations and networks

IEWs should be encouraged to set up and join occupational associations and networks that could liaise with government, industry and other partners on their behalf as well as direct progress in their work practice and conditions. And these could be involved in the SKAQPRO as well as liaise with training institutions to plan/design/deliver trainings programs. Also, this could enhance professionalism and

## Appendix A

See [Table A1](#).

introduce peer-rating into the IE.

## 5. Conclusion

The conclusions of this research revealed three key findings: workers cannot afford the cost of training and the cost of taking time off work as this will affect their income; only basic training is available to workers, which can only produce basic skills (because you can only reap what you sow); and inadequate funding of training institutions affect the quality, type, relevance and provisions of programs they offer. These affect the skill and productivity levels of the workers as well as perpetuate their struggle in the vicious cycle of low skills-low performance- low productivity-low income-low wellbeing. For instance, the poor productive capacity of the IEWs could stem from inefficiency in workplace organization as a result of low skill among other factors, which could lead to low productivity and then low income; low income could also hinder workers' ability to access markets, take on more productive work and higher earning ventures, improve communication skills, decision-making and innovative/creative abilities as well as attempt to improve their employment and/or product/service quality; and this would weaken their bargaining power; thus keeping them vulnerable (Palmer, 2009; Adams et al., 2013). This, of course, depends on the context of the SKAQPRO provided for the IEWs and if it captures the true situation that they face. Consequently, increasing skills of IEWs to improve productivity could go a long way to enhance their income and wellbeing (since customers are willing to pay for improved and quality services), but this must work within the broader circle and mix of economic, political, social, cultural and personal contexts as well as creating opportunities for skill utilization (King et al., 2005; Palmer et al., 2007; Tamkin, 2005; Engelbrecht, 2003; Mason et al., 2007).

Considering that the IHBSWs are uniquely representative of IEWs in developing countries like Thailand, we assume that the results of this study can be relevant to other countries. Further research into the issue of skill acquisition for IEWs is necessary as they make up a large chunk of the workforce of developing countries and this is not going to change for a while. It is imperative, therefore, for policy makers to find a way of ensuring that these workers are better equipped for productivity and income generation. Further research on what skills and productivity mean to IEWs who are paid per hour/service and mostly self-employed is required in order to make closely related conclusions. Research on funding for IEWs' skill training and financial support for workers, licensing and certification schemes as well as other incentives for enterprises is also required.

## Acknowledgements

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**Table A1**  
Informal Hair and Beauty Services Skills Assessed.

General Skills	Haircare skills	Facecare skills	Nailcare skills	Bodycare skills	Massage skills
Safety & health procedures	Hair and scalp inspection/treatment	Laser facial hair removal	Evaluate hand & feet as well as nail condition	Evaluate skin type & condition to determine treatment	Evaluate clients' physical mental & emotional condition
Reception management	Determine correct hair & scalp treatment	Threading facial hair removal	Determine treatment/products based on condition	Tanning & waxing	Determine massage therapy based on individual conditions
ICT	Choose correct product & procedure for individual hair & scalp	Electrical facial treatment	Apply nail treatment as well as for hands & feet	Extraction & exfoliation	Design, plan & administer massage therapy for clients
Business management	Hair shampoo & conditioning	Evaluate facial condition	Hand & foot massage & moisturizing	Peeling, wrapping & scrubbing	Hydrotherapy & aroma therapy/hot stone massage
Accounts/finance	Apply hair & treatment appropriately	Determine treatment/product based on individual condition	Determine nail polish & design based on individual skin condition,	Body & face art application	Pre-natal massage
Active communication	Coloring, bleaching, color or hair tinting	Facial waxing & toning	Clean, trim & file nails	Tattooing	Sport massage
English language	Cut, trim and shape hair & hair prices & wigs based on customer instructions	Facial cleansing & scrubbing	Polish, buff and shape nails	Fixing body accessories	Acupuncture/acupressure
Decision-making	Cut, trim and shape hair, hair pieces, wig based on individual hair tip and facial feature	Thermal facial treatment	Creates, design & apply nail art	Steaming & stretching	Swedish massage
Problem-solving	Maintain & design hair pieces & wigs	Electronic facial hair removal	Apply acrylic or gel artificial nails	Create & design body/face art	Deep tissue massage
Critical/analytical thinking	Fix hair pieces, wig & accessories	Galvanic and peeling facials	Maintain, repair & enhance artificial structures	Plan & manage treatment & therapy	Vibro-massage
Leadership/team working	Suggest hairstyles based on individual facial features & personalities	Face wrinkle removal	Electronic manicare/pedicure procedure		Manual/physical massage
Creativity/originality	Create original hairstyles from own imagination	Apply facial masks/packs	French & American manicare/pedicures		Electronic massage
Presentation	Thermal hair styling	Recognize skin type for makeup			Chinese/Japanese massage
Listening/speaking	Managing long hair	Design makeup style & product based on skin type/tone facial feature & personality			Foot, face & neck massage
Organizational	Hair perming/waxing	Manage multiracial make-up			Thai massage
Active learning	Hair straightening/curling waving	Color management & design			
Teaching/training	Managing multicultural hair	Day time party make up			
Good judgement	Trendy haircuts/styles	Night time party make-up			
Initiation/visualization		Movie/TV/Theatre make up			
Customer handling		Fashion/catwalk make-up			
Planning & coordination		Bridal make-up			
Personnel management		Fantasy make-up			
Art & design		Celebrity/glamour make-up			
Chemistry/biology		Waterproof make-up			
Social/behavior		Create & design make-up styles			
Standards monitoring/evaluation		Eyebrow/eyelash management			
Therapy/counselling					
Maintaining workstation					
Cleaning/sterilizing work tools					
Consultation/advice					



## Appendix B

See [Table B1](#).

**Table B1**

Some highlights of survey, interviews, observations and document/archival record reviews

Themes/Questions	Findings
<p><b>Skill Acquisition Process</b></p> <p>How do informal hair and beauty services workers acquire their skills?</p>	<p>Some of them took short training courses; some did only apprenticeships while others did both. Others learn new skills from online media like YouTube, Facebook and videos. They also learn from their colleagues, books and magazines. There are some who learn skills on the job and/or from family members/friends without any formal training and maintain the skills through practice.</p>
<p>What kinds of skills training are available?</p>	<p>Only Basic skills training of 3 days to 3 weeks in hairdressing, haircutting/barbering, Thai/foot massage, nail coating/fixing, makeup/herbal face mask/scrub treatment. Some of these trainings are ad hoc demonstrations. Most of them are not formal. Some salons/spas offer on-hand short trainings (3days-1 week) on specific skill areas. Trainings are designed to introduce trainees to the basics while expecting them to gain more knowledge and experience through self-learning and practice. Most trainers have intermediate skills and none with advanced skills and no professional certification. No vocational institute or training school offers full time formal training programs. Skills training institutions have no relationship with the professional associations.</p>
<p>What do you think of the skill acquisition process?</p>	<p>The training courses are too short and only at basic level. There is no professional skill training available. New skills are often learned only through Facebook and YouTube. Required trainings are scarce and mostly not adequate for customers' demands. The trainings available are too short to deliver professional skills. It is only through practice that skills can be improved. The skill acquisition process is inadequate and only produces so many low-skilled workers. The skills training need to be improved. Skills training should include attitude, behavior, communication, safety, treatment and management skills.</p>
<p>How does this affect the informal hair and beauty services workers' skills?</p>	<p>Some of the workers are very good in basic hair and beauty care, but they need to learn new skills and understand the procedures of the work. They need to acquire more appropriate skills. They need to be more professional, too many of them lack professional skills. This is why they get few customers because the customers don't feel that the workers have any outstanding skills and they can easily do for themselves at home whatever is offered in the salons. Most foreigners complain that workers do not have the skills to handle multicultural (non-Thai) demands. Most of the workers cannot handle high trends like nail art, dreadlocks, hair braiding, hair treatment, individual conditions and treatment massage (like prenatal, orthopedic, deep tissue) and anything specific.</p>
<p><b>Skill Level</b></p> <p>What are the current skills levels of the informal hair and beauty services workers?</p>	<p>Majority of the workers are at Basic skill level. Some of the workers believe that they are experts, but still need to learn new skills because they are only very good at doing one thing. They are very good at basic skills like hair shampooing/conditioning, hairdressing/trimming, nail buffing/trimming/coating/fixing and face scrub/masking. The workers want to learn skills in all spectrum of the hair and beauty services skill set.</p>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>What are the challenges of the informal hair and beauty services workers in this regard?</p>	<p>The workers want to learn new skills but trainings are scarce, cost more than they can afford and there is no time because they cannot leave their workplaces as that would mean loss of income. They want to add to their skills because trends are ever changing and they want to be up-to-date. They are willing to attend trainings if it will not affect their income and if it is affordable. But, customers complain that most of the workers are lazy and do not try to learn new skills or practice old skills regularly. But, the workers fear that if they spend money on acquiring new skills, they will not get a return on such investments because they cannot raise prices since customers will not pay (because they say the economy is bad). But, the customers say that they are willing to pay more for high quality and in- trend services. Most of the workers have peak days of Friday to Sunday and off-days from Monday to Thursday; and most of these customers over the weekend are tourists. However, most of these workers have very low English language skills. Customers complain that there are too many salons with just basic skilled workers. But, there are some franchised salons/massage parlors from Bangkok and otherwise who have highly skilled and certified workers; but they are few.</p>
<p><b>Suggestions</b></p> <p>Do you have any suggestions or recommendations?</p>	<p>Workers need to practice their skills more and try to gain experience through self- learning. Workers need attitude, social and communication skills in order to keep customers. Hair and beauty services is a very challenging area of work and requires dedication and commitment to skill learning because it works with changing times and trends, which means that workers need to always be learning new tricks and skills. It is better to first master the basic skills before trying to learn the higher order skills; and any skill can be mastered through practice. More training should be provided for professional skills; and training duration should be extended. Intermediate and Advanced certificates should also be awarded. Training institutions can offer advanced and professional trainings if they are well-equipped and funded. More training should be arranged and training costs reduced, and training should include practice sessions. Training design should involve the professional hair and beauty services workers and other relevant organizations. Also, training providers need to collaborate with professional associations, private sector, government and academic institutions to improve the skill acquisition process. This will benefit all the parties.</p>

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