

Examiners' Perspectives on Assessment Criteria for Doctoral Dissertations and Oral Examinations in English Language Education in Thailand

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Abstract

While concerns regarding evaluation criteria in doctoral assessment persist, existing research has largely focused on student experiences. Apart from a single-institution account (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023), the practices of dissertation assessment and oral examination in Thailand's English language education (ELE) programs remain largely uninvestigated. This study explores doctoral assessment practices in ELE and related fields in Thailand from the perspectives of experienced examiners, with particular attention to evaluation criteria. Of the 121 eligible participants, 71, each with experience supervising and/or examining doctoral dissertations, completed a survey; 19 informants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' backgrounds and perceptions, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis with intercoder reliability checks. The findings revealed that, although institutional documents outline assessment procedures, they lack detailed rubrics. Interviews identified seven key evaluation criteria: mastery of the intellectual landscape, argumentative rigor, effective presentation, research integrity, methodological rigor, originality, and publishability. The examiners adopted a holistic approach, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these criteria. Nevertheless, argumentative rigor was expected to be evident throughout the dissertation, suggesting greater emphasis on this criterion than reported in other international contexts. Examiners also showed tolerance for minor linguistic inaccuracies, prioritizing argument quality, and demonstrated a distinct, context-specific interpretation of originality in terms of utility. The findings provide insights into discipline-specific criteria for doctoral assessment. Informing candidates of these expectations may help demystify the assessment process and support them more effectively during their doctoral journey.

Keywords: doctoral assessment, doctoral dissertation, doctoral oral examination, English language teaching, English language education

The award of a doctoral degree represents the pinnacle of academic achievement, requiring candidates to produce an original dissertation and succeed in a final oral examination as evidence of academic and scholarly competence (Kumar et al., 2022; Trafford & Leshem, 2008). In Thailand, 25 doctoral programs related to English Language Education (ELE) are offered by 21 universities (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation [MHESI], 2025), and they serve the growing demand for English language educators and researchers. While doctoral assessment has attracted considerable research interest globally (Byram & Stoicheva, 2023; Kumar et al., 2022), persistent concerns remain regarding inconsistency, lack of transparency, and vagueness in evaluation criteria, which are frequently found to be inadequate or inconsistently applied (Byram & Stoicheva, 2023; Golding et al., 2014; Hartley & Fox, 2004). Standards vary considerably across disciplines, universities, and countries (Denicolo, 2003; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). Existing research has focused primarily on student experiences, with limited attention to examination outcomes, committee composition, or assessment biases (Carter & Kumar, 2017).

In ELE, studies have examined doctoral research trends and dissertation content across various countries and regions, including Germany, the US, Turkey, and Southeast Asia. In Thailand, the needs of ELE doctoral students and professors have been explored (Geerativudhipong et al., 2020). The most closely related work is Adunyarittigun et al. (2023), a single-institution account of doctoral examination at one Thai university, produced as part of an international comparative study of PhD examination (Byram & Stoicheva, 2023). The present study differs from and extends that study by drawing on experienced examiners in ELE and related fields from 20 universities rather than a single institution. It investigates how these criteria align with the rubrics published by institutions. The actual practices of dissertation assessment and oral examination in Thailand's ELE programs remain underexplored, and regulations vary across institutions.

The present study aims to explore doctoral assessment practices in ELE and related fields in Thailand from the perspectives of experienced examiners, with particular attention to the criteria used to evaluate dissertations and oral examinations. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, the study addresses this gap by investigating the criteria used by individual examiners. Its contribution is twofold. First, it makes visible both the explicit criteria established in institutional assessment documents and the implicit criteria that experienced examiners take into consideration when judging doctoral quality in the Thai context. Second, it reveals where examiner expectations and institutional assessment frameworks diverge. The findings are expected to provide insights into current assessment practices and identify common ground among examiners, supervisors, and program administrators to develop more transparent criteria for doctoral assessment (Geerativudhipong et al., 2020; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004).

Literature Review

The Institutional "Bar" of Doctor of Philosophy

A doctoral dissertation submission is a fundamental indicator of a successful examination (Lovitts, 2007), requiring rigorous, systematic research that is error-free, non-plagiarized, and aligned with university formatting requirements. In Thailand, this process is governed by the Quality Assurance (QA) system approved by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), which monitors enrollment-to-graduation rates.

The examination procedure typically encompasses dissertation submission, committee appointment, written evaluation, and a two-stage oral defense (proposal and final), with external examiners included to ensure transparency and impartiality (Johnson & Lee, 2014). Candidates must demonstrate mastery through persuasive verbal strategies and disciplinary expertise (Lee & Kamler, 2010). A primary evaluative criterion is comprehensive engagement with existing theories and strategic positioning of the study within the broader map of knowledge (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; Bruce, 1994; Golding et al., 2014). Failure to critically synthesize scholarly literature often signals a lack of readiness for independent research (Bruce, 1994; Hodgson, 2020; Holbrook et al., 2007).

Unsettling Rules of Criteria

Despite formal governance structures, evaluating a PhD dissertation remains subject to “unsettling regulations,” as standards vary significantly across disciplines and borders (Denicolo, 2003; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). While frameworks such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2020) and the EHEA (Vittorio, 2015) attempt to standardize “original application of knowledge,” these may not align with local institutional practices across cultures (Tinkler & Jackson, 2004).

Recent studies highlight a lack of transparency, with criteria often inadequate or “recurrently ignored” by examiners (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013; Golding et al., 2014), creating tension between explicit and implicit criteria. Explicit criteria, grounded in university regulations, emphasize an original contribution to knowledge, while implicit criteria reflect examiners’ personal expectations. Chetcuti et al. (2022) found that while 71% of examiners rely on official rubrics, a significant minority incorporate personal judgments on research skills and publication potential. While originality remains the gold standard for doctoral work, its definition is notoriously fluid (Lovitts, 2007; Winter et al., 2000). In ELE, major breakthroughs are rare; originality is more commonly found in practical utility—offering new insights into existing phenomena or applying novel research tools to underrepresented contexts (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; Clarke & Lunt, 2014)—aligning with Lovitts’ (2007, p. 331) conception of contribution as “something that has not been seen before.”

Disciplinary Nuance and Impact

The interpretation of “originality” is particularly complex in the humanities and arts compared with the sciences (Wellington, 2013), with examiner standards ranging from the introduction of a new methodological tool to the development of grounded theory (Clarke & Lunt, 2014). In ELE, originality is often “incremental” rather than a major discovery (Lovitts, 2007), and tension exists between theoretical and practical values in professionally oriented research (Winter et al., 2000). Research publishability is another key determinant of doctoral success (Houston, 2021). In Thailand, doctoral candidates in science, technology, and health sciences are required to publish part of their dissertations in peer-reviewed journals indexed in international databases. In contrast, candidates in the social sciences and humanities, including ELE, may publish in peer-reviewed journals indexed either in international databases or in the Thailand Citation Index (TCI) database (Higher Education Standards Committee [HESC], 2022). In meeting these requirements, ELE candidates must navigate the tension between international academic standards and local institutional expectations.

In ELE, examiners’ judgments of originality depend more on disciplinary specialization than on groundbreaking discovery (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023), and the selection of examiners can further shift assessment standards (Kiley, 2009). Candidates must therefore be well-prepared to engage collaboratively with their committee throughout the process (Murray & Newton, 2008). This study seeks to clarify these inconsistent standards to support doctoral training that remains effective and globally competitive (Durling, 2002).

In Asian contexts, studies have recently begun to address the oral examination more specifically. Examiners characterize the viva as an opportunity for candidates to defend an argument rather than simply reporting findings (Tan, 2022), and they assign different purposes to the oral examination, from quality assurance to constructive feedback (Tan, 2023). Moreover, Tetteh (2025) found that questioning interactions during the oral examination are pragmatically framed as comments rather than as direct questions. In terms of academic integrity and transparency in conducting the oral defenses, Gantogtokh (2026) raises concerns about rubrics and clarity when the oral examinations are conducted at different institutions in Mongolia. Together, these studies indicate that examiner expectations in the oral examination are locally established and not fully captured by written criteria. This issue has not yet been investigated in ELE in the Thai context.

Despite growing interest in doctoral education, dissertation examination criteria in ELE in Thailand remain largely unexplored, and the implicit, individually held criteria that shape assessment outcomes are poorly understood. Recognizing the examination process as a culturally situated interpretive act—shaped by inconsistent regulations, examiner subjectivity, and contested notions of originality—this study asks: What criteria do examiners use to assess the quality of a doctoral dissertation and oral examination in ELE?

Research Methodology

Participants and Recruitment Process

National Eligibility Requirements for Dissertation Committee Members

In alignment with the Graduate Program Standard Criteria (HESC, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2015), the dissertation committee must comprise at least five examiners, including at least two external examiners, one of whom chairs the committee. Internal examiners and supervisors must hold a PhD or a master's degree at Associate Professor rank, with at least three peer-reviewed publications in applied linguistics, ELT, or ELE-related fields within the past five years. External examiners must hold a doctoral degree and have published at least ten peer-reviewed articles relevant to the dissertation topic. Accordingly, purposive sampling was employed to ensure highly qualified participants capable of providing valid and reliable insights on the basis of these criteria. A total of 121 eligible participants were identified through institutional affiliations and the qualified reviewer list maintained by the Intellectual Capital Maximization Division of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI, 2026).

Study Participation Inclusion Criteria

In addition to meeting the national qualifications above, participants were required to have at least five years of experience supervising and/or examining theses and dissertations (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; Byram & Stoicheva, 2023) and to have examined a minimum of five doctoral dissertations combined across their home and other institutions. This combined threshold was set as an eligibility criterion prior to data collection. However, only 71 of the 121 candidates submitted questionnaire responses, fewer than anticipated. To maintain an adequate sample size, all 71 respondents were retained, including those who did not meet one or both of the original eligibility criteria: having at least five years of relevant experience and having examined at least five doctoral dissertations.

Survey Participants

The sample comprised 71 faculty members from 20 Thai universities offering PhD programs in related disciplines in ELE. They were recruited via email, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Review Panel of Thammasat University (No. 096/2566). Participants were selected based on active involvement in examining master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

As shown in Table 1, the majority were female (60.6%) and aged 51 or above (54.9%), with language acquisition and pedagogy as the most common area of expertise (44%), followed by curriculum and assessment (19.4%). Supervisory and examination experience varied: 28.1% had supervised 11 or more doctoral students, 67.6% had examined 10 or fewer dissertations at their own institutions, and 93% conducted both dissertation examinations and oral defenses in English.

Table 1

Profile of the Survey Participants (N = 71)

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	28	39.4
Female	43	60.6
Age		
30–40	3	4.2
41–50	29	40.9
51–60	26	36.6
Over 60	13	18.3
Number of doctoral students supervised		
Fewer than 5	32	45.1
5–10	19	26.8
11–15	13	18.3
16–20	2	2.8
Over 20	5	7.0
Number of dissertations examined in home institution		
Fewer than 5	25	35.2
5–10	23	32.4
11–15	12	16.9
16–20	2	2.8
Over 20	9	12.7
Number of dissertations examined in other institutions		
Fewer than 5	19	41.3
5–10	11	23.9
11–15	10	21.7
16–20	3	6.5
Over 20	3	6.5
Areas of study supervised or examined		
Language acquisition and pedagogy (SLA, teaching methodology, ESP/EAP)	133	43.9
Curriculum and assessment (Curriculum design, materials, testing & evaluation)	59	19.5
Teacher development and educational innovation (Professional development, technology, teacher training)	42	13.9
Global Englishes and language policy (Policy, planning, intercultural communication, world Englishes)	43	14.2
Linguistic and Literary Studies (Linguistics, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, literature)	26	8.6
Language used in writing doctoral dissertations and conducting oral examinations		
Thai	5	7.0
English	66	93.0

Note: The areas-of-study totals are higher than the participant numbers because participants could select more than one area.

Interview Informants

Nineteen informants were purposively selected from 71 questionnaire respondents who indicated willingness to participate in a follow-up interview, ensuring representation from diverse institutions across Thailand, with priority given to those with substantial experience supervising and examining ELE doctoral dissertations locally and internationally. The sample comprised 16 Thai and 3 non-Thai professors (2 British, 1 Filipino) from various PhD programs; all 19 informants were interviewed via Zoom.

As shown in Table 2, 52.6% were female, with the majority aged 51–60 (52.6%) or over 60 (26.3%). Most specialized in language acquisition and pedagogy (42.5%), followed by curriculum and assessment (22.1%). Supervisory experience was considerable, with 36.8% having supervised 11–20 doctoral students and 15.8% over 20. The majority (58%) had examined more than 10 dissertations at their home institutions and 36.8% at other institutions. Participant responses are referenced using pseudonyms (Th1–Th19).

Table 2
Profile of the Interview Informants (N = 19)

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	9	47.4
Female	10	52.6
Age		
41–50	4	21.1
51–60	10	52.6
Over 60	5	26.3
Number of doctoral students supervised		
Fewer than 5	1	5.3
5–10	7	36.8
11–15	7	36.8
16–20	1	5.3
Over 20	3	15.8
Number of dissertations examined in home institution		
Fewer than 5	1	5.3
5–10	7	36.8
11–15	6	31.6
16–20	1	5.3
Over 20	4	21.1
Number of dissertations examined in other institutions		
Fewer than 5	3	15.8
5–10	2	10.5
11–15	3	15.8
16–20	2	10.5
Over 20	2	10.5

Table 2

Profile of the Interview Informants (N = 19) (Cont.)

Characteristics	n	%
Areas of study supervised or examined		
Language acquisition and Pedagogy (SLA, teaching methodology, ELT/ESP/EAP)	54	42.5
Curriculum and assessment (Curriculum design, materials, testing & evaluation)	28	22.0
Teacher development and educational innovation (Professional development, technology, teacher training)	20	15.7
Global Englishes and language policy (Policy, planning, intercultural communication, world Englishes)	16	12.6
Linguistic and Literary Studies (Linguistics, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, literature)	9	7.1
Language used in doctoral dissertation writing and oral examinations		
Thai	0	0.0
English	19	100.0

Note: The areas-of-study totals are higher than the participant numbers because participants could select more than one area.

Researchers' Positionality

The research team comprises four English teachers. Three hold PhDs in Curriculum and Instruction, ELT, and Applied Linguistics, respectively, and have extensive experience supervising and examining M.A. theses and doctoral dissertations. The fourth researcher is currently pursuing her doctorate in Intercultural Communication. They are very interested in the process of examining doctoral dissertations and improving the quality of doctoral education, especially in the field of ELE. All four researchers were present during each interview, although only one conducted the interview at a time. They were aware of their positionality and acknowledged that their perceptions and interpretations may be influenced by their professional, ethical, and social values (Razoumova & Hooley, 2024).

Research Instruments and Data Types

Questionnaire (Appendix A)

The questionnaire, grounded in established assessment frameworks (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; Bourke & Holbrook, 2013; Winter et al., 2000), comprised two sections. Part 1 collected respondents' demographic background and their examination practice information (14 items), and Part 2 consisted of 20 items covering oral examination criteria (5 items; O) and dissertation quality attributes (15 items; D)—all measured on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were instructed to focus on areas directly relevant to ELE, given the diversity of subfields across Thailand's 25 PhD programs. Content validity was established using the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) (threshold: 0.5), internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .795$; Nassaji, 2026), and the response rate was approximately 58.7%.

Semi-Structured Interview (Appendix B)

The semi-structured interview protocol comprised three background questions and seven questions designed to elicit the participants' perceptions of doctoral dissertation standards and expectations for oral examination quality. The interview questions were validated using the IOC, with items scoring above 0.5 retained. The interviews typically lasted up to 90 minutes.

Artifacts and Documents

The documentary sources included national policy frameworks such as the Announcements regarding the standards for graduate studies programs, B.E. 2565 and B.E. 2558 (HESC, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2015) and the Higher Education Act, B.E. 2562 (MHESI, 2019), as well as institutional announcements on graduate studies, guidelines, and dissertation evaluation forms from eight institutions.

Information about Examination

Based on the standards for graduate studies program (HESC, 2022), doctoral examinations proceed in two stages: a proposal defense and a final oral defense of the completed dissertation. Each defense requires a committee of at least five members, comprising internal examiners (the supervisor and home-institution faculty) and at least two external, doctorate-holding experts from other universities (HESC, 2022), one of whom chairs the committee, handling and handles procedural duties alongside evaluation to help ensure impartiality. Candidates present their research and answer committee questions before the chair announces the outcome: acceptance, minor revisions, or major revisions with re-examination.

Data Collection

Of 121 identified participants, 71 returned questionnaire responses. Institutional guidelines and evaluation forms were also sought from program websites, but data collection proved challenging due to limited public availability and the need for formal institutional permission. As a result, forms were obtained from only eight institutions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, provided written informed consent, and were assured of anonymity. Interviews were conducted in Thai or English according to participants' backgrounds, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Thai-language excerpts were translated into English using Google Translate and verified against the original recordings by the researchers.

Data Analysis

National policy frameworks were examined for examination procedures and examiner qualifications, while institutional guidelines and evaluation forms were analyzed to identify the evaluation criteria prescribed and implemented by individual programs. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' demographics and ratings of dissertation

quality criteria. To interpret the mean ratings, the possible score range of the five-point Likert scale was divided into five equal intervals. The interpretation of mean scores followed Athiworakun et al. (2026). Mean scores were interpreted as indicating very low agreement (1.00–1.80), low agreement (1.81–2.60), moderate agreement (2.61–3.40), high agreement (3.41–4.20), or very high agreement (4.21–5.00). Interview data underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024) via iterative coding, theme generation, review, and refinement. After the themes related to dissertation quality criteria had been identified and categorized from the interview data, the questionnaire items were reorganized and mapped onto the corresponding themes.

Intercoder reliability was assessed following O'Connor and Joffe (2020): three coders, after a workshop and familiarization with the coding framework, independently coded a random 10% of the transcripts, yielding a Fleiss's kappa of 0.867 (very high agreement). Findings from the documentary, questionnaire, and interview analyses were then compared and integrated to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Results

Analysis of institutional documents and artifacts revealed that evaluation forms specify criteria and procedures for assessing doctoral dissertations and oral examinations. However, most forms lack detailed descriptive rubrics—typically listing scored items across four performance levels (Outstanding, Very Good, Good, and Unacceptable) without elaboration. Only one institution provided detailed descriptors for all performance levels. The thematic analysis of the interview data yielded seven key criteria for evaluating doctoral dissertations and oral examinations. Questionnaire findings were mapped onto and integrated with the interview findings to provide a more comprehensive account of assessment practices within the context of our study, as shown in Table 3 on the next page. The seven criteria are illustrated with relevant examples from the data.

Table 3
Mean Scores of Criteria for the Quality of Doctoral Dissertations

Criterion (and individual items)	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mastery of intellectual landscape			
D26. Successful candidates must be able to make use of relevant theories to explain phenomena in English language learning and teaching.	71	4.77	0.42
D20. Candidates can demonstrate comprehensive coverage of and depth of knowledge in the area of investigation.	71	4.38	0.66
D21. Candidates can discuss significant areas of debate in the area of investigation and clearly illustrate knowledge gaps in the field.	71	4.38	0.70
Argumentative rigor			
D22. Candidates demonstrate the ability to intellectually defend the doctoral dissertation.	71	4.45	0.65
O17. Candidates must be able to defend orally what they have expressed in the dissertation.	71	4.58	0.60

Table 3

Mean Scores of Criteria for the Quality of Doctoral Dissertations (Cont.)

Criterion (and individual items)	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Effective presentation			
D23. It is very important that a high-quality dissertation is well-organized and has an appropriate style of writing.	71	4.73	0.48
D24. It is very important that a dissertation with high quality must be well-written with flawless literacy (i.e., no grammatical errors, typographical errors, misspellings, poor sentence structures, etc.).	71	4.30	0.57
O15. I expect that candidates are able to demonstrate and present their knowledge clearly and fluently.	71	4.49	0.56
O18. For those in an English or international program, the candidates' ability to effectively communicate in English during the oral examination is one of my criteria.	68	4.26	0.64
O19. For those in a Thai program, the candidates' ability to use academic language to communicate during the oral examination is one of my criteria.	40	4.14	0.55
O16. Candidates' mental stamina in debate is one of my expectations.	71	3.76	0.82
Research Integrity			
D34. A high-quality dissertation takes ethical issues into consideration seriously.	71	4.72	0.48
Rigor of research methodology			
D33. A high-quality dissertation includes evidence of the ability to plan and design a rigorous study.	71	4.66	0.53
Originality in research			
D25. A successful dissertation must provide new knowledge and/or new theoretical understandings.	71	4.54	0.56
D32. A high-quality dissertation needs to give clear discussion of how findings are applicable to other contexts.	71	4.49	0.63
D27. Successful candidates must be able to give an original perspective or explanation of phenomena in English language learning and teaching.	71	4.41	0.62
D28. A dissertation with high quality makes an important breakthrough (theories or practices).	71	4.23	0.70
D29. A dissertation with high quality provides practical value to help solve problems in English language classrooms.	71	4.07	0.80
D30. A high-quality dissertation must challenge, redefine, or refine existing theories.	71	4.10	0.86
Publishability			
D31. In my opinion, a dissertation can be published in a high-quality peer-reviewed journal (in either national or international databases).	70	4.37	0.71

Analysis of questionnaire responses, institutional artifacts and documents from eight institutions, and interview data revealed the criteria used to assess doctoral dissertations and oral examinations. As shown in Table 3, mean scores ranged from 3.76 ($SD = 0.82$) to 4.77 ($SD = 0.42$), reflecting high to very high levels of agreement

among examiners across all criteria. The 20 items—comprising 15 dissertation-quality items (D20–D34) and 5 oral-examination items (O15–O19)—were organized into seven quality-criterion categories. Although the categories are presented in a particular sequence, this ordering should not be interpreted as a ranking of their relative importance.

Mastery of the intellectual landscape emerged as a prominent criterion, receiving very high agreement among examiners ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.70$ to $M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.42$ across items D20, D21, and D26). This criterion featured prominently in dissertation evaluation forms across all eight institutions, and 14 of the 19 interviewees unequivocally agreed that doctoral candidates must demonstrate such mastery. This entails the ability to understand and actively engage with ongoing developments in ideas, theories, and research in both breadth and depth. It also requires the ability to evaluate and synthesize scholarly literature in the area of investigation, as shown in the following excerpts.

I firstly check whether the literature review is comprehensive and includes all necessary related issues. It serves as a foundation. I always tell my students that Chapter 2 (Review of Literature) is like laying the foundation of a house. (Th12)

... there must be a link. That is, it should show how the current study relates to the development of research on that particular topic, and how the current study is situated in the body of knowledge ... it helps to fill the gap in previous studies. (Th17)

Candidates must also stay informed about emerging trends and discourses, critically analyze and synthesize the literature, identify research gaps, and use existing scholarship to support and meaningfully connect their findings to the broader body of literature (Golding et al., 2014). These aspects were reflected in one institution's dissertation evaluation form. The following descriptions quoted from the form illustrate the relevant criterion:

- Shows critical and analytical thinking about the literature
- Synthesizes the literature
- Uses the literature to build an argument and advance the field

Similar views were expressed by the interviewees illustrated in the following excerpts:

... I'd consider the theoretical framework in that study and the candidate needs to explain how the chosen theories are related to the research inquiry. Secondly, the candidate needs to select appropriate literature and explain how it is connected to the current study. Besides, the gap of knowledge needs to be identified. (Th8)

... It reveals the ability to synthesize information. ... For example, speaking to learning collocations, some researchers argue that vocabulary should be learned by analyzing meaning—such as examining the pattern of verb + noun, whereas others argue that it should be learned as chunks, as separating them is not useful. Then, candidates may present the literature review in two groups and then synthesize the findings by identifying which theorists support each perspective. ... There should be a summary and a critical review of diverse perspectives. I think they need to demonstrate the skills of synthesis and argumentation. ... We should be able to see their critical viewpoints—whether they agree or disagree, and if they disagree, what theories or evidence they use to support their argument and counterargument. (Th14)

Argumentative rigor or “criticality” (De Vita & Begley, 2024) emerged as another indicator of dissertation quality, with a dissertation item mean of 4.45 ($SD = 0.65$), indicating a very high level of agreement among examiners. Informants consistently emphasized that doctoral candidates must demonstrate the ability to construct, analyze, present, and defend well-supported arguments in a logical, coherent, and persuasive manner in the dissertation. This also includes the ability to clearly articulate how the current research is distinct from existing studies and to justify the significance of the study.

You need to have a clear rationale—what your rationale is and how it’s established. ... What is the significance of the study? ... Therefore, the most important aspects of Chapter 1 are: why the study is being conducted, what the research gap is, and how you intend to fill that gap. (Th17)

The candidate shouldn't just tell what’s going on. Instead, he or she should make clear points and form solid arguments. For example, explain why a certain issue needs to be reviewed, what research problems are, why they are significant, and why it leads to another point. (Th15)

Argumentative rigor also remained important in the oral examination. The mean score was 4.58 ($SD = 0.60$), reflecting very high agreement. Informants highlighted that the oral defense requires candidates to respond spontaneously, justify methodological and theoretical choices, and demonstrate the ability to handle and respond to examiners’ questions effectively.

[During the oral examination] They were able to answer and explain their answers to every examiner who asked questions or gave comments; they were able to respond logically. (Th15)

Some candidates who are strong fighters and are skilled can defend their work effectively. ... (Th1)

Effective presentation is another important criterion, with dissertation quality item means ranging from 4.30 ($SD = 0.57$) to 4.73 ($SD = 0.48$) and oral-examination item

means from 3.76 ($SD = 0.82$) to 4.49 ($SD = 0.56$), reflecting high to very high examiner agreement. The criterion appears in assessment forms across all eight institutions, with six explicitly including it for oral examinations. Interview data further revealed that candidates are expected to craft and communicate arguments clearly and concisely in both written and oral formats, in either Thai or English.

When you write short sentences, they come out really precise. There's no need for complicated wording. (Th2)

It's a criterion for quality in writing than in presenting during a defense. ... They need to find someone to help edit it. They have to check for plagiarism. We try to maintain quality in the writing, in grammar, format, and things like this. (Th7)

Interestingly, most examiners assessing doctoral candidates in English-medium dissertation programs paid limited attention to English language accuracy, treating it as a minor criterion addressable through proofreading and editing by native speakers or AI tools. This was the case even though ELE candidates were expected to demonstrate high English proficiency, as illustrated below.

I understand that we are in the field of ELT and are also English teachers, but I place less importance on the language itself than on the validity and reliability of the research. I do not view it in terms of 100% accuracy because students who pursue a doctoral degree in ELT can use the language to a certain degree. (Th16)

I wouldn't pay much attention to their language use if it didn't interfere with comprehensibility and intelligibility. If it did, I would tell them you probably need to get it edited. (Th19)

Only three examiners identified proficiency in academic English writing as a factor in their assessment of dissertation quality. They argued that limited proficiency could limit candidates' ability to express their ideas clearly and effectively.

I don't believe that excellent content can be achieved through poor and sloppy language use. ... My generation isn't very tolerant of grammatical errors, especially if you can prepare in advance. This affected me a lot; it discouraged me from reading. ... (Th2)

I am very concerned about language accuracy. We are English teachers, so even petty mistakes should not happen. This may be the world of World Englishes, but dissertation writing still requires standard academic English, not 'World Englishes'. (Th12)

If your English skills are poor, you can't write well, and the message will be lost. If the English is broken, you can't communicate effectively. (Th15)

The fourth criterion emphasized by the examiners is research integrity. The mean score for dissertation quality in this category (D34) was 4.72 ($SD = 0.48$), indicating that the examiners showed a very high level of agreement with this criterion. For the questionnaire participants, research integrity is thus an important factor in assessing the quality of doctoral research. However, the analysis of the qualitative data yielded an unexpected finding: only one institution explicitly emphasized this criterion in its assessment form, and only two examiners addressed this issue, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

Does the researcher really take research ethics into account and adhere to ethical considerations in conducting the study? (Th8)

Researchers need to be aware of ethics in accessing and requesting data, obtaining permission, and ensuring that everything is kept confidential. (Th10)

Despite the limited attention to this issue, an examination of the Graduate Program Standard Criteria (HESC, 2022) and the Higher Education Standards (MHESI, 2019) indicates that candidates are required to uphold academic and professional ethics, such as honesty, transparency, fairness, and responsibility, throughout the research process, including data collection, data analysis, and reporting, as shown below.

... the programs foster the ability to contribute to academic advancement, continuously integrate knowledge from related disciplines, and align with the national higher education development plan, the philosophy of higher education and their institutions, and international academic and professional standards, while maintaining high standards of academic integrity, ethics and professional conduct (HESC, 2022, p. 23).

Section 70. For the purpose of maintaining the standards of higher education, good governance, and academic integrity, no one shall hire, commission, or instruct another person to produce academic work for use in: submitting it as part of a higher education curriculum ..., regardless of whether there is any compensation involved (MHESI, 2019, p. 74).

A further issue is the use of AI. Amid concerns about the unethical use of AI, an examiner explicitly stated that her supervisees are allowed to use AI only in specific areas of dissertation editing.

I allow my students to use ChatGPT to edit their dissertations. I think they use AI sensibly for stylistic or language-related issues, but AI must not be used for content-related purposes. Students can't use AI to generate any aspects of the dissertation's content, but they may use it for stylistic and language editing. (Th19)

Is this Grammarly? ... Technology is used to facilitate their writing. I don't mind if they used it. (Th12)

However, the use of AI in doctoral research must be approached with caution and in accordance with ethical and institutional requirements. The use of AI is not automatically considered academic misconduct; however, undisclosed or inappropriate use may raise concerns about authorship and academic integrity. An examination of the Higher Education Act and institutional regulations revealed severe penalties for academic misconduct, including plagiarism, data fabrication, and contract cheating (i.e., the practice of hiring a third party to complete a dissertation and submitting it as one's own). As shown below, the sanctions range from degree revocation to criminal penalties, including fines and imprisonment.

Section 77. Whoever violates Section 70 [about contract cheating] shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding sixty thousand baht, or both. (MHESI, 2019, p. 76)

After the University Council has conferred a degree and an investigation reveals any form of academic misconduct in the thesis, dissertation, or independent research, such as plagiarism, generating fake data, or contract cheating, the faculty committee shall consider and propose to the University Council to revoke the degree and disqualify the student from further studies at the university (Thammasat University, 2025, p. 22).

Further examination of institutional announcements on graduate studies revealed requirements for plagiarism checking, text-similarity analysis, and AI-generated-content detection using Turnitin or other tools approved by the institution. Candidates must submit the checking or similarity-index reports before the oral examination. Some institutions also require these reports to be submitted with the final dissertation to the graduate school as a graduation requirement.

The fifth criterion, rigor of research methodology, received very high agreement among questionnaire respondents ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.53$) and was consistently identified across dissertation assessment forms from all eight institutions. Informants emphasized precision in research design, appropriateness of methodological choices, and rigor in data collection and analysis as essential for ensuring the reliability, validity, and credibility of findings. A clear and contextualized description of the research setting was also highlighted as an important component. Regardless of the methods employed, explicit justification for methodological choices was considered an essential requirement, as illustrated in the following excerpts. The first emphasizes the importance of candidates knowing different kinds of analysis:

The researchers need to indicate the type of analysis they use. If it were quantitative analysis, appropriate statistical tools should be used and for what purposes. They also need to give explanation why that analysis is appropriate. If it were qualitative analysis, they would need to explain which methods are employed, such as content analysis, and why that method was chosen. They need to give justifications. Important information needs to be given such as reliability and validity of instruments, and implications of the findings. (Th10)

The second takes up the issue of validity in more detail and comments on the notion of context:

Do they really demonstrate whether their research is rigorously well-designed? Do they demonstrate awareness of validity and reliability issues? ... Do they validate instruments used in the study? Another important aspect I look for is how the data are analyzed. ... Context is also essential because when we evaluate a piece of work, it depends on the context in which the study is conducted. That context must be clearly described. (Th17)

The sixth criterion, originality, was considered an important standard for assessing doctoral dissertations, with mean scores ranging from 4.07 ($SD = 0.80$) to 4.54 ($SD = 0.56$), reflecting high to very high examiner agreement. It also featured prominently in the dissertation assessment forms of all eight institutions. Interview analysis revealed that examiners emphasized originality as requiring at least one of two key attributes.

Primarily, a dissertation must offer new ideas or theoretical understandings that advance knowledge in ELE—whether through developing new theories or practices, applying innovative methods, or offering fresh applications of existing concepts—as illustrated in the following excerpts. The first excerpt is particularly noteworthy as it describes what “newness” means in practice across a range of factors:

Originality means newness, right? Mostly it has to do with the way of collecting data. ... Changing the sample is also part of it; you could say no one has done before, ... What we do should address a gap. Newness means addressing a gap that no one has yet explored—that’s the research gap... So, just changing the context to China isn’t that significant, but I noticed that the work on the concept of indirect feedback was a relatively new concept. (Th1)

The second focuses on the findings and, in the context of ELE, it is notable that this interviewee links newness with “practicality”:

Newness which constitutes a new finding. This is an important point. But for a PhD research, the scale is much larger ... Because research is about innovation—if the work produces nothing new at all, it should at least yield useful findings. I also look at practicality—whether the results can be replicated and applied in actual teaching contexts. (Th1)

In addition, the findings reveal an expanded interpretation of originality. Originality is conceptualized as the novelty and contribution of a study, demonstrated through refining or challenging existing theories, exploring new contexts, developing new models, or using innovative methods to generate fresh insights and address research questions. Most of the examiners emphasized that PhD candidates in ELE

are expected to produce dissertations that exhibit this attribute. The first excerpt highlights originality in teaching techniques:

When students want to develop new teaching techniques, there should be an instructional approach that either creates a new method or modifies an existing one by incorporating the knowledge that students contribute. For example, inventing ways to teach deaf students, or those with hearing challenges, to understand the abstract meaning of over—such as in “Game Over”—would be considered originality developed by students. In teaching deaf learners who cannot hear explanations, it may require adapting techniques or presenting teaching methods in different ways. (Th8)

The second sees originality in the use of existing approaches in hitherto unexplored contexts:

Originality may refer to the context in which something is applied. For example, a study might already have been done with advanced learners, but if no one has applied that approach with intermediate or low-proficiency learners, then changing the context in that way is acceptable and shows a certain level of originality. Or suppose someone has conducted text analysis by building a corpus to analyze a particular type of text, for instance, creating a specialized corpus in a given field. Even if another researcher uses a similar specialized corpus, if their analytical perspective employs a different framework, or if they make comparisons with another corpus, then as long as something new is done—even using the same dataset but with a different framework, that can also demonstrate originality. (Th4)

The third emphasizes methodology:

... making a meaningful significant contribution that pushes the field forward. Umm, it must have a really sound methodology and ideally, it would have an innovative methodology which pushes the methodology forward as well. (Th19)

Finally, publishability is a highly valued criterion, with a mean score of 4.37 ($SD = 0.71$), indicating very high examiner agreement. HESC (2022) require doctoral candidates in the social sciences and humanities, including ELE, to publish research derived from their dissertation in peer-reviewed journals indexed in the Thailand Citation Index (TCI) database or internationally recognized databases. However, this criterion appeared in evaluation forms at only three institutions and was not prominently raised by most interviewees. Seven of the 19 interviewees noted that evidence of publication enhanced their confidence in dissertation quality, as reflected in the following excerpts.

For me, it helps make the judgment easier—whether the work is of such good quality that, if a reviewer sees part of the thesis, they would accept it for publication. I must admit that this influences me to view the work more positively. (Th12)

If it is from one of the top 50 journals, ... And yes, if it's being published in one of those, then yes, ... the research has some kind of quality, and the person can write up research well. (Th19)

However, an examination of the guidelines and assessment forms for doctoral dissertations and oral examinations from eight institutions revealed that only three institutions included publishability as a criterion, assigning it a weighted score of 15% to 20% of the overall assessment. Among the interviewees, only three indicated that they did not consider this criterion important, as shown in the following excerpts.

I am indifferent to whether the work has been published. I have to focus on the dissertation. Publishing in a journal involves many processes, and we do not know what kinds of support might have been involved. Therefore, I do not use pre-publication as a criterion for evaluation ... (Th2)

It may not affect our judgment; our bright students are able to publish part of their work in Scopus. (Th7)

An interesting finding from the interviews was that examiners considered the interconnectedness of key criteria rather than evaluating each criterion separately, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

... when I assess a dissertation, I consider it holistically, as other examiners do (Th1).

I evaluate the content of the dissertation. I also consider the research methods used and how the candidate discusses the findings. (Th2)

Candidates need to demonstrate their ability to understand their research topic and research questions. They need to crystalize their thinking. My criteria are ... I assess their conceptualize process ... In the literature review, you need to analyze previous research studies, present what you have found, organize their findings into themes. In Chapter 3, the research methodology section, candidates need to justify their research design. You may draw ideas or models from the literature review and propose your own models that are appropriate for your specific context in Chapter 3. ... If you don't read and review the literature extensively, you will not be able to discuss your findings effectively and engagingly. You can see that every part is related to the others. (Th3)

Discussion

The findings reveal that examiners engage in a holistic evaluation of dissertations, emphasizing the interconnectedness of key criteria rather than judging each aspect separately (Houston, 2021). The key criteria reported by examiners are discussed below.

First, mastery of the intellectual landscape emerged as a key criterion, consistent with international research emphasizing candidates' ability to engage critically with relevant theories and literature (Golding et al., 2014), recognize diverse perspectives within academic debates (Winter et al., 2000), situate their research within the broader map of knowledge (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023), and connect their findings to existing scholarship (Holbrook et al., 2007). Examiners also place particular importance on candidates' ability to integrate, critically evaluate, and synthesize scholarly literature to support coherent argumentation and meaningful contributions to ELT (Holbrook et al., 2015; Kobayashi & Emmeche, 2023; Tan, 2023).

Second, argumentative rigor, conceptualized as an "intellectual endeavor" (Johnston, 1997), emerges as another criterion for assessing dissertations and candidates' doctorateness in the Thai ELE context (De Vita & Begley, 2024). This is consistent with research in other contexts that emphasizes candidates' ability to construct convincing arguments, critically engage with theoretical frameworks, rationalize research problems, identify gaps, and position their work within the broader intellectual landscape (Holbrook et al., 2007). Research conducted in Western systems—including Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Norway, and the Nordic Region—as well as more recent research in Malaysia (Tan, 2023), has similarly highlighted argumentative rigor, methodological justification, and theoretically informed interpretations as central indicators of doctoral quality (Holbrook et al., 2022; Houston & Lunt, 2024; Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Winter et al., 2000). Extending this body of research, the present study reveals that, in the Thai ELE context, argumentative rigor must be evident throughout the entire dissertation from rationale to self-evaluation.

This finding nonetheless contrasts with studies identifying other primary criteria: originality has been foregrounded in Australia (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013), the UK (Houston & Lunt, 2024; Tinkler & Jackson, 2000), Norway (Kyvik & Thune, 2015), Sweden (Elmgren et al., 2024), and Thailand (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023); methodological rigor in Australia and Norway (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013; Kvik & Thune, 2015); and effective presentation in other studies (Golding et al., 2014; Holbrook et al., 2004; Kvik & Thune, 2015).

A possible explanation is that doctoral education in ELE emphasizes critical thinking and scholarly argumentation, requiring doctoral candidates to demonstrate not only research competence but also sustained intellectual dialogue in written and oral forms (Lantsoght, 2023). These findings suggest that argumentative rigor may

carry relatively greater importance in Thai ELE doctoral assessment, although other internationally recognized criteria remain relevant.

Next, effective presentation in written and oral formats constitutes a primary criterion in assessing dissertation quality and oral examination performance, regardless of the language of submission. This is consistent with international research emphasizing clarity, coherence, and compliance with academic conventions as key indicators of doctoral quality (Chetcuti et al., 2022). However, a context-specific nuance emerges in that examiners in Thai ELE tend to demonstrate greater tolerance for minor linguistic inaccuracies. Only three examiners identified academic English writing proficiency as a factor in evaluating dissertation quality. This suggests that linguistics accuracy was less prominent in the interview data than other criteria, such as argumentative rigor, mastery of the intellectual landscape and research originality. A few examiners noted that assistance from language editors or language-support tools could help candidates improve their writing, although only one examiner specifically mentioned AI applications. However, further research is needed to understand why academic English writing proficiency received relatively limited emphasis.

Nevertheless, this tolerance does not mean that the expectation of effective presentation can be neglected. Unprofessional presentation may still create negative impressions and prompt a more critical, fault-finding stance, potentially lowering overall assessment outcomes (Golding et al., 2014). These findings suggest that while effective presentation is valued across contexts, the degree of tolerance for linguistic inaccuracies may vary according to local and institutional norms. Tan (2023) likewise reports that examiners hold differing views on the purpose of the oral examination, which may help explain why expectations about presentation are not applied uniformly across examiners.

While originality has been consistently identified as a dominant criterion across various contexts (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; De Vita & Begley, 2024; Lovitts, 2007; Tan, 2023), the concept remains inherently ambiguous, particularly in the Thai ELE context. The findings confirm that examiners expect candidates to make a substantive contribution to knowledge (Lovitts, 2007), but reveal a distinct, context-specific interpretation. Instead of prioritizing the major theoretical, conceptual, or empirical breakthroughs often associated with scientific and medical research, examiners in Thai ELE tend to value practical utility. This may be reflected through new perspectives on existing issues, alternative conceptual or methodological frameworks, and pedagogically relevant insights. Contributions that directly inform teaching practices, address classroom challenges, or support marginalized students are particularly valued (Chetcuti et al., 2022). This likely reflects the applied nature of the discipline and expectations for doctoral research in Thailand to demonstrate clear practical implications. These findings suggest that while originality is a shared criterion internationally, its interpretation and relative emphasis may vary depending on discipline and context.

Despite being rated as important in the questionnaire data and identified as an important criterion globally (ALLEA, 2023), research integrity did not emerge as a major concern in the qualitative findings. This apparent discrepancy may reflect the distinction between research integrity as an assumed baseline standard and as an explicit evaluative criterion—recognized as important yet often taken for granted. This may partly be attributed to the close supervisory relationship in ELE doctoral programs, through which students may be scaffolded by supervisors (Vygotsky, 1978) in both intellectual and ethical development (Johnston, 1997). However, this explanation is speculative, as supervisory practices were not directly examined in this study, and this interpretation should be treated with caution. Acceptable scholarly practices and ethical boundaries may thus be socially negotiated as a “form of boundary-work” (Gieryn, 1983; Johnston, 1997). While various forms of academic misconduct have been reported in other disciplines, including plagiarism, contract cheating, and unethical use of AI (Murch et al., 2025), examiners’ limited discussion of integrity in this study may tentatively suggest a degree of confidence in candidates. This interpretation is not directly supported by the data and would benefit from further investigation, for example through more targeted questioning of examiners’ assumptions about integrity in future research. Comparative evidence from the region nonetheless cautions against assuming that such confidence is universally warranted. Gantogtokh (2026) documents integrity and transparency problems in doctoral defense practices in Mongolia, indicating that the robustness of defense procedures varies considerably across national systems.

Finally, examiners place strong emphasis on the ability to design rigorous and appropriate research methods and apply them effectively to address their research questions. Examiners strongly value clear and logical justification of methodological choices (Chetcuti et al., 2022; De Vita & Begley, 2024). While no specific method is prescribed, candidates are expected to justify their research design, instruments, and data analysis by addressing validity, reliability, accuracy, and consistency (Chetcuti et al., 2022). A well-crafted research design grounded in these principles is seen as the foundation for valid, reliable results and defensible conclusions (Golding et al., 2014).

Taken together, these findings speak to the central contribution of the study. The seven criteria reported here are only partly visible in the documents that govern doctoral assessment. Institutional evaluation forms list scored items without descriptive rubrics and the criterion examiners emphasized—argumentative rigor—is not differentiated in those forms. What examiners attend to is therefore shaped as much by implicit, individually held standards as by explicit institutional criteria. It is in the gap between the two that candidates are most likely to be left guessing about what is expected of them.

Conclusion

By setting examiners' accounts alongside the assessment documents institutions actually use, this study makes visible both the explicit and the implicit criteria that shape judgments of doctoral quality in Thai ELE and shows where the two diverge. The findings offer several practical implications for ELE doctoral education. First, candidates should recognize that assessment criteria are discipline-specific; in the Thai ELE context, examiners place greater emphasis on argumentative rigor than is typically observed in other fields. Second, while minor linguistic inaccuracies may be tolerated, doctoral dissertations are nonetheless expected to meet professional standards consistent with international academic norms. Clarity, technical accuracy, and coherence remain fundamental expectations (Golding et al., 2014). Third, the concept of originality requires clearer conceptualization and explicit articulation for ELE doctoral students. Given its varied interpretation across disciplines, originality in ELE should be understood to encompass theoretical innovation, methodological advancement, and pedagogically relevant contributions. Finally, more explicit standards for doctoral assessment in ELE are needed to promote shared understanding among examiners, enhance transparency, and improve reliability. Candidates should also be informed of these expectations from the outset of their doctoral journey, helping to demystify the assessment process and support more effective preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study has two main limitations. First, several institutions declined to share evaluation forms or allow observation of oral examinations despite official requests, limiting document collection to eight institutions. Observational data would have strengthened triangulation and validity. Second, the strict eligibility criteria narrowed the pool of qualified examiners (121 identified; 71 completed the questionnaire). Because few respondents met the original five-dissertation threshold, it was applied less strictly to preserve an adequate sample size, which may introduce some heterogeneity in examination experience and potentially limit generalizability.

Several avenues for further research emerge from this study. First, it would be worthwhile to investigate why “originality” is not regarded as the most important criterion in ELE dissertation assessment, given its prominence in other disciplines and studies (Adunyarittigun et al., 2023; Chetcuti et al., 2022; Clarke & Lunt, 2014). Think-aloud protocols (Charters, 2003) could provide deeper insight into examiners' interpretations of such abstract concepts. Second, a comparative study of Thai and non-Thai examiners' perspectives on dissertation quality criteria in the Thai context would be valuable. Third, the underlying factors shaping cross-contextual differences in doctoral assessment practices should be further investigated to enhance their transparency and comparability at an international level. Fourth, future research

could explore examiners' views on candidates' use of AI tools in the research process, particularly which forms and stages of AI assistance are considered ethically acceptable. Finally, this study highlights the need to investigate examiner perspectives across other disciplines in Thailand, especially science and technology.

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Ethical Approval

The Human Research Ethics Committee of Thammasat University reviewed and approved the aims and procedures of this study. Ethical approval No. 096/2566 was granted on 18 August 2023.

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Appendix A

Perspectives on Criteria Used to Assess Doctoral Dissertation and Oral Examination and Perception of Qualities Expected from Dissertation

The study aims to, through the perspectives of experienced ELE doctoral examiners, explore doctoral assessment practices in the field of English language teaching in Thailand with a focus on what examiners view as doctoral dissertation quality attributions, how they assess the dissertations, and their roles in the oral examinations. It would be very grateful if you could help answer the questions. It should take around 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All of the information will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your cooperation. There are 2 parts:

Part I: Preliminary information about respondents and criteria used in evaluating doctoral dissertation and oral examination (Items 1- 14)

Directions: Please choose the appropriate responses.

No	Items
1.	Email address?
2.	Gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Others
3.	Age ☐ 30-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 51-55 ☐ 56-60 ☐ Over 60
4.	Approximate number of doctoral students supervised ☐ fewer than 5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ over 20
5.	Approximate number of doctoral dissertations examined in your home institution ☐ fewer than 5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ over 20
6.	Approximate number of doctoral dissertations examined in other institutions ☐ fewer than 5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 15-20 ☐ over 20

No	Items
7.	Areas of English language teaching you have supervised/examined at the doctoral level. (Check all that apply) ☐ second language acquisition and education ☐ material development ☐ curriculum design and development ☐ language testing and assessment ☐ language program evaluation ☐ language teaching methodology ☐ teacher training and professional development ☐ intercultural communication ☐ World Englishes ☐ English for Specific Purposes (ESP) ☐ English for Academic Purposes (EAP) ☐ Innovations and technology in language teaching and learning ☐ Language planning and language policy ☐ Others (Please specify) _____
8.	The language used in writing the majority of doctoral dissertations that you have examined ☐ Thai ☐ English
9.	The language used in the majority of the oral examinations that you have examined ☐ Thai ☐ English
10.	In your opinion, what are the purposes of an oral examination at the dissertation defense? (Check all that apply) ☐ To assess substantive skills and qualities that cannot be assessed through written examinations alone ☐ To assess the candidate's breadth and depth of knowledge in the field ☐ To evaluate the candidate's ability to analyze, synthesize and consolidate information ☐ To verify the candidate's authenticity of knowledge ☐ To assess the candidate's oral presentation and communication skills ☐ To assess the candidate's ability to think on the hoof and answer questions effectively and clearly ☐ To be a 'rite of passage' signifying a celebration of achievement
11.	From your own experience, is the majority of the oral defenses open to the public? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12.	From your own experience, do most institutions provide you with written criteria for pass/fail or giving a mark or grade? If you say NO, you may skip Item No. 13. ☐ Yes ☐ No
13.	Do you follow them closely? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14.	Do you have any experience rejecting any doctoral dissertations either at the proposal defense or at the dissertation defense? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Part II: View of doctoral dissertation quality attributes and examination (Items 15-34)

- About oral dissertation (Items 15-19)
- About dissertation quality (Items 20-34)

Directions: Listed below are statements about what qualities and attributes examiners expect in a doctoral dissertation and what examiners expect when they evaluate oral examinations. Please read each statement carefully. Then choose the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following:

- 5 SA = Strongly Agree
4 A = Agree
3 U = Undecided
2 D = Disagree
1 SD = Strongly Disagree

About oral examination [O]

Items	Lists	SA	A	U	D	SD
15.	I expect that candidates are able to demonstrate and present their knowledge clearly and fluently.					
16.	Candidates' mental stamina in debate is one of my expectations.					
17.	Candidates must be able to defend orally what they have expressed in the dissertation.					
18.	For those in an English or international program, the candidates' ability to effectively communicate in English during the oral examination is one of my criteria. (Skip to the next item, if you are not in any of the programs)					
19.	For those in a Thai program, the candidates' ability to use academic language to communicate during the oral examination is one of my criteria. (Skip to the next item, if you are not in the programs)					

About Dissertation Quality [D]

Items	Lists	SA	A	U	D	SD
20.	Candidates can demonstrate comprehensive coverage of and depth of knowledge in the area of investigation.					
21.	Candidates can discuss significant areas of debate in the field of English language teaching and clearly illustrate knowledge gaps in the field.					
22.	Candidates demonstrate the ability to intellectually defend the doctoral dissertation.					
23.	It is very important that a high-quality dissertation is well-organized and has an appropriate style of writing.					
24.	It is very important that a dissertation with high quality must be well-written with flawless literacy (i.e., no grammatical errors, typographical errors, misspellings, poor sentence structures, etc.).					
25.	A successful dissertation must provide new knowledge and/or new theoretical understandings.					
26.	Successful candidates must be able to make use of relevant theories to explain phenomena in English language learning and teaching.					

Items	Lists	SA	A	U	D	SD
27.	Successful candidates must be able to give an original perspective or explanation of phenomena in English language learning and teaching.					
28.	A dissertation with high quality makes an important breakthrough (theories or practices).					
29.	A dissertation with high quality provides practical value to help solve problems in English language classrooms.					
30.	A high-quality dissertation must challenge, redefine, or refine existing theories.					
31.	In my opinion, a dissertation can be published in a high-quality peer-reviewed journal (in either national or international databases).					
32.	A high-quality dissertation needs to give clear discussion of how findings are applicable to other contexts.					
33.	A high-quality dissertation includes evidence of the ability to plan and design a rigorous study.					
34.	A high-quality dissertation takes ethical issues into consideration seriously.					

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Introduction

1. What are your areas of expertise within ELE?
2. How long have you been supervising/examining doctoral dissertations?
3. What areas of English language teaching have you supervised or examined at the PhD level?

Criteria for assessment

4. From your own experience, do most institutions provide you with written criteria for evaluating doctoral dissertations? Are they the same? Please specify.

OPTION 1: If there are written criteria,

How do you use the criteria?

Do you use any other criteria besides the given criteria?

OPTION 2: If there are no written criteria,

What are your personal criteria in assessing a doctoral dissertation in the field of ELE?

5. What do you look for in each chapter (Chapter 1: rationale, Chapter 2: literature review, Chapter 3: Methodology, Chapters 4 & 5: results and discussions)?

6. What do you mean by 'originality'?

7. Based on your own criteria, how would you define an exceptional doctoral dissertation? Could you provide some detailed explanations and examples to illustrate your perspective?

8. Do you think other examiners in the panel hold the same criteria and the same expectations when they assess a doctoral dissertation?

9. Do you ever discuss the criteria explicitly? Can you give examples if so?

10. In your experience, have you observed that other institutions have different criteria than your own when evaluating doctoral dissertations? Could you share some insights based on your experiences?