

Professional Teaching and Learning Effectiveness: A Case of English Language Teaching in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the effectiveness of teacher professional learning (PL) as an effort to increase English language teaching quality in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. It used descriptive qualitative and quantitative case study approach to find about the continuous learning and development activities. Data were derived from questionnaire, observation, and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that in-service training program is considered effective for sharing knowledge, skills and information among English language teachers. The findings also revealed that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be learned in-depth during professional learning activities. In addition, the respondents perceived Subject Teacher's Meeting or teacher study groups as an effective collaborative model of professional learning activities. This study suggests that the need to involve English language teachers in a training at least once a year as an effort to help them gain new insight and experience in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills and to experience in solving problems both at school and outside school.

Keywords: Teacher's competence; professional learning; study group

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INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research suggests the importance of Continuous Learning Process (CLP) for teachers (e.g., Creemers et al., 2013; King, 2019; Lipowsky & Rzejak, 2015). This is because CLP is a determining factor in the success of producing teachers who have knowledge, skills and attitudes. Darling et al. (2017) stress CLP for teachers as a vital component to enhance the quality of teaching and learning because it promotes a responsible, creative, and proactive approach. Therefore, according to King (2019), CLP as part of professional development should be able to help teachers increase the aspects that have a strong link to teachers' practices in the classroom, namely knowledge, skills, and attitude. This is also in line with what Lipowsky and Rzejak (2015) informed that professional learning for teachers is a process of transferring knowledge, skills and understanding and helps them improve their teaching practice and shared responsibility.

Craft (2000) indicates that if schools are intended to meet student learning in a changing world, then teachers' professional learning throughout their careers are inevitable. Correspondingly, Creemers et al. (2013) define professional learning as a process aimed at

increasing teachers' knowledge and revising their teaching practices to improve students' learning outcomes as a result of both externally offered and job-embedded activities. Both emphasize that learning will occur both in formal and informal ways. This concept of professional learning thus challenges the traditional, training-focused approach to teacher's learning that more emphasis on formal approach. In current trend of educational practices, there is an increasing demand of using both formal and informal approaches in professional learning activities. Heikkinen et al. (2012) inform the need to realize and employ formal and informal learning opportunities in teachers' professional learning. They further convince that formal and informal learning are complementary to teacher's professional learning and should be leveraged by professional learning community to utilize the two kinds of learning opportunities.

In the current literature, researchers agree that innovative¹ PL is much more effective than traditional PL (Attema-Noordewier, et al. 2012; Van Veen et al., 2012). Van Veen et al. (2012) define traditional form in which PL activities are not addressed to teachers' classroom practice, teachers can't play an active role during PL

¹ Some researchers called innovative PD as reform or collaborative models of PD. Throughout this article, the term innovative forms will be used.

process, and the content is not situated to the problems and issues of teachers' daily practice. One-day workshops, seminars, and conferences are identified as some examples of traditional forms of PL. Innovative forms, on the other hand, refer to PL interventions in which teachers play an active role during PL process and the issues and the content are in line with teacher's teaching practice. Study groups, coaching, mentoring, and research by teachers are some examples of innovative forms.

The problem with traditional forms are that these activities fail to deepen teachers' capability and being inadequate to change deep-rooted views in practice (Gemedra, 2015). Teachers mostly feel boring and find irrelevant, and experience to forget more than seventy five per cent of what they learn through traditional models of PL. Another problem with traditional approaches to PL is that the activities do not capitalize on the expertise of teachers, rather they operate from a deficit model (Olin & Ingerman, 2016). On the other hand, many researchers claim that innovative forms of PL are more effective to meet teachers' needs because most of these activities are in the form of collaboration and are grounded in teachers' classroom practice (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Innovative forms of PD take into account teachers' existing frames of knowledge and experience, as well as a classroom practical focus. This is important as professional learning should become opportunity for teachers to grow professionally and that the PL should promote and support that growth.

In the Indonesian context, PL for teachers has become tradition since 1970s (Bachtiar, 2017). PL becomes one of the efforts of the government of Indonesia to improve the quality of teachers and increase student's achievement. PL has been implemented to attempt to fulfil the needs of teachers to increase their knowledge, skills, and attitude. Among PL activities are subject teacher's forum, coaching, mentoring, seminars, workshops, and in-service training (Sudarminta, 2000). In Indonesia, PL programs have particularly been carried out to introduce new curriculum or strategies in teaching. Mostly, the Ministry of Education invites teachers' representative to participate in PL activities (i.e. workshops and/or in-service training). Later, the teachers' representative will disseminate the information and knowledge they get from PL activities to their colleagues in their school/district or through subject teacher' forum. PL for teachers in Indonesian school setting has increased since 2005 (Iwani, 2014).

In the past two decades, the Indonesian government has made vital expansion in the aspects of education, including the education system, which is intended to improve learning achievement. Increased access to education is driven by government's promises to meet its official educational goals such as the implementation of the six years compulsory education for

primary school age children (7-12 years) since 1984. The result of this new policy was a significant increase in the level of participation in primary schools which reached 92 percent in 1993 compared to 79 percent just 10 years earlier (Bachtiar, 2017). Ten years after the compulsory primary education program came fully into effect, Indonesian legislation required all children to attend nine years of compulsory schooling, comprising six years in primary school and three years in junior secondary school (Coleman, 2011). In addition, the government of Indonesia has also implemented many professional learning for teachers which were intended to improve teachers' teaching practice. PL has become one of tools to disseminate new curriculum, education policies and/or strategy in teaching (Bachtiar, 2017).

The Indonesian government efforts, as noted above, have mandated and have become the goal of the national educational system to enhance intellectual capacity and develop the character and civilization of the nation. The demand to improve the quality of national education is clearly indicated in the government regulation which mention that "the quality of education must be constantly improved ... so that future generations who will continue to lead the nation can be prepared in advance so that they are in a high-level and competitive position in national life and globally" (Depdiknas, 2010, p.1).

The quote above points out that education has been considered by the government of Indonesia as the keystone of future development of Indonesia. The government of Indonesia has been trying to achieve the goals of national education through legislation and through increasing the expenditure on education to nurture the quality of education. Despite tremendous efforts have been done in terms of quantitative expansion, the quality of education and student achievement are still low (Iwani, 2014).

The research results found that teacher competence, both in terms of teaching content knowledge and in other knowledge, especially knowledge of pedagogical content and teaching approaches is still dubious (Mahsunah, et al., 2012). This evidence of doubt is supported by the results of the online Teacher Competency Test² (TCT) which was carried out in 2012, where most of the teachers have not yet reached the established competency standards. The online TCT in Indonesia had been held for the first time by the Ministry of Education and Culture, aiming to assist the guidance process for teachers who did not succeed in the exam (Tarmizi, 2012). The Head of Education Department of South Sulawesi Province informed that, based on the 2012 CTC results, South Sulawesi province ranked 13th with an average rating of 39.40 below the national average value of 42.25 on a score ranging from 0 to 100. For pedagogical competence, South Sulawesi has an average value of 39.93 from the national average

² TCT is well known as UKG (Ujian Kompetensi Guru) in Indonesia.

value of 43.20. Meanwhile, for professional competence, South Sulawesi has an average value of 40.16, compared to the national average score of 44.05 (Nugraha, 2016). These results indicate that teacher competencies in South Sulawesi province, especially pedagogical and professional competencies are still low. Very much similar results of the CTC which was carried out in 2015 that show an average value of 52.55 compared to national average of 56.69. That result placed South Sulawesi at position 18th nationally.

Based on the data above, there is a need to implement appropriate and practical professional learning for teachers to meet Indonesian Education National Standard. There are at least six main agendas that need to be implemented to increase teachers' competence (BSNP, 2010; Kuswandi, 2006). *First*, the agenda of enhancing teacher's motivation continually by increasing their capabilities and skills in planning, implementing, and evaluating teaching and learning process as the effort to increase their self-confidence as professional teachers. *Second*, the agenda of teachers' achievement and skills in implementing learning to improve the quality and equity of education. *Third*, the discussion forum to discuss the problems faced and experienced by teachers in carrying out their daily tasks and look for alternative solutions to problems in accordance with the characteristic of each subject, and the condition of each school and environment. *Fourth*, the agenda for disseminating technical information related to science and technology, curriculum, methodology, and assessment systems that are relevant to subject matter. *Fifth*, the agenda of sharing information and experiences in attending teacher professional development activities (e.g. seminars, workshops, training, classroom action research). These teacher's information and experiences need to be discussed together among teachers themselves. *Sixth*, the agenda of decomposition and compilation of school reform activities, especially learning reform in the classroom to achieve active, innovative, creative, effective, and fun learning processes.

Finally, empowering learning process activities (e.g., in-service training) should be interpreted as a process that continues to develop over time (Kuswandi, 2006). Through continuous empowerment, training process is expected to play a role as a leader in classroom reform, lead to the development and improvement of teacher competencies, act as driving agents in classroom management and school management innovation, and contribute to professional organizations. The success of continues professional learning process in empowering teachers is influenced by the work ethics of administrators, resource persons and teachers of similar subjects in developing a spirit of togetherness and brotherhood in a learning forum that has character and identity. The learning forum plays a vital function to build networks with related units and the ability to eternally work as a teacher. In this research, the effectiveness of teacher's professional learning,

especially training programs, is explored in relation to the effort of improving the quality of teaching, especially English language teaching, in South Sulawesi province of Indonesia. This is important as so far, very few studies have explored the relationship and effectiveness of teacher's professional teaching and learning practice, especially in South Sulawesi context. In addition, a growing body of research has suggested the need to optimize professional learning of teachers in addressing the complex and challenging educational developments.

METHOD

This research used Mixed Method Research (MMR), placing the quantitative and qualitative data equally. This was done because the purpose of this research was not only to identify, but also to understand the relationship between teachers' participation in professional learning activities, especially in-service training, and their knowledge and understanding of teaching.

Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to identify fifteen schools within the population that met the specific criteria and could be accessed. The criteria for the selection included: 1) schools which were willing to participate in this research; 2) schools which have at least four English language teachers; and 3) schools that were different from each other in term of geographical location (i.e., rural or urban). There were 65 English language teachers from fifteen senior high schools who participated in the questionnaire and 10 of them were involved in the semi-structured interviews. A questionnaire is a useful self-report tool to obtain data quickly and cheaply from large numbers of respondents (Ciesielska & Wolanik, 2018). The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions to find out participants' perceptions of the quality of professional learning they have participated in. There were 15 questions in the questionnaire, consisting of closed questions and open-ended questions. Closed questions required the participants to tick their choices or to rate each statement on a given five-point scale, ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. For the open-ended questions, the participants were asked to give their comments or opinion regarding with PL/TSG activities they had participated in and its relation to their teaching practice. The questionnaire by Bachtiar (2017) that consist of 15 items was adapted and administered for this study. In this research, the 15 items were modified to suit the research context.

The second research tool was observations. According to Gebhard (1999), an observation is an unbiased description of events that can be analyzed and interpreted. This research involved non-participants observation of some subject teacher forums conducted by participants using a loosely organized observation protocol. To triangulate the data, a semi-structured interview was used. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and employed open-

ended questions that were organized into two categories: characteristics of good quality professional learning activities, and teachers' perceptions of the effects of these activities on their teaching classroom practice. These two categories are related to the questions in the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. This was done to double-check and expand on what the participants' stated in the questionnaires and what they informed in the semi-structured interviews. The main questions that were asked in the interviews were given to the participants three days before the actual interviews. This allowed the participants to have sufficient time to read and understand the questions. Once an interview was transcribed, the transcript was returned to each participant for member checking which allowed them an opportunity to read their transcriptions, and to prevent researcher's bias and misinterpretations of the participants' words (Mertens, 2005).

Data Analysis

There are two types of data sources in this study, namely qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data were obtained from closed questions in the questionnaires, while qualitative data were gained from open-ended questions in the questionnaires, observations and semi-structured interviews. Each data (qualitative and quantitative) was analyzed separately. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were transferred and analyzed using the computer software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman (1997) informed that thematic analysis is a search for themes that appear as being important aspects that describe phenomenon. For these questionnaires and interviews results, the coding reference used for the data indicates the participant and the level of teaching experience. For example, the reference T.03 refers to the teacher 03. The letter "VET" refers to a very experienced teacher, "ET" refers to an experienced teacher and "NT" refers to a novice teacher. For example, T.03.VET would refer to teacher 03, a very experienced teacher.

Table 2
The quality of PL the participants

Types of PD	Quality		
	Good	Average	Poor
Seminars	14 (21.5%)	39 (60%)	12 (18.5%)
TSGs	44 (67.7%)	19 (29.2%)	2 (3.1%)
Workshops	24 (36.9%)	34 (52.3%)	7 (10.8%)
In-service training	46 (70.8%)	19 (29.2%)	0
Mentoring	37 (56.9%)	27 (41.5%)	1 (1.5%)
Coaching	39 (60%)	26 (40%)	0
Observing Colleagues	23 (35.4%)	34 (52.3%)	8 (12.3%)

Table 2 shows that from various PL activities the participants had participated in, in-service training, TSGs,

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 65 respondents who gave responses on the questionnaire, 29 (44.6 %) are males and 36 (55.4 %) are females. The participants have a variety of teaching experience. For data analyses purposes, the participants' teaching experience were separated into three different categories (see Table 1 below).

Table 1
Range of Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Gender	Total
More than 15 years	Male	13
	Female	17
6 – 15 years	Male	13
	Female	16
Less than 6 years	Male	2
	Female	4
Total		65

Based on the results, most of respondents who returned the questionnaire were either very experienced teachers (more than 15 years) or experienced teachers (6-15 years). There were 6 novice teachers who involved in this research. Although only 65 teachers who participated in this research, it is hoped that the three range of teaching experiences represented senior high school EFL teachers in South Sulawesi province.

In terms of professional learning activities, all participants have been involved in seminars and TSG, and most of them have participated in workshops, coaching and mentoring. However, just over half of them (34 of 65 teachers) who have attended in-service training. One of the questions in the questionnaire was intended to examine the participants' views of the quality of PL they have participated in. Following are the participants' views of the quality of PL they have participated in.

coaching, and mentoring were considered as good forms of PL that could help them to increase their teaching

competence. In addition, more than half of the participants saw the quality of seminars, workshops and observing colleagues as 'average'. Some of them even stated 'poor' for the quality of seminars, observing colleagues and workshops they had attended.

Furthermore, based on the analysis of qualitative data, themes were obtained regarding the involvement of teachers in professional learning. The professional learning is a process of providing some kinds of information to teachers to help them improve their teaching practice and/or activities designed and implemented by teachers themselves to develop their professional knowledge. The analysis found three themes related to the involvement of teachers in the professional learning activities: professional learning helps increase teachers' knowledge and skills; ICT becomes an important training material for teachers; and TSGs as an effective collaborative model of professional learning.

Professional learning helps increase teachers' knowledge and skills

The first theme and one that most (90%) of the respondents articulated as fundamental to maximizing learning outcomes is teachers' good understanding of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The participants perceived that to achieve learning outcomes, teachers not only need to master the lesson content, but also know the teaching strategies that are appropriate to be used for the lesson content. Teachers' understanding of these two aspects helped them manage their teaching activities. In addition, the participants in this research identified in-service training as being a significant source of knowledge and skills for them. The results of this research are in line with the study by Kalinowski, Gronostaj and Vock (2019) who found that in-service programs were reported by teachers to be by far the biggest source of influence on their decisions, prompting them to change their teaching and beliefs. The participants in this research indicated that they found the experience of socializing with their colleagues and sharing of ideas and experiences through professional learning activities are valuable and informative.

The findings of this research on the importance of knowledge and skills about lesson content and teaching strategies are important to be noted. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) argue that knowing how students understand lesson content and having a repertoire of strategies to help students engage with learning ideas are the essence of pedagogical content knowledge. Similarly, Attema-Noordewier et al. (2012) point out the need for teachers to know the subject matter they teach. However, as Attema-Noordewier et al. indicate that simply knowing a subject well may not be sufficient for teaching without knowing the teaching strategies to convey the content lesson. Therefore, good PL activities

are needed to help teachers better understand content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to help them improve their teaching practices.

Most of the participants in this research saw the link between improving teaching and improving learning. They agreed that implementing a targeted innovation alone would not be enough to create valuable change from a broader perspective of things. As Olin and Ingerman (2016) indicate that in such contexts, teachers must demonstrate that a change in teachers' part can make a difference to learning. The participants seem to recognize the vital connection between teaching and learning, where to improve learning, the teaching itself need to improve. Interestingly, two of the novice teachers in the interview informed that they were willing to take risks and try an innovation even if they were not convinced that it would work, rather than simply blaming other factors for the lack of student achievement. This is in line with what Kalinowski, Gronostaj and Vock (2019) say that teachers in the early stages of their careers were most open to change, and those nearing the end of their careers showed the most resistance while mid-career teachers who were relaxed in their professional duties were also fairly flexible and positive towards change.

ICT becomes an important training material for teachers

The content of professional learning that the participants considered need to learn during PL process was one of the questions in the questionnaire and interview. The analysis shows that the majority of respondents (86.2%) suggested that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a content that need to be learned during PL activities, especially in in-service training. Besides ICT, the participants also recommended pedagogical content knowledge (70.8%), curriculum (58.5%), and content knowledge (43.1%) as other training contents for PL program.

Majority of the participants in the questionnaire perceived that teachers need to understand well about ICT, especially how to integrate ICT with classroom learning activities. Therefore, there is a need to involve teachers in trainings, especially a training about information and communication technology. The participants' views are exemplified in the following quote.

The training I had attended is very useful; particularly the training about information and technological communication because it increased my understanding of how to integrate technology into teaching activities ... This training is essential for teachers.
(T.32.ET)

In the interview, most participants also mentioned their wish to integrate technology into their teaching practice because it is related to PAIKEM³. They reported that some teachers are still struggling to integrate

³ PAIKEM is the acronym for *Pembelajaran Aktif, Inovatif, Kreatif, Efektif dan Menyenangkan*, which means Active,

Innovative, Creative, Effective and Joyful Learning, commonly referred to as active learning.

technology into their teaching practice and so valued PL in this area. According to the participants, teachers' understanding of how to integrate technology into their practice is important in creating PAIKEM, as well as in encouraging students to be actively involved during learning process.

The importance for teachers in Indonesian to integrate technology into their teaching practice was also highlighted in a study by Hermawa et al. (2019). They found Indonesian teachers are often challenged to adapt and integrate technology into their teaching practice as a way to improve student's learning and achievement. Therefore, PL implementer need to consider providing teachers with the appropriate technological knowledge and skills. Teachers' knowledge and skills about technology will help them build good relationships with students, find good models of learning, and may contribute to education reform as a whole.

TSGs as an effective collaborative model of professional learning

Of many types of professional learning activities, the participants had participated in, TSGs (hereinafter refer to English language teacher forum) was considered as a good form of PL that could help English language teachers to increase their teaching competence. One of the reasons, as mentioned by most of the participants, is that English teachers can share their knowledge and skills, as well as collaborate with their colleagues in the TSGs. All of the participants in the interviews informed that, basically the TSGs are very good forum for English teachers to increase and update their knowledge, skills and understanding of how to teach English well as a Foreign language in Indonesia. Teachers have also opportunities to collaborate and give ideas during the meetings in the TSGs.

The benefit of collaboration in TSGs is supported by social constructivist theories of learning (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Social constructivist theories of learning believe that learning occurs when individuals hear and share their thoughts and ideas, and articulate their existing understandings. On some occasions, the participants in this research agree with the idea that learning is more effective when the opportunity exists to interact with others and with their environment (Williams, 2010). The results of this research are consistent with the study by Psychoyos (2012) that found that the combined strengths of each member in a professional learning community helped to develop each teacher's knowledge and teaching skills, and produced a better understanding of quality teaching.

The participants in this research perceived TSGs as learning forums that might empower English teachers because these forums are interactive and collaborative in nature. Some of the participants reported that they became more reflective, critical and analytical when they reflected and discussed their English classroom teaching activities in the TSGs. The findings from this research are

supported by Evans et al.'s (2009) study that elaborated the aims of the TSGs are to help teachers develop their professional competence, to improve their capability in preparing lesson plans, and to discuss teaching and learning issues. This view is also supported by Jalal et al. (2012) who indicate the benefits of TSGs are to allow teachers to collaborate, to focus on practical rather than theoretical knowledge, and to allow for ongoing consultation and discussion among teachers. Therefore, all of the processes that the English teachers in this research experienced in the TSGs have the potential to make them feel more empowered. The findings from this research also indicate that in the context of English language teaching, especially in Indonesia, English teachers need to be allowed for collaboration and sharing their expertise to find the most appropriate strategies in teaching English.

In addition, due to the collaborative nature of the TSGs, the participants saw the TSGs as a good forum to share their knowledge and expertise, as well as to combat isolation. Since the TSGs were interactive, the English teachers who participated in this research found that these forums had helped them improve teaching practices and they felt not isolated. For example, the participants informed that TSGs routinely incorporated teambuilding activities through informal social conversations before, during, and after TSG meetings. This finding is consistent with previous studies (DuFour & DuFour, 2010) about professional learning communities in which teachers share and learn together while combating isolation, improving teaching practice, and improving student achievement. Similarly, Admiraal et al. (2019) found that when teachers made time to talk to each other about specific aspects of daily teaching needs, they grew into a learning community.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the benefits and challenges of professional learning for teachers in Indonesia and drew some implications for educational reform. The findings of this research revealed that the meaning devoted to teaching and learning corresponds to the transformative concept of teaching and learning which portrays teaching as an active learning process in transferring knowledge and skills. In the current professional learning context, teachers position themselves alongside the transfer of knowledge for the improvement of the school and become educational providers for the students. The results of current research also show that factors surrounding teaching and learning context are interrelated threads woven to shape participants' perceptions. As a result, the perceptions of EFL teachers of the effectiveness of professional learning have been influenced by their past and current experiences in teaching and participating in PL activities.

This research confirms the need to implement collaboration and practice-oriented professional learning activities for teachers of English as a foreign language in

Indonesia. The participants in this research valued PL activities that can help them increase their understanding of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and provide opportunities for collaboration because these activations helped them experience in meaningful learning activities. In addition, the findings highlight the need and the potential to develop a culture of collaboration among teachers through professional learning community.

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