Is English Teachers Forum Contributive to Teachers' Professionalism Development? Voices from Indonesian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Background:

In Indonesian, teachers' competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviors on Lecturers and Teachers. Some studies have focused on teachers' efforts to improve their professional competence in the domain of academic qualification, while others have looked at how pupils interact with teachers. However, few studies have scrutinized how teachers' professional development is improved through the Teachers forum.

Methodology:

This present study investigated English teachers' viewpoints on their involvement in the Teacher Forum and how it was contributed to their professional development in carrying out their professional tasks. This Ethnographic- Qualitative study involved the chief and four members of the Teachers Forum. The data were collected through interviews and analyzed by applying the procedures suggested by Spradley (1979), covering domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis.

Findings:

The findings revealed that the participants had a good perception of the Teachers Forum, for it was potential for them to develop their pedagogical competence.

Conclusion:

Understanding and caring about students' uniqueness, conducting teaching and learning activities (setting instructional objectives, doing teaching activities, assessing students' performance), selecting ICT-based teaching media, conducting research, and doing self-teaching reflection supported the Teachers Forum's pedagogical competence.

Originality:

This study examines how teacher forums can help English teachers become more professional, as opposed to prior research that has focused on teachers' ICT abilities, research, and usage of teaching resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although formal education is trusted to contribute to teachers' professionalism development, lifelong learning is a principal that teachers must always hold to be ready for the instructional innovations. As teachers become the prime aspect of the instructional process, upgrading and updating their knowledge and skills is seriously needed to provide qualified instruction. In line with the language matter, it is widely known that language plays as a vital medium of communication with other parts of the global area. In English language teaching (ELT), English teachers are challenged with the rapid development of media and technology, which affects how language instruction is realized.

Regarding this matter, the education quality in Indonesia indicates that English teachers' professionalism is not yet good. In reality, we find that many students of Senior High School, even University students, cannot communicate in English well, although they have been studying English for several years at school. In addition, the printed material they use are dominated by written exercises such as multiple-choice tests that drive students only focus on achieving high scores without giving them many chances or exercises to apply what they have learned in their real life. It requires English teachers to master English instruction learning methods and strategies.

Teachers are the foundation of education. What teachers know and what they are able to do has a significant impact on the students' academic performance (Khanat et al., 2020; Lyngstad et al., 2019; Vaisman & Kahn-Horwitz, 2020). Ideally, the teacher is the first one who transfers the knowledge to the students and directly interacts with students in realizing the policy designed by the government. Thus, being a teacher needs special skills and knowledge. Teacher at different career phase has different professional needs, concerns, interests, aspirations, and expectations (Chen & Lee, 2021; Cooper et al., 2020; Huberman, 1992; Köseoğlu et al., 2020). Teachers are called professionals if they have appropriate educational background fields, high self-initiation and willingness to work, a long time period of experience in teaching and training, and skills and knowledge that they upgrade in continued ways.

Teachers need to foster their knowledge base for effective teaching. Brown (2007) pictures the characteristics of good language teachers; they should have technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities. It is in line with the educational Ministry Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 16 in 2007 that a teacher should have four main competencies: pedagogical, personal, professional, and social competence. In line with this issue, for instance, the Minister of Education (MOE) of China

initiates a modernization program in which education for secondary EFL teachers become the priority since education quality plays a vital role for global challenge especially for science and technology development (Medallon & Tuzon, 2016; Plaisent et al., 2021; Seip, 2020).

Improving education quality is also done continuously by the Indonesian government, including improving teachers' professionalism to develop the competencies they have to possess. The government must commit to ensuring that every student has a chance to learn from competent, qualified, and inspiring teachers to provide a high-quality education. One of the programs implemented by the government as a strategy to support teachers' professional development is the Teachers Forum. Teachers Forum is not the only program to enhance the teachers' professionalism, but it is familiar and needed as the forum for teachers to learn together to develop their professionalism. Gillingham et al. (2020) mention that a teacher forum is a subject-teacher association of certain subject teachers for Junior and Senior High School levels in a region as a forum to discuss, communicate, and share any issues they find during teaching and learning activities.

Teachers' professional development can be explicitly identified in their teaching practices. This professionalism can be enhanced through not only merely in a certain association or a forum. It can also be upgraded to active participation in academic events, such as conferences, seminars, symposiums, workshops, etc. Susanto (2020) conducted a study to investigate to what extent attending international conferences affected EFL teachers' performance in EFL instruction. This study was also directed to see whether teachers' are involved in real cultural exposure during interaction with other people with different cultural backgrounds. This Quantitative-Survey research found that attending international conferences from 5 to 10 times affected EFL teachers' intercultural awareness in terms of attitude, knowledge, skills and awareness reflected in EFL teaching practice.

The term of Teachers Forum is similar to Collegial Collaboration Program (CCP) and Teacher Working Group (TWG) (Mcwhorter & Bullion-Mears, 1998; Musanti & Pence, 2010) CCP and TWG are forums that give teachers moral support to carry them through failures and frustrations. Resources and expertise sharing help them reduce their overload. The activity also helps teachers improve teaching effectiveness by establishing the diverse teaching strategy that individual teachers possess. It provides teachers with mutual feedback to foster their capacity for reflection and the chance to learn from each other to enhance continuous improvement.

Dealing with the explanation, the researcher found similar arguments conveyed by the members of the Teachers Forum of English Junior High School Teachers. They have

assumptions that Teachers Forum gives many contributions for teachers to develop their knowledge and skill for their instructional practices, such as designing learning activities, selecting appropriate learning strategies, conducting various assessment techniques, etc. Many designed programs of Teachers Forum to promote teachers' professionalism are, for example, seminars and workshops. These programs give them chances to discuss problems, trends, and issues related to English language teaching to educational expertise.

However, (Gridina et al., 2019; Nordin, 2016) argue that the goals and contents of development programs often fail due to a mismatch between teachers' professional needs and the demands of their daily classroom conditions. Therefore, a professional development program should integrate multiple teachers' perspectives and needs. Gridina et al. (2019) and Shakour et al. (2018) stress development work must treat teachers' professionalism needs and interests in terms of continuity and progressions which are expected to enhance teachers' professionalism development.

Previous researchers have already conducted some studies related to Teachers Forum. A study by Barella (2014) focused on the obstacles and contributions of implementing Teachers Forum programs. Another study conducted by Rodhi, (2015) also focused on Teachers Forum contributions to improve teacher professional development, which affects the students' achievement. Furthermore, a study conducted focused on the practice of Teachers Forum including the strategies and the models of teachers' professional development programs implemented in Teachers Forum (Asaoka et al., 2020; Céspedes & Gutiérrez, 2017).

In terms of research design and focus, the present study differed from the previous ones. The current study belonged to an Ethnographic-descriptive qualitative with a detailed description of English teachers' views on Teachers Forum in enhancing their pedagogical competence. The Teachers' Forum contributions affected their teaching skill. Pedagogical competence is one of four aspects of teachers' professionalism in which directly correlate with the teachers' performance in instructional practices. It is also an exclusive competence of teachers which makes it different from other professions. Thus, based on the research background, this study is conducted to picture: 1) teachers' perception of Teachers Forum in supporting their pedagogical competence and 2) the contributions of the Teachers Forum reflected in teachers' EFL instruction.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted based on a natural phenomenon on the involvement of English teachers in the routine programs of Teachers Forum. The Teachers Forum, in its practice, involves the routine programs and a culture of coaching of a group of teachers, employed an Ethnographic study with qualitative approach in which the data were in the forms of statements and descriptions.

The study involved the chief and the members the Teachers Forum in which they were already English teachers. Since the needed data were based on the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints during their participation in the Teacher Forum programs to support their skill in teaching, in selecting the participants, the present study applied a concept of authoritativeness. It implied that the participants were those who had the authority to give information. It means that the chief and the members of the Teachers Forum had authority as the data sources. They were experienced teachers who had been teaching for at least twenty years and had been taking part in the Teachers Forum for at least fifteen years. The participants of the study have had at least 20 years.

The study's data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with the selected participants. Based on the provided interview guides, the participants were interviewed to investigate their views on the Teachers Forum, and to what extent it contributes to upholding their professional development to get holistic information on the practice of the Teachers Forum. The interview was directed to investigate the data dealing with the proposed research questions. Each of the participants was interviewed. The saturated data of the study were gotten from the participants. It means that all the needed data dealing with the research questions had been collected from those participants.

Data were analyzed by applying the procedures suggested by Spradley (1980) cover domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis. The analyzed data in the analysis domain were classified into two groups; English teachers' views on Teachers Forum in enhancing their pedagogical competence and the Teachers Forum contributions on teachers' teaching skills. Componential analysis determines similarities and differences in the relationship among domains that have been classified. This study applied componential analysis after the result analysis of the Teachers Forum on Teachers' Professionalism Development roles in the taxonomy analysis. The cores gotten by the researcher are the participants' involvement in the Teacher Forum inspired them to conduct peer coaching and collegiality.

3. FINDINGS

The data of the study were presented in two parts; the data presented about the teachers' perception on the Teachers Forum in supporting their pedagogical competence and the data presentation about how the Teachers Forum contributions affect the teachers' teaching skills. Regarding the data analysis employing the procedures proposed by Spradley (1980), the findings of the study are presented in a table of Componential Analysis as follows:

Table 1. Findings presentation in Componential analysis

Focus data/domain	Data classification	Component
The Roles of the Teachers Forum on Teachers' Professionalism Development	English teachers' views/perceptions on Teachers Forum in enhancing their pedagogical competence	Positive perceptions of the teachers on the Teachers Forum for the offered programs and activities contribute to facilitating peer sharing or peer coaching and to build up collegiality
	The Teachers Forum contributions on teachers teaching skill	• Related to individual student, understanding, and caring of the students' uniqueness • Related to teaching practice, framing out teaching and learning activities by setting instructional objectives, assessing students' performance, selecting ICT-based teaching media, conducting a research-based classroom practice, doing self-reflective teaching • Related to students' performance; maximizing in guiding the students to improve their English performance

3.1 The Teachers' Perception on the Teachers Forum in Supporting Their Pedagogical Competence

Since its establishment, Teachers Forum is intended to facilitate the EFL teachers to upgrade their competency in teaching practice. Although they have the same subject to be taught in the class, in this case, English, they believe that collegiality to share ideas how to teach English effectively is important to be discussed in a certain organization or a forum.

That is why, Teachers Forum is believed to have the potential to bridge their need to be more skillful in EFL instruction. As it is stated by one of the subjects,

"Every teacher has a different academic background. This difference affects to what extent she/he gets knowledge on teaching practices. The various teachers' learning experiences can be a meaningful source to take important lessons. Through a forum, each teacher can become a learning source for others".

Those differences provide the knowledge capital needed by all teachers. Moreover, the forum can be utilized to build up their collegiality. This collegiality is stimulated by the fact that as one of the foreign languages, teaching English is challenging. All the participants believed that no single best method was used in teaching English. As a forum of teacher organization, the Teachers Forum had routine and development programs to facilitate teachers in developing their pedagogical competence. The availability of the Teachers Forum becomes a learning environment for the teachers that provides the opportunity to contact all members of the forum. In this learning environment, the teachers have good motivation when they have the opportunity to whom they have to share ideas. The difference in age and teaching experience of the teacher become factors of the need for collegiality.

3.2 The Teachers Forum Contributions on Teachers' Pedagogical Skills

In Indonesian context with regard to teacher qualifications, the government has provided a guideline through the laws it enforces. Law No 20 of 2003 on National Education System, Law No 14 0f 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, and Government Regulation No 19 0f 2005 on National Standard of Education stipulate that teachers must possess academic qualifications, holding at least a Sarjana degree (S1) or four –year diploma (D-IV).

According to Indonesian Law No. 14/2005 concerning teachers and lecturers above, competency is a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors possessed by teachers or lecturers in carrying out their professional tasks. Teachers should have and develop personality, pedagogical, professional, and social competencies. Personality competencies refer to the teacher's personal characteristics, which include integrity, stability, maturity, wisdom, authority, good morality, and role models for learners. On the other hand, pedagogical competencies refer to abilities to manage learner learning, including understanding learners, planning and implementing, assessing learner learning, and actualizing learner potentials. Meanwhile, professional competencies refer to the teacher's sound understanding of subject matter knowledge and language skills. Finally, social competencies refer to the ability to interact effectively and efficiently with learners, parents, colleagues, school administrators, and the community.

On the other hand, (Stronge, 2018) has developed The Teacher Skills Assessment Checklists to help identify the qualities of effective teachers. The qualities are categorized into five skill areas as follows (1) the teacher as a person, which includes such qualities as

caring, fairness, and respect, interaction with students, enthusiasm, motivation, dedication to teaching, and reflective practice, (2) the teacher as classroom manager and organizer, which includes organization, disciplining students and classroom management as areas of concentration, (3) organizing for instruction, which includes such components as the importance of instruction, time allotment, teachers' expectations, and instructional planning, (4) implementing instruction, which includes such aspects as instructional strategies, content and expectations, complexity, questioning and student engagement, and (5) monitoring students' progress and potential, which places a strong emphasis on students as learners, thus focusing on such areas homework, student progress as well as needs and abilities.

From the various opinions given by the language experts regarding the competencies of qualified English teachers must be possessed, it can be inferred that apart from having the suitable or relevant academic qualification, it is recommended that the teacher must have a good teaching practice with their proficiency in English as well as certain personal qualities. These requirements are meaningful so that in real teaching activities, the teacher could integrate content knowledge and pedagogical competence to ensure that all students learn and perform at high levels. The set rules in the educational domain show that teachers play an important role in educational setting. Teachers are one key factor in learners' successful learning. Since the purpose of teaching is to facilitate the students to be successful, the critical ingredient of successful learning is, therefore, the professional competence of teachers, the ability to deliver quality professional service designed to increase the probability of successful learning.

The teachers argue that teaching is not one and the only activity to facilitate the students to be skillful in English. Although the teachers need to prepare a lesson plan and sometimes, they are instructed to share the lesson plan with their colleagues, teaching is not considered as one and the only determinant factor in making students to be successful. The teachers are still insisted on a commitment to understanding and caring for individual students. Through Teachers Forum, the teachers take an important lesson that every learner has his/her uniqueness. Each student has different background and experience in learning. This consciousness automatically determines the way how to train, guide or help, monitor, and asses the students' learning.

The teachers' commitment is not only reflected in conducting teaching, monitoring, helping, guiding, and assessing students' learning but also in caring toward students' responses. The students' responses toward the provided materials can be used as an indicator to make some adjustments. Considering students' responses will be easy to motivate them to learn. Practically, in a setting where language is not only treated as a subject to be learned, the teachers always use the students' response as the first concern. Consequently, the awareness is directed to adjust teaching practice and provide materials and activities both in and outside the classroom.

4. DISCUSSION

In Teachers Forum, each teacher has many chances to learn more about issues or trends related to EFL instruction. The teachers are also facilitated to discuss the problems they encounter in their teaching practices with their colleagues. Through collegiality practice, they maximize peer sharing or peer coaching activity. Consequently, the teachers gain essential feedback from their colleagues or another individual in the forum treated as an expert. It is supported by the statement of Carlisle & Berebitsky, (2011), who explains that the presence of experts can help teachers to broaden their knowledge related to their problem-solving activity in the teaching practice. In a collaborative learning atmosphere, expertise would emerge as a group feature rather than be associated with a single individual (Ucan & Webb, 2015; Zhang & Zheng, 2020).

Peer coaching can be beneficial in several ways: it can provide input from senior teachers, provide the novelty teachers with the opportunity for hands-on experience, improve motivation, offer practical classroom application, and develop collegiality. That is why, peer coaching can be understood as formal for introducing an educational innovation and preparing teachers for the change.

Peer coaching implies a learning situation that arises through the collaboration between two colleagues, with one adopting the role of coach as they explore a particular aspect of instructional practice. In the context of Teachers Forum, the most experienced teacher would provide feedback and suggestions to the more junior teachers. This practice leads each of the individual teachers to go with his/her self-improvement. Moreover, peer coaching supports innovation for teachers. In this innovation, a force enhances a career and makes it constantly self-renewing. They also find out the solution to their problem in their daily teaching activity and learn another effective way of teaching. The teachers believe that getting knowledge and skill of teaching can be achieved merely from formal education and non or informal settings. Of the high demand for qualified teachers, they have to continuously improve their knowledge and skill through an ongoing learning process (Kong, 2014; Pittman et al., 2020).

Issues related to the individual teacher, student learning strategies, and school leaders' roles are interesting in the educational field. Moreover, a true collaboration between teachers is also another interesting one. For collaboration, in its practice, tries to unify two or more figures who are different in their characteristics, it needs continual effort and frequent communication. When the teachers are in their schools setting, they connect with their students, school leader, and colleagues. The teachers insist on knowing their students and how to communicate with them individually and collectively. The variety of students' backgrounds and learning experiences requires teachers' special treatment and verbal ability. This influences the process of instruction either in the classroom or out of the classroom. The teachers' ability to observe students' reactions can be used to decide how best to get their

point across to different individuals. Teachers' capacity to communicate effectively affects their relationships with others, the clarity of their explanations to pupils, and, invariably, student understanding and achievement.

In general, verbal ability is related to how well a teacher conveys concepts and skills to students (Beal-Alvarez & Scheetz, 2015; Bertschi-Kaufmann & Graber, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). When students understand what teachers are communicating, and when teachers understand the signals from their students in terms of their responses, a two-way communication process is created that enhances students' learning. Consequently, when the teachers posit themselves as facilitators in teaching practice, they should also be effective communicators. Applying verbal ability is to establish a commitment to conduct effective teaching and learning. Meanwhile, the teachers use their verbal ability to stimulate and advise students who are not motivated. The purpose is to show the students that they can accomplish the given tasks satisfactorily.

The teachers believe that language must be efficient. It means that the main point to be successful in English, students should not only know how English is learned but also how it is used. The consequence of the idea that language must be efficient is that teachers should facilitate students on how to use the language (English) for interaction. Those issues become interesting topics for the members of the Teachers Forum. They have a new horizon from the practice of collegiality in the forum. Every teacher is instructed to teach students how to use the language to achieve the idea. What is expected by teachers is that every student can express himself clearly in English. This principle must be kept in mind by every student so that he can learn better.

The teachers have the same perception that Teachers Forum is an effective forum to support their pedagogical competence indicated by their effective teaching practice. As stated previously, in the Teachers Forum, the teachers have the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences of their teaching practices. The statement of UNESCO in Sumardi (2012) explicitly mentions that the effective way for teachers' professional development is through Teachers Forum. This forum can be a professional development vehicle for improving the teachers' academic ability or pedagogical competence. Since the high demand of qualified teachers, they must continuously improve their knowledge and skill through ongoing learning.

The finding also reveals that the teachers actualize students' performance in English. The teachers involve the students in various practices of learning. They have more time to interact with other students in an environment where spoken foreign languages exist. This condition will be more meaningful if the students show a positive attitude to be always participative, disciplined, and committed to their own learning. The teachers believe that regular practice positively contributes to language users. In a foreign language practice, being committed to using foreign languages can be done not only in a formal setting but in a non-

formal setting as well. The activities are set in such a way to invite students' eagerness to participate actively. Brown, (2007) stated that various teaching activities did not work if it did not involve students and meaningful activities for learners.

To actualize the students' English performance, according to the teachers, the students are directed to interact, which is potentially beneficial to their learning. The quality of interaction will depend on a number of factors, such as the grade and frequency in which the students cooperate among themselves in their academic tasks, giving feedback to each other in their learning activities, and sharing learning experiences and life experiences. The implementation of an appropriate interaction process constitutes a major component that helps to improve the students' outcome in many academic and behavioral problems and helps to establish a greater academic environment in the classroom (Aschettino, 1993; Beal-Alvarez & Scheetz, 2015b; Degoy & Olmos, 2020; Marunda-Piki, 2018). In that interaction, students would like to talk to and listen to other students. The reason for such students' preference may be that when language learners interact with each other, they experience some difficulties as they attempt to use the target language to communicate. As a result, they become aware of what they need to know to express themselves effectively. They may take an effort to ask their fellow students for help. The process of the students' interaction makes the school environment a more pleasant and friendly place to study. It implies that the teachers also create a good learning environment. They also have their own choice that they prefer practicing the language in informal (in real life) settings rather than in formal settings.

Schulz (1999) stated that social skills should be explicitly taught to the students so that students could work among themselves, not only in terms of cooperation but also without hostility and the teachers' authority. Encouraging the students to conduct cooperative learning with their peers needs to be conditioned. In a cooperative learning context, many interactive tasks stimulate students' cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities. Cooperative activities, furthermore, integrate the acquisition of these skills and create powerful learning opportunities. As (Wei, 1997) states, interactions between more than two persons are necessary for effective communication activities and oral practice.

The supportive human environment of a cooperative learning classroom can be built when students work in cooperative teams. As cooperative norms are established, students are positively linked to others in the area of school. In this context, in a supportive atmosphere, English learners can establish more equal status relationships with their peers. When the environment becomes more equal, students are better able to participate based on their actual, rather than their perceived knowledge and abilities. Cooperative learning or interaction, fostered by the teachers, helps students learn valuable interpersonal skills that benefit them socially.

It is generally accepted that interaction can facilitate students' language development and communicative competence. The proposition of the role of classroom interaction is its contribution to language development simply by providing target language practice opportunities. In the study of interaction in EFL classes, interaction is considered a productive teaching technique. Interaction facilitates not only language development but also learners' development. They acquire linguistic knowledge and ability through interaction. The present research is, thus, confirms the previous studies conducted by (Kang, 2014; Li et al., 2019; Yu, 2008).

The teachers also foster the students' English performance through group interaction. In this activity, the students can progress at their own pace and contribute to other's learning in such a supportive and encouraging learning context. According to Vygotsky & Cole (1978), all good learning is that which is in advance of development and involves the acquisition of skills just beyond the student's grasp. Such learning occurs through interaction within the student's zone of proximal development. Moreover, Vygotsky & Cole (1978) states that an essential feature of learning is that it awakes a variety of internal development processes that can operate only when the learners interact with people in their environment and in cooperation with their peers. From the frequent interaction with their peers, according to the teachers, the students are able to develop their potential fully and thus move beyond their current development to the so-called i+1 (Krashen, 1985).

Actualizing the students' potential is also done by developing their instructional process. Some actions usually done by the teachers are diagnosing the students' potential, giving the students feedback, and motivating the students. From the feedback given, the students make improvement in their performance.

5. CONCLUSION

Teachers Forum is perceived as a potential teachers' organization that provides fruitful contributions for teachers in developing their professionalism, especially for their pedagogical competence. Through its good programs, this organization provides every member with professional development. Teachers Forum can trigger the teachers to upgrade their pedagogical competence reflected in their EFL instruction. The Teachers Forum contributions on the teachers' pedagogical competence, based on the result of the study, are reflected in understanding and caring of the students' uniqueness, conducting teaching and learning activities (setting instructional objectives, doing teaching activities, assessing students' performance), selecting ICT-based teaching media, conducting researches, doing self-teaching reflection, and actualizing the students' English performance.

Regarding the Teachers Forum is perceived as an effective teacher professional development organization, it can be beneficial input for the Teachers Forum's committee to optimize programs and activities to meet the teachers' needs for their teaching practices. This study only pictures a small aspect of teachers' professional development in a qualitative

paradigm. The further study can be conducted by applying a survey-mixed method to get more comprehensive findings on the effect of Teachers Forum on teachers' professional development in the Indonesian context.

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