Professional Development Programs: A Burden for the Teachers?

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study started from the complaints made by the instructors of English language training designed for the non-EFL teachers of one public secondary school in Ambarawa, Central Java. The complaints pointed out the teachers' behaviors during the training sessions, which show teachers' reluctance to join the training. Hence, this study is conducted to investigate whether or not teacher professional development programs provided by the school become a burden for the teachers. In conducting the research, observations and interviews were employed. Participants of this research were those who were involved in English training program designed for secondary non-EFL teachers of that school. These included the principal, training participants (the non-EFL teachers), the instructor, and the training program manager. The findings of the research show an interesting result. Although the discussion with the headmaster points out the school's eagerness to develop the teachers' knowledge and skills, the result of the interviews with the teachers, instructor, and training program manager lead to a contradictory finding: teachers' objection to the program; a surprising finding that one should reflect upon designing teacher professional development programs.

Key words: teacher professional development, teachers' reluctance, teachers' objection

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the teaching learning process in Indonesian secondary schools has undergone a big reform. One of the reform actions is the attempt to make English as the medium of instruction. Triggered by the demand of job markets which requires a person to be able to actively use English as well as the prestige of "Sekolah Berstandar Internasional" (Internationally Standardized Schools) or Sekolah Dwibahasa (Bilingual Schools)" label, the use of English as the medium of instruction in the teaching learning process has, apparently, become a must. Hence, English training programs specially designed for non-EFL teachers start gaining their popularity. Although those programs are believed to help those non-EFL teachers become fluent in English, one question still needs to be answered: whether or not those non-EFL teachers really need those English language trainings.

The question posed here is not to argue the importance of a teacher professional development program. Instead, it is an attempt to highlight the fact that most of teacher professional development programs in Indonesia have not yet undergone a thorough needs assessment before they are implemented. Often, the so-called needs assessment is conducted by the school management, which put a great emphasis on particular interests that might not represent what the participant-teachers' real needs. The interests here may be roughly defined as schools'
urgent needs as they refer what the school thinks what their teachers should learn. This phenomenon then explains why an English training program can become a must for all teachers of one secondary school; the school wants the teacher to be able to teach in English, one requirement of Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional.

Requiring all teachers to attend one training program might not be a wise decision. Morewood, Ankrum, and Bean (2010) states that "professional development may be perceived differently by individual teachers". Teachers who believe they do not need it might not show positive attitude toward the training. This research is then developed to reflect one question raised by one participant of a training program, which was then confirmed by several others: "Why do we have to take it? We are retiring soon." Although no answer was made then, this question reflects different perceptions the teachers have of the professional development program. Understanding these perceptions can lead professional development program designers to make necessary improvement of their programs. After all, teachers' perception should be taking into account when evaluating the success of the programs.

The whole research is finally devoted to investigating the teachers' perceptions of the professional development program they are taking. As a case study whose setting is limited to one public secondary school in Ambarawa, Central Java, this research aims at evaluating the English training program implemented as part of the teacher professional development programs. The result of this study will be used as the basis of evaluating the teacher professional development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, discussion on teacher professional development programs is presented. The discussion includes the general concept and the concept shared in Indonesian context.

THE CONCEPT OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers' professional development has usually been understood as training programs specially designed for teachers. By this concept, teacher professional development is not confined to a particular area of study. Instead, it may vary across schools depending on the institutions' needs. However, one should keep in mind that professional development is not only about training. Richards (2002 in Wichadee, 2011, p.13), for example, defines teacher development as "a continuous process which can lead to doing a better job and to professional growth".

Supporting Richards' definition, Villegas-Reimers (2003:11) states that "professional development, in a broad sense, refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role". By this definition, trainings make an example only as development process can take many forms as pointed out by Ganser (2000). Ganser (2003, in Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p.11) elaborates that "professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc.) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline, etc.)". This concept of professional development is, therefore, broader than career development or staff development and is not "focused on specific job" (Richard & Farrel, 2005, p.4). It also highlights that professional development is not bound to trainings format only.
However, this concept is apparently new to teaching. As pointed out by Villegas-Reimers (2003, pp.11-12).

“This perspective is, in a way, new to teaching. For years the only form of ‘professional development’ available to teachers was “staff development” or “in-service training”, usually consisting of workshops or short-term courses that would offer teachers new information on particular aspects of their work. This was often the only type of training teachers would receive and was usually unrelated to the teachers’ work.”

Although there has been a growing new paradigm that gradually breaks the limitation of teacher professional development programs in the past few years, this trend has not yet been observed in Indonesia. It is on this concept that the focus of this research will be highlighted.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Teacher professional development programs may take various forms ranging from simple one-day seminars or workshops to series of sophisticatedly designed training programs. In addition, the programs may also include those conducted at school and those take place outside the school as Gardner suggested (1995, in Villegas-Reimes, 2003, p.54):

At one end is a form of training that takes place wholly away from the school, possibly in some specifically designed training environment. At the other end of the continuum are practices where all the training takes place in the schools in which the teachers normally work.

Some professional development programs also set different goals. Some are designed to provide the need of teaching professionals in a particular country. Some others may be designed as a manifestation of certain financial assistance, a case commonly occurs in Indonesia. In addition to the two previously mentioned, there are some teacher professional development programs which are designed to fulfill one school’s immediate needs. Whatever the design goes about, design of a practical professional development program, should articulate demands and needs of particular institutions then “compare this ideal to actual practices” (Vasumathi, 2010, p.6) . These needs are, unfortunately, often associated with the school’s strategy to conform to the regulations enacted by the government. One popular example for this is the trainings held to get a certification from the government. Some countries require teachers to take particular trainings in order to be qualified to hold a certification diploma. These trainings are often designed by a task force working under the government authoritarian supervision. As these trainings are intended to help the government ‘produce’ the so-called certified teachers, negative consequences are often experienced by teachers failing the programs. The most popular ‘punishment’ is denying teachers to teaching but assigning them to administrative position.

In most developing countries, teacher professional development often takes various forms. This is not the case in many developed countries where the programs are usually homogenous (Villegas-Reimes, 2003). Whatever the forms are, those programs stand on the same platform, that is, teacher professional development.
TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF INDONESIA

In the context of Indonesia educational institutions, teacher professional development concept seems to bear a much limited definition. In this context, teacher professional development is closely related to what is popular as “teacher in house trainings”. In-house trainings (IHT) are part of school human resources development program designed to develop teachers’ knowledge and or skills in particular areas. As there is no rule governing what kind of trainings should be given, each school enjoys privilege to decide the area of trainings it would like to have. This decision is usually in the hand of school management, i.e. school principal.

Most of the training programs are devoted to accommodating schools’ immediate needs. These immediate needs serve as the basis of deciding what programs should be carried out. In brief, a needs assessment conducted is subjective in nature, i.e., it refers to what teachers a school lack of but to what skills and knowledge the school thinks teachers should possess. This explains how English training for teachers has been very popular in Indonesia.

Since the legislation on SBI (Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional) took effect in 2009 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional no.78 tahun 2009 tentang Penyelenggaraan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional pada Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah), the demand of English in-house trainings for teachers has increased. This shows school efforts to shift to English environment, one of the requirements to be SBI schools (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional no.78 tahun 2009 tentang Penyelenggaraan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional pada Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah pasal 5 ayat 3 dan 8). The popularity of those English trainings is not solely attributable to school efforts. The Indonesian government is also responsible in creating such phenomenon by playing a role as a donor agent for schools. Since the previously mentioned legislation came into effect, the Indonesian government has been providing financial assistance through block grants, a funding provided for schools preparing to SBI. The funding, however, is not a gift in nature. A tight competition has to be undergone by each school to obtain this funding.

In competing for a block grant, schools must send proposals explaining what the funding will be used for. In the proposal, a list teacher professional development programs is mandatory. Unfortunately, the teacher professional development program here is usually understood as trainings for teachers in order to get them ready for international environment. Consequently, Therefore, English lessons are much preferred than seminar participation or books on particular disciplines. One interesting point to observe is the fact that the government administers a limited supervision on the program. The supervision is limited as it only monitors whether or not the teacher professional development program is implemented. No attention is given on the program relevance to the teachers’ work or how the program is implemented.

In carrying out an English training program for the teachers, schools may assign their English teachers or use private English course services. Often, the decision to select which private English course to use, if it is involved, is based on financial matter. However, whatever option is chosen, all those trainings aim at enabling non-English teachers to teach in English although the learning material will vary across schools from TOEFL preparation to English conversation courses. As those programs bear the label of teacher professional development, no screening is conducted to sort out the participants. All teachers, irrespective of their actual needs, are obliged to join the program. In
addition, as placement tests are often not desirable, all teachers are usually put in one big multilevel class.

In those English training programs, teachers' progress is usually measured by tests. Some programs may administer mid and post tests, each of which include speaking, writing, and grammar. Some others may use pre and post tests which cover grammar only. Interestingly, whatever the learning materials are used, many schools ask for TOEFL test for the post test. This is probably due to the demand of the SBI legislation that all teachers should posses a TOEFL score of more than 500.

From the above discussion, it is now safe to conclude that the teacher professional development program is often a result of one group decision, i.e., the school management. The school management decides what teachers should learn, why they should learn it and how their progress will be assessed. Here, teachers' opinion is not taken into account. If it is considered in the decision making process, the teachers' freedom is limited to choosing one from the several trainings planned by the management. It is then interesting to investigate how teachers perceive the professional development program prescribed for them. The teachers' perception here can give insight on the program improvement.

THE STUDY

The study in this paper is limited to investigating the teachers' perception of the teacher professional development program. The context of the study is limited to the English training held in one public secondary school in Ambarawa, Central Java, Indonesia, as part of the training program evaluation. Therefore, no generalization will be made.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study took place in a public secondary school in Ambarawa, Central Java, Indonesia. The school enjoys the status of favorite school and, consequently, has no problem in attracting new students. For the last two years, this school has been in the so called immersion program, a transition process of shifting from regular secondary school to International School to a more prestigious status, Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional (SBI). Being in this transition period, the school is labeled as RSBI (Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf International). In the transition period, this school has received some fund from the Indonesian government to implement many development and improvement programs in order to be qualified to be SBI. One of the teacher development programs is the English training for teachers which is the focus of this research.

THE PROGRAM

The English training program implemented in the school is designed to prepare teachers to be able to use English as the medium of instruction of this class. In implementing the program, the school, the principal in this case, is making use of a private language course service from Salatiga, Central Java. The arrangement requires the language course to send its instructors to school. This is agreed to ease the monitoring process of the program. To ensure the teachers stay after school for the training, the school provides free lunch for all teachers.

The compulsory training program is given after school to ensure that no classes shall be cancelled. The program starts There are two groups of participants, one being teachers of national
exam subjects, and the other being those of non-national exam subjects. The class meets twice a week from 2 P.M. to 3:30 P.M.

The program lasts for 24 meetings, two of them are devoted for mid and post tests. The English training program puts a big emphasis on speaking and grammar. No standard textbook is prescribed for the participants. Instead, each teacher distributes handouts. The handouts often take form of grammar explanation, grammar worksheet, and role play or situation cards.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Based on the agreement made with the principal, the name of the school (the research setting, the language course, as well as each individual involved in this research will not be revealed in this paper.

The participants of this study are non-EFL teachers of a public secondary school in Ambarawa, Central Java, Indonesia. Those teachers take the training after school twice a week. The teachers are divided into two big groups, each of which consists of 24 teachers. Teachers of national exam subjects (Math, Indonesian, Science and Social Studies) are in Group A. Teachers of non national exam subjects (Civics, Sports, Religion, and Arts) belong to Group B. Although the program is a must for all teachers, the English teachers receive a different role. They serve as an inspect of each class. These inspectors monitor the class instructors' performance, not the participants'.

All participants are in their 40s and 50s. Most of them have been teaching in this school for more than 10 years and some of them are even retiring soon. Most of the teachers understand very simple English utterances although all of them have never received any English training before. The participants' language ability also varies that makes them progress at different speed. Group A consists of faster learners whereas Group B needs much assistance. Group A can learn two units in two meetings while Group B struggles with repetition of one unit in four meetings.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This research was initially conducted to respond to the complaints made by two English instructors' on their participants' undesirable class behaviors. Six observations, three on each group, were then conducted to verify the instructors' complaints and to list the participants' behaviors considered undesirable. Personal approaches were also made, during the observation, to the participants to learn the participants' reason of doing such behaviors.

The observation result shows that indiscipline actions, such as lateness and irregular attendance, and unpreparedness were the common undesirable behaviors. Having to finish some work after school, having to attend to family matters, being too busy to do the assignment become the common reasons justifying why those behaviors are done. The result of the preliminary observations then confirms the instructors' assumption that most teachers do not feel committed to the training program. The obligation to attend the training program twice a week is considered as burdening rather than professionally empowering. Triggered by the curiosity to find out what the training is considered burdening, the focus of this research shifts on investigating the teachers' perception of the training, rather than merely understanding the reasons of such undesirable behavior.
The data of teachers’ perception were collected through class discussions. Class discussion is preferable as it was impossible to administer single interviews. In addition, this kind of data collection method was employed to create a secured atmosphere for the participants as to reveal their personal thought. As there were two groups of participants, the discussions were scheduled on two different days. Each discussion was conducted at the end of the seventh meeting and each of them lasted for one hour. In the two focus group discussions, the same main question was asked, i.e., what the participants think of the training program. Other questions might be generated during the discussion from the participants’ responses later to probe the participants to elaborate more on their responses. To ease the participants, all discussions were conducted in bahasa Indonesia. Each discussion was also videotaped and, later, transcribed.

During the discussion, there were only 15 participants in each group. During the discussion, the program inspectors (the English teachers from the school), the principal, the course manager, and the instructors were excluded to create a safe atmosphere and to make sure that the discussion is merely for research purpose. However, those people were informed about the discussions.

The data were analyzed by employing content analysis. The theme or codes of the discussions’ field notes were generated by repeatedly watching the video recording and reading of the discussion notes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of the focus group discussion an interesting finding highlighting teachers’ perception of how a teacher professional development should be designed and carried out. The finding is unusual as it shows a contrast between what the participants think about and how they feel about the training. Representing what the participants think about the training is the participants are aware of the fact that the program is part of their professional development program and that it is important for teachers to develop their professionalism.

[This is an important course. We can learn English here.] (Teacher 1)

[Kami] senang. Kita dipacu untuk aktif [berbahasa Inggris].
[This is an important course. We can learn English here.] (Teacher 1)

Kami senang kloq belajar [bahasa Inggris].
[We are happy to learn [English].] (Teacher 2)

However, all participants feel that the obligation to attend the training program twice a week is considered burdening rather than professionally empowering. Here, one point of view is made clear, i.e., not all teachers need professional development program.

Kami disini karena disuruh kepala sekolah.
[We are here because our principal has required us to take this training.] (Teacher 3)

Ya, kalau boleh usul, yang butuh aja yang kursus.
[If we may suggest, let those who need English training take the class.]
The result shown above obviously points out the participants’ role as the objects, instead of the subjects, of the training. Program evaluators then need to remember that when the motives of attending the training refer to the principal’s mandate, it is very likely that commitment will not exist. As pointed by Villegas-Reimes (2003:55):

“It is believed that schools and teachers will be more likely to commit themselves to change when they have initiated the change themselves; this change is more likely to become institutionalized when teachers are better prepared to plan and implement it; and needs and priorities will be identified more effectively at the local level, and this the plan to change will respond to realistic rather than to perceive needs.”

The finding also highlights the fact that although the participants do not state their objection to the English training program, they do not show willingness to join the program. This suggests that the program designed has not yet been successful as it does not ‘hit’ the right target. Here, the participants’ remark on their not needing the training, in a way, confirms their understanding on determining who should be in the program. All participants agree that teachers of Indonesian language, civics, religion, history, and any local content courses are not obliged to take the English training as they are not supposed to use English as the medium of instruction. This has been confirmed by the legislation on Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional no.78 tahun 2009 tentang Penyelenggaraan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional pada Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah pasal 5 ayat 4). Their knowledge of this legislation then explains why those teachers do not even worry about their failing the achievement tests.

*Kalau ga lulus tes? Ya nggak po-po. Wong, kami kan emang nggak akan pakai.*

*If we fail the test? That’s OK. We won’t have to use English in class.*

(Teacher 5)

*Ken ada peraturannya pelajaran mana yang boleh dan tidak [memakai bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa pengantar]*

*[The regulation clearly specifies which courses should or should not be taught in English]*

(Teacher 6)

The irrelevance between the training content and their actual need often proves to be one factor hampering disrupting a program success. Desimone (2011) in Shumack & Forde (2011:4) states that “professional development that focuses on specific content knowledge is one of the known factors contributing to effective professional development.”

In addition to the knowledge of the legislation, the discussion result also reveals that the age difference should be taken into consideration when implementing the program.

*Lha sebentar lagi pensiun kaq malah disuruh kursus. Mbok yang muda-muda aja.*

*[I’m retiring soon, why am I forced to take the course? Why not the younger teachers?]*

(Teacher 7)

*Nanti kalau sudah mulai beneran pakai bahasa Inggris khan kami-kami yang tua ini khan sudah nggak di sini.*
Teachers who are retiring soon do not see the importance of taking any teacher professional development program. They do not see the valid reason requiring them to take part in the English training either. By the time the school finally shifts to English environment, they will have retired. Most teachers then will not have any opportunities to put the knowledge into real classroom application. This, perhaps, also explains why little commitment is seen in this program.

Some of the participants also explain that difference in English proficiency does not make the training progress smoothly. This underlines the fact the course-based grouping still makes a multilevel class, which becomes a problem in each class.

Kita ini kan kemampuannya sangat beda. Kalau yang lambat kayak saya ketinggalan

[We have different proficiency levels. Slow learners, like me, are left behind] (Teacher 1)

Padahal yang pinter-pinter tidak [ketinggalan]. Mereka cepet terus.

[Fast learners are not [left behind]. They move on quickly.] (Teacher 9)

Group B of this research, for example, has few fast learners who sometimes have to wait to move to another chapter since their friends have not mastered a topic. As the instructor request of moving these learners to Group A, which happens to have many fast learners, is not granted the principal’s approval, they remain unenthusiastic learners in their group. This suggests that when designing a teacher professional development program, information on learners’ ability can help course designers and instructors determine the appropriate learning material and methodologies to employ (Brown, 1995). Hence, it is not wise to require everyone to start and end at the same point (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). A similar case is also seen in the research by Desimone, Smith, and Ueno (2006), which is related to math education. The research result shows that “the teachers with the most content knowledge are the ones participating most in the professional development related to math content. The teachers weakest in math content were less likely to be involved in that type of professional development” (Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006, as cited in Shumack & Forde, 2011, p.4)

The discussion above suggests that teachers may various perception of the concept of teacher professional development programs differently. Although they agree to the concept and are aware of the professional development importance, not all of them might show a willingness to take part in the program. These perceptions, then, should be taken into account when designing and implementing teacher professional development programs.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Professional development programs designed for teachers are not always received a friendly welcome from participants. This often has nothing to do with the teacher-participants opinion. Most participants of this research show their awareness on the importance of teacher professional development programs here. Nevertheless, when the participants are demanded to attend the programs, they show their reluctance by highlighting the fact that not all of them need the program. This suggests that the program designed employed one-perspective needs analysis by focusing on
what the learners should learn instead of what they would like to learn. Consequently, turning
teacher participants into object of one teacher development program, which is a common practice in
Indonesian contexts, often leads to the teachers' avoidance. This indicates that teachers should not
be made objects of the programs. Instead, they have to be given responsibility in taking part of the
programs design and implementation as well as freedom in selecting the programs they will take. As
seen from the previous discussion, demanding all teachers to attend one program, regardless of their
real needs, does not make that program work well. However, whether or not teachers will show
more positive attitude towards a program if they are given freedom to select the program they
would like to take part still remain questionable. This aspect, not the focus of this research, leaves
opportunities for those interested to explore further.

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