

EFL TEACHERS' NEED OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: WHEN POLICY AND PRACTICE COLLIDE

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Abstract

Align with the increasing demands of qualified and professional English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers the need of improving the capabilities of the EFL teachers, both pre-service and in-service teachers is unavoidable. In-service EFL teachers still have to update, upgrade and refresh their competences in ELT which include their pedagogical competence (teaching skill) and professional competence (subject matter) through professional development (PD). As one of the four competencies that a teacher should have, professional competence holds an important role in helping the students to learn English well. Therefore, it is obvious that EFL teachers' PD is essential for the teachers to support their learning leading to their empowerment as professional English teachers. This qualitative study tried to see the phenomenon of the EFL teachers' need for language proficiency professional development by using interview as the main data collection instrument to get the information. The participants of the study were EFL teachers who joined professional teacher training program (PLPG) at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Unesa) in 2017. The findings showed that most of the participants were very confident with their English mastery. However, they stated that they needed regular and continues PD activities specifically for their language proficiency. The activities range from maintaining the four micro skills, provide scholarship for teachers to have short course program abroad to maximizing the function of subject teacher association (MGMP).

Keywords: EFL teacher, language proficiency, professional development

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century or modern era brings challenges and gives impact not only on the social and cultural areas but also in education in meeting with the growing and changing needs of the 21st century students. In the education area, it concerns with teachers' quality. Teachers need and have to develop their competencies in their teaching skills covering pedagogical and professional areas. It means teachers need to keep up with the changes by joining professional development (PD) activities. Richards & Farrell (2005) state that the idea of teacher development is that it serves as a long-drawn goal and growth of teachers' understanding and mastery of teaching and learning process and of themselves as teachers. In other words the term profession as a teacher is a life-long learning or a career-long learning process for the teachers to undergo in their career as teachers. It is also expected that by joining

PD activities, teachers will be able to stay abreast with the challenges and future demands as professional teachers, that also includes English as foreign language (EFL) teachers. EFL teachers need to make themselves aware to keep their teaching quality high. Moreover, the goal of PD aims at the change of both teacher's belief toward their need of PD and the change in the teacher's teaching practices which will improve students' outcome (Guskey, 2003). It is related with the abilities of the teacher to provide good language models and to maintain use of the target language in the classroom.

The important role of EFL teachers in the process of their students' learning of English as the target language leads to the urgent idea for the teachers to support their learning leading to their empowerment as professional English teachers. The English teachers need to keep up with the

development of the innovation and change in the area of English language teaching (ELT) by trying to update, upgrade and refresh their competences in ELT which include their pedagogical competence and professional competence, (Wulyani, 2017; Supriatna, 2011 and Goh, 2013). Pedagogical competence is related with the teacher's aptitude of the teaching skills, material and curriculum development, assessment and professional competence deals with the teacher's mastery of the subject, in this case English.

The Importance of EFL Teachers' Language Proficiency

EFL teachers' self-awareness in updating, upgrading and refreshing their target language knowledge and mastery and also teaching skills, will be able to attract students to make them more engaged in their learning by becoming more effective in their teaching and able to become a model for the students. Having a good mastery of the target language is one of the qualities of a good English teacher. Richards (2010), mentions 10 qualities or characteristics of exemplary language teachers, one of them is about the language proficiency. Specifically, it covers the abilities in making sound pronunciation of the target language (Al-Maqtri and Thabet, 2013) and how to use the target language fluently and confidently in the classroom and to give appropriate feedback on students' oral and written work (Van Canh and Renandya, 2017). It is in line with Richards (2011) who mentions that EFL teachers' language competencies include the ability to provide good language models, to maintain use of the target language in the classroom, to give correct feedback on learner language, and to provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty.

Learners tend to look up to their teachers as their model in the process of learning and acquiring the target language. The possibility for the learners to get the experience to communicate with native speakers of English is a very small. As millennial generations they have the chances to see, watch and listen to

the use of the target language, by making use of the advancement of the technology to help them. The availability of internet access whether it is a public or a personal internet access will make the students can easily get the information using their gadgets or laptops. However, the learners still need guidance and help from their teachers. Therefore, EFL teachers' teaching competence and language proficiency are still very important for the teachers to master or possess. Teacher lack of English proficiency, has been pointed out as one of the biggest obstacles for successful teaching and learning of English (Butler, 2004).

There have been some researchers from different countries who have done research on EFL teachers' English proficiency particularly on their need of PD for their language proficiency. In Malaysia, aside from the fact that it considers English as second language, Khandehroo et al. (2011) find that Malaysian EFL teachers' need of PD related with maintaining their language skill is still high and it is the most demanded PD. It shows that even in a country where English is its second language which the use or study of the English language by non-native speakers in an English-speaking environment. The people of Malaysia have already familiar with a lot of English terms, words and sentences but still Malaysian English teachers considers and needs to have PD related with their language skills. Meanwhile in Vietnam, due to the ten-year National Plan for "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in The National Formal Education System in the Period 2008 – 2020", it requires a high quality human resources in this case competent English-speaking people. Lich (2015) in his research on the tertiary EFL teachers' needs for professional development, finds that the participants underline the importance of having PD on three domains: knowledge of language, know of language teaching, and knowledge of language learners. The same as the Malaysians, the Vietnamese EFL teachers also see that language proficiency as

an important elements for the EFL teachers to be maintained.

In the Indonesian context, the teaching and learning of English is as foreign language. The learners only have access to using English as a means of communication in their daily lives inside the classroom. Therefore, when a target language is seldom used outside the classroom, input and language use in the classroom are essential (Suryati, 2013). In other words, the role of teachers is very important because they are the main model, source and facilitator of knowledge and skills of the target language as part of the teacher's professional competence. The teachers' use of instructions and explanations in the teaching and learning process in the classroom is the only real example of the use of English as means of communication they can experience. As it is the goal of the teaching of English is to make learners able to use English as a means of communication in the future. Therefore, teachers' professionalism related with their subject they teach is essential. Muth'im (2014) suggests that teachers' professional abilities must be continuously developed through various activities, such as attending conferences or workshops about teaching, and attending teacher association meetings that focus on improving the quality of their practice. It is clear that EFL teachers' professional competence should receive the same portion of attention for development program from the government and the teachers themselves.

Language Proficiency Professional Development for EFL Teachers

A teacher needs to have self-awareness to develop further and continue their skills and experience as part of their effort as professional teacher. Professional development is the obvious choice for the teachers to fulfill the responsibility. Igawa (2008) mentioned that teacher's professional development connects many different aspects of teacher's professional development and his/her personal development. There have been various result

in research which found the effect of involving in PD programs for EFL teachers from teacher's change of behavior and teaching performances, how teachers can be more effective and efficient in their teaching to the increasing self-efficacy of the EFL teachers. In terms of EFL teachers' teaching behavior and performances, many studies found that after joining PD programs EFL teachers improve their classroom performances as their teaching became more communicative, organized, effective and attentive to students' needs, and principled in their classrooms (Choi and Andon, 2014; Giraldo, 2014; Farrell, 2015 and Al-Asmari, 2016). The teachers' own awareness, responsibilities and experiences play an important role in growing the belief that their profession is growing to reach an ongoing goal. Their belief of the importance of professional development then put into practice by joining professional development programs whether it is individual or institutional.

The individual form of PD basically comes from the teachers' motivation to keep up with the latest information on English language teaching (ELT) issues and the realization of their need of upgrading and maintaining their teaching and language competency. Murray (2010) mentions some examples of teacher development activities for language teachers such as reading journal articles, doing reflections on teaching, keeping a teaching journal, sharing journals, peer mentoring/coaching, joining teacher support groups, joining local or national or even international teachers' associations, and participating in workshops and conferences either as a presenter or just participant. And for the institutional form of PD which is obligatory for teachers to join is usually organized by a company or an institution in order to improve the teachers' practices of working into a more professional level. Abdullah (2015) and Wyaat & Ager (2017) call it as top-down PD program, such as professional teacher certification program, PD on understanding the curriculum and how to design a good and effective lesson plan.

The second type of PD is the most common PD program followed by EFL teachers in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, there were studies which inform that the most frequent types of PD in Indonesia is related with teacher's pedagogical competence. Abdullah (2015) in his research found that PD program from the government administered by The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) called Teacher Professional Training, known as Pendidikan dan Latihan Profesi Guru (PLPG) which consist mostly on developing pedagogical competence can become the means for the teachers to learn. Priajana (2017) and Irmawati et al. (2017) both studies reported on how the EFL teachers pursue their PD related with their pedagogical competence.

Among the four competences stated in the Teachers and Lecturers Act No.14/2005, two competences, pedagogical and professional, stand out in the context of ELT (English Language Teaching). EFL teachers have to keep up with the dynamic of the change in the policy related with the teaching of English which requires them to upgrade and develop their teaching skills. But EFL teachers should not neglect to update and maintain their professional competency related with the teachers' language proficiency. In terms of providing good language models for the students, Van Canh and Renandya (2017) find that EFL teachers with advanced level of proficiency would enable them to do their job better and to use the target language fluently and confidently in the classroom, to serve as good language models, to select and adapt teaching materials for more effective use, and to give appropriate feedback on students' oral and written work. The impacts are in the betterment of teacher classroom practices, teacher teaching effectiveness, and student learning results. Therefore, we need to put the light on the importance for the EFL teachers in every level of education to continue update and maintain their language proficiency through any means possible. And that language proficiency PD programs

should be done continuously and regularly as part of the lifelong learning for the EFL teachers.

In this study, the author's contribution is more to the implication of the result of finding out the EFL teachers' self-reported English mastery, their need of language proficiency professional development (LPPD), their views on efforts they can do to upgrade or maintain their language proficiency, and the challenges they face in order to join LPPD to the increasing self-awareness of EFL teachers toward the importance of language proficiency mastery and for the government to provide more professional development programs for EFL teachers particularly language proficiency professional development programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used mix-method of quantitative and qualitative methods. It used questionnaire and interviews to get the data concerning with EFL teachers' views on their need of the language proficiency professional development (LPPD) and to get their opinions on the efforts they have done to upgrade or to maintain their language proficiency and also to find out the challenges the EFL teachers' face to join the LPPD. The researcher distributed 60 questionnaires. Out of 60 questionnaires the researcher got 32 questionnaires of EFL teachers. Their ages range from 28 – 40 years. There were 11 male teachers and 21 female teachers. They were the participants of the last teacher professional training (PLPG) program held by the Ministry of Education and Culture at State University of Surabaya in 2017. The participants were given a questionnaire which consists of three parts. Part one is about demographic information. Part two is about EFL teachers' professional development. The survey instrument form is adapted from Butler, 2004 and Chacon, 2005. The adaptation was made to fit the context of Indonesian EFL teachers and to meet the Indonesian EFL teachers' characteristics. The interview is a semi-structured interview with 6 questions about

EFL teachers' efforts and challenges in joining LPPD.

RESULTS

EFL Teachers' Self-reported English Proficiency

The participants were asked to self-report on their English proficiency in question number 1 of the second part of the questionnaire. They had to measure by themselves how proficient their English is. The self-report scoring ranges from 1 to 10. It consists of the scoring for EFL teachers' general English (GE) and also for English skills such as listening (list), reading (read), writing (write), speaking (speak) and grammar (gram). Using hypothetical calculation for the score of the self-efficacy, the researcher classified the result into three, high, medium and low self-report score. High self-report score ranges from 8 – 10, medium self-report score ranges from 5 – 7, and low self-report score ranges from 1 – 4. The result can be seen in Diagram 1 below.

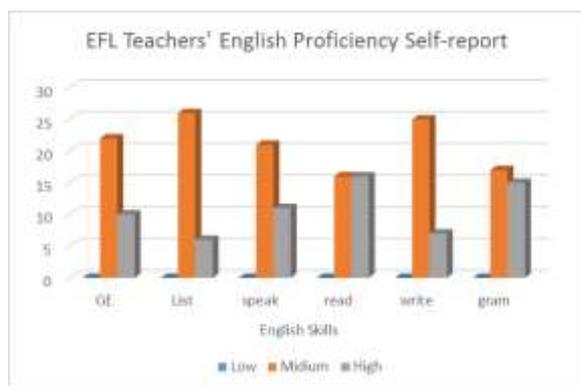


Diagram 1. EFL Teachers' English Proficiency Self- report

From Diagram 1 we can see that most of the participants (66%) considered themselves to have English proficiency in the midium level of proficiency from general English (GE) to the English skills. About 34% of the participants considered themselves to have high level of English proficiency. Except for the reading skill, the number of participants who stated to have medium and high level of English proficiency were equal. There were

no EFL teachers stated themselves to have low English proficiency score.

EFL Teachers' Need of Language Proficiency Professional Development

The second part of the questionnaire is about EFL teachers' professional development. It aims at gathering the participants ideas and opinions on professional development in general then leading to their need of language proficiency professional development. The participants were given four choices of Likert scale, they are strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD), toward the statements in the questionnaire. The result can be seen from the Diagram 2 below.

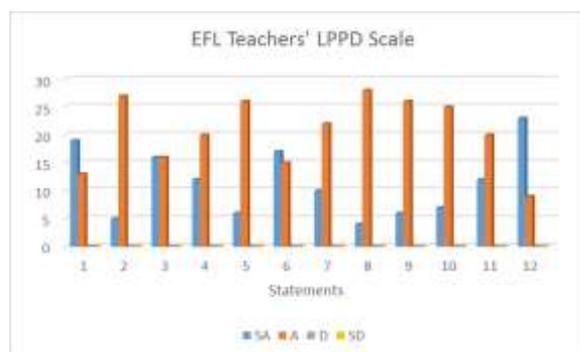


Diagram 2. EFL Teachers' LPPD Scale

Diagram 2 shows that all 32 the participants chose the answers of SA and A. None of participants chose the answer D or SD. In a more detailed data, the questions in the questionnaire can be divided into four categories. The first category (question 2 to 5) is related with the EFL teachers' need of LPPD. There were the total of 76 answers agreeing with the statements and 52 answers strongly agree with the statements. The second category (questions 6 and 7) is about English teacher association. There were the total of 41 answers agreeing with the statements and 23 answers strongly agree with the statements. The third category (questions 8 to 11) is about the activities that EFL teachers can do to upgrade or to maintain their language proficiency. The same with the first two categories, more

choices on agreeing to the statements with the total of 101 answers and only 27 answers strongly agree with the statements. The last category, (questions 12 and 13) deals with EFL teachers' views on their responsibility to get involved in any professional development and their view on the government's responsibility to provide PD programs. There were 35 answers strongly agreeing with the statements and 29 answers agreeing with the statements.

EFL Teachers' Efforts and Challenges in Joining LPPD

After the participants were given the questionnaire, the researcher chose randomly six participants to be interviewed. The result of the interview shows that for question number 1 all six EFL teachers have the same ideas that EFL teachers should upgrade and maintain their language proficiency. Question number 2 deals with the participants' participations in any development program specifically for their language proficiency. Their answer were that they have never participated in such development program. Questions 3 and 4 deal with the participants' participation in English-speaking conferences or seminars (national or international) as participant or as presenter. From six participants, there was only one of them who has ever attended an international seminar as a participant. For question number 5, it is about the activities EFL teachers can do to upgrade or maintain their language proficiency. The participants' answers ranges from reading English books, articles, watching English movies, joining English teacher association. And question number 6 deals with the challenges EFL teachers' face to join LPPD. The answers cover the scarcity of PD specifically for language proficiency, or they have never heard of such program, they do not have time due their tight schedule at their school, some of them stated that the conference, seminar or PD programs are too expensive, and all of those challenges lead to the low effort from the EFL teachers to join LPPD.

DISCUSSION

From the results of the questionnaire we can see that EFL teachers share the same ideas of the importance of professional development for their professionalism, they also underline the importance of upgrading and maintaining their language proficiency by joining a language proficiency professional development (LPPD) or doing activities such as joining English teachers association, attending and becoming the presenter of English-speaking conferences or seminars (national or international), reading ELT materials or other English-printed books, journals or articles, and joining online courses. EFL teachers also agree that they need to have self-awareness of keeping their professionalism not only pedagogically but also professionally as a part of their individual responsibility. But, they still see the importance and urge the government to also provide them with a specific PD for their language proficiency. This is where the collision between the government's policies which underline teachers' PD is teachers' own responsibility to undertake and the fact that teachers do not see this policies as an "obligation" since in reality there is no strict supervision on their language proficiency. The government, in this case The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), has already offered programs for teachers such as scholarships for continuing teachers' study, national scale competitions such as National Teacher Olympiad (ONG) or Learning Innovation (INOBEL) etc. But in practice, it is hard to compete in getting the scholarship for continuing their study, and the competitions do not attract the attention from the teachers to participate.

The next collision is related the four competences in the Teachers and Lecturers Act No.14/2005 which two of them, pedagogical and professional competence, stand out and should be given the same attention from the government. In practice, the most frequent PD offered by the government are only dealing with how to understand the latest curriculum, how to make a good lesson plan (which are written

in Bahasa Indonesia) and what needs to be done to make the students achieve the minimum passing score for each subjects in the national examination. In other words it only focuses on the pedagogical competence of the teachers. It is also a fact that the regular supervisions which have already been done only cover on how well a teacher can make good lesson plans for their teaching and learning activities in their classrooms. The teachers' professional competence should have been given the same portion of attention as the pedagogical competence has. It is to guarantee that the teachers' knowledge and mastery of the subject they teach is updated, upgraded and maintained.

As for the interview, there is a contradictory fact from what the EFL teachers have stated in the questionnaire and what they have done in reality related with their professional development particularly language proficiency professional development. From six randomly selected interviewees, there was only one teacher who said that he attended an international seminar. In one hand it contradicts to the statements of the teachers in their questionnaire which shows that they agree seminars, conference are some of the activities they can follow as the way to maintain their language proficiency. But, in another hand it is in line with their statement in the interview that teachers do not have spare time to follow or join activities or development program for their language proficiency due to their teaching and administrative work at schools and also about the financial issue that to join such program will be costly for them.

There are ways to avoid a more serious collision between the policy and the practice. One of them is to initiate a concept of language proficiency upgrading program from a school-university linkage. The schools, teachers or the MGMP (the subject teacher forum) can start the idea of the need of such program in order to promote teacher professional development, not only their pedagogical competence but also their professional competence, specifically

English. The English department of the university can then hold the program. It can become the English department's lecturer community service program. To overcome with the problem of unsupportive leadership or school principals, the English department can cooperate with district or provincial office of education to "force" the school principals to allow their English teachers to join the upgrading program and also to provide subsidiary fund for the teachers to join the programs.

CONCLUSION

This research draws a conclusion that the EFL teachers' need of language proficiency professional development is inevitable. As language teachers, EFL teachers, they need to regularly upgrade and maintain their language proficiency. It is true that their load of works, pedagogical and administrative, at school and also the unavailability of a specific professional development, such as language proficiency professional development, have driven and forced many of EFL teachers to neglect or forget the importance of their language proficiency as part of their professional competence in their teaching and learning activities. Therefore, it will take all related parties, the government, (the Ministry of Education and Culture), the institutions (e.g. universities, language centers), subject teacher association (MGMP) and the teachers themselves need to work together to sound and to make their voices heard concerning with their need of regular language proficiency professional development.

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