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ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN KABUPATEN KUPANG: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

¹RISYONO, ²LAURENSIUS KIAN BERA, ³CLEMENS KOLO
Risyono23@gmail.com

Universitas Nusa Cendana, Kupang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry study aimed to explore teachers' views of their professional development practices. Qualitative studies are used to truly comprehend through "thick rich" descriptions what's happening (or not) from the standpoint of the English teacher in reference to their professional development practices and related impact on student outcomes. This study involved a purposeful sample of 3 English teachers of Senior High School level in *Kabupaten Kupang*, acknowledged by the chairperson of the English teacher working group of Senior High Schools in *Kabupaten Kupang,* (MGMP/*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris SMA Kabupaten Kupang*) as "committed" to a life-long love of learning and to applying new knowledge gained from professional development practices into their classrooms. These teachers reflected on the experiences they valued, how they employed their learning to support student-learning outcomes, the types of support they obtained, and the barriers they faced. The findings of this study show that teachers value professional development experiences that improve their teaching skills and offer applicable and practical knowledge. To be successful, teachers believe that they need more time to continue informal dialogue with colleagues while applying new learning. Additionally, to support colleagues, teachers benefit from the further assistance provided by internal coaches. Teachers experience barriers related to lack of time and sense of ownership, preconceived opinions, inadequate training, and management of non-compliant student behaviors. In reference to student outcomes, these teachers mainly used their observational skills rather than formal assessments to evaluate the impact of new teacher learning on student outcomes.

Keywords: E*nglish teacher, long-life learner teacher, narrative inquiry, teacher's perception, teacher professional development.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a dynamic profession and, as new knowledge about teaching and learning develops, new types of expertise are required by teachers. Teaching as a profession responds to specific needs and demands, work requiring highly specialized

skill and knowledge to significantly impact student learning (Timperley et al., 2007).

Improving the learning outcomes of all students as the key objective for education needs teachers that are engaged in updating skills and knowledge continuously. It's not only in response to a changing world but in response to new research and emerging about learning and teaching. Since the teacher is an important factor in teaching quality, teacher development becomes essential and necessary for the success of teaching quality because teachers are the prime factors and catalysts for the all-around development of students (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Teachers play a major part not only in improving the quality of teaching but also maintaining it; the professional competency of teachers must be of such a high level to deliver quality knowledge to the students. This would call for the continuous upgrading of the professional development of the teachers, which is the key guarantee of quality education (Borko, 2004).

Teachers are the key to responsibility and professional development is one factor in improving the quality of teaching. They are responsible for teaching students well and effectively, understanding and applying the mandate of the policies, and negotiating with the situation. Further, they must perform great work and report their student's progress to their parents.

The question now becomes how learning opportunity as part of professional development for English teachers in Indonesia is. English is taught in schools as a subject throughout primary and secondary education in Indonesia since English proficiency in Indonesia is important and acknowledged by the government and society. It is seen as the best key to accessing better job opportunities, and higher education, as well as to participating in a global community. In addition, some universities use English as a medium of teaching instruction in certain areas like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

In the present time, the situation has become more complicated since the shifting of education policy. English teachers have to deal with expectations and demands from many parties such as students, parents, principals, the government, English service users, etc. They are responsible for teaching students well and effectively, understanding and applying the mandate of the policies, and negotiating with the situation. Further, they have to perform great work and report to parents about their children's progress. These are only a side of situations faced by English teachers in completing their tasks as a professional.

English teachers must handle expectations and demands from many parties such as students, parents, principals, other English teachers, the government, and English service users. These are only a side of situations faced by English teachers in completing their tasks as a professional. Thus, there is a need to better understand teachers' views of their professional development experiences (Raihani & Sumintono, 2010).

Professional development is defined as those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they must in turn, improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2002). Professional development for teachers is believed important as it can help improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities in the classroom, which in turn can lead to better student outcomes.

Effective professional development is ongoing, including training, practice, and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Effective programs involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students and encourage the development of

teachers' learning communities (Desimone, 2011).

However, there is currently a gap in knowledge about the professional development opportunities available to English teachers in Indonesia (especially in *Kabupaten Kupang*) and the reality. Despite the government's efforts to provide opportunities for teachers to improve their professional skills, the availability and quality of such opportunities vary widely, a challenge faced by English teachers in Indonesia is the lack of adequate professional development opportunities. Many English teachers in Indonesia have not had the chance to receive professional training in their field, which can affect their ability to implement effective teaching methods and use modern educational materials (Gultom, 2015).

This study captured the existing condition of professional development of English teachers of Senior High Schools in Kabupaten Kupang, and teachers' perception of their professional development practices related to their students's learning outcomes.

Three questions guide this study are:

1. What types of professional development experiences are being offered for teachers, and of these experiences, which do committed teachers find the most and least valuable in terms of improving students' outcomes and why?
2. To what extent and how are committed teachers able to apply what they learn from professional development experiences within their classrooms to support students' learning outcomes?
3. What barriers, if any, do committed teachers encounter when attempting to implement ideas from their professional development experiences in order to impact student learning in their classrooms? How do teachers overcome such barriers, if at all?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry to provide insight into teachers' perceptions of professional development. For this study, I conducted open, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 3 purposefully selected teachers who had a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and were recognized by the English teacher working group (MGMP) of Senior High Schools in *Kabupaten Kupang,* as individuals who demonstrated a passion for teaching, eagerness to participate in professional development experiences, and willingness to apply what is learned in the classroom. Participants were asked to record their reflections regarding professional development experiences. Each teacher selected a pseudonym to provide confidentiality of their identity.

The first criterion of selecting teachers with 5 years or more teaching experience reflects the state teaching requirements that define a teacher with professional teaching status as someone with more than 3 years of teaching and who has met the licensing requirements. Teachers who have taught for 5 years will have gained professional status and were presumed to have developed competency in teaching. The second criterion to select individuals identified as having a life-long love of learning help assured that participants could provide information-rich stories drawing on their personal experiences to help answer the research questions posed in this study.

Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized a narrative inquiry research method. Narrative inquiries involve the researcher retelling participants' life stories. There are four primary qualitative data collection types (observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials) with interviews being the method

most recommended to collect participants' narratives. In narrative inquiries, interviews are often conducted in an informal conversational manner to encourage the participants to reveal their individual stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam, 2007). Data analyses included transcribing, coding, and constructing three narratives.

This study achieved triangulation of data by using field notes, the participants' reflective journals, and the interview transcripts. According to (Creswell, 2014), triangulation of data is the use of multiple sources of evidence to determine a theme or perspective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Prior Three teacher narratives provide insight into their perceptions of professional development practices over the course of their teacher careers. Each of the 3 respondents provided a definition of professional development, described the most and least valuable professional development experiences, indicated the role of school culture when applying new learning, described the impact on students, and explained the barriers faced when applying new learning.

The findings of this study are the narratives given by the respondents which have been summarized by the researchers. In the narratives, the researcher looked at the story of the participants in their own words, analyzed the narrative for themes, and looked for commonalities in themes. A contextual summary of each narrative was provided in the findings. The researcher classified the narration into several categorizations. The categorizations were revealed and confirmed the prefigured themes. Thematizing is presented in table 1.

Table 1 Data Findings Categorizations

1	Themes
2	Views on defining Professional Development Experiences
3	Types of Professional Development Experiences
	a the most valuable professional development experiences in terms of improving students' outcomes
	b the least valuable professional development experiences in terms of improving students' outcomes
	c what made professional development become the most valuable
	d what made professional development become the least valuable
4	Views on Students' Impacts
5	Views on barriers
	a the barriers in doing professional development.
	b the barriers when attempting to implement ideas from their professional development experiences to impact student learning in their classrooms.
	c how the teachers overcome the barriers.

Discussion

The first research question explained is "What types of professional development are currently available for English teachers in *Kabupaten Kupang*?". Respondents described what they most and least valued about professional development practices in terms of improving students' outcomes. In some cases, teachers' definitions of professional development included only the in-service days required by the school. The opportunities in which teachers chose to

participate were not always perceived as professional development. From respondents' interviews, three themes emerged that illustrate most valued professional development experiences, least valued professional development experiences, and the limited viewpoint of professional development experiences only including mandated in-service days.

Teachers value professional development experiences that offer relevant knowledge, time for reflective thinking, readily applicable new learning, practical knowledge, and empowerment for teachers to opt regarding professional development experiences.

Teachers do not value professional development experiences that do not include planning of teachers' needs, contain redundant knowledge and lack of application to the classroom, do not include teacher ownership, and do not include sufficient time to learn.

Teachers do not recognize other sources of professional development other than mandated in-service days. In most cases, teachers believe that professional development experiences is required by the state and maintained by local government to fulfill teaching licensing requirements. Teachers do not connect any further professional development experiences, such as teacher study groups, student assessment events, or special projects like revising report cards, to their definition of professional development.

Research question 2 is "To what extent and how are committed teachers able to apply what they learn from professional development experiences in their classroom to support students' learning outcomes?" Research question 2 explores teachers' connections between new learning from professional development experiences and its impact on improving students' outcomes. From the results, three themes emerged that depict teachers' beliefs and understandings.

1. Assessment of students' outcome are based on multiple methods including:
   a. teacher's observation of student progress,
   b. student's behavior and product, and
   c. teacher's interpretation of the student's emotions.
2. Teachers expect professional development to meet the ever-changing needs of students; and
3. Teachers believe their teaching strategies and attitudes directly impact student learning.

Research Question 3 states "What *barriers*, if any, do committed teachers encounter when attempting to implement ideas from their professional development experiences to impact student learning in their classrooms, and how do teachers overcome such barriers, if at all?" Five themes encompass teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding barriers they encounter in the classroom. Emergent themes are *time, beliefs and attitudes, lack of support, not meeting student needs,* and *inadequate programs and materials for teaching.*

All teachers indicate that time is the most common barrier that impacts teachers as well as students. They indicate that the *lack of time*, the time needed *to do a lot of legwork* in preparing to apply new learning, feeling that *the lack of time has spread teachers so thin*, and the resentment of having *to give up personal time* were barriers teachers confronted when applying new learning.

Teachers explain how time is also a barrier for students. Teachers found it difficult when applying new learning to plan an adequate amount of time needed for students to build skills or for all students to complete an assignment. Because teachers found it difficult to plan for enough time, some students may be forced to rush through assignments to keep pace with the class. In contrast, some teachers assigned extra work

to keep students who finished early busy as they waited for the rest of the class to complete the assignment. As a result of rushing to keep students busy, teachers felt that students did not have time to completely finish work thus creating a feeling of *piling it on.*

Teachers specify beliefs and attitudes as barriers to applying new learning. Teachers feel that they *lacked buy-in to a new program*, that *colleagues were not committed to applying new learning*, and that *the application of new learning had no benefit to teachers*. Teachers' attitudes became a barrier when teachers develop a negative *preconceived notion* or would resist applying new learning because they feel they were just *creatures of habit*.

Teachers indicate that the lack of support is a barrier when applying new learning. *Lack of discussion with colleagues* of ideas or problem-solving are barriers for some teachers. They feel frustrated when they feel they *lack knowledge* or do not have *enough training*.

Teachers indicate that not meeting student needs is a barrier when applying new learning. Teachers find that when applying new learning, students' learning rates differ greatly, creating inconsistency in students' outcomes. In addition to learning needs, teachers become frustrated when students stop the learning process *when their social and emotional needs are not met.*

Teachers indicate that inadequate program and materials for teaching are barriers when applying new learning. Teachers describe these barriers as the *lack of resources* or having *materials that were not helpful* to applying new learning. Teachers face barriers when the program *didn't account for deviation from the script due to an unpredicted student response*. In some situations, teachers read from a scripted program by reading the bold print from the teacher's manual and waiting for a predicted response but were frustrated when they do not know how react to unpredictable, student response. In presenting the same program to meet all students' learning needs, *cumbersome programs* are barriers when teachers create multiple groups of learners. Teachers would teach the same lesson multiple times and adjust for individual learning needs.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

In this narrative inquiry, three English teachers of Senior High School, identified as committed to a life-long love of learning and the application of such new knowledge or skills gained from professional development experiences into their classrooms, shared their perceptions of professional development experiences.

These teachers reflected on the experiences they valued, how they applied their learning to support student-learning outcomes, the types of support they received and the barriers they encountered when applying the learning from professional development experiences. The findings of this study suggest that teachers desire greater input into professional development planning.

These teachers valued professional development experiences that improved their teaching strategies, practical knowledge, and confidence. To be successful, these teachers needed more time to conduct ongoing informal dialogue with colleagues as they applied new learning. In addition to support from colleagues, teachers benefited from the additional support of internal coaches. Teachers experienced barriers related to lack of time and sense of ownership, preconceived notions, insufficient training, and management of noncompliant student behaviors. To overcome these barriers, additional support should be provided.

These teachers used their observational skills rather than formal assessments to evaluate the impact of new learning on student outcomes. Most teachers did not make the connection between participating in professional development experiences and student outcomes. These findings have important implications for the kind of support and follow-up needed in planning professional development opportunities. Although there were only three suburban area teachers in this study, this was one of the first studies to add voice and richness to increase understanding into the insight of teachers' professional development experiences. In an era of accountability that holds teachers accountable for all students in their classrooms, this study revealed that some teachers are still not connecting professional development experiences as a means to improve their students' outcomes. Teachers need to be supported throughout this process by all stakeholders, and professional development plans should account for individual as well as their needs.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, there are three suggestions especially for teachers similar to English teachers in this study.
1. This finding suggests that teachers limit what they consider to be professional development experiences and that they need to develop a broader definition to include experiences that are outside of the school's in-service days. Without this broader definition, teachers miss the value of professional development experiences that occur beyond mandated in-service days by not attending meetings or participating on committees.
2. English teachers should receive more training and be held accountable for administrating more formal evaluation to provide more precise and consistent feedback, informing their practice as well as identifying potential needs for instructional adaptations and professional development design.
3. More follow-up is needed to connect student data with a new program intended outcomes to increase teachers' focus on student outcome as feedback for the success of their instruction.

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