

## “SHARPEN THE SAW” TEACHERS! Proposing a Model of Teacher Professional Development Program

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### Abstract

Aside from their main responsibility as educators, English teachers certainly need to regularly “sharpen the saw” or keep improving their professionalism. These demand both understanding of theoretical foundation and practical applications of interconnected aspects of EFL teaching and learning. This paper reports a case of a teacher professional development program in reflective teaching, motivating and engaging learners, and ICT applications for language learning. These topics are chosen as they are considered essential for EFL teachers who strive for a process of building expertise. This two-days workshop elaborates experts as plenary speakers to share theoretical foundation of the three areas and teachers as parallel presenters to demonstrate good practice of their teaching experience. A quantitative assessment at the end of the training results in positive responses from the participants along with evaluations on how this model of teacher development program could be improved. As a post-workshop activity some teacher participants are assisted and facilitated to implement the material. Techniques of engaging reading and ICT use for language skill practice are chosen. Finally, six points of reflection from the committee and an external reviewer provide another assessment, evaluations, and recommendations for the program improvement.

**Keywords:** English Teacher, professional development

### Introduction

English teachers in EFL context deal with multifaceted dimensions in their professional life. They are assigned to multiple responsibilities to manage students’ learning, do administrative works, prepare teaching material, check student works, and some other related jobs. Improving teaching performance is necessary, nonetheless they are busy.

McKenzie & Santiago (2005, p. 134) argue that “teaching is a complex task, and there is not a single set of teacher attributes and behaviours that is universally effective for all types of students and learning environments”. Reflective teaching paradigm is proposed in this program for teachers to continuously apply self instructional-professional-management program through effective instruments assisting them to identify and embrace the inner drive of being teachers. Tarjana (2002) proposes that reflective practice can improve English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching as Dewey (1933) proposes it

as a crucial part of teachers’ work and learning.

Motivation strategy training is required for teachers to nurture students’ inner motivation through fun yet effective teaching techniques that facilitate their active involvement not only during classroom activities, but also on their personal orientation and exploration of learning English. It is based on a concern that, aside from perspective of social psychological aspects, motivation could be viewed from how learners are affected by classroom experiences, in this case by teachers’ pedagogy (Lamb and Wedell, 2013). Moreover, teachers are said to be the most frequently acknowledged motivational influence mentioned by learners (Shoaib and Dörnyei’s, 2005).

Dealing with the last topic, 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers are supposedly to keep up with the development and demand of ICT use for language teaching to make the learning process effective. Technology can play a significant role in achieving higher

quality of education for more students (British Council, 2015). Teachers have abundant choices of technology to use to facilitate student learning. Keeping them updated with the latest technology is necessary.

This study reports a case of teacher professional development in the area of reflective teaching, motivational strategies, and ICT applications for language learning. The topics are chosen as they highlight the journey of being EFL teachers as an ongoing and relentless process of building expertise. This paper, therefore, attempts firstly to illustrate the model of professional development by means of reflections from the steering committee and an external reviewer. Moreover, how the participants evaluate the program is presented quantitatively and qualitatively.

#### *Program Conducts*

This workshop is targeted for English teachers of the Language Training Center of the university holding this program and some from its partner schools in Yogyakarta and central Java, Indonesia. As has been elaborated previously, one of the biggest challenges of Indonesian English teachers has been dealing with nurturing and maintaining professional development. This is especially crucial considering the language policy of the university to hold a non-credited matriculation program, English for specific purposes, and English for professional purposes. For these purposes, therefore, a model of practical ideas of teacher development program that is applicable to EFL setting addressing part of a fundamental call for being an English teacher relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is required. Stages of the development program cover a pre-workshop, workshop, and post workshop.

#### *Summary Information of Pre-workshop*

1. Aims at mediating expert speakers with workshop trainers to connect the ideas in a more practical-detail-classroom technique of the workshop conducts

2. Approximately lasts for 2 hours covering brief orientation and workshop demo (rehearsal) to the expert speakers and committee (divided into 3 groups: Reflective teaching, Strategies to motivate and engage learners, ICT for language teaching)

#### *Summary Information of workshop*

1. Lasts for 2 days from 8.00-16.00
2. Divided into 4 sessions: 1) Reflective Teaching (Topic I) , 2) Strategies to motivate and engage learners (Topic II), 3). ICT applications for language learning, 4) Forum Group Discussion (FGD) proposing an action plan
3. Session 1-2 consists of 1 hour talk from expert speaker, 2 hours workshops by 2 trainers; session 3 consists of 1.5 hours practicing Topic I, another 1,5 hours for Topic II.

#### *Summary Information of Post-workshop*

1. Conducting an implementation phase serves as a pilot project attempting to reduce gap between academic and real classroom-theory and practice
2. Monitoring the development is conducted by regular visitations and discussions

#### **Program Evaluation**

This workshop was evaluated firstly by means of questionnaire distributed to the participants and teacher partners upon its completion and post-workshop activity. Moreover, this project is evaluated by means of reflective practice of the steering committee within 6 aspects:

1. What are the main objectives of this program?
2. What are some of the main activities and related results?
3. To what extent has the program achieved its goals? How do we know this?
4. What internal or external partners are involved in the program? How are they contributing?
5. What are the greatest challenges with implementing this program?

6. What potential are future directions for this program? How can this work be sustained?

Finally, a reflection from an external reviewer participating this program is presented to provide different point of view how it has achieved its goals and how it is evaluated.

*What are the main objectives of this program?*

This workshop on reflective teaching, motivational strategies, and ICT applications for language learning highlights the journey of being EFL teachers as an ongoing and relentless process of building expertise. This program, therefore, firstly aimed to suggest a model of English teacher professional development by involving collaborating experts in the abovementioned three areas to provide theoretical foundations and practical strategies for teacher-practitioners. A training module of the three topics was designed and distributed to participants and used for further study in these areas. Secondly, post-workshop implementation was conducted for two months in attempt to facilitate English teachers from partner schools to apply the material they have got from the workshop. These teachers were given opportunities and facilities to enhance their professionalism and develop their whole-person identity as English educators.

*What are some of the main activities and related results?*

This program firstly began with the pre-workshop activity in which plenary speakers and teacher trainers had a meeting with our steering committee to discuss the relevance of the topics to the its scenario. Some speakers however could not make it due to distance and their busy schedule, opting for virtual communication with us. This program has helped us to expand our network with speakers from West Java, Central Java, and some other areas.

The main activity was a two-day workshop gathering experts in reflective teaching, motivation and engagement techniques, and ICT savvy to lay the foundations for the practical training on classroom activities by English teachers in parallel sessions. The product of this activity is a training module on reflective practice, learner motivation and engagement, and ICT application for language learning. More importantly, however, we had experience in designing and administering an ideal model of English teacher professional development by combining cognitive, psychomotoric, and collaborative aspects of learning.

A two-month follow-up project was conducted to see how English teachers from four partner high schools implemented what they have learned from the workshop and support them with the requisite facilities. A tangible outcome of this activity is definitely the opportunity to sustain partnership with several high schools. Their response and participation to the post workshop activity would surely enable more collaboration benefiting both institutions.

*To what extent has the program achieved its goals? How do we know this?*

In terms of professional development, the three areas represent some essential variables of being a professional teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As we have elaborated, reflective teaching paradigm necessitates these teachers to continuously apply self instructional-professional-management program through effective instruments assisting them to identify and embrace the inner drive of being teachers. Motivation strategy training is required for these teachers to nurture students' inner motivation through fun yet effective teaching techniques that facilitate their active involvement not only during classroom activities, but also on their personal orientation and exploration of learning English. Whereas, ICT use for language teaching provides more opportunities to make learning process more effective. The experts presenting these



topics had demonstrated their deep, comprehensive, and solid overview of the theoretical foundation and samples of practical techniques of their applications. Mr X, Ph.D. completed his dissertation on Reflective Teaching from a university in Australia. Prof. Dr. Y has been noted as a scholar from a reputable public university in Yogyakarta whose expertise is language teaching methodology. Dr. Z is a respected scholar with expertise in ICT from a well-known university in Bandung West Java.

Having those three experts as the plenary speakers, the two-days workshop and post workshop activity have brought success in achieving the goals. We distributed a questionnaire at the end of the workshop to assess participants' satisfaction towards the content and material, the presentation and delivery, discussion and question-answer sessions, parallel sessions, and general evaluations. Positive results were gained as shown by the average mean of 4.34 (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5).

No	Statements	Mean	Cumulative Mean	Standard Deviation
10	Overall, question-answer sessions and discussion enhanced my understanding on the topics	4.34		0.670
<b>Parallel Sessions</b>				
11	Presenters in parallel session demonstrated good mastery of their topics	4.34	4.26	0.614
12	Time allocation sufficiency for material presentation and discussion	4.03		0.865
13	Presenters delivered the material well; material was easy to understand and feasible to implement	4.41		0.733
<b>Other Evaluations and Reflection</b>				
14	Supporting facilities and atmosphere to learn	4.62	4.47	0.494
15	Moderators' role to enhance participation	4.28		0.649
16	This workshop facilitated self reflection for my professional development	4.62		0.494
17	I feel more confident now	4.34		0.553

No	Statements	Mean	Cumulative Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Workshop material</b>				
1	The material is well organized and easy to understand	4.69	4.46	0.471
2	The material is relevant to my need	4.52		0.634
3	The material is relevant to develop my teaching performance	4.24		0.636
4	It will be easy for me to disseminate the knowledge from this workshop to my colleagues.	4.38		0.677
<b>Material Delivery</b>				
5	The presenters demonstrate good mastery of the material.	4.62	4.40	0.494
6	There is sufficient time allocation for presentation and discussion	4.00		1.102
7	The presenters delivered the material well and easily understood	4.59		0.501
<b>Question-Answer Sessions &amp; Discussion</b>				
8	There was sufficient time allocation for question-answer and discussion	3.83	4.15	0.848
9	Presenters responded questions well	4.28		0.649

Samples of responses to the open ended questions are:

“This workshop is like a miracle to me since it gives me /shows me where/what I'm going to plan for my three courses next semester. In addition, the workshop was facilitated me some new insight + knowledge (Android Apps + Being reflective + Dynamic teacher)”

“I do realize that a teacher needs to be better in every class he/she teaches. Provide the students with appropriate and effective methods and activities. Actually, the last parallel session about screencast O matic is something new for me and I might use it to improve the learning process. It's quite interesting too”

“The presentation given by Mr. X about Reflective Teaching makes me open minded and I think about seriously especially what to do to my students. It's as well as ITC. It's great to acknowledge that there're lots of apps I can apply in my class to create an enjoyable learning”

“Very nice combination of plenary & paralel session. From theory to practice”



“Most of all the material - Speakers are well prepared, qualified great! (Except Mis XYZ session) It's dissapointing. I get nothing.”

“I feel so fortunate to have taken part in this workshop. Many things I was unfamiliar with (especiallly those related to the use of android apps for teaching) have become clearer to me. More importantly, this workshop has enticed and motivated me to incorporate technology into my English classroom and, of course, make it more reflective.”

“Some supervisory follow-ups are needed. We've been accommodated thus far by being provided with handouts and softcopies of the material.”

“When I get the materials related to hectic schedules perhaps I actually expect more from that session. We can start earlier, perhaps so we can end the workshop earlier too”

“Provide the participants with a brief description of each parallel session, so that they can make their choice based on which sessions they need the most”

*What internal or external partners are involved in the program? How are they contributing?*

This program have successfully involved personels, not only from the study program, but also other staff from the language center as the commitee and parallel speakers. One of them contributed as the master of ceremony and three became the secretary, treasurer, and event coordinator. Moreover, two resource persons in the parallel sessions were part time-teachers of the language training center, Ms. MY session entitled “Creative English Learning through Songs for Adolescents” and Ms. VW presentation about “The Activities Using Alphabet to Train the Spelling Vocabulary, and Building Sentence”. Both presenters shared a lot of creative and useful teaching ideas. Some other internal partners were the university vice rectors who fully supported this project by providing facilities and financial support. Much to our surprise, there were two participants from the Medical Department and one from the Product Design Department of the university sharing their

enthusiasm for the program. They stated that the topic appeared relevant for their professional development.

As has been mentioned earlier, the external partners involved in this event were the expert speakers coming from three notable universities. Other external partners include participants from senior high schools, not only from Yogyakarta province, but also from West and CentralJava. They actively participated in the event and gave mainly positive feedback. Five partner schools had agreed to conduct a post workshop activity, but due to some reasons only four made it.

*What are the greatest challenges with implementing this program?*

The greatest challenge has been mainly dealing with having coordination with two partner teachers from two schools to implement the result of the workshop. One of them is non-permanent teacher who did not appear to show commitment to do extra work in conducting a small experiment to apply teaching techniques from the workshop. Approaching both the headmaster and the teacher, finally we made it; the teacher agreed to use smartphone apps to engage students in storytelling assignments. Observing her teaching, later we found out that this young teacher was at the stage of finding her style in teaching and developing confidence in choosing “effective” methods for her students. Another teacher participant also agreed to participate in the post workshop activity. However, he neither seemed to show enthusiasm by stating excuses for having meetings nor gave immediate and proactive response to our repeated calls and visits. Finally, he offered to have a post workshop activity on a topic which we had to decline due to its irrelevancy to the workshop. Putting ourselves in his shoes, we tried to understand that being a high school teacher requiresoneto be ready with doing administrative assignments, teaching lots of classes, and managing school events. In this case, we began to realize that commitment

to improve the quality of teaching could somehow be dependent on external factors such as encouragement from the supervisor.

*What are potential future directions for this program? How can this work be sustained?*

Annual workshops in various areas of English Teaching have been included in our department strategic plan, as it has been our commitment to take actions on developing teacher quality. This year we are planning to hold the next workshop on teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) aiming to provide academic forum for ESP teachers, researchers, and material designers. Expectedly, this event strengthens and expands our networks.

Follow-up projects with some partner schools involved in this event mark a sustainable impact of this workshop. An MOU has been signed with one of the School foundation of the partner school to continue cooperation in teacher training and various related areas for its schools, ranging from elementary to senior high schools.

In the long run we believe that our mission to prepare and train English teachers in various areas of methodology and levels of education will be accomplished through and acknowledged as well-planned, well-managed, and consistent collaborative works among all stakeholders and those who opt for better and qualified education for all.

#### *A Testimony from an External Reviewer*

The program, to some extent, has been reaching its objectives as teachers are at the front line of education in need to experience a process of self development that elaborates both theoretical groundwork and practical models of techniques. Teacher professional development takes time and effort to gradually carve quality perfection. This program has served its goal by scrutinizing three essential topics in EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching. Tangible results may not be immediately observed, but that is the nature of teacher professional development. There needs to be

settling down and filtering period internalizing between input from a training or workshop and real practice.

To be more specific, this program has been raising awareness of the meaning of holistic education as the essence of learning lies on the quality of acquiring the meaning of learning itself. This need is often neglected in the Indonesian educational practice in that lots of teachers seek for perfection as shown by their students' final report grades. This orientation could potentially deviate from the true essence of education: to prepare future generations that both are academically qualified and have excellent characters. Moreover, leadership quality is nurtured by being the leader of ourselves as discussed in my session of reflective teaching.

My evaluation to this workshop, or my topic in particular, deals mainly with the popularity of reflective practice in teaching. To some extent this technique is not yet understood as something that teachers can do in every class, or even at any given time. I hope that more and more teachers realize that this is a practice of seeking meaningfulness in education that should be derived from the true self-admission and openness to what has been practiced in the process of teaching and learning.

#### **Conclusion**

A teacher professional development program essentially aims to nurture improvements of teaching performance and one's expertise to facilitate learning. This requires collaborative works with its stakeholders, making sure the program comprehensively situates multidimensional aspects of teaching English teaching as a foreign language, both theoretically and in their praxis. However, teacher professional development would ideally be nurtured from teachers' self-needs and aspirations, supported by availability time and resource with continuous supervisions and supports.

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