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## WHAT HAPPENED TO NOVICE EFL TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN PESANTREN BASED BILINGUAL PROGRAM? EVIDENCE FROM AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN EAST LOMBOK INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practice of professional learning as experienced by novice English Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers especially those teaching at Islamic Boarding Schools or *Pesantren* which ran English and Arabic language program. Case study was employed by involving English Teachers and a School headmaster. This study revealed EFL teachers found it challenging to manage classroom. This is partly caused by the class size and their limited experiences and authority to manage class. They also suffered from intimidating lesson plans design. Moreover, they found it daunting to encourage students to learning English, resulting in teachers' stress. Further, barriers of novice EFL teachers' professional learning were associated with their attitude toward continuous learning needs and limited programs to improve teachers' competency. It also revealed that this *pesantren* and the school where this study was carried out have yet to set TPD programs for its teachers. In fact, novice EFL teachers were unlikely to get necessary supports from school and senior teachers despite the presence of informal supervision from senior teachers.

**Keywords:** novice teachers; EFL; professional learning; *pesantren*; bilingual program

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik pembelajaran profesional guru Bahasa Inggris pemula, khususnya yang mengajar di Pesantren yang menerapkan program bahasa Inggris dan Arab. Penelitian dengan desain studi kasus ini melibatkan Guru Bahasa Inggris dan kepala sekolah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru-guru bahasa Inggris tersebut menghadapi tantangan untuk mengelola kelas. Hal ini disebabkan oleh besarnya jumlah siswa di dalam satu kelas serta minimnya pengalaman dan wewenang mereka mengelola kelas. Mereka juga merasa terbebani oleh penyusunan rencana pelaksanaan pembelajaran. Mereka juga merasa kesulitan untuk memotivasi siswa belajar bahasa Inggris. Semua hal tersebut membuat guru-guru bahasa Inggris tersebut merasa tertekan. Hasil penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa faktor yang menghambat pembelajaran guru bahasa Inggris pemula tersebut adalah sikap guru terhadap kebutuhan belajar secara berkesinambungan dan terbatasnya program peningkatan kompetensi guru. Pesantren dan sekolah tempat penelitian ini dilakukan ternyata menetapkan program pengembangan profesi untuk guru-gurunya. Selain itu, para guru bahasa Inggris pemula tersebut tidak juga mendapatkan dukungan yang diperlukan dari sekolah dan guru senior meskipun telah ada supervisi informal dari guru senior.

**Kata kunci:** guru pemula; bahasa inggris; pembelajaran profesional; pesantren; program dua bahasa

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## INTRODUCTION

A large body of research revealed that students learning outcomes were greatly affected by how teachers' performed their task particularly in classrooms. This obviously suggests that students' success in achieving the targeted competences is greatly dependent on how well teacher perform their tasks in class rooms. Further, their teaching performances are determined by whether or not they keep improving their teaching knowledge and skills. Another factor which affects teacher performance in their class is the context in which they are teaching. However, the context of Indonesian education is apparently not supporting teachers' professional learning. Yuwono and Harbon (2010) postulate that Indonesian education has created a context which is far from ideal and is characterised with a lot of complex realities, limitations and obstacles in its class room. With regard to EFL teaching context in Indonesia, Yuwono (2005) further argues that English teachers in Indonesia are forced to work in isolation and with inadequate support from policymakers and or other related stakeholders.

Despite the presence of a number of regulations and programs conducted to support English teacher professional growth, professionalism has yet to achieve. This is indicated from the very few of teachers who have been certified as professional teachers. An earlier study by Dardjowdodjodjo (2000)

revealed that English teachers in Indonesia have not mastered the language they are teaching. This study also suggested that English teachers are highly dependent on text book and curriculum guidelines with inadequate understanding about the philosophy behind provided materials or methods. This current study aimed at investigating whether professional learning experienced by the English teachers in Pesantren also contribute to the existing problems.

Given the facts about the problems and conditions existing in the classrooms which are closely linked to English teacher professionalism, hence, further investigation on English Teacher professionalism (Yuwono and Harbon, 2010) particularly in *Pesantren* or Islamic boarding school is necessary. Further, studies about the practice of EFL teacher professional development at *Pesantren* is hardly available. This study was expected to fill the research gap pertaining to teacher professional development.

### Concept of Professional Development

Villegas-Reimers (2003) defines teacher professional development (TPD) as the development of a person in his/her professional role, associated with professional learning experienced by teachers and it aims at promoting professional and personal growth of teachers. To put it in another word, TPD is associated with any effort which has

been done to ensure that teachers keep upgrading their skills and knowledge. Darling-Hammond (1998) suggests the TPD should be based on schools and closely related to that of teachers' and learners' daily activities.

### **Urgency of Teacher Professional Development**

It is obvious that teachers play critical roles in classrooms. They are in charge to ensure that the classrooms are comfortable places to learn and to facilitate students to gain the targeted learning outcomes. Due to the rapid development of sciences and technologies, teachers' knowledge and skills are necessary to be refreshed and updated to be able to attract students to get engaged in learning (Supriatna, n.d). However, it is likely that appropriate programs which cover the diverse needs, behaviours and teaching environment are hardly available.

Murray (2010) argues the absence of insightful feedback and regular supervision often make novice teachers feel frustrated, less effective and overwhelmed by bureaucracy might make that novice teachers sometimes feel overwhelmed. Continuous Professional Development is expected to overcome some of these problematic issues (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001) because it is a way to improve teachers' skills applicable to the teaching context and enable them to perform effectively within the school environment (Bolam,

2000). In other words, teacher professional development can be seen as a key mechanism to promote better classroom instruction and students achievement.

As for Indonesian context, the in-service education programs for teachers have yet to satisfy the need of all teachers, particularly those who are teaching in *Pesantren*. This is clearly reflected by what Supriana (n.d) argues that the current in-service TPD at provincial level have yet to work well in that only a few teachers who the opportunity to refresh and update their knowledge and skills since their teaching appointment. Supriana further claims that the "provincial office of education has not had systematic in-service teacher training yet".

### **Novice EFL Teachers**

Farrel (2012) claimed that there has been no full agreement about the definition of novice teachers. However Huberman, as cited in Farrel proposed that novice teachers were those who have been teaching for three years. Farrel further define novice teachers as newly qualified teachers or those who commenced teaching English in an educational institution usually within 3 years of completing their teacher education program". For the purpose of this study, we define a novice EFL teacher as those who have been in service for three years as teachers in *Pesantren* regardless their age.

Upon the completion of this study, it is expected that this study was able to reveal how EFL Novice teachers experienced professional learning in order to enhance their professional and personal capacity as English language teachers. It also aimed at investigating the difficulties when performing their tasks as novice teachers and the challenges to enhance their professionalism. It further sought to investigate the guidance provided for English teachers and strategies they employ to enhance their professional capacity.

### ***Pesantren* Based Education**

*Pesantren* or Islamic Boarding schools are famous educational institutions across the country. It is mainly featured by the adoption of formal and informal education approach in its practices. Normally, *Pesantren* would run their informal educational programs in the afternoon and evening and follow the national (or formal) curriculum in the morning. Another obvious feature of *pesantren* is that most of the students live in the dorm. This would enable high participation of students in all programs and to ensure that the stated learning outcomes could be optimally achieved. Further characteristic of *pesantren* that we could observe that the subjects are mainly dominated by subjects related to Islamic teachings and the implementation of bilingual program for instance English and Arabic.

Students in *Pesantren* are encouraged to communicate in both languages on daily basis. To support the bilingual program, *pesantren* normally hire teachers who have language skills either in English or Arabic. Despite these, there is one obvious issue that commonly found that the hired language teachers are not very well prepared to teach and do not receive specific in service induction to enhance their knowledge and skills. This is apparently the case in most *pesantren* in West Nusa Tenggara province, particularly in East Lombok.

This study aimed at capturing the comprehensive picture of how Novice English Teachers engaged in professional development. The overarching question of this study is to explore the practice of professional learning as experienced by novice EFL teachers in *Pesantren*. This question is then broken down into the following sub questions: 1) What teaching difficulties and professional development barriers encountered by novice EFL teachers during their first years?; 2) What sorts of professional learning programs organized for these novice EFL teachers in *pesantren*?; 3) How did they improve their teaching skills and knowledge as EFL teachers?.

### **METHOD**

This study was qualitative in nature as our main objective was to gain deep understanding about the social

phenomena in the research site without giving any treatment. Neither, we intended to generalize findings of this study although the results can be transferred to a context which has a number of similarities with the research site. We employed a case study as the research design as it is a comprehensive research which allowed us to understand a complex phenomenon and detailed interaction occurring within (Yin, 1989; Stake, 1995). It further enabled researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007). Yin (1989) argues that data collection in case study research is conducted through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data will be mainly collected through in depth interviews and each participant will be interviewed for about half to an hour. Other supporting data will be collected through participant observations and document analysis. For data analysis purposes, we will refer to research questions of this study as the guide. First of all, after each interviews and focus group discussion are conducted, we will transcribe the audiotaped conversations. Transcripts will be coded into themes. Data from observations (field notes) and document analysis will also be coded.

This study was conducted at an Islamic Boarding School (for this study, the term *pesantren* was used) in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. Four novice teachers serving in this *pesantren* were purposively selected as

participants of this study. The other participants were school principals and leaders of this *pesantren*. This *pesantren* was selected based on some criteria. First, researchers had conducted initial observations about teachers' professional development in this *pesantren*. However, the information collected was not deep, hence further investigation were needed. Second, we found most of EFL teachers in this *pesantren* were fresh graduate, or new teachers, and they met the criteria for being participants of this study. Third, we thought that we could conduct research in this *pesantren* more easily in term of access to get data as we had been familiar to the teachers and leaders in this *pesantren*.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overarching objective addressed in this study was to uncover the practice of Professional Development of EFL novice teacher at this *pesantren*. The findings of this study are presented based on the research questions.

### **Difficulties and barriers to professional development encountered by novice EFL teachers during their first years as EFL teachers**

Teaching is both challenging and attractive although for some people who do not favour it would prefer to resign. It is always challenging as the class and the students that teachers deal with are dynamic and often time

present themselves with unpredictable behavior. This would require teachers to be more flexible and get prepared to deal with uncertain situation. Teaching is also attractive as it allows the teachers to explore themselves and try to innovate in order to make the class more alive and to ensure that the students achieve the expected learning outcomes. Despite these, teaching is demanding for teachers because there is an abundant of demand to fulfill, while they might not have sufficient time to accomplish their task and they might not be mentally prepared to do the tasks. Even, teachers with a clear and strong commitment to becoming professional teachers would still encounter issues, particularly when teaching English as a foreign or a second language. As highlighted by Kanno and Stuart (2011) that those having clear commitment to be professional ESL teachers found it hard to automatically translate their commitment and adopt teacher identity.

The novice EFL teachers in this study also experienced a number of difficulties during their early careers as EFL teachers. Most of the participants in this study reported that they encountered issues pertaining to classroom management, for instance disruption in class. This was mainly caused by the class size and they lack of experiences and more because they lacked teacher authority to manage class (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). They also mentioned that preparing the lesson plans as expected by the current

curriculum is quite intimidating although they have learned this when they were having their pre-service education. Others difficulties these teachers experienced were related to motivating students or making their students to feel encouraged learning English. Most students were likely to prefer speaking in Arabic to English. This is clearly reflected by what a participant reported:

*"We found it difficult to make student love English as our Institution has strongly encouraged the students to communicate in other language...Arabic language".*

Reflecting from this excerpt, it is worth bearing in mind that school with bilingual program (English and Arabic program) also creates challenges for the teachers and students as well. As reported by the participants of this study this *pesantren* had been running a bilingual program for quite long time; however, the emphasis of the program was likely on Arabic Language. Further, teachers also found that the tight schedule that this *pesantren* set also affected the teaching and learning of English. Students' had limited time to repeat what they had learned from the teachers. Often time, this constraint made the students unable to attain the expected learning objectives. In line with these findings,

The current problems that these teachers experienced led to teacher stress. Teacher felt stress with burden that they encountered when teaching

English. Stress is also one of the major issues which teacher experienced at this *pesantren*. This was mainly caused by their inability to make students achieve the targeted learning outcomes which have been set in the school curriculum. This finding is also in line with Kyriacou and Sutcliffe's study (1978) which reported that approximately 20% of comprehensive school teachers in England found teaching to be very stressful or extremely stressful.

Speaking of barriers in professional learning, these teachers admitted that personal motivation appeared to be the major issue to improve their capacity or competency as English teachers. They were unlikely to upgrade their teaching competences. It is of vital importance that their attitude toward continuous learning needs more attention from the school leaders. Teacher with high motivation to enhance their capacity would invest more time to improve their knowledge and skills. Another issue which they encounter to enhance their teaching proficiency is the limited programs which the school, itself, has set to improve teachers' competency despite the presence of policy for this purpose. Not only the shortage of the TPD programs, the existing programs were unlikely to meet the needs of the teachers. This finding is supported by Badri's study (2016) which revealed that lack of suitable development opportunities were highly associated with the amount of professional development teachers enrolled in.

### **Professional learning programs organized for the novice EFL teachers in *Pesantren***

Based on the survey conducted by [TALIS \(2013\)](#), there were nine different choices of TPD program for teachers to participate in, namely courses/workshops, education conferences or seminars, qualification program, observation visits to other schools, participation in a network of teachers, individual or collaborative research on a topic, and mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching. From these programs, novice teachers would gain a number of benefits for their career development. One of them is that teacher could get "the opportunities to discover new roles, develop new instructional techniques and methods of teaching, refine their practice and develop themselves both professionally and personally" (Mahmoudi & Ozkan, 2015). For this reason, school as teachers' employer need to design a learning environment where novice teacher could improve their competence and personality equally. It is also necessary to restructure the types of the TPD program which meet the teachers' needs (Badri, 2016), in order that the programs become effective.

Our interviews with the participants suggest that this *pesantren* was unlikely to have blueprint concerning teacher in-service education although they have the policy pertaining to this matter. Most of the

trainings that teachers involved in were organized by the government, in particular ministry of religion office. As reported by the vice curriculum of the senior high school in this *pesantren*, the induction program for teachers were in the form of regular meetings which are done monthly. These meetings were not specifically conducted to enhance teachers' capacity or competences; however, it is more to do with consolidation or coordination regarding teachers' discipline and or administrative works. Therefore, we could regard that teachers' professional development has not been the major priority of this *pesantren* regardless its status as modern *pesantren*. The finding of this is in line with that of Supriana (n.d) which highlight that the existing in-service teacher training in West Java did not work well as most teachers have not had the opportunity to refresh and update their teaching knowledge and skills.

Slightly different view was expressed by an informant of this study, who had been teaching for about four years. He argued that the program for teacher induction was not that effective as the program is not carried out regularly, although the school had policy in regards to teacher professional development. He also mentioned that there was weekly meeting particularly for English teacher to evaluate the English language program that had been running. This meeting was mainly intended to identify any possible

alternative to enhance teachers' performance which in turn would affect students' learning outcomes or English language skills improvement. The other teachers also provided similar information.

Novice teachers are in need of guidance from school so as to be able to adapt with new working atmosphere and to be able to perform their tasks. If they get sufficient supports it would be more easily for them to immerse in new working place. In this study, novice EFL teachers were not likely to get necessary support from school and senior teachers. This was clearly reflected from the following finding.

The vice principal curriculum reported that there was no specific guidance provided to novice teachers although supervision was carried out to monitor their performances in the classroom. The teachers were encouraged to explore the materials and to keep themselves updated with the current issues pertaining to language teaching media and methods. Another support that school provided for beginning teachers was supervision from senior teachers. The supervision or guidance was done informally between senior and junior teachers.

Confirming what the vice principal of curriculum reports, we interviewed the EFL teachers. They reported that they received informal feedbacks from senior teachers; however, they did not get these on regular basis as these

feedbacks were provided when they asked to or when they had the opportunity to meet the senior teachers. They further informed that they needed more intensive feedbacks in order to be able to tackle their tasks and any occurring issue in their classrooms.

### **Novice EFL teachers' strategies to improve their teaching skills and knowledge**

As previously mentioned, the teachers did weekly meetings to discuss a variety of issues pertaining to the teaching and learning of English in this *pesantren*. In these meetings the teacher would get feedbacks from other teachers, mostly from senior teachers. With this feedback they could learn and improve their teaching practices in the classrooms. The provision of feedback as part of continuous professional learning could help these novice teachers overcome some of these problematic issues (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001).

EFL teachers also took part in trainings organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs which enabled them to learn more about new curriculum implementation and administrative works that they have to deal with. Teachers also involved in English teacher association meetings, conducted monthly. Each English teacher in this *pesantren* had to participate in turn in the teachers' meeting. From this teacher association meeting, they could gain

updated information about any issue pertaining to the English Language Teaching.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This case study aimed at capturing the practice of English teachers' professional development in a *Pesantren* running a bilingual program- Arabic and English. The teaching difficulties experienced by the participants of this study included 1) classroom management which was mainly caused by the class size and the lack of experiences and authority to manage class; 2) intimidating lesson plans design; 3) motivating students to learning English as most students were likely to prefer speaking in Arabic to English. These issues led to teacher stress. Further, the barriers these EFL teachers encountered to professional learning were related to their attitude toward continuous learning needs and limited programs to improve teachers' competency.

This study also revealed that *pesantren* did not have a blueprint concerning with teacher in-service education although they have the policy pertaining to this matter and the existing TPD programs were not effective. Also, TPD in this *pesantren* has not been the prioritized regardless its status as modern *pesantren*. Other findings in this study showed that novice EFL teachers were unlikely to get necessary support from school and

senior teachers despite the presence of informal supervision or guidance from senior teachers. Furthermore, it is found that teachers learned from the given feedback to improve their teaching practices in the classrooms. EFL teachers took part in training organized by the ministry of religion as well as in regular English teacher association meetings to advance their knowledge and skills.

As previously mentioned that there are limited studies which investigated the practice professional learning for novice EFL teachers in *Pesantren* context, thus this study would contribute to the existing literature from this context. The results of this study are also expected to inform the *pesantren* policy makers and other education stakeholders. As this study was conducted in a small scale with small number of participants; hence this study only reflected the reality of how Novice EFL teachers engaged with professional learning. For this reason, it is suggested that further investigation is carried out by involving more teachers from different *schools* to better understand the barriers of teacher professional development in *pesantren* context. Future researchers could also develop strategies to foster English teacher competencies.

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