

English Lecturers' Experiences on Professional Development in Indonesian Polytechnics

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Abstract

The paper aims to depict lecturers' experiences on the professional development programs in three polytechnics. The study used a qualitative descriptive study employing nine lecturers of English teaching in three different polytechnics. The study finds that lecturers believe that professional development programs as a means for them to improve their knowledge, skills, and expertise. Also, lecturers encounter that professional development programs are not offered equally for lecturers rather than depends on the policy of the top managerial levels. Professional development programs are mostly offered inside the campus for a shorter period rather than offered by external agents that take a longer time. The study recommends that professional development in polytechnics should be done systematically, periodically, and intensively so that lecturers of English in polytechnics can enhance their skills, improve their knowledge, and share their expertise. Further, professional development programs should involve different relevant stakeholders so that they can bring in different expertise and a variety of skills and knowledge so that lecturers of English can fully update with the modern trend of technology. Consequently, they can apply the updated skills and knowledge in their teaching to improve the quality of polytechnic output.

Keywords: English Lecturers, Experiences, Professional Development, Indonesian Polytechnics

Background

Professional development (PD) is one of the important issues for lecturers in vocational education. The recent research suggests that the majority of lecturers need longer and sustainable professional programs (Wati, 2011). The model is believed to be one of the effective ways to improve basic English knowledge as the most important aspect of being effective English lecturers.

Professional development of English lecturers in Indonesian polytechnics has become the central issue nowadays especially concerning the lack of many trained and knowledgeable English lecturers who teach vocational polytechnics. The professional development programs through short workshops, a short period of teacher training, and in-site training have failed to improve the quality of English lecturers. The research concluded that there are some serious problems in term of improving lecturers' quality in Indonesia; a) unbalanced educational training programs from elementary school level to high school level; b) ineffectiveness of training; c) different concept of what lecturers got from training is different with what they applied in the class (Wati, 2011; Yuwono, 2005). Besides, many of the English lecturers who teach in primary schools do not graduate from English Education therefore they are less trained to teach English (Rosmaladewi, 2000) and bring little impact on quality teaching and learning (Widodo et al, 2009).

The professional development of English lecturers in the Indonesian polytechnic context has been significantly under-researched, particularly in the polytechnic area. Up until now, there has been very little in-depth research that explicates the professional programs in the polytechnics, how they are implemented, and what model of evaluation can be used. Some research, however, has been done on other subjects such as Science and Technology in New Zealand (Cowie et al, 2008) and Mathematics in Indonesia (Marsigit, 2007).

Therefore, this research aims to provide the experience of professional development programs for English lecturers in Indonesian polytechnics. This research contributes to understanding the lecturer's perceptions of professional development and their implications on teaching and learning. This research is significant for policymakers, university and training associations as trainers, and partnership of lecturers on their perceptions and ways to improve basic knowledge of English lecturers.

Concept of professional development

According to Moller and Pankake (cited in Zepeda, 2011, p. xxii):

Professional learning models are tools to be used, but the real learning happens in the cycle of conversations, actions, evaluation, and new actions that are supported through intentional leadership that gently pressures and nurtures lecturers. This inquiry process must be organizationally embedded rather than externally imposed to build lecturers' knowledge and skills or increase human capital, within the institutional social networks. Moller and Pankake are emphasizing on the importance of professional development as the on-going process that is done perpetually on a systematic basis either weekly or monthly programs.

Several researchers have explored professional development (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Desimone, 2011; Ferman, 2002; Knowlton, Fogleman, Reichsman, & De Oliveira, 2015; Leibowitz, Bozalek, Van Schalkwyk, & Winberg, 2015; Zepeda, 2011). Leibowitz et al. (2015), for example, investigated the access to professional development involving 18 lecturers from eight South African universities. They found that lecturers who have regular access to PD gain greater benefits in terms of knowledge updates and greater impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.

The theoretical framework of the study is a model for sustainable professional development in an international context (Elliott et al, 1998) which includes designed model, implementation, and evaluation of the programs. Bymes (2007) proposed five aspects for sustainable lecturers professional development programs: 1) the major objective is to understand systems and the integration of ecology, economics, and societal frameworks that influence lecturers' practices; 2) the program creates teams to solve 'real-life' problems; 3) participants also play an active part in managing problems relating to their teaching practices; 4) participants also interviewed educational stakeholders; 5) another objective is to improve English language proficiency for all participants by speaking, reading, and writing English throughout the program.

Shulman (1987) pointed out that it is the subject matter knowledge and the associated pedagogical content knowledge that holds real challenges for lecturers who must learn about an innovation and somehow convert their new knowledge into a pedagogical form. He also identifies the disequilibrium that is caused to all teacher professional knowledge by the introduction of new ideas and changes in beliefs and practices.

There are several kinds of research on lecturers' professional development that emerged during the last decade as generic guides for teacher change processes. For example, Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) suggest five models that are useful for accomplishing the goals of staff development, and Cook and Rasmussen (1994) designed the effective professional development model for identifying, understanding, planning, carrying out, and evaluating change.

Meyers and Salter (2007) identified elements of sustainable professional development as follows: a) flexibility; b) modularized units of study; c) combination of self-directed/paced and collaborative elements; d) utilize online tools; e) reduction of isolation; f) relevance to immediate work; g) task-based learning.

Elliot, Macpherson, and McLaughlin (2005) urged that while there is increasing interest in the professional development of all educators there is no one approach that seems to have been outstandingly successful. Borko (2004) claimed that approaches are generally fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what we know about how lecturers learn.

Reviewing these studies above highlights the lack of research literature concerning professional development in Indonesia polytechnics. This research seeks to explore lecturers' perceptions concerning professional development within the polytechnic settings.

Research Design

To address the research aims the research adopted a qualitative case study approach (Gall, 2005). Theorists define that case study offers the study of the phenomenon in its natural context (Gall, 2005; Yin, 1994). The phenomenon in the research is sustainable professional development programs for English lecturers.

Research instruments

The main instrument for this research is a semi-structured interview. This type of interview allows flexibility for the researcher to add some necessary questions to respondents (Gay et al, 2006). It allows the researchers to create more important chances to stimulate some important additional questions. All interview questions have been tested to other English lecturers to avoid misunderstanding (Gall, 2005) and to improve the clarity of the questions (Yin, 1994). This process assists the improvement of the validity and credibility of the research questions.

Participants of the research

The participants of the study are nine lecturers from three different polytechnics. These lecturers are very experienced academic staff who have taught at the polytechnics for more than five years. All lecturers graduated from masters' background, most of them English departments and the rests are from non-English masters 'graduates. 60% of the participants are female lecturers. Two of them graduates from overseas.

Data analysis

Data analysis for this research used a thematic data analysis approach (Gay et al, 2006). Thematic data analysis allows researchers to generate key themes and categories from participants' extracts by reading the whole transcripts of the interviews. Several previous researchers have used such types of thematic data analysis approach (ayadi & Abduh, 2020; Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019; Azis, Hasiara, & Abduh, 2020; Basri, Abduh, & Hudriati, 2018).

Findings

Polytechnic A

Professional development aims to develop staff skills both academic and non-academic skills (Desimone, 2011). In this study, researchers describe professional academic and non-academic skills in professional development programs. A manager in Polytechnic A acknowledged the importance of professional development:

We have intensive training programs for lecturers organized by campus and others to improve English lecturers' skills and knowledge. The training programs include in-house English training, upgrading English knowledge, and improving English conversation skills (LA)

The manager in Polytechnic A confirms that professional development programs can be short and long-term programs. A manager: "We work together with several institutions for pieces of training and it can be a private institution" (LB). Also, ahead of the department stated: "we organize several important professional development programs such seminars, conferences, workshops and in-house training (LB). The Polytechnic A support the professional development of English lecturers teaching in the polytechnic.

Despite these training development programs offered, lecturers are selected carefully to continue their further studies. Perhaps one of the reasons, as one lecturer stated: "it is hard to gain support for continuing the study here since English lecturers are not the priority ones" (LC). For this reason, "I have to find my way to continue my further study at masters' level" (LC).

She further commented that: "It is not a surprise that every lecturer of English teaching in Polytechnic is not the priority and the main focus of the polytechnic. It is just a secondary one" (LC). As a consequence, it is hard for English lecturers to be promoted to high-level positions at the managerial level. The other implication is that lecturers of English have limited access to the key important access and less priority.

Polytechnic B

In this polytechnic, lecturers have similar opinions on the issue of professional development programs. One of the English lecturers claimed that there are much support for the professional development programs for lecturers of English: "we provide chances for English lecturers to grow and participate at any professional development programs (HA). This lecturer

further commented: “opportunities are everywhere, it depends on them to take it or not take it” (HA). This indicates professional development (PD) programs are offered both inside and outside the campus.

However, the other lecturers view PD has become an important issue for English lecturers in the polytechnic. For example, very few lecturers of English gain middle or high-level position are at managerial levels and there are few or even limited opportunities for lecturers of English to grow:

For longer training such as one or two weeks of training, it is very difficult to get permission from the top-level manager to join the PD programs especially for the programs held outside the institution (HB).

The other issue is that lecturers of English are considered as a second class academic community where they are given less priority at any PD activities: “we are not number one, but the last” (HB). As a consequence of putting English lecturers as second priority is that they have no confidence in teaching and less enthusiasm to promote English as one of the important international languages to be mastered by students and lecturers have no obligation to improve their competencies:

I have no obligation to fully engage and improve my English as it is not required and not as important as other subjects in this institution (HC).

The implication for this is that not many lecturers of English can fully participate in at any academic promotion because they are limited by the qualification and competence.

Polytechnic C

Professional development (PD) at this polytechnic has become an important issue for lecturers of English. PD has mostly been given and offered by international internal programs. For example, short training and short academic development programs are offered and delivered through on-site pieces of training. One lecturer stated: “there are few opportunities done at a campus, but are very limited for outside ones” (IC). The other English lecturer participant stated: “there is no guarantee for us to be able to join training outside campus” (IA). Even though lecturers of English have received a special grant to join it, it still requires approval from a top level manager. One participant said: “many of us have received a scholarship for PD but the institution required us to stay due to a limited number of English lecturers” (IB). The issue of PD here is to plan and organize longer PD so that lecturers of English can fully engage and participate in the programs. Consequently, they can improve their skills and knowledge in English.

Discussion

From the findings, it appears that professional development aims to improve the knowledge and skills of lecturers (Desimone, 2011) so that they can perform at the highest possible level they can perform. PD in these three polytechnics is a way of developing a high level of human resources so that these people can be an asset and human capital for the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003), provide opportunities for collaborative work among lecturers (Rosmaladewi & Abduh, 2017) and open up intercultural understanding (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018). Also, the implementation of short training, longer pieces of training, intensive and non-intensive PD programs aims to equip lecturers as Knowlton, Fogleman, Reichman, and de Oliveira (2015) described as providing different kinds of knowledge and accessing a variety of different expertise. Consequently, lecturers can meet the demand and requirements of the current trend in the science and technology sector.

It seems that these polytechnics needed to have professional development for academic staff since it is one of the ways to update lecturers’ knowledge and skills. This can impact on the

improvement of teaching and learning quality. The high-quality teaching can impact on the high-quality output. High-quality output can impact the accessibility of works and the opportunity to utilize their skills and expertise in the workplace effectively.

There are several important reasons why PD is still fundamental for lecturers in polytechnics: a) they can update their knowledge and skills so that they can perform the best quality of teaching; b) they can update the current trend of technologies so that they can use them for teaching, and c) they open up the opportunities to grow themselves personally and professionally.

Conclusion

Despite three polytechnics above views professional development as challenging issues, lecturers believe that PD is seen as one the important alternative medium for skill and knowledge development. There are a variety of opportunities for lecturers to participate in PD. The English lecturers are encouraged to improve their knowledge and skills in their efforts and programs without distracting the teaching and learning process occurring in the three polytechnics. These lecturers as non-specialized lecturers in these vocational polytechnics also reported limited opportunities to grow professionally and considered themselves as second class citizens.

It is recommended that further research and studies on a larger sample and involving many polytechnics is important to be carried out because it can provide a comprehensive understanding of the PD issues in polytechnics. Studies that involve many stakeholders in polytechnics can provide different perspectives of PD and provide insights on the ways and mechanisms of PD occurring in polytechnics.

Conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work

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