

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: HOW INDONESIAN ENGLISH-TEACHERS (SHOULD) RESPOND TO POLICY CHANGES *)

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ABSTRACT

It is well understood that teaching is a complex profession, characterized by a high degree of autonomy as a teaching activity is commonly conducted in an isolation. Knowledge to consume by the teachers is commonly the main feature of many CPD activities, and yet teachers are to face the 21st century challenges, with specific skills to acquire by their learners. At the same time, policy changes has exacerbated the intricacy the teachers are confronted with in their day-to-day professional involvement. Commonly different reactions would be put forth by teachers at school to a newly introduced policy. In the case of Indonesia, the birth of the 2013 curriculum has brought about dire predicaments on the shoulders of the teachers. TEFLIN as a professional organization welcomed the birth of the 2013 Curriculum, with a caution that efforts of developing a curriculum required such prerequisites as more qualified English teachers and fair distribution of teaching-learning facilities to every corner of the country. In short, pedagogical competencies in their broad sense of teachers and school administrators in all layers of educational settings are the key to professional development that could bring forth positive impacts on the school outcomes.

Teaching is a profession, which is complex in nature as it is indicated with a high degree of autonomy as a teaching activity is commonly conducted in an isolation. Teaching is a helping profession, which could from time to time bring about stress, burn-out, and fluctuating motivation. Therefore, there should be a conscious and concerted effort of continuing professional development for each and everyone involved in the teaching profession, through such activities as reading, analyzing teaching, researching own classroom, taking feedback from learners, and writing materials (Bolitho, 2013). Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, including teachers of English, becomes a necessity for lucid involvement in the teaching profession.

Many CPD activities have put more emphasis on providing teachers with knowledge to consume. An example is a workshop attended by teachers in which new approaches and methods are introduced, with an expectation that they will apply those in their classroom context when they return to their school. In other training activities, teachers are expected to become consumers and reproducers of knowledge, which in many cases do help teachers perform better in their teaching tasks. However, as the development efforts are largely externally driven, many

of the teachers when returning to their school would recourse themselves to their old ways of teaching (Borg, 2015). Another point to take into consideration when dealing with professional development is prior knowledge and experience. When getting into a teacher education program, a preservice teacher is not an empty vessel, as he has already been filled with prior knowledge and experience. An in-service teacher is in a similar tract, plus his prior teaching experiences (Macalister, 2014).

Current teacher professional development is even tougher, as teachers have to respond to the challenges in developing the 21st century skills in each of the learners they teach. Each individual with no exception whether he is from an elite group or from another group requires 21st Century skills that can improve marketability, employment and citizenship readiness (Hamied & Suryana, 2016) which includes among others skills for thinking critically and making decisions; solving complex and multidisciplinary problems; creating and thinking entrepreneurially; communicating and collaborating with others; and making use innovatively of knowledge, information and opportunities (P21, 2008).

How an English teacher in Indonesia develops his professional competence is in many respects largely determined by the changing policies of English teacher education in the country, especially in responding to challenges from all educational stakeholders. For example, the current TEFL phenomenon in Indonesia at the secondary education level is affected by the policy, as outlined in the 2013 curriculum, characterized by its treatment to each individual learner as a whole person, by assisting every individual learner to develop knowledge, skills and attitude. In retrospect, up to around 1968, grammar translation was dominant in classroom activities. Early 1968, oral approach was adopted with audio-lingual methods implemented. This approach was also enlivened in the 1975 Curriculum. Afterwards, the communicative approach was adopted in the 1984 curriculum and again in the 1994 Curriculum with a different label as a meaning-based curriculum. In the same way back in 2004, the 2004 Curriculum still adopted the communicative approach; this curriculum was called a competency-based curriculum in which classroom teaching-learning practices were expected to adopt a genre-based approach. Almost every 10-year period, we seem to have been destined to have to adopt a new curriculum. Since last year, we have begun to implement the 2013 Curriculum, which adopts science-based and holistic approaches (Minister of Education & Culture, 2012).

The following components are listed as specific characteristics of the 2013 Curriculum as introduced by the Agency for Development of Human Resources in Education and Culture and Education Quality Assurance. First and foremost are exit competencies, which should improve during the schooling activities with a required balance between soft and hard skills, covering attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Previously competencies were developed out of subject matters, now the competencies bring about subject matters, and they should be developed through integrated themes. The 2013 Curriculum setups are characterized by science-based and holistic nature at the primary education. At junior secondary levels, information and communication technology should be encouraged to be used as a medium for teaching and learning activities. At the senior secondary, the subject offerings consist of required and elective subjects, whereas at the vocational school, new vocational areas are introduced based on the need spectrum, reducing adaptive and normative subjects and adding productive areas in line with needs in industries.

As to the teaching-learning process, in all layers of education, process standards which previously were focused on exploration, elaboration, and confirmation are now completed with observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, and networking activities. Another teaching-learning tenet that should be implemented is that learning should take place not only in the classroom, but also in the school environment and in the society, with a view that teachers are not the only learning resources. Regarding attitude development among students, it should be well understood that attitudes as expected in the new curriculum are not to be verbally taught but to be demonstrated by good examples and practiced in every school activity.

As regards assessment, it should be carried out with a competency-based approach. There should also be a shift from assessment with tests to authentic assessment, in which attitudes, skills, and knowledge are to be evaluated through both processes and outcomes in tandem. In addition, assessment should also prioritize the one which is criterion-referenced. The reference points of assessment should include the basic competencies, the core competencies, and standards for school-leaver competencies. Another important point in assessment expected in the 2013 Curriculum implementation is encouragement to the students to develop portfolios as one of the main instruments of assessment. The following table illustrate some essential differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the 2006 School-Based Curriculum.

Reactions have varied, from deliberate resistance to wholehearted support. Any curriculum is easier to develop than to implement in a real-life classroom teaching-learning process. In this regards, Hunkins (1980) has indicated that educators very often feel everything is through when a curriculum document is finalized and relieved when they are through with their efforts in developing a curriculum. The more fundamental stage is when the curriculum is put into action, especially when taking into account that students change, new staff members arrive, innovative materials are produced and new needs are perceived and expressed by the public. Therefore we need to maintain a vigilance over the curriculum as implemented to determine if and where adjustment is required.

Different reactions have been put forth by teachers at school to the implementation of the new curriculum. Some with some defiance, as many of them still argue that it is a type of curriculum developed in a top-down and centralistic fashion. Schools belonging to the pilot project for the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum have no other option but to implement it as outlined by the ministry. Most teachers view that the new curriculum makes them even more overwhelmed by the new curriculum than the earlier curriculum. As to content coverage, the 2013 Curriculum is looked at by teachers as providing less content compared to that of the 2006 school-based curriculum. Another new aspect of the 2013 curriculum is the process of learning which adopts the scientific approach or inquiry learning with the stages of observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, and networking. The adoption of this approach could create some disturbance to teachers who are used to implementing the genre-based approach involving the steps consisting of building knowledge of the field, modeling, joint construction of text, and independent construction of text. Still another new aspect in the curriculum is the assessment techniques, which prefer authentic assessment principles like portfolios to test-based assessment.

In 2010, the Curriculum Center conducted a study and identified problems we need to handle, such as unrealized of all curriculum elements as mandated in the Education Law; a void of curriculum handling at the national and regional levels; inconsistency of the formulation of content and exit competency standards with the mandate by Education Law No. 20; fat-looking content and exit-competency standards, operationally difficult at the school level; and "teaching to the test", resulting in spur learning in which teachers pursue 'quality' products, ignoring the learning process. The Curriculum Center (2010) team also recommended that the

ministry establish policies to realize the existence of a more comprehensive curriculum management, especially as regards content and exit-competency standards, taking into account national, regional and school levels; establish policies to enhance or amend regulations related to national education standards not in concordance with the mandate of Law of Education; and establish a task force to harmonize laws and regulations that are inconsistent with the law of education. These policy studies have provided us with information on shortcomings in our previous curriculum development and implementation, quite a reflective feedback as to how intricate it is to match what has been developed and how it is implemented.

As regards theory-practice or policy-implementation interplay in maintaining quality teaching and learning, it is good to note what Loughran (2010) has to say that “scholarship in teaching requires professional knowledge of practice to be publicly available for critical review and development....”. In this respect, a teacher professional organization in its support to school practices could function as a clearing house of knowledge of practices for developing the theoretical pedagogy as the basis for professional development in its comprehensive sense, covering teacher education, recruitment and filtering mechanism, as well as merit- and need-analysis-based placement of teachers.

Efforts in professional development necessitate deliberate involvement of professional organizations. Therefore, TEFLIN (The Association of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia), as a professional organization of teachers of English, held a focus group discussion in February 2013 specifically addressing the 2013 Curriculum issues. The organization did welcome the birth of the 2013 Curriculum. However, they held that the efforts of developing a curriculum at the national level required a comprehensive perspective that would accommodate philosophical and juridical principles, language theories and language learning in relation to the curriculum of English, and considerations pertaining to the preparedness of all involved such as supervisors, headmasters, teachers, and students and availability of non-human supports for its implementation such as the syllabus, books, and learning facilities.

TEFLIN believes that the core competence and basic competence are very fundamental as they force material development, teacher training, teaching-learning activities, and comprehensive evaluation to take place. Therefore, core competence and basic competence need to be translated into a language that is easily understood and broken down into indicators

for achieving the competences. Basic competence that characterizes the peculiarity of the English subject needs to be taken into account so that the principles of learning English for communication and a means to gain knowledge will not be sacrificed. A relatively short time approaching the implementation of the curriculum was considered by TEFLIN to be potential to bring about weaknesses here and there, both from the legal aspect of the document, its socialization, and probable difficulties in implementing it at school. In addition, the position of source books, syllabus, and language focus skills to be developed, national examination, vocational high school curriculum, and the status of English in the elementary school need to be clarified and socialized. It is suggested that the government conduct a more conceptual process of socialization regarding what teachers in the field should do by involving various related parties, including teacher education institutions and the relevant professional organizations.

EFL teaching in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon, due to the gigantic student population, the variety of socio-economic and socio-linguistic backgrounds of the students, and the insufficient availability of needed learning resources. The teaching-learning activity and the teacher's competence were each found in to be significantly correlated with the students' achievement, the teacher factor is still an important variable for better language classroom. And when we are talking about teachers and their qualification, teacher education institutions are at stake, especially when quality teaching is demanded, global challenges are immediate, and teaching substances need tuning to those immediate challenges.

Curriculum change entails policy modifications and assurances of teaching-learning practices at school in accordance with the design and goals as outlined in the curriculum. We are in a complex setting, and therefore we are concerned not only with shifts in language-in-education policy, but also with relativities of languages in the complex multilingual map of Indonesia, and with the question of where English sits in relation to educational policy and practice. The newly introduced curriculum requires more qualified English teachers, both in number and in quality, as teachers are confronted with the gigantic student population on the one hand and on the other hand tasked to teach the language that could improve not only the students' proficiency in the language but also their attitude in using the language.

What a teacher needs to do to respond to the current challenge is among others to switch from professional development commonly understood as "the more traditional approach to in-

service that teachers often experience” into professional learning which is “more about the learning that occurs through the process and how that learning is then able to be applied in our practice” (Loughran 2010, pp. 200-201). Thorough understanding of the principles and tenets of the new curriculum is vital, but it is equally important for teachers to focus wholeheartedly on their daily involvement in classroom activities.

Our core duty is to teach English. However, we are demanded to teach more beyond the language itself. From experience, we have seen that character building is certainly too important to be left to school alone. In-school and out-of-school activities should be blended well to effectively contribute to character development. In this respect, Tyler (1977) has the following to say “If the school is to make its most effective contribution to character education, it will need to keep closely in touch with the out-of-school experiences of its students in order to focus on the real ethical situations these children are confronting” (p. 13). He further adds that “it is crucially important for children to see firsthand a society that encourages and supports ethical values (p. 13).

Hence, character building is everyone’s responsibility. We, English teachers, are then expected to open up our eyes as we are challenged by relatively very little content in the curriculum but are tasked with a somewhat larger scope of goals to achieve, including inculcating good character in our students. Various teaching-learning strategies should be vigorously devised and appropriately implemented by the teacher in teaching English within the paradigm of managing the learning process as well as of assuring learning outcomes to gain—the former being as important as the latter. In the teaching-learning process, the students are expected to interact with other people. The success of our teaching is certainly not only determined by the quality of selected teaching materials but also by the flexible and interesting ways of presentation and teaching-learning setups. A well-balanced combination of material selection and presentation could contribute to the success of the teaching-learning activity as assessed through on-going existence in the classroom of meaningful, effective, appropriate, contextual, and motivating communication in its broadest sense, which in its turn will fruitfully result in expected learning outcomes. Only then can we teachers perform well beyond all expectations of the aspiring Indonesian people.

In addition to pedagogical competencies, in his professional career, it is just logical as well that an English teacher should take heed to improvement of his proficiency in the language

to teach as the teacher's "language proficiency is an important component that makes up a language teacher's professional competence. Higher proficiency teachers can be expected to be more adept at using the target language to deliver more effective lessons than those with lower proficiency" (Renandya, Hamied, & Nurkamto, 2018, p. 1).

To close this paper, I'd like to invite you to decipher a message from Bolitho (2013), who says that "A society gets the teachers it deserves and any school or other educational institution is only as good as its teachers. CPD is about making the best of it at all levels. But it all starts with you! Look after yourselves!"

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