

**CHALLENGE(S) ENCOUNTERED BY NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS
TO DEVELOP THEIR PROFESSIONALISM;
A Preliminary Research Report for Further Research in Lampung Province**

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Abstract: This paper presents preliminary analysis of challenges encountered by novice English teachers teaching in secondary schools in Lampung province. This study was a modified-TALIS survey targeted to novice English teachers to identify professional challenge(s) encountered by novice teacher working in regencies of Lampung province. Their responses were analyzed using non-inferential statistics. The result showed that English teachers in rural and urban area were isolated from source of information, support from school and other related parties, and experienced misperception on their needs to their classroom practice. However, their plan to be professional remained strong.

Keywords: *challenge(s), novice English teachers, isolation, support, self-directedness*

Introduction

The term “novice” has frequently been used in studies on beginning teachers but there is no clear-cut definition of *a novice teacher* in the literature (Cui, 2012). A novice could be anyone who is teaching something new for the first time or who has entered a new cultural context for the first time (Farrell, 2012). Regarding their working commencement in an educational institution, novice teachers can be someone who are less than five years of teaching experience (Kim & Roth, in Cui, 2012), or two years of teaching experience or less (Haynes in Cui, 2012) or within 3 years of completing their teacher education program (Farrell, 2012). For the purpose of this study, a novice teacher was defined as a teacher who has less than five years of teaching experience.

There are several conditions occurred when a novice started working. After receiving university education and starting their jobs, novice teachers suddenly have no further contact with their teacher educators, and they experience the same challenges as their more experienced colleagues on the very first day of school without much guidance from their new school (Farrell, 2012). In addition, the first-year teachers are dependent on both school and district structures that channeled opportunities for learning to teach language arts for the access to resources for teaching language arts, in large part. The other condition is the novice teachers’ concerns focus may be particularly and largely powered by districts (Grossman & Thompson, 2004). Moreover, the pedagogy of novice teachers is affected by the institutional constraints, school culture and beliefs of the existing teachers in the schools (Karatas & Karaman, 2013).

Thus, new English teachers need various forms of support as they need time of coping with the pressure of real teaching (Tsui, 2003), of facing an anxiety provoking experience that involves a balancing act between learning to teach and attempting to take on identity as a “real” teacher within an established school culture (Farrell, 2009). Novice teachers also need a range of knowledge like knowledge of English structure and language acquisition (Crandall, Stein&Nelson, 2006), teaching and assessment (Jones, 2002), knowledge about learners such as establishing good relationships with pupils (Jones, 2002), helping ELLs to develop oral and written proficiency in English, understanding learning style, and knowledge of the basic laws and regulations governing the education of ELLs (Crandall, Stein&Nelson, 2006). Knowledge about school and community is also expected like knowledge of cross-cultural communication (Crandall, Stein, & Nelson, 2006).

Regarding to classroom practice, novice English teachers face so many problems related to classroom management, student motivation, handling differences among students, grading student work and dealing with students’ parents as the most cited problems. In addition, beginning teachers struggle with problems pertaining to dealing with problems of individual students, heavy teaching load with little preparation time, planning of lessons and schooldays, effective use of different teaching methods, awareness of school policies and rules, determining learning level of students, and knowledge of subject matter. The remaining problems include; burden of clerical work, dealing with slow learners, dealing with students of different cultures and deprived backgrounds, effective use of textbooks and curriculum guides, lack of spare time, and large class size. (Senom, Zakaria, & Ahmad Shah, 2013).

Considering the needs for support and knowledge, the study tries to seek the answers of what challenges novice English teachers encounter from school structure and what professional efforts novice English teachers perform to anticipate the challenges.

Methods

Instrument

The study used cross-sectional closed questionnaire modified from *Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS)* questionnaire (OECD, 2008) to collect relevant information from teachers self-report (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The questionnaire consisted of three sections; Section A consisted of eight questions related to school location, section B consisted of eight questions about personal and working responsibilities information; and section C exploring teachers' experience and plan to professional development activities or programs.

Participants

Novice English teachers participate as respondents in this study based on purposive sampling method (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The teacher respondents are selected with criteria; 1) have teaching experience maximum 5 years, 2) not more than 30 years old, 3) teach English as Foreign Language in Junior Secondary School in Lampung Province, and 4) willing to participate. There were 115 teachers who met criteria 1, 2, and 3. From this number, the researcher selected 36 respondents who willing to participate (requirement number 4). The responses of the questionnaires are processed and categorized into three based on the study questions. They are analyzed using non-inferential statistics calculation.

Findings

The result of the questionnaire is presented into three categories; information about school contexts at the workplace of the participants, information about individuals on their professional and personal information, and the information about professional development activities the teachers had involved or the activities they plan or want to participate immediately.

School Context

Schools in rural areas are located remotely and are distant from district central town. Each school provides various media of information, but all of them only provide postal communication some are linked through telephone access, and only a few provide internet connection. The distance to district central town makes the school staffs difficult to access public source of information available in town.

On the other hand, schools in cities provide all access to public information through postal, phone and internet media. They do not have difficulties in finding relevant information for their work. The number of English teachers in each school is ranging from 1 up to 18 teachers. On average, the schools employ 2-5 teachers.

Individual Professional Lives

Individual information consists of personal information like gender, age, work experience, work status, and workload. Teacher's gender is divided into 13 percent male teachers and 87 percent female ones. The age is divided into three age group; 6,5 percent under 25 years old, 80,5 percent between 25 and 30 years old, and 13 percent above 30 years old. The work experience is also divided into three categories; experiencing the first year of teaching 3 percent, those who are in the second or the third year 20 percent, and between three and five year teaching experience as much as 77 percent.

The participants are categorized into two types of employee, permanent employee and non-permanent employee. The permanent employees work for local government while the non-permanent employees work for the private parties which own the schools. 72 percent of the participants work permanently as local government employees and 95 percent of this percentage are assigned in districts in rural area. Another 28 percent work as non-permanent employees for private institution. Almost all of them work in cities. In spite of different working status, these two groups share the same obligation to work five or six days a week with classroom hours ranging from eight up to twenty five.

Professional Development Activities

From the questionnaires it is found that 70 percent of novice English teachers had involved in numerous professional development activities. Their participation is not voluntary as their school selected and enrolled them in the activities. From this 70 percent, only eight percent have additional activities from their individual initiative to participate in professional development activities. School decision to involve the novices into professional development activities afforded teachers to gain extra incentives. Fifty percent of participating novice English teachers gained incentives while the other fifty receive no incentives.

Among many forms of activity, these novice teachers mostly participated in workshops, seminar and professional network. They participated for a single day activities or for a longer duration maximum 11 days. 99 percent teachers had only single opportunity to participate in professional development activities in which 28 percent of these teachers had opportunity to participate professional development at school.

Apart from the professional development activities, these teachers were also asked about relevant activities which support their professional development. For instance, they are questioned whether they were ever engaged in such collaborative activity as discussion with colleagues, school meeting on designing or developing the curriculum, school vision and mission, and collaborating with peers to have discussion about students or to plan joint activities inter classes and grades. Their answers for these types of activities are similar. They never do such activities. Yet, they frequently exchanged materials for the lesson, shared media for instructional process, and applying evaluation standard.

Most teachers (93 percent) plan to participate in professional development activities. The favorite form is workshop and joining professional organization (MGMP and TEFLIN). On the second level preference, the respondents chose to enroll in graduate / post graduate programs and attending seminars. Other form of professional development; group discussion, observing other teachers' classes, lesson study, and mentoring are on the bottom of the choice. The frequency of the programs recommended by the teachers is ranging from biweekly, once in a semester, and annually at school or off-school. The surprising response was 7 percent teachers stated that they did not plan to participate in any professional development activities.

In fact, they have complicated situations which diverted their focus from being professional. They reported challenges they confronted in their profession. The most frequent challenge is managing time among teaching, responsibilities outside the classroom, and the schedule of professional development. As a matter of fact, less than 30 percent participants had actual time for professional development activities. The second situation that challenges these teachers is that they cannot fulfill the criteria for enlisting in particular program as they are still novices. The next challenge is the "episodic" program unsynchronized to their classroom needs. If there is any program they may join, they may neither get approval from their principal nor financial support. Not less challenging is the barrier from family concern. They prefer taking care of their family instead of leaving them to participate in an out-of town activity.

The last but not the least, novice English teachers need different foci on professional development. The themes offered in the questionnaire consist of pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, knowledge about learners, and contextual knowledge. Teachers from all districts demanded all types of knowledge. However, only respondents from Bandarlampung city did not mention their need towards content knowledge.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicated that the challenges encountered by novice English teachers were categorized into two broad challenges. The first one was isolation and the second one was classroom practice misperception. The isolation could be elaborated into isolation of their access to sources of knowledge and information and isolation from their community. Findings signified that schools provide minimum sources to obtain new knowledge and do not utilize its members to share knowledge to each other.

On one side, schools in rural areas scarcely update new information through internet websites. This may slow the novice English teachers' development down because they did not know the newest information and were not well informed about new strategies and tips for teaching. On the other side, schools in the cities were providing more complete media for accessing new information. Yet, novice teachers' workloads were amounting; prevented them to have time just to update information.

Despite the lack of the media, school as a community still holds a valuable source of knowledge; its members; it consists of principal, vice principals, senior teachers, students, students' parents and administrative staffs. School members, together, can develop a positive atmosphere of knowledge sharing. They may invite all members including the novice teachers in regular meeting in which novice teachers may develop their knowledge and acquire advice, guidance, or suggestion to overcome their challenges. Unfortunately, these valuable sources have not been explored yet as novice teachers are rarely involved in any form of collaboration. They are rarely invited to participate in designing curriculum or to observe their seniors' teaching practices. School structure and local education board never had collaboration to share policies, knowledge, or skills with teachers.

To conclude, both types of isolation led novices into **lack of support from school as a structure and as a community of practice.**

The second challenge rose from classroom practice. Confronting with many different happenings in their classes, novice English teachers need different foci on professional development. When they were asked which focus to their first prior, they demanded all types of knowledge like pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, knowledge about learners, and contextual knowledge. No one claim which focus they have to solve in the first place. **This had caused confusion or misperception on how to handle classroom practice.**

Professional Efforts to Encounter the Challenges

Professional efforts performed by novice English teachers are initiated from their conscious awareness to develop their professional lives. In other words, these efforts take place in the intention or internal motivation of the novices. Literatures on professional development and adult learning indicate that development process in adult lies on its self-directedness.

With ninety three percent novices planned their professional development activities for the next eighteen months (three semesters), this showed an initiative from the teachers to fight for their professional status. The individual plan was regarded as individual effort to overcome those challenges.

However, the individual effort would be in vain without stronger support from their community. Paralleled with the novices' choices, school and other related parties have to do immediate upkeep. Further discussion with subject teacher organization (MGMP) or Teachers of English in Indonesia (TEFLIN) Board has to be piloted. Collaboration with universities may produce fruitful opportunities to sustainable dialogues. Besides, a simple routine dialogue schedule among teachers in the school is absolutely the best, cheapest, and simplest policy yet will profit for everyone in the school, especially students.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

The study signifies that novice English teachers are confronting demanding challenges during their early years of the career. Isolated from knowledge and updated information weakened their relationship to their profession. Being isolated from their colleagues and other member of school community added one step away from their profession. The problems they encountered in their classes confused them on what, which, and how problems are overcome. They have to negotiate serious challenges with inadequate support from their environments. Their resources are any available media of information at school, advantages from their professional status, and opportunities to participate in professional development programs. More important resource is their own motivation to drive them closer to professional selves.

Suggestions

The study is only a tiny step toward the open-wide topic, i.e. teacher education in their profession. The study absolutely recommends further and deeper feasible research for English teachers in Indonesian context. Practical topics which can be derived from this research are elaboration on each type of challenge and solutions, alternative feasible supports for novices, or internal individual development of novice's professional self. Each proposal may offer more feasible topics and different frameworks and research designs can be applied to further observation.

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