Professional Development Programs for Teachers of English

Singgih Widodo

Abstract: Well-planned programs based on the needs for professional development of teachers are strongly needed to enhance the teaching-staff improvement.The impact of teacher improvement will effect the students' learning and school achievement. This paper aims at raising awareness of English teachers to upgrade themselves as autonomous learners as well as researchers and broaden their horizon for stepping the ladder-career of their profession. For that purpose, a survey as reported here aimed to identify the needs of individual English teachers and the preferred programs for professional development. The findings indicated that the 36 teachers involved needed teacher training, teacher association, teacher materials, continuing education, and interschool visit and that teacher training was the most well known program among teachers.

Keywords: professional development, needs, well-planned programs, career-plans.

Professional development programs are plans which are carried out to improve job-related knowledge, skills and attitudes of (in this case) English teachers by conducting activities to enhance their teaching improvement. These programs are essential due to reasons, such as these: they may promote teacher professional development, they may improve the individual teacher teaching performance, they may also broaden the

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horizon on learning and teaching. The programs may also become 'tools' to enhance teachers' teaching knowledge and skills.

A wide range of professional development programs may broaden awareness and become tools for learning. The programs also offer a number of learning opportunities to help English teachers further their career and professional development. In addition, they may support teacher initiatives as well as school initiatives. Customized and in-service programs might be adapted to teachers' professional development needs. As a matter of fact, people learn most energetically when they have options which match their needs, their expectations, their interests/preferences, and their styles. Moreover, professional development programs are likely to have greater impact on practice if they are closely linked to school initiatives to improve practice and these initiatives could promote the professionalization of teaching to engage more teachers in serious professional development activities (Corcoran, 1995).

This study was aimed at inspiring, especially, senior high-school English teachers with fruitful ideas on programs for their own professional development. The programs offered for professional development may be varied in terms of familiarity. Some programs are well-known and some others may be less-known or even unknown. Furthermore, it is essential to determine the needs of the individualized teachers so that professional development programs could be effective. Therefore, in order to make professional development programs successful, there are at least three things that need to be considered (Wilde, 1996). They should be well-planned, meet the needs of the teachers and utilize appropriate assessment system. For that purpose, a survey is needed to reveal the needs of individualized English teachers and the known or less-known programs for teacher professional development. Examples of programs for professional development might be in the forms of teacher-training, continuing-education, interschool-visit, teacher-network, teacher-portfolio and action research. These known or less-known programs for professional development of English teachers will be described in the following.

First, teacher-training programs are well-known in the forms of ELT seminars or workshops. On the other hand, there are teacher-training programs that may be less-known by schools or teachers such as

collaborative teacher-training program, teacher-exchange program and teacher-collaborative project. Second, some schools may also plan and offer continuing-education/study to their teachers in the forms of further study or short courses. Third, some highschool teachers could also plan to visit other high-schools to compare, learn, and reflect on some points that can be applied in their schools. In order to make use of the interschool-visit effectively, schools should also make plans in advance such as pre-planning program (preparation plan), ongoing planning program (i.e., how to use instruments for observation or interview, etc.) and follow-up planning program (i.e., how to make use of the gained information or data for school and teacher development).

Fourth, teacher-network is a professional community of teachers working together to improve students' achievement (Richards, et al, 1992: 245). Teacher network could also be in the forms of English Teacher Association Meetings which may be held monthly or bi-monthly. This is an English teacher meeting to discuss and do activities relating to their profession, for examples, lesson plans, evaluation, and other important issues. English teachers can network with other English teachers by joining ELT organizations, reading ELT journals, writing/exchanging electronic pen-pals, and giving online-mentoring for English teachers. Nowadays, more and more teaching organizations are joining the online community everyday for teacher development (Teeler, 2000:17) and many professional journals and newsletters offer selections from the latest issue over the web. Teachers might use online teaching publications (Teeler, 2000:19). Teacher-network may promote collaborations between teachers (Corcoran, 1995).

Fifth, teacher- portfolio is selective collection of samples of work that a teacher has done both in the classroom and elsewhere in order to display the teacher's talents, knowledge and skills in teaching. Teachers could use teacher portfolio as an education tool for their professional development, which is primarily used in two ways. First, a portfolio is used as a means of authentic assessment in evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher for employment decisions. Second, a teacher portfolio is also used to provide feedback to teachers so that they may improve their teaching and level of professionalism (Doolittle, 1994). In order to gain more objective data of teacher portfolio, teachers could use a means of triangulation by using several instruments, for example, teacher self-evaluation, student feedback, peer observation, teacher diary and teacher

reflection. Teacher self-evaluation is used as a tool for evaluating a teacher's performance after teaching sessions in the classroom.

Sixth, action research could be used as an education tool for teacher professional development. In teacher education, action research is teacher-initiated classroom research which seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning and to bring about improvements in classroom practices (Richards, et al, 1997). A sample online classroom action research (in the form of video show) could be found in the following website: http://www.teachnet.org/media/index.htm.

In addition, the programs for professional development can vary from one school to others. The success of these programs does not only depend on the vision, mission, objectives, and strategic plans of a school, but also the awareness, goodwill, effort and creativity of a teacher.

METHOD

The main aim of this preliminary study was to investigate professional development programs offered by schools and taken by teachers. For this purpose, the writer intended to conduct a survey concerning professional development programs for English teachers. By conducting a survey on professional development programs, the writer wanted to classify those programs into some clusters, for example, programs needed by teachers and offered by their schools and programs needed by teachers but not offered by their schools.

There are thirty-six English teachers from twelve senior high-schools (*SMU*s) in Surabaya participated in this survey. The respondents consised of female teachers (67%) and male teachers (33%). Most of these respondents were S1 graduates (86%) and others were BA graduates (6%) and S2 graduates (8%). The survey was conducted between July and August 2002. The survey questionnaires were given to all English teachers of the twelve senior high-schools in Surabaya via their school-principals. In addition, the writer also reconfirmed some selected respondents' responses to the questionnaires via phone-calls as a means of triangulation.

In this survey, the writer collected some data about the professional development programs taken by the respondents (*SMU* English teachers) within one academic year (July 2001 to July 2002), the respondents' needs for professional development and the professional programs offered by the schools. These data were collected by using closed and open ended questions. The writer presented the survey results

in some sentences with the percentage of each item and provided the ranks of each program. The survey results were then discussed in relation to the relevant concepts in order to see the familiarity of the professional development programs based on the needs of the English teachers and their schools.

RESULTS

When asked about the professional development programs taken within one academic year (July 2001 to July 2002), the respondents replied that the professional development programs taken within one academic year were Teacher Association Meeting (81%), ELT seminars (78%), self-evaluation (72%), ELT workshops (69%). As seen in Figure 1 below, the four highest ranks of the professional development programs taken by the respondents were Teacher Association Meetings (81 %), ELT seminars (78%), self-evaluation (72%) and ELT workshops (69%). These programs would seem well-known by the participants of the survey. And the five lowest ranks of the professional development program taken by the participants were Teacher-Network through internet, interschool-visit, students' feedback, peer-observation and teaching-reflection. These programs would seem less-known by the respondents of the survey.

Figure 1 Professional Development Programs Taken by Respondents (n=36) within One Year (July 2001 to June 2002)
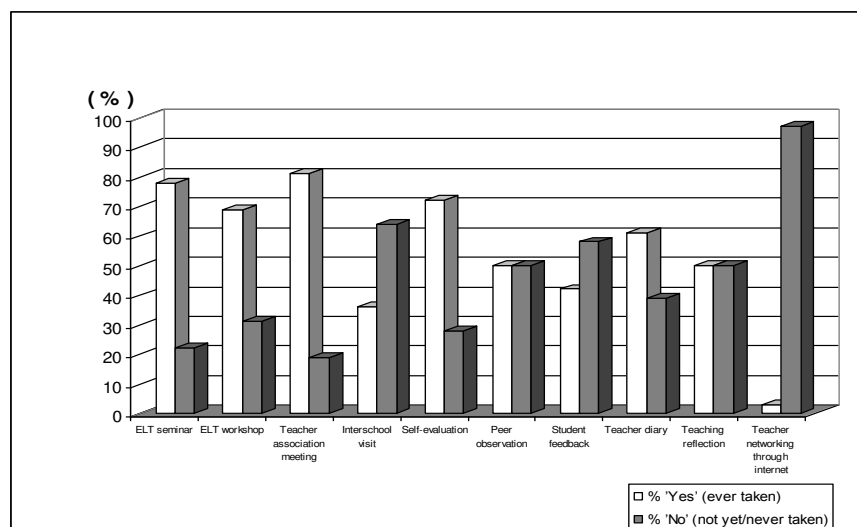
When asked about teachers' needs for professional development programs, the respondents replied that their needs for professional development were teacher-training (67%), teacher-association (25%), teacher materials/resources (19%), continuing education (6%), and interschool-visit (6%). When asked about the professional development programs offered by schools, the respondents replied that the professional development programs offered by schools were teacher training (28%), teacher-association (25%), interschool-visit (11%) and continuing education (0%). As seen in Figure 2, the ranks of the teachers' needs for professional development were teacher-training (67%), teacher association (25%), and teaching-materials/resources (19%), continuing-education (6%), and interschool-visit (6%).

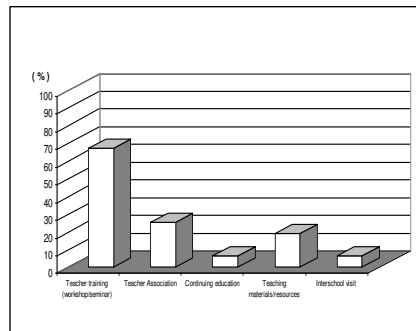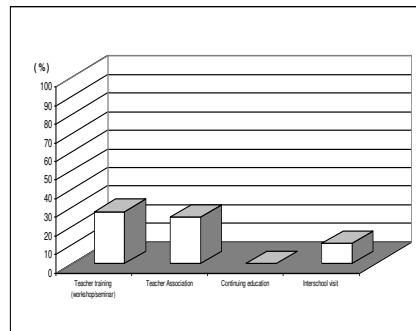**Figure 2 The Teachers' Needs for Professional Developmen**t **Programs** (n=36)

Figure 2 The Teachers' Needs for Professional Development Programs (n=36)

As seen in Figure 3, the senior high-school english teachers as participants of the survey reported that their schools offered them to take programs for professional development. The ranks of the programs offered by the schools were teacher-training (28%), interschool-visit (11%) and teacher association (25%). As seen in figure 2 and figure 3, teacher-training is a well-known program for professional development, offered by the schools (28%) but needed by most English teachers (67%). The schools also offered interschool-visit program (11%), but it was needed by few teachers (6%). Teacher association which was needed by the teachers (25%) was also offered by the schools (25%). There was no

school offering continuing-education program such as master or doctoral programs (further study), but this program was needed by some English teachers (6%). Teaching materials/ resources needed by some English teachers (19%) were not offered by the schools.

DISCUSSION

Teacher training program is the first program offered by the schools (28%) and also needed by the most English teachers (67%). This means teacher training might be considered as the well-known program for professional development. Further, the well-known teacher training programs are usually ELT seminars or workshops. There are also teacher-training programs that may be less-known by the schools or the teachers such as collaboration between two or more schools or teachers to conduct teacher training program or project(s) together for professional development. Furthermore, these teachers may follow ELT seminars or workshops when the need them, get the information about them, or have the opportunity to take part in them. Alternatively, these teachers join the seminars or workshopd when assigned or offered by their principals. In other words, there may be some factors influencing the teachers' decisions to follow these trainings, such as the teachers' needs to upgrade themselves, the information/opportunities given by the school, the advantages of taking teacher-training for professional development, and other influencing factors. This in-service teacher training would be effective if the programs/activities of the teacher training are in line with the needs of the teacher trainees. Basically, the *SMU* English teachers needed ELT skills, such as speaking (74%), writing (73%), listening (70%), and reading (68%). They also needed several kinds of training activities, such as workshops (69%), seminars (39%), and microteaching (37%) (Limantoro, 2004: 120).

The schools offered interschool-visit program (11%), but approximately half of it was needed by their teachers (6%). This means there is a mismatch between the school-plan and the individual teachers' plan due to some factors, such as needs/expectations, perceptions on the advantages of the program, and other factors. The schools usually choose the best or good schools to visit in order to learn some components from them or make a comparative study. In order to make use of the interschool-visit effectively, schools should also make plans in advance such as pre-planning program (preparation plan), ongoing planning program (i.e. how to use instruments for observation or interview, etc.)

and follow-up planning program (i.e. how to make use of the gained information or data for school and teacher development).

Teacher Association which was needed by the teachers (25%) or one-fourth of the respondents, was in line with the same program offered by the schools (25%). This means that all the teachers would follow the teacher association program offered by the school. Teachers who are members of the teacher association may have regular meetings to discuss and work together on certain matters relating to their teaching. These teacher networks might promote collaborations between teachers as well as schools. Teacher network is a professional community in which teachers' expertise and experience are respected and utilized to improve their teaching practice together (Corcoran, 1995).

Another finding is that there was no school offering continuing education program (further study) but this program was needed by some English teachers of the survey (6%). This means there is already a need of some teachers to continue their master or doctoral study for their professional development but their schools have not had such a plan yet. Some teachers may also take degree training programs by themselves or some others may take non-degree training programs. Some teachers might take short courses relating to their profession. The main aim of this program is to upgrade teachers in order to improve their knowledge and skills of the subject matter.

Only few English teachers in this survey did teacher-networking through internet (3%). This means that the majority of them did not do teacher–networking through internet, but they did teacher association meetings (81%). Besides networking, teachers could utilize internet for accessing teaching materials and activities for use in the classroom. Therefore, the use of information communication technology, such as internet and computer, may help teachers enhance their professional development.

Moreover, the schools as well as their teachers may plan the professional development programs if they ensure the advantages of professional development programs for them, for example, teachers who are actively involved in the planning of professional growth would become autonomous and self-regulated learners as well as researchers by conducting the programs.They could also step their own ladder-career on their profession, for example, they are promoted to become key or master teachers, mentors or supervisors, vice-principals or principals, or other positions if they meet certain criteria or standards.

In short, there are at least three factors that may affect the successful professional development programs for English teachers. First, as schools may have their own career plans, their plans/programs for professional development should be in line with the needs of their teachers. Second, the programs for professional development for teachers should be long-term and well-planned. This means that the programs are continuous processes and need a lot of teaching practices and reflection to enhance teachers' professional growth. The process of teachers' professional growth could be seen in the performance indicators as planned to achieve the school target in three stages: baseline, mid point and final point. Third, the criteria for assessment and evaluation should be clearly set up to evaluate the professional development programs.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Although it could not perfectly describe all the professional development programs in details, the study provides some fruitful ideas for both senior high-school English teachers and their school management to be aware of the benefits of making their best programs for teacher professional development. The programs for professional development should be well-planned (usually long-term), needs-based and objectively evaluated. The programs offered for professional development may vary in terms of familiarity. Some programs such as ELT workshops/seminars and teacher association meetings are somewhat well-known and, on the other hand, some other programs such as teacher-network through internet, interschool-visit, students feedback, peer-observation, and teaching-reflection may be less-known. Here, English teachers can network with other English teachers by joining ELT-organizations, reading ELT-journals/publications, finding e-pals, collaborative projects/ activities and online-mentoring. English teachers could also use teacher portfolio as a means of authentic assessment in evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher for employment decisions or ladder-career promotion and as feedback for teachers so that they may improve their teaching and level of professionalism. Another education tool for teacher professional development is by conducting classroom action research. All these programs above will help English teachers become active, autonomous and self-regulated learners as well as researchers and more aware of the values and benefits of professional programs for themselves. In addition, the professional development programs for English teachers could be successful if there is a match between the individual-teacher's

career plans and the institutional (school) ones to enhance the school improvement. Besides, each professional development effort should also be accompanied by a well-designed evaluation plan for determining its effectiveness.

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