

THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHING SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the complexities of a teacher training course designed by the Ministry of Education and Culture as a program to improve the teaching skills of teachers. A teacher training program, called Teaching Competency Improvement Program, was conducted as a part of continuing professional development for Indonesian teachers. This training program involved teachers as the facilitators who had attended a one-week training of trainers (ToT) prior to their duties as facilitators. Only those who passed the post test in the ToT were entitled to act as training facilitators. Each facilitator facilitated ten to twenty teacher colleagues in their respective zones following IN1-IN2-ON1-IN3-ON2-IN4-ON3-IN5 pattern for duration of 82 contact hours. This study involved 89 facilitators as respondents to an online survey. Data was gathered and analyzed using qualitative descriptive method. The finding of the study includes problems in the technological tools used in the training program, the time management, the content of the training, coordination problem among parties, and the effectiveness of the training program.

Keywords: blended learning environment, HOTS, professional development

Introduction

In-service training for Indonesian teachers has undergone several changes in previous years. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia through the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel annually conduct teacher training program to improve the quality of teaching and learning process in the classroom. The training programs are conducted in all provinces and provided for teachers from all levels of education, from primary schools to secondary high schools, and to various teachers of subject matters such as Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language), English, and class teachers at primary schools. Previous training programs include Guru Pembelajar (Teachers as Lifelong Learners) in 2016 and 2017, Pengembangan Keprofesian Berkelanjutan (Continuing Professional Development) in 2018, and Peningkatan Kompetensi Pembelajaran (Teaching Competency Improvement) in 2019. This study reviews the latest training program, more specifically the training program for teachers of English, and

investigates the complexities of the program from the perspectives of teachers who played their roles as facilitators in the training program.

To improve the quality of learning process which will lead to the improvement in students' quality, the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel under the Ministry of Education and Culture designed a teacher training program called Teaching Competency Improvement Program. The rationale for this program was the poor performance of students in examinations: the national examination by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and international examinations of Program for International Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019b). In addition to the poor performance of students, the low scores of teachers in a Teacher Competency Test conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture was another rationale. This teacher competency improvement program is claimed as a form of continuing professional development for Indonesian teachers. The program was designed and implemented in different places according to geographical approach, which is popularly known as zonation system. The purposes of zonation system were to provide equal opportunity for all teachers in Indonesia to access quality learning; to increase efficiency and effectiveness of teaching competency improvement program; to picture teachers' competencies and teaching performances, and to provide insights to school principals and supervisors in doing academic supervision to teachers. In the zonation system, teachers of same subject or study program in one particular area were gathered together in one designated school as a learning center to participate in the program. Around ten to twenty teachers were learning together and led by one facilitator, who is also a teacher from the same zone. Facilitators were selected based on their scores in teacher competency test and had been trained to be facilitators for one week in a training of trainers (ToT) program. As a teacher trainer, my role was a facilitator in the ToT.

The final goal of the teacher competency improvement program was to increase students' competencies through the improvement of teachers' competencies in planning, implementing, and evaluating teaching and learning process (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019a). The learning interaction in the program was scheduled 82 contact hours within five consecutive weeks, and carried out with an IN1-IN2-ON1-IN3-ON2-IN4-ON3-IN5 pattern. IN sessions mean that the learning process was carried out face-to-face facilitated by the facilitator at the designated school. ON sessions mean that the participants learn by themselves at their own school such as doing some assignment, designing a lesson plan, and put the knowledge they gained into teaching practice. A learning management system (LMS) was created for online learning interaction. There was no face-to-face interaction between facilitator and the training participant during the ON sessions. Control and supervision during the ON sessions was done by the school principal or supervisor. The reason for designing such program was to avoid teachers from leaving their teaching job. Since the ON sessions were allocated during working days, it was assumed that teacher participants spent two contact hours per day for independent learning and

teaching practice. The IN1-IN2-ON1-IN3-ON2-IN4-ON3-IN5 pattern is shown in the chart below.

Week	Training Schedule						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1						IN-1	
2						IN-2	
3			ON-1	-		IN-3	

4			ON-2	-		IN-4	

5			ON-3	-		IN-5	

The content learned in the program consisted of two main subjects: pedagogical knowledge and professional knowledge. The pedagogical knowledge includes issues about teaching and assessment which stimulate students' higher order thinking skills. The professional knowledge means the content as listed in the curriculum and syllabus. The selected content was to be taught to their students during the teaching practice in the ON sessions. In so doing, two out of four teacher competencies (professional competency, pedagogical competency, personal competency, and social competency) (Kemdiknas, 2007) are enhanced through the training program. Additional learning content in the training program includes students' character building and literacy activities/programs to make it consistent with the policy from the Ministry of Education on three components of 21st century skills (character, literacy, and competency) (Budhiman, 2017; Redhana, 2019), and introduction to the learning management system (LMS) for the online learning interaction. By the end of the training program, teacher participants sat a post test to measure their learning achievement, which include pedagogical and professional knowledge content. The passing grade to pass the test was 70.

Literature Review

The more complex skills students need to learn has led to changes in the role and functioning of schools, and to what is expected of teachers as well. In Indonesia, teachers are asked to facilitate students' meaningful learning, to engage students more actively in learning process, to stimulate students to think critically and creatively and to solve problems, to encourage collaboration and communication among students, to make more effective use of information and communication technology tools, and to nurture attitude and character (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019c). To enable teachers to cope with all the demands, continuing professional development of teachers is required. Teacher professional development is on-going, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support to enhance the teaching environment in the classroom (Teacher.org, 2020). Effective professional development is defined as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvement in student learning outcomes" (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2017). A teacher professional development course is perceived to be effective when, by the end of the training course, teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills are enhanced, and teachers get insights to be more creative in their teaching practices (Kabilan, 2019). In designing an in-service teacher training course, it is very important to think issues like what types of knowledge teachers need and how teachers learn (Kelcey et al., 2017). Therefore, the issues of what Indonesian teachers actually need to know and how they construct their knowledge have to underlie the design of Indonesian teacher professional development programs. Then, the duration of the teacher training program, the intensity, the strategy of delivery will be designed based on those two aspects (Kennedy, 2016).

Currently, what Indonesian teachers need to know is what higher order thinking skills are and how to develop students' higher order thinking skills. Critical thinking has been seen as one of the most wanted skills in workplaces (Gray, 2016), students, therefore, need to be exposed to critical thinking and learning skills in order to be able to compete in workplaces. The Ministry of Education and Culture has put an emphasis on developing students' critical thinking skills as a priority along with character and literacies. Teachers have been exposed to HOTS-oriented teaching approaches in various training courses (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019c) including in dissemination of Curriculum 2013. Teaching approaches are oriented to develop students' higher order thinking skills, which include transfer of knowledge, critical thinking, and problem solving. This policy seems to be an extreme paradigm shift as teachers were used to teach to fit into exam-oriented system. Studies show that teachers are not prepared with the new teaching approach which emphasizes on critical thinking skills (Chun & Abdullah, 2019; Ramadhana et al., 2018; Widana et al., 2019). Learning approaches that are claimed to be effective to stimulate students' higher order thinking skills include project-based learning and problem-based learning approaches (Jailani et al., 2017; Mustika et al., 2019; Setiawan & Bharati, 2018).

Method

A qualitative descriptive study is used to depict a detailed phenomenon to answer the "how" and "who" questions (Sobandi, 2016). This study describes the complexity of the training program, which includes how teachers involved as facilitators in the program perceive the program, and what aspects need to be maintained and to be improved for future professional development. An online survey/questionnaire was developed using Google form as in http://gg.gg/survey_pkp2019_ari to gather information from potential respondents. The questionnaire consists of three main parts: 30 questions using Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree; 4 short answer questions to obtain personal information such as name (optional), school (optional), education background, and teaching experience in years, 2 essay questions - one to ask opinion about issues related to the training program and the other one about future program for teacher professional development. Even though respondents wrote their names and schools where they teach, their

identities are kept confidential. The link of the online survey was distributed to potential respondents through WhatsApp groups, and was left open for ten days. A total number of 89 teachers responded via the link. Data analysis was done using inductive analysis. Each response was closely investigated and then grouped into sub themes and bigger themes. Irrelevant comments were excluded. Data was then interpreted and described.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are classified and discussed into themes.

Master Teachers as Training Facilitators

The respondents to the questionnaire are 89 teachers who played roles as facilitators of the training program. They are teachers of English from junior high schools (SMP) and senior high schools (SMA/SMK) with teaching experience from five to twenty-seven years. They are all holders of at least bachelor degree in English Education from different universities. 92.1% respondents mentioned that their teaching experiences and English language proficiency contributed to their self-efficacy and confidence to act as facilitators. 96.6% respondents claimed that they had done their job as facilitators well.

As mentioned earlier, they were trained to be facilitators for one week and had passed the post test. However, some respondents mentioned that the one week training with the heavy load of the content to learn was not sufficient. Not only to master the training content, in practice they were also demanded to learn and to understand the mechanism of the implementation of the training, including training participant recruitment which was supposed to be the job of the committee – local office of education. They facilitated teachers' learning in their own zones. The followings are their perspectives on the teacher training program.

Online Component

Most unsatisfactory comments are related to the online component of the teacher training program. The learning management system (LMS) which was designed for online learning interaction was not easily accessed. Teacher participants and the facilitator could not make online learning interaction. Consequently, the LMS was used mostly for submitting participants' assignment. In some places, the participants could not submit their assignments online, but handed the softcopy of the assignment in person to the facilitator. Other problems in the online component include limited access to internet and participants' low computer skills. A discussion forum in the LMS became useless because it was not used for learning interaction. Instead of using the LMS, WhatsApp was created and used for online discussion between participants and facilitator and among participants. WhatsApp is believed as having advantages over other technological tools employed for learning purposes, such as low cost, simplicity, accessibility, efficiency, and natural language. Facilitator's availability and the principle of learning anytime anywhere were claimed as two top advantages (Gon & Rawekar, 2017). Synchronous and asynchronous interaction on WhatsApp is also seen more engaging and has the potential to support learning collaboration in

a blended learning environment (Mahapatra et al., 2016). Therefore, it is suggested that the Ministry of Education and Culture needs to consider combining WhatsApp with the LMS for future teacher training program.

Time Management

The implementation time of the teacher training program varied from one zone to another, depending on the policy of the local office of education. At the initial design, the training program was supposed to be running around September to October, during teaching and learning process within a semester. In fact, mostly the teacher training program was implemented by the end of a semester, and it was perceived to be annoying. End of a semester is a busy time for teachers, both for teacher participants and facilitators. It was time for semester test, scoring students' work, and reporting the test result. Beginning or mid-term is perceived more appropriate for teachers to attend the training course. Some teachers also commented that the face-to-face tutorials (IN program) conducted on Saturdays and Sundays were annoying personal and family time. Respondents claimed that mostly teachers have one day free from teaching during weekdays. That one day should have been managed in one zone and allocated for the face-to-face meeting of the program. The duration of the training was perceived to be sufficient.

Coordination among relevant institutions

The implementation of the teacher training program involved several parties, such as the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel, local offices of education at provincial and district levels, schools, teachers as training facilitators and as training participants. Therefore well-managed coordination among those parties are very essential. The study finds that coordination between facilitators and local office of education has been good to some extent. However, around 15% facilitators complained that communication with local office was not running well. They complained that local office did not know much about technical and mechanism problems of the training program. Recruiting training participants and arranging schedule were the most problematic things. They suggested that there is a need to have the same understanding on the teacher training program between the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel and the local office of education. In addition, respondents also suggest that teacher forums at each zone, which is known as *Musyawah Guru Mata Pelajaran* (MGMP) in Bahasa Indonesia, needs to be involved to help the committee in recruiting participants. In some regions, MGMP has been running well, and they know the members quite well. It implies that they could suggest who should attend the training and who the right person to be the facilitator in their zones is.

Training participants

93.2% respondents reported that their training participants were enthusiastic to participate in the teacher training program. This indicates the willingness of teachers to improve their teaching competency, and that opportunity to attend a teacher training course was very rare. Teachers seemed to be aware the

importance of in-service training as it contributes toward an individual being more competent and satisfied in their roles as teachers. It also improves teachers' efficiency, ability, knowledge and motivation in their professional work because through in-service training, teachers acquire new understanding and instructional skills (Omar, 2014). However, some facilitators reported a different case in their zones. Teachers who were invited to participate in the training program did not show up, and some others withdrew from the training program for various reasons, such as lack of ICT skills and time constraints. Lack of computer skills and the large number of assignments from the training program were some factors that drove participants to withdraw. Facilitators recommended that senior teachers who were about to be retired should not be invited to the training program. Priorities should be given to junior teachers who are more motivated and more eager to learn. 87 out of 89 respondents also reported the total number of their participants and the number of participants who passed the post test. A total number of 1.394 out of 1.532 participants (90,99%) from 87 classes passed the post test. Respondents suggest that those who failed the test were given one more opportunity to sit the test. However, this expectation was not possible to do. Instead of retaking the test, the teachers should attend another training program in the future. Another administration program was that some retired teachers were reported to be invited to the training program. Consequently, some seats in the training courses were empty. This indicates that the data at the local office of education was not updated.

Content

Consistent with a finding in a study (Lestari, 2017), teacher participants claimed that the HOTS-oriented teaching strategy was interesting and important material, but in practice they still do not know how to develop students' higher order thinking skills. Ironically, time allocated to discuss this topic in the training program was very limited. A deeper investigation and discussion, and examples of HOTS-oriented teaching practices are very much required. Respondents mentioned that teachers need more examples of teaching approaches which are more applicable in the classroom. To complement the HOTS-oriented teaching strategy, HOTS-oriented assessment is also very much needed to enable teachers to construct tests. The tests should require students to demonstrate their higher order thinking skills such as to analyze, to synthesize, to argue, to deep understand, to apply, to evaluate, and to create (Watson, 2019). Respondents suggest having more time in practicing to construct such HOTS-oriented tests. This is consistent with study's findings in an Indonesian teachers context that teachers' knowledge in stimulating and developing students' higher order thinking skills and to assess it through test construction is still low and need to be improved (Ramadhana et al., 2018; Retnawati et al., 2018). However, to accommodate more time in one particular subject in a short period of a training course might not be possible. A special workshop in one particular subject might be an option to accommodate teachers' need. Widana et al (2019) claim that work motivation and creativity play important roles to help teachers construct HOTS-

oriented tests. These two components need to be considered in a teacher training program.

In addition to teaching and assessment materials, content about English subject (lesson unit) in the teacher training program was also commented by respondents. The content was selected from school curriculum and was not timely appropriate when it comes to teaching practice in the classroom. For example, the content to be discussed and to be practiced according to the training program was about procedure text. However, when it is time for training participants to practice it in the classroom, it is not appropriate with school's schedule. Therefore, respondents suggest that training participants are given authority to choose a topic for teaching practice in the classroom.

The effectiveness

Omar (2014, p. 4) states that "the effectiveness of a teacher training program is very much related to the awareness of teachers for self-improvement and development." This statement seems consistent with the finding of this study. As mentioned earlier, the motivation of training participants to attend the training course was high. The teachers also show their willingness to participate in further professional development courses. Overall, the IN1 IN2 ON1 IN3 ON2 IN4 ON3 IN5 pattern was perceived, on one hand, to be time efficient because the training course did not disturb their teaching jobs. Teachers did not have to leave their classes to participate in the training course. On the other hand, some teacher participants complained to attend the face-to-face tutorials on weekends because they normally spent weekends with their family. It was also perceived to be effective because the content of the training program was relevant to teachers' need even though some improvement and modification is still needed. The program provides the training participants with new insight in teaching strategy, including in stimulating students to think critically and creatively, and in encouraging students to work collaboratively and communicatively.

Conclusion

Overall, considering that 90,9% teacher participants passed the post test, the implementation of the teacher training program is perceived to be successful and effective to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching strategies which oriented to HOTS. Since higher order thinking skills has become the crucial needs in this technology era, particularly in the workplaces, Indonesian schools need to prepare and provide their students with those skills. To get a better result, the duration of the training, particularly time allocation in discussing HOTS needs to be extended. The needs of school and community, particularly the needs of workplaces, have been made a vital consideration in designing and planning the teacher training program. This is consistent with the principles of in-service education as mentioned by Osamwonyi (2016). Teachers, therefore, need to be exposed to samples of teaching approaches such as project-based learning and problem-based learning. The enthusiasm of majority of teachers to participate in the program indicates teachers' awareness of the importance of personal and professional growth. Teachers who have attended the training course have to

implement what the HOTS-oriented teaching strategies in their teaching practices. School principals and supervisors play important roles in this part to ensure that any professional development of teachers have an impact to students. This is consistent with the goals of the training program – to increase students' competencies (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019a). However, problems arose in the implementation of the teacher training programs need to be identified, discussed, and solved by the policy makers and the designers of the training course. Some modification such as time management, content, and a better coordination among parties involved in the program is very much needed. ICT tools for online dimension of the training needs to be improved. A training course for teacher professional development is most effective when cooperatively initiated and planned (Osamwonyi, 2016). As an in-service education for teachers, the teacher training program needs to be re-examined and revised for a better teacher training program in Indonesia.

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