

WHAT HINDERS TEACHERS OF EFL TO PERFORM PROFESSIONALLY IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper has tried to elaborate several factors which may inhibit a teacher of EFL to perform professionally in the classroom. Although the list provided here cannot be claimed comprehensive, as there are surely still other factors at play, at least it has raised some very important issues relating to one of the key components in education. Quality of teachers should be ensured and of priority if to enhance and maintain quality of education and all related stakeholders of education should play a role in supporting teachers to perform professionally in the classroom. One of the ways is to prevent those possible causes of professional teaching performance to exist among teachers.

Keyword: *hinders teacher of EFL, perform professionally*

Introduction

Whenever we talk about education, we cannot avoid talking about teachers. Teachers are one of the key elements in education in addition to other elements such as facilities, curriculum, administrative staff and so on. In Indonesian context, teachers are even listed as one of the eight standards of the national education (*Peraturan Pemerintah no .5 2005*). This particular stake holder of education plays a central role as the quality of education as a whole is very much dependent on the quality of teachers (Darling Hammond, 2000; Darling Hammond et al. 2001; Kyriakides et al. 2010; and Kuijpers et al., 2010). Teachers are considered to be the most influential factor to student learning compared to other factors involved in teaching and learning process. A study by Hattie (2003 as cited in Meier's 2007) revealed that 30% of students learning achievement is affected by teachers. In other words, if teacher quality is good, we can be optimistic that the student learning can be optimized. However, if the reverse is the case, we should worry about the learning that may take place among learners during the teaching learning process. Bearing in mind this pivotal

role of teachers in education, governments in many different countries, be they developed or developing, put emphasis on ensuring the capacity of teachers to perform professionally.

In reality, however, it is often the case that teachers who are employed in schools, accompanying their learners during the teaching and learning process, do not perform professionally. It is not uncommon to hear students, student parents, school principle, other teacher colleagues, or teacher inspector complain about teacher performance. Such complaints may relate to teacher overall attitude, classroom teaching performance, discipline, and others, which in turn might affect the working atmosphere among teachers and other school staff, and also the student learning. It is the intent of this article to present and discuss several factors which potentially inhibit teachers to perform professionally in their main work place, the classroom.

Subject matter mastery

In addition to teachers' knowledge of teaching methods and their ability to apply them in the classroom, there is one key element of teaching which is of great importance. It is the mastery of

subject matter. This first factor relates to how much a teacher knows about the subject he/she is teaching. In the case of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching, it is the teacher's proficiency in English. This proficiency includes both the teacher's knowledge of and skills in English, which Chomsky (1965) calls linguistic competence and performance. This knowledge and skills are very important as they are both the subject and medium of instruction. Lack of this knowledge and skills may result in difficulty and even failure in achieving the instructional objectives. Inadequate knowledge affects a teacher's ability in dealing with the main contents of his/her lesson, while inadequate skills in performing the foreign language waste the opportunity to provide learners with exposure to English, an aspect which is critical in learning a language. A teacher should be a good model in using the language as students often imitate his/her language production. A study by Amin (2013), for example, revealed that among the unprofessional teachers were those who could not make 500 in the TOEFL test. In short, while this is not to claim that good subject matter mastery will automatically lead to good teaching, as there are still other factors which affect a teacher's classroom performance, lack of subject matter mastery is one key element leading to unsuccessful teaching.

School Facilities

The second factor which might affect a teacher's classroom performance is availability of school facilities. These school facilities may come in form of text books, learning aids, library, language laboratory, and internet connection. While it is true that complete facilities do not guarantee successful teaching, lack of this teaching element will potentially hinder a teacher to explore his/her teaching potentials and creativity and hence can be an obstacle for optimum professional development. In the classroom teaching

context, for example, a teacher might have planned to show how language is used contextually by preparing a video to show. However, due to absence of an LCD projector this activity cannot be executed his/her planned activity. Another example is of a teacher who strongly believes in the usefulness of extensive reading to improve students' language abilities. To achieve this, he/she intends to design a daily program to oblige every student to read a book for reporting. However, because books are unavailable, he/she has to have the plan unexecuted. Unavailability of text book will necessitate students to spend much of their time to copy materials on the white board, the time of which can be spent for further exploitation and practice of using the target language. The unavailability of library limits students' opportunity to develop their language competency, for example through extensive reading. The same is true for language lab and the internet connection. Language laboratory enable students to get more exposure to English through multi media. Facilities are needed for the implementation of continuing professional development (CPD). The same is also true for the assessment stages. To sum up, the claim that a teacher's professional classroom performance depends much on availability of facilities is understandable as they are needed during the whole stages of teaching and learning process: the planning, the execution, and the assessment and evaluation.

Work environment

When they are going about their daily routines, teachers are not working in isolation but within social and physical contexts. Social contexts relate to other human beings in the surroundings. They can be other students, other teacher colleagues and also administrative staff, and depending on the school locations, they can also be other passers-by. A frequently occurring incident is that students being engaged in the learning

process are disturbed by noise coming from the neighboring classes or other people in the surroundings. Although this can be solved by having the teachers speak louder, it is often the students' ability to focus attention which matters.

How other teachers go about their daily personal and professional lives in school, including their feelings may affect other teachers. In relation to this Bullough Jr (2001: 29) says that "hope and happiness, like hopelessness and despair [of other teacher colleagues] are infectious". It is also true that good and supportive colleague may help teachers develop both personally and professionally. Barduhn (2002, in Murray and Christison 2011:198) says that good colleagues provide good feelings for other teachers such as comforts, humors, rewards, and escape.

The physical contexts concern the non-living objects in the teaching/learning area. This can in form of the room or building in which the process of learning is conducted, or area around it. A room which is dirty and messy will likely affect the learning atmosphere. The same is true for surrounding area. If it is crowded and smelly, for instance, it will distract students' attention and disturbs the teaching and learning process.

One day, during an observation of students doing their teaching practice, I experienced, how because of the noise and disturbance coming from the neighboring classes the practicing teacher were struggling hard to teach her class, even just to be audible to her students. So chaotic was the situation that the teacher decided to stop teaching for a while to deal with the wandering and noisy students outside. Of course, this could have been avoided had there been good coordination among the teaching staff to ensure conducive learning atmosphere.

Teacher's physical and emotional state

A teacher's physical and emotional states are also one key element which

affects his/her teaching. A teacher who is suffering from an illness is very unlikely to be able to perform his/her teaching optimally. A teacher because of a complaint on his/her leg, for example, might spend most of his/her teaching time sitting, a posture which decreases abilities to deliver a lesson, such as demonstrating an activity or monitoring student when they are on tasks.

A teacher's physical condition can also be caused by fatigue due to work overload. This type of work overload phenomenon has emerged more since the implementation of teacher certification, one requirement of which is to have a teacher to teach 24 teaching hours a week. For the EFL teachers in particular this number of working hours is already beyond the limit if to teach the students seriously. While they will still manage to spend time planning and teaching their lessons, it is often the time for giving feedback on the students' work which lacks. They refer to the big number of students in their classes as well as the need to provide detailed assessment and evaluation of each student, an assessment which covers not only the cognitive, but also the affective and psychomotor abilities. And if a teacher still insists on doing all of those activities, they will be very likely to suffer from fatigue.

While good physical state of a teacher is important, his/her emotional state, which we often call as feelings, should also be given attention. A teacher who is physically healthy but is not in a good mood, will likely not be able to execute his/her lesson well. Teacher's feeling will be manifested clearly in his/her way of giving instructions, asking and giving feedback, and the process of teaching as a whole. What is more, students' perceptions of their teacher will affect how they will go through their lesson; if the teacher is enthusiastic and motivated, the students will very likely be in that mood.

Teacher job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is another important aspect which determines how a teacher performs in a classroom. Job satisfaction as part of factors affecting a teacher's mental or emotional state will influence a teacher's overall teaching performance, which is manifest in his/her attitude and behaviors in the classroom. When emotionally stable a teacher will do things which will support student process of learning. He/she will, for example, show interest and enthusiasm in going about his/her teaching activities, which will also affect students reception of the material being taught. However, if he/she has a psychological problem, though he/she may still come to the classroom, that teacher might do something which is not only inhibitive to students learning of that particular lesson but also their subsequent attitude to learning as a whole.

What might affect teacher's job satisfaction? Basically, there are two main reasons why this feeling may come to a teacher if to refer to Maslow's (1943, 2000) theory of needs. The two needs are esteem and self-actualization needs. The first one refers to a teacher's needs to be acknowledged as they deserve to be and the second, a teacher's needs to self-actualize themselves in their teaching contexts. The former requires others to recognize the teacher and his/her potentials and hard work, which will manifest in both financial and non-financial rewards. To be more direct, there should be clear rules as to what is required of the teachers and how the rules will be reinforced. Unless there are clear and transparent rules who should does what and why, there might appear dissatisfaction among teachers, which often still evident in their teaching in the classroom.

The needs for self-actualization is also not less important. As stated earlier, after getting recognition from others, a teacher's next need will be opportunity provided to do what he/she thinks he/she capable of doing. Failure to accommodate this might result in a

teacher's prolonged disappointment, which will force him/her to perform teaching just to meet administrative requirement only. An example can be put forward here. A study by Amin (2013) revealed that a teacher who had good subject matter mastery and teaching methodology (proven by his status as third best teacher nationally and two masters' degrees, one of which is from an Australian university) could not and did not want to teach as he should do due to his disappointment of missing a career promotion. Still in the same study, another teacher did not perform his teaching seriously because of his school principal, who did not allow him to pursue his further study. These two examples are adequate to prove how job satisfaction may result in prolonged unsupportive teaching performance.

Commitment to teaching

As we have seen so far, there are so many factors which determine a teacher's classroom performance. Among the potential causes, however, there is still one factor which was found to be the most determining, that is the teacher's commitment to teaching (Amin, 2013). Collins Cobuild dictionary defines commitment as "something which regularly takes up some of your time because of an agreement you have made or because of responsibilities that you have". In other words, it is the teacher's readiness to give priority to the job he/she is engaged in on the basis of self-awareness and responsibility. Often this commitment relates to one's passion in doing something. While presence of commitment will drive a teacher to perform his/her job at all cost, lack of it will tend to decrease his/her optimum performance, bearing in mind that he/she has a full control of the class. So important is this commitment in teaching that Razak et al. (2009: 334) state that "Quality education cannot be achieved without the efforts of dedicated and highly committed teachers".

Conclusion

This paper has tried to elaborate several factors which may inhibit a teacher of EFL to perform professionally in the classroom. Although the list provided here cannot be claimed comprehensive, as there are surely still other factors at play, at least it has raised some very important issues relating to one of the key components in education. Quality of teachers should be ensured and of priority if to enhance and maintain quality of education and all related stakeholders of education should play a role in supporting teachers to perform professionally in the classroom. One of the ways is to prevent those possible causes of professional teaching performance to exist among teachers.

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