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The Shifts of Self-Directed Professional Development from A Secondary School EFL Teacher to A University Lecturer

Atin Kurniawati

English Language Education Department

Faculty of Adab dan Languages

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Mas Said Surakarta

e-mail: atin.kurniawati@iain-surakarta.ac.id

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Abstract

This narrative study described my self-directed professional development (PD) as a secondary school EFL teacher and a university lecturer. The data in this study were gathered from written reflections on my lived experiences during my formal teaching career from 2016 to 2022. The data were analyzed using thematic coding. The findings signified several self-directed PD activities that I did during my career. I spent a lot of time improving my English proficiency when I taught at a Cambridge secondary school, as well as creating and modifying engaging learning activities for my students. When I moved to university, I emphasized a better understanding of the subjects I taught by reading reference books. I also did research and wrote scientific articles. While I used the internet for my learning purposes when I became a secondary school EFL teacher, I encourages my students at the university to utilize internet for their learning as well. Several environmental factors might influence self-directed PD, such as the institution's culture, peer teachers, and professional responsibilities. It implied the need for continuous PD for English educators, which may differ from one teaching context to another, and the importance of maintaining self-motivation to give the best meaningful learning experience for the students' growth.

Keywords: English educators; professional development; self-directed learning

INTRODUCTION

Being an English educator is a life-long learning process. It involves initiation, observation, and evaluation for improvement purposes (Yurtsever, 2013). As this language is widely spoken across nations and taught in formal and non-formation institutions, an English educator should always learn to adjust his way of teaching meet learners' characteristics and demands of the society. As the world is changing and technology is rapidly growing, an English educator should adapt to these changes in his

entire career to meet the demand in each period. Even though an English educator has met the standard requirement, such as having a bachelor's degree in English or English education, it is not enough for long-term teaching practices. Because the modern world is rapidly growing, by the time students graduate from a university, the knowledge and skills they learned may become outdated (Novozhenina & Pinzón, 2018).

Teaching ability is not innate but learned and improved (Zerey, 2018). Hence, English educators should always find ways to improve their capability in teaching English as well as broadening their knowledge and improving their proficiency in the language. Those efforts are also known as professional development (PD) which includes learning how to learn and transform knowledge into teaching practices to optimize students' achievements and comprehension (Zerey, 2018). PD is carried out in several ways, such as school-facilitated learning, higher academic degree, government scheme, professional pursuit outside the classroom context, and self-directed PD (Zonoubi et al., 2017). PD can be done individually by an English educator or with the community, either independently or supported by the government, higher education institutions, or other third parties.

PD is mostly influenced by the teachers' determination and motivation to teach English. Their motivation to become a teacher also impacts how someone views the profession and how one is committed to the profession (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Other factors of self-efficacy and job satisfaction also can influence their professional development (Safari et al., 2020). Several factors are then indicated as the obstacles to do PD, such as excessive workload, lack of self-motivation, and lack of institutional support (Zerey, 2018). Somehow the educational setting of the teachers is expected to help the professional development of teachers (Irgatoğlu, 2021).

Collaborative PD also sounds good since it can bridge the gap in teachers' knowledge through collaboration among novice and experienced teachers (Nazari et al., 2019). It also provides valuable opportunities to share teaching experiences (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020). However, initiating collaborative PD is sometimes difficult because teachers have diverse background traits and motivations. It causes difficulty in designing a single curriculum that suits all their needs well. On the other side, poor resourcing, low wages for teachers, and large class sizes often reduce the time allotment for preparing the lesson and undertaking development to improve their teaching practices and professional knowledge. Due to those reasons, self-directed PD tends to be simpler and easier to conduct since everyone can do PD based on their needs and time allotment, as well as using the sources or methods they prefer. However, studies on the journey of self-directed PD in the Indonesian context still need to be explored.

PD of EFL educators has been well explored by previous researchers, mainly focusing on the type of PD, the driving motivation, as well as challenges in doing PD (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020; Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Phothongsunan, 2018; Zhiyong et al., 2020). Those studies usually took a certain level of teaching context, from elementary, secondary, to higher education levels. Most teachers agreed on the importance of PD for their careers and did PD in various ways. However, there were teachers who didn't do PD due to certain reasons, such as overloaded work (planning, teaching, grading, etc.), so that they had no time to update their knowledge (Novozhenina & Pinzón, 2018).

As an English educator who has teaching experience at secondary school and university level (2016-2021), I experienced different needs and practices of PD. After graduating from pre-service English teacher education and graduate school of linguistic study, I taught at a private Cambridge school at the secondary school level. After four years, I moved to university and taught different characteristics of learners. During my career, I joined several PD programs provided by my school or university, but I found self-directed PD more meaningful and longer lasting. As a secondary school teacher, I experienced rapid change due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020, which influenced my choice of PD activities. My teaching experience at the university level as an early-career lecturer provides insights on how and what to prepare when starting early-career as a lecturer.

The novelty of this study lies in the PD practices across different education levels with different types of learners, activities, and sources amidst the movement from classroom interaction into virtual class. This narrative study reflects my self-directed PD as an English educator across different education levels, focusing on three aspects, namely: 1) the types of self-directed PD activities as a secondary school EFL teacher; 2) types of self-directed PD activities as an early-career university lecturer, and 3) the influence of working environment on self-directed PD. This study benefits English educators in general by giving a description of the current condition of English teaching practices and demands, as well as how we can adjust our capability regarding the changes, especially at secondary school and university levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Notion of Professional Development

Activities that help to enhance professional career growth are called professional development. For teachers, professional development can be conducted through teaching courses and self-evaluation of teaching practices (Avalos, 2011). It aims at improving teachers' efficiency in teaching skills that suit students' needs. Therefore, PD should be prepared in such a way that enables teachers to recognize various demands of the students in educational, social, and emotional areas and to evaluate the teachers' qualifications regarding professional knowledge, attitude dimensions, skills, and other aspects (Laei, 2012). On the other side, PD is also an inseparable component of educational institutions which encourage educational innovations in teaching and learning practices (Prestridge, 2014).

PD represents a life-long commitment to learning through formal and informal learning opportunities. It involves many possible forms, such as continuous education, personal development, peer collaboration, and vocational education. PD also takes into account teachers' participation in developing teaching theories, decision-making, self-evaluation, and self-consciousness. Besides, mentoring, workshops, and follow-up experiential and reflective activities also become choices of continuous PD practices (Eliahoo, 2017; Ha & Murray, 2021). While it can be packed into a formal learning situation such as a seminar or intensive course, PD also can be done individually utilizing available learning sources. Internet nowadays has become a great learning source from which

teachers can access information and knowledge anytime appropriate to their needs. PD practices also can differ from one another depending on the teaching context. For example, an English educator in higher education might need more research practice as one of duty of a lecturer. Meanwhile, English teachers in primary or secondary schools need practical classroom applications as their PD since the theoretical and research-oriented program won't help much in improving their performance (Li & Jones, 2019).

Teachers should be aware of the necessity of PD for their career, yet not make it as a burden because effective PD needs to be held in a relaxed and free learning environment that enables teachers to look for what they want, and how they can achieve their goals, whom they can work with, and in what ways they can improve and evaluate their teaching (Yurtsever, 2013). Besides, schools also need to provide and/or facilitate PD for their teachers by considering proportional time allotment since the intensification of work and stress contributes negatively to PD (Tang & Choi, 2009). Schools or institutions need to provide programs that allow the teachers to do PD either individually or in collaboration.

Among various activities of PD, a study has reported that EFL teachers benefited mostly from self-directed PD through a reflection of their own teaching experience and self-monitoring compared to other profession-related PD practices, such as seminars, workshops, courses, and peer-supported strategies (Joshi et al., 2018). Self-directed PD refers to a phase in which a teacher starts, prepares, executes, and tracks his learning. It requires activities where people are not beyond control and the learning processes are handled by themselves (Irgatoğlu, 2021). By implementing self-directed PD, teachers have the autonomy to determine the kind of learning experiences that benefits them well. They also can directly do observation, implementation, and evaluation. Somehow, maintaining self-motivation and consistency tends to be challenges for self-directed PD.

Recent Studies on Teacher Professional Development

Zhiyong et al. (2020) studied the college English language teaching reform (CELTR) program in China and prominent factors which determined EFL teachers' professional development (TPD). This study reported that this program successfully improved TPD, and the key factors which contributed to their professional development were self-reflection, teachers' understanding, and teaching practices. Alzahrani & Althaqafi (2020) investigated EFL teachers' perceptions on online professional development (OPD) effectiveness in higher education in Saudi Arabia. This study pointed out appropriate features of teachers' learning, OPD courses, and teachers' use of new knowledge and skills. It implied that need analysis was always needed to discover the needs and preferences of teachers before developing OPD.

Artman et al. (2020) explored teacher-directed professional development (TDPD) as an alternative to conventional professional development (CPD). CPD practices were considered to be less effective as a result of the top-down structure, lack of continuous support and follow-up, and one-size-fits-all nature. On the other hand, TDPD, which was online-based, offered increased flexibility, control, support, and feedback. Compared to CPD, TDPD was considered much better in creating teacher autonomy, motivation, and a sense of community. Bhatt (2021) investigated secondary school EFL teachers'

understanding of self-directed PD in a developing country in Asia. The study reported that the teachers teaching at the secondary level are still often challenged with less or no effective teacher training, large class, and a lack of teaching material in their profession. Responding to those challenges, they adopted various strategies, like collaboration among teachers, reading printed materials, action research, use of internet and ICT tools, and reflection.

In the Indonesian context, Cirocki & Farrell (2019) studied the professional development of secondary EFL teachers in Indonesia. The findings indicated that the EFL teachers in Indonesia found professional development in different ways. An academic undertaking, a school-based learning, a government scheme, a professional pursuit outside the school environment, and self-directed learning are common among them. Although the teachers said that they had opportunities to develop professionally, not every teacher took advantage of this. Atmojo (2021) investigated EFL teachers' practices and perceptions of online teacher professional development (OTPD) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers found OTPD interesting and helpful, although it was somehow less satisfactory due to several factors, such as facilities and infrastructure.

The recent studies shed some light on the current state of PD. It is not only a concern for teachers but also for schools and the government. The rapid development of information and communication technology has driven the movement from conventional professional development to online-based activities, which are considered as more flexible and beneficial for teachers' autonomy. Even though the importance and benefits of PD are agreed upon, not all teachers are committed to PD. It can be caused by a lack of motivation to improve their capability or other causes from the surrounding environment. Therefore, both self-driven factors and environmental factors should be taken into consideration.

RESEARCH METHOD

Narrative inquiry was employed in this study. It took human experiences, stories, or talks to construct meaning. Narrative inquiry allows us to have reflection and development (O'Brien & Schillaci, 2002). It is an autobiography of my formal teaching experience as an English teacher in a secondary school and a university lecturer. It represents an individual's life stories, views, and personal experiences to obtain a better understanding of how people reflect and think of their life (Narváez et al., 2013). It arises as a useful method for studying teachers' current beliefs, conceptualizations, thoughts, and actions (Atmojo, 2021a).

This study investigated the narrative of my lived experience of self-directed PD in different teaching contexts. The participant in this study was me. I have passed six years, from 2016 to 2022, teaching English in two different teaching and learning contexts. During that time, I conducted self-directed PD to improve my English ability and teaching quality. Previously, I completed a bachelor's degree in English education and a master's degree in linguistics from two reputable universities in Indonesia as the basis of my teaching practices.

The data were written reflections of my lived experiences during my career as a secondary school English teacher and a university lecturer. I taught at a private Cambridge

school managed by an Islamic Education Foundation from January 2016 to December 2020 and started my teaching career at the university level since January 2021. The data were organized chronologically to reflect my self-directed PD on the contexts starting from the early step of my career and point out lessons learned as well as essential information dealing with the research focuses. The data analysis employed thematic coding. The data from the written reflection were divided thematically and coded into themes or categories. The thematic coding was re-checked and re-confirmed at different times for the trustworthy purpose. The findings were elaborated and discussed by comparing them to existing theories or the results of the previous studies. Finally, the conclusions were drawn in accordance with the focus of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Self-directed PD as a secondary school teacher

My first formal teaching career was at a private Cambridge school for secondary level in January 2016. I taught seven graders and handled English as a second language subject. Since the school was one of the Cambridge schools in the city, I expected that I was about to teach students with intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency. I was really motivated to perform well, so I did several preparations.

First, I read and learned the materials that I was going to teach. I have a Cambridge book with me, and I always learned deeply before I delivered it to my students. It became the main resource and guided the material coverage. I checked the meaning of new vocabulary. I also looked for related additional materials that could help my students learn the materials better, including language-related and culture-related materials. However, my expectation was not totally true. Whom I met were students with diverse English proficiency levels. Some of them were advanced users, while several students never learned English in their elementary school. These gaps really became a concern for me and became a trigger to design learning materials and activities which suited them best. I looked for inspiration from English learning websites and Youtube. Sometimes it helped a lot since I could easily find free-download worksheets, ice-breaking activities, Power point presentations, flashcards, and many more.

Second, I did a lot of speaking practice to improve my speaking performance since some of my students were advanced English users. Language teachers often experience emotional struggles due to their linguistic competence, especially when their students are more proficient users of English (Yang et al., 2021). I should improve my proficiency to support my overall teaching performance and give examples for my students. At the same time, it built students' trust in the teacher's ability. Since my students were early adolescents who were close to social media and digital platforms, they often used colloquial English expressions which I wasn't familiar with. Then, I considered recognizing colloquial expressions to connect closer to them. For that purpose, Youtube helped me to find the information as well as tips and tricks to speak fluently and accurately. It's easier and simpler. I also used online dictionary tools to check the pronunciation.

Third, I modified and created games for my class. Having games was always fun, and my students were so excited. I previously had some game references, but I also looked for some inspirations from YouTube English learning resources such as gamestolearnenglish.com and en.islcollective.com. Sometimes it was like trial and errors when I practiced the games in the classroom, but I kept going. For the first class that I taught, the games sometimes didn't run smoothly, but it worked better in the following class since I had learned what to improve from the previous class. I modified games for all four skills I taught, combined with other learning experiences.

Through trials and errors, I learned how to teach and communicate with my students effectively. It also improved my confidence in teaching. It confirms that employing innovative classroom instruction and activities along with improvement of language proficiency contributes to better self-confidence (Zonoubi et al., 2017). Teachers who are able to observe, communicate, and conduct things in new ways become a good role model for their students and is also beneficial for developing more effective course design and planning (Phothongsunan, 2018).

During my career as a secondary English teacher, I found online resources very helpful in providing information and references for my teaching. However, I tended to use it for my own learning resources, while I didn't implement online activities a lot in the classroom. A previous study reported that while early-career teachers considered technology as an indispensable part of teaching activities, experienced and senior teachers made a secondary role of technology in their teaching practices (Flanagan & Shoffner, 2013). I can state that technology is an indispensable part of my TPD practices for my own learning purposes, but for my classroom activities, it is surely dispensable since I can adapt and modify online information for my classroom practice to suit my students' needs and preferences.

My PD experienced rapid change during the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred in early 2020. My classes were changing online, and I did several different PD activities during this period. I was driven to learn more to use online modalities in a relatively short time. At the same time, I realized that it was not only me who should adapt very quickly but also my students. Even though the pandemic hindered classroom learning but my students and I learned quickly using digital tools. In fact, the pandemic condition has encouraged the rapid movement to online teaching and learning practices which can support students with the new skills that are very beneficial in the technology-dominated world (Cosgun & Savas, 2019).

Though YouTube has provided plenty of learning materials that I could easily take and share with my students, I hardly ever did that. I tried to make my own learning video, and I created online activities such as quizzes, polling, etc. I felt that I had a responsibility to teach my students, and I knew how they could learn better than YouTube did. Hence, I struggled a lot with learning new things and providing learning materials for my students. It tends to be an Intrinsic motivation which became the key factor for me to engage in self-determined and self-paced PD in online settings (Ballıdağ & Dikilitaş, 2021).

During the pandemic, I also joined several webinars on English teaching sponsored by Cambridge International education. Previously I never attended seminars or teaching

workshops, but only the ones held by my foundation since I didn't get the information and I didn't look for it. It implied the need of joining EFL teachers' community from which we get information about PD programs, or follow EFL teacher communities' account on social media to keep up-to-date with the current trends in EFL.

Online webinars helped me broaden my view and give me insight into my teaching. However, I only remembered little information from the webinar, especially the practical techniques that I could implement in my class. Other things dealing with theory and concept didn't really get into my mind. Besides, online webinars didn't support physical interaction which made me focus only on it. I also didn't interact with other participants since they were from Cambridge schools in all Asian countries. A study once reported that the lack of interaction in online courses with trainers and other teachers was considered to result in a less effective and attractive learning experience (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020).

Self-directed PD as A University Lecturer

I started my career as a university lecturer in January 2021. I moved to university since I saw a better chance which suited my interest. Teaching secondary level, in my opinion, didn't really bring me to the best version of myself. Teaching at the secondary level brought me to similar activities and less challenging learning materials. I like doing research and exploring new things, which wasn't accommodated well as a teacher. I taught English skills and linguistic studies in English department of a state Islamic university. It was during the pandemic that I started teaching at university. I didn't make much effort as I did in secondary school since I've got the base for conducting online teaching and creating my own learning media. I also didn't prepare much about my English proficiency since it was well trained at my previous school. However, my teaching practices were slightly different from what I did in my previous school.

As an early career lecturer teaching at different level of education, I experienced different PD practices to assist my performance. First, I put my learning emphasis on the subject content rather than thinking about creating or modifying engaging learning environment, games, or other teaching techniques. I taught pre-service English teacher students, and thus I thought my teaching tended to be more serious and focus on the content. I didn't look for games and various learning activities since lecturing and discussion would be enough for nearly-adult learners. Moreover, I didn't teach TESL or TEYL, in which I needed to translate the teaching concepts into practices. I taught linguistics studies which focus on the conceptual aspect as well as a few practices. I read sourcebooks and journals to deepen my understanding of the subjects I taught, and took only a little information from YouTube or websites.

Second, at university, I prefer doing PD by joining webinars and courses mainly about research, journal writing and publication. Publishing journals is compulsory for lecturers, and as an early career lecturer, I really needed to improve my ability. I found my passion in doing research and writing scientific articles. I joined PD provided by my campus as well as other institutions. Not only could I implement the knowledge for my own purposes, but I also shared the knowledge with my students.

Third, I explored online tools and platforms which could ease my work, such as online proofreading tools, which could ease me to check my students' work, or other platforms to record my students' works. Not only did I use it for my own interest, but I also shared those platforms with my students and explained how we could utilize the digital tools to help us learn English and prepare the teaching activities. In the future, they are about to become English teachers, so knowing those tools will also ease their duties as well.

As an early-career lecturer, I expected that I would receive intensive courses or guidance to run my duty. However, there was no such thing, and the lecturers in my department didn't really have specific and formal forum to collaboratively conduct PD. The forums I usually attend were mostly dealing with administrative stuff, like accreditation, pre-semester preparation, etc. Hence, I should learn and look for everything I need by myself. Fortunately, some senior lecturers were helpful when I had questions dealing with the study program. However, it didn't occur when I asked them about research and publication, even though they had high impact factors and many publications.

Once again, in another teaching context, I experienced self-directed PD as the more effective and efficient way to keep improving our capability. We could not depend on our peer lecturers or the institutions to improve our capability. We should set our goals, actively look for the learning sources and communities which could support up conducting PD. It tends to be so personal and depends on the person's ability and commitment to organize and execute actions toward the goal (Webster & Son, 2015).

The Influence of Working Environment on Self-directed PD

When I worked at a Cambridge school, I was motivated by the status of the school. The label of Cambridge school came with the expectation of a better English learning experience as well as the teacher and teaching qualities. It drove me to always try finding new learning activities, so my students would be engaged well in the learning activities. The students in my school came from various backgrounds and English proficiency. It also motivated me to look for ways to facilitate my students with diverse proficiency. This motivation was driven by a commitment to the moral purposes of teaching and supported the organizational conditions of the school (Tang & Choi, 2009).

The learning materials I taught were taken from the Cambridge curriculum, namely English as a second language. The materials were prepared for countries whose first language isn't English. Therefore, the topics we discussed were across nations and cultures. For that reason, it also drove me to read more about cultures in other parts of the world, such as Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and Southern Europe. I found it important and interesting to let my students recognize other cultures since language acquisition can not be separated from cultural learning, and they are supposed to interact with people who are linguistically and culturally different (Michel, 2018).

Even though the school management had provided a weekly English forum for the teachers, I didn't feel the same motivation. In my opinion, not all English teachers followed the program seriously. Consequently, I didn't expect too much from this forum and

preferred to explore by myself. I preferred having self-reflection on my teaching performance and immediately looking for solutions. Despite the benefits of collaborative activities, it can become less effective when the members are not of the same motivation and learning pace. In a certain context, collaborative PD activities are the least preferred ones. Meanwhile, reflective activities are the most preferred among teachers (Irgatoğlu, 2021).

When I moved to university, many changes I found. While I concerned about improving my teaching performance by looking for various engaging learning activities in my previous teaching context, I didn't prepare much for my teaching session at the university but only the well-presented and deeply-discussed materials. It was influenced by the subject I taught. I taught linguistics subjects which I considered more emphasis on the concepts. Besides, I taught older learners aged 17-21 years old, whom I considered more independent learners, and they had known the importance of learning the subject for their career, so I didn't need to intentionally prepare engaging learning activities. I could encourage them by asking a question, having discussion sessions and group presentation, and doing projects. It seemed similar to what I experienced 14 years ago when I was in undergraduate school, and it still worked. As a teacher, I realize the advanced development of the modern, technological world, but using the same method as how we were taught is somewhat still relevant (Webster & Son, 2015).

CONCLUSION

PD is a necessity for English educators in any level of teaching contexts. It represents diverse activities which can help them improve their teaching performance and optimize students' growth. During my career as an EFL teacher, I preferred doing self-directed PD since I could manage the activities optimally for my benefits as well as my students'. As a secondary English teacher, I did self-directed PD looking for practical, engaging classroom activities which could facilitate my students' diverse levels of English proficiency. When I moved to university, my professional development focused on strengthening my understanding of the subjects that I taught by reading reference books and journals. I was also eager to learn a lot about research, journal writing, and publication since it became my duty as a lecturer. In both teaching contexts, the internet helped me a lot in providing learning sources and expanding my teaching practices. Working environments, including the institution's culture, the students' characteristics, professional responsibilities, and peer-teachers did influence my PD. Amidst several influencing aspects in the working environments, educators with strong motivation and determination would always find the way to grow. Self-directed PD became the key strategy to keep learning through various sources which was adjustable depending on the goals.

This study has several limitations. The teaching contexts at a reputable secondary school and a state Islamic university may not represent other teaching contexts. I experienced the shift from offline class to online class which also influenced my PD, which may not be experienced by other educators. Therefore, further studies could take different

learning contexts including the education level, the students' ages, as well as formal and non-formal institutions.

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