

Attitude of EFL Teachers towards Their Dormant Consultative Forum

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Abstract. Attitude constitutes an important factor underlying an individual behavior. This paper presents results of a study on EFL teachers' attitude towards their area consultative forum. An area consultative forum is one where teachers of the same subject in a certain area gather to learn, practice, and share knowledge, skills, and professional experiences. Presumably, if the forum is utilized properly, it will be able to empower the teachers taking part in it. The survey study involved twenty urban primary school EFL teachers in the town of Purwokerto, Indonesia. Participants were chosen using convenience sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inductive procedure. Overall, the study found that the EFL teachers under investigation still had positive attitude towards their consultative forum. However, some members seemed reluctant to participate in the activities. They were sad about the unplanned programs, low quantity of activities, and poor quality of events.

Keywords: *attitude, EFL teachers, dormant, consultative forum, professional development.*

INTRODUCTION

Local English teachers' consultative forums, if utilized properly, will be able to empower the members. With diverse background knowledge, competences, and skill, English teachers can learn and practice together, and share as well as work with one another with little or no limit of space and time. Unfortunately, the forum seems to be slowly dying. So, it is interesting to investigate as to why the members have recently become less busy with this professional development oriented-forum. If time is their problem, then, they are already committed to a weekly gathering. This research aimed at describing attitude of EFL teachers towards the forum and identifying the aspects affecting their attitude.

Attitude constitutes opinions and feeling that an individual has towards something [1]. Human attitude is quite complex. It consists of thought or perception, emotion, and potential to act or behave. Those affecting attitude vary, such as experience, belief, other people considered to be influential, culture, mass media, personal emotion and education [2]. A survey on EFL teachers' perception in relation with their roles as language teachers documented that response the teachers gave on the questionnaire was inconsistent with their actual performance [3]. Through questionnaires they expressed that conducting a research was an important thing for them as language teachers. However, in practice

nearly none of them had done it. This indicates that at times perception is inconsistent to behaviour.

As far as education world is concerned, teacher is central. That is why, in many parts of the world, attempts to boost teachers' professional development have been continuously made. In Indonesia, these efforts to support teachers' professional development have been increasingly felt for the last decade. Different models have been employed so far. Within teacher certification program a few models have been revised and changed from time to time – initially portfolio system, then short training, and currently intensive training with a longer period.

Are those schemes alone sufficient to generate professional, quality teachers? The portfolio system adopted in the early teacher certification program received lots of reactions. Now, even with the intensive training there is no guarantee for the trainees to become better English teachers as intended. According to a study by Hartati, the competence of Indonesia's EFL teachers was low [4]. Undeniably, teachers also need experience, share of ideas, practice time, and reflection extensively beyond the walls of training rooms to foster their professional development.

The government and other relevant institutions (e.g. universities) have periodically held training programs, workshops, symposiums, seminars, or the like to improve teachers' quality. However, for the sake of autonomy and sustainability there should be alternative events and activities that teachers can manage alone.

Local consultative forums have been popular among teachers. Indeed, the forum could be a powerful communication arena if it works normally. Many things can be done, not just a meeting time for teachers of the same discipline, in this case English. They can learn together under the guidance of a more experienced teacher. Within their limited number of members they can autonomously plan a series of programs and implement them along the year. They can empower themselves instead of just waiting for aids from the government and institutions [5].

When the government, either central or local is not conducting an activity or providing a grant, then, they can still do a thing for developing their own professional competency. For example, English teachers can empower themselves through collaborative classroom action research studies [6]. Unfortunately, some English teachers do not participate in the local consultative forum's program. It is not hard to think that the members become inactive due to mismanagement, for instance.

The author investigated the attitude of English teachers in the urban area of Purwokerto towards their local consultative forum and the possible key factors affecting it.

A survey study on state primary school Indonesian language teachers' perception and expectation of their consultative forum had been done earlier. It used questionnaire and document. The study reported that some teachers had positive attitude towards the existence of local consultative forum. They also had a strong expectation that the forum would often hold teacher trainings [7]. The present survey will cover a wider population that includes those teachers working at private schools as well. The current survey also makes it possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation by means of interview.

One thing worthwhile when discussing attitude is satisfaction. Studies on attitude and satisfaction have been done in many fields of interest, including education. Even though attitude and satisfaction are two different concepts, both were said to have relation. If it was stated that satisfaction constitutes someone's opinions or feeling towards something, then satisfaction strongly affects attitude [8] [3].

METHOD

This survey study involved twenty EFL teachers from thirteen out of thirty state as well as private primary schools in the urban area of Purwokerto, Indonesia. Each school had about three English teachers. Convenience sampling was applied in this study, where the sample being drawn from the population was close to hand [9]. Some volunteer participants were those attending a meeting on the forum reorganisation and a few others were those joining a teacher professional program.

Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were used to elicit data on attitude. Interviews were used to elicit more comprehensive information or to ask respondents for confirmation. The questionnaires as the main instrument consist of both close and open items. Close items deal directly with attitudes. A few open items elicit general data and reactions.

Data were analysed through descriptive statistics and inductive procedure. In line with the main aims of the present study, data analysis was targeted to seek average attitude score and identify questionnaire items with lower scores (1 and 2).

RESULT

English Teachers' Attitude towards Their Consultative Forum

The twelve 5-scaled questionnaires have shown the following information. With twenty volunteer respondents participating in the study, the possible highest score for a respondent is 60 and the lowest 12. The questionnaire average score was 45.15. It belongs to category 'Positive' (lower).

Interviews with participants whose questionnaire scores deviated sharply from the average have led to a comprehensive insight into EFL teachers' attitude towards their consultative forum. An English teacher who rated '5' to all questionnaire items commented as follows. '... A new cluster of members have joined us for the last few years ... Initially, we had only 13 in-town member schools joining the forum...' When asked if there was any difference between after and before cluster merge, the teacher argued that the former had given more contribution. The teacher mentioned the then-benefits, mainly: 1) test writing in turn by members from different schools, 2) quick top-down information delivery, 3) intense share of knowledge among members, 4) competence-based representative for teacher competition, without regard to workplace. The now-consultative forum, the teacher said, lacked those all things, in spite of the fact that it was still under the leadership of the same chairperson.

Though, overall, the EFL teachers had positive attitude towards their area consultative forum, some of them considered the forum performance ineffective. There were a few concerns that required immediate advancement.

Weak Aspects within the Consultative Forum

Based on responses given to closed and open questionnaires, as well as results of interview, some problems facing the consultative forum under investigation have been highlighted. According to responses to closed questionnaire, five items gaining low rates of 2 and 1, namely 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9 were identified.

Over twenty percent of the respondents gave low rate to item no. 2 – that deals with intensity of the activities done in the forum ("So far, there is much to do in the forum for each semester.") The low rating to the item probably means that so far the consultative forum has held too few (if any) activities. This was supported by some interview data, as a teacher commented below:

'... For the forum meetings, so far, in the previous academic year we had nearly no meeting... If any, then, there was only once just prior to the national exam. So, it was indeed not a routine. So far during this academic year we have arranged only a couple of meetings. The first one when we had post-Ramadhan month gathering...and the second one when we held re-organisation'

In line with the comment above, another English teacher stated as follows: 'Meetings remain very rare. Activity held is not varied'.

The next position goes to item no. 3 – that has something to do with "charm" of activity brought to the forum ("Variety of activity presented in the English teachers' consultative forum so far has not been boring."), where more than fifteen percent of respondents gave low rates. The low rating has indicated that EFL teachers joining the forum found the activities unappealing, e.g. always the same old ones. A teacher

wrote the following brief comment: 'The English teachers' consultative forum program has run ineffectively'.

The next place goes to item numbers 1, 8, and 9, which were rated low by 11.5% of the participants. Those 3 items respectively deal with benefit of joining the forum, interpersonal compatibility of all members and/or organising chairs, and clarity of the forum's program. According to comments shared by respondents through open questionnaires, the English teachers' consultative forum in their area suffered from serious issues, including poorly-informed activity, unpunctuality, low attendance, monotonous activity, rare meeting, and unplanned program's activity. The latter was the most sharply criticised by the teachers, reaching almost 50% of all comments. The forum's activity has not been well-planned, and tended to be incidental.

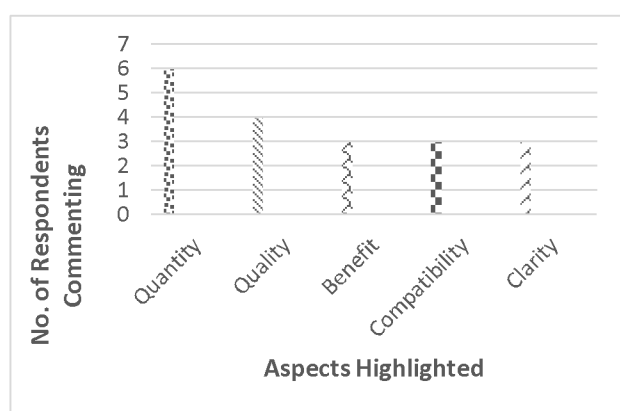


Chart 1. Members' Feedback

The positive attitude of the EFL primary school teachers towards their area consultative forum could mean that they remained loyal to the forum. That they criticised a few things of the forum probably means that they felt unsatisfied with the current condition of the forum. The idea is confirmed by the fact that the attitude falls into category "Positive" (lower).

It is also a good idea to look at the teachers' profile whose information was collected through questionnaire items. Of all 20 respondents, their ages ranged from 24 to 50 years or above. Majority graduated from a bachelor's degree program. Only 2 hold a master's degree certificate. Two respondents sat in the organizing committee, while the rest were members. Eight respondents had a status of civil servants, while the rest served as private school teachers.

Teaching experience of the EFL teachers varied, ranging from < 5 years to > 21 years. Experience in professional development activities was generally still unsatisfactory. Participation of each teacher in professional development activities averaged only once within teaching experience span. Activities attended varied, such as book writing, instructional document preparation, action research, quality teacher, pioneer teacher, national instructor, learner teacher. However, most dealt with the national current curriculum – Discovery Learning.

Excellent achievement remained very rare. Of twenty respondents, only seven were considered to hold 1 or 2 kinds of achievement. For example, a regency level-high performing teacher, teaching overseas, national instructor, and peer-assessor; or else, such as consultative forum manager, teaching practicum coach, and contest jury. In general, the teachers had been joining the consultative forum for less than 15 years.

The profile shows that, overall, quality of the EFL teachers joining the local consultative forum is still low. Therefore, those who complained about the real condition of the forum were not many in number (see Chart 1.). The more qualified and better experienced the teachers, the more challenging they become oriented to higher standard.

When requested to provide suggestions in relation to the existing condition, member teachers and organizing chairs involved mostly proposed well-planned programs, more frequently events, and more qualified activities (up to 85%). A young member teacher who joined only a year ago wrote like this: 'Arrange meetings clearly, for example once a month first week. Plan programs for next year. Make meetings more interesting'. Another member commented: 'Once in a while, it seems necessary to have a study trip to another area consultative forum, just hold an outbound activity to strengthen interpersonal cohesion, or invite a reputable source person'.

A member teacher, who held a master's degree certificate, commented very strongly: 'I hope the English consultative forum has clearly-planned programs to enhance quality of teaching and learning at school, improve achievement, and boost teacher professional development.' This teacher did not forget to share a best suggestion as follows: 'Have regular meetings with clear goals and well-planned, continuing, as well as effective activities.'

There was an impression that the two respondents discussed above did not feel happy with the condition. In the meanwhile, in response to the open questionnaires, the forum chairman only left a few words uncommon to any other research respondents. He highlighted the low support from some school managements, i.e. the authorities did not issue permission letter of attendance and funding support. In addition, he gave a suggestion regarding with invitation to reputable speakers with funding from the schools where the forum members had been working at. It was likely that the chairman was unaware of opportunities for a mutual corporation established by the consultative forum and higher educations in the area, where universities yearly grant lecturers' social service and, therefore, the forum and the schools do not necessarily budget for this. The forum organizing committee can determine a choice as to which social service proposals arriving at them would be accepted and implemented for free.

It is clear that data collected through the research instruments have shown attitude of EFL teachers involved in the study towards their local consultative forum was positive, though not convincing enough. However, some member teachers felt unhappy with the

forum's program. A few aspects were considered poor and, needed reforms, accordingly. The finding was also consistent to the author's statement at the beginning of background section. It was sad to see the fact that the consultative forum was not optimally utilized. Meanwhile, a work by Barella has argued the contribution of this teachers' forum in supporting their professional development [10].

CONCLUSION

Overall, results of this study have shown that the primary school EFL teachers under investigation had positive attitude towards their area consultative forum. However, some teachers strongly proposed concrete actions for a better condition. Their urgent needs can be summarized into: (1) well-planned program/agenda, (2) higher quantity of activities, (3) and better quality of events.

Concerning results of this study, the author puts forward the following suggestions for betterment. Firstly, the primary school EFL teachers in the area should be encouraged to take an active part in the forum's program. Secondly, the forum organizing committee should set a well-planned program, paying special attention to quantity and quality of selected activities/events. Last but not least, the forum organizing committee should periodically evaluate the program implemented and care about members' voice to assure their participation in every single activity held.

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