

## THE NECESSITY OF SYNCHRONIZING THE EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION WITH THEIR BEHAVIOR TO UPGRADE PROFESSIONALISM

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### Abstract

*Though, according to recent paradigm of pedagogy, learners play a central role in the success of education, it does not mean that teachers are less important. Teachers remain to contribute a lot in another way. Therefore, teachers have to improve and maintain their professionalism.*

*Perception constitutes a factor highly influential in shaping professionalism, as professionalism deals with behavior. This paper presents the result of a survey on teachers' perception of the roles they can play within the learning-teaching context. The survey used convenience sampling with total respondents of 61. The respondents were Senior High School teachers of English in the area of Central Java Province. The data was collected through questionnaire.*

*On overall, the survey showed that the EFL teachers had 'right' perception of teacher roles. However, they had 'wrong' perception, too. The faulty perception was about the main job of a teacher, which is to give explanations to the students; the need for the teacher to be always present among students in the class; and the belief that "noisy" (English) class is bad. Unfortunately, in practice, the teachers' behavior was to some degree inconsistent with their suitable perception of the roles. Result of this survey has suggested that an approach to bridging the gap between the teachers' perception and their behavior is crucial.*

**Key words:** perception, behavior, professionalism

Perception affects one's behavior. Perception is the way one thinks about something or the way one understands things. Unlike behavior, perception is covert. Nevertheless, on occasion, perception is important to reveal in order to look into the "hidden" truth, or the truth behind a condition. At times, perception is more likely to investigate than behavior

under certain circumstances, such as when an observational study is not welcomed or rejected by the people being observed.

Professionalism is defined as the skill and high standards of behavior expected of a professional person. Perception of teacher roles and all their manifestations affects the teacher's professionalism. Teaching profession is not identical with speaking in front of the class or sharing knowledge with the students. Joyce & Weil (1972) view teaching as creating environments for children. Closely associated with this broad view is the role of teacher as a classroom facilitator. Regardless of student learning autonomy and competency, professional teachers should be good learning facilitators. With all their efforts, they are committed to effective learning. In order to be successful in teaching implementation, a teacher should make preparations ahead of time. It is often time-consuming. As class time allotment is limited a teacher should prepare assignments for out-of-class activities.

A teacher is also a classroom director. He should organize classroom activities in such a way that the activities can run as planned and targeted. At times, when needed, a teacher should improvise. A teacher is a counselor. He should be ready to help find solutions to the problems (at least those related with the nature of the knowledge he teaches) faced by the students, including doing a research for the sake of betterment in his teaching practice.

As touched on earlier, teaching profession is not identical with speaking in front of the students and sharing knowledge with them. It is part of the role of teacher as resource. These and many more done by the teacher during pre-, whilst-, and post-class activities are meant to help the students learn.

In the perspective of language teaching, a teacher has additional roles. A language teacher serves as a model for his students. The teacher is the authoritative reference in the class when it comes to the use of the language, just as a dictionary is the authoritative reference for meaning, pronunciation, and other necessary aspects of the word. This means a language teacher should, not necessarily all the time, use well the language he teaches in his speech and writing. Reluctance and comprehension problems on the part of students can be anticipated through consistent use of the language taught and mastery of some techniques (Suwartono, 2007).

In a more specific context, the communicative language teaching, Littlewood (1981: 19) proposes another possible teacher's role – a co-communicator. In *Communicative Language Teaching* an EFL teacher

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can take part as an independent participant in the activities within the learning-teaching group. The manifestations of each role described above may vary in the classroom practice. As a classroom facilitator a teacher is not dominant and more active than the students in the classroom. As classroom director a teacher spends most of the time in the classroom monitoring the students working or performing. As a counselor, a teacher either implicitly or explicitly constantly tries to develop the student learning autonomy.

In relation with those discussed above, when the writer criticizes the practices, some extreme conditions happen to our teachers of EFL. It was true when they were doing peer-teaching in the teacher training program; it was true based on the students' opinion through informal dialogue; and it was also true based on the teaching performance of the students of teacher training college, at least because the trainee teachers were trained by the classroom practitioners at the schools where they were experiencing the atmosphere of the "real world".

There is no guarantee that the graduates of teacher preparation colleges are ready to be qualified teachers. Even, many of those who have been teaching for years remain unqualified. What do you think if an EFL teacher talks most of the lesson time when the lesson is focused on speaking skill development? What would you say if an EFL teacher speaks most of the time in the class using the native tongue? And what would it be if an EFL teacher teaches monotonously either within a lesson or inter-sessions?

Two main aspects affecting the quality of teachers can be adapted from Brewster (2007: 79). The poor quality of teachers may arise from the curricula which are out-dated and out of touch with current world development. Some EFL teacher training college students have complained about what they receive at campus, which does not keep pace with those practiced in primary and secondary levels ELT. A common example is the case of genre-based learning materials of ELT at the target schools, which has not been given stress so far during their study. The curricula may also provide an inappropriate theory-practice balance and inadequate levels of teaching practices. The qualified trainers are not less important. Students of teacher training courses will benefit from qualified trainers (for example, having good command of English and interesting methods of teaching, mastering the knowledge and skills required to prepare for good teachers, and inspiring).

In-service teacher training programs are needed to compensate for the weaknesses of initial teacher education. Ali (2007) proposes a

model that has three characteristics: reflective, collaborative, and developmental. By "reflective" he means the role of the trainee teachers is to develop, and the responsibility for development resides in the trainees, who must constantly reflect on their practice. "Collaborative" is in the sense that the trainer helps the trainees to develop and refine their reflective practices. And, "developmental" means that the trainees are given chance to develop their own judgments of what goes on in their own classroom...sharpen their awareness of what their pupils are doing and the interactions that take place in their classes...and heighten their ability to evaluate their own teaching practices. But, there is serious doubt as to whether such a model would work with our teachers. Experience has shown that peers/colleagues are not warmly welcome to enter and sit in a teacher's class.

### Methods

It is a survey study. Perceptual survey rather than observational one here was preferred for the sake of practicality. Sample of the survey was EFL teachers of primary and secondary schools in the area of Central Java Province. It used *convenience sampling* (Gay & Airasian, 2000: 137), where the 61 respondents were chosen as sample because "they were there". They were teachers of English who did not pass in-service teacher certification program following the training sessions that included peer-teaching. Few respondents were teachers of English who served as mentors to students of teacher training college in teaching practice program. Some others were participants of in-house trainings who volunteered to complete the questionnaires.

The questionnaires used for collecting data consist of 16 close-ended items and one free response item. The items were constructed with reference to main roles of language teacher, in this case, teachers of EFL. Each of the main teacher roles (e.g. teacher as a classroom facilitator) was broken down into statements of manifestation (e.g. As long as I know a lot about my lesson materials, though without any pre-teaching preparation my students will master the teaching materials). The questionnaire used native tongue.

### Survey Result and Discussion

On overall, the survey has shown that teachers of English had "suitable" perception of EFL teacher roles. Of the sixteen close-ended items, the average percentage of favorable response to thirteen statements such as "As long as I know a lot about my lesson materials, though without any pre-teaching preparation my students will master

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the teaching materials", "It is always enough to teach as I usually do", and "Too much teaching time allotment makes me do my job just as I usually do" reached above 80. While the rate of favorable response to the other three statements, i.e. "The main job of a teacher is to give explanations to the students", "A teacher should always be present among students in the class, because it is unlikely that they can learn alone in the absence of teacher", and "I am not tolerant of noise that is in my class, because it disturbs the classes nearby" was only under 50.

The findings that have shown the worst EFL teachers' perception of teacher roles are respectively: (i) the view that students are unable to learn without teacher's presence in the classroom (63.15%), (ii) the view that the main task of teacher is to give explanations (54.09%), and (iii) the view that noisy (English) classes are always bad (42.37%).

More than sixty per cent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that a teacher should always be present among students in the class, because it is unlikely that they can learn alone in the absence of teacher. This view is not acceptable for some reasons. First, it is against the widely-acknowledged position of teacher as facilitator. A good classroom facilitator should be able to prepare and design effective learning tasks. It is fairly easy to understand the idea that an effective learning task can enable students to learn with little or even no teacher's help. In practice it is not always simple, but it is quite possible to work. Secondly, such teachers' view is not acceptable because learners (students) should be trained and prepared for more autonomy and responsibility with age. And, finally, it is unrealistic that a teacher should always be present among the students all the time. For the sake of students too teachers are expected to constantly develop and maintain their skills and high standards of behavior. There are times they need to participate in seminars and forums of ideas exchange at their work place. There are also times for them to join trainings elsewhere. When a sudden call to leave the classroom comes, a teacher does not necessarily give the students a rest period – they can learn normally with best optional activities the teacher has well prepared for every single lesson.

A good example is proposed here. Given that students have learnt adequate reading techniques for comprehension, the teacher can rely on them working with few short texts of different genres on their own. In order to help them, comprehension exercises using multiple choice items would be a good alternative. When necessary, they can be required to write the referred line numbers in the text. This task can be designed for individual work. Of course, feedback to every task or

assignment is necessary to provide, and when possible, rewards are given.

As a source person in the class, a teacher gives explanations in the classroom. Nevertheless, explanation is given only when considered badly needed or when students ask questions. Over explanation will only lead to lecturing as well as teacher domination. Whether acknowledged or not, this is indeed what more frequently goes on in our English classes. Eric Pollock in "Asian EFL Journal" (1999) argues our language classrooms today are filled with the teachers that are active or dominant in the classroom. "The traffic cop syndrome is all too common in the language classroom. In his opinion, this condition is due to poor educational values.

The roles of teacher as a classroom facilitator and manager should have been prioritized in such a way that students will and are able to learn with least or no guidance from adults (teacher). It is true that for this a teacher should be creative in classroom scenarios, which will possibly take time prior to implementation. But, it is often something fruitful and sweet to both teacher and students when the lesson is under way.

Language class to some degree is different in characteristics from other classes. Practice in language use as found in role playing, language games, and audio (visual) aids-based speaking-listening activities is typical of a language class. The class dynamics as the result of these activities will be hardly free from noise. Nevertheless, noise intensity that may arise from such activities is of course not the same as that of shouts. When a language class's noise disturbs the students in the classes nearby, there must be something wrong there, e.g. unclear instruction, too difficult task, no time limitation, no control, and/or uninteresting/monotonous given task. A good example is that when an English teacher is applying a language game he gives emphasis on the game itself rather than the language use. Even reading comprehension activity is not a silent moment when variations for excellence are made, for example discussion for reconstructing the jumbled text is integrated. This is especially good for teaching the texts that are too difficult for individual tasks.

Concerning the open-ended item, only one respondent gave additional response. Therefore, the data was ignored then.

Though the teachers had suitable perception of their roles as EFL teachers, in reality they have shown inconsistency. A testimony to this inconsistency can be put forward here. First, though the teachers

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disagreed with the statement saying teachers should not do pre-teaching preparation (referring especially to statements 2 & 3), commonly the teachers practicing peer-teaching during in-service training in the teacher certification program were poor in the use of teaching media, did not offer fascinating learning activities, used no hand-outs but one particular book at hands. The class activities were colored with listening to the teacher and writing.

Secondly, the teachers perceived that they needed to always improve their quality no matter how hard it is for them to withdraw from their routines, e.g. due to overburden teaching hours (statements 4, 5, & 7). In reality, the writer has many times heard a teacher say he/she had no interest in joining trainings anymore just because he/she has obtained a professional 'educator' certificate from the govt. The writer has also noticed several teachers cancel their participation in a workshop that was about to start. Strangely enough, they insisted on deserving certificates of participation. It is quite clear that their spirit was to afford a certificate rather than to search for knowledge or acquire skills.

The teachers' general opinion about out-of-class assignments (statement 9) was a good thing. This opinion is contradictory to what most students told in informal dialogues with the writer, who is also their home tutor. According to them, their English teacher rarely gave home assignments or the like.

Last but not least, the teachers agreed with the questionnaire statement saying that a teacher should conduct a research (statement 6). Unfortunately, they have not yet shown a commitment to this stance. Based on the writer's experience as a portfolio assessor, quite rare was found one teacher's research report in every ten portfolios. It has been in line with sporadic criticisms in mass media lately concerning the very low interest of our teachers in doing (classroom action) research.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

Since professionalism is generally seen from behavior, and the teachers' perception that was revealed in this survey was too some extent inconsistent with their behavior, an increased portion of practice in either initial teacher training or in-service teacher training should be taken into account.

This survey is preliminary to preparing for a research of the same topics but which is likely to provide the genuine picture of teachers' professionalism due to more accurate data, especially those employing observational and interview method. For example, the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that pre-teaching preparation

was not needed for an experienced teacher. By observation we can see the consistency between the perception and behavior through, say, for example, the lesson plan available, or media/teaching aids. Through interviews, we can ask the teachers what things related with the lesson they have done before they teach. Through interviews too, information about daily learning-teaching routine can be revealed from the students.

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