34. Novice EFL Teachers' Professional Development: A Narrative Inquiry Into Micro Level Development Process

by Sultan Baa

NOVICE EFL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO MICRO-LEVEL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Educational researchers have made great strides in theorizing teacher professional development, though attention is still concentrated on isolated mental processes. This study therefore reports on a narrative inquiry aiming to find out micro-level development process that occurs in two novice EFL teachers and also to reveal the features of teacher's change that appear to facilitate English language teaching and learning. A variety of data collection techniques including; narrative frame, field notes, semi-structured interview and stimulated recall interview are used to make teachers' behavioral, attitudinal and intellectual component of micro-level development explicit. Two overarching themes that emerge in this narrative inquiry are; the route to be a good English teacher and rediscovering the passion to teach. The important key finding of this study is that the early year of teaching is sensitively crucial to EFL teachers' micro-level development, which is characterized by a positive shift from constructive experiences and aspiration of better English language learning process to internalization of empathy, attentive and responsive manner. Another key finding of this study is that all the novice EFL teachers who spoke positively about implementing changes in their classroom practices, embraced most of the process of micro level development that occurred, based on intuition, without clear theoretical underpinning of pedagogy, and merely classroom-bound focus. However, this study contributes to the current knowledge in relation to the crucial role of three distinct patterns of PD; discontent, aspiration and without intention.

Keywords: *Novice EFL teacher; professional development; micro-level development process; features of changes.*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in their routines experience both qualitative and quantitative changes in nature. As stated by Vonk (1995) when these changes are in positive direction, it consequently leads to professional development (PD). The main problem is PD as a *process* seems to occur accidentally and incidentally (Evans, 2019). In fact language teachers are not aware of the conceptualizations that serve as the foundations for why they do what they do. Freeman and Richards (1993) argue that it is only when they begin their journey into education that this develops. Thus, for novice EFL teachers there is a growing consensus that in a mission to generate high quality of PD, we need to better understand the developmental processes involved in their teaching lives.

Literature on the area of language teacher development has also been well-documented by educational researchers and consequently resulting in great strides in theorizing teacher PD which lay towards cognitive trend (Borg, 1997; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017). Borg (2003) in his seminal review argues that evidence for change in teachers' cognition cannot be used to make claims about changed teacher actions in the classroom. However, the theory, as it stands, tends to examine teacher's mental process in isolation and does not adequately account for novice EFL teachers' cognitive development which has an emphasis on implicit learning. It then encourages the researchers to extend the scholarship by scrutinizing the complexity of PD and draws on the construct of micro-level development (Evans, 2014) as a way of viewing changes in the novice EFL teachers' lives.

METHODS

This study employs narrative inquiry as the research design. To achieve the depth of the narrative required for this study, the researchers rely on narrative frames, semi-structured interviews, stimulated-video recall and observational field notes as data collection techniques. This inquiry adopts a four-step data analysis procedure of narrative research as suggested by (Liu & Xu, 2011). In coding for themes, it is guided by textual coding in thematic analysis (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In addition, identifying similarities and differences as well as establishing relationship across the data are undertaken manually.

The research takes place at one secondary school in Indonesia, where the participants, two novice EFL teachers, are recruited by means of purposive sampling. Table 1 provides brief information about the participants.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Teachers		Qualification	Experience	
Pseudonyms	Gender		Teaching	Age
Indah	Female	Undergraduate	Two Years Three months	24
Mawar	Female	Undergraduate	Four months	27

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Findings
The Route to be a Good English Teacher: Indah's Narratives

Indah was born and raised in Matenete Bua, a small village located in Watampone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. In pursuit of a better career, she was strictly influenced by her educations from elementary school to higher education. Though Indah had grown up wanting to be a career woman since elementary school, she did not have clear insights into what she would become until she learnt to be a teacher in STAIN Watampone, a state college which located about 10 miles from her residence. She was highly motivated and surrounded by well-educated people for four years in the tertiary education. She also enrolled in a well-known private course in Watampone. The course provided her everything she need to be a good teacher, such as the lesson or material taught, friends and an ideal model of teacher . She was fascinated by the teachers as she felt that there was a significant improvement in her competence due to her intensive learning.

The more teaching is lived, the more motivation is boosted

Indah's teaching experiences during the short period of this research project, unlike many beginning teachers who often experience more reality shocks because of having difficulties to accustom themselves in a new school culture, she had showed an impression as a lively EFL teacher, with a huge desire to become a good teacher. However, despite of her success to manage the initial stage as a novice EFL teacher, there are a lot of occasions where she described herself as if 'dying' in dealing with the students in the classroom due to large classroom size.

> ...in the last semester, only Mr. Husain (an experienced English teacher) and myself taught here, so at that time there was a losing class? where the teacher was absent, but the principal asked me to merge |that closing class| into my class. As a result, it was not effective, noisy and everything. What else can I do, even [if?] I complained, there was only few teacher here.
>
> (Indah: Semi-structured 2, May 19. 2018)

As the consequence of the large size of student number in the classroom, inadequate space in which they used to study, the students kept making noisy and the heated weather during middays, the lesson and the activity eventually were not carried out well. She was in a position where she could not complaint about the situation whereas there were only a few English teachers who taught in SMA30 Watampone. Presumably, she was concerned about some parts in which she could manage a large number of students in a classroom, instead of complaining about her existing situation;

> However because of the experience, I learnt to manage a large number of students into a group, not quite effective from the topic I discussed with, but at least the students were not *wandering* from the class.
>
> (Indah: Semi-structured 2, May 19. 2018)

Despite being obsessed on aforementioned problem, Indah was rather concerned that during the process of imparting the knowledge to the students, she just needed to do the best she could in which letting the experiences sharpened her sensitivity, trained perseverance, and imagined that these processes would

eventually lead to a beneficial situation. In fact, there was one time when she experienced competential change incidentally without any prior recognition or intention, in a time she asked questions to the students;

> …well one interesting case while teaching was there was something unpredictably. For instance when I ask "descriptive is for…" I might not finished my sentence yet, but there was a student answered it and said to clarify |make something clear or explicit|" Actually I just wanted to say "*untuk mendeskripsikan*" |which just literally translated the word "descriptive"|. In fact student's answer was more comprehensible, that was why I agreed with him. So whether I give answers or ask questions, I indirectly learnt as well.
>
> (Indah: Stimulated Recall, April 16. 2018)

As the result of the interaction between the student and the teacher, it was assumed that Indah potentially applied her increased knowledge and understanding of procedures, and designated roles and responsibilities, to initiate change that would impact upon her professional practice.

Given that teacher learning, just like any other kind of human learning, is a motivated activity, all Indah needed to be a good English teacher is to keep learning from her experience and this patterned in her life in which the processual change takes place. Therefore as long as the teaching and learning is sustained, then motivation is also boosted concurrently and finally generating Indah's own process of a good teacher.

A single textbook was not enough

Indah as a non-servant teacher in a rural school never attended a professional development session whether in material development or the curriculum held by government. Furthermore she still implemented a preceding curriculum which was called the 'Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan' (KTSP) which means school-based curriculum. Considering the principle she hold during the implementation of the curriculum, the process of teaching undertaken by Indah was characterized by textbook. The activities, instructions as well as the tasks were dominantly based on a single textbook. Ironically, whereas the learning was driven by this textbook, one of the most salient problems concerning this aspect was lack of learning resources. As Indah reported that only one focused book distributed for each table not for each students and then collected after the class ended. Because the school was still new, many facilities for instance the books and even school lab were provided insufficiently. In this circumstance, Indah's journey [who was motivated to be a good teacher was examined. By the time in reflecting her teaching, Indah was aware of the condition about the school with its restrictiveness;

> The handbook in accordance to school regulation cannot be brought home, so the students were only |allowed| taking important notes and gave assignments from the book, but it was not enough, therefore the condition triggered me to find another relevant textbook, in which it was still related to the primary handbook, thus the children |students| are able to learn conveniently.
>
> (Indah: Semi-structured 2, May 19. 2018)

On the basis of the evidence currently available, it seemed fair to suggest that Indah's expressed discontent toward the current system in which she

involved. Accordingly, the students were in inconvenience state where they had to write only the important one because they could not have the book. Indah as a teacher could not do much, but she pointed out that; *it was not enough*. She was worthy of saying it because teacher was the one who taught using the material from the book in the classroom and was the closest one to know what should matter for the students. Given the priority to this difficulty, she therefore had been triggered to initiatively undertake book adaptation.

Feature theme 1: Sense of empathy

Indah constructed her teacher knowledge which impacting the process of learning when she learned that breaking away from original perception and became more open-minded benefited to her students and made the lesson far more interesting as she needed not to waste her time with unnecessary efforts. Thinking her as a serious English teacher, she was likely preoccupied with her concerns about students before experiencing the reality of teaching. She used all the instructional material which only matter for her, the material in which she preferred to teach. It took her five and six meeting, a quite long time to realize that her teaching was inefficient after put more efforts and it was not working well. Observing students' responses, looking their assignment in her classroom, and the most important aspect was; considering what she would do or felt if she were in the students' positions (that were trying to learn inconveniently) helped Indah to realize the importance of changing in what she used to do.

Feature theme 2: Responsive

Indah's decisions into her class were often unpredictably emerged and forced her to manipulate every possible technique to follow learning. These however generated a quick reaction into her current practice. In a day as she estimated that she could make more than a hundred instant of decisions. For instance, Indah's decision was influenced by student when instructing the function of descriptive text (Indah: Stimulated Recall, April 16. 2018). She spontaneously agreed with the student's answer who said *memperjelas* (to explain) where she wanted to say *mendeskripsikan* (to describe). The word *memperjelas* according to Indah is more comprehensible in since it was straightforward for her students whereas most of the students from rural area who influenced by their mother tongue and some were second language. The word *memperjelas* is a word that usually considered as the students' second language where *mendeskripsikan* sounded as second language but it was literally translate the word 'descriptive' which was foreign language. Indah realized that the student chose better word than her, so she immediately repeated what this student said. This manifestation of competential change eventually leads to procedural change in a time when she explains the related topic of language learning.

Rediscovering the Passion to Teach: Mawar's Narratives

Mawar was born at a lovely place in Maccope, Watampone, South Sulawesi. In pursuit of her career, she started her journey and engaged with

educational environment in order to obtain a worthy degree of Sarjana (bachelor), in which people around her considered it as a license for having a certain job. Despite the fact that Mawar has engaged with English language teaching and learning over four years and enrolled in a course where the concentration was also at English teaching, ironically in her first job card it was written as 'a staff' in a marketing company instead of 'a teacher'. After graduating from her college, she decided not to be a teacher since it was considered as tough career. More than three years working as a marketing staff member which basically it was not her major, it made her return to an educational environment and finally as an English teacher. Teaching was described as a *soul* who she lived with, and could not live without. She committed to make teaching as her entire life career, so she tried to make the best she could in teaching.

Being a teacher means being a good person in nature

Throughout her first semester, Mawar struggled with few lack which emerging in several practices. English language teaching in her routine remained static; there were no other patterns or variations in her practices. After checking the students' attendance, she just asked the students whether they have any assignment or not. She just opened the book and merely followed the written instruction in every section. Although at glance there was no complex process in Mawar's performance while teaching, she was extreme in her thinking and truly genuine in what she said. One day she made a comment about why she always sat on the chair in an ongoing classroom;

> Honestly I prefer just sitting, but I do not know why, but there something pushed me to come close toward students, this is like an obligatory, it was obvious that become a teacher is becoming a good person in nature. So that was why a good thing only represented to teacher. It was not good to see this sitting |attitude|.
>
> (Mawar: Stimulated recall: April 16. 2018)

The act of being passive was renovated by Mawar's philosophy about being a teacher. She became aware that her concept about teacher was an impetus to not behaving passively in the classroom. In addition she also argued that; *It was not good to see, this sitting |attitude| after all*. In her point of view, 'just sitting' and was not doing any activity made her feel uneasy. It worth noting that her sense of considering others views (especially students) would bother her and as the consequence she might change her behavior in order to preserve her image as a teacher.

In spite of her passive manner, there was one time when she realized that it was crucial for her to monitor the students and gave better reinforcement. She made a comment after watching her teaching performance in a broader angle (through video);

> In the minute of 21, Gee! it was apparent, only the girl I have noticed. If I could be more sensitive, these two boys |students| would be noticed as well. Sometimes if I did concern on one single student, another student would be left behind.
>
> (Mawar: Stimulated recall, April 21. 2018)

Only by watching a video from her teaching, she learnt that she was not focused enough of her students. In the perspective of students, Mawar might be

described as a fairly attentive teacher, but in her own perspective she thought that she was inattentive since the treatment of students were not fair enough. As she confirmed in her remarks;

> Here the activity 4 number 2, the [female student's] question was "where do you usually find that place? I translated where did you usually find the place in the picture [picture of beach], it was ambiguous, so the students would answer the place is "the beach". So I managed them [by asking] where the location of the beach. That was helping them to answer the question, actually they were able to do so. In contrast to the male students, I just asked them to open their dictionary so that they would find the translation. I also asked them what is the meaning of *what*, *why*, the basic one. In fact, the boy needed more explanation, but I took more attention on female students.
>
> (Mawar: Stimulated recall, April 21. 2018)

Never lose control

Mawar's rationale to *change* that is 'only if it is needed' seemed to shift her to have a sense of controlling her emotion and her behavior not to change for unimportant one. In fact there was an incident in the classroom when she managed to link this rationale to profit. Mawar was teaching about descriptive text at the time, but most of the activities were dominated by memorizing vocabularies. Therefore it was very difficult for Mawar to monitor them all, and as the consequences the students often made unimportant behavior and noise for instance, walking around, and having chit-chat to the other students. As she was asked about what were her feelings at that moment, she replied:

> In that case perhaps yah.. I used to dealing with it. I might be angry. But the process of learning must go on, yet they were still focusing on the lesson so there was no problem. I was not this calm in the past.
>
> (Mawar: Stimulated recall, April 16. 2018)

In another occasion particularly after three meetings (April, 30. 2018), another same case but worse occurred again, where the students showed rude behavior while the process of learning was still undertaken. A student was found playing with his smartphone during the learning. Mawar realized that she have to take a firm action toward the student because it broke the regulation. She changed her behavior immediately and grabbed the student's smartphone. Although there was a tension at the event, the class kept going normally afterward without imposing her emotion further. When she reflected her teaching, she also confirmed that she should control her emotion for the better of the classroom situation and never let her emotion matter disregard the purpose of learning.

Feature theme 1: From being inattentive to becoming attentive

Mawar became aware of modifying her behavior into better state, from being inattentive to becoming attentive. In her remark; *if I could be more sensitive, these two boys [students] would be noticed as well.* indicated that she would be more attentive upon students the next time she experience the same condition. Her past event provided a basis, which is not to repeat the same mistake. Having been able to notice the less effective activity in the classroom and expected to have satisfied results, Mawar perhaps manifested high morale.

Summary of two novice EFL teachers' development

At this last finding section, Indah and Mawar's account of professional development will be concluded. All the process included in this section is the extended account of the conceptual framework of this research. Indah and Mawar's learning was made up of the teachers' schooling experience as a student. They endorsed three apparent sources that play the most significant role in their learning process, *Pre-service education*, *Internship* and *Private English course*. These sources were vital parts of their teaching practice which then to some extent shaped micro-level development process which can only occur in formal teaching practice.

Before the participants manifest several changes that are essential for both teacher and students, they begin with distinct patterns which defined the interaction of cognitions, those are; discontent, aspiration and without intention. Indah and Mawar in teaching practice underwent *discontent* or feeling of wanting better state from their existing situation. In a more strict fashion, this *discontent* was not only limited to classroom situation, but also existed in the context of the school culture which was wider aspect of what education involves. Besides the feeling of wanting better treatment or an improved situation which emerged before undergoing changes, the teachers also have a strong desire for high achievement to initiate change. This *Aspiration* is different with *Discontent*. While *discontents* were negative-state-oriented of teachers and predisposed by other parties (principal, students' behavior and school culture), this *aspiration* derived purely from teacher's desire of wanting to improve students (competence, performance, response) by also improving other aspects, such as the materials use or even the teacher herself (teaching conception, management skill). The last, the experience of micro-level development, particularly teacher's change can occur *without intention*. Unlike the last two features, better ways which occurred without intention was not predisposed by any party because it occurs spontaneously and there was no clear aspiration since it was happen without prior recognition of deficiency. This feature was only included in Indah's narrative and was evident particularly when the Indah spontaneously decided to change her answer immediately because of the student's response, specifically when her idea and student's idea were being met and there was no contradiction of both ideas after sort them out through her rationale, then the teacher may accept the idea although it might result in inaccurate notion.

There are three distinct features of change which appeared based on the participants' narrative; they are *sense of empathy* in which the teacher positioned their role as students and finally realized the importance of changing in what she used to do. *Responsive* in which she generated quick reaction into her current practice due to classroom interaction. And the last is *attentive manner*, in which the teacher gradually understood about the value of classroom management after facilitated through video.

Discussion

The section begins with a discussion of the key findings arising from the evidence generated in this research. Attention will then focus on the crucial process of micro-level development in teachers' life and how this process relates to research literature.

The key finding of this research is that early year of formal teaching experiences was sensitively crucial to EFL teachers' micro-level development which is characterized by positive shift; from constructive experiences and aspiration of better English language learning process to internalization of? empathy, attentive and responsive manner. Drawing on evidences from Indah's narrative especially on the first theme, it shows that her interpretive understanding about a good teacher is to keep *live[?]* on it, after having difficult problems. Considering the occurrence where the students' competence went improved because of her own effort to some extent link to her satisfaction. As added by (Harada, 2017) that this sense of achievement seem to have the most powerful effects on teacher motivation management. As the consequences of this conception, Indah learned to do the best she could in which allowing the experiences sharpened her sensitivity, trained perseverance, and became motivated that these processes would eventually lead to a beneficial situation. The path to address Indah's development process lies out on many cases mediated by self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 1997) in which she think optimistically on her aspiration in the struggle of being an English teacher during teaching process in formal classroom.

Having regard to Mawar's narrative, she also successfully manages her rationale to profit, as she is able to control her emotion in her first four-months of teaching. Novice EFL teacher is, as evidently illustrated in the Arizmendi Tejeda, Gillings de González, and López Martínez (2016) work, the one who had lacked self-confidence and masking his/her performance with conflicting attitude in mind. In Mawar's condition, she handled the situation in which the rationale to the purpose of learning was greater than her personal feelings. This condition as supported by earlier works, has an important role in teacher's daily functioning and well-being, as well as in their ability to attain their teaching and educational goals (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). In addition Asi, Aydin, and Karabay (2018) claim that by maintaining this emotional quality, it may be useful to help to create positive classroom climate. This therefore demonstrates that Mawar in the early year of teaching to some extent fulfills their development process with constructive cognitive experiences.

The central argument of this research to address Mawar's and Indah's development as novice EFL teachers' that these processes began in schooling, where the teachers have extensive experiences of classroom which defines early cognition (Borg, 2006). In addition, there was also a competing argument that pre-service education was also situated as an essential part which constructed EFL teachers' cognition (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017). The current findings, however, showed a new ground that pre-service education only constructed EFL teacher's cognition partially_. From Indah's and Mawar's narrative, in-service education is

seen as the centre of language teachers' development. When they deal with real classroom environment, they are striving with complex problems and various classroom problems. And during that process, they must change (because of discontent) or have to change (because of aspiration) to overcome the issue. In fact the change could also occur without intention which in turn will shape their behavior, attitudes as well as their intellectual.

Considering the complexity of micro-level development issue, both Indah's and Mawar's recognition of what they perceived as *incidental* improvements in their process of becoming an English teacher was also evidently described by (Evans, 2018) as *implicit* learning when one of her participants said; "I spoke, and I learned, and I spoke, and I learned." When someone sometimes can make a lot of mistakes, sometimes he/she can also make a certain condition right in that process. Unlike Evans (2018) finding, which involved informal professional learning of experienced professor with a higher level of intellect, the finding in this research involved the process of interaction where a novice EFL teacher learnt or experienced a "better way" after gaining the feedback from students and ended up with ideas acceptance. It suggests that if the teachers with their deficiencies desire to learn as a part of their professional learning, they should elicit an active interaction among students.

Another key finding of this research is that all novice EFL teachers who spoke positively about implementing changes in their classroom practices, embraced most of the process of micro level development that occurred, based on intuition, without clear theoretical underpinning of pedagogy, and merely classroom-bound focus. This condition is aligned to what Hoyle (1975) called this continuum of professionality as "restricted" extreme rather than 'extended' extreme. However Indah who was two years younger than Mawar showed one comment in which her intellectuality to some extent lay towards the "extended" professionality: *The handbook due to school regulation cannot be brought home…, but it was not enough, so the condition triggered me to find another relevant textbook…* as evidenced in Indah's narrative.

Indah's rationale about adding more books in the learning process class was based on serious evidence generally intended to the school regulation which impacted upon students learning. This value may not always be strikingly evident in the way in which English teacher find another supplementary books. Indah found herself constrained by the school's regulation and expressed the voice that it is less satisfactory, since her realistic expectation where students were able to learn conveniently was not being met as indicated in her further comment: *…thus the children |students| would learn conveniently*. However from this evidence, Indah manifested both behavioral and intellectual developments. It is obvious that she also views teaching as a career which incorporates continued personal and professional development underpinned by self-appraisal and self-improvement (Evans, 1999).

CONCLUSION

This research provides ideas and values of teacher's professional development which to some extent have not evidently shown by previous research. The significant aspects of the professional learning that occurred in two novice EFL teachers, who participated in this research, was that it was not only about doing things differently or developing new ideas and generating great result from their learning, it was also about how they manage their deficiency in their novice period and understand the problematic areas in their teaching. The teacher also tends to show constructive process in their teaching as they find a problem by themselves and initiatively overcome the problems by their own way. Moreover, unpredictable events occurring in the classroom have fruitfully shaped their development. Particularly in the way of novice EFL teacher learn, this research had made an attempt to present each teacher's life by explaining their learning and change [only one?] and finally tracking three distinct patterns of PD; discontent, aspiration and without discontent. Furthermore, investigating these patterns separately in different national, cultural or educational contexts provides new horizons for researchers and their potential findings will contribute to professional development literature significantly.

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FINAL GRADE

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor