Efl Teacher Learning in Online Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

Teachers’ professional development is essential for improving student learning outcomes and fostering overall educational quality. However, many teachers believe that TPD programs are ineffective. Teachers require ongoing programs, encouraging them to discuss ideas and give feedback, and do a collaboration. One of the programs is community of practice, which is a social learning process in which individuals with similar interest collaborate. Thus, this study aims to explore teachers’ learning in community of practice to develop their professional growth. This study adopted case study design involving a group of English teachers in Indonesia who joining an online TPD program. The data were gained through WhatsApp interaction between the teachers and the trainer, and among the teachers. The findings indicated that teachers learn in community of practice by getting proposed questions and given feedback by the trainers, getting teaching resources from the trainers and their fellow teachers, and presenting an issue related to their teaching. These aspects lead to interaction among them. Moreover, the presence of a group coordinator and administrator may help the teachers to foster teachers’ engagement towards the program.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers Professional Development (PD) has become an increasingly important topic of interest in education, since it is linked to improving educational quality (Abbaszadeh, 2013). It is commonly acknowledged that teacher quality is one of the most critical elements influencing student accomplishment (Bissessar, 2014). Providing chances for professional development to teachers is one approach for enhancing their quality as a teacher.

Foreign language teachers and the growth of teachers’ professional development of foreign language teachers are particularly important (Liu, Li, Li, & Zheng, 2023). The teacher is the key to education reform and teaching quality. Thus, teachers’ level of language competency, teaching ideas, teaching theory, teaching skills, and ability to grow independently are all fundamental variables of teachers’ growth.
In recent years, many professional development programs have been implemented to improve English language teaching. However, the following issues arose during the implementation of TPD program: training activities were not carried out in accordance with teacher expectations, teachers’ lack interest and understanding of scientific work, and ineffectiveness of the training program (Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2022). Therefore, teachers require flexible, contextualized, continuing learning opportunities (Trust et al. 2016). Moreover, collaboration is one of the effective ways for teachers to learn from each other (de Jong, Meirink, & Admiraal, 2021). Teachers may share their experiences, ideas, information, and challenges through regular communication.

The educational community has recognized the value of continual professional development for teachers to enhance teaching skills, increase student learning outcomes, and adapt to changing educational contexts (Murugaiyah et al, 2012). Community of Practice (CoP) which was proposed by Wenger (1998) established the notion of the value of social activities that connect people to communities. Community of practice is identified as a viable model for fostering teacher growth through collaboration, shared knowledge, and reflective discourse (Lave & Wenger, 2004).

Teachers in community of practice engage in social learning processes that foster the development of cognitive presence, which refers to an individual’s degree of participation, critical thinking, and deep learning in a community of practice setting (Marchy, Murni, Kartini, & Muhammad, 2022; Mayani, Suripah, & Muhammad, 2022; Muhammad, Himmawan, Mardliyah, & Dasari, 2023; Muhammad, Mukhibin, Naser, & Dasari, 2022; Muhammad, Yolanda, Andrian, & Rezeki, 2022; Sanusi, Triansyah, Muhammad, & Susanti, 2023). CoP can build an environment for teachers to propose and share their ideas, experiences, and information which can help their students to gain more effective learning experiences (Hairon & Tan, 2017). In addition, CoP gives chances for teachers to experience continual professional development which can help teachers to improve their teaching techniques steadily.

CoP focuses on practical aspects of a profession, such as daily obstacles, new tools, field innovations, and things that work and don’t work (Maryanto, Rachmawati, Muhammad, & Sugiyanto, 2023; Muhammad, Elmawati, Samosir, & Marchy, 2023; Muhammad, Samosir, Elmawati, & Marchy, 2023; Muhammad, Triansyah, Fahri, & Lizein, 2023; Muhammad & Yolanda, 2022; Triansyah, Muhammad, et al., 2023; Triansyah, Yanti, Rabuandika, & Muhammad, 2023). Therefore, CoP can help teachers reflect on their approaches, acquire new skills, and find motivation by providing mutual support (Murugaiah et al, 2016).

CoPs have increasingly been conducted online in recent years (Angraini, Alzaber, Sari, Yolanda, & Muhammad, 2022; Angraini, Yolanda, & Muhammad, 2023; Muhammad, Triansyah, Fahri, & Gunawan, 2023; Siahaan, Muhammad, Dasari, & Maharani, 2023; Soraya, Kurjono, & Muhammad, 2023). For example, Facebook group used as an informal medium for English language teacher professional development (Bissessar, 2014). Twitter is also employed as a community of practice tool, and the network’s influence on their teaching methods has been assessed (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). WeChat is another platform utilized for community practice (Xue et al, 2019). It supports their teaching growth. However, they claimed that maintaining the online community of practice may encounter various problems, including teacher rapport development, performance anxiety, time constraints, and technological dissatisfaction.

As it has been mentioned above, community practice provides benefits for teachers’ professional development through various platforms and broad of topics. Nevertheless, there is still much to be discovered regarding the how the EFL teachers learn through online community of practice. In this context, the teachers used WhatsApp as a tool to communicate with the other teachers and the trainers to talk about how to teach four English basic skills in two months. Thus, this study aims to answer this research questions: In what ways do the teachers learn in community of practice?
2. METHOD

The present study employed case study design to gain in-depth understanding of how EFL teachers learn through an online community of practice. Case study design can establish cause and effect, in which it observes effect in real contexts, recognizing that context is powerful determinant of both causes and effects (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The study is gained the data from one group of English teachers who joined TPD program named PRELIM II. The teachers communicated through WhatsApp group with one another and with the tutor. This program was focusing on developing teachers’ four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, and how to teach all these skills to the students.

Teachers involved in this project were required to do the following activities. Firstly, teachers had to do individual learning activities by watching video from the tutor related to the four basic English skills. Each skill is discussed within two weeks. After the teachers watched the video, they answered questions related to the topic. Besides having individual activities, they had a video conference each week to get further explanation and discussion related to the topic. The rest of the activity is carried out through WhatsApp group. Thus, this study only focuses on their WhatsApp interaction.

The data analysis techniques are elaborated. The WhatsApp chat excerpt is exported as text files. Each post was initially categorized according to its function within the context of the chat. The data is analyzed using thematic analysis. Deductive thematic analysis is chosen, in which the analysis will develop of a set of pre-existing themes or codes based on previous study or theory. The analysis will be identified and categorized using thematic analysis according to three key elements of community of practice by Wenger (1998): mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Their comments, questions, and discussions on WhatsApp group were used as the data set.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Community of Practice

Community of practice (CoP) is a social learning process in which individuals who share a similar interest in a subject interact over a long period of time for exchanging ideas and tactics, determining solutions, and constructing innovations (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). CoPs can be online or offline. They offer an organized mechanism for teachers to learn from each other (Mai & Nguyen, 2020). CoP provides continued professional development for teachers to help them improve their teaching techniques in turn, benefit their students (Kourkoulli, 2018). CoP can also help to build a supportive school culture, which can boost teacher collaboration (Hairon & Tan, 2017). Learning in the community of practice is a process of engagement in social practices that requires individuals to adapt to the professional community.

Wenger (1998) proposed three fundamental components of community of practice. Domain can be defined as shared interest or area of expertise that binds the members of the community together. It can be any topic, issue, or practice in which members are engaged and want to learn more. Community incorporates all the social aspects of a community of practice. Member interactions and connections, a sense of shared identity and belonging, and the creation of shared language and rituals are all part of this. In other words, it is related to the way the members of the community learn through various features. Practice refers to the process of shared resources, tools, and knowledge. This component describes the processes, techniques, and methods that teachers use to solve problems, achieve goals, and develop new information.

In addition to the three key elements of a community of practice, Wenger suggested three variables that impact the operation of communities of practice: 1) mutual engagement; 2) a joint enterprise, and 3) a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Mutual engagement is related to the members’ interaction and discussion to share a common interest or passion on a regular basis. It can occur both
online and offline which includes a variety of activities such as problem solving, reflective thinking, information exchange, and social emotion sharing.

A joint enterprise means the members sharing a shared aim or purpose toward which they collaborate. This collaborative venture might be a collection of difficulties, concerns, or a passion for a topic, and participants enhance their knowledge and experience in this field by engaging on a regular basis. Shared repertoire describes the members of a CoP in building a shared repertory of resources, experiences, stories, tools, and problem-solving approaches from which they may draw to support their learning and cooperation. This shared repertory can consist of both tacit and explicit knowledge, and it can be generated via continual interactions.

**Teachers’ Professional Development**

Teachers have an important role to aid their students to live and work in the changing world. Thus, it is essential for the teachers to develop their professional work to incorporate new ideas and values (Wang & Lu, 2012). Teacher must be learner and knower at the same time to be professionally developed (Wood, 2007). There are seven characteristics of effective teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017): content focused, incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory, supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts, uses models and modeling of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers opportunities for feedback and reflection, and sustained duration.

All these characteristics commonly appear in successful professional development model. Furthermore, effective professional development should be in a long-term and ongoing process (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). Teachers need the process for acquisition of knowledge (learning about) and the application of the knowledge to existing practices (learning to be) (Moore 2008). Throughout this process, therefore, the teachers are provided enough time to reflect on their teaching process and revise it as needed.

**Discussion and Result**

The study reveals intriguing findings on the presence of COP aspects and how the teachers learn during the interaction. Domain analysis was carried out to determine the extent to which the CoP dimensions were present in the WhatsApp interactions. The overall number of coded chats, as well as the number of each of the categories detected in the chats throughout the interactions were recorded. Table 1 displays the amount and proportion of chatting that represent the various categories. The matrix of dimensions analysis was adopted from Murugaiah et al (2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mutual Engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining mutual relationships – harmonious or conflicting</td>
<td>5,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing information, knowledge, or experience on practice</td>
<td>24,06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective problem-solving</td>
<td>2,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Joint Enterprise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting issues</td>
<td>10,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual accountability</td>
<td>15,35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of members’ traits</td>
<td>5,65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared sense of community</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The Matrix of CoP Categories and Percentages
### 3. Shared Repertoire

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared criteria</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared practice/routines</td>
<td>13,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared artefacts</td>
<td>5,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 100

The findings reveal that all indicators in the three of CoP dimensions are present in this program through mentor and teacher as participants’ interaction through WhatsApp. Table 1 indicates that most of the interaction refers to joint enterprise (46.16%). This dimension is represented by defining the issues based on their experience. Mutual engagement displays 31.51% from the interactions. They were asking and giving advice, giving agreement or disagreement, giving an example towards issue, and giving feedback. Whereas shared repertoire exhibits 22.33% of the interaction. They were sharing their teaching procedures or tools used in the classroom.

**Teachers’ Learning through CoPs**

The results reveal the components that help teachers to learn during CoPs that support their professional development. The aspects will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

**Trainers’ Guiding**

Trainers as mentors play a significant role in the process of teachers’ learning in teachers’ professional development. The findings indicated that there are numerous features carried out by the trainers that encouraged the teachers to learn more about teaching English.

**Proposing Questions**

Teachers are triggered to share and reflect on their teaching experiences by getting guided questions from the trainers. Teachers would immediately tell their teaching procedures and their struggles. Proposing ways for the teachers to learn refers to joint enterprise dimension of CoP which has the highest percentage among the other dimensions. It means this aspect appears several times in their interaction which builds up further and in-depth discussion. This can be seen in their interactions as stated in Excerpt 1.

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**Excerpt 1. Shows the Example of How The Trainer Gave the Questions and Teachers’ Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainer</th>
<th>How do you usually teach reading skills?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>I usually read the text for them first. So, they know how to pronunciation it first. Then I ask them the hard words And I will help them to find the meaning in Bahasa indo. Then I ask them to know the main idea of the text. Finally, I will ask them to retelling the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Me, using the very conventional one, by giving them many vocabularies before the session I usually start with vocabulary building task. I give them some words and ask my students to find the meaning by themselves, or I give the words and the pictures and ask them to match the words. Then, they will given the text to read. Lastly, I give them some questions related to the reading text. Sometimes in the form of short answer questions, multiple choice, or true or false. A typical procedure for me is: 1) Showing some example of the texts. then, asking them to guess what kind of text by giving some question. 2) Telling them the kind of text, teach them the definition, the generic structures and language features. When starting to comprehend the text they make a list the vocabularies that they don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
the meaning.

Excerpt 1 shows the example of how the trainer gave the questions and teachers’ responses. They shared their best practices that might inspire the other teachers to do the procedures. It supports teachers’ active learning in TPD program (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017). Guided questions can enhance active learning by enabling teachers to engage with the content and adapt it to their teaching situations. They can increase their comprehension of the content and develop new insights by responding to questions and discussing their replies with others.

Providing Feedback

Trainers provide feedback to teachers regarding the problems they face when teaching English in class. After they were given guided questions, teachers generally bring up challenges they encounter when teaching, such as their students’ difficulty in acquiring vocabulary, lack of desire in studying, lack of confidence when doing all the basic skills, or problems with themselves as a teacher. Trainers are willing to provide feedback, insights, and advise to help the teachers overcome these issues. Even their fellow teachers also give suggestions based on their experience too. The interactions are recorded in the following example in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2. The Interactions Are Recorded in the Following Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher 1</th>
<th>My students feel hardly to do writing lessons, because of their lack of vocabularies and poor grammar too</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Ok - yes that can be demotivating - so think about getting students to talk about the topic they’re going to be writing about first (to engage them and raise interest) and also teach them the words and grammar they need, or that would be useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>it easy to give a students feedback about grammar. but sometimes we usually doing mistake also 😱</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Yes - this can happen - but your English will be better than your students’ - so the key is to notice the mistake and correct it for next time. Try to learn some of the phrases for giving written feedback that you did with the other trainers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the excerpt that trainers offer feedback for teachers to cope with their problems. Trainers assist them in identifying areas for growth. Trainers also motivate teachers to reflect on their teaching and set goals for themselves, thus it helps them to build reflective habits. In a professional context, building a reflective habit and engaging in professional conversation with other teachers is necessary (Morgan, 2017; Averina & Kuswandoro, 2023). It provides the opportunity to discuss and evaluate everyday experiences to make them more meaningful which leads to transformative learning and teaching.

Sharing Teaching Tools and Procedures

Trainers distribute a variety of learning tools for teachers to use while teaching various types of skills. Teachers had a broader perspective on instructional techniques. Trainers also give examples of how to teach utilizing the provided learning materials. It can be seen in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3. Examples Of How To Teach Utilizing The Provided Learning Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainer</th>
<th>This one is for teenagers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://learnenglish">https://learnenglish</a> teens.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Thank you very much for the resource link. I’ll try some to my students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Thanks a lot! It would be useful...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Broadening knowledge is essential for the teachers because it can contribute to the quality of their teaching in the classroom and students’ learning outcomes (Borg & Edmett, 2018). The role of the trainer in offering diverse resources assists teachers in gaining new teaching experiences and developing their teaching skills.

**Presenting Issues**

Defining issues or problems to be addressed in a discussion leads the interactions among the teachers. Both teachers and trainer present the problems they had to cope with in their classroom. This is one of the examples (Excerpt 4).

**Excerpt 4. Both Teachers and Trainer Present the Problems They Had to Cope with In Their Classroom**

| Teacher 1 | The problem is, they too afraid to speak up. because they afraid when they friend laugh them try more natural speaking activities - if students write a dialogue first - it’s not really encouraging fluency and if they need to practice it in from of the class - it’s more like a performance - and that IS scary! |
| Trainer   | Ok - so put them in small groups and do games - then they are more focused on winning that making mistakes - in fact - don’t even mention mistakes for the duration |
| Teacher 2 | Me too. Lack of confidents that makes the vocabularies fly away in a sudden.. |
| Trainer   | |

Bringing up the problems that occur in the class turns out to encourage others who have the same problems, so that they can help solve the problems together with feedback from the trainer.

By describing the challenges that arise in class, other features specified in the CoP will surface. The teachers would state their agreements and disagreements towards the other opinions, asking and giving advice, providing examples to explain the teaching procedures or tools that they recommend being implemented in the classroom. Besides that, it gives them a chance to do a collaborative reflection and find a solution collectively. It is in line with the notion of community of practice that individual learns through social learning process (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). They share a similar interest in a subject, have interactions with one another to exchange ideas and techniques, determining solutions, and constructing innovations.

**Building Feeling of Belonging**

Building teachers’ engagement to the programs is critical, especially for online programs that were held in several months. Thus, based on the findings, there are steps being taken to ensure that teachers continue to participate in the activity until the end of the program. The existence of a group coordinator is essential. The group’s coordinator is a lecturer who may also assist the teachers in answering questions submitted by teachers. Furthermore, the coordinator often motivates the teachers to learn and participate more in the program.

The next aspect is that each group has its own administrator. The admin’s presence in the group is responsible for delivering program information, guidance for completing the tasks, and participating in weekly video conferences, as well as sending reminders of deadlines for each activity to be completed. These two factors may encourage teachers to engage in all activities. It depicts one of the aspects of mutual engagement which is a shared sense of community. These two ways facilitate continuous interaction among CoP members to build mutual participation. It meets one of the factors that build effective community of practice which is containing an active passionate group and creating time and encouragement, thus people can participate properly (McDermott, 2001).
4. CONCLUSION

Community of Practice (CoPs) assist the teachers in assisting their professional growth. Teachers are supervised by trainers who guide them via several techniques. Proposing a guided question encourages teachers to share their teaching experience. Feedback from both trainers and fellow teachers build reflective habits. CoPs also promote the exchange of teaching resources and approaches. Collaborative problem-solving within CoPs enables teachers to solve difficulties together.

CoPs provide a sense of belonging to guarantee long-term involvement. Group coordinators and administrators have an essential role in giving assistance, answering issues, and facilitating communication among teachers. This shared community encourages mutual engagement and increases the CoP’s efficacy as a platform for professional growth. In summary, CoPs empower teachers by stimulating reflection and active learning, facilitating information exchange, and offering mentorship. These components contribute to instructors’ ongoing professional growth and practice improvement. Despite the relevant insights gathered from research, there are limitations that should be considered when interpreting the data. The data was only taken from one group. Besides, the data came only from a WhatsApp extract. Thus, the findings could not gain in-depth understanding related to the topic. For further research, it can employ other data collection tools such as interviews and observation data, to get more thorough results.

REFERENCES


