Engaging busy teachers of young learners in in-service English training

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Abstract

Highly qualified and competent teachers are the key for outstanding education systems. Teachers, however, are too busy with administrative work. Accordingly conducting engaging in-service training for them is a relief, as well as a way to improve their teaching skills. The aim of this research is to report the in-service English training in a bilingual school in Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia, which the outcome is to improve the English skills of the teachers as a means of teaching (EMI – English as a Medium of Instruction). Questionnaires, interviews, and written reflections were the techniques of collecting the data. The result of the training shows that through some light hands-on activities, the teachers' motivation and engagement improved. This improvement resulted in the increase in using classroom language instructions.

Keywords*: busy teachers; young learner teachers; in-service training; EMI*

INTRODUCTION

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) repetitively disseminates a message that "Highly qualified and competent teachers are the key for excellent education systems" (Guerriero, 2017, p. 3). Creative teachers, who can manage the class and find suitable instructional methods and materials and who can be sensitive in adapting to the changing in the world, are highly probably successful in improving the English skills needed for their students. However, becoming a creative teacher, specifically full-time teachers of young learners, is not a one-night skill; it needs time and dedication to improve the creativity. While being a full-time teacher is highly unlikely to have enough time, as well as dedication, to innovate new ways of teaching.

Full-time signifies dedicating or using the whole of someone's available working time, typically 40 hours in a week. For teachers in Indonesia, being a full-timer means that they should fulfill both teaching and administrative works. Indonesian teachers should fulfil their duties such as lesson planning, assessing students, guiding, and other administrative works from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Situmorang, 2018). The administrative works commonly take most of their time and energy, besides, of course, teaching, assisting, and counseling

students. This phenomenon was also experienced by some home room teachers at a primary school in Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia. The curriculum of this school required their home room teachers to use English as a medium of instruction (EMI). However, the background of some of these teachers were not English education department. In addition, the students of that school were not all fluent in English; even some of them were having almost zero skill of English. The school, therefore, had a policy to regularly train their home room teachers. One of the goals was to improve the English skills of the teachers and to be able to deal with using appropriate EMI in the class considering the various English skills of the students.

The aim of the paper is to report the in-service English training for teachers of English for young learners in a bilingual school in Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia, which the outcome is to improve the English skills of the teachers as a means of teaching. The assumption of the study was that by having hands-on activities in the in-service training during their work hours would help them to improve their willingness in practicing their English for classroom uses. As a result of the higher engagement in the training, the practical activities were also expected to improve their skills in using English as the medium of instruction, in and outside the class.

In-service training model
There have been models dealing with in-service teacher professional development (TPD). Among which are standardized, school-based, self-directed, KARDS Modular model (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), and action research model of teacher professional development (Rochsantiningsih, 2004). Those models have their strengths and weaknesses which cannot directly be used and adapted in this study.

KARDS modular model, for instance, is a well-thought model to improve in-service teachers since it integrates the knowledge, identities, beliefs and values, teaching, theorizing and dialogizing, and teaching acts into one circle which influences each other. This model, however, needs dedication especially in time, which is very limited in this study. Action Research model developed by Rochsantiningsih (2004) is another well-developed model of teacher professional development. It seeks to change teachers' perceptions and behaviors through action research. This model, however, was conducted to tertiary teachers and it needed the full dedication of the teachers participated in the study. Thus, it needs modification if it is implemented to busy teachers of young learners.

Standardized teacher professional development (TPD) typically represents a centralized approach, involving workshops, training sessions and in many cases the training-the-trainer model of scaled delivery. These training-based approaches generally focus on the investigation of new concepts and the demonstration and modelling of skills (Hooker, 2017). Site-based or school-based TDP is intensive learning by groups of teachers in a school or region, promoting profound and long-term changes in instructional methods; whereas self-directed TDP is independent learning, sometimes initiated at the learner's discretion, using available resources that may include computers and the Internet. Standardized, school-based, and self-directed models are only

appropriate to be implemented in ICT-based (information and computer technology) TPD, especially for the standardized TPD which is the most centralized approach that is best used to disseminate information and skills among large teacher populations.

Lee (2016) who investigated teacher training and continuing professional development in Singapore believed that an educational system was as good as the quality of its teachers. In the model developed Lee (2016) said that

> A multi-prong approach was deployed to encourage teachers' participation in professional training and development. These included workshops or short courses for deepening knowledge of subjects taught and for enhancing pedagogical skills, and conference or seminar attendance for sharing teaching practices and broadening experiences. Teachers were also initiated into "life-long learning" with various sponsorship schemes to pursue masters or doctoral level studies". (p. 165).

This model seems to be well-managed, but it takes time and budget. Due to the limited time, this study only took six meetings in the in-service training; and the training model was in the form of a one-and-a-half-hour short course during the participants working hours.

English as the medium of instruction

British Council defines the medium of instruction as the language used by the teacher to teach. The assumption is that teaching the language, or educational content, through the target language increases the amount of exposure the learner gets to it, and the opportunities they have to communicate in it, and therefore to develop their control of it. The language policy of the bilingual elementary school, where the study was conducted, says that English is used as the medium of instruction in almost all of the subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English. This macro, or top-down, language management policy (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2015) thus requires the teachers, specifically the homeroom teachers, to have enough skills in delivering the class instruction in English, which is not an easy task at all because the English levels, or competences, of the students in one class is various.

EMI is becoming more and more popular not only in higher educations, but also from the grassroots levels (Galloway, 2017). Galloway mentioned that some practical reasons are behind this popularity. Such reasons are for example most academic research is published in English. Other than that, much of the content and vocabulary of some technical fields are also in English.

English for occupational purposes

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) along with English for Academic Purposes (EAP). ESP refers to the teaching and learning of English either as a second or foreign language in which the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain where the language can be considered as a tool for communication rather than as sets of phonological, grammatical and lexical items (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Nunan, 2004). Nunan (2004) furthermore argued that ESP was an

important subcomponent of language teaching with its own approaches to curriculum development, materials design, pedagogy, testing and research.

Since the goal of ESP is that the learners can use English in a particular domain, analyzing the needs of the learner becomes the must and the beginning of designing the materials for any ESP program. As a branch of ESP, EOP will also needs some prior information before the process of designing and also implementing the program.

Engaging busy teacher

Engagement, according to Skinner and Belmont (1993), includes components of behavioral and emotional. They explained that students who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by positive emotional manner. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of the learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Even though issues in engagement among teachers, specifically in in-service training, are crucial, this area of research is less developed when compared with studies of engagement of other professions (Klassen et al, 2013). As adult learners who should deal with both teaching and administrative work, the homeroom teachers as the participants of this study needed some activities, which were not boring and not too demanding (no homework was one of their wants). Therefore engagement is clearly an essential part of effective instructional process in this study. If students are not engaged, there is not much possibility that they will learn something in the class (Lestariningsih, 2019).

METHOD

This study attempts to describe the in-service English training for teachers of English for young learners in a bilingual school, Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia. To provide comprehensive data and achieve the objective of this study, qualitative data analysis was employed in this study. Questionnaire and interviews revealing their perceptions and experiences during the in-service English training were distributed and conducted at the end of the training. Written reflections asking for their comments, feedback, and suggestions towards the in-service training were gathered on the participant-trainer conference following the last meeting of the training.

This study was conducted in a bilingual school, Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia. As a bilingual private elementary school, both teachers and students in this school are required to use and speak in English during classes, i.e. International Primary Curriculum (IPC) class and Cambridge International Primary Programme (CIPP) class consisting of English, Math, and Science subjects. Accordingly, teachers in this site might need to develop their English proficiency to give positive impact for the children's learning and to gain successful English teaching. To meet this need, therefore, the in-service English training was conducted once a week for 6 (six) weeks, from February

to April 2019. Despite of their busy schedule teaching, assisting, and counseling students, as well as doing administrative work during the week, most of them consistently attended the in-service training every Friday after the class hours.

The participants involved in this study were selected from the homeroom teachers of the bilingual school aforementioned attending the in-service English training. From 12 (twelve) participants attending the in-service English training, 9 (nine) participants were willingly involved in this study. Based on the nature of the site and the participants, therefore, it was apparent that the selection of the site and the participants involved in the study certainly provided rich data to achieve the objective of this study.

To investigate their perception and satisfaction and to evaluate the in-service English training, a questionnaire generated by using Google Form and distributed via WhatsApp mobile application was conducted at the end of the in-service English training. The questionnaire consisting of 11 (eleven) items divided into two types, i.e. a 4-point Likert scale with categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) and open-ended questions. Table 1 displays the statements and questions in the questionnaire.

Table 1. The constructs in the questionnaire

No	Statements
Q1	You received complete information and guidance about the course before starting the training.
Q2	The course met your expectations.
Q3	The course was flexible to suit your needs.
Q4	The resources that the training has provided for you to complete your course were good.
Q5	You were involved in deciding how you learned and how lessons were planned.
Q6	The trainers make learning interesting, motivating and challenging.
Q7	The assessments were carried out regularly and planned well in advance.
Q8	You or your class representatives got the chance to participate in meetings with academic staff regarding the course.
Q9	You feel that the institution listens to you and acted on them regarding the course.
No	**Questions**
Q10	To what extent were you involved in deciding how you learned and how lessons were planned?
Q11	Please provide examples of how the trainers make learning interesting, motivating and challenging.

The interviews were conducted during the participant-trainer conference where trainers provided feedback and learning progress to the participants

and program evaluation was conducted in the form of partially structured interviews to gather supplementary data of the study. This partially structured interviews were conducted to reveal the participants' motivation and perceptions towards the in-service English training. Open-ended questions with a high degree of flexibility were asked as follow up questions to the participants' responses. The interviews done individually lasted for approximately 5 (five) to 10 (ten) minutes for each participant. Additionally, participants' written reflections containing information about their opinions as well as suggestions about the in-service English training and expectations for the next training were obtained during the participant-trainer conference.

The data gathered from the questionnaire in Google Form were statistically analyzed and presented in the form of the percentages for each response question. Following this step, each response in the questionnaire was analyzed descriptively based on the percentage. Meanwhile, the interview data and written reflections were analyzed, coded, and described to gain a deeper understanding on the participants' motivation and perceptions towards the in-service English training.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the questionnaire is generally in line with what was expected, or the assumption of this study, disclosing that the participants were engaged and motivated so that they could improve their English skills as the medium of instruction. This conclusion was taken from the means of almost all of the responses of the questions which are above 3, showing that the participants agreed with the statements. The best responses are shown in the question on whether the trainers make learning interesting, motivating and challenging (Q6), reaching 3.4 for the means. Only two statements which have the means slightly below 3, i.e. to what extent were the participants involved in deciding how they learned and how lessons were planned (Q8), and whether they felt that the institution listened to them and acted on them regarding the course (Q9). Figure 1 clearly illustrates all the means of each question/statement depicted in Table 1 above.
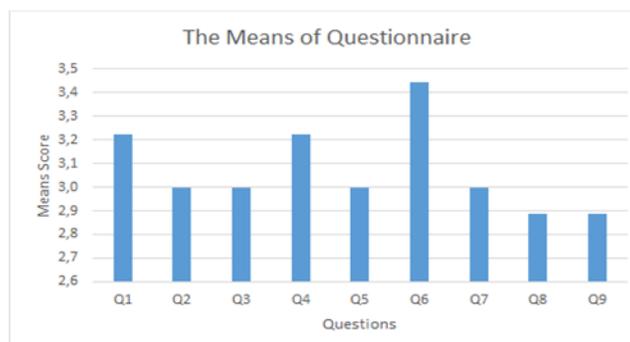

Figure 1. The means of each statement of the questionnaire

The fact that the in-service instructional process was interesting, challenging and motivating are also supported by the individual reflections and structured interview, which will be discussed further in this part. The

participants did appreciate the instructional activities, mostly hands-on, designed in the in-service training such as peer-feedback, problem-solving discussion, leaving and entering class password, 2-corner game, etc.

The most striking feature, however, is shown in the distribution of the responses of statement number 5 (Q5), whether they were involved in deciding how they learned and how lessons were planned, as shown in the following figure (Figure 2).
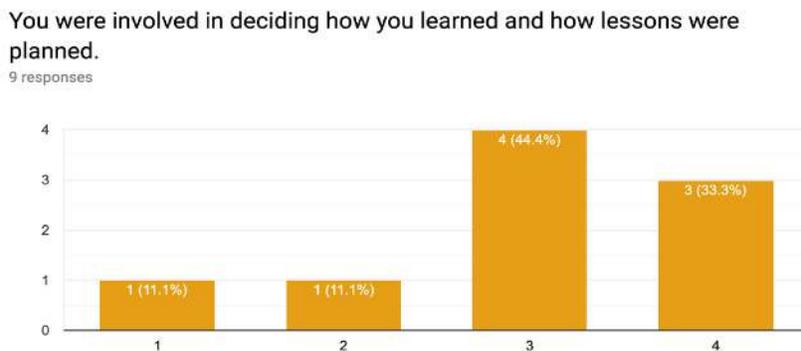
Figure 2. The distribution of Q5

Figure 2 showcases that the two participants acknowledged they were not involved in planning and selecting the lessons; while the majority of them (79%) responded they took part in planning the lessons. The response in Figure 2 was as a matter of fact in line with the answer for question no. 1 (shown in Figure 3), "you received complete information and guidance about the course before starting the training", even though the majority of the responses (78%) said they agreed.

Our first assumption behind this finding was that they were not present on the first meeting when the draft of the syllabus was discussed, nor they got the information in advance from the curriculum coordinator about the in-service training. This assumption collapsed after doing a follow up investigation that found out the participants did come on the first meeting and well-informed about the upcoming in-service training. From the information gathered, we could draw a conclusion that they decided to not agree with statement no. 5 because the lessons were not like what they expected even though they were satisfied with the lessons. Some of them had other wants, such as preparation for standardized tests (IELTS or TOEFL®).

You received complete information and guidance about the course before starting the training.

9 responses
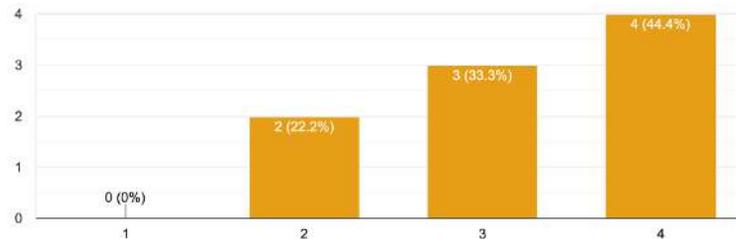
Figure 3. The distribution of Q1

Another result taken from the questionnaire is the fact that even the means of almost all the questions were good, some participants did not agree with some statements, for example for statements numbers 2 and 3 (Q2 and Q3), which states that the course met the participants' expectations and the course was flexible to suit their needs, respectively. There were 3 participants, or about 33% of the total respondents, who did not see any relations between the course and their needs, nor met what they expected as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

The course met your expectations.

9 responses
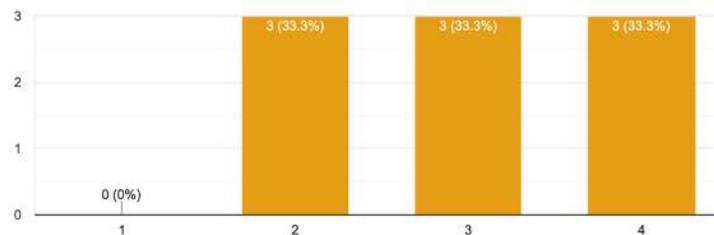
Figure 4. The distribution of Q2
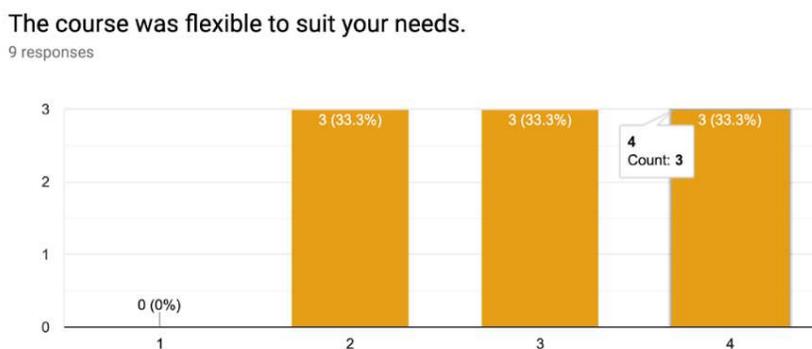
Figure 5. The distribution of Q3

The partially structured individual interviews and written reflections are used as supplementary data to reveal the participants' motivation as well as perceptions, and to explore the participants' opinions as well as suggestions towards the in-service English training and expectations for the next training. The results from the partially structured individual interviews would seem to indicate that all the participants were motivated in joining the in-service English training. Participants were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated in joining the in-service English training to improve their personal and professional development. The participants' intrinsic motivation in joining the in-service English training was shown from their statements affirming that they liked the training, enjoyed the activities, and were interested in joining the activities and games in the training. "I love and enjoy the training so much. It was really interesting and I've got a lot of knowledge from it" (Participant 4/WR). Similarly, participant 6 seemed to indicate shared intrinsic motivation in joining the training.

> "I am so happy to join the training program that you did. I felt like I was not attending a training, instead I felt like I was doing so many fun things. I'm also so happy playing the ice breaking games before we started the class. I become more confident to speak publicly. I also love the educational apps they you gave us and recommend us to use it in our class, as well as the tips in speaking in English." (Participant 6/INT)

In a teacher professional development program, intrinsic motivation "is more desirable and is expected to result in better learning outcomes" (Basikin, 2016). By having intrinsic motivation, teachers attendance in the in-service English training is more internally self-driven which might result in the application and internalization of the training contents after they have completed the training. Moreover, intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the success of English as a foreign language learning (EFL) (Gardner, 1985b; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992 as cited in Oxford & Shearin, 1996). This motivation is used as motives to improve their English proficiency as both teachers and foreign language learners. The improvement of participants' English proficiency would give an impact on the improved students' English proficiency.

Furthermore, the data gathered from the partially structured individual interviews indicated that the participants showed extrinsic motivation which is derived from external factors, such as school policy and regulation, the demands of the profession, and/or gifts/incentives associated with the participation in the training. Participant 1 mentioned that

> "I joined the training because the school obliged all the homeroom teachers to attend the training to develop our English proficiency. The training is really helpful for me to support my teaching. The game ideas, report writing, and other tips are really helpful for me in my class" (Participant 1/INT).

Correspondingly, participant 5 reflected similar perspective, "As a teacher, I do need this kind of training to sharpen my English skills. I can use the skills for teaching the children in my class" (Participant 5/INT). The findings indicated that participants' extrinsic motivation was manifested in the top-down language management policy administered by school administrators (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2015). The top-down language management policy required homeroom teachers to have good English skills to be able to deliver the class instructions in English.

Based on the partially structured individual interviews and written reflections, the participants seemed to have positive perceptions of the in-service English training after they have successfully completed the training. The in-service English training helped them enhance their confidence in in a way that they could confidently do public speaking during the school events and conferences. Participant 3 mentioned that,

> "The training helps me a lot to practice my public speaking. Before joining this training, I did have a chance to practice public speaking with my friends; we were too busy with teaching and administrative work. I also gained some knowledge about how to do public speaking in English well, how to deliver the speech in a systematic way, and what useful phrases can be effectively used." (Participant 3/INT)

Moreover, participant 9 had written similar thoughts as participant 3, "Although it's very short training, I think my English skills are improving as well as my confidence in using English in class" (Participant 9/WR). Participants' positive perceptions of joining the in-service English training were shown from their engagement in the professional context, commitment, and willingness to invest effort to support their profession (Basikin, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated whether or not hands-on activities could engage busy teachers of young learners in improving their skills in English as the medium of instruction. The findings showcase that those teachers did need to improve their English skills because it is a must (they taught in bilingual schools), and the in-service training conducted could improve their skills, specifically in increasing their confidence in using English. One most important finding that could be considered for conducting similar training is to avoid assigning homework. All instructional activities should be done in class.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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