

EFL TEACHERS' CONCERNS TO BRING THE CONSULTATIVE FORUM BACK TO ITS STRATEGIC ROLE

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Abstract

Attitude constitutes an important factor underlying an individual behavior. This paper discusses results of a study on EFL teachers' attitude towards their area consultative forum. An area consultative forum is one where member teachers of the same school subject in the area gather to learn and practice together, and share as well as work with one another. Therefore, if utilized properly, the forum will be able to empower the teachers joining it. The survey study involved twenty EFL urban primary school teachers in the town of Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia. Participants were chosen using convenience sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Data were analysed by using descriptive statistics and inductive procedure. Overall, results of this study have shown that the EFL teachers under investigation had positive attitude towards their consultative forum. However, many of them did not seem to participate enough in the activities. Basically, they were sad about, among others, unplanned programs, very low quantity of events, and poor quality of activities. When these and other constraints within the forum are solved, then it is supposed to contribute to the member teachers' professional development.

Keywords: EFL teachers, concerns, consultative forum, strategic role, professional development

Introduction

Area English teachers' consultative forums, if utilized properly, will be able to empower the teachers joining it. How come? With diverse background knowledge, competences, and skill, English teachers can learn and practice together, and share as well as work with one another continuously with little or no limit of space and time. In the meanwhile, from what has been observed so far, the forum's activity/event seems very rare. What is interesting to investigate is that some teachers of English do not take

part in this kind of professional development oriented-activities. Why do they seem reluctant to participate in the forum's activities? If time is their problem, then, they are already committed to a weekly gathering. This research aimed at describing attitude of EFL teachers towards the forum and identifying the aspects affecting their attitude.

Attitude constitutes opinions and feeling that an individual has towards something (Eshghinejad, 2016). Human attitude is quite complex. It consists of thought or perception (cognitive), emotion

(affective), and potential to act or behave (conative). Those affecting attitude vary, such as experience, belief, other people considered to be influential, culture, mass media, personal emotion and education (Azwar, 1995: 30-37).

According to a survey on EFL teachers' perception in relation with their roles as language teachers, Suwartono (2009) concluded that response the teachers gave on the questionnaire was inconsistent with their actual performance. For example, through the questionnaire they gave response that conducting a research was important for them as language teachers. However, in practice nearly none of them had done it.

English Teachers' Consultative Forum

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

A question arises: Are those schemes alone sufficient to generate professional and quality teachers? The portfolio system adopted in the former teacher certification program received lots of reactions. Now, even with the intensive training there is no guarantee for the trainees to become better professional English teachers as initially intended. They also need experience, share of ideas, practice time, and reflection extensively beyond the walls of training's rooms.

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

Area consultative forums have been popular among teachers. Indeed, the forum could be a powerful communication arena if it is empowered. Many things can be done, not just a meeting time for teachers of the same discipline, in this case English. They can learn together under the guidance of a more experienced teacher. Within their limited number of members they can autonomously plan a series of programs and implement them along the year. When this happens, it means that they can manage to empower themselves instead of just

waiting for any aids from the government and institutions (Suwartono and Anurianti, 2013). When the government, either central or local one is not conducting an activity or providing a grant, then, they can still do a thing for developing their own professional competency and quality. Unfortunately, for some reasons the English teachers, especially members, do not participate in the area consultative forum's program.

It is not hard to think that the members are 'dormant' because there is something wrong with the forum management, for instance. That is why, the author investigated the attitude of English teachers in the urban Purwokerto towards their area consultative forum and the most possible key factors affecting it. The research participants are English teachers of the urban area schools because they become a barometer. Since they work at a more challenging environment, they are supposed to be better performers compared to their suburb counterparts.

Sugiyanti (2014) conducted a survey on state primary school Indonesian language teachers' perception and expectation of their consultative forum. The data were collected using a questionnaire and document. The present survey will cover a wider population that includes those teachers working at private schools as well. The current

survey also makes it possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation by means of interview. Sugiyanti's study reported that some teachers had positive attitude towards the existence of their consultative forum. They also had an expectation that the forum would often hold teacher trainings.

One thing worthwhile when discussing attitude is satisfaction. Studies on attitude and satisfaction have been done in many fields of interest, including education. Even though attitude and satisfaction are two different concepts, both were said to have relation. If it was stated that satisfaction constitutes someone's opinions or feeling towards something, then satisfaction strongly affects attitude (Caprara in Salehi *et.al.* 2015). It can be said that someone with considerable satisfaction towards something will have positive attitude. In the context of the present study, a teacher who is satisfied with the existence of his/her consultative forum will have positive attitude towards it.

Method

This survey study involved twenty EFL teachers from thirteen state as well as private primary schools (years 7 through 9) in the urban area of Purwokerto, Central Java Province, Indonesia. There were a total of thirty schools with average of three English teachers working at

each. The sample was taken by using convenience sampling. Some participants were those attending the meeting on the reorganisation of the forum. Others were those who joined the teacher professional program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto and few recommended relevant volunteers.

Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were used to elicit data on attitude. Interviews were used to elicit more comprehensive

information or to ask respondents for confirmation. The questionnaires as the main instrument consist of both close and open items. Close items deal directly with attitudes. A few open items elicit general data and reactions.

Data were analysed through descriptive statistics and inductive procedure. In line with the main aims of the present study, in data analysis it is necessary to reveal: 1) average attitude score; 2) questionnaire items with lower scores of 1 and 2.

Table 1. Attitude Score Level

Interval	Category
50.4 — 60.0	Excellent
40.8 — 50.3	Positive
31.2 — 40.7	Only Fair
21.6 — 31.1	Negative
12.0 — 21.5	Terrible

To interpret data on respondent attitude score, the criteria table above was used. While to

analyse items with lower scores of 1 and 2, the worksheet format below was used.

Table 2. Tally Sheet for Lower Scores

	No. of Items																							
	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12	
LS	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
F																								

The tallying result was confronted against the data elicited through a few open questionnaire items, i.e. general data and feedback, as well as the data gathered through interview.

Results

With regard to main aims of the study, results of the present study are organised as follows.

English Teachers' Attitude towards Their Consultative Forum

Based on data obtained from the questionnaire, some facts can be stated as follows. The number of primary school English teachers participating in this study was 20. The instrument used to gather data comprised twelve 5-scaled closed questionnaire items. Thus, the possible highest score for a respondent was 60 and the lowest 12. The questionnaire average score was 45.15. Using a 5 category-table as presented earlier, the score belongs to 'Positive'. This has shown that overall, the attitude of the primary school English teachers joining the area consultative forum was positive.

Based on information gathered through the interviews with a few research participants whose questionnaire scores deviated sharply from the average, some facts can be used as considerations to build a more comprehensive conclusion. An English teacher who rated '5' to all questionnaire items commented as

follows. '... A new cluster of members have joined us for the last few years ... Initially, we had only 13 in-town member schools joining the forum...' When asked if there was any difference between after and before cluster merge, the English teacher said that before merge the forum membership had given more contribution in comparison to the present condition. The teacher mentioned the then-benefits mainly: 1) test writing by members from different schools in turn, 2) faster top-down information delivery, 3) more intense share of knowledge among members, 4) competence-based representative in every teacher competition, regardless which school they work at. Those all, the teacher said, are not part of the now-consultative forum, in spite of the fact that the forum is still under the leadership of the same chairperson.

This indicates that the participant completed the questionnaire based on the forum former condition. When requested to review the assessment in accordance with the current condition, the teacher revised it to average 4.

Though, overall, the EFL teachers had positive attitude towards their area consultative forum, some of them thought the forum performance was not maximum. There were a few aspects that needed special care and immediate improvement. The next section will

present relevant facts in more detailed.

Weak Aspects within the Consultative Forum

Based on responses to closed questionnaire and open questionnaire, as well as results of interview with a number of participants, there were some problems facing the consultative forum under investigation that have become negative highlight in the eyes of the members. According to responses to closed questionnaire, there were at least 5 items that gained low rates of 2 or even 1, i.e. item numbers 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9.

More than twenty percent (23%) of the research participants gave low rate to item number 2 – that deals with intensity of the activities done in the forum, that writes: ‘So far, there is much to do in the forum for each semester’. The low rating to the item probably means that so far the consultative forum has held too few (if any) activities. This was supported by information from some teachers interviewed, as a teacher commented below:

‘... For the forum meetings so far, in the previous academic year we had

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

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

The next position, more than fifteen percent (15.4%) give low rates to item number 3 – that has something to do with “charm” of activity brought to the forum, that writes: ‘Variety of activity presented in the English teachers’ consultative forum so far has not been boring’. The low rating by the research participants indicates that EFL teachers joining the forum found the activities unappealing. Activities presented remain the same old ones. A teacher wrote the following brief comment: ‘The English teachers’ consultative forum activity has run ineffectively’.

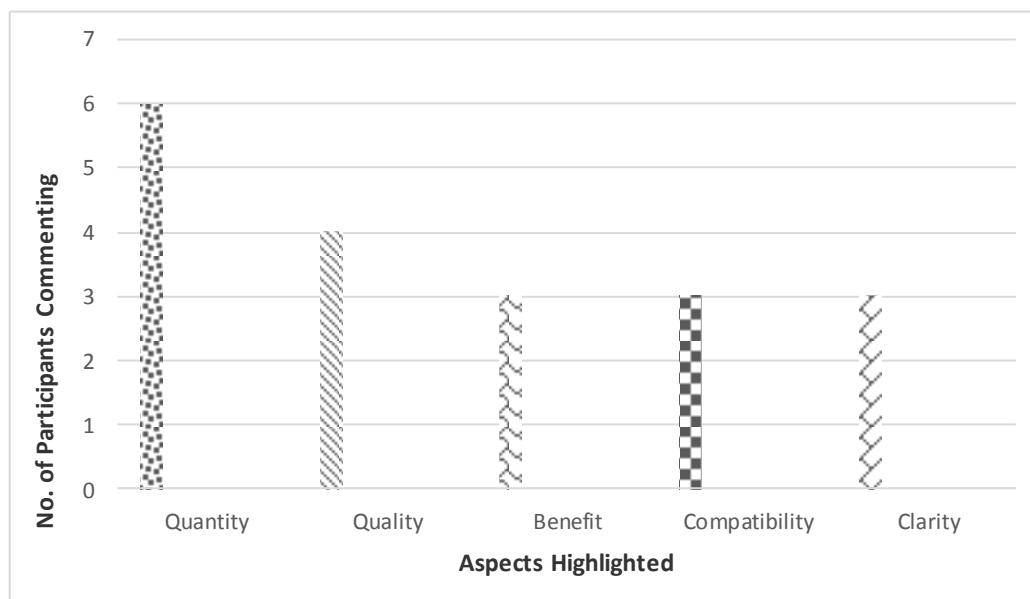


Chart of Members' Feedback

The next low rating was given to item numbers 1, 8, and 9 by 11.5% of the participants. Those 3 items respectively deal with benefit of joining the forum, interpersonal compatibility of all members and/or organising committee personae, and clarity of the forum's program. According to comments shared by the research participants through open questionnaires, the English teachers' consultative forum in their area faced some serious issues, covering unwell-planned program activity, unpunctuality, member low attendance, monotonous activity, rare meeting, and unwell-informed/planned program activity. The latter was the most sharply criticised by the teachers, reaching almost 50% of all comments. The forum's activity has not been well-

planned, and has tended to be incidental.

Based on the facts above, it can be said that English teachers joining the consultative forum in the area still valued the existence of the forum. Nevertheless, they felt unhappy with the present condition of it. Some efforts of improvement should be taken in order for it to optimally serve.

Discussion

The positive attitude of the EFL primary school teachers towards their area consultative forum could mean that they remained loyal to the forum. That they criticised a few things of the forum probably means that they felt unsatisfied with the current condition of the forum. It is a good idea to look at the teachers' profile whose information was

collected through questionnaire items.

Of all 20 research participants their ages ranged from 24 to over 50 years old. Majority graduated from a bachelor's degree program. Only two of the participants hold a master's degree certificate. Two of the participants dedicated themselves in the forum management as organising committee personales, while the rest were members. Eight participants had a status of civil servant teachers, while the rest were private school teachers.

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

Excellent achievement remained very rare. Of twenty research participants, only seven were considered to hold 1 or 2 kinds of achievement. For example, a regency level - high performing teacher, teaching overseas, national instructor, and peer-assessor; or else, such as consultative forum manager,

student teaching practicum coach, and contest jury. In general, the teachers have joined the consultative forum for less than 15 years.

The profile shows that in general quality and teaching experience of the EFL teachers joining the area consultative forum is still low. Therefore, those who complained about the real condition of the area consultative forum were not many in number (see chart of *Members' Feedback* above). The more qualified and better experienced the teachers, the more challenging they become oriented to higher standard.

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

A member teacher, who had attended a master education, commented very strongly: 'I hope

the English area consultative forum has clearly-planned programs to enhance quality of teaching and learning at school, improve achievement, and boost teacher professional development.’ This teacher did not forget to share her best suggestion as follows: ‘Have regular meetings with clear goals and well-planned, continuing, as well as effective activities.’

There was a strong impression that the two participants mentioned above felt disappointed. In the meanwhile, in response to the item that required participants to give comments, the forum chair only left a few words that were uncommon in comparison to all other research participants. He highlighted the low support from some school authorities, especially in the forms of attendance permission letter and funding. He also gave a suggestion related with invitation to reputable speakers with funding from the schools where the member teachers have been working. It was likely that the chair was unaware of opportunities for mutual cooperation established by the consultative forum and campus, where universities yearly grant the lecturers’ social service and, therefore, the forum or the schools do not necessarily budget for this. The forum organising committee can determine a choice as to which social service proposal/s arriving at them

would be accepted and implemented for free.

By doing so, data collected through close questionnaires, open questionnaires, and interviews all have shown consistency that the attitude of EFL teachers involved in this survey towards their area consultative forum was positive. However, some member teachers felt unhappy with the activities or events brought to the forum. They seemed to become disappointed as they took little or even no benefit of the forum existence. A few aspects were considered poor and urgent to be improved, such as unplanned program, low quantity/frequency of activities, and low quality of activities/events presented to the forum. The finding was also consistent to the author’s statement at the beginning of background section.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

Overall, results of this study have shown that the primary school EFL teachers under investigation had positive attitude towards their area consultative forum. However, some teachers urgently required concrete actions to improve the condition. The most urgent ones, among others, are clearly-planned program, quantity of events, and quality of activities to be held.

Suggestion

Concerning results of this study, the author put forward the following suggestions for betterment:

First of all, positive attitude of the primary school EFL teachers in the area should be improved. Secondly, it is necessary for the forum organising committee to set a well-planned program, paying special attention to quantity and quality of selected activities/events. Last but not least, the forum organising committee should periodically evaluate the program implemented and care about members' voice to assure their participation in every single activity held.

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