

Issues and Challenges to Professional Development for Language Proficiency among Indonesian EFL Teachers

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This study investigated Indonesian EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers' issues, and challenges to professional development (PD), particularly as related to language proficiency. One critical proficiency in teaching English is teachers' language. It holds a key role in facilitating learning. PD is essential for supporting teachers' goals and responsibility in learning and working towards fulfilment as professional English teachers. This qualitative study used an in-depth interview as the main data collection instrument. The study participants were six professional EFL teachers, with five to 30 years of English teaching. The participants were found to view professional development for language proficiency as important. It is part of their life-long or career-long learning, influenced by the pedagogical environment and individual language proficiency awareness. The study also revealed some issues and challenges regarding PD for language proficiency, such as language proficiency, were rarely offered by the government. Teachers had to autonomously and individually join and participate in such events. The article recommends that Indonesian EFL teachers must have self-awareness of the importance of improving their language proficiency, by participating in PD for language proficiency, despite the issues and challenges they might encounter. They have to make use of any chances to help them keep their professionalism high, by becoming good EFL teachers.

Key words: *EFL teacher, language proficiency, professional development.*

Introduction

The development of science and technology in the twenty-first century is very fast. It covers vast areas of changes and innovations, including English language teaching. English teachers need to keep up with the dynamics of the changes. They need to continuously develop their professionalism, to meet the growing and changing needs of twenty-first century students, and teaching and learning challenges, to face the era. Leung (2009), defines second language teacher professionalism as a combination of disciplinary-based knowledge, ethical principles, and time- and place-specific work practices. Professional teachers generally, not just second language teachers, can show improvement or development of their related knowledge, their understanding of what is right and wrong in relation to other people, and how they can work and do their job perfectly well in relation to their specialty.

Teachers' professionalism cannot be separated from teacher professional development (henceforth TPD), as a topic of interest and importance. Richards and Farrell (2005) state that teacher development is an idea that serves a long-drawn goal; the growth of both teachers' understanding and mastery of teaching and learning process, and themselves as teachers. Lee (2011) argues that teacher professional development, together with the need for updating professional skills and knowledge, plays an important role in teacher professionalism and quality.

The Indonesian Government issued Teachers and Lecturers Acts No. 14/2005. It prioritises the maximisation of teachers' performance in every Indonesian classroom. It has the goal of increasing the professionalism and quality of Indonesian teachers. In response to this mandate, therefore, teachers have to be both professional and empowered. They must try to maintain and update their knowledge on the latest issues regarding their disciplines, and continue learning, to improve and develop their teaching skills.

The status of English as an international language has made some countries highlight the importance of English language teaching (ELT), as an important requirement of education (Collins, 2010). Thus, ELT has become part of secondary and tertiary education systems, where English is acknowledged as a foreign language. When its teaching and learning is that of a foreign language, exposure and use of the target language occur mostly in classrooms rather than during daily communication. Consequently, English teachers have to adjust and face challenges, as they are considered non-native speakers when teaching English. According to Murray (2010), a challenge is teachers' tendency to ignore their colleagues' insights, inputs, and suggestions that can help improve teaching performance. The next challenge is the difficulty for teachers, especially novices, in developing due to school bureaucracy or policies. If teachers do not receive insightful feedback or get opportunities to develop, they may become frustrated and less effective.

Equal opportunities to participate in professional development (henceforth PD) activities can solve some teachers' problematic issues (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). English teachers need only choose and decide which TPD activities suit their needs. As teachers, they must equally improve and develop not only their teaching skills but also their language mastery and maintenance. English teachers need to keep up with innovations, and change in the ELT area by trying to update, upgrade and refresh their competences which include their pedagogical and professional competence (Wulyani, 2017; Supriatna, 2011 and Goh, 2013).

There has been much research investigating EFL teachers' professional development activities. It informs us that teachers experience a change of behaviour and teaching performance, by becoming more effective and efficient in teaching, thereby becoming more attentive and communicative to their students, and also increasing their self-efficacy (Choi and Andon, 2014; Ortactepe and Akyel, 2015; Farrell, 2015 and Al-Asmari, 2016). Studies also describe how EFL teachers pursue their PD for pedagogical competence (Irmawati et al., 2017; Priajana, 2017 and Abdullah, 2015). Yet, little is known about PD activities which specifically relate to EFL teachers' language proficiency, the types of PD for language proficiency offered to EFL teachers, and the voices of EFL teachers on PD ideas for language proficiency activities. Therefore, this present study aims at filling the gap in research, which relates to Indonesian EFL teachers' PD for language proficiency activities that specifically relate to its issues and challenges.

The result of this study is expected to give a better understanding of the PD situation in Indonesia, from the perspectives of Indonesian secondary EFL teachers. It is based on their experiences specifically related to the issues and challenges they encounter, in their effort to improve or maintain their language proficiency.

Indonesian Teacher Professional Development: Issues and Challenges

Teachers need to refresh and update their knowledge and skills, due to both the growth of science and technology and the demand for just living in a modern and global society. They cannot avoid the fact that they have to refresh or update their knowledge and skills. They are at the forefront of helping and providing their students with the appropriate knowledge for them to compete in the modern and global society. Teachers can join PD activities to keep them in pace with change and to keep their professionalism high.

Professional development can be understood as a teacher's individual efforts to grow and develop professionally. It also a form of responsibility for teacher education or teacher training programs, to provide teachers with professional knowledge and teaching skills, and to promote professional growth in their career. Professional development comprises various

kinds of formal and informal activities that aim at improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes both during and after the initial preparatory stages (Kaatuuk & Marentek, 2014 and Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Additionally, Lv (2014) states that teachers' professional development can be understood from the perspectives of the teacher as an individual and teacher education, which is supposed to encourage their professional, career growth.

To further TPD, policies have supported Indonesian teachers in actively participating in PD activities. They include the Teachers and Lecturers Acts No. 14/2005, Government Regulation Number 74/2008 on Teachers, Regulation of The Minister of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform Number 16/2009 on Teacher Functional Position and Credit Figures, and the Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 16/2007 on Teachers' Professional Competence. The existence of all those policies and their clear instructions should have been able to make, motivate, and increase teachers' awareness to be actively involved and participate in TPD. The regulations oblige Indonesian teachers to pursue PD activities, to improve their knowledge and skills. The regulations also mention the availability and obligation for the government (from central to district) to provide TPD. The mandatory provision of TPD should help teachers improve their pedagogical competence that deals with teachers' aptitude as to teaching, material and curriculum development, assessment and professional competence which relates to mastery of the subject; in this case, English. Both competencies should have the same portion of attention from the government or policymakers, and be held and offered equally to all teachers.

The issues that then arise in relation to the policies are the mismatch in implementing policies in the field. Indeed, there is already PD for EFL teachers. However, the kinds of PD held and offered are not balanced between PD for pedagogical and professional competence respectively. Abdullah (2015) found that the PD program administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) mostly develops pedagogical competence. It is frequently offered by the government. It directly relates to the policy on the latest curriculum which needs to be applied and understood by all teachers in Indonesia. Whereas, the professional competence which deals with teachers' mastery of English is somehow neglected. In their research (Khandehroo et al., 2011; Lich, 2015 and Nugroho, 2018) found that EFL teachers still need PD which can update and refresh their language proficiency. PD for language proficiency is considered an individual responsibility for the teachers to develop. Therefore, EFL teachers find it rarely offered by the MOEC, and have to look for it by themselves (Nugroho, 2018). Additionally, there has been an absence of strict rules and sanctions for teachers who do not participate in any PD activities. This has given Indonesian teachers excuses to care less about continuously improving and developing their knowledge and teaching skills.

As an English teacher, having good teaching skills is very important. Another crucial aspect of language teaching, especially English, is target language proficiency. Teachers' lack of English proficiency has been pointed out as one of the biggest obstacles for successfully teaching and learning English (Butler, 2004). Likewise, Renandya et al. (2018), mention that teachers' language proficiency is their ability to fully use their target language proficiency to explain, give examples, select relevant teaching materials, model correct language use and provide effective feedback on student performance. Judging from the importance of language proficiency for EFL teachers, teachers at large must be aware of how to improve, keep, and maintain their language proficiency. Richards (2010), argues that English language teachers need to possess a series of skills related to how they use language. One skill is providing input at a level appropriate for learners. Al-Maqtri and Thabet (2013) specifically add that it covers the ability of pronouncing sounds in the target language.

Indonesian EFL teachers face some challenges related to how to improve and maintain their language proficiency. One relates to how often the teachers contact or use the target language. It is because Indonesian EFL teachers, in teaching and learning, mostly learned and used the target language during their formal teacher training. After they finished or graduated, most met or faced unsupportive environments where English was less likely to be used, or if they did use the target language, the frequency of usage was rather low (Lengkanawati, 2005 and Lie, 2007). Moreover, EFL teachers in Indonesia are somehow impaired by their low English proficiency, and they prefer to use their first language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) to communicate with colleagues at schools or in academic forums, and to communicate in the classroom (Lengkanawati, 2005; Lie, 2007; Marcellino, 2005). Additionally, Renandya et al. (2018), mention that most Indonesian English teachers' language proficiency can be categorised in the lower intermediate-range, possibly in the B1-B2 levels on the CEFR scale. This view is supported by the fact that those teachers are not very fluent and lack confidence in using the language, in and out of the classroom. They prefer to use their L1 because of their limited proficiency. Also, their students may not understand much English.

The aforementioned discussions bring about three conclusions. First, EFL teachers should attend more to the improvement and maintenance of their language proficiency, by pursuing professional development activities related to language proficiency. Second, the government and policymakers should provide such development programs for the teachers to take part in. Third, primary and secondary EFL teachers face challenges which could imperil their efforts to improve or maintain their language proficiency, as part of their professional competence. This necessitates an investigation into how EFL teachers perceive the importance of PD activities, and how their involvement in PD activities specifically relates to their language proficiency.

Research Questions

This present investigation focused on PD related to language proficiency, in a particular context – Indonesia. More specifically, this article explores Indonesian secondary EFL teachers' perception of their language proficiency PD. It reports findings on the following research questions:

- (1) What are Indonesian high school EFL teachers' perceptions of PD, related to language proficiency?
- (2) What are the issues concerning PD for language proficiency?
- (3) What challenges do EFL teachers face in participating in PD for language proficiency?

Method

This study employed a case study approach. It thereby explored a detailed and comprehensive description of EFL teachers' perceptions of PD activities, relating particularly to their language proficiency. The in-depth study of a certain activity, process, program, situation, or an individual or small group of individuals (Creswell, 2012), resulted in better understanding and information on the issues investigated.

Participants

The participants were six high school EFL teachers. They were chosen using the researchers' judgment, or purposive sampling based on the consideration that they understand the central phenomenon and have much information (Creswell, 2012). They were also considered as model teachers, due to their achievements in teaching and learning both at and outside their schools. They have taught English for more than 10 years. All of the participants were active members of the subject teachers association (MGMP). Two were MGMP board members. Five were national instructors (teachers who passed the teachers' competence test (UKG), were trained by the MOEC, and passed their experiences onto other teachers in their areas). The participants also have attended several ELT seminars and workshops. Four have acquired undergraduate degrees in English education studies from teacher training institutions. Two other participants obtained their undergraduate degree from a faculty of letters in non-teacher training institutions.

Research Instruments

The instrument of this study was an interview guide. This form of interview best gets answers from participants, to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The guide questions were designed to get as much information as possible, to have a clear description of

the participants' perceptions, experiences, and the phenomena related to language proficiency PD activities. The first part of the interview guide asked for perceptions about the importance of PD for language proficiency. The second part consists of open-ended questions about the participants' knowledge of the issues, and their challenges in pursuing PD for language proficiency activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through a series of meetings in the participants' schools. All interviews were conducted in English and recorded. Each took approximately one hour. The information could help describe the phenomenon being investigated.

Data analysis of this present study relied on interview content which was rich in information. The data were then categorised, based on the themes raised from the research questions. Indeed, the data analysing process for this study was challenging, because the categorisation intertwined data as to EFL teachers' professional development views, and experiences related to their language proficiency.

Findings

Indonesian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of PD Related to Language Proficiency

The participants perceived PD specifically for language proficiency, as an important activity. Mr. B, Mrs. C, and Mr. D mentioned that it is important, because not only can it refresh and update teachers' knowledge and skills concerning their English but also the students' English. Mr. C stated:

"...we are the example for the students....so we need to have good language proficiency...and that's why we need to join PD for language proficiency."

Next, Mrs. A emphasised the importance of this PD, based on the great importance of English teachers' language proficiency. It is vital for the success of English teaching and learning (Butler, 2004), and the students get a good model as to how to use the target language correctly, and get teacher feedback (Renandya et al. 2018). Teachers' use of the target language, in and outside the classroom, as the medium of instruction and communication, would be one chance for students to learn how to use the target language. Mrs. E added that with the vast and fast development of information technology, students can get any information including how to learn and master the target language. Therefore, teachers must keep up by joining PD, especially in relation to language proficiency. Mr. B and Mr. F underlined the importance of this PD, because language is developing and language

proficiency is not a fixed skill. Moreover, language mastery can decrease and even fossilise if we do not regularly use it; we need to refresh and update.

The participants also perceived that PD for language proficiency would benefit them. All of the participants mentioned that they get new knowledge and learn new things. They can practice using the target language. They get more materials and ideas on what they can teach to their students. Also, they feel more confident. Additionally, Mrs. D and Mrs. E added that they can learn more about new methods and strategies in teaching English, and also how to overcome English teaching and learning problems. Therefore, participating teachers felt the need to improve and maintain their language abilities, as part of their professional responsibility, and also to serve as models to their learners in using the target language.

Some ideas from the participants for the government and the MOEC concern PD activities which can be offered to EFL teachers. They shared the same idea that there must be more training and workshops for EFL teachers that particularly relate to their language proficiency. Then, Mr. B mentioned that some kind of regulation should encourage and help or support teachers to attend PD activities. Mr. D added that governmental support can be in the form of scholarships to continue studies, do short courses abroad, and join online courses. Meanwhile, Mrs. C highlighted an equal opportunity for every teacher to join PD activities, not only those from favourite schools. Doing autonomous activities would help to keep learning language. It is likely to be one way for teachers to recharge, refresh, and update their language proficiency. Mr. D added that:

“... I find my language proficiency is decreasing. Therefore, individual initiatives should be built to do that. Apart from time-consuming administrative works as teachers, I should keep up my language proficiency through internet browsing and library visits.”

Indonesian EFL Teachers' Issues and Challenges Related to PD for Language Proficiency

The second part of the interview question for present study is obtaining information about the issues and challenges that participants encounter in PD participation for language proficiency.

Concerning the issues that the participants relate to PD for language proficiency, most participants mentioned inequality and unavailability in accessing activities. Mrs. D mentioned that:

“...there were many types of training related to the curriculum. The language proficiency PD does not relate directly to curriculum PD. The government is more concerned with the training on the curriculum.”

Professional development activities are mostly held and offered by the government, or institutions like universities or other organisations like subject teachers' associations. They related to teachers' mastery of teaching skills, material and curriculum development, and assessment. When asked the reason, it was because the government wants to ensure that all Indonesian teachers understand the latest curriculum and can apply it in their classrooms. Mr. A and Mrs. F added that the government thinks that making teachers able to produce good lesson plans, and have good teaching skills, can make students successful in their learning.

The participants reported that they were rarely offered PD activities specifically related to language proficiency. This is supported by Mrs. A. As the leader of the subject teachers' association, she stated that:

"It is true that EFL teachers are rarely offered PD related to their language proficiency by the ministry unless the teachers are looking for and join PD specifically for their language proficiency by themselves."

Another issue is the absence of strict and clear rules on sanctions, for teachers who do not join any professional development as mandated in the Teachers and Lecturers Acts No. 14/2005, Government Regulation Number 74/2008 on Teachers, Regulation of the Minister of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform Number 16/2009 on Functional Position Teacher and Credit Figures. The participants were familiar with the policies. They know that those policies relate to their certification, their professionalism, the opportunities for teachers to pursue PD activities, and that what they need to do relates to their credit figures. Mrs. C mentioned:

"I am familiar with those policies. I usually remind other teachers about those policies. I think those laws give us opportunities to be active joining professional development...we have to join...including for language proficiency. It's for us to learn and update our knowledge and skills."

All the participants stated that they realise the fact, and believe that their colleagues also realise their obligation to undertake PD as much as possible, to stay professional, updated with the latest knowledge, and refreshed in their skills as part of their responsibilities. But some other teachers do not realise the fact, or do not pay any attention to the obligation. Mr. A and Mrs. D stated that they realise it but some other teachers are not aware of it. Mrs. F stated:

"yes, off course. But not all teachers...only some. They realize the importance but for some teachers being an English teacher is just to go to work....nothing else."

Mr. A further explained that it depends on the teachers. If they retain the awareness that they still need to learn, improve, and maintain their skills, they will keep learning from any sources they can get, such as the internet, YouTube, Edmodo, etc. Mr. B argued that those teachers who do not realise their obligation to improve themselves think that their English is already good enough, so they do not need to learn anymore. He even stated that there are no rules or punishments for teachers who do not join PD.

In light of the challenges, hindrances, or difficulties which influence teachers' motivation and intentions to join or participate in PD, especially for language proficiency, the participants mentioned three challenges. The first is time. All the participants shared the same difficulties with managing their time, as to chances to participate in PD activities for language proficiency. Mr. A, Mr. B, and Mrs. F stated that they are very busy not only with teaching which they have to perform 32 hours a week, but also with administrative work. Mr. A mentioned:

"The time...we are very busy....occupied with a lot of works and teaching hours."

Mr. B added:

"We don't have any free time. And also I know other teachers say that they feel embarrassed that after all the years of teaching, their English is still not good."

Mrs. C and Mrs. D even stated that time is the biggest challenge not only for both of them but also for most of the teachers.

The second challenge is getting permission from the headmaster. Four of the participants (Mr. A, Mrs. C, Mrs. D, and Mrs. E) stated that they have to get the headmaster's permission to join or participate in PD activities, and teachers have to show a letter of invitation to the event from a provincial MOEC. Mrs. C mentioned:

"...getting permission from the principals, because we are allowed to join the activities if there is a letter of invitation from the provincial ministry of education and culture."

The next challenge is funding. This matter can discourage teachers from joining PD activities especially, professional development for language proficiency. Only two participants, Mrs. C and Mrs. F, mentioned it, contradicting each other. According to Mrs. C, if teachers have to pay to participate in PD, it will not be any problem:

"I don't think that it is a problem if we have to pay for the activity. Since we get our additional professional income."

Mrs. C was sure that additional income would help EFL teachers choose and join PD activities. But Mrs. F had a different statement. She would not mind paying for joining PD, including language proficiency activities. However, other teachers would choose not to join if the activities were not free, or if the fee was not reasonable for them. She stated:

“...money is never a problem, for me. Because some other teachers will think that money is the problem...if they have to pay with their own money they will choose not to go to PD.”

The last challenge is teachers’ lack of awareness of the importance of improving and maintaining their English mastery, especially their language proficiency. Mr. A argued that EFL teachers are unaware because no strict rules stated that EFL teachers have to join PD for language proficiency. Mr. B stated that EFL teachers need not worry, because they are not regularly tested on language proficiency. That is simply because no regulation asks EFL teachers to do so. He added that the supervisors were not from the same subject. Therefore, they do not pay too much attention to the teachers’ language proficiency. He stated:

“And the supervisor never pay attention to our language proficiency mastery, because they are not English teachers.”

Mrs. C shared the same opinion as Mr. A, regarding the absence of strict rules. She added that no clear instructions deal with professional development for language proficiency. She was referring to the much stricter and clearer rules which relate to PD for pedagogical competence:

“Different from professional development for pedagogical competence...all teachers have to join them...because they will be supervised on how they have understood and can apply the curriculum in their classes.”

Mrs. C also had the same statement as Mr. B, regarding information on the supervisors’ background knowledge. That could lead to the reason why some EFL teachers perceive that improving and maintaining their language proficiency is not an urgent matter.

Mrs. E underlined not only the importance of strict rules, but also the possibility of some punishment for teachers who do not participate in any PD activities. She also added information concerning the supervision. She stated:

“...our language proficiency is not a great concern for the supervisor, as long as our lesson plans are OK...we’re OK.”

Mrs. F mentioned that teachers who do not join PD think they have enough knowledge, and their English is already good. Therefore they do not need to join any PD. She also mentioned

that the government or MOEC never check EFL teachers' language proficiency after they have their professional teaching certificate. Further, she shared Mrs E's opinion that as long as teachers can make good lesson plans according to the latest curriculum, they will not have any problems.

Discussion

The findings of this study inform Indonesian EFL teachers. Participants in this study perceived that they need to continue updating and maintaining their mastery of language proficiency. They saw PD for language proficiency as crucial for the success of their teaching and learning process. The participants have performed some activities which can upgrade and maintain their language proficiency. These include joining subject teachers' associations, attending ELT seminars or conferences, presenting at English-speaking conferences or seminars (national or international), reading ELT materials or other English-printed books, journals or articles, and joining online courses. By doing such activities regularly, the idea of becoming a qualified, efficient, good, and successful English teacher as mentioned by Renandya et al., (2018) and Richards, (2010) would be reasonable and attainable. The participants realise that their continuous effort to master the target language knowledge, and teaching skills, will make them more effective in their teaching. Their effort would engage the students more in learning, and they would become language models for their students. Moreover, having a good mastery of the target language is one of the qualities of a good English teacher.

In participating in PD for language proficiency, Indonesian EFL teachers need to face and cope with certain challenges. Yuwono and Harbon (2010) found that Indonesian teachers' professionalism is affected by their limited time, money, and energy to participate in PD. This present study also reveals some issues, such as inequality and the unavailability of opportunities to access PD for language proficiency, and the absence of strict rules and sanctions for teachers who do not join PD. This study also reports challenges Indonesian EFL teachers face; namely time management, school support, financial matters, and teachers' lack of awareness on the importance of improving and maintaining their language proficiency.

Unequal or limited access and opportunities to join PD for language proficiency can become major issues for Indonesian EFL teachers. They are not well-informed about what PD programs are offered, and what opportunities are available for them. They have to find and explore the information and the opportunities for appropriate PD activities, in this case for improving and maintaining their language proficiency by themselves. It is worsened by the fact that PD for language proficiency is rarely held and offered to EFL teachers, by the government or the MOEC, and the unequal opportunities for teachers to participate. Only certain EFL teachers are chosen or invited by the MOEC. The absence of such professional

development activities forces EFL teachers to explore activities that they can afford to do and join, to develop professionally. Wong (2011) mentioned that while many activities may need an extra resource, other activities require initiative, time, and discipline. Concerning language proficiency, it can be as simple as keeping a diary once a teacher finishes teaching, reading ELT journals, practising, and exercising their language mastery through websites that provide the activities. Additionally, teachers can read journal articles, self-reflect on teaching, write a teaching journal, make a team-teaching, join teacher support groups, and join local, national or even international teachers' associations as mentioned by Murray (2010). It should be underlined that the government has the responsibility to provide PD programs for teachers, without any exception. That responsibility is not only to provide programs but also widen the opportunities and support for all teachers to join the programs.

The last issue relates to the absence of strict rules and sanctions for teachers who do not participate in any PD activities. It could imperil teachers' willingness and effort to be actively participating in PD. None of the existing regulations mention anything about that. Also, the government has not been able to provide a system which can regularly update, refresh, and maintain teachers' performance after passing certification. In the context of EFL teachers' language proficiency, the participants mentioned that Indonesian EFL teachers do not need to worry since their target language proficiency is not evaluated regularly in any case. They are not asked to submit TOEFL or TOFEL equivalent tests, nor a TOIEC test, let alone the CEFR test. Indonesian teachers, including EFL teachers, can use the result of their teacher competence tests at certification, for the rest of their EFL careers.

The first challenge revealed in this study is time management. Indonesian EFL teachers list heavy teaching loads or teaching hours added with administrative work, as their challenge to participation in PD activities. They find it hard to allocate time to PD participation, especially for language proficiency improvement and maintenance. These particular activities require active participation, in which participants can show their active use of target language in meaningful communication. The participants pointed out the unmatched time of the activities with teaching hours. It is almost impossible for them to leave their classes. As a result, they have to be selective in choosing activities. They mostly choose to do independent or informal PD activities such as reading English books or magazines, listening or watching news or documentary films from cable TV (if they subscribe to it), or taking language competence tests through the internet. Professional development consists of a full range of formal and informal activities aimed at improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Katuuk & Marentek, 2014).

The next challenge is school support. Teachers need a supportive environment, such as that provided by school principals and colleagues with the same goal of increasing student and teacher quality. But unfortunately, many teachers have to deal with an unsupportive

environment which can imperil their motivation to develop themselves professionally. They still have to ask permission from school principals, if they want to participate in PD, especially if they need to leave their classes. To join such activities, a teacher must ask permission from the headmaster. The invitation letter comes from the MOEC (central, provincial, or district) office. If the activity is held by an institution outside the MOEC, the activity should be acknowledged by the MOEC, and the invitation letter should include MOEC permission for the given committee to hold the activity. Failing to show all of those requirements will preclude the teacher from joining the PD activity.

The third challenge is funding. It may cause a potential problem for teachers seeking to participate in PD. Interviews reveal that funding should not be an issue any more. Most teachers already have their professional teacher incentive (TPG), after they have finished their professional teacher education program (PPG) certification, and then passed the teacher competence test. The certification program has increased teacher welfare. Some studies have found that MOEC certification since 2007 has improve teacher welfare, but this has not been able to prove that the program has improved teacher quality, so as to impact students' academic performance (Abdullah, 2015; Fahmi et al., 2011 and De Ree et al., 2012). Therefore, it is suggested that teachers use their increased income to participate in PD activities, to improve their quality and keep their professionalism high.

The last challenge could be the biggest that teachers encounter. They have to face themselves, to fight against conditions or unsupportive environments that can lower their awareness, to improve themselves professionally especially concerning their language proficiency mastery. Their lack of awareness may be caused by arrogance, stating that they have already got enough knowledge and their English is already good enough. Next is the absence of strict rules and sanctions for teachers who do not participate in PD, which contributes to teachers' lack of awareness in joining PD activities particularly for language proficiency. EFL teachers' lack of awareness is also caused by supervisors rarely even attending to their EFL teachers' language proficiency mastery, when they supervised them. The supervisors' only concern is how well EFL teachers can make lesson plans, and their classroom application.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study's findings on the perceptions of PD for language proficiency align with previous studies (Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015, Wyatt, 2015 and Wulyani, 2017). This study reveals two influences upon Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of PD for language proficiency. First, individuals perceive differently the importance of PD for language proficiency, their language proficiency self-awareness, their places of origin, and the availability of PD for language proficiency activities for them to join. Second, different pedagogical environments refer to different working contexts. Teachers working in different



areas, types of school, and the grade the teachers instruct, may perceive language proficiency PD differently.

Regarding the issues and challenges found in this study brings about two possibilities. First, teachers may just give in to the situation and accept the fact that they do not have enough support to continuously develop themselves. Second, teachers may fight and face challenges by striving and making the difficult decision to look for and pursue development by themselves.

Indonesian EFL teachers must have and keep awareness of the importance of developing and improving their skills pedagogically and professionally. They have to realise and accept the fact that PD is a lifelong learning and development process. They must continue to look for opportunities to help themselves with their language proficiency improvement and maintenance. They can make the effort individually, or collectively either through their subject teachers' association working with universities which have English departments or with institutions as British Council Jakarta, IALF (Indonesia Australia Language Foundation), the Regional Language Centre (RELC) Singapore, or RELO (Regional English Language Office).

This study was carried out in high schools. It can be suggested that researchers study EFL teachers' understanding or experiences in language proficiency PD from lower education levels, such as elementary or junior high schools, or in higher education as at universities. Further research is recommended, to investigate how EFL teachers from private and state schools perceive language proficiency PD. It is also worth exploring the role of informal language institutions or organisations, in providing continuous and sustainable language proficiency PD for EFL teachers.

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