EXPLORING TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION TOWARD THEIR PROFESSIONALISM IN TEACHING ENGLISH

Ety Fahriani
Iskandar Abdul Samad
Saiful

Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study is intended to explore the teachers’ perception toward their professional development in teaching English at senior high schools in Bireuen. This study employs a qualitative design in collecting and analyzing the data. To collect the data, 30 English teachers of 146 English teachers in Kabupaten Bireuen were randomly chosen as the participants. A set of Likert Scale questionnaires was given to 30 teachers and 10 of the teachers were interviewed by using a guided interview to explore the general perception about the teachers’ perception toward their professional development and their effort to improve their professionalism in teaching English. The finding revealed that the English teachers in Kabupaten Bireuen presumed themselves as professionals in doing their occupation. It is due to their perception that they accomplished the four pre-requirement competencies namely pedagogical, social, personal, and professional. They improved pedagogical competence by collecting teaching materials from the internet, books, and their seniors and learning about new teaching methods. They improved their competence by building a good relationship with students, parents, and school stakeholders. The teachers improved their professional competence by joining the forum of subject matter teacher (MGMP), attending education seminars, training, and workshops, and they improved the competence by behaving with good characters.

Keywords: teaching English, teacher professionalism, professional development.

1 Corresponding author: etyfariani1980@gmail.com
INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, teacher professionalism is often determined and mobilized by an external authority particularly the government (Ina & Khoirunnisa, 2018). It is indicated by the national law of teachers No.14/2005 which is used to determine whether a teacher is eligible or not for teacher certification. It will also bring certain privileges, such as a financial benefit for the teachers. Moreover, the curriculum and educational assessment are also centralized which leads to the idea that the teaching profession is not an autonomous profession (Bjork, 2004). The government mobilizes a teacher by serving the curriculum and assessment of the students’ final examination with national standards.

However, the above ideas are contrast with the discourses on teacher professionalism in which the professionalism in a specific occupation requires some degree of autonomy and self-regulation (Kolsaker, 2008). In Indonesia, teachers are mobilized and paid to pursue the standards set by the government in which the government takes part in regulating the education standard by serving a centralized curriculum and assessment. The government will assess the students’ final achievement from the entire provinces in Indonesia and decide the successful level for the final examination for those provinces. This notion is called by Day (2002) as the post-professionalism in which teachers have to content with centralized curricula, testing regimes, and external surveillance. This notion was also called by Helsby (1995) as deprofessionalisation in which he stated the governments’ intervention in education causes derivation of teachers’ autonomy, authority, and status.

Based on those ideas, the teachers’ point of view toward the issue of their professionalism in teaching is regarded as essential to be studied. The aim is to explore the teachers’ perception of the teaching professionalism issue in order to improve legitimacy and accountability (Sachs, 2003). Furthermore, it will also provide a better understanding of the construction of teacher professionalism.

In Kabupaten Bireun, almost all of the high schools have qualified English teachers whose qualifications can be seen by their regular certifications. Those qualifications indicated that they have fulfilled the requirement such as having enough knowledge and following many kinds of professional development programs such PKG (pusat kegiatan guru or centre for teacher activity), KKG (kelompok kerja guru or teachers working group), and MGMP (musyawarah guru mata pelajaran or forum of subject matter teacher) and have experiences in teaching
English. Furthermore, the English teachers in Kabupaten Bireun also follow the centralization assessment and curriculum that are regulated by the government. It means that the teachers do not have full authority and self-regulation in performing their teaching professionalism. It also implies that professionalism in teaching is regulated based on the governments mobilization.

This phenomenon brought the idea for the researchers to conduct a study regarding the teachers’ perception toward their professionalism in teaching English at Senior High Schools in Kabupaten Bireun. It was intended to find out the meaning of professionalism in teachers’ perspectives in case of their status as the civil servant who is mobilized by the government to teach the students in this area by following the centralized curriculum and assessment. Furthermore, it was also intended to collect information about the teachers’ efforts to improve their professionalism in teaching English at Senior High School in Kabupaten Bireuen.

To support this research, the researcher gathered some previous studies concerning the teachers’ professional development in teaching. Tanang and Abu (2014) investigated the teachers’ professionalism and professional development practice in South Sulawesi. The investigation focused on the teachers’ behavior attitude, pedagogic skills, and diversity learning activities through effective professional development as a commitment to do continuous improvement. The result of the study showed that gender brought the difference in behavior attitude practice and the education professional qualification brought the difference in behavior-attitudes, the strength of teaching skill, knowledge and believes through diverse learning activities in effective professional development. They also concluded that teachers’ professional development needs supporting policy, morals, infrastructure, and finances that can lead teachers to be professional. This study proved that the teachers’ professionalism is affected by the teachers’ self-attitudes and self-authority in teaching besides of the teachers’ needs toward the governments’ support in regulating their occupation.

Furthermore, Masoumpanah and Zarei (2014) conducted a study about Iranian teachers’ identity and perception of Iranian language teachers’ professional identity and perception of their professional competence. The results of this study showed that the formative years’ experience and students’ preferences in learning English were primary factors that influenced teachers’ professional identity and their sense of subject competence and these formed influential factor in the interaction
between professional identity and teachers’ attitudes towards the notion of EIL (English as International Language). The result showed that the respondents had a strong sense of professional identity. They perceived that teaching English was a respectable job in Iranian society. The interview data also showed that the participants had a strong sense of their pedagogical competence in teaching English when compared to native-speaker teachers. Thus, teachers’ positive self-image may come from their pedagogical competence in teaching English. The result of the analysis also showed that many factors affect English teachers’ attitudes toward English, and some are challenging the acceptance of EIL. The first factor affecting the acceptance of the notion of EIL in Iran is that English is not the medium used for local communication. The second factor is a strong commitment to standard English and as a result, teachers are expected to teach according to the norms.

Meanwhile, Ina and Khoirunnisa (2018) conducted a study about teachers’ perception on the meaning of teaching profession by collecting the result of a questionnaire constructed based on the theory by Hargreaves (2000) in which teaching profession could be understood from three aspects i.e. teaching status, teaching professionalism, and reasons of becoming teachers. The questionnaire result from 23 teachers from 10 primary schools in Sidoarjo shows that the teachers tended to perceive their profession as not autonomous. It is because they did not think that the centralization of educational assessment and centralization of the curriculum may risk teaching profession autonomy. After all, they tended to believe that the profession is not autonomous.

Considering the discussion above, the researchers were interested in conducting this study. The study was aimed to explore the teachers’ perception toward their professional development in teaching English at senior high schools in Bireuen and the teachers’ efforts in improving their professionalism in teaching English at senior high school in Bireuen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professionalism in Teaching

The term “profession” is originally quoted from Latin for profess. It refers to people who experts in some skills or fields of knowledge (Baggini, 2005). Meanwhile, professionalism refers to strategies and rhetoric employed by occupation in order to improve status, salary, and condition. In other words, professionalism is used to identify a profitable
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occupation in terms of respectability as opposed to doing voluntarily (Kennedy, 2007). In defining teaching as a profession, the researcher gave different ideas in determining teaching as a profession. Sachs (2003) argued that the term “profession” for a teacher is different from other professionals such as law and medicine because they have professional autonomy, a code of ethics and a specialized knowledge base.

Professionalism in teaching is highly important. Teacher professionalism is the way what teachers think about their profession, why they should be professional, and how they behave and implement their knowledge and skill related to their profession. It is relevant to the ideas by Yeom and Ginsberg (2007) who claimed that teachers take the biggest part in successful education. In other words, teachers’ lack of professionalism in their work brings high failure in passing examinations, including national examination. It seems that teacher education does not adequately prepare teachers to become professionals. Hence, providing teacher professional development for a teacher is crucial in order to meet the need of the professional teachers.

**Teacher Professional Development**

In line with the growing awareness of education quality needs in Indonesia, the society should benefit from an increasing education quality and thus be able to become active members of the knowledgeable community. Society requires a profile of skills and competent teachers to accompany their future in the process of education, developing new skills and expectations for the young generation (Husin, 2008). As the response, the society must take part in ensuring the elevating of quality, enhancing their job assurance, promoting better changes, and activating their role as change agents and in general recognizing. Teachers play their role in the implementation and intellectual dissemination reforms which requires a high quality professional identity. According to Alton-Lee (2003) and Gurney (2007), qualified teachers in teaching are acquired by providing enough time and encouraging learning activities as a valuable opportunity to learn. It is supported by Quint (2006) that when teachers meet regularly to discuss their teaching, it impacts positively on student achievement.

According to Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013, professional development is defined as activities that aim to develop an individual’s skill, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher. Professional development helps him or her
to deal with difficulties in teaching and self qualification. It is in line with an argument by James et al. (2007) that professional development is seen by teachers as a way of achieving their primary task to ensure effective and enriched teaching. Meanwhile, Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) argued that teachers are able to optimize current teaching and improve future teaching through professional development activities.

Teacher professional development is made to improve teachers’ professionalism in teaching. Examples of professional development in Indonesia for teacher professional improvement are PKG (pusat kegiatan guru or centre for teacher activity), KKG (kelompok kerja guru or teachers working group), and MGMP (musyawarah guru mata pelajaran or forum of subject matter teacher).

MGMP emphasizes how to develop professional skills of teachers through the forum peers. In this forum colleagues have a periodic MGMP gathering with the aim of encouraging an increase in the quality of teaching and teacher competence. However there are times when this board ran out of things to say because it is awaiting information from the trustees, in this case, the Department of Education in their respective areas. MGMP is focused on the development of teacher competence to be more operational and concrete.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

To collect the data, 30 of 146 English teachers in Kabupaten Bireuen were chosen as the participants by using random sampling techniques. In doing so, the researchers wrote the names of 146 English teachers at Kabupaten Bireun in pieces of papers and put them into a bag. Then the bag was shaken until the 30 papers moved out of the bag. Those teachers’ names were chosen as the participant in this research.

Research Instrument

The instruments in this research were questionnaires and interview. The questionnaires were constructed by using Likert Scale in which every question consisted of four optional answers; they are (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. The questionnaires consisted of 18 items about the English teachers’ perception on their professionalism in teaching English. The questions were constructed based on the theory by Hargreaves (2000) about the aspects that construct the teaching profession. The list of questions was
adapted from Ina and Khoirunnisa (2018) and modified based on the aim of this study. Furthermore, the researchers interviewed the participants by asking them 11 questions about their perception toward their own professionalism and their effort in improving their professionalism in regulating their occupation. The interview was a kind of structured interview in which the researchers prepared a list of the questions and asked the detail information to the participants based on the questions.

**Technique of Data Collection**

The data were collected by giving questionnaires to the 30 English teachers and interviewing 10 of those teachers at senior high school in kabupaten Bireuen. The questionnaire concerns with the teachers’ perception on their professional development in teaching English. Next, to support the questionnaire result and obtain the detail information, the researchers interviewed 10 of the teachers face to face in order to collect information about their teaching professionalism and their effort to improve their professionalism in regulating their occupation.

**Technique of Data Analysis**

The data from the interview were reported descriptively in words or pictures rather than in numbers. The data from the interview were analyzed by using three steps as proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) namely data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Meanwhile, the general result of data analysis from the questionnaires was presented in the form of a graph in which it showed the highest and the lowest choice for every question.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Results**

*Teachers’ Perception toward Their Professionalism*

There were not all of the teachers categorizing themselves as professional teachers. RN and ER agreed that they could not be categorized as professional teachers because of some reasons. RN said that she did not want to be called as a professional teacher because she argued that professionalism was a process. It was not constant in which it depended on some factors. Thus, she claimed that she could be professional in a certain condition. Meanwhile, in some conditions such as when she felt tired and angry or had some internal problems, she could not control her professionalism in doing her profession. Meanwhile, ER
argued that she was not professional yet in doing her profession because she still faced difficulties in teaching practice and designing a lesson plan. She could not control the class when some students made chaos in the class. She could not concentrate to teach and felt down when the class became very chaos and the students did not pay attention to the material. Furthermore, ER stated that she still faced difficulties to design a lesson plan. She argued that she was often faced difficulties to decide the best method for the teaching practice because she often found that the method chosen did not work effectively. Moreover, NA argued that they learnt to be professional by learning through experiences.

**The Obstacles to be a Professional Teacher**

The interview result also shows that the teachers faced obstacles to be a professional teacher. MY stated that it was not easy to be professional teachers. They needed a long-time learning and kept studying without feeling satisfied with his or her knowledge. It implies that a teacher should follow the rules of being a teacher as long as they do their occupation as teachers. Furthermore, the teachers also admitted that they faced difficulties in teaching practices. FSI said that he faced difficulties to find an appropriate method in teaching and to deal with the revision of the curriculum made by the government. Meanwhile, AM claimed that centralization curriculum affected her professionalism in enrolling herself as a civil servant at the school. Besides, WD admitted that many teachers had to ask other people to prepare the administrative requirements such as syllabus, lesson plan, annual program, and semester program in order to reduce their difficulties in managing the time.

Meanwhile, NA argued that the centralization of curriculum affected teachers’ professionalism. The curriculum was unpredictably changed by the government which brought negative effect to the teachers’ teaching quality. However, SF, RM and ER claimed that curriculum and assessment centralization in education brought negative effects to their professionalism. They felt that they were less autonomous in doing their occupation as teachers. Meanwhile, SF stated that the changed curriculum annoyed the teachers’ focus in teaching in which the teachers were bothered by new agendas to learn the new curriculum because not all teachers really mastered the new curriculum.

**The Teachers’ Effort to be a Professional Teacher**

The interview result shows that they did many kinds of effort to improve their professionalism as teachers. The interview result shows
that the teachers did some efforts in improving their pedagogical competence by joining professional development programs and they claimed that they tried to improve their social competence by learning how to build a good relationship with other people. Meanwhile, they did the efforts to improve their teaching professional competence by getting involved in several training provided by the government. Furthermore, they tried to improve their characteristic and knowledge in doing their occupation such as learning how to have a good character such as discipline, confidence, caring, and patience because they were aware that a professional teacher was a role model for others.

**Teachers’ Perception toward Professional Development Programs**

The teachers gave positive responses toward the professional development programs. They argued that the professional development program helped them to find a more effective way of transferring knowledge to their students. They also argued that they had a chance to consult the senior teachers about their problems so that they could find an effective way to solve their problems in teaching-learning process.

**Discussions**

*The Teachers’ perception toward their professional development in teaching English in Kabupaten Bireun*

The result of the data analysis from the questionnaires and interviews proved that the teachers had a positive perception toward their own professional development in teaching English in Kabupaten Bireun. The teachers believed that they were already being professional in doing their profession. They believed that they had the four pre-requisite competencies to be professional teachers as stated by the government in Permendiknas No. 18 in 2007 in which this law is used to determine whether a teacher is eligible or not for teacher certification.

Furthermore, the teachers argued that a professional teacher should learn a new method in doing a teaching practice. It is relevant with an argument by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) who identified the characteristics of professional teachers as those who are able to do some actions such as innovative teaching, motivating students to learn, knowing how and when to use a variety of teaching strategies. They have ideas to create interesting learning activities and to impress students so that they feel curious to find more information about a subject matter.

They also believed that the most important for a professional teacher was able to manage the class and teach the students based on the
They believed that professional teachers should have the subject and pedagogical knowledge. It is in line with one of the professional keys proposed by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) in which teachers should have subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. It will help them to regulate their profession as teachers by using innovative teaching, effective implementation of curriculum, participating in action reaction, and motivating students to learn.

Moreover, all of the teachers argued that a professional teacher would involve parents as a partner in education. It is because the parents would help the teachers to reach the aim of education so that the students will find the same objectives between their parents and their teachers in the process of education. This result is in line with the argument by Ina and Khoirunnisa (2018) that involving parents in the education process is very crucial.

However, the teacher agreed that being a professional teacher is not easy. The teachers faced some problems in doing their profession in Kabupaten Bireuen. They argued that fulfilling all of the required competencies namely pedagogic, social, personal, and professional competencies were not easy. They had to practice all of those competencies not only in the classroom when practicing teaching but also in their life activity such as when interacting with other people, managing time, assessing the students, etc. In other words, they argued that they had to build their attitudes, beliefs, moral and values in order to be professional teachers. The teachers believed that they should have high morals and values because they were considered as the models for their society who were paid to educate people. This professional identity is similar to the theory by Sachs (2003) who argued that professionalism has a quite relationship with values and moral in which it should present both during teaching and out of teaching itself. It is also in line with the theory by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) that a professional teacher should have a good character such as resilient, keeping composure, caring and nurturing, friendly, patience, well-organized, flexible, confident, a role-model, conscientious, creative, dedicated and goal-oriented.

They argued that there were some mismatches between the government and the teachers’ needs. For example, the teachers argued that centralization of curriculum and assessment reduced professionalism. The teachers had to follow the standard set by the government even though their schools were located in very far distance from the capital city in which their schools had limited access and...
facilities of education, making them difficult to reach the standard. As a result, the teachers did not have full autonomy in regulating education. This phenomenon is similar to the finding by Ina and Khoirunnisa (2018) that the teachers perceived their profession as not autonomous because of the centralization of assessment and centralization of the curriculum arranged by the government. Furthermore, the curriculum revision often made by the government made the teachers confused. They had to follow the changed curriculum that resulted in many changes in the syllabus and teaching process. It took a very long time to adapt with a new curriculum.

**The Teachers’ Effort in Improving Their Professionalism in Teaching English in Kabupaten Bireuen**

*Improving pedagogical competence*

The interview result showed that the teachers did efforts to improve their pedagogical competence. They attended the forum of subject matter teachers (MGMP) to find out new information about teaching learning process, the current issues, and lesson plan, syllabus, semester program and annual programs. A forum such as MGMP trained teachers to be capable in understanding learners, mastering learning theories and education principles of learning, developing a curriculum, developing learners’ potentials, communicating to learners, and implementing assessment with all techniques and kinds (Syahrul, 2016).

Furthermore, the teachers collected much material from the internet, books, and their seniors in order to help them to improve the students’ understanding of the material. Thus, the students mastered the knowledge about their subject matter and were able to transfer the lesson in a subject matter completely. It is in line with an idea by Hill, Rowan and Ball (2005) that pedagogical competence reflected by the teachers’ ability to transfer knowledge effectively in which students find a subject matter as an easy matter to study.

The interview result also proved that the teachers tried to improve their professionalism by improving their knowledge about the teaching practice quality such as learning about new methods in teaching and current technology used in improving teaching practice. They believed that to be a professional teacher meant learning in a long time period because they had to be always sensitive with new information and issue regarding the educational process. It is in line with the statements by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) who claimed that professional teachers need to be able to recognize their importance of improving their
Improving Social Competence

The teachers improved their social competence by learning how to build a good relationship with other people such as with students’ parents, school stakeholders without underestimating family background or social status. This idea is similar to an idea by Sagala (2009) who claimed that a teacher’s social competence can be referred to the teacher ability to communicate and to get involved with students, colleagues, parents, and society in regulating his profession as a teacher. The aim of this competence is to build a good relationship between students and other people so that they can find the solution for every difficulty in teaching learning practice. It is also supported by Mulyasa (2007) who said that teachers must master several characteristics of social competencies such as (1) acting objectively and non-discriminative related to gender, religion, race, physical condition, family background, and socioeconomic status, (2) being polite with other educators, staff, students’ parents and the community, (3) being adaptive with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and (4) being communicative within the internal professional communities and other professions both orally and written or other forms.

Improving Professional Competence

In improving their professional competence, the teachers did several efforts such as joining forum of subject matter teacher (MGMP), learning to master the subject matters and design the lesson plans, attending education seminars, training, and workshop. All of those activities provided teachers to learn about designing lesson plans, syllabus and teaching programs and finding the current methodologies used in teaching practice by scholars. It helped the teachers to master a subject matter intensively so that they deserved for guiding the students to fulfil their standard competence (Suyatno, Sumedi & Riadi, 2009). It is in line with Sagala (2009) who claimed that professional competence refers to the teacher’s ability to master his subject matter, to understand the core competence and the basic competence, the science methodologies, and to implement the science concepts in daily activity. In other words, a teacher is required to master his or her subject matter and have sufficient knowledge about his or her profession regulation.
Improving professionalism by joining a seminar of education and professional development programs allowed teachers to improve their professional quality through collegial or collaborative works among teachers in professional development programs. It is similar to the theory by Zuljan (2001) who said that professional development program develops their conceptions and change their teaching practice.

The teachers also did class action research in order to improve their teaching quality. They argued that they could find an appropriate way to improve students’ ability and they learnt to control the large class through doing class action research. During this action research, the teachers sought an effective method in order to improve students’ English achievement. The teachers would do some scales on learning activities to make sure that the students already understood the materials. This finding is similar to one of the professional criteria proposed by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) in that a professional teacher should have a commitment to change and have continuous improvement. They are reflective and constantly evaluating their choices and actions to improve instruction. Besides, they are also required to be involved in continuous education. They need to read journals, attend conferences, stay current in the field, be unsatisfied with the statuesque, understand current trends, and be lifelong learners. It is also in line with the theory by Ifanti and Fotopoulopou (2011) stating that teachers are required to improve their quality linear to the growth of educational needs. It also has a similar idea with James et al. (2007) who said that professional development was seen by the teachers as a way of achieving their primary task to ensure an effective and enriched teaching.

**Improving Personal Competence**

The teachers improved their personal competence by trying to behave with a good character such as discipline, confidence, caring, and patient. It is in line with the ideas by Taniredja and Abduh (2016) who claimed that the personal competence included (1) the whole personality comprising of virtue, honesty, maturity, faithfulness, and moral, (2) the ability of self-discipline, responsibility, sensitive, objective, flexible, and insightful, (3) the ability to communicate with others, and (4) the ability to develop the profession, such as creative thinking, critically reflective, willing to learn, decision making. Thus, personal skills are related mainly to the identity of a teacher as a good, responsible, open-minded person with high motivation for the development.
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

It was found that the English teachers in Kabupaten Bireuen claimed that they presumed themselves as professionals in doing their occupation as English teachers. They tried to accomplish the four pre-requisite competencies namely pedagogical, social, personal, and professional competencies proposed by the government. The teachers argued that professional teachers were people who did their occupation as teachers and had good characters, commitment, and pedagogical knowledge.

However, the teachers faced some problems in achieving their professionalism. For instance, they needed a long time practice to accomplish all of the required competencies, namely pedagogic, social, personal, and professional competencies. They also faced difficulties to deal with the centralization of curriculum and centralization of assessment that reduced their autonomy in regulating their occupation. They found that their occupation had less autonomy in which all of the standards were set by the government and the teachers just took their part as teachers whose obligation was to follow the government’ rules.

The English teachers in Kabupaten Bireuen did some efforts in order to reach professionalism in their occupation. To improve their pedagogical competence, they attended a forum of subject matter teachers (MGMP), collected much material from the internet, book, and their seniors, and learnt about new methods in teaching and a current technology used in improving teaching practice. In improving their social competence, they improved it by learning how to build a good relationship with other people such as with students, parents, school stakeholders without underestimating family background or social status. Furthermore, they improved their professional competence by joining the forum of subject matter teacher (MGMP), learning to master the subject matter and design the lesson plan, attending education seminars, training, and workshop. Meanwhile, the teachers improved their personal competence by trying to behave with a good character such as discipline, confidence, caring, and patience.

The researchers suggested English teachers to improve their professionalism by increasing their social, personal, professional and pedagogical competences. Thus, this research is considered being one of the references to add their knowledge about professionalism. Furthermore, it is recommended that other researchers do similar research in the field of teachers’ professionalism in teaching English.
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The findings of this research are expected to be a starting point for further research in the same field.

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