

## Effective INSET: A reflection of a former primary school EFL teacher

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### Abstract

*The demand of the English language teaching in the context of Indonesia grew as fast as it did in other neighbouring countries. What makes it different is that this country made a decision to remove English subject from the current national curriculum for primary schools. The main reason is that the government has not been able to provide schools with qualified English teachers. Although there is a lack of sufficient teachers as well as the unavailability of official curriculum, many schools do not refrain from introducing English to primary learners. The English teachers working in this kind of schools do not get proper opportunity for professional development and training. The worst case oftentimes found is that the schools inevitably recruit teachers with non-English educational background to teach English to young learners. This paper aims to shed light on the issue of teacher training programme in the Indonesian primary school context. Then, the principles of effective training as well as challenges during its implementation will also be discussed.*

### Introduction

The introduction of English at the primary school level requires special training for teachers especially due to insufficient professional training during their pre-service teaching (Nunan 2003 in Zein 2015b:113 ;Vu et al. 2005). Professional development is the heart of the success of any change and innovation in a way that teachers themselves reflect the quality of education (Li 2015; Wong & Tsui

2007; Bolitho 2009). It is therefore a must for a professional member to continue their education during their service through such a training that keeps them informed and help them improve their knowledge, skills, and behaviours (Aysun 2015).

In addition, Mann (2005) summarizes that teacher training is necessary especially because such training is aimed to introduce language teachers to methods, terms, and concepts of the language

teaching. This, too, correlates with the needs of training in the Indonesian primary school level where most of the teachers are quite unfamiliar with the English language teaching theory and practice. In-service teacher training (hereafter, INSET) would be an appropriate solution for teachers with low level qualification and experience such as those who are teaching at a primary level context. Teachers are the only persons who know better about the classroom. To be able to make changes in their teaching practice, they have to undergo an INSET programme. Most of the time, primary school English teachers are given opportunity to attend an INSET program at the same occasion with other subject teachers as well, either at their own schools or at the other institutions. Therefore, the INSET topics would examine the general issues commonly faced by primary classroom teachers.

This essay aims to shed light on the issue of INSET programme in supporting teacher development in the Indonesian primary school context. Then, the principles of

INSET as well as challenges during its implementation will also be discussed.

### **My context**

The demand of the English teaching in the context of Indonesia grew as fast as it did in other neighbouring countries. What makes it different is now that this country has made a decision to terminate the English teaching and learning in the primary level. The main reason is that the government has not been able to provide the schools with qualified English teachers. As a result, there is no room for an English graduate to start their career in a primary school. Although there is a lack of sufficient teachers as well as the unavailability of official curriculum, the schools do not refrain from introducing English to primary learners. The English teachers working in this kind of schools do not get proper opportunity for professional development and training. The worst case often times found is that the schools inevitably recruit teachers with non-English educational background to teach English to young learners. This

decision is due to parental demands as well as an intention to preserve school reputation (Suherdi&Kurniawan 2005 in Hawanti 2014).

Those two types of English teachers tend to be found in extremely great need of support in the form of training program specially designed for language teachers. Zein (2011) illustrates that shortage of qualified, proficient and competent teachers hinders the massive introduction of English at primary schools in Indonesia. He believes that teacher training is needed, most importantly the one which could address various needs of the teachers.

The primary schools who offer English in their curriculum tend to require all the teachers (including the non-English background) to be able to carry out their classes in both English and *Bahasa Indonesia* (literally, Indonesian language, particularly due to the unavailability of English teachers. According to my experience, the school-based INSET programme aimed for preparing English teachers from different

educational background is still far from satisfying.

Apparently, there were some aspects absent from the structures of the programme. The teachers are often found struggling with their teaching which then it certainly influences the students' learning. Nonetheless, unless teachers are given appropriate opportunity to develop themselves both professionally and personally, the quality of teaching as well as the students' achievement will improve.

### **Principles of effective INSET**

The previous INSET in my context is a school-based programme which includes practical workshop as well as self-evaluation. However, the program was terminated before it reached its goal to prepare the primary bilingual classroom teachers. Taking lesson learned from the previous INSET programme for bilingual teachers once held in my context, I would propose the following principles to be incorporated for a better, effective INSET in the future.

a. Focus on the teachers

Hayes (2002:8) teachers are the heart of any innovation within national education system and, therefore, the contexts in which they work need to be studied to inform the innovation process. There are aspects regarding teachers needs to be taken into account before designing an INSET programmes which include:

- The contextual needs (problems, situations)
- Their existing knowledge
- Their previous experience
- Their beliefs
- Their involvement

Maldezer & Wedell (2007) articulates that ‘the starting point for change’ before envisaging a change is to understand the context of the language classroom. A needs analysis should then be carried out before implementing INSET to gain sufficient information regarding teachers’ contextual needs as well as their previous experiences. Teachers should also involve in planning and implementing INSET so that they could confirm and clarify what is actually relevant with their needs. It will be effective to place trainee

teachers and their realities at the center of the programme by involving them in both the planning and the execution phases (Sandholtz, 2002 in Uysal 2012). Once they have a sense of owning the ideas and the structures of the programme, they will feel valued so that they find it meaningful. This sense of ownership is essential for them to make a change (Fullan 1982 in Uysal 2012).

Teachers’ beliefs should also be addressed prior to INSET course design because beliefs change relates to behaviour change (Al-Balushi, n.d.). Lamb (1995) suggests that any INSET course which aims at long terms changes in teachers practice will always be interconnected with participants’ own beliefs. Generally, INSET is more like a transmissive training where experts transmit the theory and concepts to the trainee while, in fact, it does not support ownership. Hayes (2000) states one of the aspects of a successful training is that the training should be experiential and reflective rather than transmissive. Training will be meaningful if it is context specific and context sensitive where

participant benefit the effective learning process through personal engagement and collaboration (Osterman & Kottkamp 1993; Hayes 2002).

b. Reflection

In order that learning to be effective and meaningful, it should be experiential and reflective because reflection provides a space for the learners to link their thought and action. Hayes (2002) points out that a reflective orientation is central to development since it also develops teachers' autonomy. After conducting INSET, teachers should be given time and space to reflect on their experiences. Reflection is a prerequisite of development in which teachers create awareness of practice (Mann, 2005: 108). The more reflective process the teachers do, the better they perform for the evaluation and change. It allows teachers to develop their self-awareness regarding their performance (Osterman&Kottkamp1993) while awareness is the tool for the behavioral change. Thus reflective

practice assist teachers to identify the problems then provide ideas for a change.

c. Follow-up support

Lamb (1995) asserts that INSET would be in meaningless without any follow-up support. It is needed to assist the INSET participants who would find themselves less motivated than they were due to confusion and frustration when applying all they had learnt. In addition, it is also aimed to balance the theory teachers received during INSET and the practice in their real classroom. As for my context, I would suggest peer coaching as the follow up support which include monitoring, peer-observation, and reflection as well.

Peer coaching refers to work collaboration among teachers and or managers during or after training to solve problems or questions arose. They are not intended to make judgment on the teaching, but rather to solve difficulties. Tsui (1995) maintains that peer observation enables teachers to gain self-reflection where teachers can ask each other questions so that they will find it easy to articulate their own

‘practical theory’. As they are able to provide explicit answers, they will become better educators.

Farrell (2007) also adds that those teachers could give each other written or verbal comments and suggestions as equals. It is not evaluative, non-judgmental but more on developing their critical thinking skills. As critical friends, the teachers can talk, question, and confront their teaching ideas. When a teacher makes interpretation on their teaching, the peer teachers would critically respond so as to support their reflective process.

#### d. Evaluation

It is worth considering that the evaluation would consist of interview and observation. INSET in my context only utilized self-assessment in evaluating the teacher’s beliefs and behaviours towards the change. However, it seems to be ineffective as Lehiste (2015) claims that self-assessment reports may lead teachers to be under- or over-reporting their skills. Baseline study would be more ideal to undertake so as to make the final evaluation more reliable and valid.

### **Challenges of INSET Programmes**

In this part, I would highlight three challenges regarding INSET commonly appear, especially in my context. In addition, what might be the reasons behind those as well as some suggestions to take into account will also be discussed.

The first challenge is that after certain period of time the teachers will likely fail to continue applying the innovation then they start returning to their previous practice.

Lehiste (2015) claims that one-shot training does not have a lasting impact on the teachers’ practice. As Zein (2015a) suggest that the main reason is because long-term sustainability of INSET depends on to what extent the course is appealing to their needs and expectations. Therefore, adjustment in terms of the course delivery and content as well as the teaching methodology should be adjusted (Yan 2007 in Zein 2015a).

Prabhu (1987 in Hayes 2002) argues that teachers’ needs, beliefs and understanding as well as the specific contexts of the teaching environment needs investigating to avoid superficial effect of the

innovation. Smith & Lovat (2003 in Hawanti 2014:166) believes that teachers cannot achieve any goal of a program when they do not understand its rationale, its objective, as well as its target). In other words, as Hayes (1995) claims, the training has no sense of plausibility where the trainers failed to make efforts to help teachers understand the rationale or underlying principles of an innovation or a change. Lamb (1995) maintains that some teachers are unable to apply new ideas because there is a gap between research theory and teachers' personal theory. He proposes that the first aid is follow-up support of which focus is on reconstructing teachers' beliefs. Teachers need to understand the underlying principles of new ideas as well the usefulness of the new practice. He further suggests the solution that is to moderate the input (research theory-received knowledge) because the teacher already have well-developed mental construct of teaching.

Li (2015:204) adds that there is the so-called conflict between the teachers' core and peripheral beliefs

which contribute to the limitation of their uptake of the innovative ideas. When teachers find problems in actual practice, their former beliefs will still influence their perception towards new ideas. Therefore, sufficient support is needed, either during or after the training course so that the teachers will not abandon the new innovative ideas. It is obvious that their beliefs play an important role in determining the success of the new changes. If the changes are meaningful and important for their students, they will voluntarily implement them. Nicholaidis (2008) depicts how most teachers' feelings of renewal once the training is over. It is understandable that they might have such a feeling when they are away from their routines.

If teachers are valued based on their knowledge and experience, they will be critical in evaluating their change and possible problems which might emerge. Teachers should also be given activities to raise their awareness so as to elaborate framework of change in their context. Lamb (1995) gives examples of awareness raising

activity such as examination of video-based lessons, analysis of classroom tasks, or completing questionnaire on teacher and learner roles. Participants should expand their awareness of their own teaching practice, determine specific areas they want to improve and design the agenda for a change. Thus, inset would be their experiential learning. In addition, Hayes (2002) recommends cascade training which is reflective and experiential to a training which is conducted at several levels but trainers drawn from a level above.

Secondly, there is apparently a tendency where INSET programme which is organized voluntarily by teachers will be appealing to those who are passionate while compulsory INSET will prone to create resentment for them. The latter might consider the programme as duty so that they think it is burdensome especially when the nature and the structure of the course are unrelated to their needs and context. Wong & Tsui (2007) points out that there might be a gap between learning content and their needs. They also

maintain that it is better for the teachers to develop their own professional knowledge rather than being imposed by other researchers.

Therefore, to attract different types of teachers, the INSET should involve them, together with the trainers, so there will be a room from collaborative development and a sense of ownership (Hayes 1995, 2002). Once the teachers develop the ownership of the ideas of change, they will surely sustain the innovation. As Hayes (1995) further maintains that sense of ownership relates to sense of plausibility of the change previously discussed. School-based learning would be the most relevant since school is the main supporter of the teacher development as long as they create a positive and supportive working environment for different types of teachers. As Wong & Tsui (2007) proposes that schools are expected identify the practical needs of the teachers and support their development for the sake of improving the change in the context. The school may also give reward and recognition to encourage teachers' participation.

Last but not least, the challenge might be often obvious is whenever teachers and trainers might have the opposing goal during the INSET course. It seems that teachers tend to seek for immediate inputs for their teaching issues while trainers often focus on how to develop their own skills, beliefs, and practice. As Lamb (1995:79) precisely puts that “teachers reinterpret the INSET input to fit their own beliefs and their own concerns about what is important to them and their students”. As for INSET in my context where background and experience are varied among teachers, this might also be the case that some of them opposed the trainers. Most importantly, if they find the course run too slow while they face more and more teaching issues in the classroom. Therefore, again, before running an INSET programme, the trainers must consider that the course should be context-specific and participant-centred in a way that the training is there to help teachers reach solve their issues particularly in their classroom practice. Conversely, it is worth considering reminding teachers that long-term effectiveness of change is more valuable than immediate, temporary innovation. As Vu et al. believes that (2015) long-term change requires a change in teachers’ beliefs and behaviour.

### **Concluding remarks**

Teacher development necessitates an ongoing and sustainable process. To achieve its developmental goal, the INSET programme should be contextually relevant with the teachers’ needs, their experiences as well as their prior knowledge. Reflective practice within the training should also be promoted so as to develop their beliefs and attitude towards the educational change and innovation. As for the context of Indonesian primary school teachers, joint efforts among different stakeholder and policy makers need to be realized considering the diverse needs of the teachers (Zein 2011). As he also argues, that teacher education with special treatment should cater all primary school teachers who have different educational background and different level of experience. Thus, it is clearly that various experts and stakeholders are needed to support them.

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