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INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS STUDYING OVERSEAS: FEELINGS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bambang Yudi Cahyono¹

***Abstract:** One of the ways to develop English teachers' professional competence is by sending them to study in a graduate program in English language education. Sending English teachers to pursue their higher level of education is one of the policies taken by the Government of East Java to improve English teachers' professional competence. In response to the Government of East Java's policy, teachers were selected to study in a graduate program with a sandwich study. The sandwich takes the format of "in-house training" held at State University of Malang and overseas study in Angeles University Foundation, Philippine. This article explores the English teachers' feelings, expectations, and perspectives on professional development with regard to the opportunity in studying overseas. The results of the study show that studying overseas contributed to professional development of the English teachers participating in the sandwich study program during their graduate education.*

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Key words: Studying overseas, professional development, graduate education, English teachers

INTRODUCTION

There are several factors that determine the success of English Language Teaching (ELT). These factors include, among others, the curriculum, learning environment, facilities, textbooks, teaching and learning activities, instructional media, and teachers. Among these factors, teachers are considered the most prominent one as other factors cannot play important roles when the teachers do not perform their duties well. For example, it is the teachers who have to “translate” the curriculum into classroom practices. Teachers also determine how a good learning environment can be created; how facilities can be managed well; how textbooks can be used effectively; how teaching and learning activities can be planned and undertaken successfully; and how instructional media can be applied properly.

In Indonesia, the duties of teachers are established in the Act on the National System of Education No 20/2003, especially Chapter XI Article 40. It is stated that one of the responsibilities of teachers or educational workers is “to have professional commitment to improve quality of education” (Undang-undang Sisdiknas 2003). Because of the important role that teachers have, teachers need to be able to develop their competences. According to the Act of Teachers and Lecturers No 14/2005, teachers need to have four kinds of competences: professional competence (knowledge of subject matter), pedagogical competence (skill in teaching methodology), personal competence (good behavior and personalities), and social competence (social interaction and acceptance)

(Sarimaya 2008: 17). Brown (2001: 430) called these respective competences “Good Language-Teaching Characteristics.” The characteristics include technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities. This article focuses on how teachers can develop one of the four types of competence, namely professional competence or technical knowledge.

In my earlier article (Cahyono 2010), I mentioned four options that can be done for teachers’ professional development in ELT. The options include sending teachers to graduate program in ELT, assigning teachers to join in-service teachers’ certification, sending teachers to a professional training program, and building teachers’ awareness of the importance of continuous improvement learning. Based on the responses elicited from the teachers, it was revealed that the options could successfully develop teachers’ knowledge which supports the teaching of English in their classrooms. Moreover, the four options improved not only their knowledge in their disciplinary study but also in curricular aspects such as in making lesson plans and in applying teaching methodologies. More importantly, all the teachers stated that “they have improved themselves compared to they used to be before they undertook the options for professional development” (Cahyono 2010: 14). This study deals with development of English teachers’ professional competence is by sending them to study in a graduate program in ELT.

Sending English teachers to pursue their higher level of education is one of the policies taken by the Government of East Java to improve English teachers’ professional competence. In 2008, the Government of East Java selected 22 English teachers of Pre-Internationally Standardized Schools (*Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional/RSBI*) and sent them

to study at the School of Graduate Studies of State University of Malang. These English teachers started their graduate study at the ELT Program of State University of Malang from January 2009. What is unique to this program is that it is tailored to the opportunity to study overseas for a sandwich study (Cahyono 2008b). Analogous to how a sandwich looks like, a “sandwich study” is an opportunity to study in the “in-house –overseas–in-house” format, where the in-house parts are conducted at State University of Malang, while the overseas part is conducted at Angeles University Foundation (AUF), the Philippines. In the third semester of their study program, the 22 English teachers departed to Angeles City to start their sandwich study for two months (February 6 to April 4, 2010). Two courses were offered in the sandwich study, that is Applied Linguistics and English for Specific Purposes.

The policy of the Government of East Java is taken in response to the demand to develop the quality of education as one of the important issues raised in the education reform. In Indonesia, it is believed that the quality of education can be improved by establishing Internationally Standardized Schools (*Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional/SBI*) which are started by the implementation of Pre-Internationally Standardized Schools (*Sekolah Rintisan Bertaraf Internasional/RSBI*). The SBI schools are different from the regular schools in some ways. In terms of the curriculum, for instance, the regular schools use the nationally standardized curriculum called the *Standard National Pendidikan* (SNP), whereas the RSBI/SBI schools use the “SNP + X” curriculum. The X factors in the RSBI/SBI curriculum require the instruction to be conducted in English, completed with science-related topics, conducted using information and communication technology (ICT), enriched with cross-cultural values, and presented by considering multiple intelligences. In addition to the application of the

curriculum and instructional facilities (ICT-rich environment or multimedia room), there is a growing need to improve the quality of the English teachers at SBI/RSBI schools. Thus, the policy taken by the Government of East Java to select and send English teachers to study in a graduate program in English Language Education is an attempt to improve the quality of the SBI/RSBI teachers' professional competence.

In response to the Government of East Java's policy to select and send English teachers to study in a graduate program with a sandwich study, this research study aims to examine how the English teachers see the opportunities that they have got to study overseas. Three questions raised in this research study are presented as follows:

1. How do the English teachers feel with regard to the opportunity study overseas?
2. What do they expect to learn when they study overseas?
3. How do they see the education overseas in relation to their professional development?

METHOD

This research study describes English teachers' feelings and expectations with regard to their study overseas and their perspectives on professional development. It involved 22 English teachers—10 male and 12 female—from various towns and regencies in the province of East Java. They were secondary school teachers, consisting of 8 junior high, 1 senior high school, and 13 vocational high school teachers. The names of the schools are shown in Table 1.

The teachers are currently studying for their Master degree in ELT Program at State University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia and have undergone their sandwich study at

Angeles University Foundation (AUF), Central Luzon, the Philippines. As mentioned earlier, they took two courses: Applied Linguistics and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The aims and activities undertaken in these two course are documented in the report that the student teachers have written (RSBI English S2 Students, 2010: 5-6). In the Applied Linguistics course, they studied linguistic theories including phonology, morphology, syntax , and the application of linguistics for solving problems related to language. This course aims at helping the students to learn “how to produce the correct sounds, how to form a word, how to make sentences using the appropriate rules and how to apply it in the real context.” In the ESP course, they students studies literature, reading, and writing. The course activities included reading a poem in front of the class, making a summary of five short stories, and presenting papers in the form of seminar on topics such as grammar, listening, writing, reading, and various issues in the teaching of English.

No	School	Town	No	School	Town
1	State Junior High 1 Genteng	Banyuwangi	12	State Vocational Senior High 1 Singosari	Malang
2	State Junior High 1	Bondowoso	13	Vocational Senior High St Albertus	Malang
3	State Junior High 1	Situbondo	14	State Vocational Senior High 1 Kepanjen	Malang
4	State Junior High 1	Lumajang	15	Vocational Senior High	Malang

5	Sukodono State Junior High 5	Probolin ggo	16	PGRI 3 State Vocational Senior High 1	Banyuw angi
6	State Junior High 1 Pandaan	Pasuruan	17	State Vocational Senior High 1	Lumaja ng
7	State Junior High 4	Kediri	18	Vocational Senior High 1 Sukorambi	Jember
8	State Junior High 1 Kesamben	Blitar	19	State Vocational Senior High 1	Jember
9	State Senior High 5	Malang	20	State Vocational Senior High 1 Purwosari	Pasurua n
10	State Vocational Senior High 5	Malang	21	Vocational Senior High 1	Kediri
11	Vocational Senior High Muhammadi yah 1 Kpjn	Malang	22	Vocational Senior High 1 Pogalan	Trengga lek

Table 1:

Names of schools of the teachers participating in the sandwich program

A questionnaire with three open-ended questions were delivered to the teachers before they started their sandwich study at AUF (in February, 2010) and it was collected when they already returned to their home country (in April, 2010). The three open-ended questions which reflect the research questions were as follows:

1. How do you feel with regard to the opportunity to study overseas?
2. What do you expect to learn in the university overseas?
3. How do you see the education overseas in relation to your professional development?

The English teachers' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed to see the variability of the answers of each questionnaire item and trends of the English teachers' feelings and expectations with regard to their study overseas and their perspectives on professional development.

RESULTS

The results of of the study are presented to answer the three research questions. The results deal with the teachers' feelings on the opportunity to study overseas, teachers' expectations of studying overseas, and teachers' perspectives on professional development from studying overseas.

A. Teachers' Feelings on the Opportunity to Study Overseas

Analysis of the responses on the teachers shows that with regard to the opportunity to study overseas, most of the English teachers felt "excited" (18 cases). Other feelings they felt included feelings of being "challenged" (13 cases) and "sad" or "nervous" (3 cases) (see Table 1). This means most of the teachers were emotionally stimulated with the academic chance to study overseas, as it is considered a good opportunity. However, few cases show that being far away from their home country made a teacher unhappy or that the new situation and culture made some teachers nervous.

No	Feelings of studying overseas	No of cases
1.	Excited	18
2.	Challenged	14
3.	Sad or nervous	3

Table 2:
Feelings on the opportunity to study overseas

With regards to the feeling of excitement, the respondents have a number of reasons as expressed in their statements presented in this section. For example, **Yk**, a female teacher stated, “I was really excited be the one of the Indonesian students study overseas or abroad. This is it, the chance to have much experiences in Philippines.” **Fi**, another female teacher said, “It was very nice and excited for me. I had many experiences when I studied and stayed in the Philippines. All the parts of that campus were very kind. I was really happy study here.” In a more elaborate version, **Wu** stated as follows:

Well, I feel so lucky having chance to study overseas. I’m sure that it is a special gift that not all people have. I used to dream of going abroad, and I really couldn’t believe that my dream came true. It’s really my special gift because my friends were celebrating my birthday here in the Philippines.

Happiness or excitement, in fact, was not the only feeling the teachers shared. They were also challenged to take the opportunity well. This is evident in some of the teachers’ responses. For example, **Rr**, a female student stated, “That is the first time I got an opportunity to study overseas. Hope that it will give me to get some new experiences and challenges.” **Ev**, a female teacher, felt that she had to speak English which she had rarely done in the home country situation, except in relation to her teaching job. In her brief words, “This program

forces me to speak daily English for communication.” A male teacher, **Ap**, felt he enjoyed the sense of being more matured in the new environment than in his home country. As he admitted, “I found something different and make more grow up to face life. I also remember the term of longlife education. It is all for my beloved motherland and country.” Nevertheless, some students also felt the sadness of being away from their home country.

Unfavorable feelings are noticeable in some of their responses. For example, **Mv**, a female teacher, stated, “Sometimes I might feel very excited and happy. Other times I may feel less positive emotions like sadness or loneliness. Sometimes I may just find myself feeling a bit down, or “blue.” On the other hand, two male teachers felt that they were quite nervous because of living in a new environment. The following statement, as expressed by **Ra** represents the teachers’ nervous feeling. He stated, “I am also curious and nervous of what I deal with and the feeling of leaving my country a long time.”

To sum up, the opportunity to study overseas has made teachers excited and at the same time challenged to improve themselves. More experiences, new cultural encounters, or academic life on campus were some of the reasons that they expressed with regard to the joyful feelings. More importantly, sadness or nervousness that occasionally came due to longingness to the home-country situation cannot surpass the happy moments that the teachers have experienced during their stay in the Phillipines.

B. Teachers’ Expectations of Studying Overseas

The result of analysis of the teachers’ answers on the question on what they expect when studying overseas shows

that there are a lot of expectations, varying from “getting experiences” (7 cases) to “learning psychology in education” (1 case) (see Table 2). In the three top responses, it is noticeable that the English teachers expected to get more experiences, to understand cross-cultural values, and to search for references.

No.	Expectations of studying overseas	No. of cases
1.	Getting experiences	7
2.	Understanding cross-cultural values	6
3.	Searching for references	6
4.	Learning the teaching process	5
5.	Learning new teaching techniques/strategies	5
6.	Interacting with new society	5
7.	Expanding knowledge	4
8.	Learning more about ESP	4
9.	Facing new challenges	3
10.	Understanding new educational system	3
11.	Learning the language	2
12.	Learning the instructional materials	2
13.	Getting more motivated to learn	2
14.	Learning psychology in education	1

Table 3:
Expectations of studying overseas

The most frequent expectations expressed by the teachers were in the form of their intention to get experiences. The statement expressed by **Tk**, a female teacher, can be an example. She said, “Getting experience to study abroad is a

wonderful thing. And I hope I can apply my experiences in Philippines to improve my teaching techniques to make it better and more beneficial.” Being exposed in a full English interaction is what, **Ra**, a male teacher, expected. He stated. “I hope to have the experience of being taught by overseas lecturers who cannot speak Indonesian at all.” **Fi**, a female teacher, shared her expectation to learn various things from her experiences. She elaborated her expectations as follows:

I expect many things in the university overseas. In Angeles University Foundation (AUF), I've got many things. I got new experiences from the lecturing, observations, fieldtrip, many big malls, etc. It was very nice.

Some teachers stated that they could understand cross-cultural values by studying overseas. This is apparent from the response stated by **Yk**, a female teacher that has been referred to earlier, who said, “I expected to dig many challenges in Philippines which I didn't get in our own country, and take as cross culture for our progress in education.” **Mv**, a female teacher that has been mentioned earlier as well, added what is stated by Yk. **Mv** confirmed, “These study abroad programs will introduce me to various cultures and show the importance of shared living.” **Lw**, a male teacher, expressed his expectations of getting various aspects of cultural exposure abroad. He stated, “I want to study as scheduled by State University of Malang, (namely) Linguistics and ESP. But I also want to learn other things, such as culture, language, education system.”

With regard to more academic orientation, the teachers intended to search for references (6 cases), learn the teaching process (5 cases), and learn new teaching strategies (5 cases). The teachers' concern about searching for references is represented in the statement delivered by **Sc**, a female teacher.

She said, “I hope I can find many references to complete my thesis.” Another attractive side in terms of academic matters deals with the process of teaching in the university. **Ms**, a male teacher stated, “I really expect to have the chance of studying specific English lessons directly from the foreigner experts.” Meanwhile, the focus on strategies in delivering lessons is stated by **En**, a female teacher. She stated, “We expect to learn new methodologies or strategies that we can apply in our classroom later on.”

Other cases show that teachers expect to be able to interact with new society (5 cases), expand their knowledge (4 cases), learn more about English for Specific Purposes (4 cases), face new challenges (3 cases), and understand new educational system (3 cases). Interestingly, only 2 cases show that the teachers had the expectations to learn the language. This may suggest that most of the teachers considered that learning the language (English) can be done while using the language for communication and for other purposes, namely the three top purposes. Two other cases each of which was favored by two participants were learning the learning materials and getting more motivated to learn. The last case, learning psychology in education, was favored by one participant.

Stated briefly, various dimensions of cultural and academic orientation were behind most of the teachers’ expectations of studying in the university abroad. It is important to note that all of the teachers know for sure that they could learn things which are beneficial for their endeavour to finish their study at the graduate level and to promote their responsibilities to be teachers.

C. Teachers' Perspectives on Professional Development from Studying Overseas

The responses to the question probing the English teachers' perspectives on professional development following the completion of their study show that most of the English teachers viewed studying overseas as a means of "increasing professionalism" (12 cases), "advancing education" (8 cases), and "enriching experiences in running classes" (4 cases) (see Table 3). Surprisingly, only one case shows that studying overseas is important to support the success in following the teachers' certification program.

No.	Teachers' perspectives	No. of cases
1.	Increasing professionalism	12
2.	Advancing education	8
3.	Enriching experiences in running classes	4
4.	Supporting the success in following teachers' certification program	1

Table 4:

Perspectives on professional development from studying overseas

More than half of the teachers considered that studying overseas a means to increase their professionalism. In this case, the term *professionalism* refers to the ideas to become professional in the job that one is doing. Indicators of professional competence include, among others, having a good academic qualification, participating in education and training programs, and having relatively long teaching experience (Sabilah, 1998: 45), **Ra**, a male teacher, stated "Getting experience overseas is very important to my profession development." Similarly, **Ms**, another male teacher, said "Education overseas is really important to my professional

development.” In a more elaborated way, **Dk**, a female teacher, explained the benefit of studying overseas for her professional development. She stated:

As an English as a foreign language teacher, the education overseas is very useful. It can improve my professional development. Based on the experience that we got, we can learn and compare our education with the education overseas. So we can apply the good methodology or strategy to improve our professional development.

In addition to seeing studying overseas as a good chance for improving their professionalism, teachers also thought that studying overseas helped them advance their education. This view is apparent in the statement expressed by **Lw**, a male teacher who has been mentioned earlier, who stated “Education overseas will enlarge my knowledge on education. Going back to Indonesia, I have more experiences in running classes and teaching my students.” While some teachers mentioned the importance of studying overseas in improving education in general, some other teachers focused more specifically on the effect of studying overseas on the improvement of their English education. **As**, a male teacher, stated “Studying in English-speaking countries is such a great chance to improve our English since this country gives us great exposure.”

Some teachers also thought that the chance to study overseas could be a means for learning the lecturers’ various ways in presenting materials and in conducting the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. **Ls**, a female teacher stated “The dedication of the teachers (university lecturers) is very high to their schools and they teach their students patiently. As a professional, I should also develop these things to help students face their problem patiently.” Another female

teacher, **En**, stated, “The teachers (university lecturers) are dedicated to the work. They are professional in their field. They not only teach about the lesson, but also the value of life.”

Unlike the benefits of studying overseas that have been mentioned previously, one teacher thought about the benefit in relation to the appreciation or reward that they may gain in the long run. More specifically, it was about the academic credit that can be used in the process of promotion to a higher rank in the teaching career. Accordingly, when a teacher is promoted to a higher rank, he or she will get a higher salary. The teacher will get even more salary if his or her status changes from a regular teacher to a certified teacher. This is evident in the statement said by **Rs**, a female teacher. She stated, “It gives more credits relates to teachers’ points for certification because it (the program) is conducted internationally.”

All in all, the result suggests that the English teachers valued their professional development in terms of their academic competence (improvement in knowledge and education) and professional competence (teaching the lesson and handling classes) over salary increase following the success in securing credits for passing teachers’ certification program.

It is interesting to note that one of the teachers involved in this study provided a longer response with regard to the research questions. This male teacher, **Sy**, wrote his response in a poem-like format with a title “A Frog in a Nutshell”. The “poem” tells about the big responsibilities that teachers have and the necessity to improve their capabilities by studying overseas. The complete version of the “poem” can be seen in the Appendix.

DISCUSSION

This article has explored the teachers' feelings, expectations, and perspectives on professional development pertaining to their education in a university in the Philippines. In general, it is apparent that all of the teachers viewed their experience in studying and living abroad in a favorable way, be it emotionally or academically.

In terms of feelings, the teachers' happiness is likely to bring positive influence on their language learning. In second language acquisition theory, emotional states are included as part of "learner differences" or "personality factors" (Brown 1994: 134-162). Examples of personality factors include motivation, attitude, and anxiety. The role of personality factors can be explained by referring to the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen 1982). According to this hypothesis, if the affective filter is strong, the chance to be less successful in language learning is high. Whereas, if the affective filter is weak, the chance to be more successful in language learning is greater. With the happy feelings that teachers had in participating in the sandwich program to study overseas, their chance to be successful is higher because of the weak affective filter.

In addition to their positive feelings, teachers also expected to achieve what they wanted from studying overseas. In fact, all of the teachers had expected things which are supportive of their academic and professional life. The high expectations are likely to encourage them to gain success, instead of creating pressure to succeed (Walqui 2005). The expectations might also show the teachers' motivation. There are two categories of motivation and each category has two kinds (Brown 2001: 75). The first category is motivation based on the source and this includes intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation. The second category is motivation based on the purpose, that is integrative and instrumental motivation. The teachers' motivation seems to be an intersection between internal and instrumental motivation. By internal motivation it means that the teachers have their intrapersonal intention to be successful; whereas by instrumental motivation it means that they wanted to succeed in studying overseas to support their graduate study and their professional duties as teachers when they have finished their graduate education.

The responses that the teachers also showed that they have a degree of integrative motivation as they would like to get involved in the academic atmosphere of the university and cultural aspects overseas. The influence of motivation on the success of the language learning in educational setting may be explained according to the motivational hypotheses by Gardner (1988 cited in Schmidt et al. 1996: 13), namely "Integrative motivation is positively associated with second language achievement" (the integrative motive hypothesis) and "Cultural beliefs influence the development of the integrative motive and the degree to which integrativeness and achievement are related" (the cultural belief hypothesis). Accordingly, the teachers' expectations contributed to the possibility of success in achieving what they wanted to learn or gain from their participation in studying and living overseas.

With regard of the last research question, it is evident that all of the teachers had optimistic views on their own professional development. They saw their opportunity to study overseas as a means to a better performance on their academic and professional duties, namely being graduate students as well as being teachers in their schools. The way teachers saw themselves is in line with what Harmer (2007: 425) who stresses the importance of attending a kind of professional

training as a means of professional growth. In Harmer's words, "One way of developing as a teacher is to undertake more training." He also adds, "What we choose to study depends entirely on our own interests and what we hope to achieve as a result of the course of study we undertake." In fact, all of the teachers in the present study felt grateful of the chance to study at the Angeles University Foundation, the Philippines, as the meat part of the sandwich graduate program they took at State University of Malang, Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study on the English teachers' feelings and expectations with regard to their study overseas and their perspectives on professional development show that studying overseas contributed to professional development of the English teachers participating in the sandwich study program during their graduate education. The opportunity to study overseas was welcome cheerfully with various expectations favorable for the improvement of the teachers' academic and professional competences. The study also suggests that the academic and cultural benefits of attending the sandwich study program overseas surpasses the reward of getting a piece of certificate for portfolios required in the teachers' certification program. With these findings, showing the success of the policy of Government of East Java in selecting and sending English teachers of RSBI/SBI schools, it is recommended that the policy be maintained in the following years so that more English teachers will be able to improve their academic and professional competences by studying in a graduate level of education tailored with a sandwich study program.

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Appendix:
A Teacher's "Poem" Response

A Frog in a Nutshell

Teachers are the front edge of a spear of nation's education system to pierce into the darkness of illiteracy, the thickness of vanity, the stiffness of injustice, and the thickness of inhumanity.

In the shoulders of teachers, there lies a big invisible burden to eliminate and terminate any disorders happening in the country.

To make a spear move fast and far, it needs great power; and to make it effective and efficient, it needs sharpening.

Support to empower teachers such as sending them to study abroad will hopefully gives them power and, as their experience, knowledge, as well as understanding teaching escalates, they will automatically become effective and efficient teachers.

Education is one of the essential ways out to better and brighter future of our nation.

Sending teachers overseas gives them opportunity to reflect what they have undergone to serve the nation; it enables them to see and understand how education in a certain country is managed.

This kind of policy is truly powerful and demanding as a great change cannot just jut out of a sheer of commonplace policy.

A great change in education service that impacts on considerable development of human resource can be achieved only by extraordinary action.

Ordinary people that do the same activities, same ways of thinking and insufficient knowledge can never create great changes.

As part of the effort to improve the quality of human resource and as one of students who have opportunity to study abroad, I feel very happy because I have the opportunity to directly observe how instruction, education system and school management are done and I can, as well, absorb new things that are possible and worth doing in my home country.

This is my biggest dream, as a teacher, that I have well-developed students with internationally accepted skill, the ability to communicate, read and write; not just a frog in a nutshell.



Celt