

RELIGIOSITY-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE QUALITY EDUCATION: AN INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract—Success in the 21st century requires quality education, and therefore, access to quality education for all is imperative. Establishing quality education requires quality teacher education and continual professional development, which in the contexts of developing countries, this is by no means easy. Teachers tend to resist innovation and be reluctant to take active parts in such programs. A breakthrough is needed, and as far as Indonesia is concerned, religiosity is the best possible answer. This paper is intended to present some parts of a longitudinal research on a professional learning community (PLC) in which religiosity is used as one of the main supports for its sustainability. Employing research and development design, and observation, questionnaires, and interview as data collection instruments, the research found that religiosity serves the function of motivating and sustaining the PLC's efforts to establish and sustain quality education.

Keywords— professional learning community, religiosity, sustainability, and quality education

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century requires quality education for any individual's success in learning, work and life (Suherdi, 2012a; Cf. Trilling and Fadel, 2009; Bellanca and Brandt, 2010, and Ferriter and Garry, 2010). Today, quality education is unquestionably a must. Successful stories in EFA in many countries (UNESCO, 2010, and 2015) are of course a good news. However, it is not any more sufficient. The level of literacy required in this century is not any more at such a simple level as those required in the past (ability to read, write, and simple arithmetic); but rather, that of critical reading, assertive writing, and functional arithmetic (Cf. Suherdi, 2012a, Huang, 2010, and Harris, 2010). Furthermore, in order to get excellent life, an individual need to have a deep understanding of core subjects and 21st

century themes, career and life, innovation and learning, and information, media and technology skills (Partnership for the 21st Century Skills, 2009). For developing countries, this is of course a long way to go. Although some important steps have been well established, many other works are waiting, especially the establishment of quality teacher education and professional development (The World Bank, 2003; EI, 2015).

This is also the case for Indonesia. The country documented a significant rise of primary enrollment (from 13.1 million in 1973/1974 to 28.7 million in 2001) as a result of primary school construction and teacher recruitment and deployment; and junior secondary enrollment (from 1.5 million in 1972/1974 to 9.4 million in 2001) as a result of universal basic education (9 years) by 2010 (The World Bank, 2003). However, when it comes to quality, as highlighted by The World Bank (2003), "The Indonesia school system is characterized by startling contradictions." As it is clear in the notes, in spite of great gains in primary and lower secondary enrollment as a result of strong political will, educational quality remains very low. Even, in spite of its significant success in improving PISA reading results, completion rates of lower secondary education, upgrading teacher workforce, and commitment to devote 20% of its national budget to education (Tobias et al., 2014) in these recent years, teachers' competence and students' learning are still far from being satisfactory.

In conjunction with teachers' competence, many efforts have been initiated and implemented. They, to some extent, have contributed to what Indonesia has achieved today. However, many 'died, are dying, and about to die' as soon as the projects they are attached to come to an end. In other words, sustainability is still a problem. Hence, efforts for sustainability is imperative if quality education is being targeted. An Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Indonesia University of Education, and will then be called the University throughout this paper) research team decided to

take professional learning community (PLC) the focus of its study (Suherdi, 2012c). The decision was urged by the fact that teachers tend to resist, feel forced to accept, and temporarily accept any innovation introduced. This is not meant to say that there is none of teachers enthusiastically accepts the innovations; but rather to highlight that the number is literally small.

Inviting teachers to implement innovations is not easy. No rewards that can attract them to join the work in a 'real sense'. In today's setting, there seems to be no 'reward' that can make most of the teachers stay in the wagon. Hence, 'fundamental' reward needs to be offered, and as far as Indonesia is concerned, religiosity offers that kind of rewards. Along its history, Indonesia's success has always been closely related to its people's religiosity: its independence, resilience, and sustainability (Cf. Pringle, 2010). On the contrary, its 'dimmed brightness' is related to the loosening grip of its people's hold of it. To sum up, religiosity has been playing critical roles in Indonesian history. Hence, it is reasonable to have religiosity as the basis of PLC in this research.

In broader concept, religiosity is very complex comprising many aspects of human life. However, in relation to this research, it is confined to 'the belief that what we do here in the world (temporary life) will be reckoned in the hereafter (eternal life); therefore, any deeds in doing professional work is critical for our life here in the world and in the hereafter'. In the meantime, professional learning community is defined as 'a group of people with various relevant background working together to maximize their service in order to get their responsibility optimally accomplished' (Cf. Stoll et al., 2006; Schmoker, 2006; Bolam et al., 2005). Hence, it should be clear now that this research is aimed at finding out how religiosity-based professional learning community (RBPLC) helps develop and sustain quality education. To be specific, there are three main questions to be answered by this research:

1. How does religiosity-based professional learning community help develop quality education?
2. How does religiosity help sustain professional learning community?
3. How do teachers develop their commitment to the learning community?

II. METHODOLOGY

With the three research questions in mind, the team ran the research employing research and development design (Gall, Borg and Gall, 2003), in which RBPLC was implemented through staged longitudinal steps in the University Lab-schools. To get clearer idea, all the aspects of the methodology will be elaborated here:

Settings

The research was conducted in three Lab-schools, including primary, junior secondary and senior secondary

schools. These schools were run under the support of School Management Board (Called BPS, standing for Badan Pengelola Sekolah), which in turn was under Coordinating Body for Lab-schools and Local Campuses (Called Bakorbang SLKD, standing for Badan Koordinasi Sekolah Laboratorium dan Kampus Daerah) of the University. Hence, to create a solid PLC, serious commitment and involvement need to be sought from the Head of BPS, Bakorbang, and the Rector of the University as well as from the teachers, headmasters, and other relevant parties in the Lab-schools such as class teachers, religion teachers, and school counselors. As laboratories, the schools were expected to host experiments and other innovative endeavors, including the implementation of the PLC. To get more benefits, the program dealt with in the PLC was agreed to be bilingual classes.

Participants

As can be inferred from the setting explanation, this research involve teachers, including such subject matter teachers as mathematics, natural science, English, religion, and class teachers and school counselors and students as the main participants, the University lecturers, headmasters, Head of BPS and his staff, and Head of Bakorbang and his staff, and the University Rector and his staff.

Instruments

The data required for this study were collected through field notes, document analysis, observations, questionnaires, and interview, both oral and written. All the instruments were developed to ensure that all the necessary data were sufficient, valid, and consistent.

The field notes were used to document all important and relevant events and incidents during the implementation, while the document analysis was used to collect relevant teachers' and students' relevant characteristics such as their background, attendance, achievement, and records on attitude, and discipline. In the meantime, observations were used to collect data of teaching practices, teachers' and students' learning activities.

Questionnaires were used to collect teachers' and students' affective factors, including interest, motivation, commitment, engagement and intention for future involvement. Last, but not least, interviews were used to cater data on their feeling and to give additional data to complement those obtained through the questionnaires.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the data analysis, some findings were evident and critical as far as the context of the study is concerned. To get clearer ideas, all the main findings will be discussed in terms of the research aforementioned questions.

Question 1: How does religiosity-based professional learning community help develop quality education?

There was no simple answer to this question. However the pattern is very clear. From the field notes and observation it is clear that in the beginning of the implementation, open lesson was not common in the setting. Discussions on solving classroom problems were avoided. Until one day, in 2009, one of the writer's teacher students came over to have a consultation on how to handle chaotic and resistant class. As a response, the writer came to visit the school and asked for the headmaster's agreement for him to teach the class in the effort of showing the teacher students how to handle the class. The headmaster refused because he and the teachers of the school thought that there was nothing that could be done for the class. To get the agreement, the writer then guaranteed that the class would be enthusiastic and successful in doing their English lessons. Then, a teaching program was set up and the whole steps were observed by all the headmasters, vice headmasters, and English teachers in the school. Ending with a success story, the JSC headmaster welcomed the writer to run experiments on how to run successful English teaching. After some sessions of teaching, at the end of 2009 an English teacher agreed to participate in the experiment. The success story resulted from the collaboration was then conveyed to many people in the stake: the head of BPS, Bakorbang, and the Rector and the Vice Rectors.

In 2010, the writer developed a teaching model called 3W+3S standing for Tiga Tahap Wajib (3 compulsory stages) plus Tiga Tahap Sunnah (3 optional stages) (Suherdi, 2011, 2012b), in which some religious (particularly Islamic) teachings were the basis of the teaching-learning processes. The project was successful in developing and implementing the model in teaching various languages (English, Japan, French, German, Arabic, and Indonesian and Sundanese to speakers of other languages). Yet, only two university lecturers continued the practice, the rest (other 5 lecturers and 7 school teachers) quit.

In 2011, based on the lessons learned from the 3W+3S project, new ideas emerged: the religiosity should be the basis of the community not only the teaching model. The Head of BPS then requested the writer widen the scope and invite more Lab-schools teachers to take active parts in the then-still-a-very-small community. Many of them are reluctant to get involved. It was at this very critical point the writer decided to put religiosity into the stage. Discussion on how teachings were parts of sincere obedience to God was then reiterated during the meetings. Informal meetings were then conducted in the effort of making the conversations more relaxed and collegial. Seeing the good signals from some teachers, the writer then requested the Head of BPS invite English, mathematics, physics, biology, and chemistry teachers from the primary, junior and senior secondary University Lab-schools. Twelve teachers (2 biology, 2 mathematics, 1 chemistry, and 2 physics, and 5 English teachers) agreed to join. Now, we were 18 in the wagon: the writer, English, 2 biology, 2 mathematics, 1

chemistry, and 2 physics, and 5 English teachers and biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, and English lecturers.

The Head of BPS requested that the group discuss the possibility of developing bilingual classes. The meeting recommended that the writer develop the model for the program. To respond the request, MPDELS, standing for Model Program Dwibahasa Empat Lapis Sinergetik (literally meaning Synergetic Four Layered Bilingual Program) was then created and implemented.

The project served to be the real start of the RBPLC (See Suherdi, 2014). Regular meetings were carried out according to the segments (for teachers, they had CESE, standing for Creating English Speaking Environment, and FORDAPA, standing for Forum Diskusi Amanah Profesional, which literally means Discussion Forum of Professional Responsibility; and for students, they had CESC, standing for Creating English Speaking Environment, and PECIMAS, standing for Pelajar Cinta Masjid). In CESE, two agenda were compulsory: learning daily academic English and bilingual peer-teaching, while in FORDAPA, members of the community discussed various topics on improving professional development as a means of improving good deeds for better life in the hereafter. In the meantime, in CESC, the members learned class-life-related conversations, and in PECIMAS, they learned good conduct and obedience in life as forms of good deeds for better life in the hereafter.

The model was then continually improved in the following 2012-2014 and enhanced in 2015. Now, after 5 years of working, the community has been serving its best in improving the teachers' learning, teaching and dialogs, students' learning, school enrolment, lecturers' teaching, research, and publication. In terms of the teachers' learning, and teaching, the team noted their professional development indicators, including their teaching quality, open lesson performance, and their English competence. Their teaching quality were evident in their teaching and peer-teaching as well as their video-taped teaching performance analysis. Their open lesson performance quality had been observable in their frequent open lessons before visitors from various parts in Indonesia. In the meantime, the teachers' dialogs developed around teaching quality and relevant issues, students' achievement and learning problems, lesson planning and instructional media development, and peer-teaching scheduling and administration.

In terms of students' learning, two indicators were clearly accomplished: classroom learning engagement and test scores, and non-academic awards. There have been increasing students' quality learning engagement throughout the implementation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation seemed to be responsible for both the teachers and students' learning enthusiasm and motivation. As evident in the video-taped teaching-learning processes, students were more and more encouraged and eager to take active parts in the processes. The intrinsic motivation may be related to the spirit of doing their best, and the extrinsic may be

encouraged by the demand of looking good in observed or watched open lesson sessions. In the meantime, the increased scores were not surprising. It can be easily predicted that the more enthusiastic and motivated students are, the better scores they may obtain.

As for non-academic awards, there had been salient evidence that almost all awards, medals and token of appreciation for academic achievement in the schools came from the experimental classes. To mention some, the awards included: English debates, speech contest, story-telling, young scientists, language ambassador, etc.

In terms of school enrolment, there have been tremendous increase in the number. Prior to the program, the schools got shortage of enrolment. In addition, the students enrolled were those who failed to get access to their primary choice. Today, the schools enjoy improved quality as well as the number of the intake. Now, the competitiveness index is above 1, while in the past it was somewhat below the number of available seats. Today, the candidates should compete for the seats.

Last, but not least, is lecturer's teaching, research and publication. The lecturer's teaching has been complemented with the lessons and findings of the research. This is evident, especially in the teaching materials and task development. In the meantime, their research projects and publication increased both in number and in the percentage of its 'real' experience illustrations.

To sum up, RBPLC has contributed at least indirectly to the development of quality education through the improved quality of academic atmosphere, teaching practices, and support system which has been made consistent through sustainable efforts of sustaining the religiosity of the PLC members. To give you visual picture of the patterns, all the development steps have been logically interlinked and mapped and may schematically be represented in Figure 1.

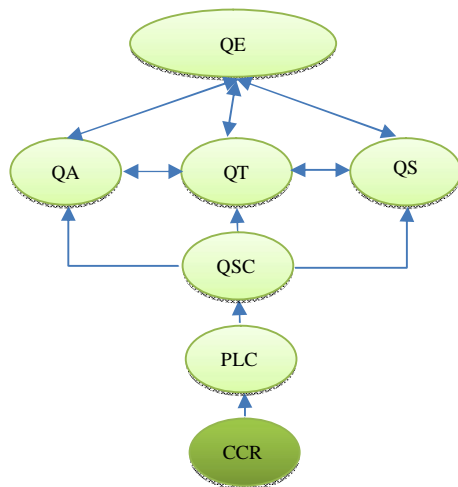


FIGURE 1 SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF RBPLC ROLE IN DEVELOPING QUALITY EDUCATION

Figure 1 describes the significance of CCR (Continuous Consistent Religiosity) through a regular series of efforts and activities (in this context, FORDAPA, PECIMAS, and daily religious examples presented by the teachers, headmasters, and any other responsible adults), and PLC, in which various stakeholders worked together to established quality education. RBPLC developed QA (Quality Atmosphere), QT (Quality Teaching), and QS (Quality Support) through QSC (Quality and Sustainable Commitment) which manifested in the forms of continuous efforts on teaching improvement, open lessons, peer-teaching, English learning, instructional media development, and other relevant efforts.

Question 2: How does religiosity help sustain professional learning community?

This question is seeking to find answers about the way religiosity help sustain PLC. In other words, it concerns the way the belief that our deeds today determine our fate in the eternal world in the hereafter. The way this happens may well be identified through UHBR, standing for Uswah Hasanah Birria'yah (literally meaning Examples from the Person in Charge). UHBR requires all members of the PLC set examples for their subordinates. In the school level, for example, the headmasters were responsible to set their daily life, at least at school, to be good examples for the vice headmasters, teachers, administrative staff, and of course, students. The vice headmasters were responsible for the teachers, administrative staff, and students. The teachers and administrative staff were responsible for the students. The intensity of members' commitment and performance of doing this was regularly measured through likert rating scales and written interview. The data show one of the headmasters admitted that the 'reward' believed to be obtained through their active participants were invaluable and worth serious 'sacrifice'. That's why he made important decisions in supporting and helping develop the PLC, including putting FORDAPA and PECIMAS into the school schedule, allowing special fund for English courses, both for the teachers and students, and other supportive endeavors.

As for the teachers, they admitted that it was 'the reward' that had made them stay. This is not meant to say that there had been no deviation in the data. For some reasons, two of the teachers quit their participation. Of course, religiosity is by no means the only factor responsible for the sustainability; however, compared to many other innovations implemented in the schools, RBPLC is the most sustainable and engaging one. The following excerpts from teachers' answers may help highlight this statement:

T#3: Taking active parts in RBPLC is a manifestation of my religious practice as performing God's commands.

T#4: Participating in PLC serves as forms of continuous self-improvement and lifelong learning which

is part of the main teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

T#9: My involvement is a way of learning and practicing my religious believe. In addition, this can improvement by professionalism which constitute the largest part of my deeds.

Hence, it is clear that in RBPLC, religiosity plays a critical basis for its sustenance and motivating factors.

Question 3: How do teachers develop their commitment to the learning community?

The last question concerns the way teachers develop their commitment to RBPLC. To answer this questions, likert self-rating scale and written interview were distributed to the teachers and they were requested to answer question on their enthusiasm, motivation, sustenance, hope and self-efficacy. The whole picture of their commitment may be represented in Figure 2.

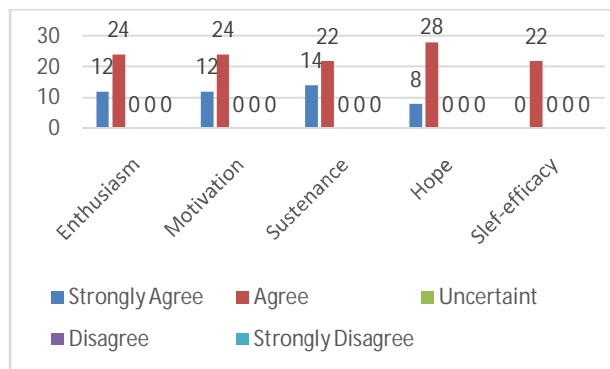


FIGURE 2 TEACHERS' COMMITMENT INDICATORS

As indicated in Figure 2, teachers develop their commitment in a promising trend. In term of enthusiasm, the data show that they were now far from reluctance. More than 65% of them agreed and 33% of them strongly agreed that they were enthusiastic in attending the activities in RBPLC. This was also supported by good attendance in the activities run by the PLC. Similar patterns were shown by the data of their motivation. This was also supported by their serious engagement in all activities run, especially in bilingual teaching-related activities (CESE, CE+, and MSE).

Different patterns emerge in the sustenance, hope, and self-efficacy data. In terms of sustenance, 61% said agreed and 39% strongly agreed to have developed efforts for sustaining their involvement in the PLC; 77% agreed and 23% strongly agreed that they hope that all other management and teachers would be participating in PLC; and 61% agreed that they developed good self-efficacy in teaching and using English, both in conversations and in teaching.

RBPLC in Perspective

The data in the previous sections clearly show that religiosity help motivate teachers to do and sustain their efforts in developing quality education as well as sustaining the PLC. To elaborate, as a PLC, RBPLC has performed all the functions a PLC need to do (See Literacy and Numeracy Secretariate, 2007): (1) religiosity has clearly motivated teachers both to learn and teach better to ensure quality learning for the students; (2) though not quantitatively evident, the focus for results have been parts of their efforts; (3) Good relationship among the members are also evident in the data; (4) Collaborative inquiry has been the most dominant part of this community both among the teachers and among teachers and university lecturers; and (5) Leadership is established and shared according to the developed structure; and (6) Teachers align their strategy to get higher achievement. For the reasons that will be discussed later, this achievement is significant. First, students' learning and achievement now gains more attention in Indonesia education settings. Discussions are now evolving on learner-centered, independent, and creative learning as well as scientific approach or other related models (Pemeriksaan No. 65 Tahun 2013; Kartikawati, Fauziati, and Hikmat, 2015). Second, educators relationship and collaboration has long been institutionalized through MGMP (Subject-matter Teacher Forum), Lesson Study Projects, and School-based Management. However, the result has been that (to echo Holmes Group's proponents' statement) 'teachers' forums are everywhere, but at the same time nowhere' meaning that the number is there, but the quality is nowhere. Of course, this is not meant to say that result is simply nothing, but rather to highlight that it is not worth.

The other two points are by no means less important. Leadership and high standard of achievement began to get its place in Indonesian education in the last decades. Quality management system and certifications have been the focus of discussion in almost all level of educational institutions. In many schools, quality awareness, discussions and quality assurance activities are now one of their daily conversations. RBPLC has synergistically combined all the advantages into a single network of teachers' community.

IV. FINAL REMARKS

This paper has succeeded in answering the three questions it tries to answer. From the data, it is clear that religiosity can play a critical role in motivating and sustaining Indonesian teachers' participation in a community's (RBPLC) endeavors for quality education. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that religiosity be used as the basis for many other community's endeavors in many aspects of national and international development. In addition, it is also reasonable to suggest that wider scope of implementation be carried out to get optimum benefits of this variable.

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