

# WHAT CAN AN ENGLISH TEACHER NETWORK DO? A STORY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN MADRASAH MGMP

Isna Indriati

MTsN 1 Kota Palangka Raya

isna\_iin@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** Teacher's network, a term for MGMP, is a forum where teachers can develop their professionalism together with their colleagues. It empowers teachers to improve themselves to be able to make good preparation for the teaching and learning process. This would lead students to be more active, creative and skillful. The teaching-learning process, then, will not be teacher-centered, but student-centered. Some benefits of being the members of MGMP are to receive support in developing teaching materials, to share and solve problems in teaching, and to improve the skills in researching and writing. However, there are also some shortcomings, both from teachers themselves and from external factors. Among them are low participation and motivation from the members, time or distance problem in attending regular meetings, and less support from the stakeholders. Nevertheless, this forum has self-employed members who autonomously collected fund to cover all the activities. These diverse activities provide meaningful exposures for the members to develop their professionalism as well as organizational management. The sharing of MGMP experience in this article will transmit hopefully positive influence to others.

**Keywords:** MGMP, professional development, English teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers are obliged to update and improve their knowledge and competencies continuously in order to enhance their professionalism. The same goes to English teachers. The need to upgrade knowledge and information is particularly important these days when we consider that today's students mostly come from generation Z; in this case, the old style of teaching might not work anymore. Teachers need to be able to facilitate the learning of the digital native students who are good in adapting to and coping with rapid changes in technology. Technology is not to replace the teachers' role in the teaching and learning process, but it should challenge teachers to make great innovation and improvement in the process. Teachers can respond to these challenges when they are continuously involved in professional development activities.

There are various terms used to refer to professional development. Lifelong education, in-service training, continuing education, and continuous professional development or professional learning can be used interchangeably (Ashadi, 2010; Hayes, 2008). Despite the different names, it has a shared function to improve teachers' competencies in order to do their job professionally. In order for the professional development to happen, a very important thing is teachers' willingness to upgrade their knowledge and skills, especially in implementing latest innovations using social media and technology for learning. Thus, teachers are expected to be the first agent of change in educational setting.

One of the important forums in Indonesia that support teachers in their professional development is the subject teachers' network, familiarly called MGMP (*Musyawahar Guru Mata*

*Pelajaran*). This is a forum that provides a comfortable place **from, by, and for** teachers. The Indonesian Government Regulation No 38 Year 1992, Chapter XIII, Article 61 (1) states that Educational Personnel may establish a professional association to improve and develop their career, capacity, ability, professional authority, and welfare for the optimum achievement of educational goals. MGMP aims to become such association, which is why the forum has important significance for Indonesian teachers.

As a professional association, this forum has a number of focuses to support teachers in achieving their learning goals. They mainly deal with context, process, and content. Due to the limited opportunities to get free course and training held by the government in collaboration with some universities, teacher development process can be carried out by this forum. The book that provides guidelines in developing MGMP sets five criteria of success of the forum. They are: (1) to encourage teachers improve their ability and skill to plan and implement meaningful and joyful learning activities as well as build good characters among teachers and students; (2) to share experiences and give feedback between teachers such as problems faced by teachers to implement their daily responsibilities and to propose solutions in accordance with the characteristics of the subject matter, teachers, school conditions, and communities; (3) to improve teachers' knowledge, skill, and behavior as well as their performances both in and out of school or classroom: implementation of curriculum, character building and the development of science and technology; (4) to provide teachers with opportunities to express their ideas through classroom action research; (5) to develop some cooperation with other institutions and government as well to conduct conducive, effective, and enjoyable teaching and learning process.

This article aims to elaborate how *Madrasah* MGMP of English teachers works in developing English teacher competencies. The description covers various programs which support teachers in completing their tasks and becoming professional teachers.

## METHOD

This qualitative research employed a case study design in order to get in depth information from the subject of the research (Ary, Jacobs, Razevieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The subjects of the research were English teachers who became members of an MGMP forum established by some teachers as the initiators. The MGMP studied was named English Teacher Network of Junior *Madrasah* in Palangka Raya city (*MGMP Bahasa Inggris MTs Kota Palangka Raya*). *MTs* or *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* is Islamic junior high schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The main goal of the MGMP is to open a place to grow teachers' capacity and promote their professional development through various ways.

The data of the study were all the information about the teachers' network activities since the time of establishment, October 2015 up to April 2018. Observation and documentation were the main instruments for gathering the data. The data were then analyzed and interpreted into some parts, namely efforts and results of professional development, support, and constraints towards professional teachers. In depth personal interview was also done to get additional information in order that the data can be presented clearly.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Madrasah English teachers' network is one of the academic forums under the supervision of Ministry of Religious Affairs. It provides wide space for the Madrasah English teachers to meet, share and discuss new information dealing with curriculum, its development, and the imple-

mentation in the classroom. This forum is established since most English teachers in Madrasah have less chance to participate in professional development activities with public school teachers under the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The MGMP studied in this research is for English teachers in all Madrasah Tsanawiyahs in Kota Palangka Raya. It has small scope in terms of members. This MGMP has 23 members from 14 madrasahs in this town. Twenty of the members have bachelor (S1) degree. The rest have obtained their Master Degree. The establishment of this MGMP was initiated by some English teachers from different schools in Palangka Raya. The first aim in establishing this forum is mainly to provide a place for discussing and learning together. Nowadays, it is intended to improve teachers' understanding related to the implementation of 2013 curriculum. The implementation of the new curriculum has caused some problems with teachers, especially in developing lesson plan, the learning method, and assessment. The basic concept is student-centered learning. Related to this concern, teachers should draw a plan which apply optimum learning activities and involve students during the learning period.

The teachers involved in the study, however, indicated that the forum will not run any activities when there is no funding to do so. Meanwhile, workshops, seminars, and other teacher trainings will need some financial support related to the provision of the speakers or trainers. Madrasah MGMP, then, stands to cope with those complex problems of accessing various means of professional development. Such conditions, finally, opens great opportunity for the members to learn organization system and management both in academic and financial areas.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

### ***Competence Improvement***

A foremost step in generating a forum is conducting regular meetings. The Madrasah English MGMP has decided to have their meeting once in a month which is held in the afternoon after school hours. The date has been determined in the schedule. However, it is tentative based on the situation. Since most of the members are full-time teachers, monthly or bimonthly meetings are held in accordance with the need of the teachers. This regular meeting helps teachers to keep contact with others and build a close relationship between members. It becomes a great support for each other, when they can gather and discuss any problems arising in school environment. Sometimes, the teachers do not discuss English learning process. They are free to discuss ways to motivate students, general problems on cleanliness even the class rules, reward, and punishment. A sudden meeting may also be scheduled for important decision making that may happen once or twice in a year.

The second step is the establishment of short-term and long-term programs. Both programs promote the teachers' competence. The short-term program set some educational goals which can be achieved soon in near future. It may take several weeks, months, but not longer than a year. Lesson plan arrangement is the first requirement that invites teachers to set clear activities in rigid time and setting to reach the learning goals. The discussion on the basic competence, indicators and materials leads the teachers to check their capability in comprehending the content as well as the learning techniques. Additionally, there might be many problems arising in English learning in classroom. Teachers, then, may share problems and discuss them together to find better solution.

Long-term program sets the goals that will be fulfilled further in the future. This Madrasah MGMP has a rigid framework which shows the target of program that should be accomplished in a

three-year period. Explicitly, it is stated that there will be an English supplementary book for teachers and students to support learning activities in or out of the classroom. Furthermore, teachers should be able to do small research and present the result in seminars. It is also expected that some articles from the English teachers will be published in journal after some years. A lesson study together with writing articles come highest in the list. This shows that the two goals may be harder to complete. This long-term program can be achieved through a series of analysis and a set of procedures. All are explored from the problems arising when teachers apply certain techniques in English learning.

In fact, the data proved that, firstly, a small number of the teachers have participated in regular meeting. There are 30% to 50% of the members who are active colleagues. The rest said that they could not attend the meeting due to the complex tasks at both school and home. Secondly, in terms of distance and transportation, some could not handle several agendas at the same time. Thirdly, teachers seem reluctant to tell their experience in English classroom. Though sharing is the best way in releasing problem, the way to start remains hard to do, especially when the forum requires English teachers to use English during the discussion.

In line with the above issues, the key concept of being a good teacher is by implementing active learning in the teachers' network. This is like an "umbrella" element that incorporates feedback of models and modeling. Once a teacher performs good models for his/her colleagues, he/she has actually posits her/himself as modeling (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). In their professional development, teachers need to act and treat themselves as learners who should actively go through certain learning processes.

### ***Collaboration Establishment***

In the framework of short-term programs, the Madrasah English MGMP clearly states all the plans for improving teachers' professional and pedagogical competencies by developing a similar lesson plan. In the lesson plan, they plot the basic competence and materials in each grade as well as the indicators and blue print for the test items. The description of teaching strategies and techniques in those teaching plans are integrated with the assessment process which is based on the curriculum development. The similarities of the lesson plans do not oblige the teachers to totally follow the entire steps. Every school has its own characteristics, and so does every classroom. In order to complete this work well, the MGMP collaborates with the curriculum experts from LPMP (teacher training institutions) and those from university. The experts give feedback for the teachers' professional development.

Teacher conferences and workshops have also been conducted in this MGMP. They cover topics related to the implementation of 2013 curriculum, revising lesson plans, trial-error of learning strategies, classroom management, and developing learning materials and media. Further, the workshop facilitates the teachers to conduct small research in their classroom. This classroom-based research can be undertaken through the implementation of learning strategies or media, where teachers are led to bring their knowledge into practice. It provides teachers an opportunity to find problems which can be developed into a research. Further, it offers the teachers an opportunity to join academic seminars held in some universities nearby. Teachers may acquire broader space to refresh their mind whenever they are attending seminars or conferences. This kind of activity may lead them to think carefully about the exchange of ideas and experience between teachers. For this activity, MGMP collaborates with some lecturers in universities nearby. Some teachers from other schools who have capabilities to share experiences

are also involved. Dealing with the government policy, the head of the government institution is invited to give clear and relevant information.

Another collaboration is established when this teachers' network held an agenda of English competition. It comprises five kinds of contests, namely Spelling Bee, Vocabulary, Speech, Storytelling, and Speech. The contest is for students from all kinds of junior high schools in the city. English experts from the local language center (*Balai Bahasa*) as well as senior high school teachers are invited to be the judges. Other programs involve teachers who are competent to share ideas, to validate the learning materials or books, and to help others do self-reflection. One more important thing is entrepreneurship. A lesson learnt from a businessman or businesswoman may give great challenge to teachers not to stop struggling.

The shortcoming of the collaboration implementation is mainly seen from the participating attendants. The payment motivation which supports the teachers to come and participate in the collaboration shows lower sense of responsibility to improve themselves.

Apart from this shortcoming, Mizell (2010) supports that a shared need and topic in a group, just like teachers observing teachers, expert teachers coaching one or more colleagues, or team meeting for lesson plans are kinds of beneficial professional development. In line with this, Kennedy (2005) outlines that collaboration in coaching or mentoring and doing collaborative action research are best practices in professional development. Moreover, these kinds of activities are best carried out in the teachers' network.

### **Career Achievement**

The Madrasah English MGMP provides various activities in driving its members to get involved in professional development. This kind of professional development, then, draws teachers to improve their teaching career. It is found that this MGMP has produced four kinds of books. Firstly, the teachers composed supplementary books in the form of English workbooks for 7 and 8 grades. Secondly, the teachers revised them and developed the workbooks into English book in the following semester. The MGMP applies crosswise validation for the book content. It requires teachers to validate their product with one another. The MGMP also involves lecturer for the expert validation. Further, this teachers' network obliges the teachers to take important notes during the implementation, since these supplementary books are used in all Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Palangka Raya.

At this point, the MGMP has provided a wide opportunity for the teachers to explore and improve their ability in terms of subject knowledge. The teachers can be book writers. In fact, the teachers can also develop their entrepreneurship skills while growing social competence among members as small scale event organizers.

### **REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION**

MGMP as teachers' network provides great opportunities for the member teachers to grow as professionals since they could manage the positive and meaningful activities in that group. Although the teachers must struggle first to build and generate the movements without any support from the government, this shows that a starting point made by the English teachers in this MGMP shows great responsibility to improve knowledge. Hargraves (2007) states that a teacher who becomes the driver of their own learning by analyzing the evidence they need to improve is a self-directed learner. By reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses, a teacher can decide what professional development they need to improve his/her performance.

Finally, it is remarkable that the establishment of any kinds of program in the teachers network helps the members to work together to reach the goals. The goals are not only about improving teaching and subject competences, but also personal and social ones. Moreover, the collaboration and partnership in this network leads to improvement in the teachers' entrepreneurship. MGMP is, then, one of the beneficial places for teachers in sharing and growing together. The English teachers who are not eager to update their new knowledge and adapt their skills through professional development activities, they will be left behind.

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