

## PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS: THE LUMINARIES FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Though it sounds cliché, the role of English teachers in the learning process is unquestionably important. However, not all English teachers are aware of their pivotal role and use that for motivating students to do their utmost to be successful. This paper aims at investigating English teachers' role from students' perspective in shaping their motivation to excel in learning English. An in-depth interview with two outstanding university students was done to obtain their perspective about the teachers' contribution to their success which was indicated by their achievement in international and national English debate competitions. The result revealed that the teachers' role was an indispensable part of their success, especially in digging their potentials to learn English and motivating them to continue their education amid the unsupportive home circumstances they were in. Their teachers acted as a counselor, helper and professional English instructors in which these roles transformed the students into risk-takers and high achievers. Those characters are true reflection of teachers' outstanding professional, pedagogical, personal and social competencies which contribute to students' success. Based on the findings, the researcher concludes that behind successful students, there are empowering teachers.

**Keywords:** *teacher's role, teachers' competencies, instructors, students' success*

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### INTRODUCTION

As the primary source of education within a community, schools definitely play an important role to educate young generations. One of the qualities of education is reflected from the quality of educators. This notion indicates that the quality of the teacher plays salient role in enhancing the quality of the students. The profession of teacher is a sort of big duty because a teacher is responsible to educate students. Not only transferring the knowledge to students but also digging the students' potentials and sparking their interest in learning.

In Indonesia, the role of teacher has been a part of the educational system. Concerning that, government set a regulation law of teacher and lecturer no.14, 2005. It mentioned that teachers must possess four competencies; pedagogical, personal, professional and social. First, pedagogical competence deals with understanding learners, lesson plan, teaching and learning assessment. Second, professional competence is the ability of teacher to have the knowledge about subject matter, the issue in the field of study, and curriculum. Third, personal is about showing firm, mature and use personality as an exemplary figure. Last but not least is social in which it deals with having the ability to communicate and get along with learners and colleagues. Two years after that, Ministry of National Education issued a more specific guideline as stated in the decree no. 16, 2007. It contains two important national standards for teachers. First, teachers are required to obtain S1 or Diploma IV and the second deals with 4 competences; pedagogical, personal, professional and social. Even though this basic knowledge already known by many teachers, not all of them are aware and apply this competence in the classroom practice.

The following year, Soedarmawan (2008) carried out a study entitled "Profile of Good Senior High School English Teacher Based on Students' Point of View in SMA 1 Durenan". The result revealed that students' expected their teacher to have 3 competencies: pedagogical, professional and social competence. However, the students tend to choose pedagogical competence as the most favorable competence among others. After that Anugerahwati (2009) conducted a research to find out the professional teachers in high schools by doing observations and interviews with several high schools teachers. The result showed exemplary English teacher for High Schools in

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Indonesia should be one who, most of all has outstanding personal competences since this competence leads the pedagogical, social and proficient competencies which will go hand in hand and complement each other.

Similar to Anugerahwati's study, in 2015, Husein (2015) conducted research to investigate the Exemplary teachers' competence. However, the subjects of his research were several Elementary Schools teachers. The result revealed that the subjects perform professional competences by possessing 4 competences as EYL exemplary teachers. Professional development along with personal and social competences contributed much to the teachers' pedagogical competences. In addition to that, Agustin (2015) conducted a study entitled "Profile of Successful English Literature Lecturers in the Faculty of Culture Studies: A Case Study at Brawijaya University". The result revealed that English literature lecturers should be one who most of all have enthusiasm in teaching profession since it will lead them to other competencies, i.e. pedagogical, subject matter, and especially personal and social competences. Although these competencies contemplate each other, still the personal and social competencies get the biggest weight to be successful English literature lecturers. In line with Agustin, Hakim (2015) conducted a study to investigate the contribution of teacher competence toward learning performance. The results showed those teachers' pedagogical, personal, professional and social competencies together simultaneously have a significant effect in improving learning performance.

Although some research has been carried out on teachers' competence, there have been few investigations into teachers' role from students' perspective in shaping their motivation to excel in learning English especially speaking. Brown & Lee (2015) stated that some factors affect the goals and the techniques for teaching speaking such as student, teacher, and overall context of the class. Students' participation is considered as one of the salient factors in teaching speaking, and the teacher's role is to stimulate the students to express their idea freely. The previously-mentioned study provides convincing evidence that students' perspective is necessary because students are the one who has real experiences in dealing with the teachers in the learning process. Thus, they are the one who can measure teachers' competencies in teaching. Different from the previous studies, in this research the researcher intends to have an in-depth study to gain comprehensive perspectives concerning the role of teacher in elevating the students' English competence based on students' point of view.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of an in-depth interview. This study fulfilled the characteristics of qualitative research as described by Ary et al. (2010). First, the researcher herself collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. Second, this inquiry dealt with descriptive data in the form of words—the opinions, statements, and or the information concerning the research subject perspective about the teacher's role in motivating their learning of English.

The subjects of the study were two outstanding university students. Those subjects were identified as successful English debaters who had several achievements in national and international levels. The selection of these subjects was done based on 4 criteria: being involved in at least 30 debate competitions, having several achievements in winning competitions both national and international, being delegates of Indonesia in WUDC and being awarded as the best speakers in some competitions, adjudicator and coach. The detailed information of debaters is described as follows:

The first subject, LR, is an English Department student of Universitas Negeri Malang. She is an active English debater since her senior high school up to now. She has been joining many debate competitions from local, national and international scale. In 2015, she was chosen as the best speaker of National English Education Debate competition. As a result of being the first runner up in NUDC, she was one of representatives from Indonesia in WUDC (World University Debating Championship) in 2017. Besides, she also becomes debate coach in some institution such as MAN 2 Malang, Politeknik Kesehatan Malang and adjudicating many debate competitions.

The second subject, FK, is an Electrical Engineering student of Universitas Negeri Malang. Since his last year of senior high school up to the present time, he has been active in debate activities. He also joined and won a lot of English debate competitions and his highest achievement was awarded as EFL 9th best speaker of WUDC Mexico in 2017. Due to his achievement on debate, he was also invited to be adjudication core in several prestigious debate tournaments such as NUDC (National University Debating Championship) 2018, Ganesha Open ITB, EJVED (East Java Varsities English Debate) and so forth. Moreover, he becomes a coach in Universitas Negeri Malang and Universitas Surabaya up to recently. The outstanding achievement in debate, as well as the experiences, was taken as the consideration in choosing them as subjects of this study.

To obtain thorough information about the teacher' role in motivating their learning English, an in-depth interview with two students were conducted. Although in qualitative study the researcher is the key instrument of their research (Cresswell, 2014), she also created an interview guide as the additional instrument to collect the data. The data were analyzed using three stages: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After obtaining the data, the result of interview was transcribed verbatim, the transcriptions were coded, and the codes were analyzed so that conclusions can be drawn. In data display, the researcher transcribed the data descriptively and presented the findings and discussion in the same chapter. Raw data in the form of direct quotation was used to support the analysis under the specific condition such as unusual or unique cases which was described by the research subjects. The findings of this study were explained and interpreted by using the theory of teacher competences. The last stage is the conclusion drawing and verification. Based on the title and the focus of this study, the conclusion drawing was directed to answer the research questions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the findings and discussions of this study based on the data gathered from the interview. It deals with 2 outstanding university students' perspective on teachers' role in contributing to their success in learning English. The findings and discussions of this inquiry are divided into four headings namely pedagogical, personal, professional and social.

### **Paedagogical**

When the researcher asked LR about her English teacher' role as part of the learning process, here is the answer provided by her:

Well, I started learning English since I was in elementary school like everyone did. However I was really suck and my English was really bad even when the first time I joined this debating club in my Senior High School. I still remembered when everyone there was good at English, spoke fluently and knew every advanced word and then I was like the one you know who was really dumb and I did not really actively speaking and every time I wanted to speak I have to like really write down everything in Bahasa and then I translated the Bahasa things into English. But fortunately, I had this, you know super generous, humble and smart SHS teacher. He is really

passionate to tell everyone that debating is really fun and you know like useful for everyone. He was really there guiding me, like you have to write down everything and I will lend you this dictionary like complete dictionary and you have to practice every day, come to me, see me and you know you have to say every words that you have written before. So yeah, thanks to him I made it this far.

Although LR obtained English learning since her elementary school years and got enough score to pass the test, she stated that her ability to speak in English was terrible. In addition to that, LR stated that her encounter with this English teacher as the turning point in her life. She felt grateful since the teacher really guided, encouraged and gave her full support when she had difficulties in learning English. She once wanted to give up on learning debate when her close friend decided to quit. She did not think that she can learn debate because it was too difficult for her. At those hard times, the teacher approached her personally, gave words of encouragement and finally made her survive. Despite knowing her ability in debate, the teacher trusted her and never underestimated her. The teachers were able to see her potentials and dig her interest to learn speaking and debate. As stated by Brown & Lee (2015) stated that some factors affect the goals and the techniques for teaching speaking such as student, teacher, and overall context of the class. Students' participation is considered as one of the salient factors in teaching speaking, and the teacher's role is to stimulate the students to express their idea freely.

The second subject, FK stated that his teacher was the one who introduced him to debate. His teacher was able to see his potentials. He told the researcher as follows:

...previously we do not have the debate coach until then we have this new English teacher and he used to be a trainer for debate and then he established new debating club when I was in the third grade of SHS and that was the last year of my education there and you know I have finished my national examination and had nothing to do. And then this teacher approached me and asked me to join the new established club and offered me to join the competition to fill my report. So yeaah, I think that was a coincidence and accident.

The above-mentioned statement indicates that the teacher analyzed the students' ability and able to see their potentials and characteristics. As stated by FK, his teacher did not force him to join debate instead he approached him personally and knew his needs at that time. Since FK is a competitive and perfectionist individual, his teacher sparked his interest by offering him he could fill his report by having several achievements. The students expected most from their teacher's pedagogical competence since the teachers should understand the students' characteristics, capacity and ability (Soedarmawan, 2008).

### **Personal**

During her high school years, LR was taught by different teachers. The previous teacher was not able to motivate the students, had less communication and interaction with the students. Related to her teacher's personality, LR told the researcher as follows:

...it was like the turning point in my life, and the amazing thing is that he did not only change one life like many of the students' lives. Like this person really...you know, he is passionate about debate, he is passionate about living, he is passionate about education so he is the one who forced us to like you have to go to college like you can make it, you have to try to find scholarship and many things like he is so good.

Before debating, I lived a boring life. I was just high school student without dream and I just wanted to graduate and get job as soon as possible. I do not feel like going to college is a possible thing for me. I was like I need money to survive and my Mom to go back; I also need my brother to continue the school. I do not feel like I have the skill to go to college and everything but then my teacher supported me to go to college.

LR comes from a broken-home family and was raised by a single mother who has been working abroad since she was in elementary school. She did not have a home environment that could support her learning. Fortunately, her teacher can motivate her to never give up on the given circumstances and continue her study. Not only giving words of encouragement but her teacher also helped her to get the scholarship when she was in senior high school to support her study. Moreover, LR stated that her teacher possessed patient and attentive personality. In the process of learning activity, the teachers often checks the students' understanding and spare his time for special students who need further assistance to see him after class. To enhance the students' ability, she also invited the students to ask her if they had problem inside or outside the classroom. He tried to dig the students' potential and analyze their strength and weaknesses.

Similar to LR, although FK did not have a fortunate home environment, to some extent the school environment contributed to his learning process. FK found that his school teacher was really good and supportive. He is able to see the students' potential and motivate them. He further explained:

I think he is supportive and he is very caring to his students and he treated his students like his own child so I think that sort of comfort and that sort of encouragement that make me to join, yeeah...I think his personality-wise is a good teacher to his students because he treated his students as his own child and really comfort yeaah and really understanding and really considerate to his students. Maybe that sort of treatment from the teacher. He is not an outstanding debater, he is not an expert in debate but he can grow the interest of the students to join the activity

Coming from dysfunctional family as the eighth out of twelve children, FK was brought up by parents who were not of high social-economic status society as his father does not have a stable job. His family did not really pursue education and value education as they see it as a waste of money and time. He has lost the attachment and affection from his family since he entered senior high school; therefore, he has been living by himself independently. However, he got such affection and comfort from the teacher since this teacher treated him like his own child. He even got financial support to continue his study in senior high school.

Those personalities of teachers make the 2 subjects trusted their teacher to be their best counselor when they had a learning problem or any problems such as family matter. It indicated that they did not feel afraid of their English teacher since the teacher provided comfort that they did not get from the home. Personal competence is very important for the teachers since they act as the second parent in the school (Soedarmawan, 2008). The natural personality appears in the teachers' ways of behaving both inside and outside the classroom. The positive characteristics make learners feel secure to stay and study with the teachers. Exemplary English teachers for High Schools in Indonesia should be one, most of all, has outstanding personal competences since the competence leads to other competencies and complement each other (Anugerahwati, 2009).

## Professional

As teacher needs to have professional competence, she/he must be knowledgeable about the issue in the field of study and also subject matter. In terms of teacher' professional competence, LR revealed: But fortunately, I had this, you know super generous, humble and smart SHS teacher.

She then told the researcher that this teacher could make the lesson enjoyable, explain clearly, have close relationship with the students, understand their capacity and recognized their ability. The material was explained in the easiest way to the complex one so that she enjoyed the learning and got valuable knowledge. Moreover she could be able to keep up with her friends' pace in learning process. Weda (2016) stated that the most dominant good teachers' characteristics preferred by the secondary school students were gives clear explanation.

FK also stated that he did not have major difficulty in learning debate because of his teacher. He stated: I think no, because I had a good coach back then and he taught me many things about how to make a good, concise and structured speech.

The teacher was creative in giving interesting example to the students and able to make teaching and learning process as student-centered. Concerning the technique used in teaching and learning process, he admitted that his teacher used various techniques such as discussion and explanation and practice. In the teaching process, the main language which was used by the teacher was English. Thus, he got a lot of English exposure to develop his skills from learning. As stated by Husein (2015) teacher's professional competence could be identified based on some criteria such as the subjects are represented in their language use all through the teaching performances. They use English at the level of the students' speed and understanding. They speak English very fluently and effectively. It is in line with Al Mahroqi et al.'s study (2015) that students and teachers generally agree about the importance English language proficiency as characteristic categories of good teacher. Also, teachers' ways of clear speaking at the students' speed and understanding level to the students makes them follow their teachers' instructions and explanation properly. Gentry et al. (2011) stated that teacher enthusiasm, feedback, and content knowledge are keys to student motivation, learning, and engagement.

## Social

Interaction plays a crucial role in human daily life. For teachers, having a good relationship with students, parents and colleagues is important as they are holistic component to make successful learning. Thus, according to the guideline issued by Ministry of National Education in the decree no. 16, 2007, teacher for social competence, teacher must have the ability to communicate and get along with learners, learners' parents and also colleagues. Based on the interview, LR stated: he approached me personally and he really understands how to motivate and treat his students well...It is in line with Dornyei (2001) stated that parents, teachers, the learner's peer group and the school play a significant role in shaping student motivation in general.

Similar to LR, FK also stated: I think this teacher can relate to you in a personal level not only to the horizontal relationship between teacher and students. I think he can tap in the world of yours.

From the previously mentioned statement, we can infer that both subjects agreed the teacher can understand them well. They did not feel pressured and feel free to share their problems so that the teacher can help them. The teacher encouraged them so they did not feel intimidated when they made mistakes. They added that in facing various characters of the students, this teacher used a personal approach to the students. They give special attention to

students who need more assistance. Soedarmawan (2009) stated that being in senior high school teacher required the ability to come into teenagers' world. In teaching, the teachers sometimes related the material with the current events or movies. To make them closer to the students, those teachers placed themselves as the student, so, they could think of what the students wanted. Teachers' pleasant, warm and comfortable interaction and communication with the school community members result in the respect of each other at school during the social relationship. Teachers' efficient response to their students' statements or expressions either inside or outside the classroom brings learners' safe feeling to speak or express their opinions. Gentry et al. (2011) stated that positive and supportive student-teacher relationships are very important in learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

All subjects perceived positively toward their teachers' role in elevating their learning English. The teachers' role was indispensable part of their success, especially in digging their potentials and interests to learn English and in a more general context like continuing their education amid the unsupportive home circumstances they were in. Those teachers acted not only as helpful and knowledgeable instructors but also as 'parents' who can be trusted to share their problems and seek for solution which these roles transformed them into risk-takers and high achievers. Such characters are true reflection of teachers' outstanding pedagogical, personal, professional and social competencies which significantly contribute to students' success. Based on the findings, the researcher comes with a conclusion that behind every successful student is great teacher who always empowers the students so that the students can have better and meaningful learning.

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