Learning to Collaborate through Collaborative Professional Learning: An Exploration of Social Learning Experiences

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Abstract

Collaboration is a supporting component of professional learning. Teachers’ experiences become the determining factors of the attainment a professional learning program. This study is aimed at exploring the professional learning experiences of teachers of two schools with different qualification by answering the following questions: (1) How are the programs of collaborative professional learning enacted to enhance the teachers’ teaching strategy and digital literacy?, (2) How do the teachers’ experiences in their collaborative professional learning impact on their policy of professional learning? This study is a qualitative case study, which involved 8 language teachers –Arabic, English, Indonesian, and Javanese language teachers- from 2 schools. Teachers from a reputable school were paired up with those from an undistinguished school to engage in a collaborative professional learning program focusing on teaching strategy and digital literacy. Data analysis involved content analysis convention of Krippendorff (2013). The program is a need-based program, which is put in different social context and built to make each participant familiar, collaborate to learn, to practice, and to implement. Putting the program into different social context facilitates participants to learn through attention, retention, reproduction, which then influences their policy of professional learning.

Keywords: Collaborative Professional Learning, Social Learning Experiences.

Introduction

People may learn from each other through collaboration. Collaboration becomes a supporting component of professional learning. Collaboration is also a part of global competencies needed to achieve within the fast-changing economies. Collaborative activities empower competitive
performance and facilitate the completion of a business plan, and the appearance of creativity, including creativity of teachers in enhancing the quality of education through developing teaching strategies and digital literacies.

Dealing with professional development, the idea of social collaborative learning is represented in Collaborative Professional Learning, Professional Learning Community, and Communities of Practices.

Bandura’s concept of social learning is in line with the development of Collaborative Professional Learning. There is a space for observation, imitation, and modelling (Duncombe & Armour, 2004). Meijs et al (2016) state the concept of social learning mindedness which covers three aspect, i.e. (1) learning results from social interactions which done face-to-face or technology mediated, learning networks, learning communities, and institutions at learning; (2) learning must transfer something from one learner to another learner or to a group of learners; (3) learning results in change within a learner because of implementing new practices.

Some relevant research has become an essential basis of conducting this research. Perry et al (2022) studied the development of a Quality Assurance Framework for educator professional development, which was stipulated collaboratively by Driver Youth Trust (DYT) and school teachers. DYT is a Non-Govermental Organization which offers online and offline professional development and varied sources. Meanwell et al (2021) developed professionalism in teaching through reflection and collaborative enquiry. They implemented cycles of reflection to illustrate the process of iterative professional learning. they also addressed the importance of collaboration.

A study on the use of an assessment tool of measuring teachers’ experiences after collaborative professional development was carried out by Lindsey (2021). The measuring of the experiences was aimed at identifying the improvement of facilitation. The results of the assessment was expected to be able to support facilitators to inquire into and make decisions about their
facilitation practice, and to assess whether changes in facilitation result in improvement.

Other studies pertaining to collaborative learning were done with technology in education as the focus. Among all of them are using video-supported collaborative learning to facilitate teacher professional development (Ramos et al, 2022), mobile collaborative learning to support continues professional development (Dahri et al, 2021). The result showed that the use of technology enhanced teachers' and experts' engagement and participation in professional development practices.

A study on the impact of collaborative learning on students' learning outcomes was carried out by Luke Jones (2023). He investigated collaborative learning in teacher research group and found that the collaborative learning lead to changes in teaching strategies and improvements in pupils' learning outcomes.

Bissessar (2021) explored social learning, collaborative professional learning, professional learning by focusing on identifying the current professional development practices and the teachers' view on the vital parts in their professional development sessions. The exploration concluded that there was an indication that the participants needed more meaningful and structured teacher professional development. The teacher wanted more social and collaborative professional learning.

The previous studies show that studies focusing the teachers' experiences during engaging in social collaborative learning was rarely highlighted. This study is aimed at exploring the professional learning experiences of teachers of two schools with different qualification. Specifically, this study answers the following questions: (1) How are the programs of social and collaborative professional learning enacted to enhance the teachers' teaching strategy and digital literacy?, (2) How do the teachers’ experiences in their social and collaborative professional learning impact on their policy of professional learning?
Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study. In order to answer its questions, this study involved 8 language teachers—Arabic, English, Indonesian, and Javanese language—from 2 schools. Teachers from a reputable school were paired up with those from an undistinguished school to engage in a collaborative learning program focusing on teaching strategy and digital literacy. The pairing was directed at building mutual symbiosis between the teachers so that both groups could learn from each other. The basic assumption raised behind the pairing is that everyone can be the source of learning in a specified social context (Lyons, 2012). Through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation the process of reciprocal learning takes place. Each teacher may enhance his professional, pedagogical, personality and social competence.

To reach its objectives, a professional program needs to be made more structured and meaningful (Bissessar, 2021). The teachers attended a weekly scheduled-coaching program comprising 6 weeks exposure of teaching strategy and digital literacy, 2 weeks planning the implementation, 2 weeks implementation, and 1 week reflection. To maximize social collaborative learning the activities were carried out in the two schools alternately by pairing the participants from those schools. Data of this study were collected through reflective questionnaire triangulated with interview, which then analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were classified and evaluated objectively and systematically by considering their situational context. In social collaborative learning, individual’s behaviors and actions influence his/her peers’ behaviors and actions or vice versa. It means reciprocal determinism takes place (Makoul, 2010).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Learning through Collaborative Professional Learning

During social collaborative professional learning program, the
participants were exposed with digital technology-based media and varied kinds of teaching strategies. After the exposure the teachers drafted some sets of learning activities implementing the exposed digital media and teaching strategies. Team teachings were, then, conducted in their English, Indonesian, or Javanese language class in the two schools respectively. Below is the detail of the program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Adopting and adapting stirrers in language class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Creation with Power Point and Canva for language class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Adopting and adapting stillers in language class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Tricking our language class with ChatGPT and Wordwall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Methods for building students’ critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>E-portfoio creation through Padlet and e-book creator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Week 7-8</td>
<td>Planning Collaborative Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Week 9-10</td>
<td>Implementing Collaborative Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice of materials in the program was based on the participants’ needs. Before the program starts, a focus group discussion was carried out to filter which points of teaching strategy and digital literacy became the priority. Focus Group Discussion was carried out to identify the teachers’ needs and interests, presentation of theories and skills as the representation of professional dialogue. Plans of teaching were shared with the whole participants in order to get feedback, which represents collaborative activity.
Teaching implementation as the representation of experimentation was done based on the lesson plan. The activity ended up with reflection. The reflective sharing was conducted after all teachers did team teachings. In that meeting every teacher shared their reflection. Other teachers commented and gave feedback. The purpose of conducting the reflective sharing was to learn from others’ teaching experiences.

**Learning from the Participants’ Social Learning Experiences**

In the last meeting of the program, after the participants involved in the activities presenting the materials, planned, and did collaborative teaching at both schools respectively, they made reflection to recall their social learning experiences during engaging in the program through completing a reflective worksheet. The written reflection was, then, shared with all participants in order to be learnt by other participants.

Below are the reflective data showing the representation of the teachers’ experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Learning Experiences</th>
<th>Representation of the Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Building new networks</td>
<td>We were put together and knew each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>... we became friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>... having more friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning the communities and institutions</td>
<td>We got information about the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>... learnt something from the community of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The live of the school gave new insights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adapting new culture of learning</td>
<td>This program forced me to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>... had to be wise in time management ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We implemented the lesson in our own creativity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The spirit in learning was something I need to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Collaborating with different participants</td>
<td>I learnt to work with new people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working with new people was not easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>... that’s why we need to work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The teachers’ reflective answers above represent their learning of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Those domains become essential competences for teachers in order to sustain their profession. In order to be clear, the data above are reclassified into social learning experiences of attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Table 3. The Learning Experiences of Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... we became friends.</td>
<td>We were put together and knew each other</td>
<td>We implemented the lesson in our own creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... having more friends</td>
<td>We got information about the institution.</td>
<td>I learnt to work with new people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This program forced me to learn.</td>
<td>... learnt something from the community of the school.</td>
<td>Working with new people is not easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... had to be wise in time management</td>
<td>The spirit in learning is something I need to learn.</td>
<td>... that’s why we need to work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The live of the school gave new insights</td>
<td>Collaboration with others facilitate the completion of a project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... most of us performed different behaviors ...</td>
<td>The characteristics of the participants were varied.</td>
<td>... they had varied personality and behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... they had varied personality and behaviors.</td>
<td>I had to decide which ones to pick.</td>
<td>We learnt about time management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had to be good at digital technology.</td>
<td>They were rich of methods. We need to catch up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collaboration with others facilitated the completion of a project.
performed different behaviors ... I liked the way ... presented in the lesson plan.

The characteristics of the participants were varied. We had to be good at digital technology
... they had varied personality and behaviors. The were rich of methods. We need to watch up
... some were supporting, some were not.
I had to decide which ones to pick. I tried to learn from them.
We learnt about time management

The summary above shows clearly the classification of social learning experiences in the domain of attitude, knowledge, and skill. They were mainly engaged in collaborative activity in presentation stage –the stage of material exposure–, in practice stage –the stage of designing and implementing teaching learning activities–, and production stage –the stage of respective teaching at the two schools.

Presentation, as the stage of material exposure was done by a facilitator. Collaborative activity in this stage was in the form of problem solving discussion. Participants learnt attitudes –politeness in stating opinions or arguments, respect and appreciation to other opinions, etc.– and skills –presenting ideas, opinions, or arguments, giving suggestions, etc. After presentation was over the participants are involved in collaborative activities, which make them possible to share, model, and learn from each other, mainly pedagogy, attitude and skills.

The teachers from both schools played both as peer learners and peer teachers to some extents. They model each other. Their social learning experiences in every stage of modelling process are classified in the table below.
Motivational learning experiences or motivational behaviors are determined by rewards and punishments, which influence repetition of the behaviors. In this research the behaviors are represented through the teachers’ policy of professional learning after the teachers were engaged in the social collaborative professional learning. The policy is measured based on six components, i.e. (1) the teachers’ view of the importance of professional learning, (2) learning through peer observation, (3) learning through workshops, (4) learning through seminars, self-access learning, and learning through peer discussion.

The score representing the teachers’ policy of professional learning is taken from the percentage of the Yes answer to the questionnaire. The score is then classified into four criteria, i.e. Very good (85-100), Good (70-85), fair (65-70), and bad (65 ≥)

### Table 5. Teachers’ policy of professional learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The components of teachers’ policy of professional learning</th>
<th>The representations of teachers’ policy of professional learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree that professional learning is important to a better teaching</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I schedule to observe the other teachers’ teaching since it may support the improvement of pedagogical and content knowledge</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as well as teaching skills
I schedule to join paid workshops to enhance my teaching knowledge and skills 50
I schedule to join paid seminars to enhance my pedagogical and content knowledge as well as teaching skills 50
I schedule my self-access learning to promote my pedagogical and content knowledge as well as teaching skills 80
I schedule peer discussion to promote my pedagogical and content knowledge as well as teaching skills 80

64.2

Although the mean score of teachers’ policy of professional learning is low or in bad category, the score does not represent balanced percentage of each component. All teachers agree that professional learning is important and most of them plan to schedule their self-access learning and peer discussion to enrich their pedagogical and content knowledge as well as teaching skills. Only half of them plan to join paid workshops and seminars. Payment still becomes a barrier for professional learning. The reason for the decision is they cannot make good earning from only being teachers at a small privately-owned school. Although money-free determines the consideration of joining a professional learning program, most teachers are still reluctant to learn from observing the other teachers’ teaching. They argue that they will not observe other teachers’ teaching unless they are ready to be observed. The teachers are still not convinced with their pedagogical and content knowledge as well as their teaching skills. If it is the fact, it can be a threatening aspect in educational practices, which may not support the success of learning.

Discussion

This social collaborative professional learning equips participants with teaching strategy and digital literacy. In line with industrial revolution, 21st
century learning also considers the contribution of technology to educational field, there is an education platform called Education 4.0. This platform focuses on learning management which helps students improve their skills through implementing a new technology resulting from the society change (Puncreobutr, cited in Anggraeni, 2018, p.15). Consequently, teachers and students must be familiar with new technology. An exploration carried out by Fitriah (2018, pp. 177-193) through interviewing 201 EFL teachers discovered that the teachers were aware of the importance of technology to help them explore their creativity and to encourage learners’ creativity in a way that it helped transfer their creativity. Alberth, Mursalim, Siam, Suardika, & Ino (2018, p. 293) also argued that social media and its facets open up new conduit for sustainable life-long learning.

Teachers in 21st century must achieve superior teaching performance as they are challenged to build their students’ collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. The integration of 21st century skills mainly deals with learning ability and innovation comprising critical thinking, problem solving, innovation, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Wang, 2014, cited in Asowayan, Ashreef, & Aljasser, 2017, p. 105). To integrate the skills, teachers need to be good at designing and implementing student-centered learning by employing teaching strategy and technology to facilitate learning appropriately. Teachers must be prepared for more complex work environment, have good literacy in the use of information and communication technology. Hence, participating actively in learning communities is advisable to tap their competence and teaching performance, “to embrace career-long learning as part of their professional ethics” (Gearhart 2010, cited in Asowayan, Ashreef, & Aljasser, 2017, p. 106)

To reach its efficiency, a social collaborative professional learning must be based on clear objectives. The objectives is reached through exposing the materials representing the participants’ needs. Before the program starts, a focus group discussion was carried out to filter which points of teaching strategies and digital literacies were prioritized. This professional dialogue is,
then, continued with presentation of materials, collaborative activity through planning a lesson, experimentation through teaching implementation, and reflection through reflective sharing. Professional dialogue on the issues of teaching, (2) collaborative plan, development, and evaluation of teaching, (3) experimentation, and (4) reflection are parts of coaching activities (McGrane & Lofthouse, 2010), which were adopted in social collaborative professional learning in this study.

Reflection is an inseparable part of a coaching program. Reflection makes teachers aware of their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. It sensitizes teachers with policies for the coming teaching. “… reflection … will help effective teachers when planning and evaluating their teaching by discussing pedagogical issues in their teaching” (McGrane & Lofthouse, 2010, p. 188). Reflection helps teachers identify the lesson learnt from a professional development program.

The choice of materials in the program is based on the participants’ needs. Before the program starts, a focus group discussion was carried out to filter which points of teaching strategy and digital literacy became the priority. The use of focus-group discussion gave space to researchers to access comprehensive data from varied participants showing their expectation. For critical ethnographer, interviews and group discussions are among several ways to ensure the validity of data (Cohen et al., 2005). Ensuring the data validity, a researcher ensures the truth of findings.

As the materials were packed based on need analysis of the teachers, they joined almost every session enthusiastically. Integrating technology and teaching strategy is the key point facilitate learning. Teachers must be prepared for more complex work environment, have good literacy in the use of technology and teaching strategy. Hence, participating actively in learning communities is advisable to tap their competence, “to embrace career-long learning as part of their professional ethics” (Gearhart 2010, cited in Asowayan, Ashreef, & Aljasser, 2017, p. 106).
After engaging in the social collaborative professional learning, teachers learn the aspects of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Those domains become essential competences for teachers in order to sustain their profession. Attitudes comprise interpersonal and social competence, Skill competence of teachers refers to pedagogical competence, the competence to conduct and manage teaching learning process comprising planning, process, and assessment and evaluation of learning (Akhyak, 2013). Knowledge covers pedagogical and content knowledge, which are parts of professional competence. The indicators of interpersonal, professional, pedagogical, and social competence in Indonesia are clearly formulated in the Decree of Ministry of Education (Permendiknas) No. 16/2007 on Standard of Academic Qualification and Teacher Competences and Permendikbud No. 22/2016 on Process Standard.

Within the professional learning program, collaboration is built to make each participant familiar, collaborate to learn, to practice, and to implement. Intensive collaboration between participants and cooperation with students enhances teachers’ awareness of what, why, and how they learn through collaborative professional learning. “Collaborative professional relationships need better tools and deeper trust, clearer structures and stronger cultures, expertise and enthusiasm, knowing what to do and how to be with each other” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018).

The program is initiated to sustain life long learning. Teachers implement what they have learnt, develop it gradually to support their educational services. Collaborative professional learning gives teacher chance to peer teach (Binkhorst et al, 2018), promotes and sustains teacher noticing of student thinking (González, 2018).

There are four quadrants of collaboration in collaborative professional learning, i.e. (1) No Collaboration, (2) Contrived Collegiality, (3) Collaborative Professional, and (4) informal collaboration (Mackay, T. et all, 2018).
From no collaboration, contrived collegiality must be attempted. All participants must be ready to work together through peer learning and peer teaching, to be aware of the process of professional development they must engage to be professional. Collaborative professionalism takes place in formal of collaboration. It is the collaboration of participants of this collaborative professional learning. When the participants continue the collaboration to sustain and enhance their professionalism after a professional development program ends, they are in the quadrant of informal collaboration. Informal collaboration depends much on self initiation as an automatic response to the awareness of teachers to be professional. It is expected that collaborative professional learning carried out for this research reaches this quadrant.

Similar to Mackay, T. et all (2018), Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) state that collaborative culture is divided into four, i.e. balkanisation, contrived collegiality, professional learning communities, and network and federation. A collaboration is characterized by tim work, tim support, mutual understanding, and openness to problems and solution.

Contrived collegiality is put as the second level of collaboration and that the level of collaboration teachers are commonly engaged. Teachers can “be benefited” from that collaboration due to its formal system, which force its members to be consistent. Contrived collegiality is administratively controlled, compulsory, performance-oriented, predetermined time and space, and predictable outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 192-196).
The key point in collaborative professional learning is learning to collaborate and learning through collaboration. After the collaboration is built, the participants will learn from each other. Pairing two schools with different qualification results in learning attitude, knowledge, and skill, completing each other’s gaps in mutual symbiosis. In intensive collaboration the learnt through modelling process – (1) attention, (2) retention, (3) reproduction, and (4) motivation (Nabavi, 2012). The teachers from both schools are both peer learners and peer teachers to some extents.

Lesson study can become an alternative social and collaborative professional learning, build familiarity between teachers through peer observation and discussion. This professional development has been widely carried out to develop teachers’ pedagogical competence (Wahyuni, 2013), to enhance the teachers’ life-long learning to teach (Suryani, Rukmini, Bharati, & Hartono, 2018), and to improve the practice of teaching through crafting and using the available local materials (Lalu Suherman, 2018). Lesson study makes teachers (1) more prepared; (2) more confidence and professional; (3) improved through feedbacks from observers; (4) more active and serious (Areni & Syafri, 2018). Lesson study may also be used to explore teachers’ beliefs about student needs and teacher role and responsibilities (Hanne Kristin Aas, 2022). Lesson study addresses teaching practices and problems, prioritizes students’ learning, encourages collaboration and reflection, sustainability and teaching process (Borko et al., 2010).

Collaborative Professional Learning has three components: (1) reciprocal group experiences and sharing experiences; (2) innovation talk and consultation; (3) creating tools of intellectual capacity which are potentially accessed by all people within a period of time (Julius, 2017:40). All the components are found in lesson study. Lesson study is a social and collaborative professional learning model that creates innovative teachers for innovative teaching.

Conclusion and Suggestion
Pairing teachers from two schools with different qualification may become an alternative way of building mutual symbiosis that support teachers’ professional development. Intensive collaboration in the form of contrived collegiality provides an easy access of modelling process through the stages of attention, (2) retention, (3) reproduction, and (4) motivation.

Social and collaborative professional learning familiarizes each other participants and creates supporting environment to peer learn, to correct, and to discuss when they practice, and implement teaching strategy and digital technology. Intensive collaboration between participants and cooperation with students enhances teachers’ awareness of what, why, and how they learn.

Attitude, knowledge, and skill can be built and enhanced through the collaboration manifested in different social context, which in turn facilitate the teachers’ life-long learning to teach and influence their policy of professional learning. This research shows how learning experiences are put in the frame of stages of modelling process in social learning. Detailed aspects determining the teachers’ policy of professional learning besides the teachers’ learning experiences in their social and collaborative professional learning still becomes the subject that needs deeper exploration.

References


