



Collaborative In-Service Training: An Effort to Help EYL Teachers Improve Their Teaching Skills

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Abstract

The Decree of The Ministry of Education and Culture No 060/U/1993 allows the introduction of English in the primary school as a local content subject. Educators have debated for years about the teaching of English to young learners in Indonesia. It is recommended that students start learning English at fourth grade although in fact, many schools start earlier, even as early as in the kindergarten. Talking about the implementation of the EYL programmes, it is inevitable to recognize that many factors have affected the implementation. Several studies have been conducted by the instructors and teacher trainers. It was discovered that most teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of English, made common linguistic mistakes, did not know how to teach young learners and some other weaknesses. The writer made use of the research findings to conduct in-service trainings, especially for EYL teachers without any English education background. Based on the teacher questionnaires, this collaborative in-service training pinpoints specific areas: practical teaching techniques focusing on story-telling, playing games, using action songs, and making inexpensive media for classroom techniques. Why collaborative in service training? Conducting in-service trainings for EYL teachers takes time, energy, and money. In this case Suyanto and her teams have applied a strategy involving the teacher trainers or instructors, the EYL teachers, the local Ministry of Education, and the important community members (hotel manager, the wealthy and local sponsors). Proposals with clearly stated objectives (helping local teachers improve their skills and increase the quality of primary school education) have been accepted and positively supported by the local government, local ministry of education and local society.

Keywords: Collaborative In-Service Training; EYL Teacher; Teaching Skill.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the decree No. 060/U/1993 of the Ministry of Education and Culture, English can be taught to primary-school children. English programs are growing and more and more children are studying English. Although the Ministry of Education has recommended beginning English instruction in the fourth grade, in reality many schools start English in the first grade, with some even in kindergarten and playgroup.

Many factors affected the implementation of EYL policy. Some of the results have been positive, while others have been negative. One of the most serious problems under the present conditions is the lack of qualified teachers. Many teachers who teach English in the primary schools do not have any English education background. To improve the conditions of the teaching of English to young learners, the authorities have done some training. One of the efforts to help teachers is by providing them with good models, trainings, and English resource books. One popular and an effective training is the collaborative in-service training. It equips the teachers with proper English teaching skills. The purpose of this paper is to share experiences in developing and conducting collaborative in-service trainings which were conducted between the years 2004 and 2010.



METHODS

We cannot do our job by ourselves; we do need others to help us complete many things. Teachers like anyone else, need chances to discuss what they are doing and what happens to them in class (Harmer, 2007). Based on our experiences, most of us find discussing the classroom and learning activities with others helps us to solve the problems. This kind of relationship can happen between teachers, trainers, researchers, and policy makers in the local or provincial departments of education.

The in-service training developers or teacher trainers might benefit relevant research findings to design, then conduct in-service training after knowing the needs of the teachers (Suyanto & Rachmajanti, 2008). Designing a training programme takes time, energy, patience, and money as well. In this case, the role of teachers, instructors, teacher trainers, policymakers, and other members of the community is important. Other members of community that become involved in this programme can be the rich, such as businessman, hotel owner, banker, and other sponsors. This community participation can contribute to the programme, so that the in-service trainings are possibly conducted to help teachers improve on increase their teaching skills.

Benefits of and barriers to collaborative in-service training If the training programmes are neatly designed, they can make the teachers improve their teaching skills and knowledge. Collaborative trainings can help teachers 1) to keep abreast of teaching and learning development of English instruction; 2) to develop understanding of different teaching and learning; 3) to become more positive about learning. Then they become more imaginative and creative; 4) exchange experiences among teachers. It was identified that the collaborative in-service trainings may 1) disturb school timetables; 2) lack of funds to develop facilities for workshops and other teaching and learning activities; 3) lack of appropriate resources for teachers of young learners. Collaborative in-service trainings can be conducted without waiting for the routine budget from the local or provincial department of education. They can be conducted through community services and good collaboration among the trainers, teachers, local government, and other community members.

Perhaps the best way to design and conduct a collaborative in-service training is to reconcile different components which will collaborate to help teachers improve their skills. Personal and social communication skill has an important role in designing and conducting this kind of training. To convince the authority and other community members, an applied proposal with clearly stated objectives needs to be well developed based on the needs of the teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here are examples of collaborative in-service training which I have done for seven years.

Medan

A proposal was developed after a long discussion with a lecturer who had collected some funding related to the need for primary school teachers to teach English. Teachers stated that they would like to have some training on practical EYL teaching techniques, such as playing games, telling stories, and singing action songs. The lecturer was good at convincing the government authority and other community members. Amazing result of a hard-working team. I was given a round-trip airline ticket; two hotel managers provided a meeting hall for a hundred teachers and a room for the trainer to stay. The city mayor provided one hundred lunch boxes and the publisher gave several books for teachers as the door prize. Due to the limited time, the trainer conducted the training through the "Learning by Doing" approach. Giving a model, demonstration and listen & repeat technique were applied. By the end of the activity, the teacher participants were able to sing several action songs, to tell story using simple English, and to play some games.



Gorontalo

More than two hundred teachers of primary and secondary schools participated in a collaborative training managed by a team of instructors from the English Education Department. The financial support was from the teachers, the education institution, and other sponsors. The local radio station participated in this two-day training.

East Java (Surabaya, Kediri, Blitar, Jombang, Malang)

Under the sponsorship of a newspaper company, more than two hundred primary teachers were trained to make inexpensive media and how to benefit their media for storytelling and vocabulary teaching. This programme was also supported by the local department of education and teachers' contribution.

East Kalimantan

The training was sponsored by a foreign oil company, provincial department of education, a publisher, and teachers. Most participants suggested that this practical training be done periodically so that they could enrich their knowledge and increase the teaching skills for their EYL class. Compared with official teacher trainings, in-service training is usually intended for a specific purpose. Most primary school teachers teaching English want to improve their skills especially in teaching songs, telling story, playing games, and developing local or classroom materials.

Usually by the end of the training, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire containing their opinion, feeling and suggestion to improve the activity. Having conducted twenty-three training in different places, I realize that independent collaborative in-service trainings can be conducted by any teacher trainer, lecturer, and master teacher as far as they are willing to work together and communicate the needs of the EYL teachers especially those who teach in isolated, rural area.

CONCLUSION

I would like to emphasize how important a collaborative in-service training is to help teachers cope with their problems. An in-service training programme, which is one of the many ways to improve and to increase the teacher's quality, can be conducted through a positive relation and good collaboration between the practitioner and other community members. The better an EYL teacher is trained, the better he/she can introduce English to young learners.

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