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# **“I couldn't play in it, but I loved it.”: Teachers' Views on Participating in English Drama Performances**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is an attempt to explore the teachers' views on their participation in the English Drama Performance (EDP). Employing a qualitative approach, this study was conducted by selecting three English teachers from three different types of education, who have been taking part in the EDP for a minimum of two performances. Data were collected through a one-on-one interview with three participants. The finding revealed that the teachers, at first were doubtful in participating in the EDP; however, after many rehearsals, they found enjoyment. In addition to their feelings, the teachers expressed their likes and dislikes in participating in the EDP. They also mentioned about the effect of their participation in the EDP towards their English skills. The study found that by participating in the EDP, the teachers could express several English language functions, enhance their pronunciation skill, practice communication skill, ease reading, and improve vocabulary. In addition to the effect on their English skills, their participation in the EDP contributes to the way they teach English to their students.

*Keywords:* drama in education, English drama performance, teachers' view

## **INTRODUCTION**

Learning English has always been identical with the duty of students in the context of teaching and learning in Indonesian schools. Students have become the objects for teachers to maintain their career in teaching without considering whether or not they enjoy the teachers' teaching style or are happy with the teachers' English

skills. In addition, students are the ones who are always asked to improve their English skills while actually English teachers also need to advance their skills. In this case, developing the standard of teaching and learning can be through improving the quality of teachers (Raihani & Sumintono, 2010).

Ironically, English teachers in Indonesia have recently been burdened with more administrative work on top of their hectic teaching schedules. With this, it can be difficult for English teachers to have time to improve their own English proficiency skills because of their own work obligations. In fact, in the 2013 Curriculum document, English teachers are obliged to prepare syllabi, lesson plans, semester programs, annual programs, daily assessments of both soft skills and hard skills, design test items and their analysis. This phenomenon has forced English teachers to stay longer at school. According to an informal interview conducted by the researcher with some English teachers in Yogyakarta, they admitted that they had to do extra work to fulfill the need of teaching in the new curriculum.

On the other hand, there are several English teachers who are still willing to improve their English skills by participating in some professional development forums regardless of their heavy work schedule. In one of the English teachers organizations, one program that has been done to help develop teachers' competence is the production and performance of English Drama. This English Drama Performance (EDP) was initially played by all English teachers who belong to that particular organization. These English teachers were taken from all five districts in the Yogyakarta Province and the performance has always been done in English, in a playback styled performance. The stories in these dramas have always reflected Indonesian folktale stories.

In participating in the English Drama Performance, not all teachers were willing to get involved. Most of them said that they were not confident and could not act in the drama performance. It is in line with

Dodson (2000), who argued that, "teachers who were not trained to teach communicatively may shy away from drama" (p. 133). Moreover, they had to sacrifice their time to do the script reading, rehearsal, and recording before the performance. In addition, previous studies about English drama have always focused on researching students', pre-service teachers' perspectives or the benefits of drama for students. Ozdemir & Cakmak (2008) conducted a research on the effect of drama education on prospective teachers' creativity. Another study was done by Lee (2007), who selected secondary school students as his respondents to reveal their perception of learning English through drama. However, few studies have discussed from the teachers' point of view. That is why this research is conducted to explore the teachers' views in participating in English drama performances in terms of their feelings and the effects of their participation toward their English skill improvement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this research, the focus is on the teachers' participation in EDP and it is based on the theory of Teachers Professional Development

### **Teachers Professional Development**

From the background of this research, it was mentioned that there are some teachers who are enthusiastic in joining professional development organizations in addition to their tight teaching schedules at school. Why does this matter? Did the teachers not already learn English in college? These two questions may irritate some teachers, however some admitted that they had already taken part in professional development activities such as

joining seminars, conferences, and workshops. However, there are times when professional development does not always happen in a formal way, sometimes occurring in situations like discussions with other teachers from different schools, doing a research, and independent reading (Mizell, 2010). In addition, Kennedy (1999) mentioned that teachers joining the professional development have been accustomed to have many tasks in one go and they could find balance among those many challenges.

Teachers need to do professional development since it can benefit them “by learning in the setting where they can apply what they learn” (Mizell, 2010, p. 8). However, many experts have mentioned many kinds of professional development activities such as Sher and O’Reilly (2009) as cited in Kennedy (2016) compared “programs that focused on subject matter with those that focused on pedagogy” (p. 946). While Blank and de las Alas (2009) in Kennedy (2016) found more effective programs like in follow-up steps in teachers’ schools, active learning methods, collective participation, and substantive attention to how students learn specific content. The program mentioned earlier can later be related to what the teachers in this research participated such as in the English Drama Performance. Teachers who became the cast in this performance did activities which were not a part of their daily responsibility. They spare their time to develop their skills related to role-play. Therefore, this activity can be considered as a part of their professional development.

### **Drama In Education**

A number of studies have shown the benefits of drama in education, especially in English classes. Thomson and Evan (as

cited in Yin, 2015), argued that drama is a great medium to enhance language skills, initiating social interaction, and group participation. While Balais (2002) stated that drama is a process of learning, which involves thinking and feeling. In addition, Baldwin and Fleming (2003) said that drama activities can create genuine contexts for language and reasons to communicate. Sam (1990) concluded that drama “helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communicative games” (p. 86). From those studies that have been conducted previously, it was clear that drama provides many benefits for the players in terms of developing their communicative language skills, providing a space to learn English through its context, and interacting with colleagues.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is a follow up study from a recent study conducted at one of the English Education Departments in Yogyakarta where the researcher was part of the authors. Although the drama performance was conducted annually, teachers’ participation and interest have been constantly shown in this program. Three English teachers were involved in this study and all their names are in pseudonyms. The first one was Mrs. Sinta, a Junior High School English teacher, who has taken part twice in the EDP. The second participant was Mrs. Delima, a Vocational High School English teacher, who has participated three times in the EDP, and the last one was Mrs. Putri, a Senior High School English teacher, who has played a role three times in the EDP. The data obtained was mainly based on a one-on-one interview using Indonesian language to ease the participants to express their views.

Each interview session lasted for twenty five to thirty minutes. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed.

In addition, to help supplement the data, an observation during the rehearsal times' interaction with the participants was also taken into consideration. The rehearsal was done more than ten times for each of the performances. In every rehearsal, the researcher was there to act as the director of the performance. Thus, he knew each of the roles in the EDP well.

### **THE ENGLISH DRAMA PERFORMANCE**

The English Drama Performance was firstly performed in 2012. Since then, it had performed every year at the national or international conference under the supervision of the teachers' organization. In each of the productions, Indonesian folktales were brought up as the theme of the performance. The procedure in implementing the EDP was started by writing the script, doing the casting, reading the script, recording, rehearsing, and performing.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to reveal the teachers' feelings about their participation in EDP and discovering how their participation affects their English skills based on their view point. The detailed explanation on the findings is presented below.

#### **Teachers' Feeling About Their Participation In EDP**

This section discusses the general feelings experienced by the teachers during their participation in the EDP. In addition, it explores their likes and dislikes towards their participation in the EDP. All of the findings were written based on the result of

the interview with three participants.

The result of the interview and observation during the interaction with the participants in the EDP revealed that teachers' feelings about their participation in the EDP were various. At first, teachers were in doubt since they did not have any background in drama. They also felt worried and they thought they could not do it. "When I first played in it, I was not sure about what I was doing since I did not really understand, I didn't feel I could do it", Mrs. Putri explained. A similar thought was also shared by Mrs. Sinta. She felt that when doing the script reading, she was also surprised as well as frightened. "In the script reading session, which happened to be the first meeting of the rehearsal, to me it was surprising and frightening." It turned out, it was her first time playing the role and when she received the script, she had no idea how to act it out or sing it.

However, after all the rehearsals were completed, a contrasting feeling was admitted by Mrs. Putri. There was one situation where she felt she was eager to perform. "When I wear the costume, I feel energized", Mrs. Putri said. Moreover, the teachers' feelings were getting more excited after receiving all the applauses from the audience. This feeling was expressed by all participants. "I am not going to say anything but that I was contented. I guess, that word has represented all my feelings in this EDP participation", Mrs. Shinta uttered. Last but not least, Mrs. Putri and Mr. Delima portrayed their participation in the EDP as a travelling experience. "Indeed, I experienced a beautiful life journey since my first participation in 2012", Mrs. Putri said. While Mrs. Delima

mentioned, "What I feel about my participation in this EDP was like a soul recreation".

This finding is in line with Lee's (2007) statement about degree of comforting in participating the EDP. According to what he found, "more students seemed to feel uncomfortable at the beginning, but they got used to performing after a few times" (p. 37). This is what the teachers actually experienced. When they admitted that they could not act in the play, it was just a matter of time. It was obvious that all of them at first possessed uncomfortable feeling, yet, when they had done practices, they were in tune with their roles and finally they could enjoy it.

*What teachers like about their participation in EDP.* From the interview transcription, it was shown that the teachers found their participation in the EDP as gaining new experiences since it was completely different from their daily routines, which is teaching. It was said by Mrs. Putri, "What I like from this is because I gain new experiences which I don't get it as a teacher." While the other teacher stated that she liked the way she had to create chemistry with the other role. "When we talk about acting, I enjoy my part when I have to get to know other people to build chemistry so that there is a connection among us", Mrs. Shinta uttered. In the same vein, Mrs. Delima supported her statement by saying that she loved the togetherness in participating in the EDP.

This finding supports Sandi's (2017) recent research, who mentioned that participation in English drama could build togetherness. In addition, she also revealed in her research that participating in the EDP means gaining new experiences. It was also shown during the interaction with

the participants that they were enthusiastic in attending the rehearsals. Even though one of the participants' house was located far from the city and it took nearly one hour to get to the rehearsal's venue, every time she arrived, she looked excited meeting the other members of the cast. Another research conducted by Lee (2007) also revealed that the different setting in the drama has created a relaxing environment. This can be described from a teacher's daily routines at school. They are planning, teaching, and evaluating. In addition, all of these activities demand the teachers to be the so-called director in the classroom. However, when they participated in the EDP, they rehearsed, danced, and performed on a stage, which give them a real different setting.

*What teachers dislike about their participation in EDP.* Not only did teachers enjoy the participation in the EDP, they also experienced negative feelings especially about the other members being undisciplined. This was strongly mentioned by all of the participants that they did not like it when the other actors or actresses did not turn up in the rehearsal. "I am sorry to say that I don't feel comfortable if the others are not disciplined", said Mrs. Shinta. In line with her, Mrs. Delima also stated that, "when they actually had confirmed to attend the rehearsal, but it turned out they cancelled last minute, it really bothered me". Meanwhile, Mrs. Putri expressed her dislike by stating that, "it indeed needs a sacrifice especially in time management".

Discipline problem was also revealed by Lee (2007) in his research, however, the problem was not related to time management, but it was on the students being undisciplined during the preparation time.



These students were playing and relying their work on the capable students. In the EDP, there were actors and actresses who became the main ones, while the others were supporting ones. Sometimes, the supporting actors or actresses relied themselves on the main ones. They were not really serious in playing the roles since they would not become the focus of the performance.

### **Teachers' Views About The Effect Of Their Participation In EDP Towards English Skills**

In participating the EDP, the English teachers have admitted that it has affected their English skills. From the interview, it was shown that their participation has helped them practice several language functions, enhance their pronunciation skills, practice communication skills, ease reading, improve their vocabulary, and convey meaning through songs.

*Participating in the EDP helped me express several language functions.* Language functions in speaking are important to learn because in speaking, people use the language functions to communicate, such as in the context of agreeing and disagreeing, expressing sympathy, and expressing likes and dislikes to name a few. Not only for students, teachers also need to master the language functions in order to be able to transfer them to their students. From the interview analysis, it revealed that the teachers' participation in EDP helped them express the language functions. It was mentioned by Mrs. Putri, "this time is about speaking from the heart, I try to express what the script is, so that the language functions work." She added, "The same words but different expression, for example, the phrase 'I told you'. Does it attempt to show anger or advice?" When the speaker emphasized the stress on the word 'told',

supported by his mad facial expression, it shows that he is angry. On the other hand, when it used the falling intonation, it can mean an advice.

This finding also supported Mahoney (1997), who claimed that drama performance provides participants an adequate space for self-actualization. Maslow (1943) mentioned that self-actualization "refers to the person's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially" (p. 382). In the EDP, the teachers can express their potential that they are hesitant to actualize it in the classroom. One example is when teachers teach the language functions for disagreement. In the EDP, the teachers can act while saying the disagreement freely. This is also in line with Mahoney (1997), who argued that fluency of expression in drama creates opportunities for conversational use of language, which promotes fluency of expression. For instance, while teachers are practicing a play, they are encouraged to repeat words, phrases and sentences several times. By so doing, they become fluent in using such expressions. This was also shown in the process of the recording. Each of the cast did many repetitions on certain phrases or expressions to create a good audio.

*Participating in the EDP helped me enhance pronunciation skill.* In the EDP, pronunciation has become one of the most crucial aspects in determining the success of the performance. Through one of the processes in the drama production, called recording, the skill of pronunciation was really proven. Therefore, the three participants admitted that their participation in the EDP has improved their pronunciation skill. "During the recording, I am questioning myself, 'Did I pronounce it correct

ly?', 'How is the stress in this word?', and even though the Javanese accent appeared, at least other people understood", said Mrs. Putri. In addition, Mrs. Shinta stated that in the recording, there was a consideration on where to give the stress on certain words; therefore, it was not just about pronouncing the words, but also about making the words meaningful. In the same vein, Mrs. Delima uttered, "I think intonation is necessary, in this EDP, I got to apply it naturally since it supports how we use the language".

In the EDP, the participants agreed that they are encouraged to pronounce the English words correctly since it was recorded and was going to be played in public. This is in line with what Chukueggu (2012) proposed about the benefits of drama using a term "authentic language use: through the use of drama, students engage in authentic language use. It becomes a means of practicing real-life language in the classroom. Drama puts a language into context and gives the students experience in real life situations" (p. 3). In short, the teachers who act in the EDP are practicing to use the English language in a real context such as the implementation of pronouncing the English words using the correct intonation and stress.

*Participating in the EDP helped me practice communication skills.* When taking part in the English Drama Performance, it seemed that teachers sharpened their communication skills. Not only the content in communication, but teachers also practice how to communicate with other casts as well as the audience. Mrs. Putri strongly emphasized that, "to me, communication is more than only applying to the language, how I communicate the language to the interlocutor and audience is important to make them understand."

This finding supports Lee (2007), who stated that participating in an English drama facilitates communication and collaboration skills development. This finding is also in line with the claim of Kempe and Holroyd (2003) about drama as an effective method to assist participants to become practical communicator. It was true that when performing on the stage, actors and actresses are not just acting, yet it is more like conveying message. To do so, it requires an effective communication skill.

Participating in the EDP helped me ease reading. From the interview, it was shown that when the teacher participated in English Drama Performance, their English skill, especially reading skill is maintained. "Frankly speaking, I am 100% convinced that after participating in the EDP, reading English stories, poems, and song lyrics seemed easier", Mrs. Putri uttered.

This finding was in line with the statement of Dodson (2000), who argued that by getting participants to read the script, it means studying the literature as well as reading it out loud. Baldwin and Fleming (as cited in Lee, 2007) believed that through text engagement, participants in EDP can enrich the critical awareness of the literacy concept.

Participating in the EDP helped me improve my vocabulary. Taking part in the English Drama Performance means dealing with the script reading. In the script of the EDP, there were several songs that were translated from Indonesian to English. From the interview result, the teachers confirmed that through their participation in the EDP, they could

improve their vocabulary. It is said by Mrs. Shinta, "To me, my participation in this EDP contributes to the improvement of my vocabulary, especially the idea of having song lyrics translated from Indonesian to English and it doesn't change the meaning. From that, I understand the message." However, when the teacher was asked to give examples of what vocabulary she gained, she failed to mention it, yet, she confirmed that she could understand the message of the story from the translated lyrics.

This finding then leads to a conclusion that message in a story can be conveyed if they are put in a context. This supports Lee's (2007) statement, "When a teacher brings in a particular scenario, certain words and expressions take on a new meaning in context" (p. 14). In addition, taking part in the EDP has forced the teachers to listen to the recording as well as reading the script over and over again. This results to the memorization of utterances in the script, especially those which were put in songs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Regarding the teachers' views of their participation in the EDP, it was revealed that overall, teachers felt positive about it. Things that they liked most when joining the EDP was the togetherness and the new experiences they gained. However, on top of what they liked in the EDP, there was one situation that made the teachers uncomfortable, namely, the undisciplined members. Most of the teachers felt bothered with some of the actors and actresses who did not come on the rehearsal or were late to arrive at the rehearsal venue.

Meanwhile, the effect of the teachers' participation on the EDP towards their

English skills were various. They admitted that it helped them express language functions, enhance their pronunciation skill, practice their communication skills, ease reading, and improve their vocabulary. The teachers generally found their participation in the EDP was beneficial, especially to help them provide the space to practice their English skills.

## **IMPLICATION**

The positive feelings and the advantages gained by the teachers towards their participation in the EDP can be an example of best practices for other teachers to do the same thing. The teachers participating in the EDP can also use their lived-experience to improvise the way they teach English in a real context. In addition, they can better explain to the students about narrative texts since the teachers were involved in the play. Regarding the teaching materials, the teachers can adopt and adapt the scenario to teach English through role-playing.

## **RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL REFLECTION**

In this research, I am as the researcher is also an instrument since I wrote the scenario of the EDP, I directed the play, and I acted as one of the actors in the play. Therefore, I myself did experience like what the other teachers have mentioned on the findings. One example regarding the effect of participating the EDP toward my vocabulary improvement was when I wrote one scenario, and I did not use the correct diction in the scenario, the language advisor corrected it and it stays in my memory forever. Such vocabulary were 'who on earth are you?', and 'long live the king and family'. At first I did not understand the English version until the language advisor



mcorrected my scenario. Another part was in the pronunciation astery. I admitted I had to look up a dictionary before the recording process. I had to make sure the words were correctly pronounced, for example the difference between 'prince' and 'princess'.

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