

## Profesionallizing Teflin

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**Abstract:** *Using general criteria for professionalism as a point of reference, this article discusses current condition of English teaching force and teacher training institution in Indonesia and examine their present standing. Problem areas are located and possible ways for improvement charted. Strategic options are then fleshed out and potential course and benefits delineated. Practical recommendations are purposed to conclude the discussion.*

**Key words:** *professionalism, English teaching*

### Introduction

Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines a profession as "a paid occupation, esp one that requires advance education and training", and conceives of professionalism as "skill or qualities of a profession are its members. From this two part definition we can drive several interrelated requirements for being a professional and the essence of professionalism: advanced education and/ or training, expertise, and qualities

More specifically, David Nunan (1999), in his role as the president of TESOL (Teacher of English to Speaker of Other Languages) organization, has identified for criteria to examine if an area of activity qualifies as a profession: (a) The existence of advanced education and training, (b) the establishment of standards of practice and certification, (c) an agreed-upon theoretical and empirical knowledge-base, and (d) The work of individuals within the field to act as advocates for the profession.

To see if what we do as an English teachers qualifies as a profession and whether our collective practice as an occupational group has the required professionalism, the ensuing section will elaborate on each of the criteria and use them as a lens to examine what we currently do and have as a collective.

Criteria for professionalism: the case of English Teaching in Indonesia (or Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia, TEFLIN)

- **Advanced Education and Training**

As a collective we do have advanced education and training program in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) available in the country. Just to mention one, The Graduate School of Indonesia University of Education offers a Master's degree program in English Language Teaching (ELT). One question important here is this: is this advanced degree in ELT a requirement for the recruitment into the job as an English Teacher? We can easily observe that some institution do require their incoming lectures to receive some advance education and/or training before they are recruited or given a full status in the teaching force. There are also many cases, however,

which indicate that this advanced education or training is not considered essential for recruitment purposes. This is evidenced in the fact that many of the currently active teachers of English in a higher learning institution across the country is not received any discipline-specific training beyond their first degree (S1 level of education). Another sorry example is that many English education centers (e.g. privately-run English courses) in the country recruit-and unfortunately with a sense of period- English speaking applicants without due regards to their formal educational background!

In summary, while opportunities to get advanced education and training are virtually open to everybody, the common practice in recruiting English teachers does not take advanced education and training as an essential requirements.

- **Standard of practice and certification**

Another defining characteristic of a profession is a set of standard of practice developed and promulgated by the profession. Usually tied to some form of certification of license to practice, these standards are usually established by professional association to ensure quality service to its clientele as well as to control license to practice for its members. One clear example that we have in our country is the standards of practice developed by IDI (Ikatan Dokter Indonesia or Indonesian Medical Doctor Association). And this association, indeed, has a final say in giving (and revoking) a license to practice for its members.

What happens in the field of teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia? Does the association of Teacher of English As a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN) have as strong influence? This national level organization of Indonesian teachers of English has thus far never articulated standard of practice and certification. Instead, the association leaves it to the “market” as to how to determine the quality of services the practitioners of EFL teaching can render to their customers. And the certification of English teachers in our country is left- for better or worse- to each individual teacher training institution.

In sum, as now, the standard of practice and certification in English Language Teaching in Indonesia are not yet established in a coherent manner.

- **A Disciplinary Base**

A third defining characteristic of a profession is the existence of a greed-upon knowledge-base. This theoretical and empirical basis is what distinguishes some profession from trades and crafts. In the field of English Language Teaching this can take the form of the manner in which important question are formulated, how the content of the domain gets defined and organized conceptually, and the principle of discovery and verification that constitute the ground rules of creating and testing knowledge in the field.

More specifically, Lee Shulman (1986) has categorized teacher knowledge into three types: (a) subject-matter content knowledge, which covers both its substantive and syntactic structures, (b) pedagogical content knowledge, which represent knowledge of the subject matter for instructional

purpose, and (c) curricular knowledge, that encompass the ability to relate the content of a given topic being learned in other classes under the same program adopting the same curriculum. Building of the specification of teacher knowledge, Shulman (1987) further characterizes the knowledge under three categories: propositional knowledge, case knowledge, and strategic knowledge. This relatively established knowledge-base of teaching can help teachers communicate among themselves about instructional issues and can, therefore, learn from one another and refine their expertise.

As far as the knowledge-base is concerned, the field of teaching (and ELT for that matter) as a collective has its own “rules of the game” and it can, therefore, claim a professional status.

- **Advocacy/influence**

Advocacy is one last criterion a profession should meet currently; most established professions have professional association whose key function is to act as advocates for the profession. With their influence, professional association can influence legislator, business people and other authorities either to create legislation that is deemed to be advantageous to the profession or to oppose legislation that is disadvantageous to the profession.

In terms of professional association, like medical doctors write their IDI (Ikatan Dokter Indonesia), Indonesian teachers of English have established at least two kinds of association: TEFLIN at the national level, and MGMP- English at a regional level. One important question here is: what have these organizations been doing to strengthen ELT as a profession an English teachers as professional? To assess relative degree of influence this professional might have on determination of welfare of its member, one can ask fundamental questions such as these: Does TEFLIN have a say in what should and shouldn't be done in the teaching of English? What influence-if-any- does this organization have on curriculum making? Does this organization have a say to what text book (or learning materials) to use? What has this organization done to protect its primary clientele-I.e, students-from possible malpractice or, at least, disservice (e.g., “overcrowded” classroom, misuse of test, or “unprofessional treatment”)? While active members of TEFLIN and MGMP-English (Council of Teachers of English) are certainly in a better position to answer the question, general public-using general observation-can easily answer the question in the negative. That is, as far as the question of advocacy/ influence is concerned, TEFLIN has done nothing noteworthy.

### **Root causes of the Predicament of the TEFLIN Organization**

As indicated earlier, professionalism in any field requires a great deal of its members and, by and large, TEFLIN as an organization has thus far failed to meet the requirements for a host of reasons, including lack of shared vision and mission,

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absence of strong academic leadership, and weak research capacity. Each of these root causes of the predicament of TEFLIN is declined below.

- **Why a shared, clear vision and mission is needed**  
As a host of thousands of intellectually-active scholars. TEFLIN literary means diverse school of thoughts. This immense intellectual capital should be channeled into a well-defined direction if the organization is to arrive to a specific, single direction. It is exactly this sense of direction that TEFLIN does not have. It comes as not surprise that this organization fails to show meaningful progress in it's over fifty year of existence.
- **Why strong academic leadership is vital for TEFLIN**  
While potentially, thousand of intellectually-active TEFLIN members can shock the world, the potentials fails to materialize because there is no powerful figure who can garner and put these domain intellectual powers to utilitarian use. Consider this example. From TEFLIN's annual conference-when the organization has regularly organized for the past fifty-one-years-one can easily find a clear picture that the field of teaching as a foreign language (TEFL)in Indonesia has proliferated in an impressive way as evidenced in a wide array of discussion topic presented in the seminar, which are all well attended. This indicates, at the very least, the fact that there are numerous Indonesian scholar who have taken step to learn by doing- and the rest of seminar attendees learned from-academic presentations in such seminars. But this wide array of fields of expertise, unfortunately, has not benefited much beyond intellectual exercises in seminar halls because no body of leadership powers has taken this scholarly capital into a wider context of real life.
- **Why research capacity is a must and how to develop it**  
A great deal of research has informed us that professionals learn on the job because their jobs entail engagement in succession of cases, problem, and projects which they have to learn about. Learning for us—as professional—is, then, inherent to our professional engagement. However, tacit knowledge drawn from personal experiences will remain implicit until we make it explicit and publicized. It is for this knowledge development purposes that research capacity playas critical role because by way of research and publications we can openly negotiate what we have individually learned from our daily practices, observation and reflections

**Where to Go from Here: Some Possible Routers to Chart**

The preceding sections have delineated major source of weaknesses in the TEFLIN professional organization which have brought the organization to its present standing. In what follows some suggestion are proposed which could potentially lead this national-level professional organization of the teachers of English as Foreign Language in Indonesia to a better status where it can benefit both its supporters and general public where the organization operates.

- TEFLIN should revisit aspiration available among its active members and collectively-decide on one, shared common vision and mission for the organization

Lack of clear, shared vision and mission in TEFLIN, in my observation, result from the absence of self definition. TEFLIN should, therefore, raise fundamental question such as these: Who are we as a collective? What kind of future conditions do we want to create for our profession? What roles do we want to play in the betterment of the teaching of English as foreign language? What roles do we want take in the development of learners of English in particular and society at large in general?

Specific answer to these question will result in clear self-definition and this take consciously-constructed collective identity will, in turn, open up a direction to take and space to chart, in other words, the formulation of organizational vision and mission will provide us with a clear picture of what kind of condition we want for ourselves and the kinds of roles we want to play to mark our existence over the world.

- TEFLIN needs to make explicit commitments to specific target beneficiaries.

TEFLIN, like any other organizations in the world, work in a network of interrelationship among other organizations under a wider system. This entails and alignment of work orientations vis a vis other similar organization in the system. However, as a distinct and autonomous organization. TEFLIN should take a relatively focused priority for its target beneficiaries. To illustrate, consider this question. What/ whom are we going to serve? System? Teachers? learners? or outsiders, such as business circle, book publishers, or regional/local governments? A specific answer to this question will lead to clear major target beneficiaries to which TEFLIN should reader its services. It is this clarity of target beneficiary that will enable an organization like TEFLIN to seize its niche and augment its special role among those it serves. With this clear sense of commitment, for instance, TEFLIN can exert its academic powers to assure quality textbook for learners of English., appropriate forms of evaluation to assess relative success of student learning, and sound instructional practice in the classroom.

- TEFLIN should take stand on important issues currently faced by the community

People I this country are often bombarded with a myriad of “reform ideas” tossed about in the media. These ideas-mostly untested-lead nowhere but massive confusion among people in the community. Consider this example: what would you say about the advantages and disadvantages of teaching English to children aged 1-6 (before elementary school age) in Indonesia context? Is it developmentally appropriate to teach preschoolers formal, alphabetic reading-writing? How about teaching toddlers mathematics? Nobody-as it seems-in the community can convincingly explain

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the nature of children learning (and/or acquiring) English as a foreign language.

These complicated issues are, indeed, not for general public to handle. It takes rigorous research studies to gain a relatively detailed understanding of those issues. TEFLIN as a host of thousand of scholars should take stand on these issues and publicize its most informed understanding for the benefit of community at large.

If TEFLIN can garner its resources to the direction spelled out earlier, this national organization shall not only gain recognition from professional communities but also shall be able to serve its beneficiaries its supporters as well as community at large who have made possible for the organization to operate in the past fifty-one years and proliferate healthily in the future.

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