EXAMINING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN REFORM OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Waode Eti Hardiyanti
Universitas Sulawesi Tenggara
waodeeti50@gmail.com

Muhammad Ilham
Universitas Sulawesi Tenggara
ilankelo@gmail.com

Aris Suziman
Universitas Sulawesi Tenggara
arissuziman@gmail.com

Abstract: The Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Indonesia has experienced major change due to government policy in the last ten years. The aim of this paper is to explore and examine the implications of the policy for the Early Childhood teachers using Foucault’s concepts as important guides for this discussion. There are three major changes that indicate the reform of ECE, (1) the need of improving the early childhood teachers’ qualification; (2) monitoring teacher’s performance; and (3) reflection on teacher’s ethics. These major changes are linked to the concepts of Foucault reveals that normalizing is emphasising to construct and target the teacher’s identities. The second concept is surveillance that is needed to maintain the regulations in every detail school, particularly on teacher’s performance. Lastly, reflection for ethical judgement and concern is essential in order to achieve moral conduct on teaching practice. Throughout this analysis, it shows that it is better if the government can fully identify the difficulty of teachers in order to establish the regulation. More importantly, giving more supports to provide sufficient facilities and programs that can be reached for all teachers is a recommended strategy.

Keywords: Teacher’s role; Early Childhood Education; Indonesia
INTRODUCTION

“What is philosophy if not a way of reflecting, not so much on what is true and what is false, as on our relationship to truth? ... The movement by which, not without effort and uncertainty, dreams and illusions, one detaches oneself from what is accepted as true and seeks other rules – that is philosophy” (Foucault, 1997, p. 327).

Examining the role of teachers in the reform of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Indonesia is a topical issue that reflects the above philosophy of Foucault. Additionally, the epigraph leads me to highlight, think and reflect about the role of teaching in society. This point is supported by Orchard, Heilbronn, and Winstanley who suggest that as an individual we take perspective from all angles (pro and con) and use this understanding to make decisions about our roles (2016). Reflection is essential in order to evaluate my overall role as a teacher, by asking myself whether my action is valuable or not for my classroom context. From my point of view, the more teachers are given chance to reflect, the better they will perform.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Indonesia has experienced major change due to government policy in the last ten years (Herlina & Indrati, 2010). The new system of Early Childhood Education requires every teacher to improve their qualification and performance. These are the main goals of the government policy. According to ECE in Indonesia (2007), Early Childhood teachers should obtain a degree in teaching or psychology. In practice, however, most Early Childhood teachers do not have a degree in teaching or psychology. This sudden change indicates a need to understand the impact academically, economically and psychologically of the current situation of Early Childhood teachers in the system in Indonesia. Addressing the issue is important since there is increasing concern that the teachers who are responsible for ECE need to be qualified hence the will facilitate strong learning processes with the new policy (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore and examine the implications of the policy for the Early Childhood teachers using Foucault’s concepts as important guides for this discussion.

A. Improving the early childhood teachers’ qualification

The new policy of ECE system in Indonesia focuses on improving the qualifications of teachers in regard to meet the new standard of their role (Herlina & Indrati, 2010). Before the reform of ECE, there is no regulation that early childhood teachers should have a degree in education or psychology. Currently, the new policy heavily emphasizes teachers to obtain a degree in teaching to become Early
Childhood teachers. As a result, every teacher now must have a degree of teaching in order to meet the standard.

This condition refers to Foucault’s notion called normalization. He states that “creating homogeneous people who will fit with society’s judgment about norms, although it is also as the measurement of individual differences” (Foucault, 1995). It emphasises that every individual action will be structured in disciplinary systems. As part of normalisation, the justification of “good teachers” is provided as techniques of power to classify the teachers’ quality (Brown, 2015). According to the Indonesian ECE statistics (2014), over 50% of Early Childhood teachers have only graduated from high schools which are considered unsuitable for becoming a “good teacher”. Therefore, improving their qualification is stated as the aim of the reform of ECE.

According to Foucault, to normalize does not always refer to something negative but it demonstrates one way to help individuals become useful through training (1995, p. 179). Normalizing is emphasising to construct and target the teacher’s identities, rather than acts. The new policy uses training as the main action to normalise the teacher. Teachers as the object of policy are expected to gain their qualification by enrolling in the education training programs. Through training, teachers will have a better qualification and also obtain useful knowledge to apply to their professions. The rationale of this new rule is due to the number of qualified teachers is limited, most of the teachers rely on past experience rather than an educational background to teach in early childhood (Rosdiana, 2005).

In practice, however, Early Childhood teachers reveal a concern that training programs are not easy to access. Marhamah (personal communication, 2016) states that the Early Childhood teachers have a huge desire to improve their qualification, yet systematic support for them is unavailable. For instance, some universities do not provide a degree in Early Childhood training compared to secondary teachers. Because of this limited support, teachers face the pressure to embody the demand for the current policy to match their reality. They reveal that the government should consider the real situation before imposing new policy because they feel disadvantaged.

Furthermore, the impact of setting this new policy for teachers are depicted to become a burden particularly teachers who are teaching in a rural area. Because of their condition, they will find hard to achieve the new policy aim. For instance, transportation and economic conditions in remote areas may limit their opportunities for obtaining a degree (Unicef Indonesia,
Working in the remote area can be problematic for teachers since adequate support for them are no longer present (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005, p. 54). Therefore, in order to create homogeneous and qualified teachers, the government needs to give massive attention to identifying the real restrictions for improving skills nationwide.

As a result, teachers who do not have an opportunity to obtain a degree or training will face the justification which Foucault calls as rank or grade. This rank has a double role in terms of normalization (Foucault, 1995). First, it identifies gaps, teachers are labelled to categorize them as “good teachers” or otherwise. The justification is purely based on their educational background. Second, rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment. In Indonesia, teachers who have a degree will be easy to have a good position and receive a higher payment. In contrast, they who do not have a degree will be at the same position. Therefore, teachers face a dilemma in their profession which results in many of them decide to leave their job (Marhamah, personal communication, 2016).

This condition illustrates the drawbacks for those teachers who have been teaching for many years but hardly recognised due to their inability to obtain a degree. I shall argue that the aim of new policy to improve the qualification of teachers can bring benefit in terms of gaining knowledge. However, relying on a degree heavily without considering the current situation and obstacles which are faced by the majority of teachers in Indonesia will lead pressure to them. Therefore, seeking an alternative way to implement and execute this new policy in order to precisely cover the need of teachers should be the priority of current Early Childhood Education in Indonesia. It can be stated that by providing accessible programs may be an effective way to persuade them obtaining a degree.

B. Monitoring teacher’s Performance

Another critical issue in the reform of education in Indonesia is the essential role of surveillance for teachers. According to Foucault, mechanism observation is used to exercise discipline (19, p.). In order to run the policy, surveillance is needed to maintain the regulations in every detail school, particularly on teacher’s performance. Foucault (1995, 187) illustrates the example of surveillance in schools, it reveals that combining disciplinary elements for controlling individuals’ behaviour, time and space. Therefore, all the individuals who are being
surveyed may try to govern themselves as the expectation.

Foucault introduces the symbol of gaze which requires a series of ways that ensure a hierarchy of constant surveillance. Application of the constant surveillance for teachers can be found in the activities where teachers should produce a document daily, weekly and monthly, to constantly report their activities in a classroom. The school authority uses these reports to examine every detail of teacher’s activities in their teaching practices and also as one of the indicators of their performance. Through the reports, teachers know that all their activities are monitored without the need for observation.

Although the teachers’ core is teaching, it is not uncommon to have many meetings a week to discuss all manner of things as a part of new policy demands of surveillance (McRae, 1988, p. 5). Consequently, teachers may find difficulty to focus on producing their teaching practices due to all the surveillance activities. This may lead them to have limited freedom to develop their creativity in their teaching practice. Therefore, teachers have little power to shape their daily work. This awareness provides the teachers with the opportunity to reflect upon the kinds of surveillance that they feel are important to their own learning, as well as to consider when surveillance might be unnecessary or even oppressive (Bowdridge, & Blenkinsop, 2011, p. 155).

By applying the constant surveillance on teachers, insecurity issues may arise. They are positioned under the pressure to complete all the discipline rules (Ball, Maguire, Barund & Hoskins, 2011, p. 612). Teachers face new forms of immediate surveillance and self-monitoring which focus on outcomes of their learning (Ball, 2003, p. 219). On the other hand, the high demand duty and surveillance on teachers may cause anxiety and dread. The possibility of them becoming insecure about right or wrong pedagogy is high, especially when the expectation is not clear and always changes. Sometimes, this policy leads to a conflict and confusion because it keeps changing every few years. Therefore, providing stability of policy is essential to lead teachers to perform better, rather than asking teachers to produce endless reports on monitoring program.

C. Reflection on teacher’s ethics

The teacher’s new role as a direct result of policy leads teachers to examine their own beliefs in teaching. As a teacher, I believe that improving education should start from us as an individual. This leads to the ethics that Foucault (1986, p. 341) explains as embedding moral values as a truth for own self. What I believe as a
teacher may not be only influenced by the policy but the condition in my teaching practice. The society where my teaching practice occurs really influences my ethical perception. Giving reflection about the new reform of education makes me think that all regulations which government states as truth may not be fully suitable with my ethics as a teacher.

Foucault explains that ethics has a creative dimension in that there are certain practices one performs on oneself to bring about a transformation (1986, p. 352). This reveals that applying ethics in teacher’s role can lead them to embed the value that they consider using in their teaching practice. The policy value depicts that having a degree in educational training is an essential indicator to label teachers as ‘good’ teachers. However, my ethical perspective is driven from the argument that just having a degree should not be the only category to become “good teachers”. For me, rather than place emphasis on the degree, teachers should be praised more for their skills and their values in teaching practice. The reform of education in Indonesia should focus on creating skilful and ethical teachers not only emphasizing on a degree. As a result, teachers may interpret this policy that by obtaining a degree is more important than upgrading their teaching skills and reflecting their teaching pedagogy.

a. Ethical substance
This phase starts when I complete my reflection for ethical judgement and concern in order to achieve moral conduct on teaching practice (Niesche & Haase, 2012). I realise that improving my ability in teaching and providing young children with useful information guides my ethics. This belief leads me to change my routine and focus on the activities which may improve my teaching practice.

b. Mode of subjection
The second element to embed ethical relations is the mode of subjection which people realise their moral obligation. In order to truly address my moral values, I recognise the moral obligation of teachers to provide the current needs of young children in regard to support their development academically, emotionally and physically (Foucault, 1986).

c. Self-formation
Foucault calls the third element as self-formation which helps us to change ourselves to obtain our moral values (1988, p. 352). To transform myself requires real action. Therefore, adequate preparation for my teaching and learning knowledge can depict my values in order to convince my students that I am able to teach them, and for them to accept me as a skilful teacher. For instance, learning from senior teachers and elaborating my knowledge in
technology are the ways to embody my values.

d. Telos

Finally, when we act based on our own moral values, it will cultivate us to be an ethical individual. The achievement of a mastery over oneself (Niesche & Haase, 2012, p. 279), my desire to be as a skilful teacher can be achieved through bringing new ideas in the classroom. Embodying my moral values may be not as easy as I thought since this may differ from other perspectives due to society, culture and social group (Foucault, 1988, p. 350). In school, teachers can apply different moral values which sometimes lead to the disagreement with other teachers. The opportunity to provide ethical relations for teachers may be difficult due to the economic status of teachers. Marhamah (personal communication, 2016) reveals that early childhood teachers do not perform optimally because they feel the appreciation given to them is not equal. This means that sometimes teachers feel their work is not appreciated, whilst the demands and expectation to perform better is increasing (McRae, 1988, p. 21).

Meanwhile, most teachers are very much dependent on their own nature, capacities, enthusiasm and belief. As a result, the limited appreciation would shape their own moral values in their teaching practice. For instance, because of the low income of teachers, some of them are looking for another job and consider teaching as their part-time job (Rasyid, 2010). This truly influences their professionalism and their moral values as a teacher. Therefore, the education system in Indonesia should concern to provide the proper economic support for teachers. I believe that by providing proper economic status for teachers will influence them to conduct their ethical manner.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the teacher’s role in the reform of education in Indonesia allows me to truly understand the current situation. Using Foucault’s concepts to unpack the impact of new policy reveals my position on this policy. From my point of view, this aim of the policy to improve the teacher’s qualification and performance through constant surveillance and obtaining a degree may not really be suitable for present reality. It would be better if the government identifies the difficulty of teachers in order to establish the regulation. Giving more support to provide sufficient facilities and programs that can be reached for all teachers is a recommended strategy. This action may effectively lead them to improve their qualification and performance. In the future, I hope Early Childhood teachers will gain more
appreciation and support, not only from government but also from society. Therefore, this will be a far more effective way to enhance teacher performance.

REFERENCES


