Teacher certification program: What we can learn from the case of Indonesia?

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Abstract. This study elaborates on the issues of the teacher certification program in Indonesia by integrating the Freirean perspectives to consider how power linkages arise within, and affect the assessment standard system, and how people who participate in this system are affected by the normalization of the system. This study interviewed 3 elementary teachers who had passed the teacher certification program. Interviews were made semi-structured and conducted one-on-one for roughly 30 minutes in Bahasa Indonesia and be analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Our findings that the main problems of the teacher certification program were implementation distortion, the absence of a serious evaluation, and the awareness and commitment of the teacher certification program participants to become professional teachers. Hence, we recommend several things in an attempt to improve the teacher certification program; system improvements should be developed by experts in more detail; however, they must possess the characteristics of a clear performance-based system.

Keywords: Teacher certification program, standardized test, elementary teacher, Indonesia

1   Introduction

To promote the quality of education, in most countries, teachers are the main issue. Teachers are the central street-level bureaucrats of the educational aspect (Hübner et al., 2021; Lipsky, 1980; 2010) and the main actors of any change effort (Banner et al., 2012; Hübner et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2015). Then, an important question constantly raised around the world is how governments should improve the competency of their teaching staff. The best way to improve teacher competence is thru teacher certification programs to assure that teachers have adequate competence to teach. The Government of Indonesia introduced a teacher certification program in 2007, in light of the low performance of the education system generally (Kusumawardhani, 2017). The main reason for this program is that teachers have failed to produce academically capable students.

In fact, Indonesian teachers as a whole have low competence compared to other employments in Indonesia and teachers in neighbor countries (Chang et al. 2013; Kusumawardhani, 2017).

However, like with most education in policy and practice, teacher certification decisions are inundated with a growing number of real candidates and constituencies; this is a high-stakes soup with multiple chefs, all of whom claim to add to the quality and validity of the process (Gorlewski and Gorlewski, 2016). In fact, several studies conducted by Kusumawardhani, (2017), Utami, (2015), and Chang, et al. (2013), reported that the teacher certification program has not provided a significant alteration in teacher performance. This is supported by the latest PISA report (2018) which still places Indonesia at the low position. This means that until now there has been no significant progress in the teacher certification program.

This study aims to provide evidence of real problems in efforts to enhance the competency of teachers in Indonesia through a certification program. The study will also emphasize how assessment processes influence and are influenced by, the context in which they are developed and implemented by integrating the Freirean perspectives to consider how power linkages arise within, and affect the assessment standard system, and how people who participate in this system are affected by the normalization of the system. In addition, accountability discourse will be interrogated to investigate how the notion of responsibility plays out in materials related to standard instruments and those related to assessment or standardized tests.

Teacher certification in Indonesia: an overview

In a strive to enhance the quality of teachers, the Indonesian government established a teacher certification program in 2005 as part of a large-scale education reform. Despite improvement efforts continue to be made in its implementation and are assumed to have a positive impact on the performance and well-being of teachers, various problems are often found in its implementation starting from recruitment, e.g., quota excess and the gap between urban and rural areas and their implementation is not as ideal as the concept.

The efficiency of the teacher certification program is influenced by the infrastructure component supporting achievement. Standard process for implementing subject specific pedagogy (ssp) workshops. Ssp activities are carried out through eight stages, namely; first plenary group discussion, group/independent work, second plenary peer teaching, revision, lesson plan making, microteaching, revision reflection, and the last session, but the most important thing is the knowledge test with a standardized test. Although there is a performance test that also determines pass, such as teaching practice supervised by a tutor, this is considered a negotiation session because it can be guaranteed that all participants will pass 100 per cent as long as they follow the specified procedure. However, the knowledge test carried out using a standardized test will determine the pass of all participants because it depends on the scores obtained so that if the participants fail all the process for one year is 'in vain' since they are declared unsuccessful and have to repeat the test in the next period.

Some important issues

Indonesia has a unique experience in reforming teacher development and management structures and processes, both in its completeness and the concern to analyzing and assessing implementation and impact. Prior to the entry into force of the 2005 teacher law, the Indonesian ministry of national education had identified several deficiencies in the education system with regard to teachers.

First, the problem of unclear teaching standards. Although standards are set, they are unclear and not detailed so that schools find it difficult to translate into the curriculum in various teacher education institutions and it is also difficult to implement ideal supervision in schools (Chang, et al., 2013). Second, the problem of inefficiency and inequalities in the teacher management system. The absence of teacher certification, and the chaotic recruitment, placement, and professional development of new teachers. The regulations of this standard are inconsistent over time and across regions and rely more on close relationships frequently than professional competency training, predominantly for contract and temporary teachers. (Fahmi, et al., 2011).

During decentralization in 2000, it became increasingly haphazard, despite it was ultimately enacted by the 2003 education law. In the rule, the education law mandates that teacher work and remuneration, standard-setting, performance monitoring, the carry out of sanctions and fix measures must be shifted from the ministry of education to the district office. However, much remains unclear to teachers for instance; issues surrounding the provision of incentives, dismissal and placement of teachers, appointment and training of headmasters and supervisors, continuing professional nurturing of teachers, and the demand for the establishment of new civil service posts.

As a consequence of the decentralization system which provides strong incentives to local governments to hire more teachers, although are not needed so teacher recruitment is rampant. As a result, the national student-teacher proportion is not balanced, and the distribution is not well-targeted, leaving many schools understaffed. Schools in remote and rural areas tend to have teachers with poor academic qualifications too.

Therefore in 2005, to improve teacher competence academically and as a component of reform in education, the Indonesian government instituted teacher certification. At first, the participation was voluntary, yet the interest of the group was very high to join this program considering the high level of incentives involved. Certified teachers receive a salary increase of 100% on top of their base salary (Kusumawardhani, 2017) its widespread application began in 2007 due to the absence of a legal basis governing the implementation of teacher certification. Then the results in 2007, around 183,000 teachers have been certified. As of 2009, around 553,000 teachers have been certified.

To indicate the teacher has achieved four areas of competence; pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies initially (2007-2010) largely relied on portfolio reviews with a predetermined format (Kusumawardhani, 2017; Chang, et al., 2013). The portfolio is then assessed by an external evaluator and assesses whether the portfolio produced by the teachers is feasible or not so that it could be declared a pass or fail. If it fails then the teachers were considered not to have met the requirements of 4 academic qualifications; pedagogical, personal, social, and professional. Assessment could be seen as a screening mechanism to separate those who met the standards from

those who did not. However, in 2007 and 2008 almost all teachers assigned to certification were eventually certified. This is because the government provides opportunities for those who had not graduated to participate in training again for improvement. Since they had graduated, they were also eligible for a raise or incentive.

Since 2012 until recently, teacher certification program has made progress, since teachers have to complete one year of training and be trained by professional lecturers. However, after training, they must then take a passing test, namely a performance test and a knowledge test. Test results determine their pass. That is, even if they have given excellent performance and assignments for one year if they do not pass the exam, they are still declared unsuccessful. So that it becomes a frightening spectre for teachers, and many teachers focus on exam preparation by discussing and answering exam questions. For them, exams are more important because exams determine pass or fail. This is relevant to the statement of Gorlewski and Gorlewski (2016), that the standard of teacher certification exams makes teachers very anxious, and the growing opinion that teacher certification is more than just a formality to gain a certificate

2   Methodology

Teacher certification is a big issue in Indonesia. One of the authors was committees on teacher certification since 2018. The present study was part of a qualitative study that focused on three elementary school teachers that have accomplished teacher certification and obtained certificates in 2018 who were selected randomly. Although this study does not intend to generalize, because we limited the participants, these findings can be used as a starting point, study material, and reflection to improve teacher certification programs in Indonesia. In addition, these findings confirm previous studies on teacher certification programs in Indonesia.

This data was collected based on observation in the past 2018-2019 (based on experience), and through semi-structured interviews with three elementary school teachers. Table 1., provides detailed information about participants. In the first round of data collection, we interviewed participants based on a series of questions and then identified key themes based on their responses (Lodico et al 2010). In the next round, we conducted in-depth interviews and discussions to more deeply understand their experiences. The interview was conducted one-on-one for roughly 45 minutes in Bahasa Indonesia. Prior to the interview, we asked the participants for consent for the entire series of studies to be carried out including asking permission to record the interview. Besides, we delivered the description and scope of our study as well. The interview data be treated by way of qualitative content analysis, with the purpose to understand the participants' subjective beliefs through the interpretation of data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Miles, 1994). Further, we did code and analyze the interview data. That is, numerous small pieces of data are collected and gradually combine or related to form broader, more general descriptions and conclusions. To ensure that the coding (code category and code name) is correct, previously we made a scheme, which defines each word and term (Lodico, et al, 2010). Then, we elaborated on the author's experienced and studied literature related

to teacher certification (Kusumawrdhani, 2017; Gorlewski and Gorlewski, 2016; Utami, 2015; Chang et al. 2013), to make synthesize.

Table 1. Data detail participants

Name	Year of teaching	Educational level	Gender
Tik	19	Bachelor's	Female
Lin	16	Bachelor's	Female
Zain	11	Bachelor's	Male

3   Finding

The teachers we interviewed gave various meanings to teacher certification. All participants believe that certification is extremely important for teachers, besides being able to enhance teacher competence, it also increases teacher wages. However, they also reported many problems in their implementation. The problems presented are in line with the findings of field observations and the results of the literature study that we have done. First, the implementation is only technical and formality. Second, teacher awareness, namely many teachers are only focused on getting certificates so there is a distortion between certificates and competencies (Gorlewski and Gorlewski, 2016). Third, socio-cultural barriers. This is in line with the findings of Kusumawardhani (2017), and Chang, et al., (2013) that the teacher certification program has not had a significant effect on teacher competence. I will address this by linking it with Freirean perspectives to consider how power relations emerge within, and affect standardized systems of judgment, and how people who participate in these systems are affected by system normalization rather than intrinsic consciousness.

4   Discussion

In my opinion, the most fundamental thing is linked to teacher knowledge. I think that teachers' competence is an important factor in all problems in education. This might self-criticism for us, as teachers, nonetheless the government has an obligation and liable for this problem. How to ensure that all programs and policies can run well, for example, the teacher certification program and other teacher training. (tik).

Participants highlighted teacher competence and training that is often carried out by the government in order to improve teacher competence. According to them, there is a gap between ideal notion with implementation. Teacher certification, which has been implemented since 2005, has not made a significant change in teacher performance. Lin argued '*lacking seriously in implement this policy even many teachers merely focus on how to get a certificate not really to improve their competency. This is just as if the obligation to be filled after that, finish*'. Referring to (Kusumawardhani, 2017), the teacher certification program in Indonesia has succeeded in increasing teacher wages,

however, this is not directly proportional to an increase in better performance. Her study reports that one of the reasons is that wage increases are not based on superior performance. Furthermore, the teaching profession in Indonesia with civil servant status is a safe and highly secure job, with almost zero chances of being fired for non-performing well. This is also in line with (Chang et al., 2013) findings, which reported that there is no distinction in the quality of teaching and learning between certified teachers and non-certified teachers.

Teacher certification and others teacher training that is often conducted did not have a significant impact. One of the pieces of evidence that the PISA survey places Indonesia is still in the lowest rank. Teacher professional development is just like a routine event that is meaningless and even lacks ongoing support (Utami, 2015). There is no serious academic evaluation of the effectiveness of the certification process. Even, one of the participants confessed that they still use the old style in teaching learning despite they had passed certification.

Teacher professional development did not benefit from important sources such as university studies or research results, communities of practice, and associations. Teachers are only limited to their formal interactions with their supervisors- which we have said is not (yet) effective- formal training programs and workshops, official exchange of observations with colleagues. Nevertheless, there is no teacher professional development that is enforced by schools such as peer coaching, critical friendship, action research assistance, and community practice models, and conferences.

This informs that teacher competence must be continuously improved and evaluated effectively if this certification program is to be successful. Periodic teacher certification and other teacher training must be accompanied and evaluated academically and systematically. If expect teachers to perform well, there must be a comprehensive evaluation and training as well as ongoing support from stakeholders (Makunja, 2016). In addition, implementation in schools still seems haphazard, apart from inadequate human resources, the teacher certification be held on campus is more reliant on administrative and technical matters. To keep the good image of the university, holding teacher certification more focused on how participants can pass the final test (standardized test). Passing the test and getting a certificate is the most important thing, not competence and improving teacher performance.

Many of us feel anxious and nervous since we are afraid of not passing the test, hence I must admit that we are indeed more inclined to how we can pass the test. Therefore, perhaps there should be an evaluation of the improvement of this system so that teacher certification that is well-intentioned and indeed needed can have a significant impact on teacher competence (Zain).

Another issue is the finding that certified teachers have no impact on student performance. Fahmi et al., (2011) reported that in general there are two factors why this was occurring. Firstly, the weakness in the concept, according to them, if certification desires to have an impact on objective indicators such as student scores, it must be reflected explicitly. Although this is not a parameter that should be evaluated periodically. Secondly, problems in implementation. The implementation that is not serious and is not the essence of efforts to elevate teacher competence so that the implementation of

teacher certification focuses on materials and strategy how to make participants pass test.

Hastuti et al., (2009), reported that most of the respondents they interviewed believed that the teacher certification program would not improve teacher quality. This is a paradox. However, they believe that the important factor of teacher performance is integrity, such as a commitment to do the best. Therefore, in this context, we agree with Gorlewski and Gorlewski (2016), that building teacher consciousness is fundamental to improving teacher performance (Freire, 1998). Consciousness is a super-structure in the 'system building' so that good concepts and policies can be implemented properly. Yet this is not straightforward, it takes hard work and a long time. In addition, there must be an evaluation of the passing test to reduce teacher anxiety and 'shortcuts' that the teacher does to pass the test (Au, 2009; Nichols and Berliner, 2007; Dorn, 2007). Irrespectively, all teacher certifications are still very necessary to ensure the quality of teachers, yet with effective evaluations for improvement.

Once teachers pass certification, they feel they are in their 'comfort zone' and are reluctant to move on to more progressive things. Thus, this shows that teachers still apply a conservative culture in teaching. When asked about the significant difference competence with the previous ones, they could not explain clearly and ambiguously, even the explanation always leads to the old style. On the other hand, what is difficult is cooperation or equating perceptions with other teachers who have passed the certification. Each teacher has idealism and even egocentrism, Lin and Tik have the same opinion:

Each teacher has a style so it is tough to coordinate and discuss to equalize perceptions. We often have disagreements with other teachers because of differences in interpretation, some persist with their arguments, it is difficult to collaborate with colleagues who want instant and don't willing to be complicated.

Objectivity without context is partial and incomplete

The notions about 'consciousness' analogize that human are 'in and with the world (Freire, 1998).' The primary idea of this premise is that humans exist among others. However, this understanding emphasizes that our existence in the world possesses 'an objective distance from its', and provides us a space and liberty to create conditions with transformative possibilities (Nichols and Berliner, 2007). While the test as the only requirement for passing is the normalization of the power system that hinders authentic awareness for teachers to become professional teachers. They are merely 'forced' to submit to the system, of course also to the regime, this clearly hinders the criticality of teachers. With its 'remarkable objectivity', standardized tests eliminate the need for the duality of understanding (Gowlewski and Gowlerski, 2016). We have to live in the world to 'get objective distance from it.' however, objectivity without context is partial and incomplete. In the current education sector (e.g., Freedom of learning) the newest curriculum reform is actually undergoing a reform initiative that focuses on accountability and independence in learning by training authentic awareness so that responsibility is attached and open to rejecting standardization. Accountability standards underscore individual liable and accomplishment

Standardization encompasses the fulfilment of common benchmarks of accomplishment based on a set of official characteristics. The double pillars of individual conformity accountability and standards work to strengthen action consistent with "the understanding of consciousness as a passive copy of reality" (Freire, 1998), that shatter collectivity and consciousness. Participating in the teacher certification process as a subject is simply trying to fit into the world without being in the world. If educators are to be agents of changing the nurturing of critical awareness that enables prospective educators and teachers to take into account our experiences given their transformative potential is critical. Without critical awareness, the false dichotomy of obedience/resistance will continue. Awareness authorizes the appearance of a more complex professional identity, which involves a dual approach of reflective resistance and critical obedience (Gorlewski and Gowlerski 2016). We strive to reject the secrecy, individualism, and false objectivity that standardized tests maintain at the end of the course as the only requirements for a pass. Instead, we encourage replacing it with transparency, collectivity, and awareness of the context-dependent collaborative nature of teaching and learning.

5   Conclusion and Recommendation

This study confirms previous findings regarding teacher certification. Attempt to increase teacher professionalism through certification has been facing many problems ranging from implementation issues and awareness of certification participants (teachers) who are still fixated on how to pass the test to get a certificate, not on the essence of training. Nevertheless, in the Indonesian context, teacher certification is extremely needed to improve teacher competencies as well as salaries. The implementation and evaluation of this program must be carried out properly. In addition, the toughest task is to build the awareness of teachers that certification is not merely an administration but to significantly improve the quality of teachers.

Hence, we recommend several things in an attempt to enhance this teacher certification program. Such system improvements can be developed by experts in more detail, yet in any case, they must have the characteristics of a performance-based system. (a) reward teachers who perform better (which is reflected in student performance, as an end goal, or other efforts as an intermediary goal) and entail to penalize teachers who do not improve or are even worse than before being certified (b); these rules of the game must (performance-based) be stated explicitly and clearly and must be socialized; (c) must be credible; eliminates some portfolio requirements on professional development that are loosely linked to student performance, and (d), evaluate standardized test in the teacher certification program.

We believe there is an abundant list of spaces and ideas for enhancement when all authorities and experts are concerned about this issue. We can delve from and adapt many options from what other countries are doing to promote the quality of education and simultaneously increase teacher well-being. Although the teacher certification pro-

gram is considered significant, since it is relevant and needed to increase teacher competence and well-being, however, it remains many problems and its impact on enhancing the quality of education remains unclear. Therefore, this is a crucial call and urge to revise and modernize its governance and implementation.

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