

# The Sustainable Impacts of Teacher Action Research on EFL Teachers in Indonesia

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## The Sustainable Impacts of Teacher Action Research on EFL Teachers in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*Action research has been a prominent topic in continuous professional development literature. Studies have evidenced its potentials for teachers, but not many have discussed the sustainability of the research as a means of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) as well as its sustainable impact. Underpinning the issue of sustainability, the present study aims at investigating what factors made the teachers choose to continue conducting teacher action research, and what pedagogical and professional competences perceived changed as sustainable impacts of Teacher Action Research (TAR). This qualitative study with a*

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*phenomenological undertone adapted Seidman's framework to conduct in-depth interviews with five English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The results showed that motivation and self-efficacy belief, institutional supports, and collaboration with academics/universities were essentials for sustainable engagement with the research. Pedagogically, the teachers increased their awareness of the students' characteristics, knowledge of effective learning, and ability to carry out reflective teaching. In terms of professional competence, they felt very confident and were able to make more publications. This study implies that TAR is a model of TPD that is able to develop EFL teachers' professionalism where they can establish a better practice and develop themselves as professionals and individuals on daily basis, without leaving their students.*

**Keywords:** English teacher, Teacher Action Research, Teacher Professional Development, pedagogical competence, professional competence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As professionals, teachers are demanded to continuously develop their competence through professional development endeavours. Current models of teacher professional development (TPD) have transformed into models that make teachers possible to take part in the improvement of their capacity based on empirical pieces of evidence. TPD is, then, not limited to activities happening in a restricted length of time and generated by academics or government only. Rather, they should be internalized within teachers' everyday practice (Atay, 2008, p. 39). Consequently, the popularity of one-shot models of TPD has declined (Atay, 2008; Hismanoglu, 2010; Mokhele, 2014), since they are assumed to fail to provide teachers with opportunities to learn from their practices and collaborate with other teachers to seek answers to their problems or to share best practice among them.

In Indonesian contexts, however, the fact that teachers have been doing action research is one of the prominent issues of TPD, since they are legally encouraged to do action research as a path of career enhancement by the issuance of Teachers and Lecturers Act No.14/2005 (Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia, 2005). The act explains the systems of the teachers' education, recruitment, and career development. Based on the act, TPD aims at the development of four teachers' competences, i.e., pedagogical, personal, social, and professional. Fortifying the act, the law of Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform No. 16 of 2009 mentions that action research is one of the activities that must be fulfilled for promoting the teachers' career. Acknowledging the law, a number of studies have reported the practice of teacher action research (TAR) in Indonesia. Burns and Rochsantiningsih (2006) describe how ten high school EFL teachers in Java who did not have knowledge about action research were given series of workshops prior to the implementation of action research in their classroom. The findings showed that action research was considered as an effective means for their professional development and had put innovation in classroom practice and helped students' learning. Thamrin (2011) notes that EFL teachers improve their teaching practice in a systematic way,

increase their awareness to cope with students' learning problems, experience working collaboratively with other teachers, and disseminate their works in a scholarly way after joining an action research workshop. Similarly, the majority of teachers in the study of Syah (2016) report that they are able to impact students' performance in the classroom.

Despite its fruitful effects upon the teachers' learning and their professional practice (Akbari et al., 2016; Atay, 2008; Chou, 2010; Halai, 2011; Halim et al., 2010; Kijkuakul, 2019; Leitch & Day, 2000; Wang & Zhang, 2014) whether and how the effects are sustained over time, thus embedded in their lifelong learning, was rarely investigated. Allwright (2007) and Dick (2019) note that the absence of sustainability on value is going to be happening in the long term. In addition, the previous studies before-mentioned have evidenced that TAR was conducted in a setting of a program initiated not by the teachers themselves (Atay, 2008; Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; Chou, 2010; Thamrin, 2011). Some studies report that the teachers who joined the program as such were reluctant to continue doing TAR (Kuzairi, 2014). Moreover, some others found action research as the least TPD activities done by the English teachers (Irmawati et al., 2017). In fact, Utami (2019) notes that only 15 out of 145 teachers admitted doing research as their personal-initiated learning. Likewise, Wulandari et al. (2019) uncover that 84% of teachers had tried to conduct classroom action research in their classroom mainly because it is mandatory to obtain a higher rank in their career path. We, thus, argue for the recognition of TAR as TPD which is closest to teachers' daily practice for EFL teachers in Indonesia.

As reported by the previous studies, although the teachers doing action research improve their pedagogical knowledge and practice, some studies also found that action research is not in favour of TPD for EFL teachers in Indonesia (Irmawati et al., 2017; Kuzairi, 2014; Utami, 2019), and some teachers who once joined an action research program were reluctant to continue conducting TAR (Thamrin, 2011). Therefore, issues about the sustainability of the research as a means of TPD for EFL teachers as well as its' impacts are worth investigating. Addressing the gaps to reveal, the present study, therefore, aims at investigating EFL teachers' self-initiated TAR and whether and how it brings sustainable changes to their pedagogical and professional competence. In regard to teachers' role as the active participants of meaning construction in developing their professional capacity (Crandall, 2000), TAR, the research-based TPD, refers to action research done by teachers in their classroom to improve the quality of their teaching and learning process. Thus, the research questions are formulated below:

1. What factors make the teachers choose to continue conducting teacher action research?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive sustainable TAR on their pedagogical competence?
3. How do EFL teachers perceive sustainable TAR on their professional competence?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Teacher Action Research as a Professional Development

As a paradigm, action research is a conceptual, social, philosophical, and cultural framework, which embraces a wide variety of research methodologies. It is an inquiry

aiming at discovering, developing, or monitoring changes in classroom practice by interrogating teachers' own and other teachers' practices and assumptions (Atay, 2008; Koshy, 2005). In addition, Koshy (2005) states that the inquiry is carried out in order to construct one's knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining, and learning from the experience, in order to improve educational practices. A more technical definition is that action research is cyclical in nature, alternating between action and reflection, continuously refining methods and interpretations based on understandings developed in earlier cycles (Ary et al., 2010). He also suggests some characteristics of action research as follow:

1. The research is situated in a local context and focused on a local issue.
2. The research is conducted by and for a practitioner.
3. The research results in an action or a change implemented by a practitioner in a particular context.

Referring to the related kinds of literature, professional development done through action research can promote teachers' ingenuity, creativity, critical thinking, decision-making ability, and flexibility to respond to changing conditions (Moutafidou et al., 2012). O'Connor and Anderson (2006) and Bae et al. (2016) find out that even though there are still some problems faced during professional development done through action research, the program has developed teachers' research skills, increased the awareness of the teaching-learning process, boosted the enthusiasm for teaching, and promoted collaboration with colleagues. Accordingly, teachers hold a significant role in the development of curriculum and they need to be reflective with their practices and to evaluate their pedagogy for the sake of the improvement of their pupils' education (Thamrin, 2011). Besides, Farrell (2008) notes that reflective practice in teacher action research generates practical knowledge for teachers and teaching.

It is argued that engagement with research provides opportunities for teachers to link theories and practices of their teaching and subsequently promote their students' learning outcomes. Doing action research increases teachers' awareness of all the activities that contribute to the preparations, implementations, and assessments in their teaching practices. Furthermore, teachers are assumed to have the ability to discover relevant insight from their engagements with their action research publications. However, with such promising outcomes, but some drawbacks in the field, the present study questioned the sustainability of the inquiry-based TPD and the sustainable impacts perceived by the EFL teachers.

## **2.2 Teachers' Competence Standard across Nations**

Standardization for teachers' competence is usually done through a board of evaluation in their community. The board functions as an evaluator to measure a particular level of competence as a way of putting a standard for a professional teacher. Some established institutions are the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education – ESL (NCATE), and the Australian Council of TESOL Association (ACTA).

NBPTS identifies and recognizes teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities, and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions. First, teachers are committed to students and their learning. Second, teachers know the subjects they

teach and how to teach those subjects to students. Third, teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning. Fourth, teachers think systematically about their practices and learn from experiences, and fifth, teachers are members of learning communities. Moreover, NCATE's standards for initial preparation of teachers of secondary English language arts require teachers to (1) demonstrate knowledge of English language arts subject matter content, (2) plan instruction and design assessments for reading and the study of literature to promote learning for all students, (3) plan instruction and design assessments for composing texts (i.e., oral, written, and visual) to promote learning for all students, (4) plan, implement, assess, and reflect on research-based instruction, and (5) demonstrate knowledge of how theories and research about social justice, diversity, equity, student identities, and schools as institutions can enhance students' opportunities to learn in English language arts. Finally, ACTA requires EFL teachers with three dimensions of competence, namely disposition toward TESOL, understanding about TESOL, and skills in TESOL.

In the Indonesian context, teachers' professional competence is regulated in the teachers and lecturers act No. 14/2005, Chapter IV about teachers' academic qualification, competence, and certification, in Article 10. It states that teachers' competence covers four components: pedagogical, personality, social and professional competences (Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia, 2005). Pedagogical competence deals with teaching skills including teaching techniques, curriculum development, and assessment. Personality competence is related to an individual's personality which can support teachers' jobs positively. Social competence deals with the ability to socialize and communicate well with others, and professional competence deals with the mastery of English as a subject matter and professional development as teachers.

The mentioned attributes of the three boards are in line with Indonesian contexts of teacher competences. Although presented differently, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical competence, and personality are mentioned as the indicators of the standardized quality for language teachers. Furthermore, professional community and engagement with research are identified as the attributes required for professional teachers. Inadequacy of teachers' competence might fail in providing meaningful learning to students. It is believed that teachers must be dedicated to a continuous plan of professional development through ongoing and sustained professional development endeavours (Atay, 2008) such as research-based TPD.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

A qualitative design with phenomenological undertones which concern understanding participants' perspectives on the lived experiences as the phenomenon they shared was employed (Creswell, 2014). The present study investigated the lived experiences of the EFL teachers who chose to continue doing action research for their professional development and what sustainable impacts of their (self-directed) action research on pedagogical and professional competences were.

### 3.2 Participants

The study purposively selected EFL teachers with experiences of doing TAR. Only teachers who chose to continue doing action research were selected. This consideration was due to the fact that many teachers did action research as a formality to get a higher rank, and some, in fact, did falsification research reports (Wulandari et al., 2019). In order to select the participants who fulfilled the requirements as mentioned previously, a questionnaire was distributed to ensure that the participants experience the intended phenomenon i.e., the experience of doing action research. It was adapted from Kutlay's (2013). Firstly, the adjustment was done in terms of the research design that the teachers were engaged with. Kutlay did not mention a particular design, while the adaptation was made into doing action research. Secondly, some options of reasons for doing research were changed into the reasons for doing action research constructed based on the findings of related literature (Ary et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2007). Thirdly, adaptation was done in terms of the language translated into Indonesian to ease the participants and avoid misunderstanding the questions. The validity of the questionnaire was checked by trying it out to twenty-eight EFL teachers and consulting it with two experts in ELT in higher education. The questionnaire was distributed in the form of a hard copy to 155 EFL teachers when they had monthly meetings of *Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* (abbreviated as MGMP, or school-cluster subject teacher working group). This meeting was selected due to the fact that it is conducted every month where English teachers gather.

From the questionnaire, it was revealed that 35 out of 138 EFL teachers in Jombang, Indonesia, reported doing action research due to joining some programs, such as workshops and seminars on action research. Yet, only five teachers were selected since they had a high frequency of conducting the self-directed TAR. The teachers were varying in terms of educational background, years of teaching experience, and school levels (see Table 1). These teachers were information-rich participants as they had the experiences of doing TAR (Seidman, 2006). Understanding the teachers' experiences by sharing the phenomena with different classroom sites can bring fruitful contributions to the development of the body of knowledge in teacher professional development.

**Table 1.** Demographic description of selected subjects as the primary data source.

| Subjects | Teaching Experience (years) | Educational Background   | Workplace                  |
|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1        | 20                          | (taking) Doctoral Degree | Islamic High School        |
| 2        | 7                           | Master                   | Vocational High School     |
| 3        | 20                          | Master                   | Islamic Junior High School |
| 4        | 14                          | Master                   | Public Senior High School  |
| 5        | 16                          | Master                   | Public Junior High School  |

### 3.3 Data Collection and Instruments

The in-depth semi-structured interview questions were developed to understand the impacts of doing TAR on pedagogical and professional competences as perceived by the teachers. Following Seidman's framework (2006, p. 15-20), the questions cover three domains, i.e., life history, detailed experience, and reflecting the meaning of the experience. First, the questions focus on EFL secondary teachers' life history as teachers

and action researchers, particularly how they are engaged with TAR. Second, the questions concentrate on the details of what impacts they feel as being sustainable by doing TAR. Third, the questions examine the teachers' reflections on the meaning of conducting action research to their pedagogical and professional development. The interviews were conducted with the five selected participants done three to four times in an ongoing and snowball fashion. Each interview session lasted about 30 to 60 minutes and was done in Bahasa Indonesia. The credibility of the interview data was checked by using member checking techniques (Creswell, 2014) to clarify the information for the questions in each session of the interview as well as to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of transcribed interview data.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The present research conducted snowball data analysis. Firstly, the interview data were transcribed to understand each participant's views toward TAR and professional development. Secondly, the data were read and re-read to assure that all the statements and quotes were equally important. NVivo was utilized to auto code and make lists of statements or quotes made by the subjects. Similar statements were coded together. After that, the questions for the coming interview were developed based on the codes and the statements analysed previously. After the second interview was done, the same data analysis, starting from transcribing, reading and re-reading, and coding, were conducted again. This time, categorization of similar statements were done to see themes emerged.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Factors of Self-initiated TAR**

EFL teachers investigated in the present study came with similar reflections. They chose TAR as their professional endeavour since it brings a meaningful impact on their classroom practices. They admitted they experienced fruitful effects as a result of conducting action research. Therefore, they continue conducting action research after their initial action research which was mostly done for the external drive, such as taking a master's degree and joining government programs.

The findings revealed themes related to rationales for the teachers' willingness to continue conducting action research. Those rationales include motivation and self-efficacy belief, institutional supports, and collaboration with academics.

#### *4.1.1 Motivation and self-efficacy belief*

Subject 4 was the teacher frequently appointed by her school to participate in national workshops or other professional development programs from the government. She firstly conducted action research when she took her magister degree in 2006. The action research was the research she employed for her thesis. After finishing her master's degree, she was highly motivated to conduct another TAR as she found that doing TAR could help her students achieve their learning objectives.

- (1) ...unlike others (research), action research is closely related to students...students' learning ability, achievement, as well as what they can and cannot do. Action research helps me seek a



solution and even new knowledge; I read and searched for it...like from workshops, seminars, or some articles. I, then, applied what I found for my classroom, expecting it could help my students, and then I observe whether they could perform better or be more enthusiastic in the class. I think I love doing my teaching in such a way, obtained knowledge of some new teaching media or strategies, implementing them, and my students were also happy because we did something new and dynamic. (Subject 4)

She also mentioned that she does TAR because she believed that life was dynamic so that she needed to keep moving to exist. She believed that if others could do it, she could do it, too.

Subject 1 conducted action research more frequently than the other participants, and she was also the most enthusiastic one about learning from the research. She said that she had always been motivating in doing research and writing it. Prior to her first action research which was done in 2010, she had done some investigations about her classroom to make her teaching practices better. For the same reason, she chose to continue doing action research after finishing her master's degree.

- (2) I like doing research; I like to investigate and observe my teaching. I cannot explain why I just like researching. When I knew action research, I think this is good; this is the right one...it can help me help the students, make the class more joyful. (Subject 1)

She admitted that her college knowledge of action research which she had from her graduate school had enlightened and motivated her to obtain the benefits of action research. When the current study was conducted, she was planning to conduct another action research for the coming academic year. Her passion for research kept her engagement with action research. For her, action research was an effective inquiry to help her solve any problems in the classroom.

The same passion for engaging with action research happened to Subject 2. She was one of the teachers carrying on doing action research until this current research was conducted. Unlike Subject 1 who knew action research from a master's program, Subject 2 did not find that her graduate school had provided her with comprehensive knowledge of action research. Her knowledge about action research is a process of self-deducting learning. However, it did not hamper her to do research. She has done her research several times, made reports of them in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, and successfully made publications from the research. She saw action research as the most suitable research she could do to help her and her students. She said that she would be satisfied if her teaching strategy or media could help her students achieve learning outcomes better. Moreover, doing TAR made her focus more on evolving her stance as a teacher. She found action research as a vehicle to make her more confident to be a teacher and to be heard by others as well as a way to help her students' success:

- (3) I did not choose to be a teacher myself, but along the way, when I could present my work (a product of action research) that was the time I fell in love with teaching. Now what I want to do is helping students and, of course, enhance the quality of my teaching. (Subject 2)

#### *4.1.2 Institutional supports*

To grow professionally, supports are meaningful to the teachers. The supports from the school community such as the principal and colleagues are a topic that mostly emerged during the interview. All the teachers appreciated the support from their

principals since without the support it is impossible for them to conduct their action research.

- (4) I have a principal supporting my professional growth by giving me permission to do my action research. I believe he understands that I do it for the school, too. (Subject 1)
- (5) *Alhamdulillah* [praise to Allah, the one God] my principal is a supportive leader; I thought support from him is crucial. (Subject 2)
- (6) Since I am a junior teacher, it brings me troublesome conducting TAR without supports from my principal, since I sometimes have other duties besides my own teaching duty. (Subject 3)
- (7) My institution gives full support for my action research by providing a collaborative teacher. The principal has the authority to assign my colleague to be my collaborator, though it is a kind of powerful force. (Subject 4)

Though some teachers did not find supportive colleagues, some teachers made the most supportive ones. The local teacher community also provided supports for them, to share discussions on their experiences conducting action research.

#### 4.1.3 *Learning community and collaboration*

Besides the school, colleagues are also crucial support. The local teacher community also provided supports for them and share issues in the classroom, experience of conducting research, and ways to develop their professionalism. All participants found that supportive colleagues helped them to be more engaged with TAR.

- (8) We have MGMP as our community. Some colleagues are interested in doing TAR, while, some others are not. They might influence our motivation too, sometimes. When we have colleagues who are enthusiastic about doing the same thing with us, we feel that we are not alone and we are motivated by their enthusiasm. (Subject 4)
- (9) We usually share action research with our colleagues at our schools. We just talk about the results of our TAR and what we had done in our class and discuss what is good to be done for our class. (Subject 1)

However, Subjects 2 and 3 did not find teacher community as the best place to have mutual and productive collegial. It was their friendship and network with the local university playing important roles as a partner to share ideas as well as a mutual collaborator. Therefore, they did not limit partners from the same school but colleagues from other schools even from a university level. Subject 2 had to make the most of her professional network.

- (10) I think, it would be great if we have friends doing the same thing with us and with the same level of motivation. Unfortunately, that is not where I am...thus I am feeling that my motivation is up and down. Lucky me, I have some friends (academics from university) ...who fuel my motivation. I also seek some workshops, seminars, and conferences to refresh my teaching and doing the action research better. (Subject 2)

## **4.2 Perceived Sustainable Impacts of Self-Initiated TAR on Pedagogical Competence**

### *4.2.1 Awareness of the students' characteristics*

All participants believed that teacher action research (TAR) improved their awareness about students' characteristics and encouraged them to pay more attention not only to what and how, but also why. They also noted that their awareness was not limited to a classroom context. Knowing their students' problems inside and outside the classroom enabled them to keep motivating their students to learn and improving their approach to teaching. They became more caring about their students, made them more focused, and enabled them to identify their students' characteristics and needs.

Subject 1 stated explicitly that TAR helped her identify the students' potentials. Knowing the students' characteristics, she could encourage her students to develop their potentials.

- (11) After conducting action research, I care more about my students. If there is a student having some potentials, I will train and give him/her any support I can give, such as giving more training and extra classes, even a ride to the competition place. (Subject 1)

She understood that her students needed someone to help them uncover and develop their potentials. Similarly, Subject 2 put intentional attention on her students. She admitted that by doing TAR, she could be more focused, and thus, it enabled her to identify her classroom issues. She became more structured and scientific in observing her students' behaviours, needs, and ability to understand materials easily.

- (12) Now before and after the class, I observe what my students need, so I could help them achieve their learning goals. (Subject 2)

Subject 4 had a different point of view about the students' characteristics. She believed that knowing students' characteristics was an innate ability the teachers owned due to their frequent meetings with their students. Nevertheless, she noted that knowing the students' characteristics through everyday teaching and TAR was not the same.

However, Subject 3 noted that before conducting action research, she already had been aware of her students' low achievement in English in general. In fact, she confessed that she understood her students more after TAR.

### *4.2.2 Enhancement of knowledge of effective learning*

Doing action research had made the teachers more careful about what was going on in their classroom. Knowledge and ability to implement various teaching strategies were sustained impacts all participants experienced as a result of conducting TAR.

- (13) I know more about teaching writing and the process of student writing, and I implemented an enjoyable writing classroom atmosphere by using a back-draw writing strategy. (Subject 3).

Engaging with TAR, they found valuable opportunities to make the experiment, adopt, adapt, and develop teaching strategies. This enhanced their pedagogical competence notably about learning approaches appropriate for their students.

Conducting TAR, they became more innovative and eager to find fun and effective ways to deliver their teaching and help their student learn.

- (14) I remember that when I did action research, I taught Grade XII and I found a problem. At that time the students had to write an explanatory text expressing a process of something namely the metamorphosis of a frog. The students looked confused and could not write as I expected. Translating word by word is not a good way for them to practice writing, I thought. Thus, I used a series of pictures to help them organize their ideas, find the right vocabulary, and arrange their sentences. And, they could write better and looked happy and enthusiastic...and I was happy, too. (Subject 4)

Teachers in the present study noted that they were challenged to find ways to provide conducive classrooms to help their students experience meaningful and joyful learning. Conducting action research has altered new teaching strategies since opportunities to experiment with adopting or adapting various teaching strategies were widely opened. The teachers' experiences indicated that action research had impacted the ways they taught English.

Before Subject 1 knew about action research, she never had such care about how to deliver a lesson.

- (15) Before I know action research, I do nothing meaningful prior to my teaching as teaching material is already prescribed in the curriculum. I only gave conventional instruction for the completion of target materials, and with no particular teaching method. (Subject 4)

In her first action research, she who never cared about her teaching became aware that her students' lack of interest was due to dreary and repetitive reading texts she gave. She found that the texts were far from the students' local context, i.e., an Islamic school. She, then, implemented contextual teaching and learning to enhance her students' motivation and reading skills.

The teachers also revealed that action research encouraged them to learn and review theories of language teaching and learning. As a result, they had better capabilities to identify and solve their classroom problems. Subject 2 mentioned that she was motivated to learn more about the process of learning writing when she found that her students failed to write a 100 words-paragraph. It was when she noticed that her students' descriptive paragraphs were not satisfactory. She, then, asked her students about their writing, and they mentioned that they had difficulties expressing their ideas in English. Reflecting on her students' writing work, she found that they were lack of vocabulary and unity. She, then, read more and found an article about web-based writing, and she adopted it in her lesson. When she observed the implementation of the strategy, she found that the writing activity could help her students enlarge vocabulary and improve her students' writing descriptive text. She admitted that engaging with action research had motivated her to read since it helped her obtain new knowledge and became more confident in teaching.

#### *4.2.3 Ability to carry out reflective teaching*

Data from the interview shows the teachers' reflective behaviour as a sustainable impact of doing TAR. Frequently conducting research has trained them to repeatedly practice doing reflection on their practice. Compared to other professional

development, the teachers mentioned that it was only action research helping them reflect their practices critically.

Subject 2 did her reflection in a more scientific way since she had well-organized records of her students' works on her laptop. She often did a reflection on the action during her teaching. Her reflection was based on the available data of her students' learning achievement she had saved. She mentioned that she also had a questionnaire to observe her students' learning motivation.

All the EFL teachers noted that their engagement in action research had made them more reflective and critical about their teaching. This, in turn, had led them to an alteration in their teaching as well as their understanding of language learning and students. All of the teachers stated, as a result of conducting the project, they had grown as teachers who were more reflective and confident about EFL teaching and learning.

As previous studies noted, being reflective in teaching is an outstanding characteristic of action research, since in action research researchers begin TAR by questioning current practices and their future acts for the improvement of the practice. In addition, teachers become more aware of their own teaching practices by reflecting and improving their approach and themselves.

### **4.3 Perceived Sustainable Impacts of Self-Initiated TAR on Professional Competence**

#### *4.3.1 Confidence*

Experiencing TAR as continuous professional development, all teachers consistently reported that the opportunity to share knowledge was one privileged impact they felt sustainable. The teachers found that doing TAR not only helped their students achieve English better and made their classroom more joyful, but they could also share something beneficial to their colleagues. Moreover, they began to realize that they can do more than teaching in their own classroom. All the teachers in the present study felt proud because they could share their experiences in improving their university) ... classroom practices. They admitted that experiencing a positive result when conducting TAR brought new insights and this somehow boosted their confidence. For them, TAR provided them with the opportunity to confidently share and mutually interact with not only colleagues but also the audience in a wider scope. Subject 2 clarified that without doing TAR by herself it was impossible for her to talk about an effective strategy of teaching reading in her vocational school in front of hundreds of international audiences.

- (16) I could present it in a TEFLIN (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) International Conference because I had done it myself. This (collaborative reading) is a more appropriate way (to cope with lengthy and various texts). (Subject 2)

Subject 1 and Subject 4 also highlighted that they would not have had the courage to make a presentation and participate in a national competition without experiencing the research in her classroom by themselves. Furthermore, subject 1 noted that she would have just kept silent and made no contribution to students and her own development if she had never experienced any TAR.

- (17) At least I had done it by myself. I mean I did not ask others to do it for me. This has made me have the courage and confidence to share what I had done, and thus I could explain it in detail to the audience, though it was just like giving information, a kind of presentation, but without any PowerPoint slides. (Subject 1)
- (18) Since I had done several TARs, I was encouraged to enrol my name in a national teacher competition, i.e., *Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan Berprestasi dan Berdedikasi* (Dedicated and Best Performing Teachers and Teaching Staffs Award), a national contest held by the Indonesian Government to acknowledge teachers' achievements. (Subject 4)

Conducting TAR gave not only self-confidence to all subjects or participants, but also equipped them with evidence-based knowledge. Such knowledge empowered their identity and stance of their profession as EFL teachers. The teachers admitted that they frequently had discussions and shared their experiences to help their colleagues conduct TAR. Sharing knowledge at the teacher forum (MGMP) was also done confidently by subjects 2, 4, and 5. The EFL teachers admitted that they could talk before their colleagues and share what they had done in their classroom and how the strategy they applied succeeded in overcoming students' learning problems. Feeling confident, enthusiastic, and satisfied consistently occurred when the teachers were asked about their feelings related to their TAR.

#### 4.3.2 Publication

Being able to demonstrate professional judgement or scientific experience, such as doing research, is one indicator of the professionalism of a profession. Perceived impacts related to this professionalism emerged in current research as teachers made themselves public. All the subjects in the current research have had experiences of making public dissemination both in small and wider scope: spoken and written.

In regard to this, Subject 1 has made her action research public. In 2015, she wrote two articles in the English Education and Linguistics journal of a local higher institution. The following year, she wrote another article for the same journal. Publication in the form of proceeding came in the following year. In 2018, she wrote another article published in a government higher institution. In total, she has made four publications based on her TAR.

Subject 2's publications were in a form of oral presentations. Her first presentation was in 2015 in *Simposium Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan* (Teacher and Teaching Staff National Symposium) held by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Her next publication was an academic presentation and proceeding of the 63<sup>rd</sup> TEFLIN (The Association of Teachers of English as Foreign Language in Indonesia) International Conference 2016. The latest is an oral presentation and proceedings in the 3<sup>rd</sup> English Teaching Conference 2017 held by the English Department of UNESA (Universitas Negeri Surabaya).

Subject 3 has made herself public by presenting her action research in a scholarly forum and writing articles for an anthology book. Her academic presentation was in three national teacher conferences held by Universitas Negeri Malang in 2010, 2012, and 2013. In fact, she was selected as a contributor writer in three books published by the same university.

Professional teachers require not only competence to teach but also the ability to demonstrate professional knowledge by making publications. EFL teachers in the current study are teachers who actively make scholarly publications, orally and in

written forms. They admitted when they found their scientific action successful, they felt urgent to share their experiences. They perceived that sharing, either in their local community as MGMP or a bigger one, allowed them to play a role beyond their classroom. Besides, the publication motivated them to be more skilful in doing TAR.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Factors Affecting Self-directed TAR**

Works of literature have documented that the teachers have conducted action research for several rationales. Some do the research as a part of their prescribed in-service training, while some others do it due to fulfilment of career promotion (Wulandari et al., 2019). However, the present study revealed that the EFL teachers continued conducting TAR since they believed that they could do something for the success of their students. They believed that they could have the power to produce betterment so that more beneficial things would happen; such belief is referred to as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is considered one of the most contributing factors to individual behaviour. The efforts done by the EFL teachers are directed by their success in doing their initial TAR. They perceived that TAR was the closest professional development tool to their daily profession-life that helped them make betterment for their students. This is in line with Desimone et al. (2002) reporting that efforts of TPD have a positive effect on teacher efficacy.

Moreover, Malmberg et al. (2010) have revealed a relationship between teacher efficacy and student learning achievement. The present study, similarly, found that conducting TAR as TPD experienced by the teachers had given them the belief that they could make the best for their teaching practices. In the present study, conducting action research was context-bound since the surrounding environment should be conducive so that the teachers felt supported. Meaningful supports from colleagues and the community are highly expected (Borg, 2010; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Thamrin, 2011).

### **5.2 Sustainable Impacts on Pedagogical Competence**

This study revealed that the EFL teachers with experiences of self-directed TAR perceived their teaching practices or pedagogical approaches changed as sustainable impacts of conducting TAR. The teachers, now, had the knowledge and skills of more varied techniques in teaching. They changed their teaching from routine techniques of teacher-centred to more fun and enjoyable activities. They learned strategies to cope with the students' problems and became more confident about teaching because they could solve the students' problems through TAR.

Impacts as such are commonly reported as the benefits of conducting action research by practitioners in a variety of contexts, both in a number of western settings and in Asia, including in Indonesian contexts. In Indonesian contexts, these similar results were reported in the study of Burns and Rochsantiningsih (2006). Such study shows that being involved in action research impacts teachers' teaching practice by providing new ideas and strategies in teaching, being able to solve students' problems, and feeling motivated to teach. Other studies in Asian contexts reveal that after

engaging with action research, the teachers' teaching strategies and skills are developed so that the teachers teach their students with more variety of classroom activities (Curtin, 2016). In terms of the benefits of teaching techniques, Borg et al. (2018) note that by possessing rich teaching techniques, teachers will be able to get rid of their frustration with students' problems in the classroom. Similarly, Morales et al. (2016) say that doing research helps the teachers improve their teaching practice as well as student learning. Likewise, this finding supports several studies (Borg, 2010; Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Halim et al., 2010; O'Connor & Anderson, 2006; Thamrin, 2011) that teachers became more aware of their teaching practices after engaging with TAR.

This present study also found that self-directed TAR enhanced the teachers' awareness of the importance of growing professionally. This finding is congruent with Sowa's (2009) study that revealed that the teachers became conscious of their teaching repertoire which in turn changed their teaching style to meet their students' needs. In addition to being aware of themselves, the teachers also noted that they became more aware of their students' problems both inside and outside of the classroom as a consequence of engaging with TAR. This finding is consistent with Dick's (2019) who asserts that the main purpose of teachers doing research is to improve practice which in turn diminishes their students' learning problems and enhances their learning achievement. In particular, it also supports previous studies (Atay, 2008; Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Halim et al., 2010; Thamrin, 2011) revealing that the teachers' awareness of students' needs became better after doing collaborative action research. The present study has evident that teachers who experienced TAR as their self-directed TPD tended to engage with the students over time and as a result, their awareness of students' needs in the classroom increased.

The present study showed that the EFL teachers had grown their self-awareness. The way the teachers made an assessment of their teaching and cared about their students' motivation and learning success demonstrated that they were implementing reflective teaching. Gore and Zeichner (1991), Leitch and Day (2000), Hilton and Hilton (2017), and Gutierrez (2019) note that teachers can be addressed as being reflective if they examine, frame, and attempt to solve problems in their classroom. Being reflective through action research leads teachers to grow professionally. Numerous studies of teachers demonstrating higher self-awareness after engaging with action research have been highlighted by many researchers (Atay, 2008; Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; Chou, 2010; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Sowa, 2009; Thamrin, 2011; Wang & Zhang, 2014). However, adding the current insight, the present study revealed that reflective practice as such will only occur sustainably if the teachers continuously do self-directed TAR.

### 5.3 Sustainable Impacts on Professional Competence

In the present study, TAR is perceived as a continuous endeavour and a venue of teacher learning to improve for their students and their classroom practices. The findings support the previous works of literature noting that action research is a professional learning tool (Bae et al., 2016) and a path of teacher learning and growing (Watkins, 2006). In terms of learning, TAR has facilitated the teachers' professional growth through learning from their teaching practice and systematically observing their teaching practice as mentioned by Edwards and Burns (2016), and Johnson



(2016). As perceived by the teachers, choosing TAR as their TPD improved their skills in investigating and analysing classroom issues, which were also found by Atay (2008), Edwards and Burns (2016), and Kijkuakul (2019).

Confidence in sharing was one of the sustainable impacts the EFL teachers believed in the present study. They perceived that their self-directed TAR equipped them with adequate evidence-based knowledge that surprisingly benefitted others. The teachers clarified that without action research it was impossible for them to talk about new ways of teaching. The present study confirms that action research enables EFL teachers to have more authority on teaching practices (Burns & Rochsantiningih, 2006; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2014). Furthermore, the present study has evidenced that by doing self-directed TAR, the teachers obtained more self-confidence. They realized that through the research their professional development was acknowledged.

Doing TAR provoked the EFL teachers to disseminate their classroom practices. The practical knowledge obtained through the scientific process enabled the EFL teachers to share advantageous knowledge and mutually interact with others. This empowers and redefines the traditional roles of teachers and confirms the current theory of teacher learning (Crandall, 2000). The EFL teachers have made themselves public both in local and even wider communities. This ability of making dissemination as the sustainable impact of TAR confirms the National Act No.14/2005 (Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia, 2005) and previous studies of sustainable impacts of action research (Edwards & Burns, 2016). Based on the empirical pieces of evidence in the present study, TAR in Indonesian contexts contributes to cultivate EFL teachers' competencies to deliver scientific presentations and publish papers.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The sustainability of TAR as a means for TPD is context-bound which requires a supportive and conducive environment. As mentioned by the works of literature, an effective TPD is the one closest to teachers' daily routines and can directly solve their classroom issues. The sustainability of TAR as perceived by the EFL teachers experiencing the research occurs due to their inner motivation and self-efficacy belief, institutional supports, and collaboration with academics/university.

Pedagogically, the EFL teachers increased their awareness of students' characteristics. They became more considerate of the success of their students' learning. Other sustainable impacts perceived by the teachers were improvement of knowledge of effective learning and ability to carry out reflective teaching by investigating their practices more critically, particularly with respect to the strategies they employed in maximizing students' potentials. It was the stage of reflecting in action research that made the EFL teachers more reflective about their daily practices.

In terms of professional competence, they felt more confident in teaching practices and publishing their papers. Their professionalism was displayed by confidently showcasing to others what they believed as an effective way of teaching. This study suggests that TAR is a model of teacher professional development that can develop teacher professionalism with classrooms and students as the contexts of learning. Besides, the EFL teachers can establish a better practice and develop

themselves as professionals and individuals on daily basis, without leaving their students.

The present study, however, may have some limitations, such as the number of the subjects and the use of the sole instruments. Thus, further researchers are recommended to invite more subjects and utilize other tools of data collection. Probably, other variables namely lengths of teaching experiences and different demographics can be used to broaden more thorough studies.

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