# LANGUAGE TEACHER AGENCY IN FACING FREEDOM-TO-LEARN CURRICULUM IN TWO TOWNS IN JAVA

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**Abstract**
Teacher agency in facing new national curriculum shifts has been a topic discussed widely around the world, as many nations implement curriculum shifts and transitions. Indonesia has also in its early years implemented the new national curriculum called Freedom-to-Learn Curriculum. This study is aimed at exploring the agency of language teachers of public junior high schools in two different towns in Java Island, Indonesia. Employing the ecological approach by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) which supported the interplay and dynamics of iterative, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions, this qualitative study brings into play the semi-structured and focus group discussion data-gathering techniques. Six teachers participated in this study. The finding showed that the level of agency was diverse ranging from high (demonstrated by three research participants), emerging (demonstrated by one participant), and low (participated by two participants). Future researchers might examine the teacher agency by involving more participants as well as capture the robust study of language teacher agencies from other parts of Indonesia.

**Introduction**

Teacher agency has been believed as an influential factor in determining teachers' success in adapting to new circumstances, embracing challenges, and accomplishing expected targets (Keiler, 2018). Teacher agency is derived from the social constructivism theory that teachers are active actors in making decisions in their classrooms due to simultaneous practices and social interaction with a teacher's environment (Aljohani, 2017). As mentioned by Bruner in Matsumoto (2017), teachers as learners are able to process creatively, inputting the knowledge they already know as a source of solving a problem while adapting to the culture they live in as their own culture (Matsumoto, 2017). Teachers play a very important role in constructing their knowledge and facilitating students in making connections between prior and new knowledge. Furthermore, teacher agency can also be strongly described when the context is facing new curriculum policy, whether they

are able to take actions toward the expected result (Jenkins, 2019).

In the context of the national curriculum system in Indonesia, teachers in formal schools are currently welcoming and implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom-to-Learn Curriculum; hereinafter FLTC). FTLC was initially designed as a response to the pandemic outbreak during 2019-2020. It has been prepared before by the current Ministry of Culture and Education (MoEC) to shift the old curriculum scientific approach-based also known as the 2013 Curriculum to the FTLC as an attempt to respond to today's challenges. Taguma (2018) remarks that the education world today faces what is called VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). The main objective of the FTLC is to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st century and to be able to adapt to the rapidly changing global landscape.

The FTLC emphasizes the development of skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (4Cs), which are essential for success in the modern world (Meleisea, 2007). In addition, there are differentiating features in this new curriculum compared to the existing 2013 curriculum, namely: essential materials emphasis, teacher and educator autonomy, and project-based learning (Lie, 2022). One of the key features of the FTLC is the flexibility it offers to both students and teachers. Students are given the freedom to choose their learning paths and are encouraged to pursue their interests through a range of different learning experiences, such as project-based learning, community service, and internships (The Jakarta Post, Inforial, 2021). Teachers are also given more autonomy in designing their lessons and assessments and are encouraged to use innovative teaching methods to engage and motivate their students (Varatharaj, 2018).

Su (2012) elaborates that there are at least five scopes of what is meant by curriculum. It ranges from the simple one that curriculum is an objective (Beauchamp, 1977 in Su, 2012); a set of contents and objectives to achieve (Wood and Davis, 1978, in Su, 2012), to a set of plans of instructions, which also can be inferred objective, contents, and plans (Tom, 1984 in Su, 2012). Broader views on curriculum offer at least two perspectives. First, the curriculum is a complete document that consists of objectives, plans, contents, and assessments (Barrow and Milburn, 1990 in Su, 2012). Second, a curriculum is a more complete package of how an educational system runs: it has objectives, plans, contents, assessments, experiences, and effectiveness which lead to appropriate revision along the way when the curriculum is implemented (Tyler, 1983 in Su, 2012). Another complementary view by Marsh (1997, in Sue, 2012) gives a notation on extracurricular and environmental engagement and hidden curriculum, and also the culture of where the school or institution is located.

The curriculum of a school, a district, a province, and even a nation needs to be transformed or come to huge refinement because of some fundamental reasons. On top of the other considerations, the curriculum must accommodate students with skills needed by the labor market and skills to create a new job market within today's context (Yazdi, 2013). Thus, critical-creative thinking and problem-solving skills are highly valued. An outdated one should be reformed dramatically both in content and instructional delivery. The next reason is humanity's reason is crucial in understanding students' vocation and the rise of students' led investigation and inquiry of knowledge (Donnely & Ryder, 2011). In addition, the national curriculum should also serve all people with many different backgrounds and

geographical challenges. In many countries, it is admitted that centralized curricula often fail in answering the case of multiculturalism, leaving alone the aspects of diverse ethnicity, geographical and natural settings, as well as religion and cultural backgrounds; hence, a national curriculum must be an enabler for the smallest units of education and schools to develop their tailored curriculum (King & Reiss, 2020).

Inclusion-pro curriculum enlarges possibilities for students to reach their best potential. With respect to local wisdom and customs where schools or institutions are located, a new curriculum must cover acknowledgment and sustainable respect since the culture provides a great sense of identity. However, this has to be taken carefully otherwise this leads to narrow-minded pride and disadvantaged localism (Chou, 2024). The rapid change of our current world also demands teachers and educators to equip themselves with many tools, approaches, and perspectives toward teaching and learning processes. Thus, this comes to another essential consideration of curriculum reform, which is to provide quality education and teacher professional training (Brodie, 2019).

Studies on teacher agencies have started to emerge in the last two decades. The theory of agency has been conceptualized in the area of sociology and psychology. Agency refers to conscious actions taken by actors in contrast to determinism in structural theory approaches. Much earlier, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) as cited in Biesta and Tedder (2007) remark that agency is defined as *"the capacity of actors to critically shape their responsiveness to problematic situations"*. In a literature review on the role of agency in psychology and educational theory as well as the study of the life-narratives and autobiographies, Biesta and Tedder (2007) elaborate on the interplay between past experiences, future orientation, and the current practices, to face challenges have helped one to achieve her agency. Agency is understood as something to achieve instead of a capability one is equipped with. The agency is also achieved with active engagement in a temporary context and within a societal interaction. A case sociocultural study on Secondary School Reform in Canada conducted by Lasky (2005) shows that the mediational system of early teacher identity formation has a stronger effect on helping teachers build their agency rather than the mediational system of the current context of reform. The study which has four representatives of teachers with strong professional identity encompasses their vocation to build teacher-students collegiate company compared to the reform which tends to be more managerial. An empirical study in Scotland involving teachers for curriculum making by Priestley et al. (2012) has underlined that in responding to curriculum change due to the incorporation of technology in education and social changes, they tend to demonstrate agency depending on the contexts. There are three influential factors toward agency, namely: beliefs, values, and attributes to teachers facing the curriculum change.

During the last eight years, several other studies on teacher agencies have been carried out. In a Vietnamese study in 2016, it was reported that teachers demonstrate high agency toward a new English language policy. The teachers are willing to take significant transformational actions to support the national new policy on English language learning (Nguyen & Bui, 2016). Two studies in the Australian context which both are related to assessment examine teachers' agency. The first study conducted in 2019 shows that secondary school teachers' capacity to exercise agency is supported by their "perceived flexibility" of resources and

provision of the social environment (Willis, McGraw, & Graham, 2019). The second study reports that the assessment system contributes as both a support and a hindrance for primary teachers to exercise agency (Poulton, 2020). A narrative inquiry study in Iran has been done to examine the EFL teachers' agency in facing Iranian curriculum change. Using the ecological approach proposed by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) as cited in Rezaee and Seyri (2021), the research mentions that EFL teachers with more than 10 years of experience exercise their agency by observing and relying on their past experiences as teacher students, envisaging the future, and making the best of what they comprehend of the newly implemented curriculum. In the same year, a case study in Mexico conducted by Davila (2021) showed that the hindrance of teacher agency in implementing a top-down policy competency-based language teaching in a BA program is because of external educational pressure and difficulties faced by universities to adapt and follow the new rule. A study in China shows that the teachers there have positive attitudes toward curriculum change, however in practice, they experience limitations of agency (Wang, 2022). A quantitative study in Finland has shown that within the professional community, the teacher agency is achieved and that the cluster varies: high, medium, and low. Those with high agency tend to gain more positive impacts on the national curriculum reform (Laivuori, 2022), while a qualitative study done in Ireland has a result that teacher agency is complex. The teacher agency is described as a need for autonomy to implement student-led pedagogy, as well as the doubt regarding other colleagues' aspiration for having agency. This also goes around the lack of trust toward school administrators to provide endorsement of agentic practice and instructors' role as decision-makers instead of school plan executors (Nally, 2024).

Among several aspects renowned in the FTLC, the implementation of project-based learning integrated into the curriculum gained huge attention. The program is called the Enforcement Project of Pancasila Student Profile *(Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, or P5 hereinafter). Pancasila is an Indonesian philosophy that plays a role as the national five major values, i.e. freedom and tolerance of faiths, human rights-equality-dignity, national unity and patriotism, democracy, and social justice. This signature program is a project-based co-curricular activity for students in early childhood, primary, and secondary levels. This is designed to enforce students' achievement and Pancasila-minded qualities and is based on the graduate competence standard. The practices are school-tailored and flexible in terms of contents, societal potentials to introduce, social problems to solve, activity plans, and execution time (Yanzi et al., 2022).

In western parts of the Indonesian context, especially in Sumatra and Java Islands, prior research on curriculum reform conducted by Indonesian researchers mostly elaborated on the curriculum implementation, rather than on the teachers and teacher agency as the executive party. Apart from them, several topics have been the central of the studies, such as (a) English teacher readiness in implementing the Freedom-to-Learn Curriculum, in the city of Padang (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023), (b) teachers' and students' perspectives on the school readiness in implementing the FTLC, in the city of Pekanbaru (Bastian, Firdaus, & Rizky, 2023), (c) teachers' voices and internal struggle on the discourse of FTLC, in the city of Yogyakarta (Ulfah & Adityas, 2023), and (d) elementary teachers' beliefs and practices pertaining to the new curriculum reform, in the city of Surabaya

(Mustofa, Lin, & Chen, 2023). Meanwhile, studies on teacher agency have been conducted in various areas other than specifically facing the new curriculum transition to the FTLC, such as (a) the impacts of school culture on teachers' transformed agencies (Sutono & Budiraharjo, 2020), (b) how systematic reflection in pre-service teacher training is conducted as a frame to investigate teachers' agencies (Cendra & Budiraharjo, 2021), (c) English teacher agency in different teaching communities from rural to urban setting (Agustin & Lengkanawati, 2023), (d) teacher agency in the implementation of differentiated learning (Nindya et al., 2023), and (e) EFL teachers' agency and self-efficacy in their professional practices (Utami & Kuswandono, 2023). Among those studies, the specific area of language teacher agency facing the FTLC shift has not been reported.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to present the dynamics of the agency of language teachers in the western part of Indonesia in facing the new curriculum transition. This paper is going to examine the dynamics of language teacher agency qualitatively in the context of teaching in Java Island, Indonesia. Six language teachers in two regencies in Java Island in Indonesia, namely Gunungkidul and Kendal, were examined to later describe of their agentic roles in embracing the FTLC transition. The two schools were in Java Island, the western part of Indonesia. The two schools were chosen to strengthen the representation of the geographical and cultural context. The general assumption was that the area of Java was near the capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta, as well as better learning facilities and access to various resources, ideas, and (Satterthwaite & Tacoli, 2003). The two schools were similar in location, which were close to the capital city of each of its provinces. Kendal is around 30 kilometers west of Semarang City, the capital city of Central Java Province. Gunungkidul is around 33 kilometers southeast of Yogyakarta City, the capital city of Yogyakarta Province. Therefore, in the early years of the new curriculum implementation, it is significant to explore how the language teachers in schools in the surrounding capital cities in Java Island responded to the FTLC transition and how the language teachers exercised their agency.

It is essential to capture the agency role performed by language teachers in response to curriculum reform since it shows how they maintain their identity during their professional career as teachers in facing multiple challenges, and curriculum reform for instance. Given that background, this paper aims to describe how teachers of public junior high schools in Gunungkidul and Kendal show their agency. To describe, two approaches are used to have a more comprehensive portrait of how teachers show agency and the influencing factors. The comparison and contrast are not yet elaborated in this study, however, the future researcher may elaborate and find out the reasons why some factors are more influential than others. The language teachers' agency at the senior high school level can also be further studied to explore, as well as language teachers in the middle and eastern parts of Indonesia. This paper intends to provide answers to one formulated research question: How do language teachers in Java Island demonstrate their agency in facing the Freedom-to-Learn Curriculum (FTLC) shift?

In examining how the language teacher agency is achieved in this study, the ecological approach proposed by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson was employed (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). In this model, there are three areas to focus on, namely iteration dimension, projective dimension, and practical-evaluative dimension. The first dimension refers to the accumulated experiences that shape the

patterns of thoughts, considerations, and decision-making from a teacher's past experiences. These patterns assist in how teachers predict, judge, and respond to their current teaching and learning situation. The projective dimension is a teacher's plans and wishes for their future encounters. This dimension involves setting goals, developing strategies from the evaluation results, predicting the potential problems, and preparing the possible solutions to the potential problems. The practical-evaluative dimension is defined as the overall actions conducted by a teacher in the current time framework. This focuses on the ongoing implementation and evaluation of teachers' judges, strategies employed, and actions taken to adapt to their practice accordingly.
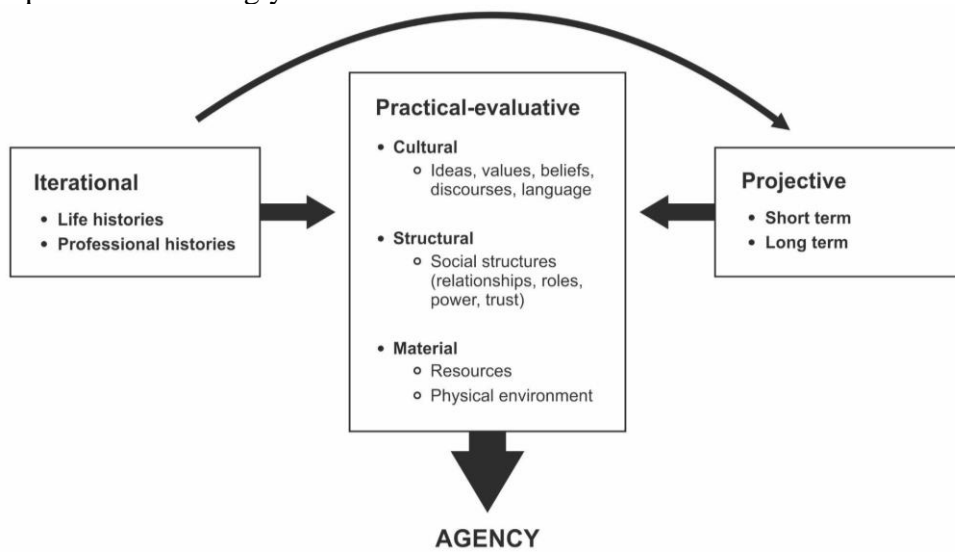


Figure 1. Diagram of the ecological approach of teacher agency adopted from Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015)

The three elements intertwine and construct the way teachers dynamically exercise their agency as the sustainable education sphere can be achieved by supporting teacher agency from individual, cultural environmental, and structural levels (Leijen, Pedaste & Lepp, 2022). A different view from Bandura's human agency as an individual capacity, the ecological system provides an obvious framework to comprehend how dynamic and contextual it is for a teacher to achieve agency in his profession, including in facing the national curriculum transition (Priestley et al. in Evers & Kneyber, 2015).

**Method**

In exploring and revealing language teacher agency, a qualitative study was employed. The qualitative study is meant to emphasize the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of an individual or a group of people as the subject of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Wallen and Tormey (2019) in their qualitative study find out how a specific method such as dialogic inquiry is used to influence the viewpoint on teacher agency. Another study remarks that a qualitative holistic method is employed to reveal how senior teachers exercise their agency to show an embracing or refusing attitude toward transformative innovation in their teaching environment. A qualitative study prioritizes an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and relies much on the data collection process. In this study, the data

collection techniques were 20-minute semi-structured interviews for each teacher and 90-minute focus group discussion. The general interview prompts were adapted by the three dimensions of the ecological approach, namely iteration which consists of life histories and professional histories, practical-evaluative which consists of cultural aspects, social structure and resources & physical environment, and projective which consists of short-term plans and long-term plans.

The subjects involved six language teachers, English, and Indonesian languages. Two English teachers and one Indonesian teacher were from a public junior high school in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta, and one English teacher and two Indonesian teachers were from a state junior high school in Kendal, Central Java. The interview was done personally to get an in-depth understanding of each teacher's experiences and meanings of their past experiences as a teaching and education student, the current practice as a teacher, and how the school environment supports them, as well as the plan. The interview prompt questions covered both teachers' perspectives on teaching experience in general and on facing FTLC transition in their school context. The follow-up stage was a focus group discussion among teachers in the same school. The results of the interview were recorded and transcribed, while the data from the focus group discussion was documented. Both would be explained in the narrative to reveal the research participants' genuine perspectives and voices to strengthen the analysis of the research.

**Findings and Discussion**

This research is aimed at answering the formulated research question "How do language teachers in Java Island demonstrate their teacher agency in facing the Freedom-to-Learn Curriculum (FTLC) transition?" Teachers' agencies would be presented in narrative forms based on their personal accounts and reflections. The categories were based on Priestley's ecological approach which consisted of three time-framed elements namely iterative, practical-evaluative, and projective (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). The interplay of the three time-framed dimensions could be inferred from their narrative stories as well as their reflections on their experiences.

In conducting the study, six teachers were involved. They were teachers of the Indonesian language and English language in public junior high schools in two different towns in Java. The table below shows briefly their profile.

Table 1. The participants' profile

| No | Teacher Label | Subject | Gender | Years of Teaching (accumulation) | Town & province of school |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | K1 | Indonesian | Female | 7 | Kendal, Central Java |
| 2 | K2 | Indonesian | Male | 11 | Kendal, Central Java |
| 3 | K3 | English | Male | 35 | Kendal, Central Java |
| 4 | G1 | Indonesian | Female | 29 | Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta |
| 5 | G2 | English | Male | 35 | Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta |
| 6 | G3 | English | Female | 2 | Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta |

The research found that the six teachers as the research subjects demonstrated various teacher agency levels, ranging from high, emerging, to low. The dominant result was the highly demonstrated agency, which was found in three teachers with

various lengths of teaching experiences, labeled as K1, K2, and K3; a medium level of agency was found in two teachers labeled as G1 (senior teacher) and G3 (novice teacher); and the low agency was found in one senior teacher labeled as G2 with 35 years of teaching experience.

### *Discussion*

The dynamic intersection of the three dimensions influenced the current teachers' agency. Teachers' growth was always socially mediated. The past robust experiences might not be able to help teachers achieve agency when the societal and cultural environment did not encourage the process. Several notable aspects played an equal role in predicting a teacher's agency towards specific circumstances. The table below shows the summary of key salient aspects of each teacher as the research participants which influenced the labeling of their level of agency in embracing the new FTLC. The data is presented in an order of the agency level from the high agency level to the low ones.

Table 2. The participants' key salient points

| Tea-cher | iteration | Key Salient Points practical-evaluative | projective | Agency level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| K1 | B.Ed in Indonesian Language Education, private and public school experiences, limited access to undergraduate school (financially), perseverance, Strong Teaching Model in Collegehood | believing in limitless learning sources, appreciating small progress, grabbing learning opportunities, and sufficient school supports | completing The Exemplary Teachers program, building robust learning sources in a personal YouTube channel | high |
| K2 | B.Ed. in Indonesian Language Education, private and public school experiences, banking career background, redefining the encounter of the teaching profession | attending the teacher's personal touch, deploring the absence of a national exam, believing creativity as the fuel for learning, and sufficient school supports | pursuing a master's degree in Indonesian Applied Linguistics, making creative FTLC activities with technology involvement | high |
| K3 | gradual process in completing formal education in English Language Education (from DII to M.Ed.), private and public school experiences, going through five curriculum shifts | learning to be good role models, believing that curriculum is a response to the *zeitgeist*, applying baby steps in learning and sufficient school supports | sharing experiences and practices on pedagogy and English lessons for students and peer teachers | high |
| G3 | B.Ed. in English Language Education, | applying differentiated learning, | exploring differentiated | emerging |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | private and public school experiences, completing a master's degree | practicing personal initiatives, and limited school supports | learning, attending PPG Program | |
| G1 | B.Ed. in Indonesian Language Education, yet initially willing to attend a nursing school, public school experiences, complying with the governmental administration's demands | new learning activities to prevent learners' boredom, limited experiences with the substantial aspects of a new curriculum, and limited school supports | completing the administration demands of the FTLC | low |
| G2 | B.Ed. in English Language Education, public school experiences, complying with the regional government's policy for civil servant teachers' placement | believing that in any type of curriculum, teachers must teach with *'head, heart, and hand'* (no concrete elaboration), and limited school supports | separately engaged and having zero necessity to adjust with the FTLC, distracted with a familial role as a grandfather | low |

The following sections are the elaboration of each participating teacher's responses and reflections in the form of a narrative. The data presentation is conducted in sequential order from K1 to K2 and followed by G1 to G3.

### *K1*

Categorized into achieving a high level of teacher agency, K1 - a female teacher with a total of seven years of teaching experience, was not allowed to continue to her undergraduate degree due to her family's financial issues. However, she finally gained her degree from a private university in East Java Province majoring in Indonesian Language Education. The study program was the most affordable among others. She enjoyed almost entirely intra- and extracurricular activities, especially one when her community had to do independent fundraising for a mini play on her campus. She found out there were many things outside classrooms called learning sources. The play community encouraged her to build a strong sense to keep on being a lifelong learner. Another crucial note was that she could have left college due to financial constraints if her supervisor had let her go. The moment when her supervisor teacher talked deeply to her was the first time she realized how big the impact of a teacher could be. She went back to her hometown afterward. She has been teaching Indonesian to senior and junior high school students for around seven years in total. K1's past and professional experiences have given her strong reason to support her to exercise a strong sense of self-agency.

When it comes to facing curriculum shifts, three noteworthy points were summarized from what she shared in the current practical-evaluative dimension. They were: a) learning sources are available everywhere especially in this digital era, b) appreciating students' small progress, and c) grabbing opportunities of teacher development programs.

One feature of the FTLC was in line with what she believed, that the learning

sources could be found easily nowadays, both online and offline.

> *I believe that learning can be done everywhere and can be facilitated by various resources. Classroom teaching-learning practices in your formal school are just one example among many others. Furthermore, in this digital era, learning sources and modes are limitless.* (K1).

Many students in her current school were not always socially and cognitively-mentally ready to attend learning. Her current students' parents were mostly away from work, and the students lived with nearby relatives (aunties, uncles, or cousins), which left the students with less ideal conditions to grow. Thus, it was essential for her to notice every small step and progress the students made.

> *I am happy easily if they can answer my questions and can do well in tests. I showed them that I am happy. Hopefully, they will feel appreciated and they will be more enthusiastic to study.*

The third point, K1 saw opportunity as an integral aspect of successful learning. She was in the process of finishing her teacher professional development program *(Pendidikan Profesi Guru/ PPG)* and was in the early stage of her participation in The Teachers Exemplary program *(Program Guru Penggerak)* offered in the FTLC. The new feature of *Merdeka Mengajar* (Fredoom-to-Teach) from the government was another true example of an opportunity to learn together with teachers throughout the nation.

> *Grabbing opportunities and making the best of them were very encouraging for me. I know sometimes I get overwhelmed, however, I enjoy the fruit of these struggles. My students can benefit from these processes as well.*

In a social context, she remarked that the school where she worked currently showed a supportive community. Her school culture where she currently was, is described as *"very supportive"*, adding more value.

> *The senior teachers remind the juniors to join the online workshops and training from the teachers' professional network (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran/ MGMP). The headmaster showed care towards the new policy as well. I know where to go when I find confusion. I believe that the shifting in the national curriculum will always have a good intention to improve our quality of education.* (K1)

Deriving from that belief, in the future, she had already thought of a long-term project of building a personal YouTube channel as a learning resource.

> *All students, everywhere, can easily access the channel and learn from it. I want to provide real examples of sentences and Indonesian expressions in the digital content of drama or play. I like drama and want to do something meaningful with it.* (K1).

Her highly exercised agency is the accumulation of an excellent temporal dynamic from the three orientations namely iterative, creative-projective, and

practical-evaluative. Rajala and Kumpulainen as mentioned in Goller & Paloniemi (2017) remarked that an educational change in a school context could result in several orientations of temporary-dynamic agentic roles that the teachers showed to manage their professional and personal necessity (Goller & Paloniemi, 2017).

### K2

K2, a male teacher with 11 years of teaching experience, was categorized into a high teacher agency. Teaching was not his initial profession, since he started to work in a private bank in the same province where he came from, Central Java. His professional life as a teacher might have started a long time ago when he conducted a pre-service teaching program (i.e. iterational dimension). Although he had some years of working far from the educational world, his true calling was to be with students in a formal school context. He pursued his undergraduate degree in Indonesian Language Education and he was very fond of Indonesian linguistics, especially morphology. He has been teaching in his current school for around five years since he started his role as a civil servant teacher, while another two years have been spent teaching in a private school in a different town.

From a practical-evaluative dimension, there were three salient points to discuss at length. First, his enthusiasm to embrace the new curriculum seemed to be rooted in his belief about the teacher's approach toward each student. The FTLC was considered to be a breakthrough in comparison to the testing-driven curriculum enacted in his youth, whose success was measured through *Ebtanas, Evaluasi Belajar Tahap Akhir*, or the final learning evaluation. However, he remained cautiously wary of the new policy, whose assessment tended to embrace students' wants, not their actual needs. Unfortunately, in his observations, a growing number of students failed to know what they intended to do and achieve in their lives.

> *I agree with the government's intention to consider the kid's preference in the study. Yet, the problem is there. Not only are kids clueless about what they want to be, nor do they also know what subjects and fields interest them.* (K2)

The second point, he agreed that creativity was the fuel for effective learning. Being liberated to explore various teaching media and take authentic learning materials relevant to students' context was another point he was thankful for in the new curriculum. In addition, the P5 implementation was an intriguing innovation that forced students and teachers to be creative and collaborate meaningfully.

> *Hence, teachers must take their biggest part in directing kids, especially their attitude and morality. In the classroom and in doing P5, students practice how to communicate politely and be responsible with their personal and group tasks. Also, in my facilitating role, they are liberated to choose the digital form of posters in P5 as long as they do not include harsh words with no clear context.* (K2)

The third aspect, he pointed at the teachers' role was getting more prudent in assisting the students to grow better in attitude and academics. The role was not only an individual role but the communal teacher' model in a school that the students could witness daily. This role was promoted by the school environment where he was currently serving. The teachers, in his point of view, showed genuine

collaboration and respect in a less rigid hierarchical manner. In welcoming the FTLC, the culture, and society were effective in encouraging junior teachers to join teacher workshops.

> *The senior teachers are very caring. They greet, remind, and push us to join online seminars, submit the work, and apply a bunch of the knowledge from the training in the classroom. The headmaster, though I didn't see him in person quite often, supported us in welcoming the government's new policy by announcing the teachers who were not around due to the workshops & training and asked other teachers to pray for their success. Slowly but surely, though this is something new, we can digest and apply accordingly.* (K2)

Planning the projective future, due to his interest in Indonesian Applied Linguistics and the career path of a civil servant teacher, he was willing to join a master's degree program as his long-term orientation. Besides, in the teaching practices, he aimed at exploring more creative activities, with technology involvement (e.g. *Canva* and comic-generated tools).

To infer, K2 demonstrated high agency by a strong academic reason that he had gained in the past and what he was willing to take in the future. At the current moment, sufficient support from the school has been playing a big role in demonstrating his agency. Collin, et al. in Goller and Paloniemi (2023) asserted that creativity and professional agency are strongly related. The higher the agency, the higher the creativity in the professional work context, and at the same time, the higher a teacher's creativity which is supported by one's environment, the higher the agency.

### K3

K3 was a senior teacher who would be retired in two years. He pursued the lowest level degree Diploma II, Diploma III, undergraduate, and the latest was a master's degree, all was majoring in English Language Education. He has been teaching in formal junior high schools for 35 years. His strong academic background and positive attitude toward the curriculum changes from time to time have resulted in facing the new curriculum FTLC positively. He focused on performing strong working ethics across curricula. In his practical-evaluative judgment of welcoming the FTLC, he shared three notable reflections. The first one was that being a teacher means being a good model of nurturing learning processes.

> *Being a teacher means being a good role models for students. They see us everyday, they observe us in speaking, teaching, and whether we, teachers, are willing to learn or not. We expect students to learn, we should give models that we also keep learning. Learning a new policy and technology for instance. When the teacher is dedicating his time to nurture his own learning process, I guess the students can notice.*

The second notable view was on the curriculum shifts. He has been teaching through five different types of national curriculum. For K2, curriculum change was a crucial response to the *zeitgeist*.

> *... curriculum change serves to fit in the zeitgeist or spirit of the time. The era*

*has changed too, a lot. But at the same time, nothing changes. Why? The meaning of education is the same from time to time, it is to facilitate young people to be independent and grow by themselves. In my first era of teaching, we used CBSA (cara belajar siswa aktif/ students' active learning), which was described simply as students must read and ask more questions in the classroom, thus, teachers provided more reading passages and formulas in writing English sentences. Today, we have YouTube and hundreds or thousands of free learning sources. Students can learn and know those materials easily if they want. That's why sometimes students do not listen to us anymore. The spirit of the time is different.* (K3)

As a senior teacher, he admitted that the technology advancement in education is inevitable, although he was not always that techno-savvy. That being said, the third powerful point was elaborated. He mentioned that in learning processes, baby steps were helpful.

*Learning a little bit slowly to adapt and adopt was better rather than being reluctant to learn the new technology. I take a longer time to learn the nature of each digital educational tool, matching them with the relevant materials, and bringing them to the classroom. I guess the idea of implementing the FTLC was the same. We, teachers, must take one thing at a time to process and apply it in the classroom.*

The one-by-one learning was also applied to other learning processes, such as immersing and implementing the signature project-based learning in the FTLC, called P5 *(Project Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila).* K3 added that the guidelines for implementing the FTLC had been clear, and everything was learnable because the sources were already provided. Nonetheless, the school was sometimes unable to meet all the requirements demanded in implementing all elements of the new curriculum perfectly.

*P5 is an example. It was highly suggested to invite experts in areas of catfish nursery in one of the P5 implementations, however, it was not possible due to time constraints, so we invited internal teachers who happened to manage their catfish nursery to share their experience.* (K3)

As agency is achieved in a social and ecological context, it is necessary to explore the school context where a teacher is serving. The current school context was supportive, he remarked. The school administrators showed sufficient reinforcement and the nature of the teachers and officers' relationship was supportive.

*The headmaster encourages all teachers, the juniors and seniors, to take part in familiarizing us with new educational technology such as Canva and Capcut video editing. Teacher professional networks in each subject have also been a good-to-go party to ask for help and collaboration.* (K3)

In addition, with two years awaiting his retirement, his projective plan was to keep being a role model and to be open to peer teachers and students if they wanted to come and ask him about pedagogy and English lessons for more detail. The

interchange of the three dimensions of the iterative, practical-evaluative, and supporting school environment, as well as relevant projective plans, enabled K3 to achieve a high level of teacher agency. Sihvonen et al. (2023) found that there could be several factors influencing teachers' agency; among those were teachers' background, the interaction in culture, and the environment of learning (Sihvonen et al., 2023)

## *G1*

G1 is a senior Indonesian language teacher in her current school. She pursued her undergraduate degree in Indonesian Language Education although she was initially willing to enroll in a nursing school. She has been teaching Indonesian to junior high schools in Balikpapan and Gunungkidul for 29 years. As time went by, she finally found enjoyment in teaching junior high school students. She has been going through several national curriculum shifts. To sum up her iterative dimension, her professional history generally showed her adjustment in implementing a new curriculum whenever there was a shift. However, her focus was only on the administration adjustment and fulfillment, as it was usually expected and required whenever a new policy was introduced.

> *Usually, the supervisor would come and check all the required files on implementing the curriculum. I must make many adjustments and my primary focus is there. However, I agree that a new curriculum must bring something new so the teaching and learning become varied and not boring.* (G1)

Due to the emphasized focus on administration completion, she admitted that it was challenging to bring the best out of the FTLC in the classrooms.

> *For me implementing the FTLC is very hard, maybe because there is plenty of technological involvement. I admit, I need a lot of assistance in enhancing my teaching with technology.* (G1)

Some improvements were made, although they sometimes merely touched the outer part and did not yet delve into the substantial components of the FTLC.

> *One thing I have tried with my students is to compose a visual poster to support the P5 activity, and I asked my students to work outside of the classroom: in the corridor or the school park.*

However, she searched for enlightenment through the teacher professional network *(Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran/ MGMP)* of the Indonesian language in her region. She was given ample workshops and training. Nonetheless, the school environment did not provide sufficient support needed for her to improve.

> *The headmaster instructed us to join the training, however, he did not encourage and provide necessary feedback if we the teachers tried and still found confusion. The teacher community of the same subjects at the school level did not hold improvement meetings quite often to consolidate, share, and search for solutions.* (G1)

Besides her tendency to perform passive and reactive actions towards the new

features that the FTLC brought up, the lack of reinforcement from her working environment seemed as another notable influential factor hindering her from achieving agency.

Discussing the future projects related to welcoming the new curriculum, she was reluctant to elaborate on the contents, materials, sources, digital platforms, or delivery strategies. Her only focus remained on document completion and submission since that particular demand was all about the previous curriculum shifts. Hence, G1 failed to demonstrate a high level of language teacher agency. Bjork (2005) found that Indonesian teachers, especially those acting as civil servants, worked the orientation of serving the higher authority rather than nurturing learning development (Bjork, 2005).

### G2

He mentioned himself as lucky to be able to live in an era where the graduates of the English Language Education programs did not have to compete with other alumni to secure a teaching job. After completing his studies in a public teaching institute in Yogyakarta, G2 was placed in a junior public school in Gunungkidul. G2 has been teaching English for more than 35 years. Although he had been through five different curriculum shifts, he did not show a high degree of enthusiasm in perceiving the curriculum. G2 held a strong belief which remained irrefrangible across all curricula.

> *As teachers, we must teach students with head, heart, and hand. This means teaching with all the best we can offer: knowledge, practices, and empathy. I guess this attitude is applied in all types of national curricula* (G2)

In the practical-evaluative aspect, he seemed not to be enjoying the new curriculum shift. He preferred to complete his final year of teaching with the previous curriculum, *Kurikulum 2013*, which was more familiar. In addition, in dealing with educational technology, he admitted that there were too many new practices to master and too fast to follow. Bria (2017) discovered that senior teachers faced challenges inside of their encounters and from outside pressures, one of which was technology integration. However, they tend to exercise agency by emphasizing moral lessons as a compass for the younger generations (Bria, 2017). This problem was not addressed recently by the school administrators or the teacher community. The insufficient social and cultural support from the school where he worked seemed to be one of the factors of hindrance for him to demonstrate high agency.

In his last year of teaching career in the school, he did not seem to have any projective plans related to teaching English.

> *I am welcoming my retirement time happily. Honestly, I don't want to trouble myself with career and job-related stuff anymore, not with the new curriculum.* (G2)

From the dynamic intersections of the three aspects, G2 was not able to achieve agency by embracing the new curriculum FTLC. He remained separately engaged with his reluctance to stay relevant to the demands of the era, both in keeping the spirit of learning and in involving educational technology in his

teachings.

## G3

G3 was the youngest teacher among all participants. She finished her studies in English language education and collected experiences as an English teacher in primary school and public junior high school. Her young experience, however, did not excuse her to actively search the sources of the new curriculum FTLC.

*At first, I knew very little about the curriculum's purpose. I joined the preparation of P5 and started to get to know more about the FTLC. I learned by myself the platform provided by the government.* (G3)

She did not find big challenges when it came to technology involvement as an integral part of the new policy. Her future short-term plan also drove her to be more open to new opportunities for improving herself. She took a master's degree program in the same field. She was also willing to take a teacher professional development program or *Program PPG (Program Pendidikan Profesi Guru)*. This program was required as a condition to be a civil servant teacher in Indonesia.

*I love the field of education. I want to improve myself by taking a master's degree currently. I also want to take Program PPG later in the future.* (G3)

When being interviewed about how the school culture and the social structure in her school gave support for the new curriculum implementation, she did not show a satisfactory response.

*Honestly, I face many challenges when I want to implement the new curriculum in the classrooms. I usually asked the vice principal of curriculum. He would help only if one teacher or two asked him to explain. I think the well-knowledged teachers could do much better by facilitating the learning together and encouraging the other teachers to undergo the workshops provided by the government. Doing P5 was also the same. I think it was an interesting innovation since the students here who enjoy drawing batik could explore more, however, this must be maintained carefully to gain maximum learning experiences.* (G3)

She emphasized some facilities provided by the school that were good enough although not all teachers were willing to take the benefits from.

*At school, teachers are allowed to use the school computers in the laboratory with full air-conditioning setting rooms and full wifi connection. So, actually, in my opinion, we need motivation from peer teachers and the headmaster to mobilize the school initiative to study the new demands of the curriculum together.* (G3)

Her great self-agency both from the interplay of her robust background and plans for continuing the teacher's professional development, yet, was not accompanied by the high social encouragement from her environment, resulting in a medium-high of the agency. Yulianti (2015) discovered that some factors play as support and some others as hindrances to the success of the new curriculum

implementation. Among those were teacher professional development and schools' role to involve parents to support the success of the implementation. School leaders play an important role by demonstrating transformational leadership and enhancing teachers' collective agency (Yulianti, 2005).

## Conclusion

Two main conclusions are drawn from this research. Firstly, the differences in the level of agency among teachers are influenced by several important factors. Iterative dimensions are greatly influenced by the personal backgrounds of each teacher. Practical-evaluative dimensions mirror the school culture and ecological contexts. The projective dimension reflects personal aspirations, related to whatever they hope for and/or dream of in the future. These three aspects are interrelated and form the degree of self-agency.

Secondly, the second dimension, i.e. practical-evaluative, is influenced by several important factors, including standards and curriculum contents. The new curriculum serves as a pivotal factor in determining the degree of teachers' agency. In particular, two curricular dimensions that help shape the dynamics of teachers' agency are the ample opportunities for students to express their voices and choices, and the nature of project-based learning in P-5, whose goals are to nurture the 4Cs.

Recommendations for future researchers include increasing the number of participants to ensure a more representative sample. Embracing quantitative methods could provide a more systematic and objective analysis. Involving participants from different parts of Indonesia would enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings, capturing a more diverse range of perspectives and experiences.

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