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TEACHERS' INTERACTIVE DECISIONS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE BASIS AND FACTORS

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A B S T R A C T S

This research aims to recognize the factors triggering and foundations affecting teachers' interactive decisions related to teachers' personal development. Interactive decisions as teachers' reaction to an unexpected situation during teaching and learning activities. The participants in this study are 3 (three) English course teachers. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The data then were analyzed using Gomm's thematic analysis. The results showed that the factors triggering teachers' interactive decisions were teachers' assumptions, teachers' expectations – students' lack of cooperation, and technical problems; the foundations of the interactive decisions were teacher's experience, students' needs, and class management. These findings indicate that making an interactive decision is a complex process. Many situations may trigger it, and teachers have to cope with it instantly without preparation. These unexpected situations require teachers' quick thinking and reaction which are based on and enrich their personal development.

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INTRODUCTION

When coming to the class, teachers prepare every aspect of their teaching, such as materials, methods, teaching techniques, and assessment. However, it is common for them to experience unexpected situations during their teaching and learning practices. This type of situation requires the teacher to make quick decisions when handling the class. Teachers are required to overcome both expected and unexpected situations in class. As a teacher, making interactive decision becomes one of the important issues in teaching and learning practices. Tsang (2004) defined interactive decision as teachers' reaction towards an unexpected situation occurred during teaching and learning activities. Doyle and Carter (2019) mentioned factors influencing teacher's interactive decision-making are instructional goals, student responses, and contextual factors. It can be implied that unexpected situations can be based on the material, interaction, and context.

In connection with teachers' professional development, Kirkpatrick and Ruggieri (2017) state that self-awareness, reflective practice, and continuous learning are the significant

elements in teachers' development. Reflecting on unexpected situations in the classroom is the implementation of self-awareness and reflective practice.

Tsang (2004) argued that teachers' personal practical knowledge affects their interactive decisions because "teachers are in some way influenced and /or guided by their personal practical knowledge" (p.166). Personal practical knowledge is "knowledge which is experiential, embodied, and reconstructed out of the narratives of a teacher's life" (Clandinin & Connelly as cited in Sun 2012, p. 761). This argument is emphasized by Swart et al., (2018) stating that teacher's personal practical knowledge evolves continuously over the course of teachers' professional careers. It encompasses not only their past and present experiences but also informs and influences their future practices (Connelly et al., 1997; Talaee, Bozorg, & Schrittesser, 2023). In his research investigating teachers' personal practical knowledge and interactive decisions, Tsang (2004) found that teachers' interactive decisions were driven by several factors: teachers' assumption, time limitation, lack of student cooperation, students' lack of knowledge, and technical failure. Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler (2017) also mentioned that the process of making interactive decisions by teachers is characterized by the "responsiveness to student thinking and adaptation of instructional approaches" (p.102). These studies emphasized the cause of why teachers made interactive decisions and what were the reasons behind the decisions. The personal practical knowledge of teachers is one of the key factors. Teachers' understanding of content, context, and students plays a significant role in their decisions. Van Veen, Zwart, and Meirink (2017) state that the interactive decision made by teachers reflects their "pedagogical beliefs, knowledge, and responsiveness to student needs". These three aspects are built as teachers try to develop their professionalism.

Lange as cited in Bailey (2010) stated that professional development is defined as "a process of continual intellectual, experimental and attitudinal growth of teachers" (p.21). Johnson and Golombek (2002) asserted Lange's point by arguing that professional development is not simply a process of imposing new knowledge on teachers, but rather a process of "reshaping teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices" (p.2). Furthermore, Opfer and Pedder (2019) stated that "Contemporary views on teacher professional learning emphasize the integration of personal and professional development, recognizing the interconnectedness between teacher beliefs, practices, and student outcomes" (p.75). Richter et al. (2014) in Anggini and Santosa (2023) argued that professional development is a long-term process that focuses on enhancing understanding, skills, and competencies. Reflecting on these understandings, professional development can be attained through the process where teachers construct and re-construct their knowledge.

The understanding of the process of teacher professional development is elaborated by Farrell and Macapinlac (2021) stating that professional development can be achieved through reflective practice, meaning teachers critically analyze their teaching ideology. The critical analysis will contribute to increasing teachers' awareness of their teaching practices. This understanding can be applied in the process of making lesson plans and teachers' actions in the class such as making interactive decisions. These practices help teacher to develop their professionalism by challenging their personal practical knowledge and teaching beliefs. However, little attention has been paid to how interactive decision-making processes contribute to teachers' ongoing personal and professional development in real-time classroom scenarios.

Therefore, this research tried to answer two significant questions regarding teacher's interactive decisions: 1) What are the factors making the teacher make an interactive decision? And 2) What are the bases of the teacher's interactive decision?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to determine the bases and factors of teachers' interactive decisions. This means the participants would explain, describe, and share their experiences. Due to the nature of the purpose and data, the research was designed to use a qualitative approach. Qualitative research offers in-depth insights into individuals' experiences regarding a particular issue. It goes beyond merely hearing their opinions and thoughts, focusing instead on comprehending the full scope of their experiences (Scott & Garner, 2013). Merriam (2009) also stated that "the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection of analysis; the process is inductive; the product is richly descriptive" (p. 14). Based on this, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study.

Population and Sample

This study was conducted in Mataram. The participants were coming from different institutions. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The participants in this research were 3 English teachers who have been teaching for more than five years. The five-year experience was chosen because it was considered to have sufficient experience in teaching and not a novice teacher. Novice teachers are those who have 5 years or less experience in teaching (Kim & Roth, 2011, as cited in Curry, Webb & Latham, 2016). There was no age or gender issue when selecting the participants.

Concerning the number of participants, there were 3 participants in this study. This decision was driven by the researchers' aim to gather detailed information on the topic. In addition, by having 3 participants, the researcher could have a deeper understanding and analysis of the responses and information the participants gave. Perry (2005) highlighted that the information-rich paradigm focuses on the data quality rather than the sample size. Therefore, the number of participants in qualitative research is not a significant concern, as the goal is to explore individuals' experiences with a specific issue, rather than to generalize findings.

Instruments

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview. This type of interview allows a researcher to ask further questions or topics based on the responses given by the participants related to the discussed issue (Lambert, 2012). As a result, richer data were obtained to be analyzed to understand the topic better.The participants were asked what language they preferred to be interviewed with. Most of the participants chose to explain both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. They would switch when they thought using certain language would give more insight into the topic. The participants were also informed that if they felt uncomfortable answering any questions given, they were not obliged to answer. This interview was conducted separately in places chosen by the participants. The researchers asked the participants to choose a place to create a comfortable atmosphere for them. The interview lasted for around 30 minutes for each participant.

Data Analysis

This research used thematic analysis where each conversation was coded based on the theme. The first step conducted for this analysis was transcribing the audio recording. The transcribing was focused on "*what* is said rather than *how* it is said" (Poland, 2002, p. 630). Once the transcribing process was done, the researchers sent it to the participants to validate the transcription. Following this, the transcription then was read carefully several times to have a better understanding of the content. Throughout the process of comprehension, the researcher

sought clarification from the participants whenever data required confirmation to prevent potential misunderstandings.

The researchers then continued the data analysis using Gomm's (2004) steps in thematic analysis, which were: deciding themes, deciding evidence, coding, and analyzing them. After transcribing all the recorded material, the data analysis process began with coding. The researchers thoroughly reviewed the data, identified emerging themes from the interviews, and applied corresponding codes. Subsequently, the researchers categorized the coded data. By analyzing and comparing the responses of the 3 participants, the researchers identified themes that were consistently addressed across all interviews. After these processes, the researchers conducted a peer review with 3 colleagues who were familiar with this study. The 3 colleagues were given all the analysis results and told the process of the data analysis. They then checked and asked questions about the data analysis. The purpose of the peer review was to validate the analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factors Triggering Interactive Decisions

Teachers' interactive decisions are spontaneous reactions toward an unexpected situation during teaching and learning activities (Tsang, 2004). Based on the analysis of the interview with the participants, teachers' interactive decisions are driven mainly by three factors: teachers' assumptions, teachers' expectations – students' lack of cooperation, and technical problems.

The first factor is teachers' assumptions. Teachers come to the classroom with some basic assumptions about their students' abilities and classroom context. These assumptions are based on some series of data. These assumptions also help teachers in making the syllabus of the taught course.

> Excerpt 1a*:* "When I make a plan I take into consideration the student population I will teach and I ask previous teachers about them if possible. If not, I usually discuss what I will cover during the course and also ask their opinions of what they want to learn in the course before handing in my syllabus"
>
> Excerpt 2a: "Well, I go to the class and know their level, so I just go to the class and follow the next topic"

Based on this argument, teachers have assumptions derived from series of data about their students' needs. Her assumptions of students' needs, which indicate their abilities, are subject to the data that she obtained on the first-day meeting. Based on these assumptions, the teacher could create a lesson plan and syllabus for the course. However, these assumptions could also limit the teacher's preparation related to possibilities that could occur in the classroom. Therefore, teachers' assumptions can both help teachers to prepare the lesson and at the same time, it also can lead teachers into difficulties when their assumptions do not appear to be real in the classroom.

The second factor that triggers teachers to make an interactive decision is teachers' expectations – students' lack of co-operation. These two aspects are related to each other. It might not be precise if we, practitioners and scholars, only put point on students' lack of co-operation as a factor driving an interactive decision. The question which we have to raise is "why do we consider it as students' lack of co-operation?" One excerpt from the interview:

> Excerpt 1b: "After planning lessons, I usually have some plans and hopes about activities students will do in the next meeting."

These expectations are based on the class activities done in the classroom. For example, after learning how to do presentations, the students are expected to have the skills to do presentations. But they sometimes cannot. Other excerpts are:

Excerpt 1b: "I gave them games but they just sat on their chair and busy playing with their phone"

Excerpt 2b: "Sometimes they just look at the worksheet I gave them and look confused what to do"

Excerpt 3b: "I like to make groups for my class activity, but mostly the students like to stay with the same group and if I change the members, they will look upset"

This shows that sometimes teachers' expectations do not match with the real situation in the class. This phenomenon, in fact, is usually known as students' lack of co-operation, in which makes teachers have to make interactive decisions in order to ensure the continuity of class activities.

This critique does not imply that teachers' expectations are the causes of what is known as students' lack of co-operation. Rather, students' lack of co-operation cannot be judged separately from teachers' expectations which are also a factor triggers interactive decisions. Teachers and students are two main cores of interactions in the classroom. Therefore, to provide a more comprehensive argument about teaching and learning practices in the classroom, the consideration of both sides, teachers and students, is significant.

Finally, the last factor is a technical problem. Technical problem in this research is related to the utilities in the class such as internet, LCD, TV, and computer. Some activities in the class rely on the use of computer, LCD, TV, and internet. One of the participants argued:

Excerpt 1c: "When it comes to technological tools, sometimes some updates are not applied for certain laptops or cellphones that don't allow updating or downloading of new software. This might create a conflict between what I have in my computer and what students have. For this, I need to change my plan to suit what they have in their laptops or cellphones and adjust it to the context..."

Excerpt 2c:"sometimes the HDMI cable cannot connect to my laptop and I feel frustrated"

Excerpt 3c: "I feel lost when the internet doesn't work. I know I have to creative but I have prepared everything, but yeah"

Related to technical problems, teachers are required to be creative. At the same time, they also have to make appropriate decisions that suit the context. The issue of technical problems is not merely related to computers, the internet, overhead projectors, and printer. The technical problem also can be the light in the classroom, the number of chairs and tables, and the temperature in the classroom.

To sum up, there are some emerged points that can be derived from the discussions regarding teachers' personal practical knowledge which is in line with their professional development. Figure 1 shows how 3 previously mentioned factors trigger interactive decisions and how interactive decisions can help teacher's personal development. First, teachers have to have assumptions about their students' abilities due to their contributions toward the process of making lesson plan. Furthermore, these assumptions will help teachers to assist their students in the teaching and learning activities, for instance, the type of approach and interaction that teachers will apply to their students.

Second, the sources of the assumptions are information obtained from previous teachers teaching the course and students' opinions. However, teachers should not overly rely on these assumptions due to technology advancement which helps students to learn outside the classroom. This technology advancement can be both contextually situated, meaning that teachers are able to utilize it inside and outside classroom to help them to understand classroom.

Third, teacher's assumption and teacher's expectations are two different areas but intercorrelated to each other. While teacher assumption focuses on the information gathered

and obtained by the teacher related to the students ability level and the context of the classroom, teacher's expectations focus on the teacher's prediction about how students will react and/cooperate with the materials given. The correlation between these two aspects is an important factor in a teacher's development. By experiencing many classes in which every class is unique, teachers are able to face different cases and then incorporate all the knowledge and practices that they have so far to overcome such problems. They have their assumptions and expectations, and they will find the best solution based on their experiences.

Finally, Technical problems also become one of the issues demanding teachers' interactive decisions. In all cases, teachers' interactive decisions should consider the context. This can be concluded by noting Tsang's (2004) argument saying that "teachers interact creatively between plans, student responses, and teacher improvisation" (p. 164).

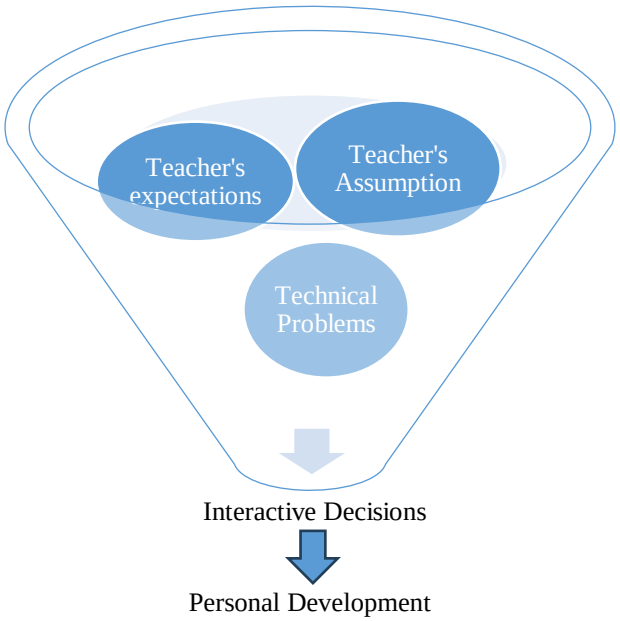

Figure 1. Factors Triggering Interactive Decisions

Foundations of Interactive Decisions

The participants mentioned that three factors contribute as foundations to their interactive decision: the teacher's experience, the student's needs, and class management. The first one is the teacher's experience. In their teaching practices, teachers are learning. These teaching-learning experiences lead to teachers' knowledge of pedagogy. Teachers' knowledge of pedagogy can be gained from their education, teaching experiences, and how they perceive their roles. These three aspects help teachers to understand the meaning of teaching. Dehghan (2022) emphasizes how teachers' understanding affects teachers' decisions in the classroom. Despite the different teaching philosophies, each teacher has a similar goal for their students: to make them successful.

Teachers experiences come from many sources, and one of them is their experiences as learners/students. As teachers who have experience as students, they somehow have a grasp of students' feelings. Tsang (2004) argued that "each teacher, experienced or novice, has his or her narrative of past experience, and this partly shapes how they are as teachers" (p. 165). Johnson and Golombek (2002) asserted that teachers' past experiences also contributed in teachers' understanding of "what is and is not possible within the contexts in which they teach" (p.5).

Excerpt 1.1: "I remember when my teacher used a different topic for that class because most of us were not interested in the next topic"

Excerpt 2.1: "I remember when I was observing my colleague teaching. The topic was about religion, and the students said that they didn't have religion, so they did not want to talk about religion"

These experiences as both learners and teachers can help teachers to arrive at appropriate interactive decisions. Teachers will consider students' backgrounds and the context of the class to overcome any unexpected situations that occur in class.

The second basis is students' needs. Students go to the class with some expectations such as learning new things. When a student comes into a class but finds out that he or she has already understood the material, teachers have to think immediately to fulfill that student's need. Teachers are expected to be creative to manage this problem due to some aspects to take into consideration: students' feelings, classroom context, and the purpose of the course. Students' needs are not merely concerned with the required knowledge in the class but also related to their feelings, defined as students' desire to learn. Therefore, in making interactive decisions, teachers should consider this factor to create meaning for learning to students.

Excerpt 2.2: "I just wrote the topic on the whiteboard and they said that they already understood about it"

Excerpt 3.2: "I don't know whether they are too smart or what, but whenever I come that one class, they always said that they already knew about the material"

The last basis is the classroom management. Taking into consideration, classroom management is highly important in order to have a good learning environment. When teachers make their interactive decisions, they also have to consider the impact of their decisions on the classroom. Classroom management components are time, activities, and management behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2002, as cited in Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, & Sugai, 2008). Teachers need to examine these three components in their interactive decisions. This argument is related to the second basis of interactive decision: students' needs. Students need to feel comfortable in the classroom which can support their learning process.

Overall, making interactive decisions is complex. The cycle of factors triggering and foundations of teachers' interactive decisions and relation to teachers' personal development can be seen in Figure 2. An interactive decision is not only related to the teacher itself but also to the students. In other words, the experiences that teachers gain over the course of their careers are not just isolated events; they form the foundation of their practical knowledge, which is crucial for their long-term professional development. This practical knowledge helps teachers to better understand the nuances of teaching, anticipate potential challenges, and respond to the diverse needs of their students. As a result, the process of making interactive decisions becomes a vital aspect of teaching, allowing teachers to not only improve their day-to-day interactions with students but also contribute to their own growth as educators. Thus, interactive decision-making is much more than a reaction to classroom events—it is a reflection of a teacher's professional journey and personal development, which continues to evolve over time.

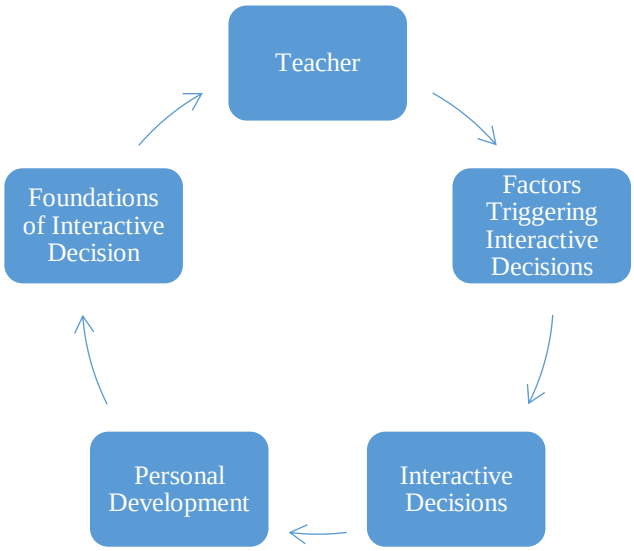

Figure 2. The Cycle of Interactive Decisions

CONCLUSION

Interactive decision-making in the classroom is far more complex than simply responding to unexpected or spontaneous situations that arise during a lesson. It encompasses a range of dynamic processes and plays a critical role in shaping not only classroom interactions but also the personal and professional development of teachers. There is much more to interactive decision-making than meets the eye, as it requires teachers to engage with various factors that influence both their immediate choices and their long-term teaching strategies. In this study, it was revealed that teachers' interactive decisions are built upon three primary foundations: the teacher's own experience, the needs of the students, and effective classroom management. These three pillars serve as the guiding framework through which teachers navigate the multitude of decisions they face in real-time within the classroom environment.

Furthermore, the study highlighted specific triggers that prompt teachers to make interactive decisions. These triggers include their personal assumptions, expectations regarding students' behavior, instances of students failing to cooperate, and various technical issues that may arise. The ability to make these decisions is not innate but is deeply rooted in teachers' accumulated experiences. These experiences stem from their own journeys, both as learners in the past and as educators in the present. Through these experiences, teachers develop a unique set of skills and insights that help them address the complexities of teaching, handle student behavior, and adapt to unforeseen challenges in the classroom.

This process of making interactive decisions is closely tied to a broader concept of personal development, which refers to the ongoing growth and improvement of teachers' skills and knowledge over time. As teachers encounter diverse situations and reflect on their experiences, they build a body of practical knowledge that informs their teaching practices. This practical knowledge becomes an essential component of their professional development, contributing to their ability to make more effective decisions in the future. In essence, teachers' personal and professional development is an evolving process that is driven by the continuous accumulation of experiences and the ability to reflect on and learn from those experiences.

This research offers several implications for teachers' interactive decision-making. First, teachers should conduct comprehensive assessments to gain a deeper understanding of their students' proficiency levels. Relying on a single method may be insufficient; therefore, employing multiple data collection strategies is essential. Although this approach may require additional time, it is crucial for making more informed interactive decisions. Additionally,

enhancing technological expertise can support teachers in addressing technological challenges within the classroom. By staying updated on advancements in educational technology, teachers can access a wider range of tools and alternatives, enabling more effective interactive decision-making.

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