

# ITA Zoning

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## Investigating Teacher Agency: Zoning Policy Implementation in Favorite and Non-Favorite Senior High Schools

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### Abstract

Teacher agency plays a significant role in successful teaching. Upon the implementation of student enrollment zoning policy throughout the country (since 2018), demographic changes started to occur. Favorite schools in the city of Yogyakarta inevitably had to admit students with less academic skills, making teaching activities more complex and difficult among teachers. This study attempts to reveal how English teachers dealt with such dynamic changes. This study employed qualitative method. Twelve English teachers from favorite and non-favorite senior high schools in Yogyakarta, Bantul and Sleman were involved in this study. They were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews and two of them were invited to have in-depth interviews. The results showed that those two English teachers were agentic. The zoning policy was largely seen to have created unnecessary challenges among English teachers. During the pre-zoning policy, students were homogeneous in terms of background knowledge and academic skills. Such a homogeneity ended after the policy was implemented. However, interview data gathered in this study strongly suggest that teachers were able to navigate themselves, mostly due to warm, academic culture of their school. The warm school culture has successfully bridged the diversity of students' abilities in the class.

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers stand on shaky grounds. Borrowing from Habermas' (1971) Communication Theory, teachers are drawn to two diametrical poles, namely Systemsworld vs. Livesworld. On the one hand, the Systemsworlds require teacher to be compliant to existing rules, regulations, bureaucracy and administrative matters. Quality of instruction and learning is defined mostly by test scores, graduation rate, rankings, and compliance to external rules. On the other hand, the Livesworlds expect teachers to engage in meaning-making processes in their interactions with students. What is valued most is relationality, i.e. how teachers maintain a psychologically secure learning environment that allows all students to succeed. Therefore, each individual student matters a lot and teachers will listen to the voices of students: their challenges and difficulties.

There are many problems regarding Education related to the enactment of system worlds. One of them is the policy of the national Ministry of Education, regarding education standards related to the administration of examinations. In the practice test, the evaluation results obtained by students outside the bureaucracy at the local government level who co-opt the evaluation system. School education targets passing examinations as a reference, this will be in accordance with the objectives of school ranking

The minister of education and culture NO 14 (2018), launched the new regulation that the students apply school in the designated zones. By implementing this rule, the minister of education and culture had opinion that children study in the school close to their house. Other point of view of the zone school enactment is decreasing the amount of accidents on the way during the new academic year, since there were some accidents happened because one student was not accepted in favorite school then they had to take out the documents and move to the other school. This situation made the crowd in roads. On the other hand, the government hope

that the zoning policy omit the perception of favorite and non-favorite school. Additionally, Mahyani, Wahyunengseh, & Haryanti (2019) stated that in 2018 the zoning policy is replaced by the Central Java Governor Regulation No. 64 (2018) on Admission of new learners on State Secondary School and Vocational High School in Central Java province. The governor of the Regulation, there are two interesting passages in Article 10, paragraph 1 that is "schools are required to accept prospective students who live in the school zone at least 90% of the total number of learners " and paragraph 2 that is "PPDB selection at the level of SMA and SMK shall carry out friendly social program shall accept and free education for new students coming from income families cannot afford at least 20% of the total number of students who received"

Research on teacher agency promises at least to things. First, a growing body of research shows that quality teaching is mostly determined by an individual teacher capacity (Cendra, 2019; Mukti, 2018) Such a capacity covers unique identity, agency and moral purposes of the teacher. As cited from Cendra (2019) the teachers' experiences could trigger their self-regulatory behaviors to walk toward their hoped. Moreover, Thomas (2008) through his research confirms that obeying regulations or doing administration is considered stressful. It refers to the effect systems worlds operation at school. Ramli (2018) added that identity can generate a distinctive side of self through story. Second, the study on teacher agency is believed to reveal unique experiences that made up particular teachers. Teacher agency as a theoretical framework serves a set of vocabulary, concepts, and explanations about teachers' unique life experience and how they negotiate with real challenges on their day-to-day business.

Attempts to better understand teacher agency are linked to its transaction with the bigger settings in which it used to be embedded (Datnow, 2012). The agency of teachers portrays a complicated dynamic, connected with the basic and social highlights of the school, locale, and the bigger arrangement environment.

Moreover, (Priestley & Pirsta, 2014) characterize agency as a **dynamic and dispositional** nature, **embedded in situated practice**, instead of **as a natural quality that one can have**.

In reality, professional teachers are not merely required to provide a role model in learning. More importantly, teachers are also required to skillfully navigate themselves in challenging contexts. Upon the implementation of student enrollment zoning policy, nationally mandated in 2018, there has been a huge demographic shift in class. The policy has forced public schools to house more heterogenous students. Public schools are no longer allowed to admit students merely based on academic performance of candidates. The policy mandates students in a certain distance to be admitted, no matter what academic performance they demonstrated. Given the growing complexity, teachers cannot rely on external measures to guide their actions. They are the only adults in the room, who are expected to act professionally so as to serve their students better. At this point, the very concept of teacher agency speaks well to respond the dynamics of teaching. Rogers and Wetzel (2013) define agency as "the capacity of people to act purposefully and reflectively on their world" (p.63).

It is necessary to note, however, that an individual teacher may not make a huge difference in the life of his or her students. From an ecological perspective, teachers will draw much from their community. Priestly, Edwards, Priestly, & Miller (2012) vividly argue that agency as "is strongly connected to the contextual conditions within which it is achieved and not as merely a capacity or possession of the individual" (p. 197). Priestly et al. (2012) added agency is like agency which is **by social interaction and achieved in particular situations**. In terms of the relation among teachers, Lasky (2005) claims that agency is "mediated by the interaction between the individual (attributes and inclinations) and the tools and structures of a social setting" (p.900).

The student enrollment zoning policy has direct or indirect impacts that occur in the short

and long terms (Andina, 2018). First, from a social justice perspective, it opens access for those disadvantaged. The zoning policy provides an access to quality education for low-performing students coming from families with mediocre socioeconomic capabilities who live nearby a favorite public school. It is unquestionable that socio-economic backgrounds of parents play a major role in preparing students to deal with academic tasks. A limited access to quality education is believed to have created an educational system that maintains a cultural reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). It is undeniable that poverty begets poverty. Children of poor parents cannot access good facilities, making them lag behind their richer counterparts. Therefore, there is no room for upward-bound mobility that allows them to get rid of their poverty.

Seconds, zoning policy on student enrollment is believed to create a more heterogenous culture in schools, which in turn will make up a more democratic society. Daily encounters to diversity will create a more tolerant disposition among students. Maintaining a positive outlook on diversity among citizens is certainly one of the most important things to ensure the unity of this highly pluralistic nation. It is therefore important to create a space that allow young people to get along to each other as early as possible. In many occasions, however, as observed by Thoms (1977), Pool (1959), and Simons (1980), in larger urban areas, some schools tend to cater for relatively affluent areas, while others drew their clientele from **industrial or working-class areas**.

Thus, Agency is the **integral to teachers' capacity to reflect on and take action in their practice**. The researchers used chordal triad from Priestly, et al. (2013) as illustrated in Fig.1. Therefore, this study aims at revealing how teacher agency helps teachers to navigate through tough challenges, especially upon the implementation of student enrollment zoning policy. Teacher Agency has been one of the focal points in the investigation of teachers in their Livesworld.

Priestly<sup>1</sup> et al. (2013) observe that the iterative and projective dimensions relate to the qualities that individuals bring to their interactions. The iterative dimension builds upon past achievements, understandings patterns of action and the projective dimension, as well as differences between short term and long-term orientations of and for action. The practical-evaluative dimension distinguishes between the cultural, structural and material domains in particular social settings at specific times. It reflects the agentic actions that are embedded in the present and are inherently social.

## METHOD

This study investigated a main question with two additional questions to make this study well-defined, namely, 1) How did English teachers enact agency in the face of changing student demographics? 2) What are English teachers' attitudes towards zoning policy implementation? 3) How does English teachers' agency after implementation zoning policy?

The data of this study were collected from interviews with twelve English teachers in Yogyakarta, Sleman and Bantul. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique. There were two English teachers from different regions who were available for in-depth interviews. The researchers conducted the in-depth interview with one English teacher from Yogyakarta and one English teacher from Bantul. This research study began on February to September 2019. At the beginning of February, the researchers accomplished the data by having meeting with the principal of the school. Then it continued to meet the English teacher to have interview. The researchers had interview with the students to provide some context to the study. Table 1 is about the description of the teachers.

**Table 1.** Research Subject Description

Name	Age	Years of teaching
Helen	46	24
Ilsa	51	30

The researchers used qualitative approach in this study. The researchers used basic interpretative studies to understand the phenomenon of the zoning implementation in a different school. According to (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Ravieh, 2010) basic interpretative study provides rich descriptive accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved. Demographically Yogyakarta is in the city center, while Bantul is in outer. Favorite and elite schools Public are in the city center. High land prices in the city will only be affordable by rich families who are well understood for the importance of education. Rich families will get education services, while poor families, who are in the outer, will also get access to education with a quality zoning system. By applying qualitative method, the phenomenon regarding the zoning implementation is seen as a result of the constructing teacher agency.

Hence the researchers analyzed the data in three dimensions as mentioned in the following diagram, namely; iterative, practical-evaluative and projective (Priestley et al., 2013) to see the teachers' agency. Figure 1. Understanding Teacher Agency (Priestly, et.al., 2013)

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Favorite schools get good attention from the public, smart people will be accepted in that school. By having zoning policy implementation students were defeated by students at the closest distance to the "favorite" school location ((Mahyani et al., 2019). This condition can provide teacher performance in class. Thus, this section the researchers analyzed the data with the chordal triad model by Priestly et al (2013). The researchers were dig out teachers' agency toward zoning implementation. Teacher 2 has more experiences in teaching rather than teacher 1. Both of them were from different school. Demographically changes supposedly influence the agency of the teacher. However, there are not significant differences among them. In the



table 1.2 the researchers explain about the teacher agency.

**Table 2.** Agency of The Teacher

Helen	Agency	Ilsa
The priority of being a teacher is teaching and giving challenging assignment so that the students can work and produce something. Education is stated from the character building. As a teacher never stop learning. Teacher doesn't always look scary but having close relation with the students make them develop well. As long as the teacher know the portion.	Projective	Change the teachers' point of view about teaching smart students only. As a teacher must keep learning and innovating. Awareness and update information is a must a teacher. Paper less, then we can use gadget, laptop, LCD for teaching.
She is a friendly and busy teacher. Her activity besides teaching are motivating teacher in the seminar, writer, scoutmaster. School principle trusted her to become a national language instructor. However, her priority in her task is the students' developments. Technology helps her when she went out of the school for attending such as meeting. She did online class. The school environment supports her idea, the students are using gadget and laptop.	Practical-evaluative	As a deputy principal of the curriculum, she has a lot of activities beside teaching. Her responsibility in the curriculum matters encourage her to make SKS system in that school. She made listening materials, module, and <i>lintas peminatan</i> book. Structurally she has good relationship among teachers and staffs. Her activities encouraged her to be more updated teacher. She used the technology for teaching in the class.
First child in her family Her parents taught her moderately, pluralist, and respect to others A former teacher at <i>Melati</i> School 2003 the candidate of civil servant at catholic school. 2006 Civil servant at state high school Yogyakarta moved to state senior high school in Yogyakarta. Graduated from master program at state university.	Iterative	A single fighter mom. Her husband passed away when her children still small. She is a strong woman. A former teacher at <i>Bhineka</i> school Former teacher at <i>Melati</i> School As Civil servant at state senior high school in Bantul Graduated from master program of catholic university.

According to the table 1.2 there are some similarities from the research participants. First, they are strong and far-sighted. As first child in her family, Helen must give a good example to her little sister and brother. However, Ilsa, as a single mom, forces her to be able to survive in her life and save her children in the future. That past experience influences their resilient toward the systemsworld which is enacted in the school. Besides, their past experience in the education; both of them graduated from master degree. This affects their ability to make the future decision. Second, the participants are pluralist.

Both of the research participants were experienced in the working in a school which is different from their religion.

Third they are friendly. Even though the participants come from different school which has its own school culture, Helen and Ilsa have almost same way in treating the professionalism in work. Fourth, they have the same opinion about the orientation as a teacher. Here, it is in line with the research background, that they positioned their selves in the lifeworld orientation in teaching.

Therefore, then the researchers discussed briefly about what the researchers found from the table. Based on the table 1.2 the iterative provides a resource for them to construct their future practice. Helen as the first child of a moderate family made herself able to have a teaching experience at a Catholic school.

"I am Muslim but I was taught in Catholic schools. For me it doesn't matter because I'm not teaching religion." (Helen)

Her point of view on diversity she had gained since childhood. This brings her to her current mindset and attitudes, where she is able to carry herself wherever she is. So, Helen applies the agency in a way that is drawn from her own learning experience to build knowledge and understanding of students' needs.

"For me, as a teacher, we have to be able to understand the needs of our students" (Helen)

She also added that by building good relationships with students it also became one of the ways in understanding students.

"The relationship between teachers and students must be close but respectful. We are really pretend in different characters. Not only am I a teacher, you are a student, but also become a teacher, sometimes a friend, sometimes a parent. This is to make them comfortable." (Helen)

Through her experience (iterative dimension), she showed that the experience can help her in understanding more about the learning process of students by putting the projective in the future.

On the other hand, Ilsa with her iterative dimension made her become a great woman. Her struggle in life makes Ilsa even stronger to survive in the next life. The human values that she had from her life have a role in her life today.

"I do not demand the students to learn fast because their characteristics are different. As teachers, education is not merely a competition but how we develop together." (Ilsa)

Education does not only focus on the results but the process to achieve the goal. The teacher has the responsibility to recognize

students more deeply in order to know their potential. Shortly, Ilsa builds relationships with students well.

"I consider students as friends sometimes I position myself as a parent." (Ilsa interview)

Drawing from both iterative and projective dimensions, Helen takes a practical-evaluative opportunity to reshape her ideas and beliefs.

"I was given the opportunity to become a national English instructor. I must do it well." (Helen, interview)

The same thing was said by Ilsa in the interview. Ilsa takes a practical-evaluative opportunity to reshape her ideas and realize what is believed to be true.

"I was given the opportunity to be the vice principal of the curriculum section. I do that responsibility well. One of them is by making a credit system module for students." (Ilsa)

The credit system helps students get learning according to their abilities. For those who are fast learners are facilitated as well as slow-learners. Thus, the diversity of student schemes is not a problem in the classroom. In implementation of zoning policy, Ilsa and other teachers at the school are ready to implement the policy. It refers to Priestly et al. (2012) mention that ecologically agentic teacher supposedly has role in managing class.

Both of them have had teaching experience at BOPKRI, this school has students with various abilities. The iterative dimension comprises the experiences and perceptions that teachers have of the past that can impact on their present (Charteris & Smardon, 2015). The diversity that is seen is from the level of discipline and intelligence of students. Many challenges must be faced when teaching at the school. Her resilience is very much needed. Helen and Ilsa's experience while teaching at this school brought her to her future activities. Thus, Ilsa said:

"As teachers, we don't only teach smart because we educate." (Ilsa)

In the current conditions, with the enactment of zoning policy, it does not dampen their agentic zeal in educating students.

Diversity of students' abilities in class and demographic changes have become commonplace for him. Thus, the enactment of the zoning system or not does not affect their teacher agency.

English Teacher Attitude

Rogers and Wetzel (2013) uttered about agency as the ability of a teacher to at purposefully and reflectively on their world. Both of teachers provide meaning in their lives. Thus, they know what should be done to become a good teacher for their students.

In terms of implementing policies such as syllabus provided by the government, they modify it to suit the level of student ability. Moreover (Widyaningrum, Saleh, & Sutopo, 2018) stated that as English teachers who are not native speaker, the teachers should have better knowledge. Likewise with the application of extracurricular materials.

"The extracurricular materials composed by theme which exist around the school. The activities run well." (Ilsa)

Their agentic reinforces their belief in the face of government policies. Both of these teachers have the belief that education starts from character.

"First is the character. By positioning human is more important, we hope it can be balanced. To immediately taking both academia and character is impossible. For the best choice, I will improve the character first, then academical, I must also encourage the students." (Helen)

In short, these two agentic teachers face the students' demographic changes positively. Furthermore, as Priestly, et al (2012) explained that agency as strongly connected to the contextual conditions within which it is achieved and not as merely a capacity or possession of the individual. This process made the teacher have strong agency of being a good teacher. Their believes support them to be more sure of what they do in the future.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research participants are able to face the zoning policy professionally. They are able to maintain the lifeworld rather than the systemworld. It shows that the zoning policy implementation did not change their point of view about the main purpose as teachers namely the students need and school orientation. The theories used by the researchers in this research is in line with the research questions that their past experience (iterative), and school environment influence their projectivity.

In changing the students' demographics, the teacher preserved their agency. Their performance obviously show that students become the main focus. Even though the students are more complicated, teachers have high motivation to be best facilitator for them. The school support these two teachers for their projective. Consequently, before and after zoning policy be implemented by the government the two teachers who become in research participant in this research are able to maintain their agency appropriately.

By accomplishing this research, there are two recommendations to the future researchers. First, the research participants can be added more, since every teacher has multiple experiences and different ways attitude in facing the zoning policy implementation. Second, the research scope can be expanded. The future researchers can take research sampling from more than two different districts.

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