

Students Insights on Indonesian EFL Pre-Service Teachers in Malaysian ESL Schools

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement of global workforce, English language teaching program in Indonesia should be designed to prepare students with adequate knowledge and experiences to teach globally. Many collaborative works are done among universities to give first-hand experience on international pre-service teaching. The purpose of this study is to get some insights from Indonesian students' pre-service teaching experiences in Malaysia. Five pre-service students majoring in English language teaching from three different universities in Indonesia were involved as participants. This descriptive study used narrative inquiry and employed data from students' reflective journals, interviews, field notes and other documents. English is taught as foreign language in Indonesia (EFL), while Malaysia taught it as their second language (ESL). Despite the differences, it was found out that the pre-service students faced some challenges related to students' characteristics, language proficiency, classroom management, and cultural shock. However, they also got some benefits for involving the international teaching practicum program such as improvement of their English, knowledge on Malaysian curriculum and best practices on dealing with student-centered classes, as well as great impact on their soft skill development. It is expected that this study can be a basis to design curriculum to prepare Indonesian students for global competition.

Keywords: *EFL, ESL, pre-service teachers, student perspective*

1. INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has been of concern throughout the world and has prompted calls for reform to pre-service EFL teachers' practices in order to raise the standard of teaching and learning ([1] Aiken & Day, 1999; Cook, 1996; [2] Vélez-Rendón, 2006). Pre-service teachers training program is needed in countries where English is used as a foreign language—including Indonesia. It is important to prepare the students in meeting the challenges and standards for EFL teaching [3] (Lu, 2002; [4] Wertheimer & Honigfeld, 2000).

EFL pre-services teachers are not only expected to be professional in term of teaching abilities, characteristics, and skills ([5] Guskey, 2003), but also in classroom management which is an indicator for better teaching and learning ([6] Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Such characteristics need to be demonstrated by every pre-service EFL teacher who wishes to create interesting, enjoyable, and knowledgeable classroom experiences.

To add international values including upgrading knowledge on global curriculum, many universities are conducting joint teaching practicum with their universities partners worldwide. However, not so many studies are done previously to get better insights from the participants to

evaluate and provide better preparation for the upcoming programs.

The studies on pre-service teachers teaching experience have been conducted by some researchers. [8]

Heeralal and Bayaga (2011), examined about what a teacher must prepare to deal with common problem at the time in the classroom. They found that pre-service teachers need to pay attention to flexibility in the time of course participation, in the content of the course, in the instructional approaches and learning materials, and last, in the course delivery and logistics.

In addition, [9] Mudra (2018) examined about the obstacles during teaching English in urban or school in Indonesia. The results showed that the obstacles during teaching practicum are classroom management, learning materials or resources, teaching aids or media, teaching methods, learners' English skills, choice of language use, slow internet connectivity, learners' motivation, evaluation technique and parental support.

Besides, the study from [10] Mukeredzi, (2017) explore the experience teaching practice in rural school. The finding shows that pre-service teachers experienced a shift of mind as they engaged in professional thinking, learning and meaning making.

Yet, the researchers found that there is no previous study conducted to know the benefits and challenges of pre-service teaching, particularly the one that is done by Indonesian pre-service teachers-who are using English as foreign language in Malaysian classes-who are using English as their second language. Thus, the purpose of this research is to study the experiences of the Indonesian pre-service English teachers in Malaysia, and use the result as a basis to prepare for the improvement of the future program and curriculum.

2. METHOD

This descriptive study used narrative inquiry and employed data from students' reflective journals, interviews, field notes and other documents. Five pre-service students majoring in English language teaching from three different universities in Indonesia who followed international teaching practicum program in Malaysia were involved as participants. This descriptive study used narrative inquiry and employed data from students' reflective journals, interviews, field notes and other documents.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Challenges Faced by Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers in Malaysian Schools

3.1.1 Students' Characteristic

When teaching in ESL classroom, students' characteristic becomes one of the challenges that were faced by Indonesian pre-service teachers. Before teaching, the teacher should know the characteristics of the students, so they can determine what materials will be given to. A teacher must really deepen the character of the students, after that a teacher must determine the appropriate treatment that must be given to students. The heterogeneous condition of students causes teachers to provide different treatments and tasks.

Based on the data, Indonesian pre-service teachers said that ESL student's characteristics were much different. The students' English proficiency is higher and physically more active and talk-active in the same time. They also have a very excellent critical thinking ability. So, the Indonesian pre-service teachers must struggle with student's English proficiency. ESL students are willing to have more activity; it makes the Indonesian pre-service teachers create fun activities to support their teaching materials.

The factor that influenced such challenge was ESL student's ability in English is very different with EFL students, and it was just beyond the pre-service teacher's expectation. Students' English ability makes the pre-service teachers aware of their own English language proficiency. It forces the Indonesian pre-service teachers to have at least better English than students. They also need to build students trust that the teacher qualified and reliable person to teach them English.

3.1.2 Students' Language

Regarding to challenge on students' language, this study serves that the Indonesian pre-service teachers faced difficulties in understanding the students when they speak. The factors that influence the challenge is Malaysia have several slangs word and accents, such as those found in

Indian, Penang and Chinese students. It is also supported by [11] Namvar (2014) research which states that slang words is considered part of the culture and style of young people. The younger generation usually uses slang as a secret code. When they want their secrets or words should not be understood by the people of other generations. Besides, they also tend to speak fast and produced different sounds in pronoun, thus sometimes the pre-service teachers could not understand what the students were talking about.

3.1.3 Classroom Management

Classroom management also becomes challenge faced by the Indonesian pre-service teachers. This is caused by several factors such as; students were talking to their peers during lessons, because they had strong emotional engagement. The pre-service teachers are challenged to attract the students to do their activity. In line with that, [9] Mudra (2018) who conducted a study on pre-service teacher obstacles during teaching English in urban or school in Indonesia also found similar factors which influenced the classroom management was due to noises produced by the students the lesson.

Then, there are some students who were shy, afraid, nervous and not confident when asked for a presentation. One of the challenging thing was how to make students wanted to speak and organize their ideas neatly. The pre-service teachers also suggested them to speak up every day not just in English lesson, so they can build up their confidence.

Another thing needs to be considered is the time allocation. Time allocation in Indonesian classes are usually 90 minutes, while in Malaysian classes are only 60 minutes per meeting. It caused Indonesian pre-service teachers to divide meetings into two sections. [2] Akin and Yildirim (2016) found about strategies of keeping up successful classroom. They summed up that they concluded that class management can succeed if EFL teachers can effectively control time and manage good plans in the classroom.

However, the Indonesian pre-service teacher had a little bit challenges, but overall they can manage the class and interact with students in well. They also can handle the students who have misbehavior and confront the students who have variety of characters well. They can make the students enjoy learning English with them.

3.1.4 Culture Shock

Culture shock is also a challenge for Indonesian pre-service teachers. The participants experienced culture shock in a non-academic environment that refers to social, cultural, food and language interactions. In line with that, [12] Ernofalina (2017) also found about experienced culture shock in a non-academic setting which refers to initial euphoria. It deals with homesickness, loneliness, seasons and weather, food, public facilities, and non-academic official procedure. Then, [13] Rajasekar & Renand (2013) examined that the factors that influence culture shock are tradition and religion. While the impact of culture shock for the Indonesian pre-service teachers is the difficulty when using and understanding Malay language.

3.2 Benefits of being Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers in Malaysian Schools

3.2.1 Improvement of English proficiency

Related with data analysis, the researchers found that Indonesian pre-service teachers must speak English most of the time. Speaking in English every day were helping the Indonesian pre-service teachers in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Other than that, it has a big influence on the development of speaking English. During the program all Indonesian pre-service teachers use English to communicate, whether in classroom or not. This is caused by the Indonesian pre-service teachers who cannot use and understand Malay, whereas students also cannot use their language.

In line with that, the study from [14] Wahyu, et al. (2014) explains that when students talk to others using English every day, it can improve their speaking abilities. This is because the school environment gives a big influence in improving student development. It means that, when EFL pre-service teachers speak using English can improve speaking abilities.

The participants said that international teaching practicum program is such a great foster for them to increase and develop their English proficiency, because every day they speak using English fully. Sometimes, there are some student who asked about the grammar, vocabulary and how to pronounce some word. So, they should learn a lot about the vocabulary and also about how to pronounce the word well. Student's English proficiency also reminder to learn more, listen more, and read more about teaching world. Previous research by [15] Mahu (2012) has shown that having an understanding of English can increase students' level of literacy and also can develop their vocabulary well.

3.2.2 Upgraded Knowledge about English Curriculum in Different Country

Curriculum facilitates the pre-service teachers in teaching. The results of this study also revealed that syllabus is also one of the benefits, because the Malaysian syllabus is easy to be adapted and implemented by the Indonesian pre-service teachers. The topic in the syllabus also is more interesting and trying to involve a critical thinking. It also wants to raise the social consciousness, social awareness from the students. In addition, the school has a very high awareness of having a teaching learning activity for the 21st century where the teachers have to pay attention to critical thinking process, and have to make sure that we involve all students in all activity. [16] Fatimah, (2017) examined that teaching in the 21st century can encourage EFL pre-service teachers to be more creative in providing activities or materials that are more attractive to students. Besides, they not only teach, they also have to involve students in each lesson or activity undertaken. The lessons should be activity-based and learner-centered and revolve around real-life tasks to ensure relevance; and also stated the goals clearly and stated other aspects to be learnt at this part.

As for lesson plan, the study shows making lesson plan in Malaysia was a benefit for Indonesian pre-service teacher

teaching in ESL classroom. In EFL context, teacher have to make lesson plan that contain at least learning objectives, core competencies, basic competencies, indicators of competency achievement, teaching materials, teaching methods, learning resources, learning steps and assessment of learning outcomes. While in ESL context, teacher just have to make the lesson plan that contains learning outcomes, activity, objectives, teaching aids, and materials.

Indonesian pre-service teachers are given the freedom to teach anything, as long as it should be in accordance with the level of skills that are being taught. They also look for materials from the internet or adopt materials from the Indonesia's 2nd grade high school textbook. The mentor in the school is very helpful in giving advice about materials that will be given to students. Almost all of Indonesian pre-service teachers teaching in form 4, so there is no grammar or formula that must be taught and should be focus on writing and speaking skill. Other than that, there is no assessment; because in ESL classroom the assessment will be done every one month or three months later.

3.2.3 Soft Skill Development

Referring to one of the competencies contained in the Explanation of Government Regulation No. 14 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards, the second point is about the personality competence of a stable, mature and wise teacher, noble, exemplary for students and society, able to evaluate their own performance, and develop themselves sustainably. Soft skill is certainly an important requirement in the world of education, in this case the teacher. Because the teacher will be a role model for students, which includes how teachers are skilled in applying self-management (communicating, leading, building relationships with others, and developing themselves).

During the teaching practice, Indonesian pre-service teachers also participated in the university program that was handled by the students of education department, participated in activities at school and also learned to care about the environment. The pre-service teachers were also taught to be more disciplined and tolerant.

The results of the study show that there are several challenges and benefits of following teaching practices in Malaysia. The researchers also found that there was no similarity between the present study and the previous one. Some previous research only explained the obstacles faced by the EFL pre-service teacher when teaching in rural schools in Indonesia. Besides, there are also those who explain what a teacher must prepare to deal with common problem at the time in the classroom. They found that pre-service teachers need to pay attention to flexibility in time of course participation, in content of the course, in instructional approaches and learning materials, and last, in course delivery and logistics. Other than that, other study by [10] Mukeredzi (2017) found about *pre-service teachers' professional learning experiences during rural teaching practice in Acornhoek, Mpumalanga Province*, explore the experience teaching practice in rural school. The finding shows that pre-service teachers experienced a shift of mind as they engaged in professional thinking, learning and

meaning making. Previous researchers have never assessed how the EFL pre-service teachers teaching experience when teaching in schools where English is regarded as a second language.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

It can be concluded from the results of this study that there are many kinds of challenges faced by Indonesian pre-service English teachers while following the international teaching practicum in Malaysian English classrooms. The first challenge is students' characteristic which proves that Indonesian pre-service teachers must struggle with student's English proficiency, because they have excellent critical thinking ability, very active and clever. So, the teachers must find out the challenging materials for the students. As for the second challenge is the Malaysian students' language. It is pointed out that the students have several slang and accents, such as those found in Indian, Penang and Chinese students. Besides, the students also tend to speak fast and produced different sounds in pronunciation, thus sometimes the pre-service teachers could not understand what the students were talking about.

The next challenge is classroom management, where the challenges are how to make students wanted to speak and organize their ideas neatly and manage the class and interact with students. Other than that, the Indonesian pre-service teachers also handled the students who misbehaved and confronted the students who have variety of characters well. The last challenge is culture shock. Indonesian pre-service teachers has difficulty when looking for food, must join in a fire drill that had never before known and had to adapt to several buddies that speak using Malay.

The next is the benefit of joining international teaching practicum in Malaysian ESL classrooms. It is showed that there are many kinds of benefits experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers while training in ESL classrooms. The first is improvement pre-service teachers' English proficiency. Speaking in English every day helped the Indonesian pre-service teachers in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. This is caused by their difficulties in using and understanding Malay, whereas students also cannot use their language.

Then next is knowledge about curriculum, the syllabus is considered not too difficult to understand. In addition, the lesson must be activity-based and learner-centered and learner-centered and revolve around real-life tasks to ensure relevance; and also stated the goals clearly and stated other aspects to be learnt at this part. Other benefit is lesson plan, because Indonesian pre-service teachers are given the freedom to teach anything, as long as it should be in accordance with the level of skills that are being taught. They also look for materials from the internet or adopt materials from the Indonesia's 2nd grade high school textbook. There is no grammar or formula that must be taught and should be focus on writing and speaking skill. Other than that, there is no assessment every meeting; this is different to Indonesian context where an assessment will be done every one month or three months.

For the last benefit is a soft skill development. During the teaching practice, EFL pre-service teachers also participated in the university program, school activities, and also learned to care about the environment. The pre-service teachers were also taught to be more disciplined and tolerant.

Based on the results of the research that has been obtained, there are several suggestions proposed. First, it is highly recommended that Indonesian pre-service teachers joining international teaching practicum to be trained or to take microteaching classes before the program. This is to anticipate the Indonesian pre-service teachers when dealing with students who have very good English skills. In addition to preparing for the Indonesian pre-service teacher in class management later and how to interact with students. Besides, Indonesian pre-service teachers also have to practice a lot using English, because when teaching they must use full English.

It is also recommended that before practicing teaching, it is better for the campus to provide a little knowledge about the curriculum, syllabus or lesson plan so that they get an idea of how the system exists in Malaysia. Though, the curriculum that is there is easy to follow, it never hurts to be recognized first before teaching.

Another recommendation that must be taken into account in addition to learning devices is time. The time spent for teaching is only one month. The duration should be extended so that the teacher can better master the learning and get to know the character of the students. The Indonesian pre-service teachers need a long time to adapt to their living environment, school environment and also students. Based on the participants experience, the Indonesian pre-service teachers has begun to get used to the environment in the second and third week. So for the next program, it should be given a duration of practice at least for two months. Hopefully by lengthening the program, the pre-service teacher will have sufficient time to understand school system and to plan appropriate activity in the class.

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