

EFL Pre-service Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Practice Program: A Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The paper aimed to reveal the challenges that were encountered by EFL pre-service teachers. The study involved three EFL Pre-service teachers who conducted their teaching practice program in their eighth semester. The research method of this study was narrative inquiry, and the data were gained by using narrative frame, narrative empty box and interview. The findings showed that pre-service teachers faced some challenges during the teaching practice program. The challenges were the difficulties in finding the suitable teaching material and students' motivation. Each pre-service teacher also had their own ways to overcome their challenges. They were as follows: had a discussion with the mentor, asked for their friends' advice, prepared more interesting teaching materials, and had various teaching activities. For further research, it is recommended to find out what kinds of courses that are required to help EFL pre-service teachers in preparing them to face the real-life teaching experience during their preparation time in the teacher training university.

Keywords: *Challenges, EFL pre-service teachers, narrative inquiry, teaching practice program*

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for English teachers who have good competence is very high. This is due to a regulation from the government which states that English lesson must be part of the curriculum for secondary level. In order to answer the high demand, teacher training universities offer teacher practice program for their students to prepare the prospective teachers. Therefore, the teaching practice program is usually held on the last semester of their study.

Knowing that teachers are important component of education in making the educational goals can be achieved, they have to manage the learning process, the students and the class environments. When teaching, teachers use their knowledge, skills, attitude, and practice and students learning achievement highly depends on teachers' readiness in establishing the activity (Namunga & Otunga, 2012). Every single thing that they have learned and covered when they were pre-service teachers, was expected to be used when they enrolled in teaching practice program. Teachers also play an important role in teaching and learning process to improve student outcomes and their effects towards students' learning appear to be sustained and

accumulative (Darling, Wei, & Johnson, 2012). Studies on teacher effects towards students' achievement have found that teachers determine differences in students' learning, and they also can make a bigger difference to students' educational success than most other variables (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The influence of good or bad teacher not only affects students' learning during their present year but also in their further years. That is why every teacher has to pay attention and must be aware of what they are teaching.

In many literatures, teachers are required to have good competences, performance, actively involved in professional development, engage knowledge with current issues, conduct the tasks ethically, and show commitment or responsibility in teaching practice at school. Teachers are also required to engage in learning opportunity in professional development such as workshop, mentoring, and training to support their role (Tanang & Abu, 2014). With all things that must be fulfilled above, eight semesters of learning is not enough for a future teacher. They need to have more practice that are conducted by themselves.

The core of professional development for teachers is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the

benefit of their students' growth (Avalos, 2011). Teacher training institutions usually do not mention about complexity and content of the school and cannot give a lot of importance to teaching activities (Haney & McArthur, 2002). Therefore, experiences and attitudes of prospective teachers before the teaching application are very important (Wilkins & Brand, 2004). The cases experienced by pre-service teachers before the application, reveal their lesson presentation and cases that attach importance. In addition, it is expressed in most studies that prospective teachers' prior knowledge or attitudes before teaching experiences influence their lesson activities (Desouza, Boone, & Yilmaz, 2004).

Preservice teachers enter teacher education institutions with thousands of hours of experience in classrooms as learners themselves; as such, they hold preconceptions about what it means to teach. Lortie (1975) coined the term 'apprenticeship of observation' to describe students' prolonged exposure to the work of teachers during their years of compulsory education. It is during this 'apprenticeship of observation' that pre-service teachers internalize many of the values, beliefs, and practices of their teachers and begin to develop their own lay theories about good teaching practice without the influence of formal instruction (Knowles, 1991).

In order to fulfil the high demand of English teachers in secondary level and to help teacher candidates be better prepared for their future teaching experiences, reflection is remarkable value for teachers' professional development. The reason behind accepting reflection as a teacher practice may be that teachers need to reconceptualize their teaching practices, especially when there is a discrepancy between what they believe and what they implement (Kayaoglu, Erbay, & Saglamel, 2016). With regards to English language teaching (ELT), reflective practice has become a dominant part of teacher education (Johnson, 2009), because it gives teachers opportunities to play a central role in their own professional development (Richards, 2008).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate what challenges were encountered by EFL pre-service teachers especially when teaching in 3 top schools in Bandung and how they overcome the challenges in reflection to their preparations in doing teaching practice. The study tries to answer the following questions: (1) What challenges are encountered by EFL pre-service teachers in reflection to their preparations in doing teaching practice? (2) How do they overcome the challenges in reflection to their preparations in doing teaching practice?

2. METHOD

The design of this study was narrative study. In this paper the term of narrative study and narrative inquiry

are used interchangeably, because they refer to the same thing. Narrative inquiry is a research in which "storytelling is used as a means of analyzing data and presenting findings", while narrative study is research in which "stories are used as data" (Barkhuizen, Phil, Alice, 2014). Furthermore, the research followed procedures which are proposed by Creswell (2012).

The participants (P1, P2, and P3) of this research were three pre-service teachers who conducted their teaching practice in top three schools in Bandung. School A is the first public school in Bandung which is chosen by the Ministry of National Education (Depdiknas) through the Directorate General of Primary and Secondary Education Management to provide international standard education service. School B is the school which becomes the target of International Schools for student exchange program. School C is one of favourite school in Bandung that is also received Adiwiyata Award (this award aims to encourage schools to adopt behaviours that are respectful towards the environment).

In gaining the data, we distributed narrative frame, narrative empty box, and conducted an interview with the participants. Both narrative frame and narrative empty box were adapted from Barkhuizen, et al. (2014); Barkhuizen and Wette (2008). In the narrative frame, the participants were asked to write their experiences and their reflections based on the sentences provided in the frame., also identify different challenges and successes at different points of time. A frame was developed and given to three English Pre-service teachers.

To anticipate the limitation of narrative frame such as restricting participants' stories, we provided narrative empty box with appropriate prompt at the end of the actual sentence-smarter frame for participants to write freely and additional information that they want to share (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

The next step is conducting an interview. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. We can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses (McNamara, 1999).

After that, the data from narrative frame, narrative empty box, and interview were combined and we did the restoring. In this step we needed to collaborate actively with the participants in order to maintain the originality of the stories. Once confirmed, we looked for the themes and analysed them.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study found 2 big themes after applying the narrative frame, narrative empty box and interview session with the participants as follows

3.1 *The Challenges for Pre-Service Teachers*

The aim of this study is to find out what kind of challenges that the pre-service teacher faced when doing the teaching practice. By giving them the narrative frame to be filled and doing some interview with the participant, it is found that the three pre-service teachers faced two major challenges which are: the difficulties in finding the suitable teaching materials and facing the students that lack of motivation.

3.1.1 *The Difficulties in Finding Suitable Teaching Materials*

Media is an important key in delivering the material. It aids to support the teaching and learning process. However, based on the interview there is confusion in selecting media for the students, whether the media chosen were suitable with the students' level of knowledge and also there was some mistakes in operating the media. As P1 stated

When I was teaching at that school, I was facing some challenges. I felt that many of the procedures and the teaching activities that really different from what I got in college. It was difficult. Especially in making the lesson plan. (DFTM_P1_1)

P2 and P3 said

The challenge that I face during my teaching practicum as a preservice teacher, I guess it's related with choosing suitable materials with my student's characteristic. Because sometimes when I provide them a learning material that they told is not really interesting for them, they would like, they do not motivate in learning English. (DFTM_P2_1)

I think that choosing the appropriate method, technique, material, and media in teaching was the hardest part of all. For example, when the projector was error and could not be used, it made me lost so much time. (DFTM_P3_1)

Based on the findings, all the participants were aware of the difficulties in finding suitable teaching material. It is found that P1 feel difficult when making the lesson plan, since it was different with what he had learned in college. In other side, P2 keep looking for the suitable material for his students to avoid their boredom and to make his students to be more independent. Moreover, P3 experienced a condition where the media

that she used did not work well and made the activities that she had planned was failed.

During teaching practicum, materials are essential things which influence a teaching process in a classroom. Teaching materials help a teaching and learning process; the teaching materials must be designed specifically for them, the teaching materials should make it possible for students to preview and prepare their lessons, and the teaching materials should allow for adaptation and improvisation. In many cases, teaching materials are the centre of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom. Thus, development of teaching materials and teaching aids is critical to the success of educational activities (Rahayuningsih, 2016).

Selection of materials for classroom use is a challenging task for a language teacher as it provides a platform through which students learn English language. The materials play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language. Presentation of developmentally appropriate, relevant and engaging materials is, therefore, the prime responsibility of the material developers and the teachers (Evans, 1998). The materials are the centre of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom (Kitao, 1997).

3.1.2 *Students Motivations*

The participants found that the student's motivation was low. They had to find the strategies to make the students felt motivated in learning English such as: provided them with video, icebreaking, and group work.

P1 and P3 were aware that each student had different interest and different way of receiving the information or knowledge with their own perception. Some students also did the assignment of other subjects at the same time that showing they lacked motivation in learning English.

As a result of students' motivation that is low, the students were sleeping in the class, chatting with their friends, and did not complete the assignment. They were doing those activities while the learning process was held. They only interested when they met the pre-service teacher for the first time or the beginning and knowing that they will have a new teacher.

The student's behaviours were changing after having some sessions with the pre-service teacher. The participants need to remind each student and heightened their voices to make the students focused in following the class activities. When facing this kind of situation, the try to find out the ways in improving her student's motivation in learning English.

Therefore, student's motivation was one of the challenges that the three participants faced. They found that the students were lack of motivation. It has been determined that individuals may experience an absence of motivation to perform. There is a belief that a large number of individuals do not have the personal ability to enact the required task, the belief they cannot maintain the effort that is required by the behaviour or the belief that they are simply powerless in effectuating a suitable outcome (Pelletier, 1999).

Enhancing student's motivation can be achieved through the collaboration between parents, teachers, learners and Ministries of Education. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that many of our students are poorly motivated and have poor work ethics. This calls for more organized and well-planned efforts on the part of teachers to remedy such a situation.

3.2 The Way Pre-Service Teacher Overcome the Challenges

The participants found their own ways in overcoming their challenges in the teaching practice program by reflecting to their post experiences as student teachers.

3.2.1 Reflection on Difficulties in Finding Teaching Material

Reflection in teaching refers generally to teachers learning to subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to a critical analysis, and taking more responsibility for their actions (Korthagen, 1993). One method of encouraging this reflection is for teachers to form groups in which they discuss and reflect on their work (Korthagen, 1993). The three participants did different kinds of reflection to overcome their challenges. The pre-service teachers tend to keep finding the suitable materials for his students and have a discussion with their mentor as stated below

Before started to teach, I prepared the teaching material and some strategies in teaching that I got from college, especially that suggested by my lecturer in the previous semester, and also from the feedback that I got from my colleagues at the same school when having a discussion with them. (RDFTM_P1_1)

P2 and P3 said

I would use the book with title "The Path Way to English" as references or the main source of my teaching material and I tried to find something else from the internet such as the British Council site. (RDFTM_P2_1)

Because of the tragedy of error projector, I realized that I also need to repair my time management. (RDFTM_P3_1)

When the three participants were aware about their difficulties in finding the suitable teaching materials, they did the reflection on action to overcome the challenge. They prepared the teaching materials more carefully and tried to input the suggestion from their friends and mentor when having a discussion. They also found the teaching material from some sources, as follows: books entitled *The Path Way to English* and in addition they also pick some of the teaching materials from internet like British Council site. Furthermore, when the third participant experienced a condition when she was informed that the tool she had prepared did not work well and felt difficult to find the replacement tools, she realized that she need to prepare more than one teaching materials when came to the class and fixed her time management.

3.2.2 Reflection on Students' Motivation

In this part, the participants compared the differences between first impression that the students gave when meeting them for the first time and when they have taught the students for several times. This created some strategies in facing the students, as stated by P1, P2, and P3 as follows.

Knowing that happened, in the next meeting I would like to divide them into some small groups, in order to make them have a intense discussion with their group members. Not only by dividing them into some small groups, I was also trying to make my students more attractive with using different kind of learning method and learning material. (RSM_P1_1)

Dealing with that I tried to find something new or some interesting learning materials for them and also the variety of the activities. Because, if there was only one activity maybe that could make them bored. In addition, I provide them with some games in learning so that they will try and will motivate to learn English. (RSM_P2_1)

In line with P1 and P2, P3 overcome the challenge by grouping his students.

For the students that were lazy in finishing the task, I was approaching them one by one and keep checking up on them until they complete their work. I was also helping my students that have difficulties in learning the material. I tried to approach them one by one and explained the material all over again until they got it. I kept handling those kinds of students. When I noticed that there were some of them that very quiet and not really active. I was asking them a little bit

more than the active one. But the problem was, whenever I asked them and pointed the students which was quiet, she or he could not answer my question. They would stay silent and make the atmosphere become awkward. So, I just tossing the question and eventually the active one was the one that answered my question. I did like the active students in my class because they were lifting up the mood in the class. (RSM_P3_1)

Providing the students with some games and various activities, P3 also approached them one by one and kept checking up on them until they completed their work, helped the students which have difficulties in learning the material, and explained the material all over again until they got the point.

Motivation can affect how students approach school in general. How they relate to teachers, how much time and effort they devote to their studies, how much support they seek when they are struggling, how they perform on tests, and many other aspects of education. If students are not motivated, it is difficult to improve their academic achievement, no matter how good the teacher, curriculum or school is. Moreover, unmotivated students can disengage other students from academics, which can affect the environment of an entire classroom or school.

4. CONCLUSION

From the findings it could be concluded that the challenges that encountered by pre-service teacher when conducting their teaching practice were (1) the difficulties in finding the suitable teaching material and (2) facing the students' lack of motivation in learning English.

They found ways to solve their problems by having teacher reflection the problems. This resulted in using some certain books as references, adapting the teaching material from the internet, provide the students with interesting video, and also preparing for the second plan when the media or tools did not work well. In addition, they asked some advice from their mentor and friends, keep making and preparing the suitable material: video, ice breaking,

Furthermore, the reflection on facing students' motivations are using more attractive learning activities, sharing some interesting experience, grouping the students, and also implementing ice breaking and interactive games. Those of which they had not prepared when joining their courses in university.

Nonetheless, this study has weakness, i.e., we did not have opportunity to observe the class due to COVID19 pandemic. Thus, further research is suggested to have classroom observations.

In terms of the participants' readiness for conducting teaching practice, it is strongly suggested that they can get more practices on supporting teaching competence in their courses on their initial years as student teachers. So that the next pre-service teachers have more provision before doing their teaching practice in the school.

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