

# Constructing EFL Teacher Knowledge Base:

## A case study of the fourth year EFL pre-service teachers

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**Abstract**—Pre-service teacher education plays an imperative role in constructing the knowledge base of EFL teachers. The objectives of the study are to draw an initial classification of the elements of teachers' knowledge base based on the types of knowledge and the kind of resources that the pre-service teachers have obtained to develop it and why such sources were employed. The data were collected through interviews addressed to five pre service teachers who were in the beginning of their fourth year of the study. The interviews reveal that they recognize pedagogical knowledge in designing lesson but they do not acknowledge the other knowledge domains. In addition, the teachers employed pedagogical courses, their personal experience, and internet as the resource to obtain their knowledge because these resources provide practical benefits for the teaching. Considering the partial representation of EFL teacher knowledge base and the unclear contribution of the teacher education courses in developing the knowledge base, it is suggested that different types of knowledge and skills are designed to provide the benefits for the pre-service teachers and emerge as influential resource for developing the teacher knowledge base.

**Keywords**—*knowledge domain; construction and development; influential resource*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher knowledge base is the specialized knowledge that teacher knows; the expertise, understanding, awareness, knowledge, and skills that second-language teachers need to possess in order to be effective teachers [1-6]. It is the information that teacher educators believe their students must know [1]. Thus, teaching necessarily begins with a teacher's understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught [5]. Basically, teacher knowledge base has specific domains [5,7-14] based on the division of language and teaching [3,13]. These domains has been reviewed on their constant and critical interdependence which leads to the the reconceptualization [2,10,14,15].

The domain of teaching in the knowledge base is discussed in two categories; a priori and grounded. A priori category discusses arguments over relevance of discipline-derived knowledge such as applied linguistics or second language acquisition. A priori proposals often derive from research and study in fields from the point of view of what learner is doing and not from how the teacher perceives that learner. Grounded category includes analysis of language teaching that start with

the activity as it is practiced in the classroom; thus they are grounded in the phenomenon itself [16].

Moreover, the knowledge base of EFL/FL/ESL teachers has been reviewed from different perspectives. Some researchers propose the framework of teacher's knowledge base as a situated knowledge; the arguments that suggest the knowledge base as a process that is supported by its surrounding factors. Among the influential contexts, researchers have recommended collaboration with colleagues [17,18] and teacher educators [19]. It is also reported that teachers' individual belief and experiences [20], the foreign language learning beliefs, the professional practice [17,18,21,22], and active student involvement [18] greatly influence the teaching practice.

The factors influencing the situated knowledge of the teachers also confirm that the knowledge base is developed over time. For example, the foreign language pedagogical knowledge of beginning teachers is transformed during their initial professional years [21]. In addition, changes in beliefs about teaching and learning English as Foreign Language is evident after their participation in teacher education program. Teacher knowledge, ability and skill development can be observed and creativity as a talent or gift can be developed as a skill [23].

Another significant groundwork in portraying the EFL/ESL/FL teacher knowledge base is the disparities between theory and practice. Researchers have been arguing whether the knowledge base is solidly formulated during the pre-service teacher education or it is transformed within different periods, including the in-service teacher education. Studies also signify the discrepancy between teaching behaviors and teacher beliefs because teachers are influenced by examination-oriented education [24]. Another study compares the expertise of novice and experienced language teachers [25]. There is a discrepancy between the participants' views and their classroom practices based on reports on the views and beliefs of novice EFL teachers about the English language teaching methods [26].

This paper explores what knowledge domain that the teachers realize in their lesson plan, what the most influential resources in the knowledge realization are, and why the factors are considered prominent in their decision for the lesson plan.

## II. METHODS

To meet the abovementioned objectives, the study employs qualitative case-study. The teachers' verbal report on their thought was collected by conducting interviews [27]. Interviews was initiated based on the lesson plan. The transcripts of the interviews were recorded and then organized, analyzed and interpreted. The subject of the study was pre-service teachers who were in the fourth year when the study was conducted. The sample was chosen randomly from 40 students. The students were offered to participate in the study and then they submitted their lesson plan. There were five pre-service teachers participating in this study. They were labeled as Preservice Teacher (PT); PT1, PT2, PT3, PT4, and PT5 respectively. The lesson plan was studied before the interviews were performed. The interview questions were modified from Achtenhagen [28], Townsend [29] and Clapp [30] for their opinion about curriculum; Littlejohn and Widneatt [31] and Munby [32] for the content or material, Nunan [33] and Dubin & Olshain [34] for the knowledge of lesson objectives, and Littlewood, [35] for the communicative activities. The data from the lesson plans were analyzed to answer the first objective and interviews responses are the raw data for the answers of the second and third questions.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are presented according to the order of the questions. They are presented thematically so the discussion is following the presentation of the results.

### A. The Domains of EFL Pre-Service Teachers Knowledge Base

The lesson plan documents show the representation of each elements of instruction yet they do not provide much detailed information. The PTs were able to show that they have planned the objectives, the materials, the activities, the media, and the assessment method. At this point, the PTs demonstrates their pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the teachers completed the explanation and confirmed their understanding on the importance of the curriculum. The teachers identified the *Core Competence* and *Basic Competence* from the curriculum and adopt them in their lesson plan. They also agree that the objectives and the outcomes can be defined based on the competence. The interview also indicates a confirmation. The part of pedagogical knowledge can be observed from the sample extract of the interview as follows:

R : *Sebelum menulis Lesson plan ini apa yang anda lakukan? ada survey ke sekolah?*

PT1 : *Ya, kan ada KI dan KD, KD saya liat di internet kan ada silabus. dari situ kan bisa dikira kira apa yang mau ditulis di learning objective sama materi nya.*

[I can refer to the curriculum when I select the specific competence. Then I just formulate some relevant objectives]

R : *Jadi nggak berdasarkan kondisi nyata di kelas ya?*

PT1 : *Iya sih, dari indikator sama objective dan materinya dikira kira aja.*

[well, I just guess the objectives without considering the students' prior learning]

(extract 1)

In addition, the researcher tried to explore the conceptual aspects of PTs pedagogical knowledge. The data shows that these teachers defined goals and objectives inconsistently. And then, they were not able to explain the connection between the concept of curriculum and the recent update of Indonesian National Curriculum. Moreover, PTs also displayed an unclear explanation on the concept of designing instruction. When they explained the stages in designing a lesson, none of the teachers write the lesson plan based on real situation or real students need nor these PTs saw the importance of needs analysis. Among five PTs, only one who stated that she had interviewed her students. Other PTs confirmed that their lesson plans were designed based on their personal view when they were in high school students.

All teachers were aware of the obligation to select a suitable strategy and technique in delivering the material. They used their own experience as a reference in selecting and implementing certain type of learning strategies and media. Thus, the standard for selecting the strategies and learning experience is the teachers preference while the students' were ignored. For example, PT3 counted on her opinion to predict students' interest to select the objectives and material. They wanted to demonstrate specific technique like *Total Physical Response*, to measure the level of difficulty of the task, by using their own experience when they were students in senior high school. They utilized the internet information or referring to their own experience when they were students, to develop strategy for delivering the material and for achieving the lesson objectives. All different sources were the reference for the objectives, the strategy, and the activities or tasks for the material and media.

All PTs had a weak understanding and application of assessment methods. PT2 measured the level of difficulty by using the length of the text. They did not write indicator-relevant assessment types. On the contrary, they could explain that the learning outcomes appear both in process and product of the lesson. But they did not realize the process oriented or product oriented assessment in their lesson plans. Thus, there are some essentials they miss to explicitly state in the lesson plan.

Lastly, the teachers also demonstrate lack of knowledge about the concept of tasks and activity. They do not elaborate the responses on what bases they use to implement specific tasks and activity. They believe that an enjoyable, easy activity should be preferred. They do not state that the tasks and activities are related to the outcomes or related to the objectives that they have designed before. They even cannot identify the definition of the terms *task* and *activity* properly. Thus, they do not have a declarative and procedural knowledge of learning experience. They demonstrate parts of pedagogical knowledge but they also miss many aspects within the same domain.

The interview also signified a lack of teachers' understanding of content knowledge. They were not able to show how the lesson objectives were articulated in the

material. The teacher did not mention any functional aspects in the lesson (e.g. as the indication that they understand functional aspects of language). They could not choose which linguistic elements they wanted to explore to support the reading comprehension (e.g. sound and pronunciation, words and vocabulary, text and semantics). They did not indicate a significant justification to assure that they need to define the term “comprehension”. In fact they could not clarify the language aspects for each element of comprehension.

#### B. The Contribution of Different Resources in Constructing the EFL Teacher Knowledge Base

The pre-service teachers pointed specific resources to support the process of designing lessons. All teachers acknowledged the pedagogical subjects as supportive resources for their lesson. They denoted that there are specific functions of each subject for different processes in constructing the lesson. For example, lesson plan and material development courses were used to prepare the lesson or class, especially in defining the objectives and developing the subjects. Besides, some participants include language skills such as vocabulary and reading as important subjects that contribute to their knowledge in designing the lesson.

Teacher perception of how subjects or courses are considered important in developing the elements of their lesson. They wrote a statement on how important the courses are. The courses that have been appreciated are curriculum development, lesson plan and material development, English Teaching Method, and English Teaching assessment.

*Mata kuliah csd menjadi pondasi awal dlm kita mengajar, kita harus tau kebutuhan para peserta didik sehingga mampu dituangkan dalam kurikulum dan silabus. Dalam silabus juga tertuang Ki dan Kd dalam pelaksanaan pengajaran. Lesson plan dan material development membantu kita dalam menyiapkan proses pembelajaran itu dilakukan, dari mulai perencanaan hingga pengembangan material. Et method membantu kita dalam mencari method yang tepat untuk digunakan. Et media membantu kita mencari dan menentukan media apa yg tepat digunakan. Et assestment membantu kita dalam pembuatan evaluasi pengajaran, bagaimanam membuat evaluasi yang benar.*

(PTs statement)

On the contrary, PTs confirmed that they did not see any significance of the content courses to the process of enhancing students’ ability in mastering the material. The teachers, again, showed a lack of understanding and interest to the content knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge courses. The participants believed that pedagogical courses are more beneficial. Their understanding on the planning the lesson confirms their preference on the courses. However, they did not acknowledge the same benefits that the teachers could gain from the courses on language system and language skills.

In addition, the participants of the study also considered their personal experience when they were students as important consideration for designing a lesson for their students. They think that their past experience was similar to the current

students condition. The experience was related to how they were taught as students and what they think they learned at that time. They also use their personal interaction with particular students from certain grades to explore learning neccessities that should be put in their lesson. There is negative personal consideration found that one of the participants is totally guess what will be appropriate for her students. The personal experience was also highlighted as the resource for writing down the lesson plan. Yet, they were not actually exploring the students condition; see the following extract.

- R : Apa yang Anita lakukan  
PT1 : Karena pengen menerapkan media tertentu, menerapkan strategi tertentu yaitu TPR  
R : Anita sempat ke SD liat situasi atau ngobrol?  
PT1 : Ada, nanyain kalau belajar bahasa Inggris ngapain Trus katanya mereka belajarnya gitu gitu aja.

(extract 2)

Despite its minor appearance, the internet also is considered as a resource of preparing a lesson. The interviews with PT4 reveal that information on the internet is one of the resource in designing lesson.

- R : Dibuat berdasarkan sekolah mana? situasi seperti apa?  
PT2 : Nggak pakai sekolah manapun. Berdasarkan pengalaman pribadi. Wah banyak salah ya Bu? Mau di wawancara nih Bu?  
R : Nggak, Cuma mau tahu latar belakang  
PT2 : Apa yang sudah pernah dialami sebelumnya, waktu SD diajarkan apa Cari info di Mbah Google, ada yang menarik, pas, kenapa nggak.  
R : Jadi info dari internet dicocokkan dengan pengalaman pribadi ya?  
[so did you mix your own experience and the information from the internet]

- PT2 : Iya Bu.  
[yes, Mam]

(extract 3)

#### C. Why Different Resources Construct the Same Knowledge Domain?

It is clear that all PTs’ gain during their initial training has strong impact to their knowledge base construction. The curriculum document can be a useful resource for teacher knowledge. Besides, their personal experience as secondary school students is another resource of the knowledge base. Their preference on pedagogical courses has become the third resource of the knowledge base.

The PTs can apply the essentials from their pedagogical courses because they can see the benefits of the courses to th teaching (see PT statement). On the contrary, they cannot see the ultimate benefits offered in the content knowledge classes,



especially when they deal with the teaching process. The personal experience also contributes a great influence to the shape of the knowledge base. All PTs are still impressed with the specific strategies that have had experienced while they were students. Alternatively, they are curious of the effectiveness and the interesting aspect of certain technique. These two reasons are evident with their responses and reasoning.

The internet is the fastest channel to look up various information for their knowledge. Eventhough the use of internet is not dominant, but this resource can replace a bulk of reference books that to read them, it is quite time consuming. Thus, internet is the best alternative to seek information or important documents.

The findings signify that EFL teacher knowledge base is constructed from different resources but is still limited on the pedagogical knowledge domain. The study does not find any indicators that show the development of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as a part of the knowledge base framework.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the time period when pre-service teachers study in university has contributed a very strong impact on shaping the knowledge base before they really go to school to start becoming teachers. It is also indicated that pre-service teachers experience as students in secondary school also intervene the shape of the knowledge base of the pre-service teachers. Their interaction with the surrounding also supports the process of the knowledge base construction. The clarity of practical benefits from each resource is a dominant reason in shaping the PTs preference when they utilizing the resource for their professional practice.

#### V. IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests the importance of real practice in the process of teaching, starting from the making of the lesson plan up to the teaching performance in real classroom. Instead of practicing teaching in a manipulated class in skill-oriented subjects such as *Micro Teaching*, the teaching can be conducted earlier in the real classroom. The study also calls out to researchers, practitioners, and teacher educators to explore more on teacher competence in subject matter but not as exclusive aspect to learn in teacher initial training.

The study also signifies to refine the curriculum of English education curriculum in the university where the participants study especially the syllabi of language skills courses and linguistic courses. Those subjects must have a sharper objective which integrate the needs of elaborating the language elements into teaching learning package. Teacher education institution and teacher educators are suggested to develop integrated curriculum in which pre-service teachers will be able to identify the subject matter exploration and application in the material and to transform the knowledge into teachable units.

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