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Learning to Teach in Indonesian High School Settings: A Case Study of Two EFL Female Pre-Service Teachers

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The teaching practicum has long been recognized as an important component of pre-service teacher education (Santoro, 1997) if not the most important one (Farrell, 2007). It is also the “capstone experience” in most teacher education programs (Gaudelli & Douley, 2009, p. 311). The importance of the teaching practicum for student teachers in the process of becoming teachers is also widely recognized (Beck & Kosnik, 2002). One reason for that is that it provides students with the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills they have learned in their pre-service teacher education courses.

Due to the importance of teaching practicum in the process of becoming teachers, this field has been extensively studied for the last four to five decades, if not longer (Carney & Alimi, 2005). Abundant research has highlighted the impact of the teaching practicum on the professional development of pre-service teachers (Cecere et al., 2012; Carin, 2014; Choy, Wong, & Low, 2014; Katlan, 2013; Kay-Ayrud, 2010; Kuusandono, 2013; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013; Mousaw et al., 2011; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012; Vetter et al., 2013). While the teaching practicum for language teachers especially in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other languages) has been scrutinized widely, ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) practicums remain unexplored (Carin, 2014). My research, then, delves into the following: the conditions for teaching practicum on ESL settings.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of two female EFL pre-service teachers in an Indonesian university teacher education program in learning to teach in high school settings. Using a qualitative case study design, I aim to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the goals of the pre-service teachers’ student teaching?
2. What instructional tools do they utilize in their teaching?
3. What tensions do they encounter in the process of learning to teach in high school settings?

Methods

Conceptual Framework

Viewing teaching practicum as an activity designed for achieving particular goals, I use activity theory, an extension of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, as my framework to analyze the complexities of learning to teach within school settings. For this study, I employ an activity theory lens based on the second generation of scholarship (Engeström, 1987), which is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Student teaching as an activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 1987, p. 78)](image)

Research Participants

This is part of a larger study of EFL pre-service teachers in an Indonesian university teacher education program. For the purpose of this post, the two participants, Ema and Prita (pseudonyms) consented to participate in the study. Both of them were 20 years old at the time of data collection and were multilingual. One of their parents was elementary school teacher, and they were both from a small town in West Kalimantan.

Findings

As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, both Ema and Prita share similarities and differences in their experiences of learning to teach in school settings.

Figure 2: Configuration and tensions in Ema’s school instructional activity system

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 3: Configuration and tensions in Prita’s school instructional activity system

![Figure 3](image)

Similarities

- Both students are working hard as engaging students in the lesson and enabling students understand the materials and followed instructions.
- The community involved high school students and a cooperating teacher.
- Tools: both utilized various mediaing tools in the classroom.
- Division of labor was clear in which students as learners and a cooperating teacher served as a mentor and facilitator who ensured pre-service teachers had opportunities to teach in class.
- School rules governed the teaching and learning process.

Differences

- Pulsk: Ema’s school used Curriculum 2013 while Prita’s school used KTSP curriculum.
- Division of labor: Prita’s mentor allowed Prita to observe her and worked together in classrooms while Ema’s mentor did not allow observation and let Ema teach by herself.
- Mediating tools: Ema’s school had limited facilities to support technology used teaching materials while Prita’s school had adequate facilities.

Mediating Tools: instructional materials (PPT, video clips, textbook, workbook, pedagogical knowledge (pedagogy, classroom management, rules, policies), and students) and languages (Indonesian, English and Indonesian).

As the findings indicate, mismatches between university and school expectations and constraints) and division of labor while Prita did not.

Figure 4: Roles, rules, and relations

Conclusions

- Activity theory is useful framework to understand the complexities of learning to teach within school contexts.
- From activity theory perspective, learning to teach in Indonesian high school settings is complex and involves interrelating factors which are not always aligned. Schoeman and Andriana (2012) note that in their study, the two pre-service teachers mostly experienced tensions in relation to rules, mediating tools, and division of labor. In addition, tension between mediating tools and community also occurred in both participants’ activity systems. All the tensions were apparently contributing to the achievement of the goals which forms another tension.

Future Research

Despite the useful insight that the findings provide, further research is needed to better understand the professional development of EFL pre-service teachers. Some areas for further research include:

- Student teachers’ experiences in interacting with school personnel outside the classroom.
- Bigger sample sizes, including more participants and more schools.
- Intervention programs to better prepare pre-service teachers in dealing with big class sizes with diverse student backgrounds.

Implications for Teacher Education

As the findings indicate, mismatches between university and school expectations exist. Some implications are then worth considering.

- Teacher education institutions need to bridge the gap between university and school settings.
- Policy makers need to establish clear criteria and rules in relation to student teaching placements.
- Teacher educators need to update their knowledge and understanding of how English is learned and taught in school contexts.

- Integrating courses related to managing big classrooms and students’ behaviors into teacher education program curriculum are greatly needed to equip pre-service teachers with knowledge about how to handle big-size classrooms and their students.

References