CHALLENGES IN TEACHING EFL FOR PRE-SERVICE YOUNG LEARNERS TEACHERS

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Abstract

To educate 21ˢᵗ century young learners, a teacher is demanded to have balanced knowledge in both theory and practice. Focusing on EFL, regardless whether English is taught as a compulsory or local subject, primary school students need introductory concept of English covering several skills and components. To encourage the students' English mastery, the teacher indeed becomes the center point of the class. The success in achieving the competencies depends on how creative and innovative the instructors are. However, Indonesian pre-service teachers seem to have obstacles in learning and preparing sound English instruction. Various factors contribute to their competence including the fact that English teaching is not their primary goal. Thus, this article aimed to reveal potential challenges appeared to the college students in the English Learning for Primary School class and propose several strategies to enhance their English performance. To get the data, descriptive qualitative method was applied with interview and questionnaire as the main instruments. The results showed that pre-service primary school teachers in Indonesian context believed that teaching English faced prospective challenges identified from five categories. Furthermore, to cope with those difficulties, they have several strategies to conduct focusing on three aspects: media development, plenty of fun activities, and a technology literate teacher. In short, the earlier pre-service primary school teachers get a lot of ELT illustration and treatment, the more ready they will undergo English teaching. This is considered significant to discuss, especially for the teacher candidates to build and develop their professionalism in teaching English for young learners.

Key words: challenges, young learners, pre-service teachers, primary school

1 INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher looks as an easy job whereas there are plenty of things to consider and prepare if we do it professionally. One of the subjects which need a lot of preparation is English since in Indonesian context the language is taught as a foreign language for the learners. Related to this, pre-service teacher education contributes significantly to the future career of the English teacher–whether they become professional or not. The background knowledge they got from their college becomes the foundation of their teaching. Both theories and practice should be balanced to build appropriate belief on how to deliver knowledge to the students in the right way. In addition to educational experiences, when the teachers come to the class, they also bring their cultural backgrounds and social interaction that may further shape their beliefs about English instruction (Johnson, 1992a; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Smith, 1996).

The implementation of an English curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools has created a huge demand for competent children's English teachers. Considering the use of English as International language in the world, the nation has decided to equip the learners English as early as possible. Now, officially starting from the first grade of primary school, the students have learned English and even some kindergartens or preschool also start introducing English although it is in very limited use. In fact, the one who teaches English in elementary school does not earn completely English education in the university since in this country the primary school teachers are those who

graduated from Primary School Education program, not English program and the compulsory subjects focused in their study are Math, Science, Social, Bahasa Indonesia, and Civics. Thus, the researcher believes that this issue is interesting to discuss as the starting point to produce better English teaching in primary school.

Reflecting on the data above, research related to teaching English in elementary school particularly dealing with the pre-service teacher's belief including the perception on the challenges in teaching English is still at an early step. So far the research in English teacher education has focused on secondary and tertiary schools. Very little attention has been paid specifically to elementary levels of English teaching in Indonesia. It is considered important to comprehend this since the result will be beneficial to develop more effective elementary school English teaching program. As we know that English should be taught with fun activities in this level and of course many differences appear in the learning environment if we compare it to the teens or adult learners. One factor that is important to think is that the subjects are classified into young learners (children between the ages of 5-12) and teaching English to young learners are more student-centered, active, experiential, authentic, democratic, collaborative, rigorous, and challenging. Understanding teachers' specific ideas about English teaching can inform researchers and teacher trainers about how teachers are expected to employ their teaching, and how to provide appropriate teacher education programs. Thus, this study is an attempt to examine issues concerning teaching English in elementary schools, with a particular emphasis on the pre-service teachers' beliefs towards the potential challenges and strategies in teaching EFL. The research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

(a)   What are the pre-service teachers' beliefs on prospective challenges in Teaching English to young learners?

(b)   What are the pre-service teachers' beliefs on strategies applied to make the teaching performance better?

2   REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature highlights the personal experience which becomes the base of this research, the concept of challenge, the relation between challenge and belief, kinds of teacher's belief, and the factors that support primary school pre-service teaching belief in teaching English.

Based on the researcher's personal experience in "English Learning for Primary school" course, it showed that the students seemed to have a number of burdens when they heard the word English. Reading English source and speaking English in the classroom were a big deal to do. English is like a monster for most of the students whereas they are expected to perform well in English instruction later. If this condition continues, English teaching problems will appear to both the trainees and their future students in the real teaching. Such thoughts are supposed to be analyzed and solved to increase the teaching. Shinde & Karekatti (2012) stated that the teacher educators should consider these language learning beliefs and changed them since theirawareorunawareparticipation affect their career.Teachershavethe right toproduceorcrackthetrends. Generally, when the teacher has to teach what they do not master, they tend to teach the materials based on their own belief,teachtheirpersonalvalues,   andmanage   their   students   inaccordancewiththeirownparticular definitionsof Englishteachingandlearning.This condition is often done subconsciously. Consequently, high encouragement needs to conduct in order to create joyful atmosphere in building their English competence and equip them with appropriate and positive belief in teaching English.

Challenges in this study are the terms closely related to the obstacles, difficulties, or problems the one had or has got from experience or even will get in the future. If it is about pre-service teachers' anxiety to the event happening in their future career, it means that the challenges haven't occurred yet, but they have worries that it will influence their teaching quality later on. Thus, challenges in this study can be called as a part of belief which becomes the factor of English teaching effectiveness in the next generation.

Both the professional development of teachers and their classroom practices are influenced by educational beliefs. Since the 1990s, research has focused on the exploration of the knowledge and belief that lay behind the practice of teaching. Some studies have proved it. Johnson (1994) and Numrich (1996) revealed how pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs are based on prior experience and

how such experience relates to classroom practice. Johnson (1994) found that pre-service teachers' instructional decisions during a class were based on images of teachers, materials, activities and classroom organization generated by their own L2 learning experience. Some other researchers on teacher education and development have showed how teachers' beliefs play a critical role in affecting their teaching and the kinds of thinking and decision making that underlie their classroom practices (Moon, 2000; Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Smith, 1996; Trappes-Lomax & McGrath, 1999). Shinde & Karekatti (2012) found that primary school pre-service teachers in Indian context from MM (Indian Medium) and EM (Marathi Medium) shared a similar and consistent set of beliefs. Most of them have common beliefs about:

(a) The nature of children's English development, which is in accord with the recent research literature on second/foreign language learning at early ages
(b) English teaching methods and techniques employed in the classroom, which are basically in tune with the teaching principles of CLT
(c) Teacher talk features which provide comprehensible input and
(d) A strong sense of self-efficacy as English teachers in terms of doing their work, which may have a positive impact on their performance.

Teachers' beliefs have already been classified into various sets of categories by some researchers (Johnson, 1992a; William & Burden, 1997). William and Burden (1997) divided their discussion of teachers' beliefs into three areas:

(a) About language learning
(b) About learners
(c) About themselves as language teachers.

Furthermore, a number of studies have attempted to investigate the beliefs of ESL teachers through questionnaires or inventories (Hsieh & Chang, 2002; Johnson, 1992a; Kern, 1995; Liao & Chiang, 2003; Richards, Tung, & Ng, 1992; Yang, 2000). Yang (2000) discussed prospective teachers' beliefs in four areas:

(a) General beliefs about child development
(b) General beliefs about language learning
(c) specific beliefs about teaching English to children
(d) Self-efficacy and expectations.

Factors influencing teachers' beliefs on English teaching are educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, social interaction (Johnson, 1992a; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Smith, 1996). Accordingly, these three factors also influence the pre-service primary school (young learners) teachers' belief. Educational experience refers to what the pre-service got from their English instruction in their campus and other English program(s) they joined to improve their competence. Next, cultural background means that cultural aspects take the big influence for the development of teaching concept. For example, the one who understands more about cross cultural ideas will be easy to transfer the culture of the target language in the classroom. In relation to social interaction, the more people interact with the society using English, the more the pre-service teachers give exploration in teaching English to their students. Richards (1998) further explains that beliefs are usually guided by a number of factors: their own experience as learners in classrooms, prior teaching experience, classroom observations they were exposed to, and their previous training courses at school. The second factor does not fit completely to the pre-service teachers since not all of the pre-service teachers have experience to teach in this very beginning semester.

3   METHOD

This study presented a descriptive research. The data were collected by administering questionnaire and interview in addition to observation. Furthermore, qualitative design was applied since it fitted to its characteristics, namely actual setting, words or pictures data, process concern, and inductive

analysis. 36 pre-service teachers who enrolled in the "English Learning for Elementary School" course participated as the subjects of this study. All pre-service teachers were second-year college students joined in the evening program for primary education. The technique was purposive sampling since the subjects fulfilled the criteria set by the researcher. They have already taken 3 lessons related to English (English I, English II, and English Learning for Elementary School).

Inorderto know theteachers' challenges and their specificbeliefsinamoresystematic way,*TheQuestionnaireofPre-servicePrimary School Teachers'TeachingBeliefs,*(seeAppendix I)wasdeveloped.Theresearcher adaptedanumberofrelatedquestionnaires(Horwitz,1987; Hsieh&Chang,2002; Oxford,1990;Yang,2000). The researcher also formulated questions about specific challenges in future teaching English in primary school. The questionnaire consisted of 53 discrete questions divided into five categories (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Description of Variables in Questionnaire

Variable	Sub Variables	Question Number
	Beliefs on the Nature of Children's English Development	1-14
The Pre-Service Primary School Teachers' Beliefs	Beliefs on Self-efficacy as an English Teacher	16-21
	Beliefs on Teacher Talk	22-34
	Beliefs on Teaching Media, Methods, and Materials	35-46
	Beliefs on Future's English Teaching in Elementary School	47-53

To support the data, interview was conducted to some students to identify their opinion about teaching English in primary school nowadays and later. The students were selected randomly based on their accessibility and English proficiency in the classroom. Having collected the answers from questionnaire, in analyzing the data, the researcher counted the percentage of each respond. Their responds determined their understanding and potential challenges and strategies on teaching English for young learners. Then, to clarify the pre-service teacher's answers, the recording of the interview was transcribed and classified based on the similar and different ideas in each category of pre-service teachers' belief.

4   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1   Children English Development

To know how young learners develop their English, fourteen items were given. Majority of pre-service teachers believed that every child has different learning styles and individual variations in their cognitive development process (item 2 & 7: more than 86%). Moreover, almost 90% agreed or strongly agreed that children learn faster when they do activities, use mother tongue fluently, get English in earlier level, practice regularly, interact with other people, use English as a medium of instruction, and understand the content of the subject (item 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14). In relation to language skill (item 10&11), they thought that 4 skills are important to teach, but reading and writing (98%) got a slightly higher percentage than listening and speaking (around 80%) The two things they disagreed or strongly disagreed were on item 1 and 9 (55-65%). They believed that not every child will be successful in learning English, and learning English is totally different from leaning Indonesian. Finally, they were confident to say that children learn English faster than adults (item 13: 90%).

The result of the first category showed that some are in line with the literature. Related to different learning style, it supports Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligence concepts. He takes pluralistic view of learning by recognizing that everyone has different cognitive strengths which influence their way of learning. In second language learning and development, Moon (2000)

suggested that physical activities such as playing games, making things, action songs, rhymes and drama can provide excellent contexts for children to learn English. In a similar manner, to criticize the direct analogies between first and second language acquisition, Brown (2000) dispelled the myth that second language teaching should resemble first language teaching.

Pertinent to the superiority between young learners and adult learners (Brown: 2007) on age in SLA/SLL argues that evidence of children outperforming adults in second language acquisition is misleading because the manner of learning dealing with their cognitive abilities instead of age may be the main factor in determining successful acquisition. More specifically, Dulay, et. al. (1982) concluded that children appear to be much more successful that adults in acquiring the phonological system, while adults improve faster than children in the areas of syntax and morphology. For language skills, the results do not completely fit for the theory of learning. It is believed that in language acquisition the learners will start from listening followed by speaking, reading, and writing. Then, the agreement on regular practice and using English as medium of instruction is justified by the need of repetition of the language in improving the children' English proficiency.

The prospective challenge taken from this first category is that not every child can learn English well. This is related to the students' multiple intelligences and the fact that English and Indonesian learning are totally different. This is supported by the interview result showing that the students mostly thought that the future English teaching in elementary school will be difficult in introducing the materials due to different pronunciation, stress, intonation, and spelling. The children have little or no prior knowledge of the target language.

4.2   Pre-Service Teacher's Self Efficacy

The responses from item 15, 18, 19, 21 indicates that teaching English is not easy, challenging, difficult, and did not bring fun for the pre-service teachers (around 56%-68%). This is perhaps due to their belief that English is not the main goal to teach in elementary school. Nevertheless, they still have confidence that in the future they can teach English (item 16, 17, 20: 57-69%).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action to produce given attainment (Bandura: 1997). It provides a measure of effective learning in the context of initial teacher education (Cheung, 2006), pre-service teachers' self-efficacy would have an impact on how they think, feel, teach, and learn, and therefore self-efficacy is predictor for pre-service teachers' learning effectiveness. According to the result, the next challenge is that teaching English is harder compared to other five compulsory subjects (science, social, Math, Bahasa Indonesia, and Civics). English is not the main target to teach and to be their research issue since it is only local subject. Based on the interview result, this responds were various based on the students' English proficiency. The main point is that the more proficient the students are, the more confident they will teach English to their students. Dulay, et. al. (1982) further explain that in second language acquisition, children's first language can negative and positive transfer which can provide errors and correct construction.

In accordance to the result of the questionnaire and interview, mostly they do not feel enjoyable when teaching English. Although they try to be confident, almost 40% of all students could not show their self esteem. Accordingly, their self confidence (mental) and performance (physical) readiness are interrelated and significant aspect in teaching. Harmer (2001) suggested that all English teachers should care for their physical well-being in order to counteract stress and possible tiredness, so that they can survive, learn, grow, and achieve a balance between mind and body.

4.3   Teacher Talk

Mostly the pre-service teachers (60%-90%) believed that the teacher needed to expose the students to listen to English sound, respond English questions, present English story, but not speak all the time in the class, (item 22, 23, 24, 25, 27). Furthermore, they all agreed that training was needed although in Indonesian context it has not been facilitated well (item 25). To avoid misunderstanding, clarification in Indonesian is important (item 28 & 34). In relation to the students' response on teacher talk, students need feedback and correction in addition to give repetition and paraphrasing technique (item 31 & 32). To accommodate the effective communication, they supported that teaching vocabulary (item 30) and encouraging the students to speak and act more (item 33) are pivotal.

The forthcoming challenge appeared in this category is the lack of English training. The interview results showed that English classes obtained during college study were not sufficient. They stated that English exposure existed nowadays to accommodate English improvement has not been realized. In other words, there has not been maximal effort from Indonesian government to assist primary school teachers in teaching English professionally. Providing English training is necessary to foster their English skill in maintaining effective communication with the students through appropriate teacher talk and giving constructive feedback during lesson. To give the constructive feedback in terms of correction and suggestion of course the teachers are expected to have adequate English skill.

4.4   Teaching Media, Method, and Material

In identifying pre-service teachers' belief on media, method, and material, 12 questions were given. They disagreed and strongly disagreed (around 60%-90%) on four items (item 34, 36, 41, 43) showing that teaching by using monolingual method is not effective and the focus of lesson on grammar was not suggested. Furthermore, pronunciation is not the significant thing to introduce. Other numbers which were agreed and strongly agreed are the use of media and Internet, songs, role play, games, moving activities, conversation, integrated learning, mistakes correction all the time, and strict rules to build discipline. (item 35,37,38,39,40,42,44,45,46 : more than 70%).

Through the sense of fun and play, the children are living the language for real. Moreover, they delight in imagination and fantasy. However, games are not the only way in which individual personalities surface in the language classroom (Halliwell, 1992). In addition, she mentioned that correction is not forbidden, yet for teaching children, teachers do not have to run round the room frantically trying to hear everything they say. Reflecting on the pre-service teachers' respond, they did not know that correcting students' mistakes frequently can break into the child's attempt to construct a whole meaning. Bilingual method is also considered fine in the second language acquisition. Therefore, the use of code switching is allowed for teaching language (Dulay, et. al., 1982). The concept that grammatical rule is not the emphasis for children can also be accepted. However, the pre-service teachers still have not understood that pronunciation is better to expose in children's activities.

To conclude, the most potential challenge in this point is that the demand of correct pronunciation in teaching children since in this period they tend to be more successful in acquiring the phonological system of the new language; many eventually achieve native-like accent. Next one is appropriate technique to respond the students' mistakes in order not to discourage their feelings in the process of language learning.

4.5   Future English Instruction

The last category is the researcher's questions related to future English instruction. The pre-service teachers showed their agreement (around 60%-90%) that the future students will be more critical, more frequent in using English, more skilled in operating multimedia and online sources, excited in outdoor activity, and more cooperative in learning community (item 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53). Item 51 was predicted not to happen. More than 90% disagreed and strongly disagreed that the students will be easy to handle during the class.

Dealing with the classroom management, the respond reflects on the idea that creating the balance between a caring environment and one where there is control is not easy task for any teacher (Linse, 2005). Then, critical thinking is influenced by various factors (experience, knowledge, social interaction, etc.) it is undeniable that nowadays, to face globalization era, society, technology, and teaching process always encourage the students to be more confident. This brings positive atmosphere since the students will be braver to express ideas. Furthermore, the teachers seem to give high appreciation on students' participation. In recent and later time, students centered learning is more and more meaningful in educational context. To facilitate this, problem solving activities can be used by the teachers in which the learners work in the group to cooperate and select the best ideas to make decision. Group work is also useful for outdoor activities. It is nice to conduct outdoor class, but not the priority. This should fit with the materials, supporting environment, and adequate control for one class.

Talking about children's English use, it depends on the supporting environment. It cannot be denied that next generation students will use English frequently in their activities since in Indonesia

nowadays English is already introduced from early age, and it is supported by learning sources or entertainment which commonly uses English. Lastly, technology brings special issue for the pre-service teachers due to its easiness and richness of information. This can both assist and damage the children. Therefore, be sure that you have the skills and expertise to properly supervise the learners. Without adequate supervision, children can easily become victims to Internet crime and can visit inappropriate sites.

In short, the last approaching challenge is the shift in terms of attitude (more critical students), English use (more frequent), technology use (more modern learning source and dictionary), preference on outdoor activities and group work activities, and classroom management (more active).

4.6 Strategies for Better Teaching

Based on the result of interview, the pre-service teachers propose their ideas to create better English teaching for young learners. First, the ability to develop educative instructional media should be equipped by the prospective teachers. Children like something fun and eye catching. Thus, providing colorful and appealing things can make their attention span longer in classroom activities since it can reduce their boredom (Kasihani, 2007). Second, to accommodate the various students' interest, various activities and materials need to be prepared. Every child has special characteristic in term of their diverse potential. Facilitating them with many activities can help them develop what they can do best (Linse, 2005). Third, technology mastery (including computer and Internet) becomes the next consideration to be professional. In addition to assist the teachers in supporting teaching materials, technology can be good facilities for children to foster their creativity (Linse, 2005).

5 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study reveal that pre-service primary school teachers in Indonesian context believed that teaching English has prospective challenges in the real practice identified from five categories. Furthermore, based on their learning experience, to cope with those obstacles they have several planning to conduct focusing on three things: media development, plenty of fun activities, and a technology literate teacher. From the researcher's point of view, providing intensive teacher training to ensure that the teachers have adequate English proficiency is crucial part. Insufficient English proficiency is associated with lower teacher confidence that may influence children's motivation for learning English.

It is hoped that the above research findings will encourage more language researchers and educators to learn more about teachers' beliefs. The results from this study may be used to remind pre-service elementary school English teachers to strengthen their teaching principles and method for young learners. The last, it may be of interest for future researchers to identify further challenges faced by pre-service and in-service teachers with different research subjects, instruments, and analysis to enrich the existing theories discussing about the best practice of teaching English for young learners.

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