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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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Introduction

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 & Ousley, 2009, p. 931). 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 opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply knowledge of teaching and learning which they gain during their university coursework (Beeth & Adadan, 2006).

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 (Caires & Almeida, 2005). Abundant research has highlighted the impact of the teaching practicum on the professional development of pre-service teachers (Caires et al., 2012; Canh, 2014; Choy, Wong, Goh, & Low, 2014; Kabilan, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kuswandono, 2013; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013; Moussay 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 (Canh, 2014). My research, then, extends the little research on teaching practicum in EFL 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 employed an activity theory lens based on the second generation of scholarship (Engeström, 1987), which is illustrated in Figure 1.
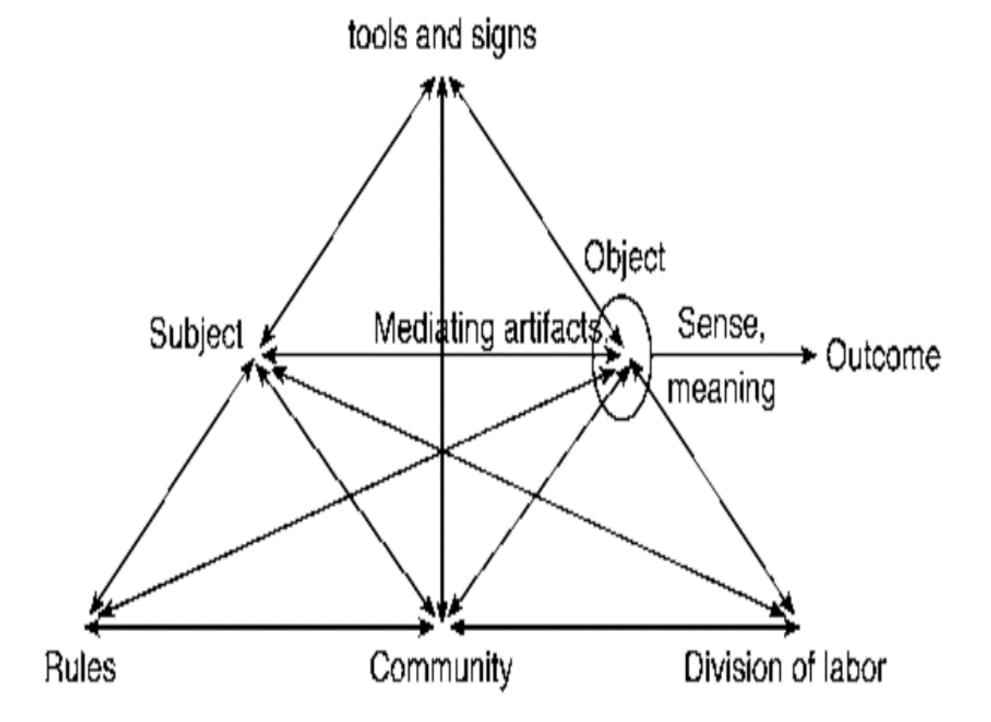

Figure 1. Student teaching as an activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

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 poster, the two participants, Ema and Prita (pseudonyms), were selected based on the commonalities they share. Both of them did their student teaching in high schools and had the same university instructor in their microteaching class. 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.

Research Sites

This research involves two high schools in West Kalimantan, Indonesia where the two participants did their student teaching. in both schools, English was learned and taught as a compulsory foreign language subject twice a week and it lasted for 90 minutes in each meeting.
- Barata High School (pseudonym), a public school located in Pontianak City. The number of students at the time of data collection was over 800.
- Damai High School (Pseudonym), an Islamic-based public school located in Pontianak City. The student population at the time of data collection was over 700.

Source: http://www.geocurrents.info/gc-maps/geocurrents-maps-by-country/geocurrents-maps-of-indonesia

Data Collection Methods

Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were the main data collection methods. Additional data in forms of lesson plans and syllabus were also gathered to triangulate the data.
- Classroom observations were conducted three times in Ema's classrooms and five times in Prita's classrooms ranging from one hour to one and half hours in each classroom observations.
- Semi structured interviews were conducted twice. One interview was conducted after all the classroom observations and one after the end of student teaching. The interviews ranged from 13 to 39 minutes in each of the interviews.

Data Analysis

In line with my interest in understanding the complexities of how pre-service teachers learn to teach, I analyzed the obtained data based on an activity theory framework (Engeström, 1987). The activity theory lens was used to identify the interrelating factors in each teaching context and the challenges that pre-service teachers experienced in their teaching practicum. In so doing, I wrote field notes for each of the classroom observations. For the interviews, I audiotaped them and transcribed them afterwards. In order to do the analysis, I reread all the obtained data with the intent to identify the objects or motives and other components of each participant's instructional activity system in school contexts such as mediating tools, rules, community members, and divisions of labor. I used MaxQDA, a qualitative software program to help me transcribe the interview, manage the data and code the data for salient themes.

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.
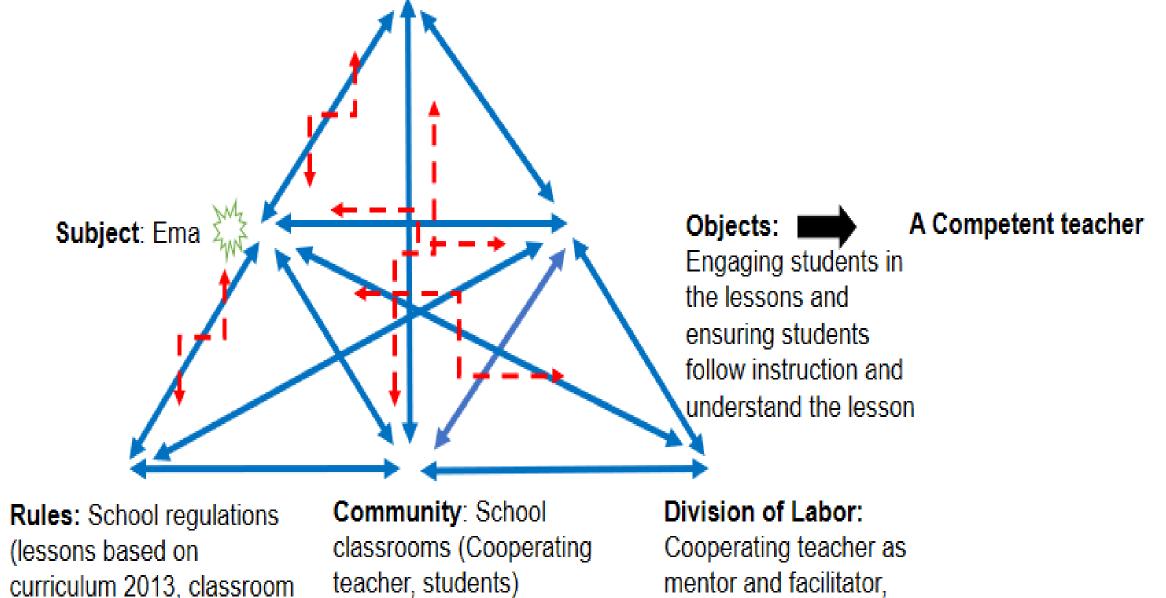
Similarities	Differences
• Both shared similar main goals: engaging students in the lesson and ensuring students understood the materials and followed instructions.	• Rules: Ema's school used Curriculum 2013 while Prita's school used KTSP curriculum.
• The community involved high school students and a cooperating teacher.	• 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.
• Tools: both utilized various mediating tools including multiple languages.	• Mediating tools: Ema's school had limited facilities to support technology used teaching materials while Prita's school had adequate facilities.
• 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 .	

Mediating Tools/Artifacts:
Instructional materials (textbook, handout, workbook), pedagogical knowledge (groupwork, pair wok, translating, questioning, calling on students, reading aloud together), and Languages (Arabic, English and Indonesia)

Note: The red dotted elbow double-arrows represent tensions. The blue double-arrows indicate interrelating components. The green explosion sign represents internal tension. The emboldened texts indicate the components involved within an Activity System. The black arrow indicates the intended outcome.
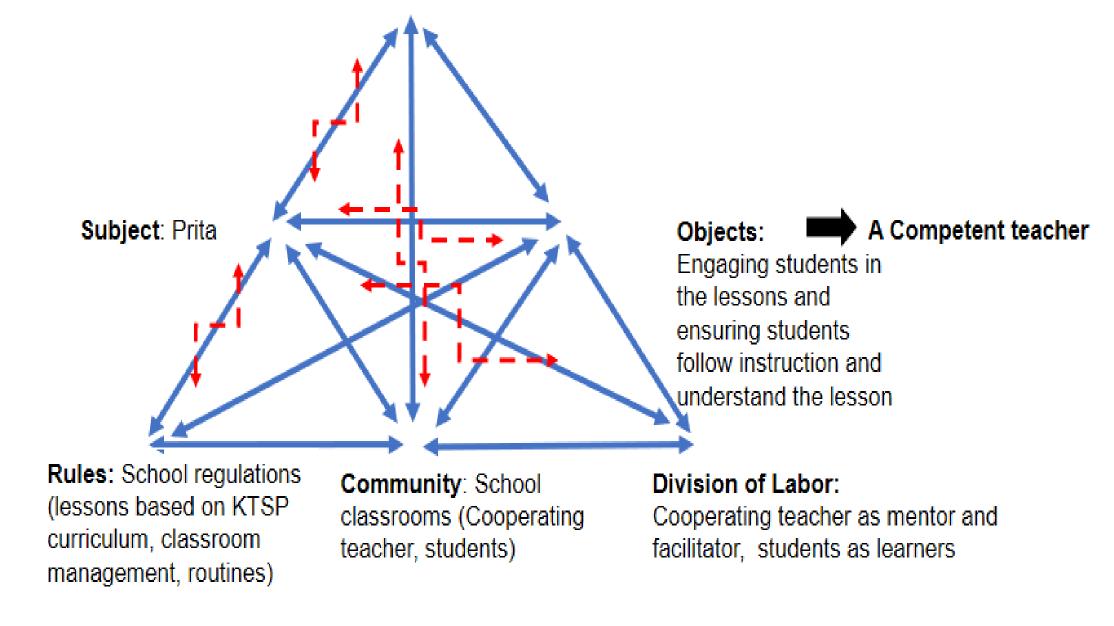
Figure 2. Configuration and tensions in Ema's school instructional activity system

Mediating Tools/Artifacts:
Instructional materials (Ppt, video clips, textbook, workbook), pedagogical knowledge (groupwork, translating, questioning, calling on students), and Languages (Arabic, English and Indonesian)

Note: The red dotted elbow double-arrows represent tensions. The blue double-arrows indicate interrelating components. The emboldened texts indicate the components involved within an Activity System. The black arrow indicates the intended outcome.

Figure 3. Configuration and tensions in Prita's school instructional activity system

Similarities and differences are also found in the challenges that both Ema and Prita experienced in their student teaching as illustrated in Figure 2 and 3.

Similarities	Differences
• Both Ema and Prita encountered tensions with rules (time constraints) and division of labor (classroom management)	• Ema encountered internal tension (inconsistency in her view of using target language) while Prita did not.
• The mediating tools and the community in both activity systems were not aligned with each other (the big class size and students' diverse English language ability).	• Ema experienced a tension with mediating tools.
	• Ema encountered tension with her mentor as part of division of labor while Prita did not.

Conclusion

- Activity theory is useful framework to understand the complexities of learning to teach within school contexts.
- From the activity theory perspectives, learning to teach in Indonesian high school settings is complex and involves interrelating factors which are not always aligned with one and another. Among the interrelated factors, 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.
- Learning to teach in school contexts is challenging for EFL pre-service teachers in the study as school and university expectation are not necessarily aligned with one and another.

Future Research

Despite the useful insight that the findings of the study 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 settings
- 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 expectations.
- Policy makers need to establish clear criteria and rules in relation to student teaching placement.
- 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.

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