

EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EFFORTS AND STRUGGLES IN TEACHING ENGLISH ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on EFL pre-service teachers' efforts and struggles in teaching English online. This is a narrative inquiry research by collecting data from diary, interview and informal conversation. The participants of this study were two pre-service teachers from English education department of a private university in Cianjur. The findings showed that in teaching English online, the EFL pre-service teachers (PSTs) did various efforts in preparation and implementation stage. In the preparation stage, the EFL PSTs tried to optimize their efforts and faced some challenges in designing lesson plan for online teaching, creating teaching videos and choosing the suitable platforms and media. In the implementation stage, their efforts and struggles were identified in terms of students' participation management and assignment submission as well as providing clear and comprehensible instruction in online class context. Beside consulting the teacher mentors, the PSTs also carried out reflection on their teaching to improve the quality of their teaching.

Keywords: EFL Pre-service teacher (EFL PST); teaching practicum; online teaching; narrative inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum is fundamental for EFL Pre-service teachers to develop their teaching skill and experience before they face the in-service teaching world. In addition, it serves as a critical bridge among theory and practice (Darling-Hammond et al. cited in Portman and Rass, 2019). However, the pre-service teachers are often struggling and unprepared in tackling the issues in their teaching practicum (Beeth & Adadan cited in Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüz and Busher, 2015). In managing the difficulties of instructing in schools during the practicum, pre-service teachers are generally supported by school-based teacher mentors and university-based teacher educators. Some 'chaos' situations may come up during teaching practicum, for example when Pandemic came, the EFL pre-service teachers should teach online which they did not previously expect and predict. This research looked at the efforts and struggles of two EFL pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum online for three months in two different high schools in Cianjur.

Pre-service teacher and Teaching practicum

Johnson and Perry cited in Agustiana (2014) stated that pre-service teacher should go through teaching practicum to give them teaching experience. This is important to do

considering that they will be professional teachers in the future. In teaching practicum, pre-service teachers not only have to do teaching practice, but also have to adjust several things about being a teacher. Chaplain cited in Klassen and Durksen (2014) stated that teaching practicum is a mentally demanding time. In this case, the pre-service teachers should fulfil the needs of the learners, school administrators, mentor teachers, and college supervisors. For many pre-service teachers, the practicum is appraised as the most distressing experience.

When doing teaching practicum, pre-service teachers can face unexpected problems. Sometimes, pre-service teachers faced difficulty in making lesson plan because there are some components which are very complex and detailed. As what Nurtanto, et al. (2021) explained that the components of creating a lesson plan are extensive and detailed. They also explained that the learning plan is administrative in nature, whereas in reality, the teacher must be able to consider the method chosen, the contents of the material, the activities to be carried out, the implementation of the practice, and teaching strategy all of which must be interconnected. Furthermore, according to Cole and Knowles, reported in Yin (2019), pre-service teachers in particular seem to struggle with the gap between expectations and reality, regardless of how much preparation they have before to the practicum. So, pre-service teachers have to prepare everything as good as possible before the teaching practicum to create a successful practicum. A successful practicum, according to Beck and Kosnik, cited in Portman & Rass (2019), allows student teachers to put their skills to the test in an environment which should include emotional support, professional collaboration and respect, exposure to the school beyond the assigned classroom, and a manageable workload.

In order to create a successful teaching practicum, pre-service teachers need to reflect so that they can do better teaching. Reflection, according to Dewey, as cited in Riyanti (2020), is an active activity of looking at oneself in order to improve something. Teachers benefit from reflective practice, according to Ferraro mentioned in Riyanti (2020), since it allows them to gain a better understanding of how they teach, which can lead to them becoming more effective teachers. With this in mind, reflective thinking is linked to the goal of strengthening teachers' ability to self-regulate. All reflection, according to Jay and Johnson, cited in Riyanti (2020), has the same goal: to express what and how teachers think about their practice in order to support effective learning. In this case, the pre-service teachers are usually guided by mentor both from school and university to develop their knowledge (Beeth and Adadan cited in Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüz and Busher, 2015; Gebhard cited in Yuan and Lee, 2014).

The use of technology in education: Advantages and Limitation

Technology plays an important role in education. According to Leer and Ivanov (2013), the educational technology brings together professionals in education and technology to look at the various ways that technology might help construct more efficient, effective, and long-term educational models. According to Lazar (2015), educational technology can be used in three ways: as a tutor (the computer delivers instructions and helps the user), as a teaching instrument, or as a learning tool. In terms of its roles, Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) explain that technology plays four roles in education: it is used as part of the curriculum, as an instructional delivery system, as a means of assisting with instructions, and as a tool to improve the entire learning process. Furthermore, Aagaard (2015) mentions that today's educational system is progressively integrating digital devices into the classroom, such as laptops and tablets, on the belief that employing these technologies will boost student enthusiasm and learning. However, spending time in a classroom reveals that these technologies also pose a barrier to educational practice.

According to Lazar (2015), by using educational technology, students can progress autonomously in mastering teaching materials, set their own pace of study, review content that is not yet clear, and quickly receive results and track their progress when examinations are completed. In addition, Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) explained the benefits of technology as follows: it motivates students to learn; it allows students with busy schedules to work from home on their own time and it trains students to learn new technology skills that they can apply later in the workplace. Furthermore, Budhwar (2017) explained some advantages of technology in education; (1) Easy access to study materials, (2) Ongoing learning, (3) Knowledge sharing, (5) Learning aids, (6) Distance learning and (7) Accurate record-keeping. However, there are some limitations of technology especially in educational field. According to Budhwar (2017) there are some limitations of technology in education: (1) easy access to pornographic, violent, and other unsuitable materials, (2) a disconnected youth, (3) the cyber bullying trap, (4) inevitable cheating, (5) a big distraction.

Online learning

Online learning is characterized as distant learning that is aided by technological devices such as laptops or smartphones that require an internet connection (Gonzalez & Louis cited in Subekti, 2021). With online learning, teachers and students can do teaching-learning activities from their home. As a result, learners can continue to receive class instructions from their own home, rather than needing to travel to their school. When online learning platforms are utilized to supplement face-to-face training, the term "web-facilitated" is employed; it is called fully online when all instructions are conducted online; and hybrid or blended, where instruction is delivered both offline and online in roughly equal proportions (Plaisance cited in Subekti, 2021). In conducting online teaching, teachers can use various platforms to publish learning tasks online in real time, check the fulfilment of student assignments in real time, and provide feedback (Zhao, Zhou, Liu, and Liu, 2020). In that case, students use computers and mobile phones to complete learning tasks on time and they take advantage of online learning and homework submission. Some academics feel that by using online education platforms, students can participate in the construction of knowledge and progress in discovery and conversation, resulting in a multi-dimensional and comprehensive understanding of the subject (Garrison & Terry cited in Zhao et al, 2020). Teachers also can tailor online courses to learners' needs and enhance their success in online learning settings if they have a deeper understanding of their pupils (Black, et al., cited in Zhao et al, 2020).

In terms of its types, there are synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous classrooms enable teachers and students to engage in real time, such as through a teleconference (Plaisance cited in Subekti, 2020) such as *Zoom*, *Skype*, and *Google Meet*. Meanwhile asynchronous classes allow students to complete activities from anywhere with internet access within a set time limit, such as a week (Plaisance cited in Subekti, 2020). Asynchronous online classes are often taught using Learning Management System (LMS) systems such as *Moodle*, *Schoology*, and *Google Classroom*. Furthermore, in today's asynchronous classes, numerous teachers use teaching videos for online class which is sometimes difficult to produce high-quality ones (Zhang, 2017).

METHOD

In conducting this study, a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach was used. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a method for understanding and analysing the meaning that individuals or groups attach to a human or societal situation. The research process involves processes and emergent questions, data collection in the participant's context, data analysis inductively moving from specifics to broad themes, and the researcher's

interpretations of the data's meaning. Therefore, the qualitative was considered suitable to find the answer the research questions of this study. More specifically, narrative inquiry was used in this research. According to Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik (2013), Narrative Inquiry in Learning Research and Language Teaching provides an introduction to narrative inquiry methods – research methods that use stories as data or as a method for presenting findings. The participants were two EFL pre-service teachers of a university in Cianjur. The participants had teaching practicum (PLP) in two different Senior High Schools in Cianjur. The data required for this research were stories from the experiences of pre-service that were collected from diary (Creswell, 2014), semi-structured interviews (Barkhuizen et al., 2013) and informal conversation (Swain and Spire, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Some efforts and struggles were identified in the pre-service teachers (PSTs)' preparation stage of their online English class. The first related with the efforts and struggles in making lesson plan. The PST1 thought it was tough and challenging to design lesson plan for online class because there were many aspects that she did not know.

It was tough and challenging because there were many stuffs that I did not know before. So, I needed to learn it first and tried to make the lesson plans for several times. Besides, I also had many revisions on my lesson plans and tried to be actively involved in a discussion forum with my senior in college because I needed to know my weaknesses and gain new insights from it.

(Pre-service teacher 1)

The excerpt shows that designing lesson plan was challenging since the components of creating a lesson plan are extensive and detailed (Nurtanto, et al., 2021). It is also explained that the learning plan is administrative in nature, whereas in reality, the teachers must be able to consider the method chosen, the contents of the material, the activities to be carried out, the implementation of the practice, and the teaching strategy all of which must be interconnected, which made it hard in some ways, especially for pre-service teachers.

Not only making lesson plan, the PSTs also made a lot of preparations for online teaching such as creating teaching videos. Revealed by the pre-service teacher (PST)1, she tried to optimize her effort in making teaching videos that suit her students' needs by conducting several steps. First, she watched some teaching videos to get a lot of information then identified and analysed the videos in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. After that, she discussed with her colleagues who were teaching in junior and senior high school on their perceptions toward online activities. The PSTs expressed their struggles in the process of video creation. Sometimes, they spoke too much in the video that need to be edited and revised. Besides, the phone and the camera quality became another challenge. Moreover, the place of recording which should avoid noise was quite challenging. The PSTs found it was hard not to make mistakes in the process of video making which corroborates what Zhang (2017) stated that it is simple to generate a teaching video, but it is difficult to produce high-quality teaching videos.

In addition, the PSTs also made a lot of effort and struggled in choosing suitable applications, website or platform as the online English teaching supports. PST 1 chose and used various applications, websites or platform as teaching media which were suitable to use in her teaching practicum context. Before choosing suitable applications to apply in the class, PST1 made some efforts such as tried and tested various applications before deciding the suitable one.

Then she also used another application to combine the two parts of videos. Moreover, she used website to make quiz and also made group chat in a chatting application.

Then, I tried to use various applications but most of them were not free. Accordingly, I decided to use an application called Screencast-O-Matic because my English teacher in senior high school introduced me to this application. In the end, I used another application namely Filmora to combine the part one and two into one video. After that, I made a short quiz using Google Form.

(Pre-service teacher 1)

The story shared by the PST 1 shows how she optimized her efforts and struggled in preparing what she perceived suitable for the online learning. In the interview, PST 1 asserted that to decide the suitable application to use in her online teaching, it could take about five hours. Different with pre-service teacher 1 who had to choose suitable applications by herself, pre-service teacher 2 should use some applications that were set up by the school. In this case, PST 2 struggled with the school limitation in utilizing technologies. Even, the school did not allow the PST 2 to do zoom based synchronous learning which restricted the creativity and the PST's efforts in optimizing the online teaching and learning process. At that point, the school only allowed the teacher to use WhatsApp, Google Classroom and LMS provided by the school and the PST2 struggled in making plan of using those limited sources to conduct her online English teaching.

The struggles and efforts were not only in preparation, but also in its enactment such as in managing students participation. The PSTs faced some critical moments such as students' low participation as well as students' lack of obedience in doing and submitting assignments.

The first meeting was full of surprises because the students were not actively involved during teaching-learning process in Google Classroom. Fortunately, I made a group chat on WhatsApp before and able to give instructions there.

(Pre-service teacher 1)

As seen from the excerpt, the PST struggled in facing students' responses and involvement that pushed her to find a solution to the problem. As shown in the excerpt, the PST optimized the WhatsApp interaction to support the interaction in Google Classroom. Even the PST 1 and PST 2 contacted the students who did not do the assignment, one by one.

I inform each student who still not submit the assignment in the form of list. I also remind them how to do the assignment in case they forgot. Not only in group, I also contact them one by one to remind them to do their assignment as soon as possible. It was tiring.

(Pre-service teacher 2)

From the excerpt, we can see that the PST tried to manage their students by various approaches, either through conversations to discuss teaching-learning activities or contacting them in person to do assignments. The PST1 also had a conversation with her students about their teaching-learning activities and the students' feelings which is in line with Ragawanti's (2015) elaboration on managing class by drawing perspectives, thoughts and other information from students.

The PSTs also tried hard to make their explanation well comprehended by their students. Since the explanation was carried out in online mode, with the absence of direct presence, the PSTs should make sure their sentence and structure use can be understood, especially when it was delivered in English.

As usual, I explained the material using chat features. The struggle was I should arrange the sentence which is understandable by my students.
(Pre-service teacher 2)

The excerpt shows that the PST 2 admitted the challenge of giving comprehensible explanation due to the absence of present, expression and gesture. The chat features do not allow the PST to see the students' reaction of their explanation which make it even more challenging to make sure the instruction is clear.

In optimizing the online English teaching practicum, the PSTs did a reflection to evaluate teaching skills especially in managing online class. Based on the result of reflection, she knew what she had to do for the next meeting, and by doing reflection she could improve her teaching skill day by day.

Based on the result of my self-reflection, I tried to make another teaching video with a shorter duration. I also tried to be more active and decided to not waiting my students to ask something to me.
(Pre-service teacher 1)

As shown from the excerpt, the PST could find the weakness of her previous teaching and plan for better teaching result. In this case, the PST1's teaching reflection yields a benefit mentioned by Riyanti (2020) that it allows the teachers to gain a better understanding of how they teach, which can lead them to become more effective teachers. The PSTs also evaluated their teaching by asking the students related to teaching-learning activities in terms of material effectiveness, students' difficulties and their perception toward teaching-learning activities. It was done to solve the learning problems and fulfil the students' expectations toward the class.

CONCLUSION

This research explored two EFL pre-service teachers' efforts and struggles in carrying out online English class during their teaching practicum. The findings show that the EFL PSTs optimized their efforts and struggled both in online teaching preparation and implementation stage. It implied that English Teacher Education Program needs to give more emphasis on preparing EFL pre-service teachers for technology integration skills in English teaching. In addition, the roles of teacher mentor and teacher educator become the crucial aspects in guiding the EFL pre-service teachers in tackling the issues during their teaching practicum, especially in online context.

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