

Learning from English Lecturers' Voices in Teaching Oral Communication in EFL Classrooms in Indonesia

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Abstract

Research in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings indicates that teaching oral communication continues to pose many challenges for various reasons. Teachers' limited competence, students' low proficiency level, and the use of inappropriate teaching methods are some of the most commonly perceived reasons that can compromise effective English teaching to improve students' oral communication skills. Yet, little is known about English language teacher educators' (ELTEs) pedagogical practices in the context of English language teacher education programs (ELT-EP) in Indonesia. The purpose of the study reported in this article was to investigate ELTEs' voices regarding teaching oral communication to pre-service English language teachers (PELTs). Using semi-structured interviews, data from eleven ELTEs, who were teaching speaking and listening at a university in the Province of Gorontalo in Indonesia, were collected. Using a thematic analysis approach, the findings showed one major theme, viz. "challenges", which incorporated three sub-themes: "ineffective classroom management"; "time spent for other roles"; and "inadequate teaching facilities". It is suggested that listening more closely to the ELTEs' voices might help tailor teacher education programs to Indonesian contexts. A number of possible solutions generated from the analysis of data are provided in order to assist teacher educators in similar contexts in their pedagogical practices.

Keywords: English language teaching, Oral communication, Pre-service teacher education

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Introduction

The purpose of the study reported in this article was to investigate ELTEs' voices in teaching oral communication classes in the context of ELT-EP in a university in Indonesia. The reasons why this investigation took place were twofold. First, through such investigation, it was expected that continual improvement with regard to developing students' oral proficiency level through teacher education might be facilitated. Second, the investigation focused on examining to what extent the practices of teaching English in the program had satisfied the requirements stipulated in the Government Law of Republic of Indonesia No. 19/2005 on Standard of National Education.

This article initially looks at the need to listen to teachers' voices, current practice of teaching English and the standard of national education in Indonesia, before outlining the research objectives, methodology and findings, and finally closing with a discussion, conclusion and some recommendations.

Why listen to English language teacher educators?

Teachers' cognition, along with their teaching methodology and resources, plays a significant role in language teaching and learning. Bedir (2010) suggests that what teachers know and believe influences their instructional practices and classroom behaviours. One determinant factor that is crucial to the improvement of these teaching practices and classroom behaviours is the teachers' professional preparation program (Borg, 2003).

Research about teacher education programs has been extensive, especially in the context of Indonesia (e.g. Luciana, 2006; Zein, 2014). The results point out the inadequacy of much pre-service teacher education in English language teaching in Indonesia. Zein (2014), for example, who examined lecturers' voices at some pre-service teacher training institutions in Indonesia, suggests a reformulation of the English language curriculum to tackle issues about teaching young learners at secondary schools. At the same time, investigations about ELTEs' voices regarding teaching oral communication in a ELT-EP in Indonesia remain scarce. Accordingly, it is useful to listen to ELTEs' voices, situated within the current position of ELT in Indonesia and in light of relevant official standards.

Current position of English Language Teaching in Indonesia

English language learning occupies a significant space in the Indonesian educational system. At the secondary school level, English serves as a compulsory subject from Year 7 to 12, and is tested in the national examination. At the tertiary level, mainly in the first and second year of an undergraduate study, English is learnt as a compulsory coursework unit (Yulia, 2013). The inclusion of English as a Foreign Language into the Indonesian curriculum at these levels of education is mandated in Chapter 33 and 37 of The Law of Republic of Indonesia No. 20/2003 on the System of National Education, and Chapter 3 Section 9 of The Decree of Government of Republic of Indonesia No. 19/2005 on the National Standards of Education.

The Eight National Standards of Education

To ensure the effectiveness of educational practices in all levels of education in Indonesia, the Indonesian government issued a law No. 19/2005, which regulates the eight national standards of education. These standards are:

1. Standard of the graduates' competence, which relates to attitude, knowledge, and skills
2. Standard of content, which relates to the scope of lessons and level of competence
3. Standard of process, which relates to the implementation of education
4. Standard of educators and educational practitioners, which relates to criteria of pre-service and in-service training, and the physical and the mental feasibility
5. Standard of facilities, which relates to the minimum criteria of learning facilities
6. Standard of management, which relates to the planning, implementation and supervision of educational activities
7. Standard of budgeting, which relates to the budgeting of annual costs of an educational institution.
8. Standard of educational evaluation, which relates to the mechanism, procedures and assessment instruments

By meeting these standards, Indonesian educational institutions are expected to provide the best services of education to their students and ensure that graduates are able to compete in the growing labour market. The key objectives and related research questions for the study reported here grew out of this context.

Objectives and the key research question

The study sought to examine ELTEs experiences when teaching oral communication at an English teacher training university in Indonesia. The aim of the study was to facilitate improvements in these teacher educators' language classroom practices. The key question asked was "What challenges do you encounter in teaching oral communication?"

Data collection and analysis

The study used a constructivist paradigm, seeking to describe and reconstruct what the participants perceived about their pedagogical practices. Data was gathered using a purposive sampling method. All English lecturers who taught oral communication, that is speaking and listening, were invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview that lasted for approximately 30-45 minutes for each interviewee. To establish trustworthiness, the participants were provided with accounts of what they said during the interviews for member checking purposes (Erlandson et al., 1993).

To analyse the data, a thematic approach was used. Transcripts of interviews with the participants were read several times in order to select which unit of data to analyse. The analysis commenced by picking up themes related to the key research question. The unit of data was examined twice in different periods in order to anticipate bias.

Feedback from a colleague who had expertise in using a thematic approach as a tool to analyse research data was used for cross-checking purposes.

Findings

The data revealed that the three major challenges that the ELTEs experienced were ineffective classroom management, time spent for other roles, and inadequate teaching facilities. The subsequent paragraphs describe each of these challenges.

(a) Ineffective classroom management

Several ELTEs, namely ELTE5, ELTE6, ELTE8, and ELTE11 reported that they had difficulties when managing their classes for two reasons, namely, large classes and time constraints. ELTE6, for example, said she found it difficult to manage her class because of the class size:

So it's really hard for me to accommodate all the things because we have...we are... in... ya that's one of my challenges. Well, because we have big classes. We have thirty students in the class. So, sometimes I can't explore all students' capability because of the big class. ...” (ELTE6:67)

Similarly, ELTE11 said that unless there were fewer students in the classroom, it would be difficult for the ELTEs to teach effectively:

But sometimes we don't have to arrange the class because the class is big class ya. One class is many person like thirty four person one class. So it's very big class, I think. So it's very difficult for us to arrange the class, to manage the class. It's very difficult for us to teach them. If we have just twenty person in this class it easy for us to arrange, to manage the class, how to prepare the students. Like this. (ELTE11:40)

On the other hand, ELTE5 perceived that the ineffectiveness was also due to the limited teaching hours at the department, which discouraged the PELTs to use English effectively when communicating orally:

It's only about a hundred minutes and then there are twenty or even more students in the class. So if we calculate, so dealing with a hundred minutes and thirty students or let just say twenty. It means that students only speak five minutes. So in one week they only have a chance to speak English five minutes and I think it less than enough for them to be better in English.” (ELTE5:28)

In support of ELTE's views, ELTE8 indicated as follows:

Ya, if we based on the schedule of the sixteen may be fifteen meeting based on the course, I think it's not enough because the student needs more time so they should practice by themselves. (ELTE8:59)

In brief, the challenge of “ineffective classroom management” was categorized into three sub-types, as shown in the following table. The next section describes the second type of challenges, namely “time spent for other roles”.

Codes	Frequency of references
Large classes	2
Teaching hour is limited	1
Students only speak five minutes	1

Figure 1: Codes relating to “ineffective classroom management”

(b) Time spent for other roles

“Time spent for other roles” was seen by ELTE3, ELTE4, ELTE10, and ELTE11 as a type of challenge that they experienced outside the classroom context. One example of the type, according to ELTE3, was frequent lecturers’ meetings:

So if you are asking about what’s my problem, so far no. But now, what I feel now, is my time. Sometimes I’m not, I cannot concentrate, full concentrate, a hundred percent, because I have to think about other things, like there will be a meeting at two o’clock or something else or I have to do this. But now everything we have to do at the same time.” (ELTE3:58)

Another ELTE, ELTE 11, for instance, contended that her colleagues and she were often required to get involved in administrative tasks and to become part of a committee of some events. As she put it,

Mereka harus mempersiapkan, harus ada kepanitiaan, terlibat langsung dalam panitia-panitia. Semua administrasi harus dikerjakan oleh dosen. Padahal sebenarnya adalah tugas kita mengajar. Jadi kita fokusnya hanya mengajar. Terkadang kita mempersiapkan untuk pengajaran, untuk mengajar, tapi terbentur dengan tugas-tugas lain yang memang harus dibebankan kepada kita administrasinya” (ELTE11:42, in Bahasa Indonesia)

They [teachers] have to prepare, there has to be a committee, been involved in that committees. All administrative tasks have to be done by the lecturers even though our duty is to teach. So we focus only on teaching. Sometimes we prepare for teaching, to teach, but we are ... with other duties which are imposed on us. (Researcher’s translation, ELTE11:42)

The ELTEs reported two sub-types with respect to the “time spent for other roles” challenge. The subsequent table presents the sub-types, followed by the section “limited teaching facilities”.

Codes	Frequency of references
Doing administrative tasks	2
Frequent lecturers meeting	3

Figure 2: Codes relating to “time spent for other roles”

(c) Limited teaching facilities

Many of the ELTEs (ELTE1, ELTE2, ELTE5, ELTE6, ELTE 10 and ELTE11) mentioned “limited teaching facilities” as another type of challenges that they faced in the classrooms. For instance, ELTE1 said:

We don’t have LCD. If I have a slide but then, you know, ma’am it’s broken. (ELTE1:49)

In support of this view, ELTE10 stated:

Kalau dari segi operasionalnya, ininya, alat-alatnya, ya biasanya kami itu di atas panas. Terus biasanya berapa kali saya turun ke bawah untuk mengajar karena di atas speaker-nya tidak jalan. Semuanya tidak ada yang jalan. ... Kalau mau speaker keluar dan perlu mau pakai LCD, tidak ada LCD. Informasi LCD di jurusan rusak semua. Termasuk yang di lab rusak semua (laughing). (ELTE10:30, in Bahasa Indonesia)

With regards to the operational reason, it’s, the devices, ya it’s usually hot up there. Also, I usually go downstairs many times to teach because the speakers up there [in the classroom on the 2nd floor] does not work. All of them do not work. ... When we want speakers and need to use LCD, we can’t get an LCD. They said that all the LCD belong to this department are broken. And so are those in the laboratory (laughing). (Researcher’s translation, ELTE10:30)

ELTE2, on the other hand, pointed out that the limited teaching facilities challenges also related to the inadequacy of textbooks. She said:

“...kalau (In) Speaking actually we don’t have any specific textbook. Because ya, I mean there are many supporting books but it depends on them. They can explore themselves by their own ...” (ELTE2:50)

The table below categorizes different sub-types of this “limited teaching facilities” challenge. Discussion on all of the types of challenges in teaching oral communication described earlier is presented in the subsequent section.

Codes	Frequency of references
Faulty LCD	2
No specific textbook used	3
Faulty audio speakers	1

Figure 3: Codes relating to “inadequate teaching facilities”

Discussion

The findings revealed that the types of challenges that the ELTEs experienced in teaching oral communication were ineffective classroom management, time spent for other roles, and limited teaching facilities. Many scholars perceive that large classes and time constraints, especially with limited teaching hours, often prevent language learners from making use of all the linguistic resources they have in EFL communication. This is particularly the case of EFL learning in Indonesia. Due to the restricted amount of exposure to English users, and despite the long period of English learning at the school level, many high school and university graduates in Indonesia are generally seen as low competence speakers of English (Lie, 2007). In fact, Lamb and Coleman (2008) added that the problem with this low competence is also caused by a poor teaching quality, which results from the teachers' low salary, low level of English literacy, and limited opportunities for in-service training.

Researchers from other EFL settings have also raised similar voices. Abu Alyan (2013), for example, who investigated the kind of problems that were faced by the students and the teachers in an English Department program at a Palestinian university, suggests that both the students and the teachers consider large classes and limited teaching hours as problems that compromise effective oral communication instruction. Another researcher, Li (1998), indicated that one of the challenges that teachers in South Korea encountered in their English classrooms was a lack of time. Due to their heavy workload, the teachers found it difficult to write materials and to design classroom activities on their own if they wanted to apply a communicative approach in their classrooms.

Because expectations over effective and qualified English language teachers in the Indonesian context remains exceptionally high, it is crucial to find ways to address all the challenges. Rectifying problems that grow out of the classroom context, including the shortage of teaching and learning resources, should also include that from outside the classroom context, notably the time that the ELTEs spent on performing additional roles. By so doing, as suggested by Lamb and Coleman (2008), English learners' motivation in improving their learning can be maintained. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the *Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan (LPTK)* / Institute of Teacher Education to meet the expectations. *LPTK* bears the responsibility of ensuring that its graduates have the required teaching skills and language skills required in their future workplaces as school-teachers. In fact, it is obligatory for all these *LPTK* to abide by the standards as stipulated in the Law No. 19/2005.

Conclusion

It is concluded that in the context of the study, the ELT-EP may need to reconsider all pertinent factors that support effective teaching of English oral language in light of the fact that complex challenges in and outside the classroom context with regard to oral communication instruction were identified in the study. To address these challenges, there are a number of possible solutions that may be helpful. First, more funding could be invested in enhancing the quality and quantity of learning resources for the students if fostering independent learning is one of the goals of the program. Second, the lecturers need to be given ample time to invest time in teaching. This means their involvement in other additional tasks should be re-evaluated for the sake of effective teaching preparation. Also, smaller classes might help to more effectively facilitate the development of the students' oral proficiency level.

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