

Students' Teaching Practices Using Participatory Learning Technique and Multiple Online Learning Platforms

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Abstract

This paper reports an implementation of peer-participatory learning technique in reflective teaching practices in a teacher training program. The teaching practices, in addition, were enriched with educational technology engagement through the use of multiple online learning platforms namely Klasiber, Facebook, Google Hangouts, and WizIQ. Two modes of teaching (offline and online teaching practices) were tried out with both peer-teaching and real teaching. Data were collected from pre-test and post-test using an adapted teacher knowledge test, reflective notes, and focus group discussions. Results indicate that although students' teacher knowledge test score has only a slight increase (2,72%), their understanding on teaching stages, material adaption, classroom management, and awareness of offline and online teaching aspects are noticeably growing. While the use of Klasiber, Facebook, and Google Hangouts were successfully employed throughout the sessions, WizIQ was in total failure due to some technical problems. This study highlights the significance of trials, peer review, feedback, and reflection as urgent components to be employed in teaching practices. In the same sense, motivation, perseverance, and persistence are elements required to succeed in acquiring new experiences.

Keywords: peer participatory learning, online learning platforms, klasiber, Google Hangouts, WizIQ

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Introduction

Within the digital technology era where advances and innovation may occur within few seconds in timely framework, teachers and researchers are demanded to get along with it and embrace it into their professional development. Teachers, in particular, need to update and redesign their classroom practices to comply with the daunting changes. Information and Communication Technology, without reasons, should become a part of learning and teaching processes. Referring to the term used in McCrindle Research (2006), the current undergraduate students in university mostly fall to the category of Generation Y, a group of people born between 1980 and 1994. Indeed, there is no wonder that this generation is so much interested and inseparable with anything related to technology. Data of internet users in Indonesia only comprise for 2 million people in 2000 and the number soars to 55 million users in 2012 (Internet World Statistics, 2012). It can be predicted that within the next 3 years all students in the secondary level are generation Z. This will suggest that students now studying at a teacher training program degree, when choose to become teachers, will be teaching students from generation Z, a generation that was born between 1995-2009 (McCrindle Research, 2006).

Gearing to the phenomenon of future student generation, teachers are correspondingly demanded to master technology and adopt it in their teaching practices. This underlies the urgent need for curriculum developers and teachers to evaluate their designs. Teacher training programs in particular is challenged to offer better comprehensive program integrating content and technology. Micro teaching courses should be improved to accommodate both traditional teaching face-to-face which is fully classroom-based learning and online classrooms. There are various number of learning management system (LMS) that can be used. At Islamic University of Indonesia, online learning is accommodated through class cyber (Klasiber). However, other online learning platforms such as Google Hangouts and WizIQ can also be utilized.

In this study, three online learning management systems were used to provide learners with meaningful experiences in doing offline and online teaching practices. The three systems can be used as a compliment for the other. One feature that is not available in one software can be replaced by another. Peer participatory learning is adopted in this study due several reasons. First, it gives opportunities to learners to learn in groups and actively participate through interaction and communication among the members. According to Kohle, learning stages for adult learners turn into concrete experiences, reflection, theory and practice implementation, and new experience construction or modification (as cited in Ajiboye and Ajiton, 2008). It is expected that students having teaching practices with multiple online learning will acquire teaching competencies necessary to teach students from generation Z. They will be required to work in team, reflect their experiences, applying theories into practices, and then they will construct their experiences into a new one.

Research Questions

This research proposes four inquiries:

1. How are peer participatory learning techniques (peer feedback and peer teaching) implemented in Micro Teaching course?
2. How do students perceive the implementation of participatory learning techniques and multiple online learning platforms in Micro Teaching course?

Methods

Twelve students of undergraduate teaching program participated in this study. They took Micro Teaching course with 2 semester credits. However, in practice, the total hours for their micro teaching sessions are similar to that of 4 credit semester. This course is pre-requisite for Field Study Program—a program in which students are sent to high schools and assigned to help teaching English to the students. Micro Teaching course is aimed to train and prepare students to apply all theories they have learned into teaching practices.

Prior to their teaching practices, students are taught about teaching stages, lesson planning, and using media in teaching. All students taking micro teaching course must have passed several courses as the pre-requisites—classroom management, teaching methodology, material development, and language assessment. Students were to have peer teaching sessions in classrooms (traditional method) and real teaching sessions with real students (online teaching) using Google Hangouts and WiziQ. Students were trained how to use those two applications and they have some trials sessions prior to their teaching practice sessions. Klasiber, in addition, is used to upload teaching materials and store data about pre and post teaching preparations. Discussions on particular issues can also be uploaded on to the Klasiber and further discussions can be continued in classrooms when necessary.

A pre-test was administered at the first meeting and a post-test at the end of all sessions. During the offline teaching practice sessions, students were assigned materials and given the schedule for their teaching practices. They had to prepare for the lesson plan and media that would be used in classrooms. Students were encouraged to consult with teachers when preparing for the lesson plan and teaching media. Each student was given 40 minutes for each teaching practice. During the teaching practices, their peers were required to fill in observation forms which would function as peer feedback and evaluation. The practicing students, similarly, had to fill in the reflective teaching forms after their teaching practice sessions were over. This is aimed to raise their awareness of their teaching practice aspects they needed to improve. At the end of each teaching practice session, a class conference was conducted to give the opportunities for the teaching students to evaluate their own teaching practices while at the same time receiving feedback and comments from their peers. In the same way, teachers support the class discussion with valuable feedback on the whole teaching practice sessions including teaching stages, teaching materials, media, interactions, and classroom management. Rubric for lesson planning and teaching practices were used to assess students' performance. All teaching activities were videotaped.

The online teaching practices were also conducted in the same way as that of the offline mode. The procedures, peer's and teachers' feedback, reflection, and evaluation were all carried out and all online teaching practices were recorded using Snaggit software application.

This research employs a mix-method approach and data were collected from pre-test and post-test of teaching knowledge, observations, documents, and focus group discussions. All data were collected, reduced, categorized into themes, and analyzed. The pre and post test results will be used to measure students' teaching knowledge while other types of data were used to describe experiences, procedures, and other related learning reflections.

Literature Reviews

Teaching media have been extensively used in classrooms either single learning medium or multiple learning media. Klasiber, a Moodle-based learning management system, has been used in Universitas Islam Indonesia since 2010. All academic affairs are connected and controlled using the Klasiber and e-learning is highly encouraged to be used. One important to bear in mind is that e-learning should not replace the face-to-face teaching. E-learning is aimed to equip students with soft skills of computer and digital literacy significant for their future career development.

A large number of studies on how ICT is brought into classrooms have been of great concern for both teachers and researchers. Harmer (2004) suggests that various media may be put into classrooms including the ones made by teachers. In addition, Pritchard (2007) confirms that internet has played a very important role that teachers need to induce various teaching approaches to teach using the internet. Mullamaa (2010) resonances that e-learning gives many benefits to learning such as easy access, customized need and interest, as well as enhanced skills for information search through the internet. Although internet use and online media for learning and teaching remain debatable in term of their benefits and drawbacks, one essential issue to be immediately tackled is how to effectively bring the technology into classrooms with any possible best approach to achieve learning objectives. The underlying reason behind all those is nonetheless the characteristics of the digital native generation.

In this study, peer-participatory learning technique and multiple online learning platforms were implemented in Micro Teaching course. Kohle argues that in participatory learning technique students actively participated in interacting and building relations among its members (as cited in Ajiboye and Ajiton, 2008). This participatory learning strategy give spaces to four stages of adult learning, such as concrete experiences, reflections, theory application in practices, and construction/modification for further new experiences. Multiple online learning platforms, on the other hand, refer to the use of three learning management systems, namely klasiber (a learning platform particularly designed for the internal use of Universitas Islam Indonesia's academic members), Google Hangouts (a chat feature offered by Google where up to 10 people can communicate synchronously), and WizIQ (a subscribed online learning platform that offers some features such as video conferencing, whiteboard, chat, and screen)

Cohen (2010) mentions some competences that need to be acquired by teachers-to-be such as understanding on curriculum, evaluation, and ICT to support the teaching and professional activities. Similarly, Warschauer and Meskill (2000) confirm that ICT should be used as not only teaching media but also communication media that can be accepted and used in accordance to students.

PLA (Participatory Learning Approach) rooted from the views of Vigotsky and Piaget (Shen et al, 2004). In PLA, the members of a group participate in a learning process to meet their needs, opportunities, and actions in order to make a change on something (Pretty et al, 1995). Further, Pretty et al (1995) explains that this approach supports innovations, varieties, and complexities. It also opens for interactive learning that leads to open thinking patterns and experiences. Kohle defines PLA as a learning approach in which students play an active role in the learning processes. Interactions between teachers and students are visible through four stages: real experience, reflection on experience, putting theories into practices, and experience modification for further new experiences (as cited in Ajiboye and Ajiton, 2008).

In this study, peer participatory learning technique involves all students to give, take, reflect, and evaluate their own teaching practices as well as their peers'. This approach requires students to actively participate in the process of teaching practices because they have to do the reciprocal activities. Students are given full opportunities to teach their peers as well as to evaluate them. They observe their peers' teaching practices and are observed respectively. It is, therefore, expected that they understand the feeling of being students as well as teachers. Given this valuable chance, students will be able to construct their own meaning for being good teachers and good students at the same time.

Findings and Discussions

The offline mode of Micro Teaching practices were successfully conducted, however, there were some problems emerge during the online mode sessions. Only two online learning platforms that could be used (Klasiber and Google Hangouts). Students are basically familiar with Klasiber since it is used since they became students in the university. Google Hangouts is a user-friendly platform because it can be operated in Android-based Smartphone. Unfortunately, we encountered some technical problems with WizIQ and that was so disappointing for students. The problems were due to the internet connection and hardware compatibility and that not all students had compatible computers or laptop to support the WizIQ for running.

The Micro Teaching practice is divided into three stages: micro teaching preparation course, training on using WizIQ and Google Hangouts, offline teaching practices, and online teaching practices. In the first part of the preparation course, students were informed with some teaching knowledge such as general teaching skills, the use of teaching and learning media, teaching procedures, lesson planning, and skill integration. Some related assignments were given through reflection forms and discussion over the online management system (Klasiber) was administered. On the second session, teaching practices start with scheduling that includes topic assignment, skills to be taught, and time allocation. When a student became the teacher, others acted as students. After the teaching practice was over, the student teacher had to fill in the reflection form. In the same way, other students filled in the

peer microteaching form. A class conference was then conducted following the completion of the forms. Further discussion and teacher's feedback was also carried out within the time allocation.

In the online teaching practice sessions, the concept of peer-participatory learning technique was implemented through team-teaching. Students were grouped into a group of three. Each group made a lesson plan together and prepared for all learning media needed. A student had to teach ice breaking and presentation stage only, or practice stage only, or production stage only. This needed to be done due to the time constraint.

Data from the focus group discussion indicate that both offline and online teaching practices provide students with meaningful teaching experiences. They learned how to design a lesson plan which needed to suit the topic and the learning objectives as well as deciding classroom activities according to their stages. For online classrooms, the preparation was even much more demanding due to some adjustment on the availability of materials and accessibility of the program or online platform application. Therefore, teachers were demanded to be aware of the different mode of teaching and the techniques to deliver the lessons. There were many teaching elements of offline and online modes that differ in the way they were implemented such as teacher-student interactions, communication breakdown, and types of feedback. In practices, teachers and students had limited interaction in term of undetected body languages or unclear face expression. Giving instructions were as hard as maintaining communication in online teaching mode. Repetition very frequently occurred which was likely due to indirect face-to-face interaction and voice clarity. Although the online learning platforms provided video conference feature, not all the time the feature could be used. The unreliable internet connection seemed to become the source for this problem.

Furthermore, the teaching practices were found really challenging for students. It was also found that teaching peers and teaching real students were completely different, and this becomes even more challenging. In addition, with the trainings of using multiple online learning platforms (Klasiber, Google Hangouts, and WizIQ), students understood how the teaching should be conducted, how the teaching materials should be adapted or adopted, how teachers should be techno-savvy, and how teachers should be ready anytime when technical troubles appear in the middle of online teaching sessions. More importantly, students realized that teachers had to be creative in planning lessons and arranging classrooms' activities. Otherwise, classes would be boring and students became passive and irresponsive.

With the implementation of peer-participatory learning techniques in Micro Teaching classes, students perceive that peer feedback and teachers' feedback are greatly helpful. Feedback, according to the students, is viewing their teaching practices from others' views. This becomes more objective, comprehensive, and salient. Making lesson plans, similarly, is also much clearer when peer and teacher's assistance is present. Their feedback definitely gives richer perspectives for the lessons and the activities. Learning from peer's strengths and weaknesses is able to make their teaching practices better. Lastly but importantly, reflecting what their peer has done during their teaching practices and later on making some improvements for their own learning is indeed a powerful tool leading to self empowerment.

The students' experiences on the micro teaching practices using PLA has clearly proved the benefits proposed by the PLA proponents. As supported by Pretty et al (1995), students learned how to innovate their teaching strategies from observing other students' teaching practices and then reflecting it. Interactive learning, additionally, is salient when peer feedback is given and student teachers made responses. The implementation of micro teaching using the PLA is also in line with what is affirmed by Kohle (as cited in Ajiboye and Ajiton, 2008) in which students are involved in four stages of learning real experiences, reflection on experience, putting theories into practices, and experience modification for future richer experience.

Despite all those positive results of PLA implementation and the use of multiple online learning platforms, there are some issues that require more attention and improvement. Extended sessions for micro teaching is necessary due to insufficient time allocation. Forms for written feedback need to be simplified, infrastructure and facilities are in need for improvement, and trainings on giving clear instructions are similarly deemed essential and should be trained to students.

Conclusion

Peer participatory learning approach is basically student-centered, thus it encourages autonomous learning, students' creativity, participation, and responsibility. In addition, it helps generate positive learning environment in which students provide both assistance and feedback and encourage reciprocal learning. In other words, competition is repressed while cooperation is enhanced. Students' ability in using online learning platforms increases and it is proved by their fluent actions when using the application. Another positive impact on the online learning platform usage is their initiatives to have simulation prior to their teaching practices.

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