

Focusing on Teaching from the Get-Go: An Experience from Brazil

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Abstract: *This article is written by Denise M. De Abreu-E-Lima, Luciana C. De Oliveira, and Eliane H. Augusto-Navarro. Denise M. De Abreu-E-Lima is an associate professor of English language and Literature at Federal University of Sao Carlos, in Brazil. Her research focuses on the use of multiple intelligences theory in teacher education and materials development. Luciana C. De Oliveira is assistant professor of literacy and language education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University, in the United States. Her research focuses on the development of academic literacy in the content areas, second language writing, and nonnative English-speaking professionals in TESOL. Eliane H. Augusto-Navarro has been a professor of English at Federal University of Sao Carlos, in Brazil, for 5 years. She holds Ph. D. in linguistics and a master's degree in applied linguistics. Her research interests involve the teaching and learning of EFL grammar, TESOL teacher education, EFL writing, and English for specific purposes. The writers conducted a study to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education in Brazil by offering a new curriculum for the undergraduate programs in language and literature at Federal University of Sao Carlos. The researchers proposed something new to the Brazilian education system where they integrate the teaching of language skills and the teaching knowledge from the get go. However, this controversial idea proved to be effective to increase the competence of English teachers.*

Keywords: English language and Literature, applied linguistics, English for specific purposes, TESOL teacher education

1. Current Condition of the ELT in Brazil

It is widely recognized in Brazil that EFL instructions in elementary and secondary schools do not have satisfactory result. The main reason for the failure, according to the writers, is the poor education of pre-service English teachers in undergraduate programs in language and literature. This was revealed by a survey carried out in 1995 in the public and private schools of Sao Carlos to determine the percentage of teachers who were certified to teach. 50% of the English teachers had never attended a university and did not have a degree in English. Most of them had taken independent course at private schools that offered English instruction or had lived in other countries for a while and, therefore had some knowledge of English language.

The limited knowledge of the language teachers; lack of comprehensive knowledge of the content to be taught, and lack of pedagogical education, lead to ineffective teaching and learning. For most of them EFL teaching and learning mean speaking the native language in class and keeping classroom order with authority and a mechanical process based on grammar exercise and text translation.

2. English Teacher Education in Brazil Higher Education System

In Brazil, the undergraduate language and literature program at higher education is responsible for preparing English teachers at elementary and secondary schools. However, there are some problems with the language and literature program that leads to the incompetency of the output. The writers mention some of them:

1. Heterogeneous group of students

Most of the students have low proficiency of English where they are unable to read a text or engage in conversation. Some have attended English courses and are able to read, write and use English in conversation. Some are pre-service and in-service teachers.

2. The difference between a bachelor's degree and a teaching credential

Brazilian program of language and literature offers two tracks: A bachelor's degree and a teaching credential. Both groups start off by attending the same 3-year series of content courses. Those who want bachelor's degree finish their program at the end of these 3 years. Those who want the teaching credential have to complete 1 more year of educational courses.

3. Lack of connection between content and educational courses

The fact that the students who would be certified to teach and those who would not take the same courses led to:

- No reference to educational issues during these courses.
- No intersection between the content and pedagogical courses.
- Lack of critical reflection on established teaching patterns.

Based on the fact that the education of pre-service teachers in Brazil have shown that the strategies used to teach English to these learners have been ineffective, the writers proposed that new more effective ways were needed for several reasons:

1. There was a need for English communication courses that would cater the advanced and beginning students.

2. The lack of instruction in specific language teaching skills has negative consequence in the career of Brazilian EFL teachers.
3. Only through progressive education can a teacher surmount the everyday challenge of his/her job.
4. Language proficiency is one of the requirements for a good language teacher.
5. The main way to provide prospective EFL teachers is to discuss with them the process of learning and teaching EFL as they develop English proficiency throughout their undergraduate studies.

3. New Curriculum

The most important change made was the teaching credential track in the program of language and literature was introduced to the teaching materials earlier from the first semester. The theoretical texts about teaching become the content of the other materials such as grammar, reading, vocabulary, writing, etc. The following table describes the detail of the new curriculum.

No	Semesters	Materials
1	1-4	Content-based texts, listening materials, and movie excerpts to teach the English language is used. Students give oral presentations, which are videotaped throughout the program. Texts concerning the teaching and learning of a foreign language are used as the basis for reading comprehension; work with vocabulary and grammar, and teaching of reading strategies.
2	5	More attention is given to writing. The courses discuss writing as a process and introduce genre analysis. Many texts are written and edited, sometimes by the whole group. Genre characteristics of fables, fairy tales, novel summary, academic text summary, and conference abstracts are discussed.
3	6	Students learn to prepare classes based on multiple intelligence theory where they learn how to use the view of people's multiple intelligence to create activities to teach English to students in public elementary and high schools. They also learn how to integrate these activities in interdisciplinary projects.
4	7	Teaching English to adolescents is offered. This is directed to prepare pre-service teachers to use projects in a real educational context and to design interdisciplinary activities. Here, they learn how to integrate certain topics required by the Ministry of Education to be addressed by all public schools in the country such as ethics, sexual guidance, work and consumerism, the environment, health, cultural diversity, etc.
5	8	The course on evaluation and production of materials is given. It teaches pre-service teachers to analyze teaching materials and requires them to write a project with a research question based on their EFL teaching and/or learning. Here, the students learn to analyze the combination of teaching materials and their relevance to a particular target group of students. In this course several theoretical texts on teaching and learning were provided and discussed with the pre-service teachers.

For the final project, pre-service teachers are required to design a unit that promotes the teaching and learning of different skills by using a fairy tale to explain a transversal subject. One of the goals is to develop pre-service teachers' awareness of their target group in order to motivate their future students to learn and participate in foreign language classes. Each pre-service teacher presents his/her analysis in writing and oral presentation. This is followed by classes about how to design and implement a study about EFL teaching/learning, and students outline a project with research questions and a hypothesis based on their own EFL teaching and/or learning experience.

4. Results

It is a unique opportunity to teach the language by using EFL teaching and learning processes as the foundation of the lessons. There are four advantages to teaching the course this way:

1. The students learn language through a communicative and meaningful approach.
2. The students are not only learning the language but also how to teach the language.
3. They are able to reflect on their experiences as both learners and teachers of English.
4. Both the students with high and low levels of proficiency can benefit from this type of learning.

Several factors contribute to the success of the program:

1. The use of communicative approach,
2. Interdisciplinary approach to program content,
3. Focus on pre-service teachers' future educational context,
4. The strong belief that the time to begin preparing teachers to face their future challenges is while they are in a teacher education program.

Advantages of the New Curriculum

The new curriculum applied by the researchers as an effort to improve the quality of pre-service teachers brings some positive effects. Introducing the teaching knowledge earlier enables the pre-service teachers to develop both their knowledge of the language and the teaching competence at the same time. This is supported by some researches that discussing theoretical texts about teaching is an effective strategy in pre-service training (Abrahao, 2004).

Focusing on spoken ability in the first 2 years of the program is very beneficial for the students. With their ability to communicate well, they will be very confident to discuss about teaching materials because they realize that to be able to teach English, they have to be able to use English communicatively. Thus, this will lead the pre-service teachers to teach English communicatively because they themselves are able to use English communicatively and leave the traditional method which only focus on reading and grammar presentation. The reason for teachers to use traditional method in teaching

English is due to their incompetence in using the language communicatively.

The new curriculum is based on the strong belief that the time to begin preparing teachers to face their future challenges is while they are in a teacher education program. For this reason, this curriculum is directed to prepare pre-service teachers to use projects in a real educational context where they are going to teach later when they graduate. They are taught how to integrate certain topics required by the Ministry of Education to be addressed by all public schools in the country such as ethics, sexual guidance, work and consumerism, the environment, health, cultural diversity, etc. This consequently will make the pre-service teachers ready to teach as they graduate from the university.

The success of this program is accommodated by the Brazilian Ministry of Education that since 2002 developed educational parameters for teacher education that have to be followed by all universities. The parameters required the program to change and adapt their curricula to prepare teachers for their practice and combining content and professional development.

Disadvantages of the New Curriculum

The introduction of the new curriculum as previously described, apart from its beneficial effects, has some drawbacks. However, the disadvantages mostly related to the technical things such as the capability of the lecturers to apply the curriculum, the ability of the lecturers to work collaboratively as a team, and the difficulty to find suitable teaching materials.

The specification of the new curriculum to include teaching materials as the content of the all subjects taught, make it difficult for some lecturers who are not from English education background. For example, in teaching speaking, the topic to be discussed should be related to teaching speaking. At the same time while they are learning how to speak, the students will also learn how to teach speaking. This, of course, requires lecturers who understand about the theories of teaching speaking.

The new curriculum requires the lecturers to work collaboratively to make sure that the materials they teach are in accordance with the curriculum requirements. As a matter of fact, working collaboratively among lecturers is not easy. A good management is prerequisite to make them work together as a team.

The most crucial problem in implementing the new curriculum is finding out suitable teaching materials. It is very difficult to find text books for all subjects (speaking, listening, writing, reading, grammar, etc.) that use theories of teaching as the content. Therefore, the lecturers should create their own teaching materials. They can actually take some articles about teaching from books or journals, but they have to modify them to suit the language level and the need of their students. Again, this is not easy and only competence lecturers can do this.

Relating the Article Content to Indonesian Context

The condition of EFL in Brazil more or less is the same as the condition in Indonesia. The teaching of English at secondary or tertiary level is considered to be ineffective. However, there is a different way of looking at the cause of the problem. In Brazil, pre-service teacher education is considered to be the source of the failure, while in Indonesia, mostly students are blamed for their own failure. The different perception leads to different way to solve the problem. As for Brazil, revitalizing pre-service teacher education is expected to be able to improve the quality of instruction, while for Indonesia, improving quality of national examination will lead to better students' achievement.

English Teacher Education in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the students who want to be teachers can enroll to teacher teaching college. There is no bachelor's and teaching credential track. Those who want to be English teachers should enroll to English teaching college. They have to study in the college for four years and at the completion of the program they are eligible to be teachers at elementary and secondary level.

This actually is a good system where the students know from the very beginning that they are studying to be teachers. However, there is no integration of the materials taught among knowledge contents and teaching contents materials. The language knowledge materials are offered in the earlier semesters and the related teaching materials are offered later. This condition makes it, to certain extent, the same as the previous condition of Brazilian education system which differentiate the bachelor's tracks and teaching credential track.

Other problem with Indonesian education system related to pre-service teacher education is the teaching practicum. This practicum is not well organized as a medium for the teacher students to apply theories of teaching they have learned at campus and also learn from the practitioners. With the lack of communication between the teaching college where the teacher students study and the schools, it is impossible to expect that the practicum program will achieve its intended objectives. Most of the times, what the teachers practice in their own every day teaching and learning is different from what is learned by the teacher students at campus. This certainly will lead to frustration to the teacher students.

Lesson from the Experiment in Brazil

There are some good lessons for the improvement of pre-service teacher education that can be taken from the experiment done in Brazil. Among them are:

1. Improving quality of English language teachers should be done by improving the pre-service teacher education. This is because the time to begin preparing teachers to face their future challenges is while they are in a teacher education program.

2. Any efforts done to increase the competence of teachers in pre-service teacher education should be based on research. The study done here to integrate English as the content knowledge with teaching context come from the previous study conducted by Paiva (1997) and Abrahao (1992) who recognize that the lack of instruction in specific language teaching skills has negative consequences in the careers of Brazilian EFL teachers. Therefore, programs that prepare EFL teachers should integrate the learning of teaching skills with the learning of the language skills and the knowledge about the language.

5.Suggestion

Having read the new curriculum offered by the researchers, there is one thing needs to be included, ICT. Nowadays, the role of ICT in language learning and teaching is indispensable. The use of ICT can be beneficial for both teachers and learners. Becta ICT Research (2004) reveals the beneficial effects of using ICT for both pupils and the teachers. For students the use of ICT enables them to learn at their own pace, the use of digital resources that can be slowed down can lead to greater understanding, and the use of email correspondence with the native speaker can improve their grammar and vocabulary. As for the teachers the use of ICT can help them to provide their own teaching materials by utilizing various resources in the Internet, interactive teaching can be very motivating for teachers and students as well, and teachers can also have access to use the language with the native speakers. Several studies conducted by Sonia (2012), Lidström, and Hemmingsson, (2014) and Azmi (2017) revealed the benefits of integrating ICT in language learning.

With these advantages, it is obvious that English teachers should be able to use ICT to facilitate language learning. To be able to do so, teachers should be prepared earlier from the pre-service teacher education. Thus, ICT should be explicitly included in the curriculum.

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