

IMPROVING TEACHERS QUALITY THROUGH PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING: A CASE STUDY AT A TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE

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Abstract

For the last decade, the issue of teachers' quality in Indonesia has been a long debate. Despite its importance, the quality remains a big question. The launch of Teachers Certification Program in 2005 has raised different perspectives. It cannot yet significantly improve the competence of teachers across the country. This issue leads to questioning the existence of teachers training institutes that mainly produce the existing in-service teachers and pre-service teachers.

The present study investigates (1) how student-teachers perceive pre-service teacher training and (2) how the program benefits them. Employing observations and interviews to collect data, nine cooperating teachers, eleven student-teachers, and one university teacher serve as respondents. The data are then analyzed based on the four teacher competences stated in Undang-Undang Guru dan Dosen (2005).

The study depicts that almost all student-teachers consider pre-service teacher training are beneficial for school on partnership and for them on a share fare; they get new insights on teaching methods and research-based class. Few student-teachers find a little benefit from school activities they attended. Regarding many administrative tasks they should handle, they consider the program discourages them, promotes less critical thinking and less participation. In spite of teaching aids provision and guidance provided by their cooperating teachers and the university teacher, they cannot manage their students' questions well during class sessions. Supervision can provide less appropriate demonstration and give less feedback. Fortunately, they find supervision given by the university supervisor, in particular, provides new insights, be interesting, and makes teaching practicum easy. University teacher claims that the program can run well when all persons in charge are responsible to enroll the program. When it does not happen, a little improvement the student-teachers will get.

Though the program benefits most student-teachers, it won't promote quality improvement when less qualified persons are in charge to supervise the program. The results imply that pre-service training may contribute to teachers' quality when it is managed well. It should involve school and university managements as well cooperating teachers and university supervisors. They should be well selected to fully get involved in the program. Their enrolment will somehow contribute to better education, especially teachers' quality improvement.

Key words: teaching practicum, teacher training, student-teacher, teachers quality

Background

Indonesian government has been in a long battle towards teachers' quality for its country for decades. Since the launch of Teachers Certification Program in 2005, Indonesia has certified not less than 2.7 million teachers (up to 2009, Maulia, 2008) with only 600,450 certified teachers. It shows that there is only around 42% of total teachers across the country (www.edukasi.kompas.com/read/xml/2009/10/31/1938579/persentase.guru.yang.lulus.portofolio.turun) who can meet the requirements of qualified teachers as stated in its regulation.

Less teachers' competence has been considered a contributor towards teachers' quality decline. One factor that may cause this to happen is that many teachers, who are mostly graduated from Teacher Training Institutes, do not yet meet the standard of mature English teachers (Marcellino, 2005). The result may cause those teachers professionalism cannot be established well. Those teachers capacity in helping student towards learning mastery is not well developed. They may lack of qualification (Dahrin, 2000) and pedagogic competence to conduct their day-to-day activity. The teaching process administered may only be a teaching ritual that cannot cause any improvement or betterment for their students.

Providing teachers-to-be with large portion of basic competencies of instructional strategies at Teacher Training Institute classes may help them understand educational strategies, philosophical thoughts, psychological approaches, teaching methods and instructional techniques to uplift the professional competency and skills in real environment (Hasan, 2003). Having pre-service teacher training, they may be well equipped to anticipate and handle problems and barriers that they may encounter later in their teaching career. In regard with that the training anticipates that teaching is an activity that mostly deals with intricacies in classroom setting, therefore, the training helps them to prepare for such condition (Sutikno, 2010).

Pre-service teacher training conducted in Teacher Training Institute has contributed to improving pre-service teachers' competence in carrying out instructional activities in their classes (Khaerudin, 2001). During the training sessions involving student-teachers, cooperating teachers, and university teachers, planning instructions and implementing them are two frequent activities. The three parties will have a three-way conference later after teaching session administered by student-teachers. In this session, they discuss issues encountered, which are mostly difficulties found during teaching sessions. By doing so, it contributes to a noticeable progress in improving the student-teachers' capacity in handling their students during class sessions (Johnson and Perry, 1967). Unfortunately, there are some times that the conference does not run well (even it does not happen at all). It results in less feedback on the student-teachers' performance before and after their classes. In some cases, it demotivates and even discourages them to get the teaching competence required (Sunarjo, 2001).

Based on the above reasons, the present study has investigated (1) how student-teachers perceive pre-service teacher training and (2) how the program benefits them. These two questions are expected to lead to identifying factors that play an important factor to teaching training in general. It will then provide a theoretical basis for institutions enrolling pre-service teacher training to anticipate any possibilities that

may hinder student-teachers to gain the expected qualification and competencies. The study will also provide information that is necessary for such institutions to provide as a baseline for such program of course. So, they can provide knowledge and skills that the student-teachers need in their future career.

Pre-Service Teacher Training: Its Features and Functions

Pre-service teacher training initiates student-teachers into actual school environment. It serves as a crucial aspect of teacher preparatory program (Ogonor and Badmus, 2006). It is a period when the student-teachers are introduced to conduct teaching responsibility in partnership school over consecutive months. It provides them opportunities to come in contact with any kinds of school routines (Ogonor and Badmus, 2006). They will see how teachers work together and how the school bureaucracy operates (DelGesso and Smith, 1993). During this training, the student-teachers will learn how to translate the theory and principle of education into practice. Here, they will learn to apply the approaches, strategies and techniques of teaching they have learned in actual performance. They may find any discrepancy between what has been learned in university and practical situation. Through the course, the student-teachers will have the opportunity to link the theory with practice to resolve some of noticeable inconsistency (Murtaza, 2005).

Some studies show that pre-service teacher training plays a major importance in teachers' acquisition of teaching skills as an early field experience serves as a culmination of the teacher education process. It prepares a career in education in which they will translate the theories and methods that they have studied during their teacher preparation program into practice (Tok, 2010). In the course, the student-teachers are not only involved in social activities that imply relationships between not only the teachers and their students, but also between these parties and materials, equipment, classroom environment, curriculum as well (*Sarçoban*, 2010). By taking the course, student-teachers will have the opportunity to discover their potential abilities as well and bring these to classroom context in which the abilities are rehearsed (Cohen, 1994).

Pre-service teacher training enables student-teachers to lessen the level of anxiety. They will feel more assured and less anxious about teaching when they later carry out the real teaching (Whittington et al., 1995). Such kind of assurance and reduction in anxiety can only be accomplished if all parties including cooperating teachers are fully involved in this teacher preparation program.

In sum, pre-service teacher training is beneficial in helping student-teachers enhance their teaching ability. It provides the best experience in teacher education in terms of influencing classroom behavior of perspective teacher (Murtaza, 2005). In addition, it is regarded as the critical factor in determining whether a teaching credential shall be awarded (Burstein, 1992). It is designed to provide opportunities and assistance in a school setting for the student-teachers to develop their professional competencies, and the personal characteristics, understanding, knowledge, and skills of a teacher (Olaitan and Agusiobo, 1981).

Methods

The present study is in a descriptive study. This study involves nine cooperating teachers, eleven student-teachers, and one university teacher. They provide responses toward phenomena found during observation.

The study employs observations and interviews to collect data. Observation serves as the main instrument to collect data. By so doing, the real phenomena are revealed as they are. The problems found act as facts can be elaborated for further investigation. Interviews are conducted in order to unpack the observed findings that need to clarify. This session confirms what has been found during observation sessions.

The data are then analyzed based on the four teacher competences stated in Undang-Undang Guru dan Dosen (2005). The Convention states that teachers should have four competences; professional competence; pedagogic competence; personal competence; and interpersonal competence. The first refers to teachers' capacity in mastering subject of teaching, its curriculum, and related disciplines. A teacher of English, for instance, should have an adequate mastery of English subject that he/she teaches and he/she can develop programs related to subject he/she teaches. The second refers to the competence of teaching; planning instructions, implementing them, and evaluating them, and also reflecting them, and realizing students' potentials. Third refers to how attitudes and behavior of being a teacher as a profession is also well developed. The last refers to how a teacher interacts with their students, colleagues, superintendents, and other parties while doing their duties.

However, due to some limitations, the focus of the present study will be limited to the first two competences; professional competence and pedagogic competence. The focus will encompass student-teachers, cooperating teachers, and university teacher to how to conduct a well managed pre-service teacher training in the future.

Findings and Discussion

Few student-teachers (4 of 11) find a little benefit from school activities they attended. This might happen mostly during the early days of the training. This might also happen when student-teachers and their cooperating teachers and the university teacher cannot provide a well feedback and they cannot reflect what is going to with relevant strategies available. In other words, they cannot link theories with practice (Murtaza, 2005). When this happens, whatever activity the student-teachers attend, they will not find any advantage in it. It is in line with Sunarjo (2001) that incapability of linking theory and practice might discourage student-teachers and it might result in less competence teachers (Kaherudin, 2001) in bridging theory and problems found in practice (Murtaza, 2005). Therefore, providing adequate feedback and reflection during three way conference will be a great advantage for the student-teachers.

Regarding many administrative tasks they should handle, student-teachers consider the program discourages them, promotes less critical thinking and less participation. It seems they are trapped in monotonous routines. They only do what they are asked to. They do not have wide opportunity to exercise their critical thinking. They tend to follow instructions given rather than manage what they consider important and necessary to do. They have less access to main teacher duties; they only imitate

and do what they are instructed to do. Though this is the time for student-teachers to interact with teachers' works and daily routines (Ogonor and Badmus, 2006) and their school bureaucracy operates (DelGesso and Smith, 1993), however they need to get the opportunity to integrate the theories in education that they have learned during their study (Murtaza, 2005; Tok, 2010) when interacting with many aspect involved in teachers' duties (Sarcoban, 2010). By doing so, they will get the real experience of being a teacher in their real contexts.

The study depicts that almost all student-teachers (8 of 9) consider pre-service teacher training are beneficial for school on partnership and for them on a share fare. The training will not only provide better performance of the school, it also improves the image of the school. By doing so, the school will have a good portfolio in regard to community service provided. Olaitan and Agusiobo (1981) state that a good pre-service teacher training will provide student-teachers to develop their understanding, knowledge, and skills of a teacher in their school setting. Therefore, it will contribute to quality improvement of the school as well.

All student-teachers get new insights on teaching methods and research-based class. They can learn a lot from teaching sessions they have attended and observed. In some cases, they learn new methods employed by other student-teachers. Having observed the teaching sessions, they get enrichment of practical matters that will help them to implement in their daily routines as a teacher. It is somehow the major finding that is apparently seen during pre-service teacher training. Through observation, they found their own classes are full of theoretical basis of teaching that help them promote better learning environment. This is in line with Hasan (2003) who claims that pre-service teacher training may uplift student-teachers competence and skills specially in encountering classroom problems. By attending the course, they will be equipped by educational strategies, philosophical thoughts, psychological approaches, teaching methods, and instructional techniques.

Inspite of teaching aids provision and guidance provided by their cooperating teachers and the university teacher, they cannot manage their students' questions well during class sessions. The lesson planning that they administer has an adequate attention during consultation with the cooperating teachers (6 of 11). The cooperating teachers merely check its availability rather discussion its content that can help student-teachers better in handling their classes. Therefore, when they interact with their students, they cannot find that the lesson scenarios help them manage their classes. It seems instead of promoting a good classroom environment, it triggers monotonous teaching. This proves that an inadequate and inappropriate feedback giving will not provide student-teachers comprehension on teaching matters (Burstein, 1992; Olaitan and Agusiobo, 1981). When this happens, they will have difficulty in developing their potentials and will discourage them to take a teacher as their future profession.

Supervision can provide less appropriate demonstration and give less feedback. During supervision session, student-teachers can observe modeling from their university teacher and reflection. When three way conferences do not run well, the student-teachers do not have an adequate opportunity to get feedback. At the end, they cannot get insights whether what they have implemented in their classes is appropriate or not.

This is in line with Olaitan and Agusiobo (1981) who state that a good pre-service teacher training will provide opportunities and assistance for the student-teachers to develop their professional competencies, and personal characteristics, understanding, knowledge, and skills of a teacher in their school setting.

Fortunately, student-teachers find supervision given by the university supervisor, in particular, provides new insights, be interesting, and makes teaching practicum easy. The student-teachers even get the opportunity to observe teaching process conducted by their own university teacher. In most cases, modeling session is held when there is a necessity for the university teacher to demonstrate a method in handling classroom session that the student-teachers find difficult. This session is very beneficial and helpful indeed for the student-teachers since it provides its real contexts. It inspires them to conduct teaching sessions which they can further elaborate.

Conclusion

Pre-service teacher training conducted in Teacher Training Institutes has been a program that benefits most student-teachers. It won't promote and contribute to teachers' quality improvement when less qualified persons are in charge to administer and supervise the program. The results imply that pre-service training may contribute to teachers' quality when it is managed well. It should involve school and university managements as well cooperating teachers and university teachers. They should go through a well selection process to fully get involved and dedicate themselves to the program. Their roles will somehow contribute to better education, especially to teachers' quality improvement. The more qualified pre-service teacher trainings exist, the more qualified teachers will be.

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