

TEACHERS' QUALITY AS A CRUCIAL PROBLEM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

For the last decade, the issue of teachers' quality in Indonesia has been a long debate. Schools want teachers who are dedicated, well-qualified, have a good command of English, work well with their colleagues, can engage and motivate their students, and are committed to helping their learners succeed. The reality; however, appears to betray the demand since English teachers' quality in Indonesia is still in question. This article highlights some points related to teachers' low quality, such as lack of linguistic knowledge, too much use of Bahasa Indonesia, too much focus on the content area, low creativity, and insufficient understanding of the role of culture in language development and academic achievement. Teachers' quality is of the essence as it contributes a great deal of impact to students in particular and education in general.

Keywords: teachers' quality, linguistic knowledge, creativity

Introduction

The quality of teachers in Indonesia has been an issue for quite a long time. The results of studies done by World Bank Indonesia (2011) and Kompas (2012) show that the quantity of teachers does not go hand in hand with the quality. The quantity is overloaded while the quality is below standard. Most of them do not have an adequate expertise to carry out their job as a teacher. In addition, nearly 50% of

teachers of elementary, junior high, and senior high school are in pitiful state since they have not achieved bachelor degree as the minimum requirement to become a teacher in Indonesia (Bramantyo 2013, March 8). Moreover, they do not meet the standard of teaching properness for they teach subjects not based on their disciplines. Besides, the result of the Teacher Competence Test, especially the mean score of junior high school English teachers is only 34 (Rozandi

2012, August 5). This results from their deficiencies and consequently brings about several issues for students in particular and for education in general.

Indonesian English teachers’ deficiencies

Although constructivism theory developed by Von Glasserfeld notes that teachers do not shape one’s knowledge, they do contribute a lot in his knowledge development. However, whether or not they will serve as what they are supposed to is still in question since, as a matter of fact, many English teachers in Indonesia face a great deal of deficiencies here and there.

First, they lack linguistic knowledge. The result of test of TOEIC, among six hundred teachers of international-standard pilot project schools (RSBIs) of SMPs, SMAs, and SMKs in Indonesia was still below the minimum score (PMPTK). A more specific example showing their low linguistic knowledge is the most common error found in pronouncing words. They mispronounce words which basically are easy to pronounce as long as they consult it

with quality dictionary. Here are the examples:

Words	Part of speech	Correct pronunciation	Mispronunciation
next	Adj	/nekst/	/nek/
later	Adv	/'leɪ.tər/	/'let.ər/
three	N	/θri:/	/tri:/
quite	Adv	/kwaɪt/	/kwaɪət/
present	V	/pri'zent/	/'prez.ənt/
focus	V	/'fəʊ.kəs/	/'fɔ: 'kju/
height	N	/haɪt/	/heɪg/
elephant	N	/'elɪ.fənt/	/'eləfənt/

Those errors seem simple; however, the impact will be fatal. Wrong pronunciation might leads to incorrect meaning. Moreover, students will have wrong knowledge in their lifetime as teachers are models for their students and it is highly predictable that they will deliver the same errors to their students if they too become teachers one day. Stander (as cited in Nel & Muller, 2010) affirms that where teachers’ own L2 knowledge is not on an acceptable standard for the use of English as the language of learning and teaching, their poor usage and knowledge of the language

are transferred to the learners. Some questions then arise. Do they feel lazy to open up their dictionary to know the correct pronunciation of those words and many other unlisted words? Or is it that they do not know how to read phonetic symbols? A yes answer for both questions signifies that something must be done about teachers' quality.

Second, with teachers lacking in linguistic knowledge they use 80 % Bahasa Indonesia in teaching English. 80 % use of L1 is just too much in teaching L2. In fact, the general assumption that has prevailed for some time is that English ought to be learnt through English, and not by the use of L1, which has to be prohibited in the classroom. Many ELT professionals even wonder how students can truly appreciate target language exchanges if they continually rely on their L1 (Bouangeuneas cited by Jadallah and Hasan, 2007). According to Ellis (as cited by Jadallah and Hasan, 2007) several authors maintain that L1 has no essential role to play in EFL teaching and that too much L1 use might deprive learners of valuable

input in the L2. Therefore, good language teachers should use the L2 in order to provide as much input as possible to students (Meyer, 2008).

Third, many English teachers consider language as a content area, much like mathematics or science. They focus on explaining grammatical rules of the language without stressing on their practical and contextual use in daily conversation. Tedick and Walker (as cited in Tellez & Waxman, 2004) maintain that this misunderstanding suggests that teachers simply must know the language to teach it. In addition, when language becomes an object, they believe that second-language teaching is teaching about language rather than teaching with language. Thus, they neglect the teaching of the skill of the language itself. Those who emphasize only the form-based features of a language (e.g., phonology, grammar) fail to help students develop a communicative understanding (e.g., pragmatics, socio-cultural competency) of language. Again, Tedick and Walker (as cited in Tellez & Waxman, 2004) argue that when

language teaching is nothing more than the didactic presentation of form, facts, and rules, English language learners have little chance of gaining the fluency and thereby the accuracy needed to participate fully in schooling.

Fourth, they lack creativity in teaching and learning process. They use monotonous teaching method in which they just explain the material taken from the text book Also, they rarely develop learning media into something more applicative and interesting for teaching and learning process. Furthermore, they seldom create a joyful and meaningful learning atmosphere for their students. In addition, they have not been fully able to create a more student-centered activity in which they can involve them in the teaching and learning process. Creativity is all-important because it can improve academic attainment (Richard, 2013).

Fifth, they lack a working knowledge and understanding of the role of culture in language development and academic achievement. To give an example, a friend of the writer, a

junior high school teacher, asked whether the English for “seputih kapas” was “as white as cotton”. The writer sorted it out by saying that “as white as snow” would be more acceptable. What if similar cases happen to exist out there? Again, they will commit a sin by transferring other wrong knowledge. In fact, not all words in Bahasa Indonesia can be transformed into English just by simply translating word by word. Some cultural knowledge should also be taken into consideration in translating Bahasa Indonesia into English. Tedick and Walker (as cited in Tellez & Waxman, 2004) maintain that the disconnection between language and culture has left language teachers without any consideration of home or target culture or the ways in which these two may relate.

Reasoning teachers’ quality

School administrators, parents, and students themselves widely support the notion that teacher quality is vital to students’ achievement. A growing body of research shows that student achievement is more heavily influenced by teacher quality than by

students' race, class, prior academic record, or school a student attends. Marinova (as cited in Nel & Muller, 2010) concludes from reviewed studies that the availability and the access to good L2 input and instruction produce the best outcomes in L2 and ensure native-like proficiency. In addition, she found that the sooner a learner is exposed to the L2 in an environment rich with L2 interaction and input, the more time a learner spends on a task and the longer the learner is resident in an L2-dominated environment are better predictors of L2 acquisition. Nevertheless, none can be achieved if the teachers are under qualified.

In a larger domain, a teacher is the heart of the activity of education. The quality of education depends on the quality of the teachers (Fajar cited by Suparlan, 2008). It is utmost important to improve an interesting, fun, enjoyable, and discerning teaching and learning process in establishing a quality education. Other education resources are oftentimes less meaningful without the existence of teachers since they

will be the ones managing, planning, designing, and controlling the teaching and learning process. UNESCO (as cited in Hartoyo, 2008), in the report of *The International Commission on Education for 21st Century*, states that the very first step to take in making the quality of education better is to enhance the quality of teachers. It is apparent that qualified teachers are highly needed in bringing about quality education. On the other hands, less qualified teachers will lead to less quality education.

Coping with the issue

Everybody is a lifelong learner. It will be too much of a conceited person if one thinks that learning is terminal once he or she finishes college. It is a must for teachers to have the drive to always engage in self-study for the betterment of their quality. Also, teachers need continuous professional development which can be done by participating in conferences. Being a part of an association or related to their realm of work is also fruitful since it usually provides its members with a

considerable amount of up to date information, so teachers can always catch up with any latest issues in teaching.

Conclusion

Issues of teachers' quality have been of great concern for many years. The fact that English teachers in Indonesia are still under qualified can be seen from their deficiencies, such as lack of linguistic knowledge, too much use of Bahasa Indonesia, too much focus on content area, low creativity, and insufficient understanding of the role of culture in language development and academic achievement. It is essential to pay more careful attention to teachers' quality and try to work something out to cope with the situation as good things are bound to happen when an education world has qualified teachers with it. That is they do good for students' achievement and quality education.

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