
“What Makes You Different?”: the Process of Teacher Cognitive Development in Pre-service EFL Teacher Education

Elys R.R. Misrohawati

STKIP PGRI Ponorogo, Jalan Ukel No.39, Ponorogo, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: elys.wati.id@gmail.com

Abstract: English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' practice in the classroom depends on teacher cognition. It is what teachers think, know, and believe about EFL teaching. To be a good teacher, they should have cognition that contributes to the success of teaching. Pre-service teacher education must be designed to support cognitive development that has potentials to create effective English classroom teaching and learning activities in the future professional practice. The role of teacher education is not only in cognitive development, but also in constructing new positive cognition if the students of EFL teacher education have prior negative English learning experience. This paper discusses cognitive development in three area, i.e. material design, teaching methodology, and learning context. Hopefully, this study has positive impact for the conduct of teaching practice on pre-service EFL teacher education courses.

Keywords: *pre-service EFL teacher, teacher cognition, teacher education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teacher EFL educators in a private college in Indonesia, especially in rural area, faced the first challenge with their new students related to their students' English proficiency. Majority their students had low proficiency in English and it needs extra effort to accelerate their students' English proficiency.

The next challenge was how to make them able to teach English well since they have low proficiency in this subject. From some discussions with colleagues and students, it was found out that majority students had negative stereotype toward English. This stereotype emerged from their previous experience in learning English.

This discussion comes to pre-service educators themselves who should answer these challenges. They, as teachers, should help their students, the pre-service EFL teachers, to develop positive mind-set to improve their achievement in learning English (Erten & Burden, 2014). It is started by asking the students why they think they are having difficulties and how this may be affecting their language learning. Subsequently, teachers give support and encouragement to help change negative or unhelpful attributions and build a sense of competent self-whilest at the same time developing the students' skills and learning strategies (Erten & Burden, 2014). Changing

pre-service teachers' mind-set is changing the way they teach in the future because teachers' self-beliefs of EFL learning influence their in-class practices (Sheikhol-Eslami & Allami, 2012).

Belief is the notion that underlies the term of cognition (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014). In the term of cognition, the way to give the positive experience as a learner can build the cognition—what teachers know, think, and believe—about teaching and learning during teacher education which continues to influence the classroom practice (Borg, 2003). The notion of cognition became the core of discussion “to embrace the complexity of teachers' mental lives” (Borg, 2015:54). It provides the framework of cognitive process influencing what pre-service teachers know, think, and believe about EFL.

This article is a self-reflection as pre-service teacher educator capturing the teaching practice from the process of cognitive teacher development point of view. Studying teacher cognition is so important since teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who play a central role in shaping classroom event and studies of psychology have shown that knowledge and believe exert a strong influence on human action (Borg, 2015).

On the other hand, there was relatively little impact of pre-service teacher education on

pre-service teacher belief systems (Çapan, 2014). This pessimistic statement related to the power of pre-service teacher education emerges a question in one discussion with my colleague, “What makes you different?” It means what makes teacher educator able to make pre-service teachers with unsupportive mind-set and low proficiency becomes a great teacher in the future. This question also can be for students. It is typical to have students with supportive mind-set and high proficiency success. It is special, start from having unsupportive mind-set and low proficiency become pre-service with supportive mind-set and high proficiency and to be great teacher in the future because of the education in their college. The key to start this is generating awareness. If pre-service EFL teacher have opportunities to become aware of their prior beliefs about teaching and learning, to reflect on these and to make connections between theory and practice, pre-service teacher education will be more likely to impact on trainees (Borg, Birello, Civera & Zanatta, 2014).

2. TEACHER COGNITION RESEARCH

General education scholars have has studied teacher cognition for decades. In 1970s, it was started by the study of teachers’ decision-making related to teaching and learning and their pedagogical knowledge or constructs (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014). In 1980s and 1990s, the study of teacher cognition shifted to teachers’ acts as the results of their way of thinking. It started the development of concepts such as teachers’ decision-making, perceptions, behaviour and beliefs, and pedagogical knowledge (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014).

In the mid-1990s, the study of teacher cognition in English as a second/foreign language was started to examine various aspects of what L2 teachers know, believe and think and of the relationships of these constructs to what teachers do (Borg, 2009a). Mainstream study on teacher cognition that becomes more sophisticated are summarized into these relationships between teachers’ cognitions and practices: (1) teachers’ cognitions can be powerfully influenced by their own experiences as learners; (2) these cognitions influence what and how teachers learn during teacher

education; (3) they act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience; (4) they may outweigh the effects of teacher education in influencing what teachers do in the classroom; (5) they can be deep-rooted and resistant to change; (6) they can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers’ instructional practices; (7) they are, at the same time, not always reflected in what teachers do in the classroom; (8) they interact bi-directionally with experience (i.e. beliefs influence practices but practices can also lead to changes in beliefs) (Phipps & Borg in Borg, 2009a).

Nowadays, English teacher cognition has been studied in some areas related to vocabulary (Gao & Ma, 2011), grammar (Borg, 1999; Moini, 2009), teaching practice (Navarro, 2013), first language use (Imran & Wyatt, 2015), student inquiries (Fagan, 2015), and corrective feedback (Mori, 2011). In addition, Borg (2011) carried the research about the impact of in-service teacher education on language teachers' beliefs.

In pre-service English teacher education, the research of teacher cognition was on vocabulary (MacAlister, 2012; Gao & Ma, 2011), grammar (Çapan, 2014; Farrell, 1999), language learning (Peacock, 2001; Wong, 2010), language learning and in-class practices (Sheikhol-Eslami & Allami, 2012), teaching practicum (Yuan & Lee, 2014), and material development (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014). In this study, the following section discusses pre-service EFL teacher education related to the process of cognitive development.

3. PRE-SERVICE TEACHER COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In pre-service EFL teacher, cognitive development process is classified into confirmation, realization, disagreement, elaboration, integration and modification (Yuan & Lee, 2014). In Yuan & Lee’s (2014) study, pre-service teachers strengthened their prior beliefs by perceiving a consistency between these beliefs and the newly presented information. Realization refers to the process that the pre-service teachers became more fully aware of or picked up a new belief in the teaching practicum. Through elaboration, the

pre-service teachers also deepened and expanded their existing beliefs by adding in new dimensions. Disagreement took place when the pre-service teachers rejected their previously held beliefs. Integration indicates a more complicated process of refining and reorganizing of the prior and newly acquired beliefs into a comprehensive and integrated system. Modification accompanies the process of disagreement. Yuan and Lee's (2004) research demonstrated a more complex process in which the original beliefs are not simply rejected and replaced by the opposite ones but are modified and refined through field learning activities.

Yuan & Lee (2014) do not limit this process in to discrete belief change categories. It is ongoing process of pre-service EFL teachers' belief transformation. For instance, confirmation and realization can accompany integration, and disagreement can lead to modification. This study does not capture the entire process of pre-service teachers' cognitive development or suggest some linear and fixed routes for their belief change. On the contrary, it gives pre-service teachers' individual experiences and various encounters in the situated contexts (Yuan & Lee, 2014). The experiences shared in this article are discussed into three areas, i.e. material design, teaching methodology, and learning context.

3.1. Material design

The principle in designing teaching material in any subject I teach is the material should be significance, interesting, contextual, familiar, authentic. It is started from the course objective. When I taught Expository and Argumentative Essay Writing, the course objective I wrote in the course contract did not use terms that they are familiar with. I wrote in the simple words, students will be able to describe something and to express their argument in English essay. Since for some students writing essay was still not important, I gave the elaboration that the one that pursues graduate studies, and graduate work, and scholarships usually requires essays, so they need to know how to write well. Students would be more motivated in the language class when they realize that they are learning concepts and skills associated with business or the environment and that they are doing "actual" school-work instead of learning

English (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014).

For the topic to write, I let them decided. To assist pre-service teachers in developing their students' language skills, the material should be focused on themes and content familiar and interesting to students (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014). After classroom session to discuss what we were going to do, we had individual session to discuss their draft. I made sure they wrote essay we intended to study.

In other subject, like Grammar, I used any stuffs having English words to learn. From soap until computer, they have English explanation and instruction. Using these stuffs, pre-service teachers were able to relate to the significant relationship of the presentation of the authentic materials and learners' motivation to learn. It is one of the primary roles of utilizing materials in teaching. They were able to see the close connection between materials and the contextual factors as well. Hence, these future ESL teachers developed their critical evaluation of their own materials from their experience using the materials and they made and used in their language classroom (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014).

3.2. Teaching methodology

Initial conceptualizations of teaching and learning that pre-service teachers bring to teacher education are shaped by the prior language learning experience (Borg, 2009b). The role of teacher education is not only in cognitive development, but also in constructing new positive cognition if the students of EFL teacher education have prior negative English learning experience. In the classroom, I started playing this role at the first meeting, I love opening the discussion about what is their opinion about the subject they are going to learn and whether they have had experience related to the subject matter. Especially for the new students, I invite them to say how they feel and what stereotype they have on English.

Acknowledging, making explicit, and examining pre-service teachers prior cognitions is an important part of pre-service teacher education, particularly true when these prior understandings of teaching are inappropriate, unrealistic, or naïve (Borg, 2009b). If we accept the contemporary constructivist position that

teacher learning occurs through interactions between prior knowledge on the other hand and new input and experience on the other, ignoring pre-service teachers' prior conditions is likely to hinder the ability to internalize new material (Borg, 2009b).

Teacher educators should involve pre-service teachers in activities that could help to unravel their beliefs at an earlier stage of the program and thus, refine possible misbeliefs (Çapan, 2014). It is started by asking the students why they think they are having difficulties and how this may be affecting their views of themselves as capable language learners (Erten & Burden, 2014). If pre-service EFL teacher have opportunities to become aware of their prior beliefs about teaching and learning, to reflect on these and to make connections between theory and practice, pre-service teacher education will be more likely to impact on them (Borg, Birello, Civera & Zanatta, 2014).

At the seventh semester, pre-service teachers have practicum course. It was probably the most powerful course to develop teacher cognition. It was found out how pre-service teachers gained some invaluable experience, knowledge and understanding in relation to materials development, evaluation and adaptation for language teaching through self-reflection (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014) and discussion with their mentor. The evaluation of their self-developed materials; after reflecting on the implementation of the materials, gave them some insights on how they can improvise the materials. This study shows that improvisation or modification of the materials could be done after reflecting and considering the reasons and benefits for doing so. The decisions on how to modify and adapt the materials were done based on their reflection on their students' responses and performance as well as in relation to the principles related to effective materials development (Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014).

3.3. Learning context

The main model in the process of pre-service teacher education is the educator. The way they teach must be congruent with knowledge of teaching discussed in the classroom. The use of examples and modelling enabled them to see

certain instructional strategies or principles in a real context, preferably with similar characteristics to the pre-service teachers teaching placement, which helped them to see what these look like in a classroom (i.e., acquiring procedural knowledge) and thus to transfer this knowledge to their own teaching contexts (Dahlman, 2006).

Become a good model is educator's way to build positive learning context in pre-service teacher education and it is the most challenging way in cognitive development process. On the other hand, providing context that is in line with their teaching knowledge is providing learning experience which is powerful to develop teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2009; Dahlman, 2006; Yuan & Lee, 2014; Ismail, Albakri, Ismail, & Hussin, 2014).

Like being creative in utilizing varying method and strategy, it needed extra time and energy. Teaching essay writing used to be fun in the early stage and would generate negative emotion for some students in the writing practice stage. Whereas, negative emotions in the participants, such as frustration and feelings of being unprepared, even though it was relevant to the situation, are counterproductive with cognitive development process (Dahlman, 2006).

When it happened, what I did was guiding the negative emotion to have positive meaning that leads positive respond. Three kinds of coping that can generate positive affect during stressful circumstances, i.e. positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping, and infusion of ordinary events with positive meaning (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000)

4. CONCLUSION

EFL teacher cognitions, what teachers think, know, and believe (Borg, 2003), have significant role in EFL classroom practice. What shaped these cognitions is teacher experience. English is learning experience, teaching learning, and teaching practice.

Learning from the study that teacher experience with the classroom influences cognition more than education (Çapan, 2014), pre-service teacher education should bring real teaching practice into the course. Not only in the practicum course, but in all courses pre-service teachers should be able to feel that their courses are significance, interesting, contextual,

familiar, authentic. Bringing knowledge into real practice, educator should be a model to apply congruently what discussed in the classroom.

The process of cognitive development will not run successfully if there is barrier in their mind. The barrier is negative mind-set about English and learning and teaching this subject. Teacher educator should help to increase the awareness by doing reflection discussion about the previous experience with English. All the negative perception should be acknowledged first before developing positive meaning. It can be applied for prior knowledge or the knowledge being studied.

This paper is initial study about cognitive development of pre-service teachers and the impact in the future practice. It is still needed to be studied the model of pre-service EFL teacher cognitive development that is able to give significant impact to teacher cognition when they have become practitioner.

5. REFERENCES

- Borg, S. (1999). Studying teacher cognition in second language grammar teaching. *System*, 27(1), 19-31.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language teaching*, 36(02), 81-109. ISSN 1475-3049. Retrieved from http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/1652/1/borgs1_Language_Teaching_36-2.pdf
- Borg, S. (2009a). *Introducing language teacher cognition*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/staff/borg/Introducing-language-teacher-cognition.pdf>
- Borg, S. (2009b). Language teacher cognition. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 163-171). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Borg, S. (2011). The impact of in-service teacher education on language teachers' beliefs. *System*, 39(3), 370-380. doi:10.1016/j.system.2011.07.009
- Borg, S. (2015). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Borg, S., Birello, M., Civera, I., & Zanatta, T. (2014). *The impact of teacher education on pre-service primary English language teachers*. Retrieved from http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/E142%20ELTRP%20report_FINAL_V2.pdf
- Çapan, S. (2014). Pre-Service English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Belief Development about Grammar Instruction. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(12). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n12.9>
- Dahlman, A. (2006). Second Language Preservice Teachers' Accessing of Background Knowledge and the Role of Context. *Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 6(2). Retrieved from <http://tesol-dev.journals.cdcs.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2015/06/1.-Dahlman-2006.pdf>
- Erten, İ. H., & Burden, R. L. (2014). The relationship between academic self-concept, attributions, and L2 achievement. *System*, 42, 391-401.
- Fagan, D. S. (2015). When learner inquiries arise: Marking teacher cognition as it unfolds "In-the-moment". *Ilha do Desterro*, 68(1), 75-90. doi:10.5007/2175-8026.2015v68n1p75
- Farrell, T. S. C. (1999). The reflective assignment: Unlocking pre-service english teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching. *RELC Journal*, 30(2), 1-17. doi:10.1177/003368829903000201
- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American psychologist*, 55(6), 647-654. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037>
- Gao, X., & Ma, Q. (2011). Vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs of pre-service and in-service teachers in hong kong and mainland china. *Language Awareness*, 20(4), 327-342. doi:10.1080/09658416.2011.579977
- Imran, S., & Wyatt, M. (2015). Pakistani university English teachers' cognitions and classroom practices regarding their use of the learners' first languages. *Asian EFL Journal*, 17(1), 138-179. Retrieved from <http://asian-efl-journal.com/quarterly-journal/2015/03/21/volume-17-issue-1-march-2015-quarterly-journal/>
- Ismail, N., Albakri, I. S. M.A., Ismail, N., & Hussin, S. (2014). Pre-service teachers' reflection on the use of self-developed English language teaching materials for English as a second language students. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum*, 20(4), 35-51.
- MacAlister, J. (2012). Pre-service teacher cognition and vocabulary teaching. *RELC Journal*, 43(1), 99-111. doi:10.1177/0033688212439312
- Moini, M. R. (2009). The impact of EFL teachers' cognition on teaching foreign language grammar. *Pazhuhesh-e Zabanha-Ye Khareji*, (49), 141-164.
- Mori, R. (2011). Teacher cognition in corrective feedback in japan. *System*, 39(4), 451-467. doi:10.1016/j.system.2011.10.014
- Navarro, D. (2013). R. barnard & A. burns, (eds.), researching language teacher cognition and practice: International case studies. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36(3), 358-361.
- Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, 29(2), 177-195. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(01)00010-0
- Sheikhhol-Eslami, F., & Allami, H. (2012). The relation between teachers' self-beliefs of L2 learning and in-class practices. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(8), 1684-1692. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.8.1684-1692
- Wong, M. S. -. (2010). Beliefs about language learning: A study of Malaysian pre-service teachers. *RELC Journal*, 41(2), 123-136. doi:10.1177/0033688210373124
- Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2014). Pre-service teachers' changing beliefs in the teaching practicum: Three cases in an EFL context. *System*, 44(1), 1-12. doi:10.1016/j.system.2014.02.002