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## ARE THE GRADUATE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM READY TO TEACH THE UNDERGRADUATES?

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**Abstract:** According to the curriculum of the Graduate Program, *Universitas Negeri Malang*, the graduate (*S2*) students of the English Language Teaching program have to take teaching practicum in their third semester, where they have to teach the undergraduate students. In the past, they could choose and apply for the subjects that they wanted to teach, either skill or content courses. Since the academic year 2012, however, the practice has changed. The students no longer have to teach at the undergraduate program; instead they only have to do Peer Teaching with their classmates. In the past, graduate students were mostly teachers or lecturers of English; while currently they enrol at the Graduate Program straight after graduating from their undergraduate (*S1*) degree. Some of them are teachers of private courses, some are junior lecturers with 1-5 years' experience, while the rest are fresh graduates who have never taught. Questions then arise: are these students ready to teach the undergraduates? What difficulties do they have in the teaching practicum? What do they hope to get from the course? This paper presents the results of my mini research concerning the readiness of the students to do the teaching practicum, and their hopes and expectations regarding the conduct of the Teaching Practicum Course. Data were taken from observations and questionnaire to 35 students from two classes of the 2014 cohort. Most of them stated that they still needed further lessons, especially in Classroom management and materials selection to equip them. This is in line with the writer's observations which show that many of their practicum are still teacher-centered, and there is some apparent difficulty in time management. Some suggestions on improving the curriculum for the graduate program are provided.

**Key words:** *teaching practicum, peer teaching, difficulties, readiness*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching practicum has always been considered one of the most important aspects that prepare students to be "real teachers" in the field. This is true not only for undergraduate students who will be teachers in Primary or Secondary schools, but also for Graduate students taking the Master's program in Education, who are expected to be teachers in colleges/universities. According to the syllabus of the Graduate Program in English Language Teaching, *Universitas Negeri Malang* (2015), the Teaching Practicum Course is designed to help students in developing knowledge of practical teaching strategies to teach at the Tertiary level, particularly for the regular students. Students of the customized classes, who are teachers of elementary or secondary schools, do the teaching practicum in the level of the students they are teaching. The development covers the use of appropriate media and the development of lesson plans.

Students should demonstrate their skills in the form of peer teaching which include different patterns of teaching and learning such as conducting pair and/or group work, giving drills and exercises, questioning, and managing the classroom.

This mode of conducting peer teaching for the teaching practicum course as stated in the syllabus has only been implemented since the 2012 academic year. Previously, graduate students had to teach in real classes in undergraduate courses, where they were supervised by a mentor lecturer. The students could choose and apply for the course that they want to teach, either skills or content courses. Since 2012, however, there have been too many graduate students taking Teaching Practicum at the same time that there have not been enough classes that could be used for the practicum. The department therefore, decided to conduct the teaching practicum as peer teaching in the graduate program.

In the writer's experience of conducting the Teaching Practicum courses in the last four semesters, she has observed several problems which come up every semester, two of which are the choice of teaching method and classroom management. In this present semester, therefore, she wants to investigate the problems that the student teachers face in doing the teaching practicum, and ultimately find out whether the students are ready to teach in the undergraduate classes.

In the odd semester of the academic year 2015-2016 the writer teaches 2 classes of Teaching Practicum for the Graduate students of the English Language Teaching program in their third semester; each of the classes consists of 19 students, divided into two offerings of 10 and 9 students each. Each student will teach twice during the semester, once for teaching a skill course and once for a content course. In each meeting two student teachers will teach for the duration of 40minutes, two students act as observers, while the rest of the class act as undergraduate students. During that time the writer observes the teaching-learning process, and at the end of each meeting the observers and the writer (as lecturer) give feedback and suggestions for the student teachers. The observation covers the lesson plan, teaching technique, media used, and the language of the student teacher. The feedback is then used as reference for the student teachers to improve their teaching and lesson plan. At the end of the semester they have to submit the two revised lesson plans complete with the media and the powerpoint slides they use in the practicum.

The order of practice is to be decided by the students themselves; they usually draw lots on who teach when (both in the first and second rounds). After the order has been fixed they then think about what to teach in each round; the writer does not determine what course to teach in each round, they can teach skill course in the first round and content in the second, or vice versa. Furthermore, they can use any syllabus they want, it does not have to be the syllabus of *Universitas Negeri Malang*. As a result, some students use syllabi from the State Islamic University Maliki Malang, from Brawijaya University, State University of Padang, and others.

## 2 METHOD

A number of studies have been done regarding the teaching practicum done in schools (Ragawanti, 2015, Saricoban, 2010, Starkey and Rawlins, 2010, Yusof et.al, 2014). However, they all deal with the teaching practicum of undergraduate students in secondary schools: the student teachers' classroom management skills, the problems encountered in class, their learning process during the teaching practicum, and the perceptions towards the teaching practicum, respectively. The writer has yet to find research findings regarding the teaching practicum done at the Graduate level. Therefore, this study is important to contribute to the body of knowledge.

This research aims to find out the student teachers' perceived problems in teaching the undergraduate (*SI*) level, which in turn will show us whether they are ready to teach the undergraduate level students. Lately, the students enrolled in the Graduate program have been getting "younger"; in the past, graduate students were mostly teachers or lecturers who had taught for some years, either in secondary or tertiary level. Today, however, most of them are fresh graduates from the *SI* program; thus, experience in teaching is not among their strong points. Therefore, the writer anticipates that there would be problems concerning the teaching practice.

This study employs a questionnaire to get data on six aspects: (1) students' occupation, whether they are currently teaching or not;(2) if so, where they are teaching and what subject;(3) how long they have been teaching;(4) in their experience, what serious problems they have encountered in their classes, they have to also explain their choice(s); (5) what they expect to get from the Teaching Practicum Course, and (6) what they expect to get from the course and how they plan to use the experience obtained from the course in their future teaching career.

Besides the questionnaire, the writer also employs informal interview with the students, to know their feelings and hopes about this course. Some of the teaching sessions are also video-taped so the students can learn and discuss the performances. Data from all the instruments are then analyzed to get the

answer to the question posed as the title of this paper: are the graduate students of English Language Teaching Program ready to teach the undergraduates? Findings from each instrument are elaborated below.

### 3 FINDINGS

Findings from the questionnaire show a variety of answers; from the 35 students, 18 students (51%) are teaching, and 17 students (49%) are not. Among those who are currently teaching, most are teaching at private courses (61%), and the others (55.5%) are teaching at different schools: both private courses and at Junior High, Senior High (both public and private) schools, and at colleges. Those teaching at private courses generally teach preparation classes for TOEFL, IELTS, and academic writing. Meanwhile, those teaching at colleges are mostly teaching ESP, Intensive Course, or General English. The students' teaching experiences are mostly between 1-5 years (54%) and 6-10 years.

Regarding the serious problems that they have encountered in their teaching career, again answers vary. In the questionnaire the writer provides five options; i.e materials development/preparation, media development /selection, classroom management, choice of suitable method/technique of teaching, and students' language proficiency. Data from the respondents' answers show the following results:

**Table 1:** problems faced by student teachers

No.	Problems	Percentage
1.	Materials preparation/development	22.0
2.	Media development/ selection	5.71
3.	Classroom management	40.0
4.	Choice of suitable method of teaching	48.5
5.	Students' language proficiency	40.0

For this question, it is worth noting that some of the respondents who are not currently teaching also give their answers, based on their estimation and experience as undergraduate students themselves. The reasons they give for their choices can be elaborated as follows.

Respondents who choose number 4, "choice of suitable method of teaching", mostly state that they find difficulties in coping with heterogeneous students, and in

maintaining students' interest during the lesson. Quite a few respondents also mention that they get it from their own experience as undergraduate students, where they observed that lecturers who did not have good techniques did not teach well.

The second highest percentages of choice, classroom management and students' language proficiency, are given similar answers by the respondents. Classroom management is seen as a serious problem mostly because they teach in large classes with different proficiency and learning styles; they find it very hard to control students in any way (especially grouping). One of the respondents mentions that, as s/he is teaching at a famous Language Course, the students are generally from upper middle class/high social status families, and they pay very little attention to the teachers since they enrol at the language course just because it is the "in" thing among their peers.

As Lewis (2002) states, classroom management problems generally fall into three categories: motivation, constraints, and the teacher's role. Data from this present study seem to indicate that the biggest problems faced by the respondents fall into the second category, as they mainly talk about big classes, seating arrangements (which makes it difficult to group students), heterogeneous students, and lack of authentic/suitable materials.

In terms of students' language proficiency, some respondents state that it is a big problem for them as their students come from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), with very low proficiency. Some others state that since they are teaching ESP, most students have low proficiency, and low motivation; hence, the difficulties in finding activities that can maintain students' engagement in the lesson.

The next aspect in the questionnaire which gets a considerable choice is the materials development/preparation. Respondents who choose this aspect state that the problem mainly comes from lack of suitable materials for their students' age and level of competence. Preparation classes for TOEFL and IELTS have no problem here as the materials are just the preparation/exercise books which are determined by the institution.

The others, on the other hand, face difficulties when their institution does not provide good materials (and media) so they have to search or develop them. Respondents who have no background knowledge and training on materials development see this as a big obstacle.

The smallest percentage for the problems is the media development and/or selection. This small percentage may be due to the fact that (1) the respondents do not think it is an important aspect in teaching, or (2) they actually do not have serious problems in developing or selecting media for their classes. It is the writer's hope that the second possibility is the real reason.

One important thing related to this option is that some respondents choose all the options, and the explanation they give is that the lecturer in the previous semester never teaches them those things. The writer thinks this is an important thing for the department to consider.

The last question in the questionnaire is about the respondents' expectations on what to

With regard to the respondents' plans on how to use the experience and knowledge they get from this Teaching Practicum Course, most of them give very similar answers: (a) to use the feedback from their classmates and lecturer as references to be a better teacher/lecturer, (b) to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of their classmates so as to get ideas from the strong points and avoid making the same "mistakes"; (c) to get ideas from their classmates on some innovative techniques of teaching, and (d) to use all the knowledge and experiences as reflection and self-evaluation on their own teaching.

As stated above, besides distributing the questionnaire, the writer also conducts some informal interviews with the students. Some of them wonder why the teaching practicum is no longer conducted in the real classes in *SI*. We then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of doing the practicum in the real class vis a vis as peer teaching. The students say that in the real class they will get the experience of teaching in the real situation, so they can conduct their teaching-learning activities according to the lesson plan. However, they cannot learn a lot from the real class as the

get from the course, and their plans on how they will use the experience from this course in the future teaching career. The distribution is presented in the table

**Table 2:** respondents' expectations from the course

No.	Expectations from the course: to get ...	Percentage
1.	some deeper understanding of methods of teaching	54.0%
2.	some experience in teaching undergraduate students	68.6%
3.	more knowledge in teaching undergraduate students	80.0%
4.	more knowledge in developing lesson plans and media	68.6%
5	Others: to be a better teacher, be more confident, more knowledge of K-13, more knowledge of teaching content courses	

observer will only be the mentor lecturer, and maybe some feedback from the students. On the contrary, in peer teaching they can get more knowledgeable feedback, both from the lecturer and the observers. The feedback, comments and suggestions at the end of the session are very valuable to improve their teaching, either for the second round, or later in their career. This, according to them, quite makes up for the "artificial" classes that they get in the peer teaching. As teachers they feel very much helped by the feedback and suggestions from the observers and the lecturer. As "students", they state that on the one hand they sometimes face difficulties in pretending to be undergraduate students; but on the other hand, they learn a lot from observing their classmates and experience the teaching-learning process.

The last "instrument" that the writer uses in this study is the video recording of some of the practicum sessions. The students videotaped their teaching practicum on the sessions that the writer cannot attend the class due to other duties. Later, the class discuss the video tape, and students also learn from the strengths and weaknesses.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this present study have shown that the graduate students of the English Language Teaching program still need more training and experience to teach at the undergraduate level. They still face many problems concerning the choice of suitable technique of teaching, classroom management, and materials development, among others. Based on the questionnaire, respondents state that they expect to get more knowledge and experience in teaching undergraduate students, and that they feel they can learn a lot both from their own success and “failures” and from observing their classmates do the practicum. What needs more attention, however, is the statement of several respondents that they need all the knowledge because the previous lecturers did not equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge. This may be a one-sided opinion, but we should not let it slip from our attention; therefore, the writer suggests that the Graduate Program in English Language Teaching, particularly in Universitas Negeri Malang, reconsider their syllabus. So far, students get the Teaching-Learning Strategy Courses in their first and second semesters (Catalogue,

2015) and combined with their background knowledge from their undergraduate studies, they are assumed to be ready to teach in the tertiary level. The results of the questionnaire, interview, and video recordings, however, would be a strong foundation for the study program to reconsider the contents of the syllabus.

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