

UNRAVELING THE CHALLENGES OF INDONESIAN NOVICE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study aiming to unravel the challenges that Indonesian novice teachers of English have to cope with, in terms of lesson planning and implementation, classroom management, and professional development. It also inquires into the teachers' pre-service teacher education experience and support system provided by the school, which might relate to their challenges. The study is a qualitative case study involving eleven English teachers of secondary schools (junior and senior high schools and vocational schools) in Malang areas who have less than five years of teaching experience. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires followed up with semi-structured interviews as a means to clarify and elaborate what the respondents had written in the questionnaires. The study reveals various challenges faced by these novice teachers, including planning and implementing a lesson based on the 2013 Curriculum, designing and applying motivating learning strategies and assessment procedure that would be applicable to a class of students with a relatively low level of ability, and managing a big class. It concludes with some recommendations to bridge the gap between the pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development.

Keywords: novice teachers of English; Indonesian context; pre-service teacher education; teacher professional development

It is generally understood that learning a second language or a foreign language in a context such as Indonesia is a lengthy and complex process because it implies learning a new language as well as learning a new culture and way of thinking and doing. The role of teachers in the frame of learning a foreign language is thus one of the decisive factors to the success or failure of the learning process. In other words, the presence of competent teachers is of critical importance in achieving the ultimate goal of learning English.

Graduates of pre-service teacher education programs are often confronted with the fact that as novice teachers they have to teach in the school context immediately. A novice teacher is regarded as anyone who teaches a new course for the first time (Farrell, 2012, p. 437). In general, however, the term novice teacher refers to anyone who has just completed pre-service teacher education and has less than three years of experience in teaching. The facts show that it is not uncommon for novice teachers, including novice teachers of English, to handle various demands of the experienced and professional. This is certainly a challenge for novice teachers, particularly if there is not much professional help and support available in the teaching environment.

Numerous studies on novice teachers of English have been conducted in the international context, covering several aspects of novice teachers. Research

by Brannan and Bleistein (2012), for instance, reported that novice teachers were desperately in need of support from their mentors, both of logistical knowledge and of those related to professional and pedagogical competences. A similar case was also found in Mann and Tang's (2012) study, showing that novice teachers of English in Hong Kong needed a lot of support because once they are in school, novice teachers must fulfil the demand for an effective performance and assume professional responsibilities as experienced teachers do. Research by Senom, Zakaria, and Shah (2013) found the challenges facing novice teachers of English in Malaysia, while Liu (2014) researched the same topic in Taiwan.

By contrast, in the Indonesian context, much research on teachers that has been done mostly focuses on experienced teachers and professional teachers who have received teacher certificates (see, e.g., Abdullah, 2015; Amin, 2014; Anugerahwati & Saukah, 2010; Irmawati, Widiati, & Cahyono, 2017; Rido, Nambiar, & Ibrohim, 2016). Abdullah (2015), for example, investigated the influence of English teacher certification program in Indonesia on in-service teacher learning. Earlier, Amin (2014) identified factors that led English teachers to deserving a professional title. Irmawati, et al. (2017) reported on various activities undertaken by professional English teachers in improving their pedagogical skills. Anugerahwati and Saukah

(2010) and Rido, et al. (2016) conducted research similar in purpose, that is, exploring the journey of professional English teachers, but different in contexts, one in general schools and the other in vocational school.

Research on experienced and professional English teachers, in fact, has been widely carried out, while that on novice teachers of English seems sparse. Furaidah and Widiati (2000) conducted classroom action research to develop the reflective teaching skills of experienced and novice teachers of English at Public Senior High School 8 Malang through collegial observations, peer conferences, and teaching journals. However, the study by Furaidah and Widiati (2000) did not specifically address the issues of novice teachers of English, but rather the development of teachers' reflective teaching abilities.

Compelled by this very fact, this present research is intended to examine some challenges related to novice teachers of English in the Indonesian context. Before becoming an experienced teacher and a professional teacher, all novice teachers must have gone through certain phases and taken specific routes in their personal and professional journey. These phases and routes are very likely to be a gap faced by novice teachers of English since they have just completed their pre-service teacher education program but must carry out professional duties and obligations as a professional teacher. Therefore, the expected outcome of this study is the documentation of challenges confronted by novice teachers of English in the Indonesian context, particularly in terms of lesson planning, instructional implementation, classroom management, and professional identity development. In other words, this study attempts to listen to the voices of novice teachers of English and to capture the complexities of their journey of becoming teachers. According to Farrell (2012), conducting another study on novice teachers means creating a corpus of novice teachers' stories that any novice teacher can refer to when experiencing similar teaching problems and difficulties. Such data are indispensable in teacher professional development utilizing the 'standard-base system' model, namely professional development program, bottom-up in nature, based on the real needs identified by the teachers themselves in the performance of their daily tasks. As stated by Ingvarson (1998, in Villegas-Reimers, 2003, pp. 16-17), the traditional system of teacher professional development, often referred to as in-service training, seems inadequate because it applies top-down approach whereby the program is usually established by the government, short-term, and not necessarily responsive to the practical needs of teachers.

METHOD

In regard to the nature of the topic under investigation, the design of this present study

appears close to that of a case study, reflecting such characteristics as portraying a unique example of real people, in this case novice teachers, in real situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 289), being a specific instance which is designed to illustrate a more general principle. As the results of this study are going to be used for another form of research, that is a program development, this case study can be categorized as exploratory (Yin, 1984 in Cohen et al., 2011, pp. 290-291), being a preliminary as pre-development.

Referring to the definition of novice teachers by Farrell (2012), the study involved English teachers in Malang, Indonesia, who had had one- up to five-year teaching experience when the study was conducted. Malang local government has two administrative areas, namely, Malang Municipality and Malang Regency. Through intensive communication with the heads of English teachers' forums (or subject matter teachers' forum) in the areas, we recruited eleven novice teachers of English to participate in the study, four teaching at junior high schools, three at senior high schools, and four at vocational high schools. In the last five years the Indonesian government has implemented a moratorium policy on recruiting civil servant teachers, which explains why there were only a small number of English teachers in Malang areas we could identify as novice. Nevertheless, with the relatively small number of research subjects, we expect to minimize the possibility of resulting in information which is of superficial perspectives as the research objective is to provide the complexity of the information concerning novice teachers in the Indonesian context, and following Creswell's (2008, p. 217) suggestion, the addition of more individuals might diminish the researchers' ability in providing an in-depth picture.

The study thus employed a multiple case study approach where multiple cases, in this case, the eleven novice teachers of English, were investigated in terms of their experiences as relevant to the objectives of the study in order to gain better understanding of and "for the benefit of a broader group of cases" (Tavakoli, 2012, p. 47), that is, current and future novice teachers of English.

The detailed information about the eleven teachers is shown in Table 1. This was obtained from Section A of the questionnaire used as the main instrument in this study. For the sake of confidentiality, those eleven teachers were identified as Research Subject (RS) 1 up to RS 11. Out of the eleven research subjects, seven are currently teaching at private schools, whereas the rest at public schools; five of them obtained their bachelor degree from state universities, whereas six from private ones; and only one research subject did not hold Bachelor Degree in English Language Teaching (ELT), but in English Literature.

Table 1 indicates that the novice teachers' experience ranges from five months to five years, with the teaching load varying from eight to thirty-

five hours per week. In the Indonesian context, teachers are generally required to teach for twenty-four hours.

Table 1. Background information of the research subjects

Research Subjects	Length of Teaching Experience	Gender	Teaching Context	Academic Qualification	Teaching Load per Week
RS 1	1 year	Male	Junior High	B.A. in ELT	10 hours
RS 2	2 years	Male	Junior High	B.A. in ELT	8 hours
RS 3	5 years	Male	Junior High	B.A. in ELT	20 hours
RS 4	3 years	Female	Junior High	B.A. in ELT	25 hours
RS 5	2 years, 11 months	Female	Senior High	B.A in English Literature	35 hours
RS 6	3 years, 11 months	Female	Senior High	B.A. in ELT	22 hours
RS 7	1 year, 5 months	Female	Senior High	B.A. in ELT	12 hours
RS 8	0 year, 5 months	Female	Vocational	B.A. in ELT	29 hours
RS 9	1 year	Female	Vocational	B.A. in ELT	13 hours
RS 10	2 years, 3 months	Male	Vocational	B.A. in ELT	25 hours
RS 11	4 years	Female	Vocational	B.A. in ELT	12 hours

As stated before, the main instrument to collect the data was a questionnaire, consisting of a number of open-ended questions. As Takavoli (2012, p. 243) points out, open-ended items are often used in qualitative research, as they “enable respondents to answer as much as they wish, and are particularly suitable for investigating complex issues, to which simple answers cannot be provided”, which fits the objectives of this study.

There are four sections in the questionnaire. Section A explores the background information of the research subjects, the results of which are presented in Table 1. Section B finds out the reasons for their taking up teaching as a profession. Section C investigates the subjects' experiences during pre-service teacher education, and Section D unravels their experiences as novice teachers. More specifically, Section C is intended to obtain information concerning whether or not their pre-service teacher education program has adequately prepared them in terms of English skills, content knowledge and skills, pedagogical knowledge and skills, personality skills, and social skills, whereas Section D examines the difficulties they face as well as the support provision they receive. The questionnaire was validated by an expert in ELT prior to being used in data collection. It was also tried out to a number of students attending teacher professional education program (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru – PPG*). Revisions were made based on the results of expert validation and tryout to improve the clarity and the contents of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed electronically by the research subjects. The completed questionnaires were then used as a guide for the researchers to conduct an interview with each one of the research subjects. The interview was done to clarify and elaborate the information collected from the questionnaire.

The data from the questionnaire as well as from the interview were qualitatively analyzed to find out the patterns of commonalities in the

research subjects' responses. Following Johnson and Christensen (2014), we consciously took into account the perspectives of the people, in this case the novice teachers of English, whose experience is being investigated as well as the contexts in which their experience takes place.

FINDINGS

The results of the qualitative analysis to the data collected are presented here to focus on the novice teachers' experiences during pre-service teacher education and their experiences in the initial years of teaching. To enrich the data, however, we collected some information concerning their reasons for becoming English teachers. All of the novice teachers acknowledged that they had the passion in learning and teaching English and that they thought English is an important language for global communication. Therefore, they might feel that it is a privilege to teach English to Indonesian students, as also stated by one of the subjects: “*I like English, and I have passion in teaching English. These two reasons enable me to improve my English and to teach English to my students with joy*” (RS 9). The reasons seem to be in line with two of the four motives for choosing a career in teaching suggested by Ornstein and Levine (2008, p. 3), namely, the “desire to impart knowledge” and the “interest in and excitement about teaching”. Ornstein and Levine further confirm that those reasons resembled reasons found in many previous studies conducted during the past twenty years. Such reasons tend to strongly motivate teacher candidates to perform effectively when they become teachers.

Experiences during pre-service teacher education

As mentioned before, Section C of the questionnaire seeks for information concerning the adequacy of the pre-service teacher education program in preparing the research subjects in terms of English skills, content knowledge and skills, pedagogical

knowledge and skills, personality skills, and social skills. All of them mentioned that they obtained courses related to English skill development, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing courses and the ones related to subject-matter content. They claimed that the knowledge and skills related to English language and content was sufficient for supporting their career as English teachers in their respective teaching contexts. All the novice teachers assured that they could apply their English skills for day-to-day classroom uses, one of which, for instance, was for selecting and developing learning materials in the form of different kinds of texts. In short, all the research subjects appeared confident with their English knowledge and skills for classroom survival purposes.

In addition to English skill courses, the research subjects also took such pedagogical courses as English curriculum, classroom management, teaching media, teaching English as a foreign language, and language assessment. Most of them had the idea that the pedagogical knowledge and skills they received during the pre-service teacher education was not sufficient in terms of content and time. In the case of understanding English curriculum, for example, they reported that the curriculum they had studied during their undergraduate study was different from the one implemented nationally by the government when they graduated. As a result, they had to spend time adjusting to and understanding the philosophical approaches as well as the practical orientations of the new curriculum, necessary for lesson planning.

Related to teaching practicum, it was revealed that the time allocated for teaching practicum ranged between one to three months. Most of the research subjects agreed that, through the teaching practicum, they had opportunities to learn to teach in real classes and were thus able to apply the theoretical principles they had learned at campus to classroom contexts. They also learned to adapt their teaching strategies to the needs of their students. Interestingly, all the subjects agreed that this teaching practicum boosted their confidence as an English teacher candidate. Apart from those positive comments about teaching practicum, however, the subjects reported several challenges identified during the teaching practicum, such as problems in developing lesson plans, managing classes with students having different ability and motivation levels, motivating students to learn English, selecting and creating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials for vocational students, and dealing with many administrative responsibilities. The situations become more difficult as those research subjects perceived that they did not get adequate guidance from the supervising teachers. Therefore, to solve those problems, all of them mentioned the need for discussion forums with both senior teachers at school and their supervising lecturers at campus.

In addition to subject matter and pedagogical competences, English teachers in Indonesia are required by laws to possess personality and social competences. Personality competence refers to a personal ability as well as a noble character reflecting a steady, stable, mature, wise, and authoritative personality in order to act as a role model for students. Regarding this competence, all the novice teachers admitted that their personality competence was cultivated and nurtured through subconsciously observing their lecturers' behaviors. As Scrivener argues (2011, p. 13), exposure in the form of observing our own teachers (in this case lecturers) work and behave can build our image of the expected job and behavior of a teacher. Such acquisition of personality competence from college life was then maintained once the novice teachers started out, as indicated by one of the subjects as follows "I try to do my best in my daily life as a teacher. In terms of my behavior, I always try to control my attitude" (R4).

Social competence is defined as teachers' ability to communicate and interact with students, colleagues, school administrators, parents, and community. Most of the research subjects agreed that they developed their social competence through both getting actively involved in classroom tasks and active participation in student organizations in which they practiced communicating and interacting with other students from different backgrounds. However, they mentioned the absence of a course which was specifically designed to teach them to become socially competent and effective. It might be their lecturers' personality and attitude that have enabled the novice teachers to learn in effective working relationships and good classroom atmospheres, complying with Scrivener's (2011, p. 18) categorization of teachers.

Experiences during the initial years of teaching

When asked whether they felt confident with their teaching competence to embark on a teaching profession, seven respondents felt confident, while the rest did not. The confident group mentioned that in the initial years of their teaching they felt that the skill and knowledge they had obtained from pre-service teacher education sufficiently enabled them to survive in classroom settings. However, they eventually also realized that they still had a lot to learn as they faced the real conditions in the field. The less confident group mentioned various reasons why they were not confident. RS 5, for instance, stated, "I feel I do not have enough knowledge and skills to teach because I am not a graduate of an education program. Of course this is very influential because my knowledge of teaching methods is very minimal". Their lack of confidence became obvious when they had to teach students of the final year who were facing the English national examination. RS 3 in this case explained, "I have lack of

confidence, even more, if I have to teach Year 12, which is more about National Examination than developing their English skills. There is a great responsibility there so that students can understand the problem, can answer questions, and can get good grades”.

Concerning their main duties at schools, the subjects’ responses were similar; as teachers, they were to conduct instructional administration, to develop lesson plans for the teaching and learning, to prepare learning materials, to implement the teaching and learning process, to conduct student assessment, to carry out remedial teaching and enrichment, to guide, mentor, and direct students, to conduct research, to become a homeroom teacher, to develop students’ personality, and to work in teams for special events held by schools.

Regarding their feelings in their initial years of teaching, the novice teachers mentioned various emotional states such as being excited, confused, challenged, or nervous. All of them loved to meet students and teach them English, but did not enjoy the administrative burden imposed by schools. Besides, they added that initially teaching was heavy and very frustrating because students were difficult to manage and tended to show lack of respect to them as novice teachers.

Challenges in lesson planning

Developing effective lesson plans appears crucial. All the research subjects, however, complained about the complexities of developing lesson plans based on the new curriculum, that is, Curriculum 2013. Two respondents admitted that they did not have the knowledge and skills to create the required lesson plans. Others were still confused about the steps of the scientific approach adopted by the curriculum. They reported that they did not have adequate understanding of each step of the approach from *observing, questioning, collecting information, associating, to communicating*. They were not able to determine what kind of teaching activities they should put in each step and thus had trouble determining what kind of questions should be asked by students and how to make students ask questions.

Another limitation was how to develop smooth and sequential teaching activities in the lesson plan. Two respondents complained that the lesson plan should be made very detailed and that they should present the lesson plans to the supervisors from the Education Office of Malang during school inspection. The rest of the respondents complained about the limited time that they had to finish the lesson plans. One research subject teaching at a vocational high school reported not to have a good understanding of content of English for students of industrial chemistry department, which then made it even more difficult for her to develop the lesson plans. Unfortunately, they admitted that sometimes as novice teachers, they only made the lesson plans

based on the sample lesson plans provided for them, but in fact they did not understand the purpose and the stages of the lesson plans.

All the research subjects also pointed out a major difficulty they faced in lesson planning, that is, how to design teaching and learning activities that are motivating to the students. They complained that their students generally lacked the motivation and the ability to learn. One research subject who taught at a private school also mentioned that the English teachers’ forums he attended did not really consider the problem that typically happened in private schools, related to students of lower level of ability.

Challenges in lesson implementation

In line with their major challenge in lesson planning, the common challenges that all the research subjects experienced as novice teachers in implementing a lesson were to address the needs of students having different ability levels and dealing with students coming from various family backgrounds. They had difficulty teaching students with low level ability. These students may need more time to understand the materials; therefore, the activities in the classroom might go beyond the time allocation. The classroom learning may exceed the time allocation designed in the lesson plan. Another constraint is related to students who were bored with learning because many teaching stages were repetitive and predictable. In addition, some students were less respectful to them because of their young age.

In addition, all the respondents admitted that they were not able to use English as the medium of instruction. One respondent stated,

“The main constraint is students’ lack of vocabulary because English is a difficult foreign language for students. When I start using English, my students start ignoring or even appear unwilling to listen, because they feel they cannot understand what I am talking about. Thus, they choose not to pay attention. Therefore, classroom learning is more frequently conducted in Indonesian (90%) than in English”.

Student evaluation and scoring processes were also demanding as most of the research subjects had many classes with a great number of students in each class. They confessed having difficulties assessing their students. RS 7, for example, stated that her students had low level of understanding, but the school required the students’ scores to reach the minimum mastery level. Besides, as explained by RS 9, conducting attitude assessment was a bit problematic. When involving peers for attitude assessment, she found that her students seemed to be subjective; therefore, the results might not be reliable. Furthermore, the novice teachers admitted the difficulty assessing productive skills, speaking and writing, particularly in developing and using

scoring rubrics. The novice teachers also felt that the most challenging task in assessment was preparing their students for English national examination to achieve the best scores possible due to the high expectations from the school as well as from the parents.

Challenges in classroom management

In terms of classroom management, the novice teachers reported to have difficulties handling big classes. The number of students in their class might reach thirty five. This is quite an obstacle as well as a challenge. For example, to create a quiet and conducive classroom took them a while, and to give every student attention was likely not possible, which might also have been caused by the limited time available. Concerning this, RS 6, for instance, asserted *“The most common challenge is the lack of time. The time available or provided and used to carry out the duties is very limited”*. The next common challenge concerned heavy teaching loads. As can be seen in Table 1, four teachers had to teach more than twenty-four hours per week. RS 5 admitted, *“The toughest challenge is the heavy hours of my teaching that make me feel tired in the late hours. So, it greatly affects my mood and performance while teaching. This is very unfair to the students who get the afternoon lessons, because maybe they cannot get the maximum teaching from me.”*

Challenges in professional development

The questionnaire items referring to professional development dig up information about the teachers' familiarity with doing reflections on their teaching, conducting action research, attending professional development (PD) forums, and other PD activities, as well as the support they receive from school to continuously develop their professionalism. First of all, the novice teachers admitted that they did not have any mentor who was officially assigned by the school to assist them during their initial years of teaching. However, three of them mentioned that because there was more than one senior English teacher in their schools, they could consult the senior teacher to handle various issues related to their work. Related to this, RS 2 explained, *“I often discuss and ask many things about learning to him (a senior English teacher who is also the chair of the English Teacher Forum). He often advises and helps me, as a new teacher, to learn a lot, and to adjust with the conditions of the field. We often discuss how students and classrooms are affected, what methods can be used in the classroom, what materials can be developed, with what techniques, etc. I am greatly helped by him.”* The other four novice teachers, however, were the only English teachers in their schools, so that they did not have any colleagues to discuss matters related to English teaching.

Furthermore, the majority of the novice teachers indicated that they did not undergo any orientation program before they began teaching. They acknowledged that when they first taught, they went directly to the classes and handled many students of various ability levels. Only one teacher claimed that she obtained an informal orientation, as she stated, *“Yes, it was not actually an official orientation program in the school. But more informal, new teachers are invited to the class by senior teachers, or new teachers with their own initiative to participate in the classroom followed by senior teachers. From there, the new teacher will begin to learn to be familiar with the condition of the class, then, to observe the techniques or methods of teaching the old teacher. These teaching techniques can be used as reference for the new teachers.”*

Five research subjects claimed that they had some opportunities to join PD activities; for example, they joined training in the new curriculum, that is, Curriculum 2013, attended the regular meetings of Subject Teacher Forum, and join seminars or workshops on English teaching. Two subjects, however, stated that they had not had a chance to join any professional development activities due to their heavy teaching loads. RS 1 admitted, *“I have not had the opportunity to develop myself. But I plan to attend workshops, seminars and training that will be useful to me”*.

Regarding reflective practice and action research, the novice teachers at junior high schools said they did not do any of these. The senior high school teachers who participated in the study mentioned some ways they did reflection, that is, by giving questionnaire to the students at the end of term, doing reflection at subject teacher forums, having discussion with colleagues and using the results of supervision and evaluation by the board of foundation for their reflection. One vocational school teacher mentioned that she did reflection at the end of a lesson. Only a couple of teachers stated that they had done action research on the use of games and movies. The research subjects seem to lack familiarity with doing reflective practice on a daily basis, and research is not something in their agenda.

When asked whether the schools provided other support for their career development, some of the responses were promising. Four research subjects stated that the schools provided support in the form of leniency over deadline and understanding mistakes they had committed in their teaching, enough time to familiarize themselves with their students, equipment and media needed for students' learning, or reward for their students' achievement. The others stated that the schools provided facilities such as books, internet, language laboratory, etc. A number of schools also periodically conducted supervision and assessment

programs, which were used by the novice teachers as a reflection on their teaching performance. RS 9 mentioned, *“Fortunately I was periodically supervised and assessed by some of the teachers and staff of the Foundation, then I was informed about the results which covered the weaknesses and the strengths”*

DISCUSSION

The findings related to experiences during pre-service teacher education suggest that the novice teachers perceived having learned substantial amount from their pre-service teacher education in terms of subject matter knowledge and skills, but less in terms of pedagogical ones. When juxtaposed with the findings from previous studies by Faez and Valeo (2012) and Kiely and Askham (2012), this study confirms the benefits of pre-service teacher education. The novice teachers acknowledged that although offered just for a short period of time, the teaching practicum was very useful, similar to what Faez and Valeo (2012) found among Canadian teachers. Besides, in line with Kiely and Askham's (2012) findings, the pre-service teacher education provided the novice teachers with English knowledge and skills to be transferred to their students and thus contributed to their confidence in standing in front of the class, feeling that their English was more than enough to teach secondary school students.

The novice teachers, however, felt the lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills in their pre-service teacher education. It is quite understandable as pedagogy needs to be applied to actual teaching, which, in the case of those novice teachers, they previously had only during the teaching practicum. In regard to curriculum, for example, the one that they learned during their undergraduate study was different from the curriculum implemented nationally when they graduated, that is, Curriculum 2013. The feeling of not having sufficient knowledge of the curriculum seems to have influenced their competence in developing lesson plans. In fact, it seems to be the curriculum document itself which is not self-explanatory. The same experience of difficulty understanding the new curriculum, particularly analyzing the basic competences to teach, was also found among teacher candidates involved in the study by Hayati, Widiati, and Furaidah (2016).

The novice teachers in fact loved teaching, but did not enjoy the administrative work assigned by the school, which means that they had to juggle between teaching their subject and doing non-teaching duties. Many of them also indicated the absence of orientation program and mentors, which would have been helpful to them during their initial years of teaching. Similar findings were also shown

in Yukawa's study (2014) on novice teachers of English in Japan.

The heavy workload, the minimum support at the beginning of their career, and their perceived lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills make it more challenging for the novice teachers to plan and implement an effective lesson, manage a class well, and conduct continuous professional development. Developing good lesson plans seems to be the most complex task as they had to understand the curriculum well. They had to be able to formulate instructional objectives, select and organize materials, select and organize learning experiences, and design assessment instrument. Brown and Lee (2015) suggest that novice teachers usually experience problems of creativity in those aspects. In implementing the lesson, the challenges were mostly related to students, such as students' lack of ability in English or low motivation to learn English, similar to those found by Shin (2012). This, according to the research subjects, has resulted in their inability to use English as a medium of instruction. In terms of classroom management, the problem they faced dealt with big classes, which reflects their acknowledgment of their lacking pedagogical skills.

The novice teachers also admitted that they did not feel confident when assigned to teach the final-year students due to the English national examination. They mentioned that the schools and parents had very high expectations about the students' scores in English national examination, so teaching became very stressful. This is reasonable as even for more experienced teachers, preparing students for the high-stakes English national examination in the Indonesian context was burdensome that washback effects were found, for example, in the research conducted by Furaidah, Saukah, and Widiati (2015).

Novice teachers need to increase their criticality of addressing challenges faced in initial years of teaching (Karatas & Karaman, 2013), which in our opinion can be done through developing reflective practice. As the novice teachers in this study had limited understanding of reflective teaching, following Farrell (2012), pre-service teacher preparation should assign student teachers some reflective activities, even should offer a specific supplementary course on reflective teaching. By so doing student teachers can get the opportunity to critically examine and reflect on their own teaching experiences, leading to improvement and further development (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 541), an element essential in continuous professional development.

Furthermore, as pre-service teacher education appears to be the period when the novice teachers started learning teaching, they need to continuously sharpen their pedagogical skills by observing other people teach, as suggested by Scrivener (2011, p. 9).

Similarly, Johnson (2009) asserts that the heart of teacher education is teacher learning. From observing other teachers over time, they might take a number of tangible things such as ideas for certain classroom activities, work (teaching) pace, etc., which might later be inbuilt to their own teaching. Such teacher learning is framed by Richards and Farrell (2005, in Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 540-541) as developmental processes of four conceptualizations of *skill learning, cognitive process, personal construction, and reflective practice*.

Pre-service teachers need also be aware of various activities teachers can do to continuously develop their professionalism, which may include “having discussion with colleagues, joining teacher association forum, attending seminars and workshops, taking courses, doing research, reading relevant sources, surfing the net, and doing team teaching” (Irmawati, et al., p. 293).

As Yukawa (2014) found in her study, the novice teachers might also benefit from “reconnect(ing) with former professors and alumni teachers”. Mentoring program which involves pre-service teacher educators as well as experienced school teachers is a potential alternative solution to support the novice teachers during this period of initial teaching and bridge the gap between pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development, as also suggested by Mann and Tang (2012). This kind of program involves partnership between school and university and the formation of learning community (Avalos, 2011) to enhance teachers’ practice by implementing new ideas and doing reflections. As Van Driel and Berry (2012) state, to develop teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and skills, it is not enough that the teachers receive examples from experts. They need to have the opportunity to implement the strategies they have learnt and conduct reflections, individually or collectively, on their teaching experiences. They also require mentors who are able to give constructive feedback on their teaching, which is a crucial element in the process of inducting novice teachers (Hudson, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the novice teachers perceived their pre-service teacher education adequate in equipping them with subject matter knowledge and skills. However, in the real field of teaching, they faced various challenges including planning and implementing a lesson based on the new curriculum, that is, Curriculum 2013, as well as designing and applying motivating learning strategies and assessment procedure that would be applicable to a class of students with a relatively low level of ability. Managing a big class appears to be another

challenge for them, so is using English as a medium of instruction. There seems to a gap between their pre-service preparation and their needs in the initial years of teaching. We have therefore discussed some recommendations to bridge the gap, one of which is by conducting a mentoring program, to facilitate the development of reflective practitioners and help the novice teachers deal with their challenges. We will address this program further in the second year of our three-year research study on novice teachers of English.

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