

# EXPLORING TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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## Abstract

Having pedagogical competencies is one of the requirements to become a professional teacher in Indonesia. That is to say, teachers must master this competence and English teachers of young learners are not exempt. Thus, this study was conducted in order to explore the English teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competencies in teaching English to young learners and how their beliefs were reflected in the teaching-learning process. Interviews and observations have been conducted to collect qualitative data from the participants in Surakarta. Included in this study were 2 English teachers at a private school in Surakarta. The results of the study indicated that the English teachers faced several challenges in implementing their beliefs on pedagogical competencies. The study we have done suggests that pedagogical competencies of the English teachers can be developed through a professional development program which should be organized by every school in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** beliefs, pedagogical competencies, young learners

## Introduction

Teachers can be the heart of learning activities. Their presence gives a soul to their students. Not only focuses on doing the teaching tasks, great teachers think and help their students to maximize their potentials. Furthermore, teachers have power in the classroom. By using their power, they can shape students' potentials, help students to change their future, and enlighten students' view on something. Above all, teachers' power can impact students' life. But being a great teacher is quite challenging because this job has several responsibilities such as clarifying values and promoting moral development, transferring knowledge, and also helping students to develop students' potentials (Suyanto and Djihad, 2012). In order to make the teachers' tasks run well, they are sued to be professional.

To become a professional teacher several competencies are needed to be fulfilled. In Indonesia as stated in the Law of Teachers and Lectures article 10 verse 1 a professional teacher must have four competencies named pedagogical competencies, personality competencies, social competencies, and

professional competencies. One of the most important competencies that must be mastered is pedagogical competencies.

According to Indonesian law number 14 of 2005 related to teachers and lecturers, it is explained that pedagogical competence is the ability of teacher to manage learning process that relates to students, including understanding insights or educational foundations, understanding students, developing curriculum or syllabus, understanding learning theory and learning principles, implementing learning which is educational and dialogical, using learning technology, evaluating learning outcomes, and developing students to actualize their various potentials they have. Mulyasa (2007) in Hakim (2015) stated that pedagogical competence is the ability to manage the learning of learners includes an understanding of learners, instructional design and implementation, evaluation of learning outcomes, and the development of learners to actualize their potential. Pedagogical is a set of behaviors or capacities allowing for efficient manifestation of an activity, or as a minimum professional standard. It is often

specified by law which professionals should reach (Suciu and Mata, 2011).

To get a good quality of teaching-learning process, mastering pedagogical competencies is highly needed because several aspects of teaching and learning are involved in it. Moreover, teaching English to young learners are very different with adult so the mastery of pedagogical competencies is very crucial. According to Harmer (2007), teaching English to young learners needs a highly skilled and dedicated teaching. When teacher is able to teach his students in this age, it opens a great chance to raise a successful learner. Thus, the role of teacher is irreplaceable.

One of the aspects in pedagogical competence is the ability to develop students to actualize their potentials. This competence is highly needed nowadays due to the necessity of current and future needs. Even though the developing students' potentials are important, little attention has been paid to this aspect. As educators or teachers, we are supposed to help students to understand their potentials. This can be reached by having awareness and responsibility to dig for information about the students' talents and interests. By knowing their potentials earlier, especially in English skill, we can shape their talents so that they can truly be what they should be. Every kid can be anything. The jobs of teachers are to ensure and facilitate them to become the best version of them and helm them to change their life for having better future.

In doing the job, a teacher can be influenced by several factors. One of the factors is a belief. Belief controls teacher's actions. As stated by Kindsvatter et.al (1996), teachers' pedagogical competencies are influenced by their personal beliefs. Borg (2001) defined belief as a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others. Teacher's belief is considered to be able to affect the classroom teaching. In the same way, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) asserted

that teacher's belief strongly predict their decisions and classroom practice.

The implementation of pedagogical competencies especially for the aspect of developing students' potentials in English might be quite challenging for the English teachers of young learners in Indonesia. It is because English is not included in the curriculum. Following the regulation from Ministry of Education in 2001 about decentralization of education in Indonesia, some Elementary schools use English subject as a local content which is taught in their schools (Musthafa, 2010). Thus, English teachers should try to provide and prepare the English teaching materials by themselves.

However, some schools still give highly attention to English subject. The private school which had been observed by the researchers in this study is one of the schools which provide English subject for the students. This school even provides some English programs that facilitate the students to develop their English skills. The students who are from this school also won several English competitions such as story telling competition, speech contest, and also English Olympiad.

Due to the unique case that the researchers found in this school, a study related to teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competencies was done. This study, however, solely pertains to focus on one of the aspect of pedagogical competencies that is the ability to develop students to actualize their various potentials. This study aimed to explore the teachers' beliefs and practices of pedagogical competencies in their school. For this reason, the research questions were:

What are English teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competence?

How are the English teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competence reflected on the practice in teaching English to young learners?

### **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research which uses case study as a research design. It is because the researchers found a unique

phenomenon that interests the researcher to explore. As stated by Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) in Creswell (2009), case study is a design of inquiry in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. This research had been carried out at one of private school in Surakarta. The participants were two English teachers with the teaching experiences ranging from 8 to 17 years. They were contacted through the researchers' professional network and volunteered to take a part. The teachers' names are pseudonyms that are Mr. Mahmud refers to the first participant and Mr. Fajar refers to the second participant.

Interview and observation had been done to collect the data. The researchers used semi-structured interview and digitally recorded and transcribed. The interview consisted of 4 main parts, namely: questions about the teachers' background, questions about the teachers beliefs on pedagogical competencies in general, questions about teachers' beliefs on developing students' potentials, and questions about how they reflect their beliefs in teaching learning process. After interviewing the participants, the researchers observed the teaching-learning activities to clarify what the teachers stated in the interview process. Robson (2002) claimed that what people do may differ from what they say they do so that observation provides a reality check.

The data of this study were in the form of information related to teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competencies especially on the aspect of the ability to develop students' potentials. To analyze the data, the researcher used a data analysis technique from Miles and Hubberman (1994). After the data had been collected, the researchers reduced the data by summarized it, chose the main data, found the pattern, and lost the unimportant data. Then, the data were displayed. The researchers showed the data so that the information related to the research's issue could be seen clearly. The last is drawing conclusion. The researchers

verified the data and made initial conclusion to answer research questions.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study revealed the information related to teachers' beliefs and their practices on pedagogical competencies which focused on the aspect of developing students' potentials. Firstly, the researchers looked for the information related to the teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competencies in general and then went further by asking several questions related to the ability on developing students' potentials. The result of the interview and observation were displayed here.

#### **1. Teachers' beliefs on pedagogical competencies.**

The participants were asked about what they think of pedagogical competencies. They shared their idea about pedagogical competencies. The first idea came up from the first participant, Mr. Mahmud.

“Pedagogical competence is one of the four competencies that teachers should have it as for professional teachers. I think that this competence is very important for the teachers because the teachers can ... they can learn how to manage classroom, know the students characteristics, then we also should improve ourselves in teaching method.”(Mr. Mahmud)

The next participant, Mr. Fajar, shared his thought about pedagogical competencies and highlighted more relation between pedagogical competencies and learning. As he stated that:

“Pedagogical competence is related to learning. It is the ability of the teacher to manage classroom learning, the ability of the teacher to master the situation in the classroom, and then of course the ability to know the students' weaknesses and strengths in the class either academic weakness or other eminent potentials.”(Mr. Fajar)

Both participants highlighted pedagogical competencies with the ability to know the students' characteristics and to manage the class. What the teachers thought about

pedagogical competencies is also in line with the definition of pedagogical competencies according to Indonesian law number 14 of 2005 and Mulyasa (2007). What the participants mentioned were involved in the aspects of pedagogical competencies. It means that the participants aware about pedagogical competencies. They also pointed out the importance of pedagogical competencies for teachers. They believe that teachers who can implement pedagogical competencies in the class are able to understand students' characteristics, the teaching method to use, and the strategy to manage class, and know how to fit material to students which have many different characteristics. In line with Cameron (2001) who stated that knowledge about children learning is seen as central to effective teaching. Successful lessons and activities are those that are turned to learning needs of pupils, rather than to the demands of the next text-book unit.

The participants' understanding on pedagogical competencies knowledge was also reflected on their practices. In the observation of their teaching-learning activities, the researchers clarified those beliefs. The first participant, Mr. Mahmud tried to make learning activities more fun. He tried to adjust the material that was suitable with his students' characteristics. As the researchers found in his class, the students seemed enjoy learning English with him because he used several learning activities in the class. He began the learning activities by greeting students and asking about their activities in the morning. Then he started explaining the materials shortly. He believes for teaching English to young learners, teachers need not to explain much but should give more examples and practice it together. Harmer (2001) in Juhana (2014) stated that young learners get their understanding not only from explanation but also from what they see, hear, and learn when they have a chance to touch and interact with (experience it). After explaining the material, he continued the learning by playing game together. He used some flashcards which are related to the

material. Most students enjoyed playing the game and looked excited. Some of students even scrambled to participate. As stated by Thomson (2011) playing games in the classroom raises students' interest and motivation to participate in class.

Mr. Mahmud also ensured that all of the students participated actively in the class by giving each student a chance to play a game, answer the questions, and share his/her idea about the topic discussed in the class. He also discussed the material in the textbook together. He walked around to make sure that all of the students did the given worksheet and asked the students' difficulties. These activities are in line with what Mustafa (2003) in Juhana (2014) stated that young learners learn best as a community of learners in non-competitive environment. Mr. Mahmud also tried to teach English by talking and doing things in students' social context. He was also generous to praise his students. He believes that whatever students do should be appreciated.

The second participant, Mr. Fajar had a slightly different way in teaching English to his students. He stated that teaching English for grade 4 to 6 is not the same with teaching English for grade 1 to 3. Most of the students in his class said that game is not pretty interesting again. He further explained that may be because the focus of learning has shifted due to the students' needs. Especially for students in grade 5 and 6, games are less used. The students preferred to do some English worksheets. In this case, Mr. Fajar facilitated the students' needs by providing additional worksheets from different sources to make students do not feel bored. As suggested by Juhana (2014) that teachers should create interesting, fun, enjoyable, and fun lesson for young learners.

## **2. Teachers' beliefs on developing students' potentials.**

After asking the participants' view on pedagogical competencies, the researchers dig for information about the participants' beliefs on developing students' potentials. Firstly, the participants were asked about their

view on developing students' potentials. The first participant, Mr. Mahmud stated that there is such an excitement in discovering students' potentials. He feels happy and interested in finding students' potentials. *"It is like doing observation"* he said. If he finds students who are good at English, he will invite them to join competitions. He also communicates to the students' parents so that they also aware and give attentions to their children's potentials. He believed that students' success also depends on parents' support. Furthermore, he stated that *"Students can be great when there are many supports around them not only from the teachers but also from the environment and the parents."* In relation to developing English skill, Cameron (2001) stated that language can grow as the child takes over control of language used initially from other children and adults.

The second participant, Mr. Fajar viewed students' potentials as the ability to absorb learning. Students' potentials can be seen from their ability to master learning materials. As he stated *"If the students are able to master learning, it means their learning potentials are also good. It is indicated by their readiness in doing learning activities actively such as doing assignments and tests while students who have less academic potentials can be seen from their activities in the class as well."* Moreover, he explained that there are much non-academic potential as well that he finds out on his students. He facilitates the students to develop their potentials by joining English club. English club is one of extracurricular in the school.

Further, the participants were asked about how important to know students' potential is. The first participant, Mr. Mahmud stated that *"When we know their (students) potentials, we can improve their own potentials. We can guide them ... that it is your (students) way, your (students) future is here ... in this path."* So Mr. Mahmud believes that he can be a guide to the students' path for the future. The second participant, Mr. Fajar said that *"It is very important to know students' potentials because if we know their potentials we know how to provide material and know how we*

*upgrade their skills and potentials."* He believed that children have multiple intelligences so there are much potential should be explored. Children might be not good in one aspect but they might be good at other aspects. So both participants believe that students' potentials are important to be explored.

### **3. The way teachers practiced their beliefs on developing students' potentials**

In this part, the researchers asked five questions related to the way the participants reflect their beliefs on developing students' potentials. The first question is *"how do you know the level of progress of your students in learning English?"* Responding to this question, Mr. Mahmud shared his idea that he knows the level of progress of his students in learning English from the activities in the classroom. According to his concern, active students usually speak in the class and have good pronunciation so that he invites the students to join some competitions such as English Olympiad etc. and also join English club or being English agent. English agent is a special program which invites a student to be the agent of English in a class. The student who is selected to be English agent has several jobs like talking English to his/her friends, promote the use of English in the class, and being delegation for competition. The second participant, Mr. Fajar said that the level of students' understanding can be seen from how enthusiastic the children are in learning both inside of classroom and outside of classroom.

The second question is related to kinds of learning activities which encourage the students to learn English. Mr. Mahmud explained that student-centered is the most important strategy. He further explained that the best method for teaching in the class is by making students are active, have a chance to do something in the class, and also make some projects. There is one program he made called 'one minute to talk' in the class. It is a program which facilitates students to talk anything in one minute. Meanwhile, Mr. Fajar focuses on using the textbook. Mostly he uses

the textbook for teaching English and develops the materials if he needed. He also uses additional worksheet and games from other sources.

The third question is related to the way teachers identify students' talents, interests, and learning difficulties in learning English. Mr. Mahmud stated that he knows the students' talents, interests, and learning difficulties when he interacts with students at the classroom. Having a same idea with Mr. Mahmud, Mr. Fajar also said that he identifies students' talents when they are at the classroom and their readiness in learning process.

The fourth question is related to the way teachers facilitate students to develop students' potentials. Both participants explained the same idea that they provide several extra programs for English like English club, English agent, and training for competition. English club is an extracurricular program which is held once a week on Saturday at 8.00 a.m. This program focuses on improving students' speaking skill by making various activities which are different from regular class. In this program, the teachers are supposed to think and develop the material to be delivered to the students.

The last question is about "do they provide learning opportunities to students according to their own learning strategy?" Mr. Mahmud explained that he sometimes combines some learning strategies at one time. According to Cameron (2001) the use of various types of learning activities is important because young learners lose interest more quickly. Lots of short, simple, activities are best suited to their attention span. He further added that the textbook used is also quite good which provides CD that contains games, audio recording, and visualization of the materials. Mr. Fajar also stated that the book already fulfils what the students' needs. So he just needs to maximize it. Cameron (2001) believed that providing young learners activities with lots of brightly colored visuals is one way to take their attention and to keep them engaged in activities.

## Discussion

Pedagogical competencies play an important role in teaching-learning process. Teachers have many jobs to do so they need special skills and competencies to make learning activities run well. Understanding pedagogical knowledge will help teachers to make an effective teaching. An effective teaching is a key to achieve goals of learning. As stated by Suci and Mata (2011) that pedagogical competence has close connection with three important factors of education: educational achievement/ success/ efficiency, professional development, and societal change.

Developing students' potentials as one of the aspects of pedagogical competencies is necessary to be given attention due to the needs of competitive people in the future. In the future, we need human resources who are high-skilled, professional, and qualified in their field so developing students' potentials can be a bridge to fulfill those needs. Teachers as the agent of change need to give more attention to their students by not only focus on the academic aspects but also non-academic aspects. Teachers can help students to find their best talents and also shape it so the students' potentials can be maximized.

In relation to English subject, the participants in this study have done several ways to develop students' potentials, namely: providing English club, making a program called English agent and 'one minute to talk', and giving special training for students who will join competition. Furthermore, the participants give attention to the students' potentials either in the academic aspects or non-academic aspects. From these programs some students have been identified their potentials and participated in some competitions. They even won and brought some awards to their school.

After having interview, the researchers think of the participants' knowledge about pedagogical competencies and its practice in the class is pretty good. It is due to the fact that they have studied this competence when they were at university. Mr. Mahmud told that he was an active person and liked joining

seminar when he was in university, so did Mr. Fajar. But, now he has difficulties to find out such a seminar/workshop which discussed about pedagogical competencies which focus on teaching English to young learners. But this condition does not stop his curiosity. Mr. Mahmud has some ways to feed his hunger on knowledge of pedagogical competencies. He likes to look for video about teaching on YouTube. He also regularly discusses with his colleges and reads some books related to children. He hopes that it can improve his skill in teaching and help him to be more creative teacher.

From the interview, the participants also shared their challenge when they implement pedagogical competencies in their teaching-learning process. The first is there is lack of professional development about pedagogical competencies especially for teachers who teach English to young learners. The second is there is lack of time for teaching English. It is due to the impact of the new curriculum which makes English subject has less time allocation. The participants feel difficult to explore the materials because there is not enough time. The last is related to developing students' potentials; they sometimes find a fact that parents and environment do not give support to the students. For instance, there is not any attention from the parents to help their children to practice what the children learn from school. This condition weakens the process of maximizing students' potentials in English so the optimum result cannot be obtained.

### Conclusions

Pedagogical competencies as one of the competencies which should be mastered by teachers are less developed. It is proved by the lack of professional development in school. In the context of teaching English to young learners, the presence of pedagogical competencies cannot be left behind because teaching children are very different with adult. Moreover, the new curriculum do not provide enough time for English learning in Elementary school. It makes English teachers difficult to explore their teaching

method and teaching material so that they feel difficult to adjust the material and reach the learning goals. Due to those reasons students' potentials are also less gotten attention. Meanwhile, developing students' potentials are needed to support good human development. As we know that one of the most important aspect in developing country is by having good human resources. By having talented children who understand their values and their capacities, it brings optimism to our country's future.

Teachers are the agent of change so the government must give attention to them, know what happened in the field (schools) and provide what teachers' needs especially in this case is by providing more program which helps teachers to develop their professionalism such as making professional development program regularly and providing some workshops and seminars about pedagogical competencies to every school in Indonesia. Then, the government should consider adding the allocation time for English subject in school.

To create a better future generation, we can start from our school. Generations that will not only give benefit for current situation but also in the future. On teachers' shoulder we put our children's future and on children's shoulder we hope for our better country's future.

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