

## Developing Standards for Language Teacher Education Programs in Indonesia: Professionalizing or Losing in Complexity?

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**Abstract:** Setting standards for language teacher education programs, materials, and evaluation sparks some hope in attempts to improve the quality of the programs. Yet, this very fact augmented by my examination of ten language teacher education programs in Java, Bali, and Lampung (FKIP and PGRI) triggers a critical look at the idea of standard development. In particular, I would like to explore whether it can lead to a better professionalism or we are just lost in the complexity of the standardization itself. This paper consists of four sections. Departing from an overview of language teacher education programs in Indonesia and the theoretical foundations, some major problems in this area are identified. Following this, the discussion is focused on the idea of standard development for language teacher education programs in Indonesia. Eventually, some suggestions are put forth to highlight the need for establishing coherent curriculum framework bridging the two realms of language teacher education and school milieu as well as providing learners with knowledge base that enables them to cope with complex demands of school settings and more essentially, to act as an agent in the social change process.

**Key words:** language teacher education, standardization

Teaching is a highly-demanding profession due to not only the intricacy of the rigorous triangular relationships among teachers, learners, and the subject matter but also the society's high expectation and pressure upon teachers. Teachers are often seen as the agents largely responsible

for students' success in all aspects. While the recognition and the appreciation toward the profession 'is still far from satisfying, the challenging tasks seem to endlessly encounter teachers' lives day by day.

Given this fact, it is apparent that this profession aggravates the needs for life-long exploration beyond the four or five-year period that language teacher education in general prepares. In a similar vein, Sharon Feiman-Nemwser from Michigan State University (cited in Shalaway, 1997: 280) states, "Learning to teach is a bigger job than universities, schools, experience, or personal disposition alone can accomplish."

Evolving process is one of the fundamental issues student-teachers are to grasp during their education program, without which their professionalism would not be fully developed. As Laurie Borger (cited in Shalaway, 1997: 280) stresses,

"We are constantly trying to perfect the art of instruction in our classroom. You will never say, I am finally a master teacher, but you will spend your career pursuing the science and art of instruction. You will always be learning and perfecting."

In the case of English language teachers, the demand would be more heightened as by nature learning a second language involves the very person of students, going beyond their cognitive development. It is a process of learning closely bound to their total involvement, commitment and at the highest degree, to the development of their second identity. Within this understanding, English teacher education programs should strive to equip student-teachers not only with the knowledge of English language Art concepts, which by itself would pose challenges to cope with, but also with pedagogical aspects, which exceedingly encompass the understanding of transmitting knowledge.

Examining ten English teacher-education programs in Java, Bali, and Lampung, I found that not only were the discrepancies wide in terms of the teachers "English knowledge base" but also the teaching skills were not adequately imparted and developed. Departing from this picture and the demand placed on the profession, the idea of TEFL standardization makes me ponder as to what degree it can lead to a better professionalism or we are just lost in the complexity of the standardization itself. Moreover, within the paradigm of competency-based curriculum, this question becomes more critical.

In attempts to probe the issue, I begin with an overview of English teacher education programs in Indonesia, followed by some key theoretical issues in this area. Serving as the grounds on which the discussion on developing standards for Teacher Education programs in Indonesia is based, some major theoretical underpinnings concerning standardization are laid out.

#### **AN OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH TEACHER-EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN INDONESIA**

The following descriptions are restricted to my experience in closely looking at ten English teacher education programs (FKIP and PGRI) in Central and East Java, Bali, and Lampung. At the period of the examination, these programs were based on the 1994 national curriculum, providing uniformity in terms of linguistic and pedagogical base knowledge. Apart from the local curriculum accentuating the academic flavor from each institution, basically the curriculum consisted of general subjects related to nationalism, religion, ethics, logic, etc.; English skill-related subjects; English teaching-related subjects; as well as some pedagogical subjects, with the largest percentage dedicated to English skills.

While it is obvious that the programs largely shared the subjects, they primarily differed at the substance of those subjects. Putting it briefly, the uniformity occurred only at the level of labeling the name of the subjects given, not going beyond the content of the subjects. It would be totally misleading to perceive this kind of uniformity as the same standard of the programs.

As previously mentioned, the programs also widely varied in terms of human resources. The gap ranged from those who possess good academic qualifications and competence to transmit the knowledge to those who are poor. Another captivating picture dealt with the inadequate development of the student-teachers' teaching skills. Despite the presence of teaching practicum as one of the major subjects to take, it seemed apparent that the link between the academic realm of these programs and the practical school milieu had not been established.

At this point, Gabel (1997, cited in von Dittfurth and Legutke 2002: 163) pinpoints the heart of the problem: "Programme components lack a coherent curriculum framework within which the practicum, if provided at

all, often remains an alien element among university courses.” From my observation, one of the problems lay on the rigid format of teaching practicum. It had not been used as a forum for the student-teachers to navigate all their recourses, begin to evolve their teaching capacity, as well as to construe the task of teaching as an art with ample rooms for innovation. Rather, the program was seen merely as an obligatory subject to pass and often wrapped up in straitjacket mechanisms, laden with resolute procedures.

Apart from the gap between universities and schools, the fragmented curriculum framework and the rigidity of teaching practicum, the development of student-teachers’ teaching skills were likely to pertain to the English teachers at schools where they have apprenticeship. In general, it was often the case that these English teachers were narrowly framed by teaching routines and a particular method, leaving a little room for dynamic, eclectic and in Brown’s (2001) term enlightened teaching. As a result, their input cannot optimally facilitate the student-teachers’ teaching skills. Also, the short time of apprenticeship, which usually ranged from two-week to one-month period can be another variable contributing to the insufficient input from the school English teachers.

In sum, from my perspective, the varying degree of the human resources’ qualifications and competence, the curriculum, particularly the implementation of teaching practicum, and the minimum support from the school English teachers constitute three primary obstacles in English teacher education programs in Indonesia. At last, it is necessary for me to underline that my view toward the teaching practicum does not go beyond my understanding that the teacher education programs at their best can only prepare teachers to embark on teaching profession.

#### **SOME KEY THEORETICAL ISSUES IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

This section attempts to discuss some fundamental aspects of English teacher education programs by exploring what effective teachers do, in lieu of what good teachers are. The accounts largely draw on Richards’ and Nunan’s (1990) arguments concerning some primary issues of teacher education in second language teaching.

The world of language teaching has reached autonomy with its own

knowledge base, typically derived from linguistics, language learning theory, and language teaching methodology; its own paradigms as well as its research. Yet, these elements of autonomy do not necessarily mean that they constitute professional language teachers. Richards and Nunan explain that a claim about any direct relation between the development of the language teaching field and the preparation of language teachers is still few.

They further argue, if the utmost goal of language education program is to prepare effective language teachers, it should be grounded on ‘a theory of effective language teaching’—incorporating ‘effective language teaching processes’ and ‘the nature of effective language teaching’ to arrive at ‘the principles for the preparation of language teachers’ (p.4).

Within this framework, they examine two approaches to the study of teaching: micro and macro approach. While the former is an analytical approach focusing on ‘the directly observable characteristics’, the latter is a holistic approach probing the aspects beyond ‘quantifiable classroom processes’ (p.4). Both lay the foundations on which theories of effective teaching and principles for teacher education are built.

#### **MICRO APPROACH TO TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

Giving focal attention to the behaviors of effective teachers and the teacher-student interaction, Richards and Nunan at least identify two aspects deemed crucial to the development of teachers’ effective behaviors. The first is concerned with the teachers’ use of questions. As they quote, among the aspects of questions use investigated involve: (a) types of questions (low-level questions requiring recall of facts and high-level questions using synthesis, analysis, and critical thinking); (b) students’ involvement in asking questions; (c) the amount of wait-time after a question; (d) the amount of multiple-response questions used (questions to which at least three or four students may each provide a response) (p.5). It is argued that these aspects of questions influence the quality of teaching and students’ involvement.

The second aspect is closely allied to time-on-task and feedback giving. Time-on task, or engaged time, refers to time during a lesson in which learners are actively engaged in instructional tasks (Good and Beckerman, 1978, in Richards and Nunan, 1990: 6). As for feedback, quoting Berliner (1985: 147), Richards and Nunan identify three forms of

feedback related to effective teachers: giving praise, suggestions, and picking up an idea suggested by a student and developing it.

In conjunction with second language classroom instructions, they specially refer to the verbal phenomena as the relevant behavior student-teachers are to be aware of. The phenomena are differentiated into low-inference categories and high-inference categories. The former refers to categories "whose definitions are clearly enough stated in terms of behavioral characteristics that the observers in real time coding situation would reach high levels of agreement, or reliability" (p.8). For examples, question types and wait-time belong to this category. The latter relies more on abstract inferences, such as indicating students' interest in a topic and pointing out problems of classroom management.

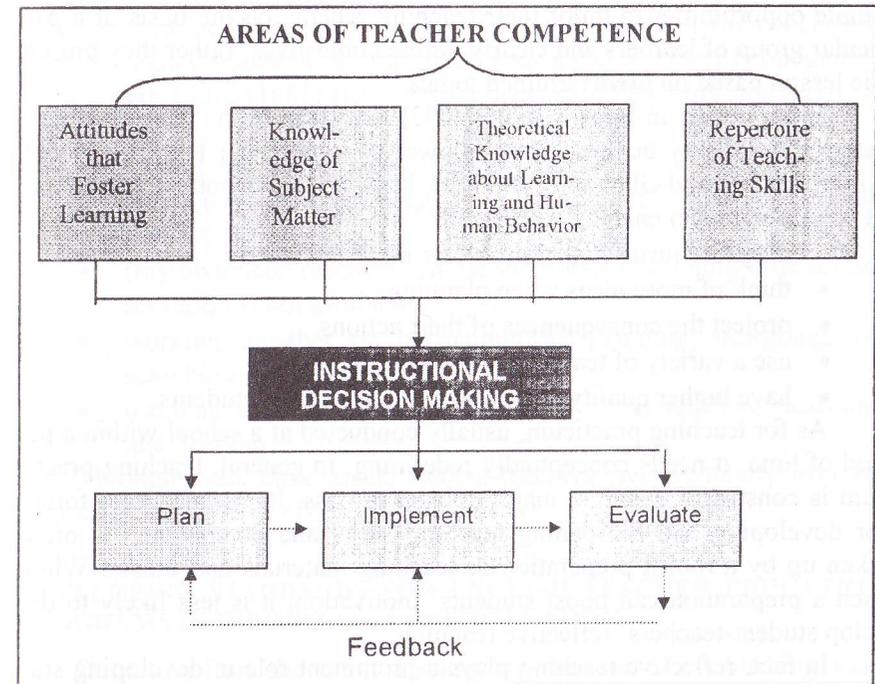
Despite the fact that low-inference categories can be imparted to student-teachers in a particular period of teaching, it is unlikely the case of high-inference category as it is bound to abstract and complex aspects of teaching. At this point, it would be of great importance to evoke student-teachers' awareness of these aspects.

#### MACRO APPROACH TO TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Under this category, highlighting the total context of classroom teaching and learning, Richards and Nunan pay attention to the nature and the significance of classroom events, involving both low and high inference categories. This emphasis is reflected on the dimension of effective instruction. Drawing the work of Doyle (1977) and Good (1979) on the theory of active teaching, both recognize four teaching attributes distinguishing effective instruction from ineffective one: a) classroom management, b) structuring, c) tasks, and, d) grouping.

With regard to classroom management, teachers' managerial skills in carrying out the classroom interactions are underscored as a crucial element paving the way to effective teaching. The second attribute, 'structuring' refers to the clarity and the logical sequencing of delivering instruction while the third one, 'tasks' emphasizes not only appropriate tasks but also on the order, pacing, products of tasks, learning strategies employed, students' participation, and materials available. The last is grouping, dealing with how to arrange students in groups and how the arrangement can foster their learning achievement.

It is obvious that putting the components of micro and macro approach to teaching into classroom practice essentially necessitates teachers' competence to make an effective decision-making -- another fundamental area underpinning effective teaching. Ryan and Cooper (1998) pinpoint four areas of competence for effective instructional decision makers. They are presented in diagram 1.



**Diagram 1: Areas of Teacher Competence**

Source from James M. Cooper, "The Teacher as a Decision Maker," in *Classroom Teaching Skills*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. James M. Cooper (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1994), p.9. cited in Ryan and Cooper (1998: 153)

#### APPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS: INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Taking into account the problems of English teacher education pro-

grams in Indonesia and the theoretical key issues discussed above, there are at least three areas that need to be worked out: a) micro teaching, b) teaching practicum, and c) seminar on teaching.

In relation to micro teaching--a prerequisite subject for teaching practicum at schools, it should serve student-teachers not only to follow a particular teaching model provided but also to critically look at the models and be creative with their own. It means student-teachers should be given ample opportunities to tailor their teaching scheme on the basis of a particular group of learners and clearly defined objectives; rather they present the lesson based on predetermined topics.

In so doing, in Kraft's term (2003), they can be a 'conceptualizer' rather than merely being a rigid follower of a particular teaching model. Citing Phillips and Glickman (1991: 8), Kraft (2003: 2) notes that thinking at conceptual level enables teachers to:

- diagnose instructional problems more effectively;
- think of more ideas when planning;
- project the consequences of their actions;
- use a variety of teaching approaches; and
- have higher quality communication with their students.

As for teaching practicum, usually conducted at a school within a period of time, it needs conceptually redefining. In general, teaching practicum is construed as only a major subject to pass. Its essence as a forum for developing and sharpening teaching skills and competence is often taken up by a robust preparation of teaching materials and media. While such a preparation can boost students' motivation, it is less likely to develop student-teachers' reflective teaching.

In fact, reflective teaching plays a prominent role in developing student-teachers' capacity to think creatively and self-critically about the beliefs, values and assumptions underlying their classroom practice. Moreover, it is through reflective thinking, the practicality of micro components and the subtlety of macro properties can be elevated to a degree of awareness exceeding that of the traditional teaching practicum. In a similar vein, Zeichner and Liston (1996, cited in Bailey, et al., p.39) point out that it is the quality of being critical that accounts for reflective teaching; simply thinking does not necessarily warrant reflection on one's teaching.

Moreover, the link between teaching practicum at English teacher

education programs and schools should be established on the basis of mutually beneficial collaboration. Putting it briefly, the programs should be able to share the theoretical insights while schools nurture the practical aspects of teaching itself. In so doing, a coherent curriculum can be created.

The last area to deal with is seminar on teaching. It is of great importance to hold a seminar on teaching in which student-teachers can establish a small academic community to have a shared dialogue concerning teaching-related issues. Referring to the concept as a sense of collegiality, Kraft, citing Little (1981) lists some aspects of collegiality conducted at schools:

- talking about practice;
- observing each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration;
- (my own note: teachers can use video-taped teaching if direct observation is not available)
- working together on curriculum by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating curriculum;
- teaching each others what they know about teaching, learning, and, leading.

Through these three areas, student-teachers can eventually exercise their capacity to make effective decisions.

#### **DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN INDONESIA: A CRITICAL LOOK**

Departing from the above discussions, the idea of establishing standards seems to entice me. It would be desirable to put such demanding nature of teaching into an ordered set of behaviors, performance and measurement. Yet, at the same time, I perceive the risk of simplifying its richness and dynamic nature to the extent of diminishing its very essence. This is the concern that Arey (2002) shares when commenting on the implementation of standardization in elementary schools:

We have taken standards and the idea of rigorous education and turned them into a rigid, formulaic recipe of what "good" teaching looks like. Unfortunately, the recipe often has nothing to do with how children actually learn best.

Apart from the fact that Arey's case takes place in a different educational level, to a considerable degree, her concern portrays one facet of the standardization, worthy of caution.

Even in the broad world of tefl/tesol, the idea of standardization becomes a hotly debated issue clouded by considerable doubts. To provide a picture, I quoted some web-based discussions on a governing body in the world of tefl/tesol. One of the interesting remarks posted was:

"Isn't time to create a semblance of an industry watchdog?....." in such a truly global field as TEFL, the principles of assessment cannot remain so culturally localized."

This remark offers a room for thinking about a governing body and an internationally standardized assessment. Yet, he himself casts some doubts about the issue:

"Or is this something that can never happen in this field because the tefl industry is really expressing a certain global zeitgeist, an angst based on the fracturing or geographical borders and cultural ideals and beloved traditions."

Two other comments from Bruce and Theresa in the same web site fundamentally questioned the heart of standardization: "against what standard would things be measured?"

Despite the fact that the idea of setting up a governing body to standardize ESL/EFL teaching qualifications is great, in reality they find many challenges to cope with. Theresa pointed out two significant remarks:

"if you set the bar too high, it makes entering the field very difficult and creates a shortage of teachers. If you set the bar too low, you devalue the entire purpose for the standardization."

Likewise, I ponder some questions on theoretical and implemental grounds before exploring whether the standard development can lead to a better professionalism or even at the very initial phase of our endeavors, we would be lost in its intricacy. Conceptually, my underlying point con-

cerns the very nature of the standard itself:

- What is meant by standard intended to develop? ;
- If viewed and understood as a set of criteria measuring particular performances, on what basis are the criteria against which the performances or behaviors are measured determined?

Moving to the implemental level, I attempt to find out:

- what aspects of teacher education programs could be standardized.
- Taking into account two categories: human and non human resources, the following questions arise:

Human resources: what aspects of student-teachers can be standardized?

- Can their knowledge be standardized?
- Can their skills be standardized?
- Can their competence be standardized?
- To what degree do student-teachers' human variables (personality, cognitive and learning styles, affective aspects, value, belief) and higher thinking skills have rooms in the standardization?
- To what degree can the above variables be controlled in standardization?

Non human resources: Curriculum, approach and, teaching instructions:

- What aspects of these areas can be standardized?
- Can they be completely standardized?

Closing all these questions, I come to the ultimate means to prepare, that is assessment – what kinds of assessment instruments are required? It is obvious that without the presence of valid and reliable methods of assessment, it is unlikely the desirable standards can be obtained.

In search of the answers to these questions, some keystones of the standardization are laid out. Probing the issue of the graduates standards programme, Smith, et al., (2003) state that,

In a small elite, higher education system, standards could be implicit. Implicit standards were held in a community of practice and belief that was small enough to actually work. However, with a mass higher education system, the shared understandings of an academic elite are simply not a sufficient basis for standards.

Borrowing the key terms used by Middlehurst (1996, cited in Smith et al., 2003) in pointing out the four key themes in the standards debate, I propose four major aspects to carefully address in establishing the theoretical grounds of standardization in Indonesian teacher education programs:

- *Compatibility*: the degree to which the standardized aspects can be compatible across teaching communities.
- *Security and reliability*: to degree to which the standardized aspects are tradable within teaching academic communities.
- *Nature and purpose*: to what degree the standardization lends itself to the goal set up. This means greater clarity and explicitness of the standardized aspects are of top priority. A Smith, et al. explain, this is due to the fact that the values in which judgment of standards in higher education rooted are often a result of the practice of the community rather than explicit articulation.
- *Control of standards*: It requires the mechanisms to sharpen and to lay firm grounds for shared academic communities to exercise their judgment upon the standardized aspects.

Furthermore, Middlehurst (1996, in Smith, et al., 2003:12) pinpoints five areas that need to be addressed if academic standards are in the pursuit:

- the conduct of academic staff;
- the educational background, ability, motivation, and learning approaches of students;
- curriculum design and content, learning activities and support for learning, and the assessment regime;
- the granting of an award and recording of student attainment; and
- the institutional context that provides a framework for articulation, assurance, maintenance and enhancement of standards.

Based on these theoretical accounts and the problems of English teacher education programs in Indonesia, I arrive at my concluding points that it would seem too elusive to think of establishing standards for the whole components of teacher education programs in Indonesia on two grounds.

First, while it would be possible to spell out the desired outcomes based on particular criteria, the main obstacle would come from the nature

of the aspects standardized. In my opinion, from the perspective of human resources, it is unlikely the case that student-teachers' teaching skills and competence can be standardized. The involvement of their very nature of creative human being mirrored in their higher thinking processing would seem a vital variable hindering the standardized outcomes. Second, some other variables, such as their personality, affective domain, beliefs, values would exert considerable influence upon their performance so the standards cannot be fully implicated.

The area that seems possible to be standardized is student-teachers knowledge. Yet, the extent of the standards would not be likely to go beyond the knowledge of the content subjects. The ability to transfer that knowledge is another competence unreachable by the standard development.

In terms of non-human resources, it would be feasible to apply a baseline for curriculum particularly regarding the subjects and their content. As for teaching approaches and instructions, it would seem too vague to set up certain standards due to their highly context-bound nature. The decisions on what approach and instructions to employ are very much dependent upon a particular context teachers encounter. Accordingly, imposing standards on the two aspects would hinder the evolvement of reflective thinking, eventually bringing about ineffective teaching.

Furthermore, at this moment, it would seem realistic to set up standards at the level of threshold – a set of minima for the expected outcomes. This set of minima should be derived from shared teaching academic community, clearly articulated, and accompanied by valid and reliable method of assessment. In addition, it would be also better if the shared academic communities setting up the line are not too broad so that the judgments established can be held accountable. Under these conditions, I would argue that the standardization can pave the way to the quality enhancement of teacher education programs in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Dealing with an intricate world of second language teaching, whose nature involves the wholeness of learners, the tasks of language teacher education programs surpass the needs of developing student-teachers' linguistic, methodological and pedagogical knowledge base. In essence, pre-

paring effective language teachers is the ultimate goal of the programs. And this absolutely constitutes a gigantic challenging task accompanied by a picture of society high pressure and limited reward upon the profession.

With such a background, it is luring to think of developing standards for the programs so as the subtlety and the complexity of the intertwined variables of second language teaching can be put in measurable aspects. Yet, it is the neatness of standardization that should be taken into caution. It is the potential area where the devaluation of the programs can occur.

Developing standards can enhance the program quality if it is grounded on an in-depth conceptual understanding of standardization itself. At least, there are four keystones of standardization that should be carefully treated: compatibility, security and reliability, nature and purpose, as well as control of standards.

Moreover, it should be clear that not all components of the programs can be measured by a fixed baseline. Student-teachers' teaching skills and competence as well as teaching approaches and instructions are too rich to standardize. On the other hand, standards can be feasibly applied to the area of curriculum, particularly the subject contents and student-teachers' mastery of them.

At last, my underpinning argument is that standardization can yield better quality for language teacher education programs if the shared academic judgment from which standards are derived can be clearly articulated and held accountable. If not, it would lead only to the vagueness and lost directions.

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