

TEACHER CANDIDATES' EXPERIENCES IN A PROGRAM OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: This study was conducted to know the teacher candidates' experiences before and after they joined a program of teaching English to young learners. The sixth-semester teacher candidates joined the program in a semester of the class program. Qualitative research was chosen as the design. Implementing open-ended questions was the main data. The teacher candidates answered five questions answered by ten teacher candidates. Those questions were about the teacher candidates' experiences in understanding teaching English to young learners, classroom management, classroom language usage, classroom activities, and assessing the students. The findings were analyzed and interpreted to know the teacher candidates' experiences in a program of teaching English for young learners. The findings of the study about the teacher candidates' experiences in a program of teaching English to young learners were that teaching English to young learners was challenging because it forced to be creative teachers; managing students could be done through grouping because it provided a chance to get closer with their friends; using simple language by providing more time to practice could improve young learners' freedom; varying activities helped young learners enjoyed the class, and taking notes or adding practice to check the students' mastery were the ways to assess them.

Keywords: teaching, English, young learners

INTRODUCTION

When entering teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates already have opinions about what it means to teach based on their thousands of hours spent in classrooms as students. Teaching English to young learners is one of the programs given to sixth-semester students of a certain university in Semarang. The program is introduced to them as their life supply after graduation. As English education students graduate, they are not only capable of teaching English at higher levels but also at the primary level. Therefore, joining the program of teaching English to young learners benefits their life. It is the program as the actual classroom practices that are considered. It acknowledges the variety and complexity of the circumstances in which young learners are exposed to and involved in English learning. As teacher candidates for young learners, they face many pedagogical challenges (Arnold et al., 2018). The challenges are the key role of curriculum implementation, competence, and skilled teachers (Uztosun, 2018). Therefore, the program was to educate the teacher candidates to teach young learners. They were lauded for their dedication to the development of young minds. The program's main objective was to accommodate them in young learners' English lessons based on their learning and developmental characteristics. They are not only shaped or socialized by the events of their lives; rather, they play an active role in interpreting those events.

Indonesian students are faced with the regulation that English is their foreign language. It is taught at the primary level as an additional subject. In some schools, it is inserted into the daily schedule. When the students come to that schedule, they may find it difficult to understand

it as verbal instruction. Therefore, they may get the wrong understanding. They find different words and expressions in their mother tongue and English. This condition affects their challenge in learning English. Developing the teacher candidates' competence can facilitate the students' challenge (Kömür, 2010) because a wide range of competencies and skills propose qualified teachers (Korkmazgil & Seferoğlu, 2021). Teacher candidates are faced with the readiness of young learners' language development. For many Indonesian students, the concept of using English at school is strange. They do not know the words and even the grammatical structures. In communication, they may make up words and change their accents. They are trying to be creative language users. To mediate the creative language users, the teacher candidates should experience the environment of creative language teachers.

As creative language teachers, the candidate teachers should understand some concepts of teaching English to young learners. They must provide adequate support to their students while balancing the varied demands of the classroom (Cameron, 2001). Language instruction should include creative outlets like plays, music, drawings, and stories. Research done by Coyle & Gómez Gracia (2014) presents that including musical activities in English lessons for kids looks at the potential of musical activities for boosting young learners' vocabulary. Teachers and their teaching practices are important aspects of the success of TEYL implementation (Baldauf et al., 2011). According to a study on the difficulties faced by educators in the classroom with students in elementary school through high school, Copland et al. (2014) found that the teachers were experiencing various challenges, such as exam-related issues and differentiating the curriculum. Teaching speaking with these difficulties depends on the setting in which they are encountered. As a result, the purpose of this present study was to know the teacher candidates' experience in a program of teaching English to young learners. Their experience strongly influenced their development. Their experiences determined how much and how well they understood the information introduced to them in the program.

To get the result of the teacher candidates' experiences, limiting the aspects of teaching English to young learners into an understanding of teaching English to young learners, classroom management, classroom language usage, classroom activities, teaching vocabulary, and assessing the students were essential. Those aspects combine theories of teaching English to young learners mentioned by Halliwell (1992) and Cameron (2001). Those aspects were used in the instrument of the study. The use of those aspects was the novelty of this present study. Several researchers focus on a theory of teaching English to young learners. However, this present study combined two theories to get the answer of the teacher candidates' experience in the program of teaching English to young learners. The combination of the two theories was based on the assumption that the characteristics of teaching English to young learners are unique. As stated by Scott & Ytreberg (1990), the characteristics of teaching English to young learners cover many parts. For example, words are not enough, a teacher needs to play with language, a teacher should understand that language as language, a teacher should think about variety in the classroom, routines are important, students need cooperation, not competition, and the last, teacher needs to think about grammar and assessment.

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of the study was qualitative research. The sixth-semester students of a certain university in Semarang were the participants. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were chosen as the main instrument of the study. The questionnaire contents were about the teacher candidates' experience in understanding teaching English to young learners, classroom

management, classroom language usage, classroom activities, and assessing the students. The five questions were the main data source of the study. The data were distributed to the participants before and after they joined the program of teaching English to young learners. The researcher categorized the result of the open-ended questions into each aspect.

FINDINGS

By combining two theories of teaching English to young learners and mentioning them in the contents of the open-ended questionnaire, the researcher got the present study's findings. The findings are differentiated into two sections: before and after the teacher candidate joined the program of teaching English to young learners.

The findings of the questionnaire distributed before and after the program of teaching English to young learners

Table 1
The Teacher Candidates' Experiences on Understanding Teaching English to Young Learners

Teacher Candidate	Experience before the Program	Experience after the Program
TC-1	Teaching English to young learners is difficult for me because it takes many activities	Teaching English to young learners is something challenging
TC-2	Teaching English to young learners is tired because they are active	Teaching English to young learners is interesting because I can use song, games and even short story
TC-3	Teaching English to young learners is challenging because teacher should be active and creative	Teaching English to young learners is really challenging because I should be creative in accommodating students to learn
TC-4	Teaching English to young learners is fun because I am in the childish situation	Teaching English to young learners should be creative
TC-5	My understanding is that it makes me happy because I am with them	Teaching English to young learners is wonderful because I can use simple language, songs, games, coloring, and puzzle
TC-6	For me it is frustrated because it takes time	Teaching English to young learners is something challenging
TC-7	Teaching to young learners makes me busy	Teaching English to young learners is something challenging

TC-8	Teaching young learners is fun	Teaching English to young learners is more than I know before because I can use many things, such as games and pictures
TC-9	Teaching English to young learners is something special	Teaching English to young learners is something challenging
TC-10	Teaching English to young learners forces me to be creative	Teaching English to young learners is something fun and challenging

The teacher candidates' experience in understanding teaching English to young learners before they joined the program was dominated by the experience that teaching English to young learners is challenging, fun, and happy. Teachers of young learners should be creative and busy because many activities should be encountered in the class. On the other hand, the teacher candidates' experience in understanding teaching English to young learners after joining the program was dominated by the experience that teaching English to young learners is challenging, interesting, and wonderful. Various teaching activities can be implemented in the class to attract the students' enthusiasm, such as songs, games, pictures, and colorful media.

Table 2
The Teacher Candidates' Experiences on Classroom Management

Teacher Candidate	Experience before the Program	Experience after the Program
TC-1	Students are grouped	Students are grouped, take them out to learn from outside.
TC-2	Students' seats are grouped	Students are grouped or they can work in pairs, take the students out of classroom to learn from the surrounding.
TC-3	Students can have circle position	Students can work in group because it permits them to talk and share idea.
TC-4	Teacher should manage classroom well	Students are grouped. Permit students to make mistake can treat them to talk. Teacher can use interactive media also can treat students to talk.
TC-5	Teacher can divide students into groups	Students are grouped, take them out to learn from outside.
TC-6	Teacher should choose partner for students	Students are grouped, arrange their seat, permit them to talk in their groups.

TC-7	Take a circle time for students and create colorful classroom	Take students out to learn from outside. Group them and permit them to make mistake.
TC-8	Make group for students	Students are grouped, interactive media is important, noisy is good.
TC-9	Group the students, arrange the seats	Students are grouped, move their groups.
TC-10	Students are grouped and classroom is colorful	Students are grouped, move their group, permit them to talk and make noise.

The experience dominated the teacher candidates' experience that the classroom management should be in the situation of well seat arrangement, which makes students work in groups, and the class should be colorful. On the other hand, the teacher candidates' experience in classroom management after they joined the program was dominated by the experience that the classroom should be in a situation of well group arrangement, the students can move around, the students can have different seats each week, they are permitted to make noise and teacher permits students to make a mistake which is as the solution to give them time to talk.

Table 3
The Teacher Candidates' Experiences on Classroom Language Use

Teacher Candidate	Experience before the Program	Experience after the Program
TC-1	Use bilingual, Indonesian and English	Simple English is a good choice than using Indonesian.
TC-2	Indonesian and English are the classroom language	Simple English accompanied by gestures or miming is a good classroom language.
TC-3	English and translate it into Indonesian can be the choice.	The translation is not about using Indonesian but it can be in different alternative to use body gesture, facial expression or miming.
TC-4	Dominant English	Simple English is the solution
TC-5	Use bilingual, Indonesian and English	English is the dominant language and Indonesian can be still used if the students do not know the meaning.

TC-6	Speaking in English is a good choice	Using simple English, simple instruction
TC-7	Simple English	Avoid complete and long English
TC-8	Simple English	Simple English, simple instruction
TC-9	English is accompanied by gestures and facial expression or even miming	Simple English, simple instruction, adding gesture and miming
TC-10	Simple English	Simple English, simple instruction, miming

The experience dominated teacher candidates' experience with classroom language before joining the program was dominated by the experience that the classroom language should be simple and bilingual. On the other hand, the teacher candidates' experience with classroom language after joining the program was dominated by the experience that the language should be simple for communication tools and instructions. The way to communicate can use miming, facial expression, and gestures.

Table 4
The Teacher Candidates' Experiences on Classroom Activities

Teacher Candidate	Experience before the Program	Experience after the Program
TC-1	Use pictures and songs	Use pictures, story, mini drama, songs, games
TC-2	Use pictures series, songs, puzzle	Use songs, games, mini drama, story, pictures
TC-3	Use digital pictures	Use mini drama, story, pictures, games, songs
TC-4	Use pictures	Use songs, games, mini drama, story, pictures
TC-5	Use games, pictures	Use pictures, story, mini drama, songs, games
TC-6	Use games, pictures, songs	Use songs, games, mini drama, story, pictures
TC-7	Use songs, games, pictures	Use songs, games, mini drama, story, pictures
TC-8	Use songs, games, pictures	Use story, songs, games, mini drama, pictures
TC-9	Use puzzle, games, pictures	Use mini drama, songs, games, story, pictures
TC-10	Use games, pictures	Use pictures, story, mini drama, songs, games

The experience dominated teacher candidates' experience with classroom activities before joining the program was dominated by the experience that the classroom activities should use pictures, songs, and games. On the other hand, the teacher candidates' experience with classroom activities after joining the program was dominated by the experience that the activities should cover pictures, songs, stories, and games.

Table 5
The Teacher Candidates' Experiences on Assessing Students

Teacher Candidate	Experience before the Program	Experience after the Program
TC-1	Give short test	Using notes can be the way to assess students without showing the real test
TC-2	Give simple test	Practice can be the way to assess students
TC-3	Use short test	Practice can be the way to assess students
TC-4	Use short test	Do not show the real test but practice can be the way to assess students
TC-5	Use short test	Test is not merely test but ask students to practice and teacher makes notes of their practice can be the solution to assess students
TC-6	Give easy test	Ask students to practice and teacher makes notes of their practice can be the solution to assess students
TC-7	Use simple test	Ask students to practice and teacher makes notes of their practice can be the solution to assess students
TC-8	Use short test	Do not show the real test but practice can be the way to assess students
TC-9	Use short test	Using notes can be the way to assess students without showing the real test
TC-10	Give easy test	Ask students to practice and teacher makes notes of their practice can be the solution to assess students

The teacher candidates' experience in assessing students before the teacher candidates joined the program was dominated by the experience that the way to assess was in the form of a test. On the other hand, the teacher candidates' experience in assessing students after the teacher candidates joined the program was dominated by the experience that the way to assess was in the form of practice and notes.

DISCUSSION

The teacher candidates' experiences in a program of teaching English to young learners were varied. The teacher candidates' experiences were divided into two sections. The first section was taken before the teacher candidates joined the program to teach English to young learners. The second was after the teacher candidates joined the program to teach English to young learners. Those two sections had a similar purpose: to know the teacher candidates' experiences on five aspects of teaching English to young learners. The five aspects understood teaching English to young learners are classroom management, classroom language usage, classroom activities, and assessing the students.

Through the present study, the researcher got the teacher candidates' experiences. The teacher candidates are well experienced in teaching English to young learners. In a semester, they had various experiences teaching English to young learners. They had experience teaching English to young learners, how to manage the classroom for young learners, how to use classroom language which can attract young learners to be able to communicate, how to create classroom activities, how to teach vocabulary, and how to assess young learners. All of them were not stand-alone but related to each other. The teacher candidates have to follow the rules of each aspect.

In order to be able to teach young learners, the teacher candidates should enjoy the process because teaching English to young learners is challenging. It is challenging because words are not enough. The written word alone is not enough for them. It is important to emphasize activities encouraging movement and sense engagement when teaching young learners. In order to make the most of the time at school and in its surrounding area, the teacher candidates need a plethora of materials at their disposal, including photographs and physical artifacts. The teacher candidates need to show young learners what they have to do.

In order to be able to manage a classroom, the teacher candidates should create variety in the classroom. It is vital to have a wide range of options. They have to consider a variety of activities, variety of pace, variety of organizations, and variety of voices. They have to create systems and routines and organize and plan the lessons. They must pay attention to the use of a regular occurrence or routine. They have to tell and recite rhymes.

In order to be able to use classroom language, the teacher candidates should obey the rule of language as language. It takes time for language to emerge as a distinct entity from the world around young learners. This self-awareness can be found in the native tongue of some of them. Facial expression, body language, and other cues complement the spoken word. The teacher candidates need to use these hints to their greatest potential. By the time a young learner learns to read, the language has become fixed, and there are fewer opportunities for him or her to infer meaning from context. Young learners can ponder the language and construct their understanding by taking a book home and reading it multiple times. Writing is no different in

this regard. Therefore, reading and writing are crucial to their development as language users and individuals, despite being exceedingly difficult skills to acquire and requiring a great deal of time and effort to master.

In order to create wonderful classroom activities, the teacher candidates should be able to decide not to accept any awards or rewards. Other sorts of encouragement are far more helpful. Incorporate experiences into the lessons; they encourage great language practice and foster a sense of community. In order to learn, young learners require a sense of community. To the extent practicable, have them hang out in groups. It does not mean they always need to be working in groups. However, they thrive when surrounded by their peers. Studies show that simply sitting next to someone else can improve collaborative skills.

In order to be able to assess young learners, the teacher candidates should be able to keep detailed records of each young learner's development is a valuable habit for any educator to get into the situation. The teacher candidate might want to update parents on the progress. The teacher candidates should have frequent discussions with the young learners about their work and encourage periodic self-evaluation. It is possible to do this by using young learners'-friendly language, highlighting their successes, and downplaying their failures.

CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded that the teacher candidates' experiences in a program of teaching English to young learners were that teaching English to young learners was challenging because it forced to be a creative teacher; managing students could be done through grouping because it provided a chance to get closer with their friends; using simple language by providing more time to practice could improve young learners' freedom; varying activities helped young learners enjoyed the class, and taking notes or adding practice to check the students' mastery were the ways to assess them.

This present study can reflect, especially for the teacher candidates of a certain university in Semarang and generally for the teacher candidates who read this article. This research can be a picture of the reality of teaching English to young learners. Through the limitation introduced by this present study, further researchers or readers interested in the same topic can broaden their scope of teaching English to young learners. As a result, a more interesting topic is related to teaching English to young learners.

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