
Teaching English to Young Learners Practicum Program: Do Philosophical Foundations Matter?

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Abstract

A practicum, like any other educational practices, is supported by a set of an operating procedure or a guideline. The guideline may be in the form of a curriculum book, a syllabus, or a set of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). A curriculum or guidelines in education carry their philosophical foundations that serve as the driving forces of the educational practice. This article aims at revealing the philosophical foundations that embody English for Young Learners' practicum program through an inferential content analysis study. The data were in the form of phrases and sentences taken from the practicum operating procedures and other relevant documents. The results showed that the most mentioned aspect of the documents was the learners' roles. This finding led to the discovery of the philosophical foundations of the practicum which were dominated by Progressivism and followed by Social Reconstruction, Existentialism, and Religious Humanism. The findings of the study also raised the discussion on how relevant educational philosophies towards the efforts of preparing teachers in the 21st century.

Keywords: educational philosophy; philosophical foundations; practicum.

Introduction

An educational practice, including a language teacher education, requires a solid and strong foundation. Such a required foundation may be historical, philosophical, political, psychological, or anthropological assumptions, ideas, beliefs, or principles that underlie the practice of education. These underlying beliefs determine how students are taught the subjects, what

roles the teachers are supposed to take, the objectives of the educational practice, and how the learning materials are designed.

Nowadays, Education, has evolved and grown from the thinking and the writing of the great educational philosophers that their contribution cannot simply put aside. Educational philosophies are what drive the goals of teaching and learning to achieve in teacher education. Unfortunately, educational philosophies tend to "play in the back" rather than getting involved in the pragmatics of teacher education (Stehlik, 2018). Thus, it is very much significant to discuss the philosophical foundations that underlie some of educational practices today to understand better why and how a certain educational practice is conducted and how it is relevant for the future needs, the 21st-century education, of educational practitioners (teachers).

The schools of philosophical thoughts may become the driving forces that define the roles of teachers, ranging from authoritarian to mentor, and the roles of students, whether they are behaving as passive knowledge receivers or active experience seekers. Some philosophical schools commonly underlie the practice of education which comprised of Perennialism, Essentialism, existentialism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, Humanism, and Religious Humanism.

Perennialism believes that there are universal and abiding values that students need to know and internalize in them through education (Tan, 2006; Darmi, 2013). Perennialism considers education as "the absorption of ideas and teachers are examples of values and ideas, while essentialism emphasizes "the absorption and mastery of facts and skills and teacher's role as a mental disciplinarian and moral leader", (Ellis, Cogan & Howey, 199 in Tan, 2006, p. 33). In this case, Teachers are the focus of pedagogical practice where in the process of practice Knowledge acquisition as a means of cognitive development will enable a person to understand problems and propose a solution to the problems, (Darmi, 2013). Thus, Teachers are supposed to help learners think rationally through lots of oral presentation, and explicit teaching of traditional values (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2018).

Essentialists believe that teachers should have the expertise in the subject they teach and should become the role model for academic and

moral pursuit, (Tan, 2006). Essentialism and Perennialism are similar as they are rooted from idealism and realism which view that classic knowledge and values are universal and timeless. However, they differ in terms of how they view the main purpose of education. According to essentialism, school functions as a means of transferring cultural and historical classic. Similar to perennialism, Thus based on essentialism principle, the educational curriculum tends to be subject-centered as it is believed that these subject matters will prepare students for further education, work, social and political participation (Gutek, 2004).

Existentialism values personal choices therefore existentialist teachers are those who value individual freedom and choices, open-minded, reflective, and able to provide learning environment that accommodate reflective teaching and learning. A fixed curriculum is eschewed where the content and pedagogy are designed to meet the students' needs and preferences, (Tan, 2006). Thus, it is encouraged to use authentic assessments like portfolio assessment as standardized tests are considered rigid, inaccurate, and tyrannical (Gutek, 2004).

Progressivism, from the word progress, means to move forward. It is a philosophical belief that orientates to future betterment. According to Progressivism, education is not only a process of transferring knowledge from teachers to students but it is also a means of training students to think scientifically through collecting empirical data and theoretical information, analyzing, justifying, and drawing conclusion to find alternatives of solutions to certain problems, (Muhmidayeli, 2011 in Fadlillah, 2017). Based on progressivism, education has the mission to transform learners to be competent problem solvers and adaptable society members, (Fadlillah, 2017). Students in progressivism are the center of educational practice, their academic, emotional, physical, social, and intellectual development are given attention (Gutek, 2004). Besides, teachers are a facilitator who guides students towards problem-solving tasks (Tan, 2006; Syafryadin, 2020). Finally, Tan (2006) also describes that a "democratic system is maintained throughout with the students working collaboratively in groups, sharing ideas, and resolving differences through dialogue and guidance from the teacher" (p. 34). This notion reflects

progressivists' mission to prepare students for democratic political system participation.

In reconstructionism or social reconstructionism, education is seen as a means of elevating, reconstructing, and reforming the society towards the new world order (Hanif, 2014; Tan, 2006). Reconstructivists call for multicultural education to expose students to a "larger sense of identity and purpose" beyond their own culture (Tan, 2006). This school also believes that all human beings have the tasks to save the world. Based on this, Reconstruction of healthy intellectuality and spirituality through the teachings of good values and norms will lead humans today and future generation towards a new world order (Rahmayana, 2015). Thus, knowledge, skills, and subject matters are required to help address problems in society where teachers are agents of social change that guide students in understanding the world's problems (Hanif, 2014).

Humanism comprised of Secular Humanism that perceives humans and society on the basis of rationality and Religious Humanism that views everything based on religious moral values. Secular Humanism has been considered fail in addressing global society problems in which the people suffer from spirituality crisis. Thus, Religious Humanism may be the answer to bring humans back to their original belong as creatures with Divine spirituality (Masduki, 2011). Secular Humanism glories human freedom however Religious Humanism highlights that things should be based on humanity values with balanced humanity and religious interests (Amin, 2013). Thus, Education, in Religious humanism, is a means to develop individuals' potential based on basic life values like liberality, creativity, collaboration, honesty, self-actualization which is framed by Divine spirituality. A study in a *Madrasah* (Islamic-based School) in Indonesia related to the implementation of Religious Humanism values in the school context revealed there were three implications in education. First, education is not value-free. Rather it is a means of developing individuals' worth as God's creation. Second, teachers have very important roles in class. Teachers are not only transferring knowledge. Teaching should aim at not only knowledge acquisition but also at building positive mentality and characters in students. Thirdly, humanism and religiosity movement need to involve everyone in an

educational context where Principals (heads), teachers, and other staffs are all role models for students (Hibana, Kuntoro, & Sutrisno, 2015).

Practicum is still one of the most prevalent pedagogical practices in pre-service teacher training as much efforts and time are allocated for the program, (Cohen, Hoz, & Kaplan, 2013). Practicum provides student-teachers with the authentic experience to apply the pedagogical theories they have learned in college or universities, (Lawson, et.al., 2015; Gray, et.al., 2017; Lomi & Mbato, 2020). During the practicum, student teachers also learn the micro-skills of teaching such as classroom management, preparing materials and media, presenting a lesson, and assessing students. Student-teachers also learn school management from school principals, supervising teachers, or from other fellow practicing students.

Commonly, educational institutions cooperate with local schools to place their students for a practicum program. Practicum supervision tasks are shared between school teachers and university supervisors. There is a shared responsibility between universities and the school society of educating future teachers. However, in a not supporting situation, for example in the case of a limited number of schools that can accommodate the number of practice students, a university designed their own practicum setting to accommodate the needs of a practicum place. A university-based practicum rather than a school-based one becomes an alternative. It is not an ideal practicum setting as student teachers would only experience peer-teaching without ever really experience working with 'real students' in an authentic school situation.

In the English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University, student teachers are accommodated to do university-based practicum of English for Children (EFC). English for Children is one of the elective concentration subjects worth 10 credits for semester 5 and 6 students. EFC takes the principles of teaching English to young learners (TEYL or EYL) and aims at providing students with the basic knowledge of young learners' pedagogy, skills of designing TEYL programs, and skills of teaching EYL. In the first two years, the students were highly assisted by lecturers to set up language schools for young learners. This practicum is a university-based one but real pupils are invited to participate in the language school. These young participants are the 'real'

pupils of the practicum classes. In the following years, students learned from seniors who also acted as mentors. Lecturers functioned as a supervisor for the practicum and patron for the language school.

To prepare and perform the practicum, the students are provided with a guideline Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of EFC Practicum. The SOP was designed by the EFC lecturers' team and officially legalized by the department. The SOP is a formal document aims at assisting learners in preparing and conducting the practicum and it contains information on mandatory requirements to take part in the practicum such as pre-requisite subjects the previous semester, the procedure of the practice, students' and lecturers' roles, and assessment methods and criteria. This SOP functions as a guideline therefore it is very open and it leaves rooms for students to be creative in doing their practicum.

Philosophically the SOP is designed to guide students for the 21st-century education challenges. This article, thus, aims at discussing a content analysis study conducted on the SOP document to see what philosophical foundations underlie the practicum of EFC as reflected in the documents. The study was guided by this proposed question: What philosophical foundations embody the practicum program?

Research Methodology

The study aimed at revealing the philosophical values that embody the practice of Practicum of English for Children (EFC) at Yogyakarta State University through qualitative content analysis (Borg & Gall, 2007). Qualitative Content Analysis was selected as the aim of the study was to infer the patterns of sentences found in the source documents that potentially carry philosophical values. The practicum documents involved in the study were the Curriculum of the Study Program issued by the University, the Syllabus of the Practicum of EFC, the SOP of Practicum of EFC, and the Module of the Practicum of EFC. All documents, excluding the curriculum were designed and produced by the EFC team of English education Department of Yogyakarta

State University and they had gone through several revisions. The versions used in the study were the latest version.

The data were collected from the documents of EFC practicum which comprised of the SOP of EFC practicum and the Module of EFC Practicum. The referential units of analysis consisted of the sentences found in the selected practicum documents. As the documents were procedures in nature, it consisted of pointers defining steps, requirements, or description which were available in the forms of phrases and sentences. The documents were read and re-read several times to see the patterns (Krippendorf, 2004)

Before making an inference, a construct building was conducted and the analytical construct was built through reading theories of pre-service teacher education, teaching practicum for pre-service teachers, and educational philosophies. Inferences were then made based on the analytical construct. The construct was used to identify possible philosophical ideas implanted in the text.

A qualitative thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007) was used to get themes from emerging codes gained from the analysis of the documents to find out the philosophical foundations of the process of the practicum implementation.

The phrase units were categorized into several categories and sub-categories (see table 1). Data reduction was then conducted to reduce some irrelevant, miscellaneous, or repeated phrases. There were 106 phrase units that were decided as the data of the study.

Table 1. Categories and sub-categories of the phrases

No	Categories	Sub-categories
1	Description of the practicum program	Approaches
		Principles
		Objectives
2	The students' roles	Program designer (language school designer)
		Teacher
3	The lecturer's roles	Supervisor
		Facilitator
4	Students' assessment	Assessment methods
		Assessment documents

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Findings and Discussion

Findings

Based on the analysis of the data, it was revealed that there are four philosophical foundations in the designed practicum of EYL, namely Progressivism, Social Reconstructionism, Existentialism, and Religious Humanism.

1) Progressivism

Progressivism focusses on learners and it is the basis of learner-centeredness, (Darmi, 2013). It aims at reforming education from focusing on teachers to putting the emphasis of learning on students so that learners become tough and competent individuals that can meet the future challenges, (Fadlillah, 2017). Progressivism colored the practicum as shown by the dominant phrases that described learners' roles in the practicum compared to lecturers' roles.

2) Social Reconstructionism

The philosophy of social reconstruction proposes that education is a joint activity, interaction, and collaboration between students and teachers, between students and students, and the environment, and other learning resources with the aimed of being able to solve personal and social problems in order to create a new society, which was more stable (Warnandi, nd). In the Practicum documents, Social Reconstructionism was reflected in the phrases below:

Table 4. Phrases Reflecting Social Reconstructionism

No	Phrases	Category
1	Developing students' ability to work in a team (collaboratively)	Program Description
2	Peer teaching based on the lesson plans they have developed under lecturer's supervision	Learners' Roles
3	Identifying problems that intervene in learning and overcome the problems both individually and in groups	Learners' Roles
4	Peer assessment	Evaluation and Assessment

3) Existentialism

There were three findings related to Existentialism; first, related to the SOP of the practicum, the practicum was not tightly bordered by a fixed and rigid curriculum, it was guided by a set of procedures instead. The SOP was not a fixed curriculum. The procedure was open to the dynamic changes suited to students' needs, interest, and preferences. It is in line with the principles of existentialism that there is no fixed curriculum in existentialism education as all content and pedagogy were designed to meet students' needs and interest. Secondly, it was found that students were encouraged to do reflective practices related to their teaching experiences including how they addressed problems during program design and during teaching processes. In the philosophy of existentialism, education should be emphasized on personal reflection on one's own commitments and choices so that education can build a whole human being through reasoning and taste (Alwasilah, 2014). It is seen in the sample of the phrases below:

Table 5. Phrases Representing Existentialism

Phrases	Category
Presenting school management reports which include challenges, solution to problems, and reflection	Learners' Roles
Reflecting on weekly teaching practice	Learners' Roles

Thirdly, in terms of assessment, existentialism considers standardized tests dehumanizing students. A more creative, open kind of assessment like portfolio assessment would be valued better, (Tan, 2006). As shown in the documents, in the practicum, the students were assessed based on their portfolio collection, as shown in the table below:

Table 6. Existentialism in Assessment

No	Phrases	Category
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Observation • Portfolio Assessment (Syllabus, PowerPoint Slides for presentations, Teaching Materials and media, designed tests) • Peer Assessment 	Assessment methods
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum reports • Swot Analysis Report • Practicum Report • Weekly Diary (reflection, problems, solution) • Self-evaluation forms • Peer-evaluation forms 	Students' Assessment (Portfolio)

4) Religious Humanism

Religious Humanism aims at building a person as a whole human being who values religiosity and spirituality (based on a certain religion) and values human morality. Education, according to Religious Humanism, should focus on developing human beings towards their full potentials without leaving values of religions. In the practicum documents, this philosophical foundation was found in learners' roles as teachers in which they need to have the competences of:

- a) Believing in God, showing religiosity, and practicing academic honesty
- b) Valuing humanism in teaching based on religious values, morality, and ethics
- c) Internalizing values, norms, and academic ethics through reflective practice in teaching

(Practicum SOP, 2018)

By internalizing these stated competencies, the student teachers were expected to be religious role models with morality, integrity, and good characters for their pupils.

Discussion

The official name of the practicum program is Practicum of English for Children and has the main objectives to provide students with the experience to design a language program for children that is structured and relevant to the principles of TEYL, to conduct a TEYL, and to evaluate a TEYL program. The practicum applies a project-based approach and involves reflective practice too. Apart from the main objectives, also stated in the practicum Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that the practicum aims at developing students' ability to work in a team, shaping students' leadership skills, and preparing students for future challenges, (Tim EFC PBI UNY, 2018). These are in line with the 21st-century skills which consist of the 4Cs- Critical Thinking and problem solving, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and innovation, (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; National Education Association, nd). In the practicum, the students work in a team to design and run the language school. Working in a team will require them to communicate with one another to make sure the school runs well. They will also need to work collaboratively to design programs, solve problems, propose a solution. The following are the examples of phrases that come in line with the spirit of 4Cs of 21st-century education:

Table 7. Four Cs (4 Cs) of 21st Education as Reflected in The Practicum Documents

No	4Cs	Phrases
1	Critical thinking and problem solving	Communicating problems in teaching-learning and proposing solutions
2	Communication	Communicating with stakeholders (faculty members, parents, sponsor groups)
3	Collaboration	Working both individually and in team proportionally
4	Creativity and innovation	Implementing innovative, fun, and creative teaching-learning

It is not only the student teachers who are expected to acquire these 4 skills through the series of program designing and practicum programs. The lecturers are also expected to possess the same skills to be able to facilitate students' learning. Facilitation may come in the form of designing a curriculum or syllabus that enables learners to develop all the necessary skills, motivating

students to move further and try harder, and supervise students in finishing the tasks. These phrases from the practicum documents reflect the necessary actions the lecturers are supposed to do during the practicum:

- bridge communication between students and faculty members,
- supervise students during the language school designing,
- assess and evaluate the designed program, and
- observe, supervise, and assess students' teaching practice

(Tim EFC PBI UNY, 2018).

Jan (2017) affirms that teachers of the 21st century need to be able to prepare their students to meet the challenges of the future by catering to their needs and becoming a good model. He further asserts that teachers have several characteristics that would enable them to function wholly. A teacher education program, therefore, needs to properly prepare their student teachers through several learning activities that help bridge them to future professional needs. Teacher education. According to Jan (2017), the program should be characterized by a more learner-centeredness nuance, project based-learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and creative learning. In a learner-centered classroom, students are placed as producers not merely users.

The availability of ample resources with the advancement of technology allows easy access to various kinds of learning materials. Students can collaborate with other class members to adopt then adapt many sources to design the learning-teaching materials that they need to use with their students in the practicum. Student teachers are also allowed a great opportunity to develop their creative potential in designing digital and analog learning media and materials to use in their class.

Student teachers also need to develop their problem-solving abilities. Sacks (2013) believes that teachers benefit from their ability to meet problems with a smart solution. In the educational field, teachers are those in the frontline that run a certain policy. When problems arise, a teacher-driven solution is better as teachers feel that they are involved in proposing the solution and that they are heard. It leads to better work productivity and a higher sense of autonomy among teachers.

This study had revealed that thoughts of Progressivism are dominant in the procedures of the practicum. Progressivism education is humanizing in a sense that it provides wide opportunities for learners, student teachers in this context, to reflect on their educational practice and "the consequences of their professional activity", (Bim-Bad & Egorova, 2016, p.5). Fung (2005) stated that student teachers need to take their learning seriously and be committed to their own professional development through being reflective. Being reflective means that they revisit the learning-teaching practice and "to reconstruct, re-enact, and recapture the events, the emotions, and the accomplishments", (Shulman, 1987 in Fung, 2005).

Indonesian National Law of Education (Undang-undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional [UU SPN]) No 20 Year 2003 Article 1 has mandated that education aims at developing students' potential in terms of their spirituality, self-control, personality, intellectuality, conscience, and skillfulness that are applicable for oneself and for the society. The practicum SOP has internalized the spirit of the philosophical foundations as an attempt to meet the nation's mandated educational objectives. Today's world, and continues to the future, demands competent and innovative individuals (teachers) who are capable of learning and re-educating oneself. Individuals who do not represent themselves only in this world, but ones who realize that they have a mission not only to transfer knowledge but also to develop other human beings (students) morally, emotionally, physically, cognitively, and psychologically through their teachings and personal image.

Conclusion

Educational practice is rooted from religious and cultural values as well as from the wisdom of the great thinkers and these values are coloring the pragmatics of education to prepare students for future demands. The nation's aspirations and the philosophical thoughts being discussed above are closely interrelated and reflect the same visions. The nations' aspirations are being realized through educating future teachers taking the positive thoughts of the great philosophies and implement it in the practice of education.

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