

The curriculum of English language teacher education in expanding circles: English teachers with the best teaching skills or the ones who are best English proficient?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Curriculum, teacher education, expanding circles</p>	<p>Countries classified as expanding circles have endless worries about the qualities of Teacher Education products. This happened because such expanding circles can never give enough room for English learners to have real-life practices since English is not the lingua franca. Similarly, in Indonesia, the issue of highlighting the qualities of the products of Teacher Education has become an endless problem that never leaves a satisfactory solution. This issue might become a blip in a situation where a new curriculum will be implemented soon. Attempts have been made to increase qualified products of teacher education in Indonesia for years, yet the results are not better than expected. Six domains of content (i.e. theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and context knowledge) presumably might have been used by Indonesian teacher education as the core knowledge base of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE); however, since Indonesia has various geographical areas which implies various contexts of SLTE, these six domains of content might not be differently adopted in all parts of Indonesia. Highlighting how important all six content domains in the development of Indonesian SLTE are presumably led to how much attention should be paid to each domain. Reviewing these six domains of content, specifically, this article intends to analyze how those domains are synchronized in composing the core content of the English Department curriculum in teacher education. Are they all equally important?</p>
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1. Introduction

According to Kachru's (in Jenkin, 2006) most influential model of World English, Indonesian belongs to the so-called "expanding circle" where different patterns of acquisition and functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts were found. Since English is not spoken in daily life, World English speakers in the expanding circle grow up bilingual or multilingual, implying different circumstances of acquisition. This results in, among other things, the fact that they only have fewer rooms for real-life practice, but are also faced with

unique characteristics of learning contexts. English teachers, teacher-producing institutions, and English language education are epicenters of increasing qualitatively and quantitatively English learning of non-native speakers in these expanding circles.

Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) would be a fundamental issue in discussing those epicenters. In the field of TESOL, there has been a long debate on whether or not SLTE programs should focus on practical teaching skills and academic knowledge (Johnson in Burns & Richard, 2009). Two strands within the fields of SLTE have been problematic - the one emphasizing pedagogical issues and the other focusing on academic knowledge, i.e., knowledge about language and language learning. There is no consensus on what kinds of knowledge should encompassed in the SLTE programs as Richards (2000) proposed six domains of content to constitute the core knowledge base of SLTE - i.e. theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and context knowledge-which are good, in my opinion, to be used to see how the Teacher-Producing Institutions prepare their products, i.e. English teachers. In the context of the Indonesian educational system, formally, English teachers should be the products of Institutes of Teacher Training and Education (STKIP or IKIP) or Teachers Colleges in a university (FKIP). In Indonesian terminology, both teacher training institutes and teacher colleges are formally labeled as teacher education.

Content of the teacher education curriculum should meet the national curriculum of higher education which is represented by ministerial regulation, i.e. SK MENDIKNAS NO 045/U/2002 and SK MENDIKNAS NO 232/U/2000, which divide the national curriculum in Indonesian universities into two parts, i.e. core curriculum and institutional curriculum. The core curriculum should contain at least 40 - 80 % of the entire courses that the students take; while the rest is the institutional one. This means that nationally in Indonesia, teacher education would not show significantly different content in its curriculum structure. All teacher education in Indonesia applies approximately similar core content of curriculum, including the curriculum of the English Department.

This article would like to review Richard's (2000) six domains of content in the core knowledge base of SLTE and analyze how those domains are synchronized in composing the core content of the English Department curriculum in teacher education. Have Richard's six content domains equally been represented in courses stipulated in the English department teacher education curriculum?

2. Literature Review

Kachru's (1986) three concentric circles—with the countries traditionally enjoying ownership of English treated as the "inner circle," the postcolonial communities which use English as a second language for intra-national purposes labelled as the "outer circle," and all the other communities increasingly using English as a foreign language, primarily for international purposes, labelled the "expanding circle"—situated different varieties of English in its historical context. Consequently, the concept of "World Englishes" strengthens debates on the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in countries where English is not spoken in daily routines. In these countries, English is taught as a foreign language in schools, while in everyday activities, students speak their local or national language. This condition leads to a lack of out-of-class learning exposure for learners of English. These learners do not have enough opportunities to use English after they leave the English class; only certain individuals

have access to authentic English programs on TV or authentic English reading materials, such as magazines or newspapers. In short, compared to learners of English in the "inner" or "outer" circles, learners in the "expanding circles" have fewer opportunities to practice the target language outside the class. Similarly, English teachers also face these challenges.

In Indonesia, various regions demonstrate a continuum of circumstances, from highly facilitated English learning environments to very limited ones. From the learners' perspective, good English exposure is easily gained in more developed regions, such as Java and Sumatra, where access to authentic English books, magazines, and TV channels is relatively easy. Conversely, in developing regions such as Papua, Kalimantan, and Maluku, English learners must make extra efforts to access such resources. From the teachers' perspective, this context implies varied opportunities to participate in in-service training, such as seminars and symposiums, to enhance professional development. In more developed regions, teachers can easily attend such training events, while in less developed regions, such opportunities are rare. These disparities highlight the need to revisit the curriculum structure in pre-service teacher education programs.

Pre-service teacher education in Indonesia adheres to formal regulations for establishing the core content of higher education curricula, as stated in "SK MENDIKNAS NO 232/U/2000." This regulation mandates a significant portion of subjects within the core competencies. In the English Department of Pre-Service Teacher Education, the core competencies are structured into three divisions: teaching content, language content, and research content. The teaching content includes courses such as TEFL, issues in TESOL, and curriculum design; the language content comprises courses like semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics; and the research content includes thesis writing and research in language teaching. These divisions align with the overarching goal of preparing English teachers for the context of teaching English in an "expanding circle." However, the question remains: which portion of these divisions should be prioritized for pre-service training students? Should the programs aim to produce English teachers with the best teaching skills or the highest English proficiency?

Since the field of TESOL emerged in the 1960s, debates have revolved around the curriculum structure in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) programs, particularly concerning the balance between "knowledge about" and "knowledge how" (Burns & Richards, 2009), or practical teaching skills and academic knowledge (Johnson, in Burns & Richards, 2009), or content and delivery (Singh & Richards, 2009). The relationship between these two strands has been a challenge in designing teacher education curricula. Including more courses focused on teaching skills tends to produce teachers with strong pedagogical abilities, while emphasizing academic knowledge tends to produce teachers with high English proficiency. This dichotomy is now considered a traditional view in the TESOL field, as it treats teacher learning as a cognitive issue and focuses on improving delivery effectiveness.

More recent perspectives on teacher learning emphasize the mental processes involved, where learning is seen as the theorization of practice rather than merely applying theory to practice. Key components of this learning mode include the roles of participants, the discourse they create and engage in, the activities they undertake, and the artifacts and resources they use (Burns & Richards, 2009). In this context, debates on whether to prioritize teaching skills or academic knowledge are less relevant. Instead, the structure of teacher

education curricula, particularly in English Departments, should be contextually flexible to address the diverse needs of learners and teachers effectively.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to address the research focus derived from the core domains of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) as proposed by Richard (2000). The methodology is designed to explore the practical and theoretical understanding of these domains among teacher candidates, particularly in how they perceive and apply the proposed core domains in their preparation for teaching.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to analyze how teacher candidates internalize and integrate the six core domains—namely, theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision-making, and context knowledge—into their learning and teaching practices. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and practices in the SLTE context.

The participants in this study are teacher candidates enrolled in an SLTE program at a higher education institution. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants currently taking courses that align with one or more of the core domains outlined by Richard (2000). The inclusion criteria include enrolment in an SLTE program for at least one semester and active participation in theoretical and practical teaching courses. The sample size is flexible, with an estimated 10–15 participants, to ensure data saturation and richness of responses.

Data Collection Methods

The following methods gather comprehensive insights into the participants' perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured Interviews: Questions are designed to explore participants' understanding of each core domain and how they perceive the interconnectedness of these domains in their training. Classroom observations were done by observing the participants during teaching simulations and peer teaching activities to identify how they demonstrated skills related to teaching skills, communication, and pedagogical reasoning. Document analysis: Course syllabi, lesson plans, and teaching portfolios are analyzed to understand how SLTE programs embed and assess the core domains.

Data Analysis

The collected data are analysed using thematic analysis, which involves the following steps:

1. Familiarization is done by reviewing interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to gain an initial understanding.
2. Coding: Assigning codes to data segments that align with the six domains of SLTE.
3. Theme Development: Identifying patterns and themes related to the core domains' implementation, overlap, and integration.
4. Interpretation: Relating the findings to Richard's (2000) theoretical framework to draw meaningful conclusions.

4. Findings

Communication Skills and Pedagogical Reasoning and Decision-Making

Communication skills are a cornerstone of effective teaching, enabling teacher candidates to express ideas, instructions, and feedback clearly and effectively. This domain is essential for conveying subject matter and fostering an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Effective communication involves verbal skills, such as appropriate language and tone, and non-verbal skills, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures. In SLTE programs, communication skills are cultivated through courses like public speaking and TEFL, where teacher candidates practice articulating lesson objectives, explaining concepts, and interacting with students.

Pedagogical reasoning and decision-making complement communication skills by focusing on the teacher candidates' ability to adapt their teaching strategies to the specific dynamics of the lesson. This domain requires candidates to assess classroom situations and make informed decisions about managing time, engaging students, and addressing misunderstandings. For instance, during a TEFL course, candidates might learn to decide whether to use a direct instruction approach for a grammar lesson or to employ group work for a communicative task. The interplay between communication and pedagogical reasoning ensures teachers can respond flexibly to students' needs, fostering a productive learning environment.

Together, these skills underscore the practical aspects of teaching. They emphasize the importance of not only knowing the content but also being able to deliver it effectively and adjust teaching approaches based on classroom interactions. Including such skills in SLTE curricula ensures that candidates are well-prepared to handle the complexities of real-world teaching.

Context Knowledge

Context knowledge represents a unique and critical domain in SLTE, emphasizing the understanding that language teaching occurs in diverse settings influenced by sociocultural, administrative, and policy-related factors. According to Richard (2000), this domain equips teacher candidates with the ability to adapt their teaching practices to the specific needs of their educational environment. For example, teaching English in a rural school with limited resources requires a different approach than teaching in an urban, well-equipped institution. Context knowledge helps candidates consider these factors and plan realistic and practical lessons.

Courses like sociolinguistics and issues on TESOL play a pivotal role in developing context knowledge. These courses expose candidates to concepts such as language variation, bilingualism, and the impact of globalization on language use. Candidates are encouraged to analyse case studies and reflect on how sociocultural factors affect language learning. For instance, they might study how language policy in a bilingual country influences curriculum design or how cultural norms shape classroom interactions. Such insights are invaluable for teacher candidates, enabling them to align their teaching strategies with the cultural and institutional context of their students.

Context knowledge also extends to understanding administrative practices, such as curriculum requirements, assessment policies, and resource allocation. By integrating these elements into their training, SLTE programs prepare candidates to navigate the complexities of the education system and advocate for effective teaching practices within their institutions. Overall, context knowledge bridges the gap between theoretical understanding

and practical application, ensuring that teacher candidates are prepared to meet the diverse challenges of language teaching.

Subject Matter Knowledge

Subject matter knowledge refers to the deep understanding of the content that teacher candidates are expected to teach. This includes familiarity with specialized concepts, theories, and disciplinary knowledge in second language teaching. In SLTE programs, subject matter knowledge is developed through courses like research in language teaching and sociolinguistics, which provide candidates with a strong foundation in both theoretical and applied aspects of language education.

A solid grasp of subject matter knowledge enables teacher candidates to deliver accurate and meaningful instruction. For instance, understanding linguistic theories such as phonology, syntax, and pragmatics allows candidates to explain language structures effectively to their students. Furthermore, this knowledge helps candidates design lessons addressing specific language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, ensuring students receive a well-rounded education.

In addition to theoretical knowledge, subject matter knowledge includes staying informed about current trends and best practices in language teaching. For example, candidates might explore innovative approaches like task-based language teaching or technology integration in language learning. By engaging with research and professional literature, candidates are better equipped to make informed decisions about their teaching methods and materials.

Subject matter knowledge is also critical for fostering confidence in teacher candidates. When candidates have a thorough understanding of their content area, they are more likely to feel prepared and competent in the classroom. This confidence enhances their teaching performance and positively impacts student learning outcomes. In sum, subject matter knowledge is the foundation for effective teaching practices, ensuring that candidates are well-equipped to meet the demands of language education.

5. Discussion

Debates on the dichotomy between teachers with the best teaching skills and those who are best English proficient might have been questioned by some parties when reviewing the products of pre-service English teacher education in Indonesia. Proponents of the former argued that pedagogical competence is very important; they believed that a highly proficient English teacher cannot be guaranteed the best teacher if he/she does not have enough teaching skills. In contrast, proponents of the latter concept stated that teaching is an art, so even with no teaching skills, everyone can learn to teach as long as she/he is very proficient in English. Both proponents are correct.

Seeing a dichotomy between two strong sides, focusing on teaching skills and emphasizing academic knowledge in SLTE, seemingly leads to the traditional perspective that learning is viewed as a cognitive issue. The recent perspective is a focus on the context in teacher learning, which incorporates communities of learners engaged in social practices and collaborative construction of meanings (Burns & Richards, 2009). Therefore, the curriculum structure of English pre-service teacher education might cover all content

domains by considering the circumstances of the various teacher education in various regions in Indonesia. In this sense, three proposed schemes focus on the domains that must be implemented differently in structuring the nationwide teacher education curriculum.

These three schemes might be better implemented to meet specific characteristics of each cluster region in Indonesia regarding the circumstances of TEFL. For instance, scheme 1 might be appropriate for teacher education in less developed regions where resources are still poor, infrastructure is inadequate, etc. English teachers in this cluster region should be best-proficient; Scheme 2 is good for the curriculum in bit developed regions since in this cluster region, resources are a bit better, but gives less infrastructure for learners so that they feel difficulties in getting good learning environment access and scheme 3 is suitable for teacher education in very developed regions where both resources and infrastructure are better.

6. Conclusion

Richards' six domains of content for SLTE might be the ones which at the moment are comprehensive to include when restructuring nationwide curriculum of teacher education specifically the English Department. The domains should seemingly be synchronized with the geographical regions of Indonesia where different infrastructures implying different out-class learning exposure for learners of English in expanding circles. These three schemes offer possible ways to accommodate the different circumstances in different parts of places of Indonesia where students will learn English as a Foreign Language.

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