



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: THEORY AND PRACTICE – A PLPG MODULE

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Abstract: In this article, the writer argues that the module entitled English Language Teaching and Learning: Theory and Practice written by Endang Fauziati et al. (published digitally in 2011, 297 pages) has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths are related to the theories of education which are comprehensively presented in the module, its clear flows of thinking, and some great evaluations at the end of each chapter. Its weaknesses are related to such issues as its content, approach, and objectives. It is concluded that despite those weaknesses, the module is generally great and it is, therefore, important for the improvement of teaching and learning in general, in English in particular.

Key words: *Module, theories of teaching and learning, strengths, and weaknesses.*

INTRODUCTION

This module for was prepared for Teacher Education and Professional Development Program (famously known as PLPG) that the government of Indonesia conducted to equip its teachers nationwide. The objective of the program is obviously to improve teacher’s professionalism in teaching, in terms of knowledge and skills. The module was written by experienced scholars and competent figures in English teaching, namely, Endang Fauziati, Siti Zuhriah Ariatmi, Malikatul Laila, Djoko Sriyono, Agus Wijayanto, Rini Fatmawati, Aryati Prasetyarini and Nur Hidayat.

This paper is prepared with the objective to present a critical review of the module. It is the expectation of the writer that she has done justice in reviewing the module, in the sense that it serves as a critical review rather than a cynical point of view over this academic document.

Summary of the Module

The summarised content of the module can be seen in the following mind mapping shown in the module (p.4).

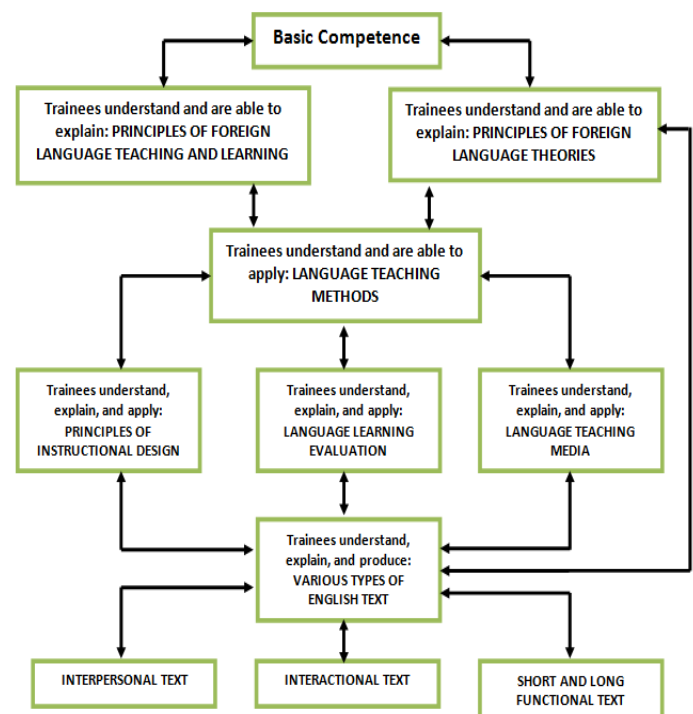


Figure 1.1 Summary of the Module

Looking at the mind mapping, it indicates that major portion of the module is on theoretical part as the basic component of the module. The theoretical part includes language theories, principles of foreign language teaching and learning, foreign language teaching

methods, principles of instructional design; language learning and evaluation and language teaching media. A minor portion dedicated in the module is on types of English text, which is comprised of interpersonal text, interactional text and long and short functional text.

The reason why the writer states proportion of the module covers more on theoretical frameworks it not because of the numbers of pages dedicated for this component, in comparison to the 'practical' classroom teaching element. Instead, it is because the topics under the theoretical section are more diverse than the non-theoretical part, which only talks about types of (English) text.

Strengths of the Module

Before arguing on the weaknesses of the module, first of all the writer elaborates positive points or elements of the module that the writer has identified as its strengths. This is done with the awareness that there is some 'goodness' of it, apart from its 'not-so-good' points. In terms of strengths, there are a number of points the writer concludes as follow: 1) the module has been designed with comprehensive theoretical pedagogical foundation upon which the teaching and learning process is conducted; 2) what is also important to notice is that the module has been designed with clear flows of thinking, as represented by its mind mapping; 3) the module provides some evaluation sections at the end of each chapter, along with the key to the correct answers and measurement of achievement which allows its readers, teachers in general, to do a self-evaluation on their improvement; and, 4) its theoretical components are comprehensive as they are compressed into a format (as in the module) which is not complicated, but simple.

Weaknesses of the Module

Besides the positive elements of the module as stated above, the writer believes that it has some weaknesses related to such issues as its content, approach, and objectives. These are described further below.

Issues on content

This module consists of two parts. The first part is about theoretical principles for teaching and learning and the second part is about practical issues. In terms of theoretical knowledge, this module is very comprehensive as it covers relevant theories on language teaching and learning, foreign language teaching method, instructional design, language teaching media, and language learning evaluation. At some point, this module's theoretical part seems like a curriculum of formal education for such English education departments

like that of the English Education Graduate Program conducted for those st Mudyng for their masters degree in English education.

Theoretical foundation is, of course, an important part of education program and processes. However, it should be brought into practice. The writer shares the argument that "However good a theory, it cannot simply stand alone as theory itself without being put into practice and tested in relation to other ideas by exploring, reflecting on and reworking to create new ideas" (UK Essay, 2013).

The second part of the module which deals with practicalities in teaching and learning process seems insufficient as it covers English functional texts. However, there are more topics that can be included as language learning covers four aspects, i.e., listening, reading, writing and speaking. All these fours skills should be given proportionate attention in the module. It is a common feature that creating joyful teaching and learning processes is a challenge for many teachers due to various aspects in teaching, both internally and externally. Although in general, most teachers in Indonesia have undergraduate education degree, which is more or less the same as bachelor degree, however, teachers need continuous training and refreshments so they will be able to keep up with the changing world where education process is taking place.

Issue on the approach: does it address teachers' needs

When comes to the selection of topics and materials, an important question that can be asked is how the assessment was made. According to the writer, despite meeting the expected national standards, yet the module addressing teacher's competence should be based on factual problems, that is, the real problems teachers face in English teaching. This opinion is closely linked to the issue presented in point 3 below. TeachThought.com (2018) suggests adaptive learning as one of ten innovative learning strategies for modern pedagogy that teachers should master. This implies that underlined message that teachers should be assisted to review their state of teaching practices before they can create new teaching environment. Yet, self-evaluation and self-critique is not something that everyone do willingly. Have all these facts been considered prior to and during the module development? Yet, the writer is fully aware that identifying needs is somewhat challenging because one may ask such questions as "Whose needs?" and "Which teachers?"

Issue on the objective in addressing teacher's professionalism

The writer thinks that teacher's professionalism should focus on improving teacher's creativity in designing and managing teaching and learning processes in classroom practically. This means it should embrace more on teacher's teaching skill. In the context of Indonesia, there are huge gaps in terms of school and teaching facilities in big cities and small cities, bearing in mind remote places such as in mountainous areas of Papua, small islands or border villages between Malaysia and Indonesia. Thus, there is a need to support innovative teaching ideas that teachers can use in day to day English teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Gaps in facilities have somehow impacted on teaching quality. Hence, reducing those gaps is an urgent call to answer.

Regarding teacher's professional development, Fletcher-Wood (2018) quotes Mary Kennedy's opinion on four types of professional developments, namely: 1) prescription, i.e., sharing universal ways to address particular teaching problems); 2) strategy, i.e., presenting practices as in prescription and a rationale for when and why to use them; 3) insight, i.e., helping teachers to see familiar events differently, creating "self-generated 'aha!' moments"; and, 4) bodies of knowledge, i.e., presenting "a coherent body of interrelated concepts and principles" which is 'inherently passive.'

According to Constantinides (2015), teachers need to develop their creativity in classroom and for such reason, there are eight suggested steps to becoming a more creative teacher as described below.

Step one: equips teachers with plenty books, include online resources, and training courses with possible free online courses as well as university programs. *Step two:* connects teachers with other teachers where they can share experiences and interests. In occasions like these, teachers can be encouraged to become speakers. *Step three:* collects and compiles teaching ideas. We might develop something like bank of teaching ideas, where teachers will become not only customers but as well as marketers and investors to develop the banks bigger and beneficial to more teachers. *Step four:* share learning experiences. Sharing teaching ideas generates conversations with other teachers, and those

conversations stimulate more ideas; they are a great bridge to creative teaching. *Step five:* remove blocks to creative thinking. Teachers should be encouraged to feel capable and creative in teaching. *Step six:* practice the creativity. It is about learning by doing and improvements necessarily made in following up the implementation. *Step seven:* start experimenting and reflecting in daily teaching and learning process. *Step eight:* make creativity a daily goal.

The module, despite its comprehensive theoretical components, it is the opinion of the writer that it somewhat still lacks of practical "what to do list" for teachers in their teaching routines. Despite the formal theoretical concepts and teaching materials which are sound, what is important for teachers is also about "tips and tricks" of successful implementing of such concepts in real language teaching classes, that is, some aspects that cannot be found in the module. Programs that are designed to improve teachers' professionalism is required to cover this as extensive as possible, knowing that after the completion of the program teachers will return to their duty stations and in most cases conduct teaching and learning process by themselves. What should be taken into consideration is not only how well a program has been conducted and improvements made by teachers during the program, but how the 'new' knowledge is blended by teachers into daily their classroom teaching and learning processes. Such programs as those for education and training of prospective professional teachers should provide opportunities to create high quality learning processes.

CONCLUSION

It is acknowledged that the module discussed here has both strong and weak points. Its strengths, of course, are great for both practising and prospective English teachers as well as for those interested in the teaching and learning of English. Yet, it has some weak points that its readers have to be aware of so that they do not see the module as something which is perfect.

In that sense, presenting some weak points of the module as mentioned in this article is not meant to question the quality of the module, nor to undermine comprehensive construction of the materials that have been integrated into the module. The writer's concern is rather on the practicality of the materials presented in the module, that is, application of such great ideas in regular classroom teaching and learning processes needs to be

discussed further. Despite those critiques, however, the writer believes that the module is generally great as it has some justifiably logical ideas needed to improve its readers's understanding of the nature of the teaching and learning in general, of English education in particular.

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