



A Workshop on How to Find Current Topics for Research

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ABSTRACT

Conducted in a 2-hour online workshop session format in November 2021, this community service program aims to share my practical experiences as an Indonesian researcher on finding current research topics, specifically in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. The participants of this online workshop were seventeen (17) lecturers in the English Language Education program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Conducted synchronously in a Zoom platform, the workshop started with my presentation on three main points: (1) "my ways" in finding research topics, (2) my published articles that might provide writing ideas for the participants, and (3) reasons why the participants need to write and publish their work in an academic journal. This presentation session was ended by a question and answer session from the participants. Some reflective questions for Indonesian researchers and ideas for future community service programs were also presented.

Keywords: Community Service, Research, Research Topics, English Education.

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian higher education contexts, every lecturer has three primary responsibilities (or *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*): teaching, doing research, and doing community services (Adit, 2021). As a lecturer in an English Language Education program at a private university in Indonesia, a typical story that I often hear from my colleagues at my campus and friends working in other universities is that they do not have time to write and publish their articles in a journal. *Why?* Some common reasons might include teaching too many classes in a semester, doing administrative tasks, getting involved in many task forces, being a committee in various campus events, and/or dealing with family matters. In national newspapers, Ari (2018); Kohar (2021); Sucahyo (2018) also voiced their concerns about administrative tasks that often burden and consume so much time of Indonesian lecturers that they cannot focus their attention to conducting research, writing well, and publishing their work in a journal that has a high impact factor.

If Indonesian lecturers cannot deal with their workload and manage their time well, I am concerned that they might no longer have the energy and motivation to do their research and publication. With that background in mind, my community service program in the form of 2-hour online workshop session aims to motivate and give practical guidance for Indonesian lecturers in finding some current research topics, especially in English Education fields, that are simple and doable by the lecturers who might have the similarly increased workloads and been bombarded by administrative tasks as concerned above.

METHOD

The 2-hour online workshop session was initiated by the English Language Education program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (PBI-UMY), on November 13, 2021, at 8-10 a.m. The workshop session was conducted using the Zoom platform (<https://zoom.us/>), and broadcast live on YouTube. The participants of the workshop were seventeen (17) PBI UMY lecturers. Similar to Subekti (2021), this *insidental* workshop did not ask the participants to submit an academic paper to publish in a journal or other related final products at the end of the workshop session.



Figure 1. The Workshop Poster



Figure 2. The Workshop Participants

The workshop consisted of two parts. In the first part, I did my 45-minute presentation based on these three main points and expectations, which I will clarify in more detail in the findings and discussions section:

- 1) “my ways” in finding research topics,
(*Expectation*: the participants are able to find simple and doable research topics for their future research agenda.)
- 2) my publications that might provide writing ideas for the participants,
(*Expectation*: the participants are able to mention and conduct similar research to the publications I have shown to them.)
- 3) and reasons why the participants need to write and publish their work in an academic journal.
(*Expectation*: the participants are able to explain why they need to have the spirit to do their research and publication activities.)

Before I started my presentation on those three points to the workshop participants, I explained that I would *not* position myself as a more knowledgeable researcher than the workshop participants. When showing my publications (see point 2), I also clarified that I did not intend to “show off” my research and writing ability to the participants. Instead, I used my publications as a real example of what I have done, hoping that the research participants felt motivated and inspired to do similar things. In the second part of the workshop, the participants could ask any questions related to my presentation and clarify those three main points I presented. In this question-and-answer session, I tried my best to respond to all questions, ideas, or concerns raised by the workshop participants constructively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

“My Ways” in Finding Research Topics

As a lecturer, I have been experiencing the same issues as I explained earlier in this paper, especially dealing with administrative tasks and being in some task forces, which might affect my time to research, write, and publish my work in academic journals. In that condition, my practical strategy to keep me writing is to always start from a simple (research) topic. I usually get that simple topic from my classrooms. For example, I like to write about my teaching and learning activities with my students, some technology tools I use to support my teaching, and classroom tasks or assignments that I assign to my students. Then, when the article is ready to publish, I always start by sending that article to non-accredited national journals and move to SINTA-accredited national journals. For a complete list of SINTA accredited journals, please visit

<https://sinta.kemdikbud.go.id/journals>. If successful, I will then gradually target international journals or those indexed in SCOPUS (<https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>).



Figure 3. A Sample of My Presentation Slide

Additionally, I encouraged the workshop participants to visit some national/ international journal websites and see the journals' current issues/ publications. Then, they could see current topics published in the journals, read one or two articles they were interested in, and conduct similar research. Some journals that I suggest them to visit are *TEFLIN Journal* (<http://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal>), *CALL-EJ* (<http://callej.org/>), *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language* (<http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/>), and *The Journal of Teaching English with Technology* (<https://tewtjournal.org/>).

Another "my way" in finding the research topics that I presented to the workshop participants was to visit *Google Scholar* (<https://scholar.google.com/>). Then, I asked them to type "top/ favourite" national or international researchers in their fields, see their publications in the last three years, read their publications, write similar ideas, see which journals that publish the researchers' articles, and (if possible) plan to publish in the same journals. As an example, Figure 4 below shows my search results in *Google Scholar* on Professor Thomas Farrell's research works in reflective practices.



Figure 4. My Search in Google Scholar

Besides Thomas Farrell, I also mentioned some Indonesian researchers (e.g., Dr. Ribut Wahyudi and Dr. Joseph Ernest Mambu) who become my role model in research and publication. I like to visit their Google Scholar regularly to be informed about some journals that publish their articles.

My Publications that Might Provide Writing Ideas for the Participants

Will the journal editors accept our articles discussing simple ideas like what I did? My answer is yes! To convince the workshop participants, I showed them some of my articles that were successfully published in academic national and international journals and were written in “a teacher-friendly style with fewer references, relevant to classroom practitioners” (Renandya, 2014, p. 3). For example, in 2016, I wrote an article entitled *Integrating Technology in an Indonesian EFL Classroom: Why Not?* (see Mali, 2016). It was successfully published in *Beyond Words Journal*. In the article, I describe three technology tools (Edmodo, Blog, and Hot Potatoes) that I used to support my teaching and learning practices back in the year 2016. In 2018, I published an article entitled *Project Based Speaking Activity: The English Funfair* (see Mali, 2018). I successfully published the article in *Accents Asia Journal*. In that article, I described a speaking activity (i.e., the English funfair) that my students did in their speaking class. I framed that description under project-based learning theories. In 2019, I wrote another article that described the potential of a blog that I used in my classroom. The article was published in *ELTR Journal* (see Mali, 2019). More recently, I published an article in *The Journal of Teaching English with Technology*. The article presented three simple lesson plans to practice students’ creativity and communication using the *Postermymwall* website in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing and speaking classes (see Mali, 2021). With these examples, I then encouraged the participants, as a start, to think about and write using similar simple ideas they can find in their classrooms and try to send their articles to academic journals.



Figure 5. The Question and Answer Session with The Workshop Participants

Writing and Publishing Our Work in an Academic Journal: Why?

There are some reasons that I present to the workshop participants about why they need to write and publish their work in an academic journal. Some of the reasons are: doing their job as a lecturer, showing their professionalism, sharing their voices to the world, obtaining higher academic functional position (*Jabatan Fungsional*), or becoming a way of their self-actualization. Additionally, I emphasize other two reasons about the essence of writing and publishing their work. The first reason is to win a scholarship to pursue a doctoral degree in an overseas university. At this point, I informed the participants that my publication records might be one of the main reasons why I was awarded a Fulbright-DIKTI scholarship to pursue my Ph.D. study at a state university in the United States back in the year 2018. Second, it is to inspire our students. To clarify, I am always happy to use my published articles as writing examples for my students, for instance, in my academic writing or research proposal class, and tell my students that if I can write and publish this particular work in an academic journal, they should be able to do it too,

even better than what I did. I believe that knowing our WHY can enhance our motivation to write and publish our work in an academic journal.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this community service program, I have shared my practical experiences as an Indonesian researcher on finding current research topics in English Education fields and on sustaining my research and publication activities. Similar to Subekti and Rumanti (2020), I received the participants' feedback for my session through WhatsApp chat, such as "*sejauh ini peserta pada suka, idenya sangat membumi, saran-saran yang diberikan sangat doable dan inspiratif, ilmu yang diberikan sangat bermanfaat* [the workshop participants like your presentation; the ideas that you present are realistic; the suggestions you give are very doable and inspiring; the knowledge that you present is very useful]." These positive comments from the workshop participants might indicate that they appreciate my presentation based on my authentic experiences in writing and publishing articles in academic journals.

There are some questions that I cannot answer in the workshop session. We might use these questions to reflect on our work as a lecturer and researcher:

- 1) How can we prepare our students' papers (e.g., in a scholarly writing class or research proposal class) to be publishable in an academic journal?
- 2) How can we manage our time well to write, do research, and successfully publish our work in an academic journal?
- 3) Publishing our articles in SCOPUS indexed journals is considered more "prestige" than that in national journals. Is that true? Do you agree with that statement? Why? Why not?

In the future, this community service program can be continued by asking the workshop participants to (1) share a simple (research) topic they have found, (2) an article they have written based on that simple topic, and (3) an academic (national or international) journal they have targeted to publish their article. Then, the community service committee can invite a seasoned researcher to provide feedback and have a constructive discussion with the participants about those (1-3) aspects. Another possible community service idea is to ask a workshop presenter to discuss one of his/her published articles in more detail and deconstruct parts of the article as practical guidance for the workshop participants who wish to write a similar article. In closing, I told the workshop participants to start writing and not let their perfection stop them from publishing their work in academic journals. Please always remember: if I can do it, you can do it too, even better than what I did! Publish and flourish!

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