



Presence in Teaching: Intended Practices and Remaining Challenges of Teachers in Indonesia

Article History	
Received:	19.01.2021
Revision:	31.01.2021
Accepted:	12.02.2021
Published:	20.02.2021
Author Details	
Ahmad Ardillah Rahman ¹ , Nasution ² , Warsono ³ Sanasintani ⁴ and Muhammad Said ³	
Authors Affiliations	
¹ Institut Parahikma Indonesia, Makassar, South Sulawesi	
² Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Pendidikan dan Keguruan (STKIP) Bima, West Nusa Tenggara	
³ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi (STIE) Ganesha Jakarta	
⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Negeri Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan	
Corresponding Author*	
Muhammad Said	
How to Cite the Article:	
Ahmad Ardillah Rahman, Nasution, Warsono Sanasintani & Muhammad Said (2021); Presence in Teaching: Intended Practices and Remaining Challenges of Teachers in Indonesia. <i>Int Aca J Edu Lte.</i> 2(1); 87-92.	
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Abstract: The Indonesian government has continuously pursued to improve the quality of its education. One of the crucial factors in empowering the education is through strengthening the quality of teachers and teaching profession. This article aims to explore teachers' professional practices and expertise in Indonesia by considering the theory of 'presence' in teaching. Presence can be defined as the capability of teachers to connect and engage with students mentally, emotionally, and physically in the learning environment for teachers to be able to meet the needs of students in learning. This article is divided into two sections. Firstly, it addresses the current educational practices and explores the problems of teachers' pedagogies in Indonesia. Using data from existing research and surveys, it reveals that the requirements for standardised test and ranking system, the culture of transmission model in teaching, and the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students bring the education further away from the essence of what it means to teach. Therefore, in response to these problems, the second part of this article suggests the needs of teachers to reconceptualise their current understanding of pedagogy and to employ the concept of teacher presence in teaching. In doing so, teachers are expected to build connection with students, connection with pedagogical and content knowledge, and connection with parents and communities.

Keywords: Presence, Relationship, Pedagogical knowledge, Content knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly understood that teachers play significant roles in students' development. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to have qualities of expert teachers so that their influences on students would be beneficial for students' entire life. This article discusses challenges as well as several attributes of expertise in teaching where teachers have to deal with in order to be able to provide better pedagogies in classroom circumstances. According to Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011), in order to become highly accomplished teachers, there are several qualities required for teachers to hold such as having the good pedagogical knowledge, being able to collaborate and create professional engagement with parents and colleges, and having skills of professional practice in implementing effective pedagogies. In Indonesian

education context, the government similarly has the national standard of professional teachers containing four underlying competences. Those competencies are pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence (Regulation of Minister of National Education, 2007).

Besides these standards issued by governments or institutions, there are many other dimensions of expertise in teaching defined by scholars. Loughran (2010) argues that teachers as experts should be able to continuously reflect upon their past experiences in order to develop better teaching instructions in their future practices. For Freire (1998), the notion of expert teaching is much akin to several attributes such as humility, courage, and democratic. In addition, Oplatka (2009) and Fielding (2012) put great emphasis on teachers' emotional engagement with students and the importance of teachers in building learning communities within school contexts.

However, referring to the existing pedagogical practices of teachers in Indonesia, the requirements for standardised test and ranking system bring the education further away from the essence of what it means to teach. Teaching and learning have been mostly described in numbers and grades where it focuses on test and results rather than process and analysis. What mostly comes in teachers' mind about pedagogy is traditional: good pedagogy is only associated with high test results, while bad pedagogy is linked to low test results. Consequently, teachers are losing sight of what it

means to teach. Teaching is no more viewed as the engagement of teachers in more personal and meaningful relationship with students.

Therefore, this article attempts to look at the factors causing the problems of teachers' pedagogy in Indonesia. It will also suggest a conception and paradigm of what constitutes good teaching practices where teachers should not be only physically but also emotionally 'present' to their students.

This paper will be discussed in twofold. Firstly, it will discuss the common and existing pedagogical practices of teachers in Indonesia, especially to see how the relationship between teachers and students have emerged in the schooling system. Secondly, it will discuss the necessary attributes of expert teachers, attributes that teachers should accomplish in order to present to their students successfully. Conclusion and further implications will also be suggested toward constituting expert teaching practices.

Existing Pedagogical Practices of Teachers in Indonesia

Before exploring the intended pedagogies and the attributes of expert teachers, it is essential to look at the current and common pedagogical practices of teachers in Indonesian education contexts. In this part, some problems of pedagogical practices employed by teachers will be discussed. In general, it can be identified that there are three main upheavals of educational practices in Indonesian schooling systems.

Firstly, as mentioned in the introduction, a standardised test has been placed at the centre of educational practices that has hindered students' learning and teachers' pedagogical development. The accomplishment of teachers' pedagogy is simply measured by how successful their students in the standardised test such as the national examination (UN) or classroom examinations (Sulistyo, 2015). Schools and teachers will be considered to have failed if their students cannot do well in the standardised test. The result of examinations has become significant for students since it is used to determine the eligibility of students to continue to the next level of education or to find a prosperous job for their future life. As a result, the orientation of educational practices is to prepare students to have a high score. For that reason, teachers very much struggle to meet the expectation from the test where teachers end up teaching to 'the test' rather than teaching the knowledge of values and wisdom.

This practice is not in harmony with Fielding's (2012) idea of education where it is argued that the essential aim of education is to practice a pedagogy enabling students to develop instrumental knowledge of values. The practice does not also cohere with the aim of Indonesian educational system to develop students who are pious, good ethical, and knowledgeable (The

Constitutions of Indonesian Republic, 2003). Ideally, education at the practical level is not only about teaching the students of technical knowledge, but it is also about teaching them morals which are unfortunately undermined by the actual pedagogical practices of teachers. Hence, the gap between the intended purposes of education and the actual pedagogical practices should be taken into account if the aim of the education is to be achieved.

Secondly, what often comes up as pedagogical practices at the classroom level in Indonesia is a transmission model where students must listen to the teachers' talk and take notes for the entire day. Teaching is implemented in a one-way instruction from a teacher to the students as described in the Freire's (2000) 'banking' concept of education. Students are not given chances to personalise their own learning. They are not accountable and responsible either for what they learn. As a result, the understanding of students is not deep, and what is taught just becomes 'fragile knowledge' which brings students to nowhere. Similarly, another characteristic of common pedagogy in Indonesia is a rote-learning practice (Zulfikar, 2010). This rote-learning practice is not only implemented by teachers in religion or history subject where students are demanded to memorise historical texts or religious books and documents, but it is also employed by teachers in almost all the subjects, including science, civics, languages, and mathematics. For instance, in mathematics, teachers do not associate materials to make sense of mathematics knowledge to everyday life situation. Students are only urged to memorise mathematics formula without gaining further explanation when and how the formula and pattern can be applied in the real-life situation. This condition makes the mathematical learning less meaningful, and it makes students uninterested and frightened of math because it is taught in an uninterested and intimidating way.

Haberman (1991) argues a critical need for teachers to provide authentic learning where learning becomes a meaningful concept for students. It is also stated that good teaching should make students understanding the core conception of what is learned, and how it works in real life situation. Therefore, instead of being the main sources and the only subject of learning, teachers should provide room for freedom so that learning can be expanded. Teachers should situate the learning that can encourage learners to become thinkers and creators of their own learning. It is essential because students tend to learn better when they see something more meaningful from the experiences of learning on their own. For example, in the 'photosynthesis of Biology learning', it is necessary for teachers as experts to teach

not only in a classroom, but it can also be in a garden outside the class where students and teachers can directly explore how plants photosynthesise.

By situating the teaching and learning in an authentic place, students will learn in a meaningful way and understand the reasons for learning that particular knowledge. Therefore, unless teachers commit to transforming their pedagogical culture to provide room for students on creativity and authenticity, the development of students' learning and teachers' pedagogical expertise may not occur.

Thirdly, another long tradition of Indonesian pedagogical circumstances is the huge gap between teachers and students in terms of hierarchical relationships. It is argued that successful teaching is mostly influenced by how teachers connect and build the good personal relationship with students (Noddings, 2012). However, in Indonesian educational contexts, teachers take precedence over students where the 'over-superiority' of teachers on students takes place in the everyday interaction. In the schooling system, students are strongly 'loyal' to a hierarchical structure of authority. For that reason, in most cases, the personal and emotional relationship between teachers and students are rarely created in pedagogical practices. In many classrooms, teachers ask questions, and students simply give answers without further comment from students. The common view of Indonesian students is those good students will never say 'no' or disagree with their teachers. As a result, rarely do students articulate an opinion which is different from their teachers' opinion. In some cases, even if students acknowledge that their teachers made wrong explanation or answers, students will not mention it. This traditional culture and the hierarchical teacher-student relationship may limit the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Therefore, to address this problem, there is a critical need that the relationship and connection between teachers and students in Indonesia should be transformed.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that transforming the current traditional practices of teachers' pedagogy has never been simple. Despite the introduction of teachers' professional standards in terms of personal and social competence in the reformed of Indonesian curriculum, many teachers remain employing traditional culture and 'old-fashioned' teaching strategies. Therefore, teachers need to reconceptualise their values, belief, and understanding about pedagogy and teacher-student relationship in order to be able to turn their teaching practices into effective teaching. It is important to emphasise that having only the professional standards of teachers or inquiry-based pedagogy in the curriculum document will not be as effective as if teachers don't change the way they think about what teaching really means. Hence, in the following part, the discussion on the attributes of expertise in teaching, especially the concept of teacher presence will be much elaborated.

TEACHER PRESENCE AS AN EXPERTISE

To this point, the discussion has been the cultural and pedagogical problems employed by teachers in Indonesian schooling system. Now, I will move on to elaborate another paradigm of teaching to discuss the concept of teacher presence as an important attribute of expert teachers. Rodgers and Reider-Roth (2006) argue that presence can be defined as the capability of teachers to connect and engage with students mentally, emotionally, and physically in the learning environment in order for teachers to be able to meet the needs of students in learning. In order for teachers to be present to their students, there are three dimensions that teachers are required to accomplish as experts. Those dimensions are the connection of teachers to students in terms of emotional and personal relationship, the connection of teachers to their pedagogical practices and content knowledge, and the connection of teachers to parents and the community beyond the classrooms (Rodgers & Reider-Roth, 2006). The discussion on those three dimensions will become more details in the following section.

a. Presence as Connecting to Students and Understanding Differences

This part suggests that the first attribute of being 'present' in teaching and learning practices is teachers' understanding of their students' personal characteristic and backgrounds. Rodgers and Reider-Roth (2006) argue that teachers should look closely to students' personal aspects because it will make teachers easier to 'enter into each student perspective'. By entering to students' perspectives, teachers can see and experience the way students experience the teaching and learning. As a result, teachers and students can develop the mutual empathy and a trusting teacher-student relationship. However, it is worth noting that building trusting relationships with students will be influenced by how teachers show their authenticity and originality in their everyday interaction. When students find that their teachers are showing unauthentic behaviour, as mentioned by Oplatka (2007) as 'emotional labor', it will create a fake and hierarchical relationship between teachers and students. Consequently, it is difficult for teachers to be able to improve connectedness with their students.

In contrast, Noddings (2012) argues that it is easier to have more meaningful and personal relationship with students once the behaviours such as caring, empathy, and affection are shown more genuinely by teachers. It is further argued that when students notice that their teachers care and put high expectations on them, and that their ideas and presence are valued by their teachers, students tend to learn better as well as value their teachers in return (Oplatka, 2007). For that reason, teachers as experts should put great efforts to make sure that students know that they are being cared. Teachers

should give the best that they can give to show that they are really intentional to help and teach their students.

As a result, the level of closeness and connectedness between students and teachers will increase which consequently affect to better pedagogical practices.

In Indonesian education contexts, however, teachers may need to change their paradigm and perception about what really means being a teacher. Teachers need to acknowledge that they have various roles as educators. Effective teachers should be able to act not only as teachers and elders but also as 'friends' where students can share their problems toward their study (Gregory, 2001). Therefore, one aspect that should be underlined by Indonesian teachers is to create balancing and an authentic relationship with their students.

Aside from having a connectedness and an authentic relationship with students, another important attribute of teachers in order to be 'present' is the ability of teachers to acknowledge the differences among their students. Teachers should understand that every student might have different abilities and consequently have different preferences on the way they should learn. Therefore, expert teachers should identify students' social behaviour and their strengths and weaknesses so that they can direct their teaching practices according to the way students prefer to learn. According to Brookfield (2006), knowing students' ways of learning is an essential skill that teachers should accomplish. By knowing and understanding students' preferences in learning, it might be easily for teachers to provide effective teaching since teachers' pedagogical practices will be grounded based on the students' needs. This attribute coheres with Eison's (1990) idea of effective teaching where he argues that to enhance the pedagogical practices in a classroom; teachers should attempt to ground their teaching in how their students are learning.

Given this important attribute, the notion of flexibility in teaching becomes essential as another character of skilful teachers. Haberman (1991) in his discussion on 'the pedagogy of poverty' argues that students should be taught in a flexible way without relying on a structuralized way of delivering knowledge. By having flexibility in conducting teaching and learning practices, it enables teachers to have more dynamic and exciting classroom circumstances where teachers will develop appropriate pedagogies to suit their students' abilities and needs. Moreover, Brookfield (2006) argues that unpredictable moments and various forms of limitations may occur in teaching and learning practices of every teacher, even for the experienced one. Therefore, in that kind of situation, being able to develop flexibilities to maximise the available resources and facilities would be significant for teachers where they can handle and win over their students no matter how out of control the planning is.

b. Presence as Connection to Content and Pedagogical Knowledge

Having just discussed the first dimension of presence where teachers should build an authentic relationship as well as provide flexibilities in their teaching practices, it is now important to discuss how presence is reflected into two important notions: subject content knowledge and knowledge of students and pedagogy.

Firstly, it is argued that the presence of teachers is characterised by teachers' deep understanding of the subject that they will teach (Rodgers & Reider-Roth, 2006). Similarly, according to Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011), among seven attributes mentioned as professional standards of Australian teachers, it is also confirmed that standard two underlines the importance of teachers to 'know the content and how to teach it'. It means that in order for teachers to be present and to be able to teach relevant and appropriate contents to their students, teachers should familiarise themselves with the knowledge of subjects. After having deep understanding of the substantive principals on the subject, it is also required for teachers to be able to implement those principals into meaningful and effective pedagogies. For instance, teachers should select and organise the learning materials with clear guidelines and explanations on intended skills and purposes that are to be achieved by students.

However, referring to the pedagogical practices in Indonesia, many teachers know the content knowledge of their subject very well, but when it comes to implementing it into teaching practices, they found a lot of hurdles for the knowledge to be accessible to their students. It is true that how students gain knowledge and understanding are obviously affected by the way teachers in offering instructions and pedagogies. When teachers cannot translate their knowledge into effective teaching, students will be difficult to understand what they are learning. Therefore, Loughran (2010) suggests that expert teachers should find a way to best explain subject-matter to students. One key to the problem is effective preparation and planning (Eison, 1990). Before coming to the classroom, it is fundamental for teachers to plan and prepare their intended pedagogies and strategies employed in the classroom. Expert teachers should recognise the importance of revisiting their lessons to seek useful resources for students, re-exploring the content and appropriate strategies, and more importantly preparing for 'the unexpected moments' in the actual teaching and learning practices.

Secondly, another important aspect that teachers are expected to accomplish is the ability to observe students' development and then develop pedagogies that can further enhance students' teach (Rodgers & Reider-Roth, 2006).

Teachers should be able to identify how much students have learnt from their classroom practices. In doing so, teachers should be able to monitor their students' interaction or responses during the teaching and learning so that they can evaluate whether learning already occurs or not in their actual pedagogies. The students' interaction and responses during the classroom teaching and learning as well as formative assessment result should become the foundation of teachers to see the progress of their students and thus help teachers to identify areas for improvement. Rather than using the assessment result for the sake of the ranking system and students' grade, the results on assessment and interactional observations should be used formatively by teachers to develop strategies that can enhance better and successful learning of students.

Similarly, to successfully develop better pedagogical practices, Loughran (2010) advocates the necessity of teachers to occupy reflective practice in teaching. Expert teachers should reflect upon their past teaching experiences to enhance successful teaching and avoid unsuccessful approaches for future references. Expert teachers should be able to use the knowledge of past to translate it into better pedagogical practices. Expert teachers may not always be successful in developing effective teaching instructions, however, they are always capable to use their experience to develop better teaching and learning experience in the future. Thus, expert teachers are seldom found to identify themselves as experts as they are in a constant realization that they need to learn more. This idea absolutely coheres with Feiman-Nemser's idea (2012) who put great emphasis on the importance of teachers as perpetual learners.

c. Presence as Engaging with Parents and Communities

In this section, I will discuss the importance of teachers' engagement with communities and parents in order for teachers to deeply engage and present to their students' learning. According to Bernstein (2004), students' academic success requires two sites of pedagogic acquisition, the school and the home. It means that teachers' accomplishment in enhancing students' learning will also depend on students' exposure in their everyday life outside the schooling context. Therefore, to be able to fully present to students' learning, teaching demands teachers to connect not only to students but also to parents and community. Whilst parents may not directly influence on pedagogical practices of teachers in a classroom, the engagement with parents will be significant for teachers in strengthening the teaching and learning. For instance, the involvement of parents in a conversation and collaboration with teachers will give valuable inputs for teachers in linking the classroom pedagogical practices to students' experiences in their daily life. Thus, teacher-parents' engagement and communication will

contribute to initiating a constructive learning environment for students.

Besides, the attendance of teachers in knowing and building a relationship with parents will enable teachers and parents to understand what is expected and how students will be taught during the learning process. As a result, they will have the same vision and understanding on students' learning and objectives. According to Gao (2008), different views between teachers and parents on how teaching and learning should be operated have always been a problem in a schooling context. The sense of unfairness and dissatisfaction of parents have always emerged where they are not comfortable with the way their children are educated by their teachers. Consequently, with the minimum support from parents, the teaching and learning practices cannot be operated effectively. In most cases, parents will simply blame teachers for the unsuccessful practices of education.

In Indonesian education context, for instance, it is reported that a male teacher in Senior Secondary School in South Sulawesi was even hit and beaten by his student and his father during the schooling time (Hajramurni, 2016). This unfortunate incident might be argued as the result of the bad relationship and lack of communication between teachers and parents. The teacher cannot present to meet the expectations from the parents and the student. Therefore, to develop the teaching practices of teachers in schools, it is important for teachers to acknowledge that engagement with parents and communities is fundamental. Parents can contribute not only on funding and financial support, but also their knowledge of their children, which will be significant for teachers if they can discuss and share to decide appropriate actions and academic activities for students. Unless teachers can create good personal relationship with parents and communities, it might be argued that teachers will not be able to fully present on exploring and developing students' potential.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, there have been many problems on pedagogical practices of teachers in Indonesia. The key issue is that teachers mostly put the great emphasis on the importance of grading, ranking system, and competition, while hardly do they focus on the importance of reflexivity to provide better teaching practices. The national examination has been pointed out as the leading factor that discourages innovation and change in pedagogical practices. Besides, another common issue of Indonesian education is that the majority of teachers continue implementing rote learning practices where memorisation rather than understanding has become the major focus of teachers' pedagogy. Learning has been situated in a teacher-centred rather than a student-centred setting. In addition, teachers' personal relationship with students, parents, and communities seems to be neglected as part

of an important notion to enhance pedagogical practices of teachers.

Therefore, while teachers' education and continuous training is critical to develop teachers' expertise in teaching, it is also needed for teachers to reconceptualise their current understanding of what pedagogy is. It is true that effective changes in pedagogy require teachers to realise the importance of 'presence' as the foundation of their pedagogical practices. In doing so, teachers are expected to be able to build connection and engagement with students, subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, and parents and communities. All in all, expert teaching is not about the absence of mistakes and limitations in the practices, but it is the presence of teachers to their students.

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