

Teachers' Beliefs in Balancing Linguistic Competence and Teaching Performance in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Linguistic competence and teaching performance among English teachers in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms have been at the center of linguists' discussion, both theoretical and applied in the 21st century. This study attempts to examine the importance of balancing linguistic competence and teaching performance in learning and teaching of English classrooms. Moreover, this study aims at exploring the different ways of linguistic competence and teaching performance defined by linguists. It also investigates how differing interpretations of these two concepts influence learning and teaching in foreign language classrooms.

Following the idea above, an online survey was conducted to discover the EFL teachers' beliefs about linguistic competence and teaching performance in EFL teaching practices. The result indicated that most of them have a clear idea toward the concept of linguistic competencies and teaching performance and believed that it is important for EFL teachers to have a good command of linguistic competence in order to help them perform better in their teaching practices/performances. Therefore, linguistic competencies and teaching performance should be placed equally.

Keywords: Linguistic competence, teaching performance, EFL teachers, EFL classroom.

1. Background of the Study

It is an important element to discuss the linguistic competence related to teachers' competence in the teaching and learning process because teachers have to design, implement, and develop the syllabus. Mowla (2008) stated that teachers should improve their language skills in order to get well-educated learners who will be involved in the teaching-learning process. By considering this purpose, thus, EFL teachers have to be competent linguistically and professionally particularly in the language they teach.

Linguistic competence can be defined as the system of linguistic knowledge (Chomsky, 1965). It is different from a linguistic performance that emphasizes on the way of the language system which is used in communication. Linguistic competence, therefore, deals primarily with an idea between a speaker and a listener in applying the language knowledge in actual performance.

Applied to language learning and teaching, linguistic competence plays an important aspect for language teachers in order to gain the goals of language learning and teaching. Hattie (2009) argued that the quality of a teacher is one of the key factors that may have contributed a lot to the students' achievement. Thus, as language teachers, particularly English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, should have linguistic competence such as communicative competence including general competencies.

The general competencies can be categorized both in linguistics and language teaching performance. It is because both linguistic competence and teaching performance have influenced the process of teaching and learning in language classrooms. It is because there was a significant difference between teachers' linguistic competence and their achievement as language teachers (Majeed, N. T. & Yassein, M. T. 2013). As a result of the research conducted by these researchers, it is found that EFL teachers must have well enough linguistic competence because it is found that EFL teachers, especially in that research, did not develop their linguistic competence through self-development.

Therefore, it is suggested that EFL teachers should be continuously involved with in-service training courses in order to develop their linguistic competence. By considering this case, it automatically will help EFL teachers to create and do an effective language classroom. In line with this case, Newby (2011) established that there is a relationship between the use of a linguistic code of a language (performance) and the basic rules of language knowledge stored in the minds of a person (competence).

Therefore, this current research is conducted to seek how important linguistic competence to influence EFL teachers' performance in learning and teaching process. As good language teachers, they do not only have to know well about pedagogical competence, interpersonal skill, and personal qualities, but they also have to consider more about technical knowledge (Hartatik, 2011). It can be illustrated in the picture below.

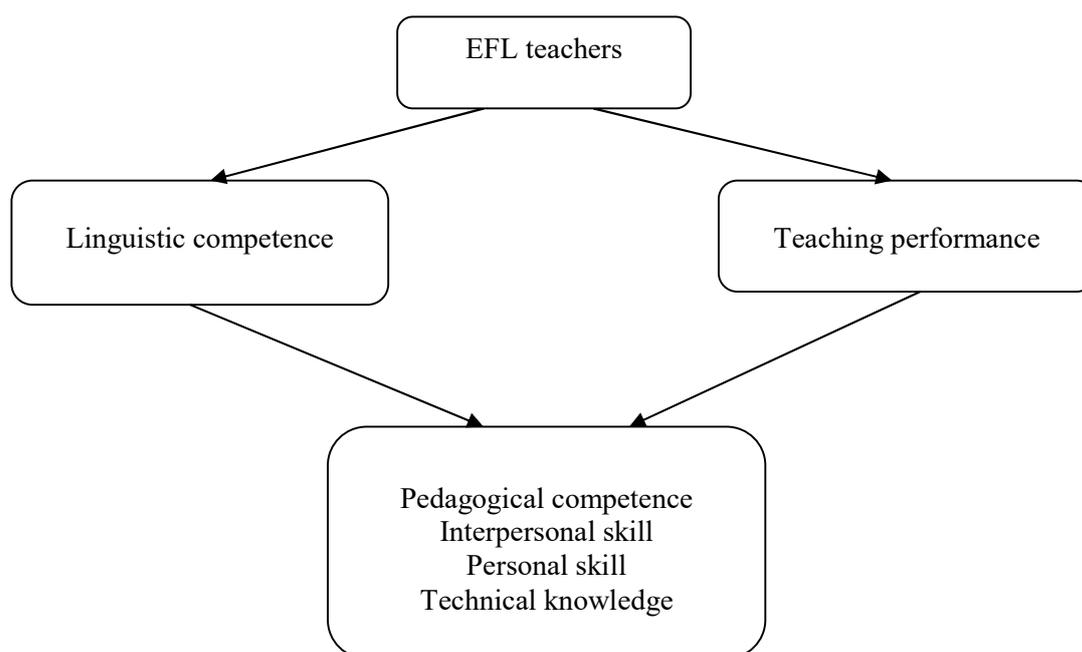


Figure 1. Good characters of EFL teachers (Hartatik, 2011)

This concept is about how EFL teachers understand the linguistic system of English phonology, grammar, and discourse. They may also comprehensively grasp the basic principles of language learning and teaching. In relation to this concept, EFL teachers, therefore, should be encouraged to have a good skill about language knowledge and language use because it will let them give the opportunity for their students to interact using English in both receptive and productive skills such as speaking and listening (Tahir, 2017). Wong (2011) stated that language knowledge is about the structure of a language while language use is related to the language production and the use of the language physically such as spoken or written skill.

In addition, EFL teachers should have fluent competence in language skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) which can be related to the understanding of the close connection between language and culture so that they can relate teaching and learning process to the real experience. Moreover, EFL teachers should place the knowledge as the first aspect in order to develop the students' achievement in a foreign language. Patel (2003) cited in Tahir (2017) stated the holistic approach which covers some aspects that should be considered by EFL teachers such as knowledge, self, discipline, personal and professional development, and learning and teaching.

2. Research Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the EFL teachers' beliefs, perspective, and suggestions about balancing linguistic competence and teaching performance in the ELF classrooms.

3. Research Problem

The research problem is formulated as “what are the EFL teachers' beliefs, perspective, and suggestion about balancing linguistic competence and teaching performance in the EFL classrooms?”

4. Research Methodology

The research design is descriptive qualitative. For collecting the data, the researcher conducted an online survey among EFL teachers. Those all teachers were randomly selected. There were 132 EFL teachers participated in the current study. After receiving 132 questionnaires, however, out of 132 EFL teachers 30 of them answered and returned the questionnaires. Out of 30 teachers who returned the questionnaires, 5 of them were willing to be interviewed by telephone. These 30 EFL teachers (12 male and 18 female) were randomly taken from the different level of schools such as an elementary school, a junior high school, a senior high school, and a private English course in Gorontalo, Indonesia, to respond to the questionnaire. Besides, these participants consist of 3 teachers from Elementary schools, 6 teachers from Junior high schools, 6 teachers from Senior high schools, and 15 teachers from private schools.

The questionnaire and interview were used to gather EFL teachers' perspectives about the concept of linguistic competence and teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Additionally, the survey conducted based on the characteristics of good language teachers, which consists of four major areas namely pedagogical competence, interpersonal skill and personal skill, and technical knowledge. Moreover, the questionnaire or the interview designed by the researcher consists of two main parts of questions. The first part was about EFL teachers' general identity while another part was about the questions of their beliefs and perspective about linguistic competence and teaching performance.

Regarding their perspective and beliefs about linguistic competence and teaching performance, there were seven general questions formulated by the researcher. Those are about the important aspect to understand the linguistic system of English phonology, grammar, and discourse in EFL classrooms; their perspective about EFL teachers' responsibility to comprehensively grasp the basic principles of language learning and teaching, EFL teachers have to have fluent competence in language skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading), EFL teachers need to know and do the effective classroom teaching by understanding the knowledge and skill of English and teachers' quality.

5. Results

From the questionnaire and interview provided by the researchers to the participants, the result indicated that about 50% EFL teachers were from formal schools (elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools) and 50 % EFL teachers were from non-formal schools (private schools). This result can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. The total of participants

Schools	Gender	Total
Elementary schools	Female (2), Male (1)	3
Junior high schools	Female (3), Male (3)	6
Senior high schools	Female (2), Male (4)	6
Private schools	Female (9), Male (6)	15
Total		30

Furthermore, all participants have been asked and interviewed about their perspective on EFL teachers' linguistic competencies and teaching performances. The general indicators of the questions to get the information are stated in the Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' perspective about linguistic competence and teaching performance in EFL classrooms

Items	Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Is it important to understand the linguistic system of English phonology, grammar, and discourse in EFL classrooms? Why?	Strongly agree	9	20.7
	Agree	14	47.5
	Disagree	4	8.6
	Strongly disagree	3	7.5
Do you think EFL teachers need to comprehensively grasp the basic principles of language learning and teaching? why?	Strongly agree	6	16.2
	Agree	15	52.7
	Disagree	5	12.6
	Strongly disagree	4	8.6
Why does an English teacher have to have fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening, and reading?	Strongly agree	8	19.2
	Agree	17	66.7
	Disagree	3	7.5
	Strongly disagree	2	6.7
Do you agree that EFL teachers need to understand the close connection between language and culture? why?	Strongly agree	15	52.7
	Agree	9	20.7
	Disagree	4	8.6
	Strongly disagree	2	6.7
Do you think teachers need to know and to do the effective classroom teaching by understanding the knowledge and skills of English? why?	Strongly agree	10	25.7
	Agree	15	52.7
	Disagree	5	12.6
	Strongly disagree	0	0
Do you think EFL teachers' quality is one of the key factors that influence students' achievement? why?	Strongly agree	8	19.2
	Agree	12	34.6
	Disagree	6	16.2
	Strongly disagree	4	8.6

Because there were seven general questions formulated by the researcher, in the current research, one of those seven questions is not mentioned in the Table above. This is because the EFL teachers' suggestions were gathered as recommendations to the future EFL teachers. Therefore, further explanation will be provided in the next part. Furthermore, based on the results above, it can be determined that most of the participants stated "agree" in answering those seven general questions. The calculation of this result can be drawn in the Table below.

Table 3. The amount of responses of the general questions

Variables	Questions	Response(s)
Strongly agree	Question 1	9
	Question 2	6
	Question 3	8
	Question 4	15
	Question 5	10
	Question 6	8
	<i>Total</i>	<i>56</i>
Agree	Question 1	14
	Question 2	15
	Question 3	17
	Question 4	9
	Question 5	15
	Question 6	12
	<i>Total</i>	<i>82</i>
Disagree	Question 1	4

	Question 2	5
	Question 3	3
	Question 4	4
	Question 5	5
	Question 6	6
	<i>Total</i>	<i>27</i>
Strongly disagree	Question 1	3
	Question 2	4
	Question 3	2
	Question 4	2
	Question 5	0
	Question 6	4
	<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>

The Table above determines that most of EFL teachers from different level schools agreed with the given questions. By analyzing the result from this Table, it shows that most of EFL teachers in Gorontalo state their argument in the “Agree” aspect, which shows 82 total responses. However, their argument in the “strongly agree” answer is in the second place which shows 56 total responses, and the following aspects, the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” aspects, are in the third and fourth places which shows 27 and 15 total responses.

6. Discussions

The questionnaire and interview help the researcher to gather the participants’ responses related to the linguistic competence and teaching performances in English teaching and learning process.

6.1. EFL Teachers’ Beliefs about Balancing Linguistic Competence and Teaching Performance

Most of the participants agree that it is important for EFL teachers to master and understand the linguistic system because they believe that teachers need to have better skills than students. In addition, it will also help them to speak and write correctly in order to make them professional because all those items of the linguistic system will influence teachers’ pedagogical skill, interpersonal skill, and personal qualities. In relation to pedagogical skill, the linguistic system will help teachers to prepare better and suitable lesson before they teach in a classroom. This is due to guiding students to a better understanding and application of English usage. This means that teachers need to integrate the linguistic aspects, not completely teach the theory. In other words, linguistic competence in terms of English phonology, grammar, and discourse are the fundamental of learning English.

However, another side from the participants’ perspective explained that not all the linguistic elements are important because when teaching English grammar, they tend to apply the use of language grammar into a daily conversation rather than explaining the structure, particularly for elementary students. In contrast, it is important for teachers to teach grammar rules for advanced levels because of their level of education.

Moreover, EFL teachers need to have the basic principles of language learning and teaching. All participants involved in this current research argued that they strongly agreed if EFL teachers have to have good enough basic principles before teaching in order to make the students comprehend the material so that the result of teaching and learning will be maximum. It is because mastering basic principles of language learning is a must. In addition, teachers are obligated to comprehend basic principles of language learning and teaching. Even though they are gifted to be a teacher, understanding the notions of language, learning, and teaching, will expand their insight and deliver a successful learning in practice because the basic principle of teaching is the first key to the teachers’ needs in order to make the effective teaching goals. Hattie (2009) emphasized that a teacher’s competence plays major roles in students’ achievement.

In relation to the students' achievement, therefore, teachers are not only teachers but are also promoters, motivators, and facilitators or role model for their students. In relation to this concept, EFL teachers should propose a pedagogical framework consisted of teacher wisdom (teachers' experiences, strategies, personal role and task design), device features (any kinds of language learning devices), learner mobility (place and time in language learning and teaching), and language dynamics (the variation of communication and language use (Kukulka-Hulme, Norris, and Donohue (2015, cited in Tahir, 2017)). The pedagogical framework is drawn in the picture below.

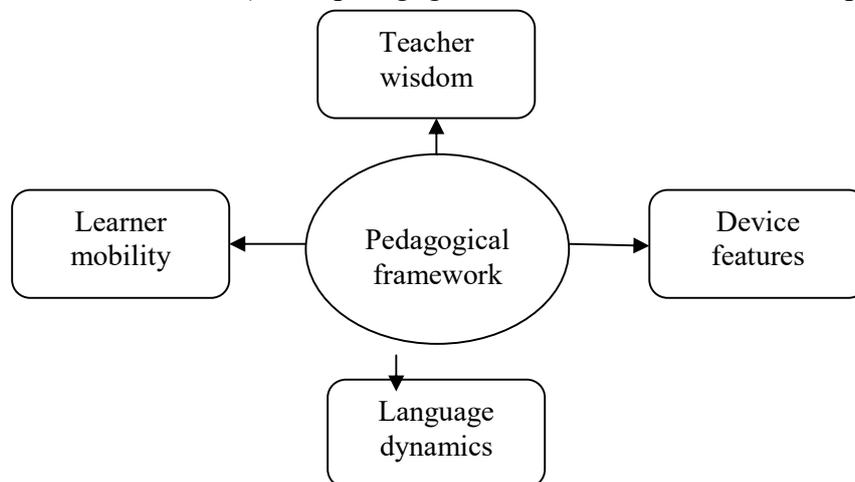


Figure 2. Pedagogical framework

This is also in line with the teachers' language competence. Due to the effective teaching and learning, teachers are expected to have fluent competence in language skills such as speaking, writing, listening and reading. It is an important aspect to be mastered by EFL teachers since these language skills are connected to each other, for example, the integration between listening and speaking or reading and writing (receptive and productive skills). Moreover, it leads to a concept that the teacher's competence will influence the students' competence. However, there are six participants who were not really sure about having all these language skills in teaching and learning. They argue that a teacher may have no preference or the skill that they understand the most. Therefore, it will be alright if a teacher may have no perfect comprehension in one of the skills. Nevertheless, it is continuously equipping them with sufficient knowledge of the four language skill essentials.

6.2. EFL Teacher's Perspective about Language and Culture to Support Teaching Performance

To connect the language and culture in language teaching and learning should be understood by EFL teachers. It is a good thing if teachers include culture in language teaching due to the compulsory skills. Also, to understand the language, both teachers and students should understand the culture as well as possible because they are acquired together and are not separate (Mitchell and Myles, 2004 cited in Ho, 2009). As a consequence, teachers should learn the culture in order to make a connection between the language use, for example, the use of formal words the teacher taught to the students or informal vocabularies that are only used in a specific situation.

In relation to culture, understanding the language will be demonstrated about understanding the culture which can take teachers and students to the way of life, the way they think, feel, exist, and relate to each other. EFL teachers, of course, will be challenged with this situation because they are capable of reflecting the relationship between two cultures. It also helps students to experience new things, particularly about culture, because the culture contributes to the students' achievement, especially if the topic is interesting.

6.3. EFL Teachers' Suggestions to all EFL Teachers about Balancing Linguistic Competence and Teaching Performance

There are actually several points that should be considered as EFL teachers to balance their linguistic competence and teaching performance. It is because teaching a language is teaching to people how to communicate to others using other languages. In relation to the teaching and learning process, students' confidence in using the language is more important than sticking to the patterns and making students use correct grammar usage. Teachers should let the students communicate and do "trials, mistakes, and errors" so they can learn more from practice than methods of learning.

Another perspective given by the participants was about reading. All EFL teachers may improve their linguistic competencies and teaching performances by reading and studying the material of linguistic competences and practicing it in the classroom. The teachers can also share information with other teachers and absolutely join in a workshop about linguistic competencies.

However, to be a good teacher who balances linguistic competence and teaching performance, it should be from their heart. Teachers do not have to think a lot about money or salary due to being a teacher is a great job. Thus, teachers should rely more on the responsibility of teachers in order to make the students change the world by pursuing their dreams.

7. Conclusions and Suggestions

To live in today's multicultural world, EFL teachers should encourage themselves to be professional. They are expected to have a good competence in language especially English as a foreign language. They need to develop their knowledge about English in order to support their performances in teaching English. Thus, they are not only expected to develop their language knowledge or linguistic competence but they should also try to be good English teachers by mastering their linguistic competence and their ability to teach English their students.

By having the whole explanation about this current research, it can be concluded that most of EFL teachers in Gorontalo, Indonesia, have strong argumentations about balancing their linguistic competence and teaching performance in teaching English as a foreign language. Moreover, it is really important to have good enough linguistic competence in order to support or help teachers to teach in language classrooms. Thus, the characteristic of teachers in terms of their competencies is needed. To have good characteristics of EFL teachers, they have to encourage themselves to have good linguistic competence and teaching performance for a better practice in EFL classrooms.

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