

REVEALING THE LEVELS OF REFLECTION OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN TEACHING PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on revealing the levels of pre-service English teachers' reflection during teaching practice program. The research design used in this study was a qualitative case study using reflective teaching journals and questionnaires as data collection instruments. The participants in this study were three English language education students of the 6th semester who were conducting teaching practice. This study revealed that pre-service teachers' reflection levels were at the descriptive reflection and dialogic reflection levels. The pedagogical implication was that the reflection can help pre-service teachers develop their reflection skills by familiarizing themselves with reflection practices, making reflection as an important part of professional development, and seeking guidance from experienced teachers or mentors.

Keywords: reflective practice; pre-service English teachers' teaching practicum

INTRODUCTION

To analyze, interpret and evaluate their experiences in order to improve the quality of their future teaching, teachers use reflective practice, which is usually viewed as a cyclical and systematic form of inquiry (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). This practice is concerned with improving skills and competencies necessary for the development of task-specific as well as

more general skills. Pre-service teachers (PSTs) have the opportunity to improve classroom procedures, assessment methods, lesson planning, and all other aspects of the teaching and learning process by reflecting on their teaching and learning activities. Thus, the knowledge, abilities and skills possessed by pre-service teachers will be very useful for them in the future (Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017).



PSTs are student teachers who do not yet have teaching qualifications and are pursuing teacher education to become a teacher. To support teacher professionalism, prospective teachers are equipped through the PPL program. It is a clear expectation in teacher education that pre-service teachers will engage in activities during their studies that allow for reflection, both as a process and an outcome.

Nuraeni (2021) conducted a study on “pre-service English teachers' reflective practice strategies during teaching practice to promote professional development”. They found that all pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to engage in reflective practice by exploring different ways to ask questions and decide on problems they experienced in classroom teaching. Kim (2018) explored the study of “pre-service teachers' reflective journal writing on practicum: focus on reflection and perception”. She revealed that open-ended journals referring to a list of guiding questions can help pre-service teachers' reflections. Open journals can help pre-service teachers to promote the practice of reflection.

With regard to reflection, there are still few studies that identify the level of teacher reflection. Meanwhile, this study focuses on exploring the levels of reflection of pre-service teachers in the English language teaching program.

Reflective Practice

Based on the theory proposed by Dewey (1933), reflection is the process of actively, persistently, and carefully considering each belief or form of supposed knowledge by considering the premises that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.

As mentioned by Wallace in 1998, critically reflecting is important because

students can build their professional identity (Setyaningrahayu, et al, 2019). By reflecting deeply through the teaching experience, students will have the opportunity to develop their professional identity. Reflection is very important and there are many improvements in pre-service teachers' teaching practices. Therefore, reflection should be trained, taught, and implemented in every aspect of the teaching and learning process specifically for pre-service teachers. In fact, pre-service teachers develop their competencies well through reflection. It can be concluded that the practice of self-reflection can improve teachers' ability to think critically, increase individual teachers' capacity to develop self-knowledge, and develop professionalism in teaching.

Levels of Reflection

There are different levels of reflection that occur in self-reflection. Due to the different definitions, analyzing the levels of reflection requires frameworks that have been developed by reflection researchers (e.g. Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zwozdiak-Myers, 2018; Korthagen, 2011, as cited in Syslova, 2015). For example, the framework of levels of reflection developed by Van Manen (1977). He is believed to be the first researcher to develop levels of reflection (Moon, 2006). There are three categories of Van Mannen's (1977) levels of reflection, namely, 1) technical rationality, which contains context-free generalizations about teaching and learning that are not related to specific instances of classroom experiences, but rather to teaching or classrooms in general. 2) practical rationality, which contains context-appropriate reflections on teaching and learning based on specific examples of classroom experiences, events, and student actions. And 3) critical rationality, which



contains multi-contextuality that includes specific incidents or actions across other teaching contexts (Nurfaidah, et.al, 2017).

Hatton & Smith (1995) mention Van Manen's three levels in relation to the substantive purpose or main focal point of reflection. Hatton & Smith (1995) developed Van Manen's levels of reflection for teacher education based on data and theory that characterize reflection phenomenon research. Hatton & Smith's levels of reflection are also what the author uses in this study as a framework for analysing the data collection. They categorized four levels of reflection to identify reflection writing. The four levels of reflection are descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection.

1. Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing called non-reflection means that the writing is not considered reflective if it only reports the literature or describes the events that happened in the classroom.

2. Descriptive Reflection

Descriptive reflection means it is reflective, as it is not just a description of events but there is some attempt in the writing to give reasons or justification for events or actions but in a reported or descriptive way.

3. Dialogical Reflection

Reflection that indicates “stepping back from the event or action leading to a different level of pondering, discussing with oneself and exploring experiences, events, and actions by using the quality of judgment and possible alternatives to explain and hypothesize”. These stages start from description, analysis, evaluation, alternatives, and generalization to metacognition as an iterative phase of reflection.

4. Critical Reflection

“Critical reflection is the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). It suggests that critical reflection involves a continuous and careful assessment of beliefs or knowledge, considering both the evidence that supports them and the possible consequences or conclusions they may lead to.

Pre-service Teachers and Teaching Practices in English Language Education Programs

Mufidah (2019) defines English teacher education programs as programs that prepare students to become professional English teachers. In teacher education programs, teaching experience is essential for prospective teachers to develop their teaching skills.

Supporting professional teacher standards through the implementation of teaching practicum. Teaching practicum is an educational program for prospective teachers that aims to educate and motivate them to gain understanding and expertise related to the competencies of a teacher (Rahmadiyah, Hariani, & Yudiono, 2020; Fitri, Nurhayati, & Suchaina, 2023).

Iqbal & Nuraeni (2017) stated that the PPL program provides an opportunity for prospective teachers to develop their abilities in the real classroom teaching and learning process. They get a good experience even though they have to go through difficulties during the practice. Through direct observation and experience, teachers can reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching methods, the effectiveness of their learning strategies, and how they respond to students' individual needs. This

allows pre-service teachers to reflect on their role as educators.

METHOD

The research design used in this study was a qualitative case study using reflective teaching journals and questionnaires as data collection instruments. The term 'qualitative research' is a general term used to refer to a complex and evolving research methodology. It focuses on questions that examine the relationship between information about people's actions and phenomena, and the settings in which they do those things (Crocker, 2009). The qualitative research design adopted in this research is a case study. Yin (2003), states a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a recent event in a real-life context, especially when the boundaries and context are not easily visible".

Meanwhile, the participants were 3 students in their 6th semester of the English education study program in one of the universities in Bogor. The reason for involving these 3 participants was that they were in the teaching practice period so they could practice their teaching reflection. In this research the researchers used reflective teaching journal and open-response questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from Kim (2018) and Orakci (2021). The research used open-response questionnaire to get deeper information from participants. Reflective teaching journals were taken 8 times during one month. To analyze the results of the reflective teaching journals, the journals were framed with Hatton & Smith's (1995) characteristics of reflection levels. Also, the data analysis questionnaire was divided into three stages, there are data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion based on Miles and Huberman (1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the data collected in the reflective teaching journal. This researcher used Hatton & Smith's (1995) categories of reflection levels as a technique to analyze the data collection. The categories of reflection levels are descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogical reflection, and critical reflection.

Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing is not considered as reflection writing. It is simply a form of report that describes events or literature and does not indicate interpretation, analysis, or justification of the events described. The tendency to explore teaching experiences in a reportive way is exemplified in the following vignette.

"On Wednesday I taught in class M.4/1. I replaced the teacher to teach English. At that time, I was confused because I had no preparation. For that, I tried to find ideas about what material to teach. After a while, I finally chose to play a game. The students were very happy."

(entry #1)

This writing outcome is categorized as non-reflection because the practicing teacher may not have an understanding of what reflection is and how to describe what happened by analyzing and interpreting the experience. This can also happen if the individual has no experience in writing reflections. As said by Tsui (2011, as cited in Effendi & Triastuti, 2022) teachers in the early stages tend to be interpretive and less analytical, thus making them tell what they experienced with limited reasoning about their actions.



Descriptive Reflection

PSTs' reflective teaching journal entry data mostly resulted in the descriptive reflection category. Reflections are categorized as descriptive reflections because they are characterized by writing more than a description of events by attempting to provide reasons based on personal judgment without analysis.

PST 1's reflection, for example, shows that PST 1 can reflect on his teaching at a descriptive level. This is because PST 1's reflection writing meets the characteristics of descriptive reflection, namely being able to describe classroom events in sufficient detail and provide reasons behind some actions as in the following quote.

“What I taught today was Verb To Be through a song. This song uses a mixed language, English and Thai. I called one of the students and asked him to write the lyrics because the song is written in Thai, so to avoid mistakes in writing, I asked the student to write it himself.”

(entry #2)

Student teachers began to focus on the strategies and methods used to achieve the set goals. The ability to justify events, provide reasons or justifications for actions even in descriptive reports, as stated by Hatton and Smith (1994) this level of reflection is easier to master. And evidenced by the findings at the descriptive level of reflection is the most reflective of student teachers' teaching journals.

Dialogic Reflection

The third form is a deeper level of reflection. This stage starts from description, analysis, evaluation, choice, and generalization, which then develops into a metacognitive process as part of an

iterative cycle of reflection. This point was raised by PST 2 in the reflective teaching journal in the fifth entry. He stated:

“Learning during the day makes children lazy because they want to go home. When I am in a situation like this I have to be able to raise the children's spirits so that they want to learn, so I took the initiative to give a quiz to the children and if they can [answer the quiz], I will give them a prize.”

(entry #5)

This fifth reflection teaching journal entry from PST 2 belongs to dialogic reflection as it reflects the teacher's ability to step back from classroom events, consider different perspectives and find creative solutions to challenges in learning. In the reflection, the teacher faced a situation where the children became lazy when the lesson was conducted during the day.

Thus, this reflection shows that the teacher not only understands the situation, but also engages in a dialog with herself to find better solutions. She explores alternative possibilities in dealing with learning challenges and considers the impact of her actions. This reflects a higher level of reflection, dialogic reflection, where the teacher develops a deeper understanding of the learning experience and seeks ways to effectively improve her practice.

At this level, pre-service teachers still need to be guided to think reflectively to improve teaching and student achievement. The participants demonstrated what Hatton and Smith (1995) call 'stepping back' from the events/actions that led them to make quality judgments.



Critical Reflection

Up to the results analysis stage, the above research findings could not prove that student teachers could achieve the highest level of reflection mentioned by Hatton and Smith (1995), which is critical reflection. Hatton and Smith's (1994) research states that it is unlikely that the critical level appears in teacher reflection in the early stages of classroom teaching experience, because to reach the highest level requires more open-mindedness and more experience that takes a long time.

Based on the findings focusing on the reflection level of English PSTs, it was revealed that all student teacher participants had passed the descriptive level of reflection and two of them were able to reach the dialogical level of reflection, although their written delivery was still limited.

CONCLUSION

The levels of reflection are categorized into four as initiated by Hatton and Smith (1995). Based on the results of the study, most PSTs reached the dialogic level. This is indicated by PSTs' ability to "withdraw" from activities to analyze, evaluate, and explore learning challenges. Based on the pursuit journals, most began with descriptive statements about events that occurred without justification. There were some statements that went beyond descriptive writing. As the PTS did more engagement in their learning, they showed an increase in their writing to descriptive reflection and dialogic reflection. However, there was no evidence of critical reflection where they not only explored, analyzed, and evaluated the learning, but also characteristics of critical reflection that analyzed its influence on the historical, socio-political, and cultural context of the event.

Based on these findings, it is hoped that prospective teachers can help develop their reflection skills by familiarizing themselves with reflection practices, making reflection an important part of professional development, and seeking guidance from experienced teachers or mentors.

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