# Reflective Practice Strategies of Pre-Service English Teachers during Teaching Practicum to Promote Professional Development

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**Abstract**
*Reflective practice in pre-service language teacher education is required as a tool to critically evaluate the link between theory and practice as well as to explore the beliefs and practices of pre-service English teachers during the teaching practicum programs. This study was aimed to explore the strategies of reflective practice used by pre-service English teachers during their teaching practicum to promote professional development. A case study was adopted as a research design and reflective journals were employed to collect data. The participants involved were six pre-service English teachers who had joined teaching practicum at schools for three months. This study employed thematic analysis for analysing the data from reflective journals. The results revealed that three strategies of reflective practice were identified: recollection, reflection-in-action, and mentoring process. In each strategy, the participants reflected differently based on the learning experiences they had, the teaching situation they faced, the ability to make decisions, and the beliefs they possessed. Through these strategies, they learned how to develop their own theories of teaching, how to make various links between theory and practice, and how to develop the level of thinking, problem solving, and decision making. If these strategies are continuously conducted, they ultimately can develop their professionalism as teachers. This study implies that reflective practice can*

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*also be incorporated in the curriculum of pre-service teachers and not only during teaching practicum since it entails huge benefits for pre-service English teacher development.*

**Keywords:** English pre-service teachers, professional development reflective practice, teaching practicum.


## 1.    INTRODUCTION

The complexity of teaching demands teachers to question their practices for their own professional development (Mathew et al., 2017). Certain ways can be done to accommodate their practices, and one of the many ways is through reflective practice. The reflective practice is how a teacher questions about what is going on in the classroom, evaluates what is being taught, finds out the strengths and weaknesses, and looks within themselves their own teaching philosophy.

The reflective practice is an important component to be integrated into the initial teacher education program, and it also has been widely investigated to find out how reflective practice contributes to the professionalism of pre-service teachers (PSTs) (see Faghighi & Sarab, 2016; Pandey, 2012; Tiainen et al., 2018). In the context of pre-service teachers, the reflective practice is usually occurred during teaching practicum at schools to give opportunity for the PSTs to evaluate the link between the theory they gained from campus and practice at schools (Yesilbursa, 2011), and to "build a sense of agency as future professional teachers and develop their autonomy and self-confidence" (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018, p. 922).

The development of research on reflective practice varied from investigating the reflection strategy through video recordings (Susoy, 2015), levels of reflection (Nurfaidah et al., 2017), the relationship between EFL teachers' reflective practices and self-efficacy (Moradkhani et al., 2017), to the teachers' perception of their own reflective teaching (Afshar & Farahani, 2018). All these indicate huge interest in reflective practice and its relation to other factors.

Even though the above studies have explored the importance of reflective practice, there is still much to be searched on how PSTs do the reflection on their experience during teaching practicum particularly in the process of reflection that leads to their professional development. Therefore, this present study is aimed to raise the issues of PSTs' experience in the process of reflection using certain strategies and how the reflection entails their professional development. This present study is guided by the following question: What are the strategies of reflective practice used by PSTs in teaching practicum programs to promote their professional development?


## 2.    LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1    Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has become a very popular concept in pre-service language teacher education. Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on action to engage in a process of continuous learning (Mathew et al., 2017). Through reflective practice, the

teachers can "structure or restructure actions, knowledge, theories or beliefs that inform teaching for the purpose of personal professional development" (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012, p. 5). Therefore, reflective teachers can continually learn from their teaching experiences by engaging a problem-solving process in which they "collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection" about their own teaching practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 1). Critical reflection can be described as a process of "contemplation with an openness to being changed, a willingness to learn, and a sense of responsibility for doing one's best" (Jay, 2003, p. 1). In addition, reflection is the process in which pre-service teachers (PSTs) engage in learning and teaching (professional practice) that provide a chance to critically analyse and evaluate that learning or practice (Black & Plowright, 2010). In this context, reflection constitutes a key rationale for reflective practice.

There are two reasons why reflective practice is beneficial for in-service and pre-service teachers to reflect on their practices. Firstly, they can develop their own theories of teaching English. Secondly, they make various links between theory and practice while exploring their own beliefs about teaching (Cirocki & Farrel, 2016; Pollard, 2005). Through reflective practice, they learn from their own professional experiences and they can develop the analysis of feelings and the evaluation of experiences (Mathew et al., 2017).

With regard to pre-service teachers (PSTs), they learn how to do reflective practice in the period of teaching practicum. They learn how to practice the skills of thinking critically, solving problems, and making decisions. In the teaching practicum, they also experience the process of teaching and learning in real situations. Therefore, by continually and critically evaluating their teaching experience, they can foster their reflective practice which eventually leads to their professional development (Mann & Walsh, 2013).

In conducting reflective practice, certain strategies can be used such as recollection (Selmo & Orsenigo, 2014; Wallace 1991), reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), and mentoring (Tonna et al., 2017). Thoughtful recollection in reflection leads students to heighten understanding of learning and relevant transfer of learning and skill (Selmo & Orsenigo, 2014). Pre-service teachers (PSTs) do recollections by recalling relevant knowledge or experience that may help them with their evaluation of the problem. Meanwhile, reflection-in-action is experiencing, thinking on your feet, thinking about what to do next, and acting straight away (Argyris & Schön, 1978). In other words, reflection-in-action is the capacity of PSTs to think deliberately and critically about what they are doing while they are doing it (Schön, 1983) as a response to revise the real action which will result in restructuring strategies and juxtaposing theory and practice to the real context.

With regard to mentoring, it is a one-to-one relationship between an experienced person and a less experienced person to learn or develop specific competencies. The mentor also has a pivotal role in encouraging the mentee to become critically reflective and to continue to learn throughout his or her career (Dymoke & Harrison, 2006). Thus, all the strategies of reflective practice are aimed to improve professional activity (Schön, 1987) and play a central role in professional development (Mathew et al., 2017).

## 2.2 Professional Development

Professional development can be described as the development of a person in his/her professional role (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). In the context of initial language teacher education, pre-service teachers (PSTs) are prepared to be able to develop their professionalism in many ways during their study as teacher candidates. One of the many ways is through teaching practicum where PSTs evolve the process of learning and growth (Farrell, 2007) and bring about change in the classroom practices and in "their attitudes and beliefs and in the learning outcomes of students" (Guskey, 2002, p. 381). Professional development for PSTs is elicited from individual personal experiences and reflections of teaching (Farrell, 2007). The reflection of teaching in the teaching practicum is pivotal for PSTs where they do the teaching in the classroom, observed by a mentor teacher, and afterward discuss and analyse the teaching performance with the mentor (mentoring process). Such a process can enhance teacher's professional skills and attitudes and improve the learning process as well as student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Guskey, 2002).

Professional development is one way to keep teachers updated on their knowledge, commitment, and enthusiasm about their work (Day, 1999). The strategies for professional development for PSTs include reflective analysis of teaching practices where they examine beliefs, values, and principles (Richards & Farrel, 2005), particularly during the mentoring process. Thus, their professionalism grows as a result of "gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 11).

In addition, professional development is also gained by PSTs since they always do the reflection on their own knowledge obtained from universities or elsewhere and the experience of their own. A wide variety of professional learning is aimed to assist teachers to enhance their professional knowledge, competence, and skill. This indicates that reflective practice can improve professional activity for teachers who teach in the classroom. For this reason, reflective practice constitutes a central role in professional development (Mathew et al., 2017).

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Participants and Location

This study adopted a qualitative case study research design as this study is "…an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40), and it focuses on a certain aspect and is descriptive in nature. This case study research was conducted at three senior high schools in West Java, Indonesia, where the pre-service teachers did their teaching practicum. The participants of this study were six pre-service teachers (PSTs) in their seventh semester who were taking the teaching practicum program in three different schools (two participants in each school). These participants were randomly chosen, and they had no teaching experience before. Therefore, this practicum program was their initial experience to teach in a real classroom situation.

### 3.2    Instrument

The reflective journal was employed as the single instrument for this research. In two months of the practicum program, the PSTs had to write a reflective journal after their teaching performances and mentoring time. Each PST could write as many cases as they could find in their teaching practicum process in two months. This reflective journal tracked down their reflections on teaching experiences, weaknesses, and strengths. Furthermore, in this reflective journal, the PSTs wrote about and discussed not only emotional but also intellectual hardship and transformation on what they know about identity and learning (Barney & Mackinlay, 2010) as well as developed more complex levels of reflection (Ryan, 2015).

### 3.3    Data Collection

The reflective journal was used as a data collection technique. The reflective journal writing was the first experience for them, so they needed to be informed on the first day of their teaching practicum that they should keep and write a diary or journal describing what they had experienced during the process of teaching practicum, for example, mentoring process with mentor teachers and teaching performance in the classroom. Thus, during teaching practicum, the PSTs kept the journal and wrote what they experienced in their teaching, started from planning the lesson to implementing and evaluating the teaching learning process. What they wrote might be about problems and how to solve these problems by the process of critical analysis and evaluation of the existing situation. This process is intended to question and reconstruct knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018). If the process is done frequently, the PSTs can become reflective practitioners and ultimately lead to professional development. The benefits of reflective journals are to increase teachers' awareness of the challenges and weaknesses of their classroom practices and to help teachers explore their teaching and implement good classroom practices (Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2017).

### 3.4    Data Analysis

To analyse the data from reflective journals in the form of transcripts, thematic analysis was adopted. The thematic analysis was aimed to create a thorough and systematic record of the coding and themes (Galanis, 2018) used in the journals. The transcripts of the journals were firstly read and coded based on the keywords for certain reflective strategies. The themes were then created according to the theoretical framework and were finally presented. The presentation of the findings was categorized based on the main themes, which in this case were the strategies of reflective practice. Under each theme/strategy, each participant was coded as PT1 for pre-service teacher 1, PT2 for pre-service teacher 2, PT3 for pre-service teacher 3, PT4 for pre-service teacher 4, PT5 for pre-service teacher 5, and PT6 for pre-service teacher 6.

## 4.    RESULTS

Referring to the research question and data analysis from reflective journals, three reflective practice strategies used by the participants were identified. They were recollections, reflection-in-action, and mentoring process.

### 4.1    Recollections: From Previous Learning Experiences to Internet Sources

Recollections are defined as reflection processes through recalling appropriate knowledge or experience that assist pre-service teachers (PSTs) to evaluate their problems. In this respect, recalling appropriate knowledge was also experienced by the PSTs during their performance of teaching. The strategies used during the recollection stage were recalling previous learning experiences (in senior high school and on campus) and recalling other sources.

The following illustrates the examples of recollections experienced by three PSTs (PT1, PT2, and PT3).

Excerpt 1:    When I have to teach types of texts, I grab the coursebook previously used in senior high school. I figure out how I learn all about types of texts and try to teach them to my students. (PT1)

One of the PSTs (PT1) carried out reflective practice through recollection. It was done by recalling the knowledge required for a relevant situation. In this situation, the knowledge was not gained from campus but from what she learned in her previous learning experiences during her senior high school years. When she had to teach text types such as narrative, recount, and descriptive during teaching practice, she recalled her relevant knowledge about text types. She then reflected on the process of how she learned the text types during her study at school. Her recollection then became the basis to make a decision on how to teach text types to her students during her teaching practice.

Unlike PT1, another PST (PT2) recalled her knowledge gained from the theory learned on campus to help her face the teaching situation as stated in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 2:    When I came across problems in my class such as students' boredom, and less attention to the lesson, I remember the Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) subject on campus. This subject introduced games, jigsaw, and mind mapping to teach young learners. I then tried to use these techniques/activities to solve students' boredom. (PT2)

PT2 took benefits from the theory that she learned on campus, and applied it to overcome her teaching problem, namely monotony in the classroom. She reflected on her previous experience/knowledge when she learned the TEYL subject at the university where she learned certain teaching techniques on how to overcome students' boredom and less attention to the lesson. Therefore, when she encountered a difficult situation, her previous knowledge was triggered.

Another case was found when PT3 tried to recall her relevant knowledge to overcome the teaching problem. However, she found that the knowledge gained from campus was considered irrelevant to her current teaching problem, as shown in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3:   When I come across teaching problems, I try to recall my previous knowledge from campus, but I cannot find the theory needed, so I search for it on the Internet and I can find them. (PT3)

When PT3 tried to recall her previous learning experience from her campus, she could not find the relevant knowledge for her teaching because the campus did not accommodate the appropriate knowledge needed for the existing teaching situation (unfortunately, she did not mention her problems). Instead, she used information from other sources such as the Internet. In other words, the recollection of all theories studied at the campus was not always applicable for school situations. Indeed, there were mismatches between theory gained from campus and the knowledge required by PSTs to be able to teach at schools. The knowledge that they did not get from campus was usually dealt with the variety of students' abilities, interests, motivation, and how to cope with the lack of school facilities to support classroom activities.

From several excerpts related to the recollections above, PT1 and PT2 did the reflection by recalling the knowledge from previous learning experiences as an English learner in senior high schools and as a student-teacher at a university where she learnt techniques/strategies in teaching English. However, not all relevant knowledge from formal learning contexts can be used as the main source for recollection. PT3 sought the other forms from what she was familiar with, such as the Internet (technology).

## 4.2   Reflection-in-Action: Thinking on Your Feet

One of the ways on how to reflect is through reflection-in-action, which means thinking on-the-spot to manage unpredicted or astonishing situations and yielded achievable solutions. Reflection-in-action, which serves to revise 'action present', makes people think critically about ongoing action and triggers 'on-the-spot-experiment'. Through this action, new methods could be created, their beliefs and strategies were restructured, and most importantly, theory and practice were connected in order to deal with the situation as experienced by PT4.

Excerpt 4:   When I taught narrative writing, I used part of a film as a stimulating activity and mind mapping technique. I asked the students to use mind mapping to understand the narrative text but they did not do what I said because they found a problem with this activity. I then explained once more, but the students still did not get the point. I then changed it with another activity that could make the students understand. (PT4)

In this excerpt, PT4 introduced a certain teaching technique to teach writing, but the students did not respond well to her. She then decided to change her previous plan. In this case, she tried to revise her 'action present' so that her teaching goal can be achieved.

Another PST (PT5) also encountered a situation where he came up with a sudden action as shown in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5:   When I taught descriptive text, I used Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The students were not enthusiastic and inactive. I then changed into the direct method, but the students still did not respond well. But when I used games, they were active and enthusiastic. So, I made an adjustment to the class situation. (PT5)

In Excerpt 5, PT5 always modified his teaching performance adjusted to the class situation, particularly to students' responses. Firstly, he adopted GTM to teach the descriptive text, but the students were not enthusiastic. Then he changed into the direct method, but still no response from his students. In fact, the students wanted games so he took a sudden action to overcome his problem by using games in his teaching. Thus, the action of changing teaching techniques on the spot is taken to restructure his strategy and this constitutes the reflection-in-action.

From the above cases, the PSTs decide to change class activities that have been planned to another activity in order to attract students' responsive attitude so that their students can actively engage in the classroom. Deciding on on-the-spot actions allows them to solve the problems and to maintain the dynamic class. The PSTs have overcome difficult situations by reflecting in action. Thus, they have upgraded knowledge-in-action through professional practice and have developed the skill of thinking on their own feet.

## 4.3 Mentoring Process: Learning to Be Critical to Develop Professionalism

Mentoring process can serve as a way to do the reflection and usually involve three parties: pre-service teachers (PSTs), one mentor teacher, and one university supervisor. However, most of the time, the mentoring process is only attended by the mentor teacher and the PSTs because the supervisor usually comes to schools for PSTs' final teaching performance examination. The mentoring process was usually administered right after the mentor teacher observed the first and second PSTs' teaching performances. The teaching matters discussed were mostly on lesson planning, the stages of the lesson as well as classroom management. What the mentor teacher suggested was then implemented by the PSTs in the third teaching performance. This was experienced by a PST (PT2), as shown in the following excerpt

Excerpt 6:   After I finished teaching, my mentor and I sit together to discuss my performance. She suggests an applicable way to implement teaching stages and she gives an example of how to teach in the classroom. She also advises me not to make students passive and should communicate well with the students. What my mentor suggested is then implemented in my next teaching. (PT2)

This excerpt illustrates how the reflection took place during the mentoring process where the mentor teacher and the PT2 discussed her previous teaching performance, particularly on how to do the activities in each stage of the teaching learning process and also other suggestions dealing with managing students. PT2 felt that her mentor's feedback was very useful and could be implemented later in her future classroom.

Another PST (PT6) experienced collaborating with a firm mentor teacher who demanded her to have good English capability as well as teaching performance. The way he supervised the mentee was not only done right after the teaching but also in the middle of her teaching performance by directly suggesting or commenting on certain actions. Nevertheless, she accepted this way considering that her mentor teacher helped her to develop teaching capacity as described in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 7:   During my teaching practicum, I learned a lot from my mentor teacher particularly on developing teaching skills rather than from campus because the knowledge was too theoretical. Even though my English knowledge and my teaching competence were not

PSTs made "a new sense of situations by connecting them to previous learning experiences and a variety of information" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 263).

The above cases show how the reflection engages the PSTs in a thoughtful recollection that can develop their understanding of learning (Selmo & Orsenigo, 2014) and gradually lead to the development of their teaching skills. During teaching practicum, they practiced how to develop theoretical and professional knowledge and critical thinking (Selmo & Orsenigo, 2014). Moreover, the PSTs merged the theory/knowledge learned on campus with their practical experiences in a teaching practicum, and PSTs should be given the opportunity to practise doing the reflection. By constantly reflecting on their classroom practices, questioning what is going on in the classroom, and finding solutions to their own teaching problems, their professional competence will grow on their own (Mathew et al., 2017). Thus, reflective practice can be a good form of professional development since through reflective practice, PSTs can improve their teaching in the classroom.

## 5.2 Reflection-in-Action

In the case of reflection-in-action, the PSTs experienced different ways of how to do the reflection-in-action. PT4 decided to change the planned teaching technique in the classroom because it did not work if she implemented such techniques. In this case, she had evaluated the situation where a certain teaching technique did not work, then she tried to think of another technique on the spot and it finally worked. With her action, she revised her present action to cope with the unpredicted situations and yielded achievable solutions (Schön, 1987). This kind of action can direct people to think critically about ongoing action and trigger 'on-the-spot-experiment' so that new methods could be created, their beliefs and strategies were restructured, and most importantly, theory and practice were connected so that the PSTs were able to cope with certain situations (Schön, 1987).

Meanwhile, during teaching performance, PT5 sometimes adapted his teaching to the demand of the class situation such as students' responses. The action of changing teaching techniques on the spot was taken to restructure his strategy and create new methods and this action constituted reflection-in-action. The reflection-in-action is a frequent event where the PSTs should think on the spot to manage the unpredicted or astonishing situations and yielded achievable solutions. In this situation, PSTs interacted with their experiences (Munby, 1989) and learned from their own professional experiences (Mathew et al., 2017).

In this situation, the PSTs revised the 'action present' by reflecting critically on the ongoing action and ultimately redesigned their strategies to overcome the problems that occurred. (Schön, 1983) and at the same time, they learned how to make a decision (Mathew et al., 2017). Making a decision was pivotal for PSTs since they had to make on-the-spot decisions of different aspects of the lesson that might not have been planned (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

## 5.3 Mentoring Process

The mentoring process is also one strategy of reflective practice where mentor teachers and PSTs reflect on what the PSTs have done in the classroom while being observed by the mentor teacher. They evaluated mentor teachers' lesson observations

and feedback (Mukeredzi, 2017) and discussed what to do next and what PSTs should and should not do. The mentoring process in teaching practicum is also a critical factor in professional learning and development (Mukeredzi, 2017) and has a positive impact on commitment, classroom instructional practices, and student achievement (Mukeredzi, 2017).

In the mentoring process, PT2 felt that her mentor's feedback was very useful and could be implemented later in her future classroom. This indicates that PT2 began to realize the benefit of mentoring process for her teaching improvement. Meanwhile, PT6 appreciated the feedback from her mentor teacher because it made her learn more about how to teach in the classroom. Even though she realized her weaknesses in English competence and teaching skills, she was still optimistic that what her mentor did was to help her to be a more professional teacher. Both PT2 and PT6 listened and responded to their mentors and took further action in the classroom after having the mentoring process because they realized that they learned new and important teaching knowledge and more importantly, they trusted their mentors. On the other hand, PT4 trusted her ability since she had excellent English competence. Thus, she carefully chose the mentor's feedback. If the feedback was consistent with her beliefs, she accepted it, but if it was irrelevant, she was persistent in her beliefs. Thus, the responses to mentor teachers' feedback were different among PSTs.

The roles of mentor teachers in the mentoring process contributed significantly to the professional development of the PSTs. The mentors' tasks were to guide, supervise, counsel, oversee, model, support, critique, and instruct (Larkin, 2013). Besides, they had played their roles such as identifying PSTs' strengths and weaknesses, giving constructive feedback, and providing encouragement (Maphalala, 2013). Thus, in the mentoring process, the PSTs learned how to be critical of their actions because critical reflection enabled teachers to evaluate their teaching matters and take certain steps to improve teaching quality (Farrell, 2015; Warring & Evans, 2014).

Finally, this study implies that reflective practice in language education should become the main subject in the curriculum of English teacher education program in order to introduce to the PSTs what reflective practice is and provide opportunities to practice how to do the reflection both in learning and teaching situations for their own personal and professional development.

## 6. CONCLUSION

During teaching practicum, all the pre-service teachers (PSTs) are given opportunities to do the reflective practice by exploring various ways to question and decide the problems they experienced in their classroom teaching. In this study, the PSTs adopted three strategies of reflective practice: recollection, reflection-in-action, and mentoring process. In the recollection strategy, the PSTs recalled the relevant knowledge from their previous learning experiences either from their schools or teacher education/university. Meanwhile, the reflection-in-action was adopted by the PSTs since they always encountered teaching problems in the classroom that needed to be solved right away, or they were required to take action on the spot. Regarding the mentoring process, the PSTs did the reflection guided by the mentor teachers to critically discuss their teaching performance and other teaching matters as feedback to

take further action. Through these strategies, they learnt to reflect or evaluate their beliefs and practices and also learnt how to construct and reconstruct their personal theories of language teaching and learning. If this process is done frequently during teaching practicum, they will ultimately develop their own professionalism as teachers. In other words, their reflective practice during teaching practicum can result in their professional development.

The limitation of this case study was concerned with the limited respondents (six pre-service teachers/PSTs) and it adopted only one kind of research instrument, i.e., reflective journal. The limited number of respondents might hinder more exploration of various strategies used by various PSTs to reflect on their teaching experiences. Meanwhile, the adoption of only one kind of instrument in this research cannot guarantee that the data substantiation was fulfilled. Therefore, for further research, it is suggested that providing more respondents and adding at least two more kinds of instruments would deepen the findings of this study (i.e., interviews, observations, questionnaires). Besides, exploring other strategies would enrich the practice of reflection in a language teacher education context.

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