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## **IN-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTION AS A PATHWAY TO DEVELOP TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM**

### *Research Article*

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# IN-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTION AS A PATHWAY TO DEVELOP TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

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## Abstract

In-service teachers are required to understand how to be professionals since they have the responsibility to provide a quality education. One of the strategies to help teachers develop professionally is by conducting reflective practice or reflection. Reflection-in-action, one type of reflection, can be used by teachers to reflect on the pedagogical content knowledge while on the job. This research aimed at exploring teachers' practices in reflective practice. More specifically, it focused on identifying the aspects of pedagogical content knowledge, known as PCK, as reflected by English teachers during teaching and learning process. To investigate the issue, there were two in-service English teachers from one of state-owned school in Indonesia involved as the respondents of the study. Data in this qualitative case study were acquired through observation, documentation, and interview. It was found that reflecting on pedagogical content knowledge had a valuable contribution to in-service English teachers' development. It led them to the awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in handling and guiding their students. Instead, it also helped them be more well-prepared for the next teaching.

*Keywords:* in-service teacher, EFL, reflective practice, reflection-in-action.

## 1. Introduction

Reflective practice is an outstanding model of most language teacher education and development programs worldwide to optimize the teaching and learning in every level of education (Farrell, 2007, 2015). Reflection programs are commonly found in in-service teacher training. Some research studies argue that pre-service teachers need to be engaged in reflective practice since they are the candidates of professional teachers in the future. LaBelle (2017) proposes several benchmarks for teachers to develop professionally through utilization of particular frameworks. Providing particular comprehension and training related to reflective practice is believed can help teachers improve their teaching skills. It is important since the teacher is considered as one of the most important pillars in education. This is corresponding with Nurkamto's (2016) opinion that the teacher is the core element in education because he/she directly guides the teaching-learning activities in class. In addition, Afshar and Farahani (2018)

find that the teachers are required to be more experienced practically and academically, to achieve this goal they can take part in reflective practice. This is undeniable that reflective practice is an essential way for the teacher to develop their professionalism (Meierdirk, 2016). With this in mind, the teachers' role cannot be separated from the knowledge base. Loughran (2002) pinpoints that the teacher needs to understand the components of the knowledge base to be effective and critical educators. Basically, Shulman (1987) has proposed the categories of teachers' professional knowledge base in the wider context of education. More specific, there is a term "pedagogical content knowledge" which is considered as a way for teachers to relate what they know about teaching to what they know about what they teach. In the EFL context, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is a necessary part of teacher competence since it integrates content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. It means that PCK is expected to help teachers develop their capability in teaching English more effectively.

In the Indonesian context, in order to develop their pedagogical and content knowledge, English teachers are required to fulfill several criteria. The main requirement they should hold diploma four (D-IV) or bachelor (S1), instead they can also enrich their knowledge and skill through Education and Professional Training for Teachers (PLPG and PPG). Further, the regulation of Ministry of National Education (MoNE) number 16/2007 states that pedagogical content knowledge is noticed as a set of teacher' competency which covers four elements: pedagogy, professional, personal, and social competences (as cited in Kultsum, 2017). In brief, pedagogy competence refers to teacher ability to instruct and manage students in the teaching-learning process properly. Professional competence refers teacher's knowledge and ability to understand the subject matter. Personal competence means teachers have good character and attitude since they are the model for learners. And the last, social competence is the teachers' ability to communicate, interact and socialize with the students', colleagues, students' parents, and also school environment.

An effective teaching in English learning can only be achieved when practitioners conduct a critical reflection and continuously make improvement on several components of pedagogical content knowledge for language teachers. However, conducting all those aspects of teaching and learning processes is not easy. Clarke (2008) states the effective teaching can also be gained by reflecting on some aspects such as teaching goals, teaching methods, and students' ability level. Azizah and Tosriadi (2018) explore several components of pedagogical knowledge of an English teacher's experience in doing reflective practice through a teacher diary. It is summed up that the feedback found in teacher's reflection can be used as a benchmark to solve the problem appearing in teaching practice and lead the teacher to improve teaching skills and practices. Moreover, Ibrahim, Surif, Arshad and Mokhtar (2012) investigate self-reflection of Chemistry student teachers on pedagogical content knowledge and describe that the student teachers in their reflection consider the chemistry syllabus, chemistry topics, students' difficulties, and teachers' method and techniques in teaching. However, the research of PCK has been many times investigated in the areas of mathematics and science while studying in English teaching context is still limited (Evens, Elen, & Depaepe, 2016).

This current study aims at exploring in-service English teachers' reflection on the aspects of pedagogical content knowledge they reflect during teaching and learning process. To meet the goal, the researchers conduct this research by observing in-service English teachers' reflection in the classroom that called reflection-in-action. Then, the research question is formulated in the following research question:

*What are the components of pedagogical content knowledge reflected by in-service EFL teachers in the teaching-learning process?*

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Reflective Practice**

The pioneering figure of reflective practice, Dewey (1933, as cited in Loughran, 2002) proposes the terms reflection and reflective inquiry which reveal the definition of reflection or reflective practice as “an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it and the conclusion to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, as cited in Farrell, 2012). Many philosophers, theorists, and researchers have tried to develop a framework to explore the quality of reflective practice in deeper and wider contexts such as (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999; Fund, Court, & Kramarski, 2002; Lane, McMaster, Adnum, & Cavanagh, 2014). Dewey (1933, as cited in Farrell, 2012) in his conception of reflective practice adds that teachers must have some attitudes considered important to using reflection. It means that the thinking teacher requires three attributes to be reflective. The attitudes are open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility. Open-mindedness, means that teachers must have a desire on listening and looking at several aspects of problems and pay attention to many alternative ideas and views to reach several solutions and the alternatives; responsibility which is a careful consideration of the results to which an action will lead to; and wholeheartedness which implies that teachers can overcome uncertainties and fears so as to critically evaluate their practice in a meaningful way.

Huball, Collins and Pratt (2005) define reflective practice as ‘the thoughtful consideration of what we do, what works and what does not. Minott (2010) defines reflection as careful thought; it could be defined as a transformation about trained educated criticism combining research; learning about context, and balanced judgment (critical thinking) about previous, present, and future actions, events or decisions. According to Farrell (2012), “reflective practice enables teachers to stop, look, and discover where they are at that moment and then decide where they want to go (professionally) in the future”.

Moreover, the concepts of reflection are evolved in three types. In detail, Schön (1983, 1987, as cited in Farrell, 2012) acknowledges the terms “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action” which followed by Mannen (1991) who adds the third types of reflection named “reflection-for-action”. Farrell (2012) in his work when revisiting Dewey and Schön’s concepts highlights that teachers’ reflective practice involves three types of reflections: 1) reflection-in-action, the practitioner must be engaged in reflecting of his or her intuitive knowledge while on-going teaching; 2) reflection-on-action, means practitioner reflect his or her teaching in deep understanding about what happened in classroom teaching; and 3) reflection-for-action, practitioner must look back at the past teaching to be aware of the next teaching. Additionally, Soisangwarn and Wongwanich (2014) explores the criteria of types of reflection utilize by teachers. Teachers can reflect their teaching directly in the classroom by using simple questions to analyze problems when the student does not understand the lesson. Identically, reflection-on-action can be noticed by assessing the effectiveness of teachers’ teaching and students learning after teaching. Lastly, in preparing the next teaching teachers can conduct reflection-for-action. In this type of reflection, teachers try to improve their teaching by seeking out the opportunities to talk about teaching with others and preparing an anticipatory action for next classes.

### **2.2 Pedagogical Content Knowledge of English Teachers**

In 1986, PCK was acknowledged by many scholars as a part of the knowledge base in the educational context. PCK is stated as an important aspect of knowledge bases because it identifies the role of knowledge in teaching which represents teachers competency related to content and pedagogical aspects.

Pedagogical content knowledge comes from two domains that are content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Content knowledge is a crucial point for teachers of any subjects. Darling-Hammond (2008) states content knowledge is very valuable in creating effective teaching. While pedagogical knowledge is related to teachers' ability in giving clear instruction and creating meaningful learning. Shulman (1987) opines pedagogical knowledge is knowledge, theory, and belief about teaching and learning. It is followed by the selection of a particular teaching approach to deliver any subject in the classroom. That's why PCK can be defined as a combination between a specific subject of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 2004). Then, it is argued that subject matter knowledge is the other names of content knowledge including the specific topic that must be taught in the classroom such as English, Math, Chemistry, and any other subjects included in educational curriculum. In the English learning context, there are several types of research related to pedagogical content knowledge. Liu (2013) conducted a case study research on elementary teachers in the US. Liu separated content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in the research concept. It is argued that people with ESL content knowledge could teach English better because they have already had the understanding on the contents they are going to teach. Further, an English teacher with pedagogical knowledge has more opportunity to have the variant strategies in teaching English that can make teaching-learning activity runs more effectively. In Liu's study, PCK is categorized into four components: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners, and knowledge of teaching context.

According to Shulman (1986), there are five components involved in PCK. They are knowledge of subject matter; knowledge of instructional strategies; knowledge of learners' conceptions; an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics difficult or easy for learners; and curriculum knowledge. Moreover, another researcher, McDougall (2005) states PCK includes: (1) Knowledge of core concepts, process, and skills that a topic has the potential of conveying to the students. (2) Knowledge of the aspects of a topic that are difficult for students to learn. (3) Knowledge about what instructional representations, for example, analogies, metaphors, exemplars, demonstrations, simulations, and manipulations are most likely to be most effective. (4) Knowledge of what misconceptions students could hold that are likely to get in the way of learning. In more detail, Setiadi and Musthafa (2014) propose several aspects of pedagogical content knowledge that suitable to Indonesian context. It involves (1) knowledge of representations of subject matter (content knowledge); (2) understanding of students' conceptions of teaching and learning a certain subject matter; (3) general pedagogical knowledge of teaching strategies; (4) curriculum knowledge; (5) knowledge of educational context, (6) knowledge of educational goals; (7) assessing and evaluating instructional process and learning outcomes; and (8) making use of assessment and evaluation results for instructional purposes.

The current research on PCK conducted by Kultsum (2017) concludes that pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) covers four aspects. (1) Knowledge of curriculum, in this part, English teachers need to know how to develop instructional. (2) Knowledge of subject matter, which means English teachers should have good knowledge of English such as four English skills, spelling, phonology, syntax, and other linguistic aspects. (3) Knowledge of learners, this type of knowledge integrates pedagogy and social competencies. Here, English teachers must have a good understanding of their students. Such as understanding on students' level of English, learning difficulty, learning motivation, and emotional condition. (4) Knowledge of pedagogy, it relates to teachers' ability to manage and organize their classrooms and the ability to select the most appropriate teaching approach. Simply, it focused on the teaching strategies, methodologies, and techniques.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Design and Participants**

The purpose of this study was to explore the aspects of pedagogical content knowledge reflected by in-service EFL teachers in their reflective practice. Considering the nature of the current study, a descriptive case study was considered as a proper method to be used in this study. The data were qualitatively gained through document analysis, observation, and interview with two in-service EFL teachers who serve as active English teachers at one of the state-owned vocational high schools in Indonesia. The participants teaching experience ranging from 8 to 10 years. The participants were purposively selected in accordance with the characteristic of this study. In this case, we set teachers involvement in reflection-in-action as our consideration in selecting the sample. As requested by participants, the respondents' names will be kept anonyms in this research report. Thus, we will label Participant J, and Participant A to refer to the name of the respondents.

#### **3.2. Data Collection**

The data in this study were gathered through observation, document analysis, and interview. The process of observation was started with researchers reading the lesson plan utilized by in-service EFL teachers in teaching. And then it was continued with classroom observation. The observation was done twice for each participant. During classroom observation, researchers acted as non-participatory observers. In this case, we did not involve in teaching and learning process. We just sat in the classroom, observed teachers carrying out the lesson. The purpose of the observation was to find out the aspects of PCK reflected by participants during teaching and learning process. We also observed whether teachers teaching out of their lesson plan or not. Lastly, the interview was conducted to explore and confirm the data acquired during observation. We let the participants decided the day, time, and location of the interview. We also let them choose the language of interview. The interviews were carried out at school (school library and office).

#### **3.2. Data Credibility and Analysis**

To sum up, data in this study consist of (1) lesson plan, (2) field notes of the observation, and (3) field notes of the interviews. To achieve the credibility of the data, the researchers used method triangulation, theory triangulation, and member checking. Method triangulation is used when researchers collect the data using different techniques. In this context, researchers used document analysis, observation, and interview. Meanwhile, in theory triangulation, the researchers provided some related theories to support findings in the discussion part. Besides, member checking is also considered as the technique to achieve the credibility of qualitative data. In this study, the participants were requested to read and crosschecked the finding generated from several sources, it was to confirm and ensure that the result of this study was derived from participants' experience. To analyze the data, the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) was applied. There were three phases to follow: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) drawing and verifying conclusion.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Findings

#### 4.1.1. The issues reflected by in-service English teachers

##### 4.1.1.1. English lesson material and the students' difficulty

One of the most common themes of reflection found in this study was teaching material and students' difficulty. All participants of this study expressed that they did reflection in-action regarded teaching material and students' difficulties and interest in learning.

Teaching material and students difficulty were two interconnected things. Thus, in discussing teaching material there should be space for students' difficulties.

The participating teachers of this study revealed from our interview that she always reflecting on her teaching in action. She argued that by so, she could create a more meaningful learning. As stated by participating Teacher A

*“ I always reflect in action. Especially on teaching material and students' difficulty. Since our duty is to educate our students, so the quality of teaching material and students' difficulties in understanding the lesson should be our main concern ” (Teacher A on the interview on February 19, 2018)*

Her response to the interview was confirmed when we did classroom observation. During her teaching, participating teacher A tried to make sure that the material she delivered could be understood by her students well. Thus, when she gave some explanations and instructions, she checked her students' understanding by giving a simple question such as *“any difficulty? or any question?”*. When she found that her students were confused, then she directly simplified her explanation by using simpler language. By doing so, she hoped that her students could understand the lesson.

Quite similar to Teacher A, participating Teacher J also reflect her teaching material and learners' difficulty during teaching and learning process. She tried to ensure her students mastery of the material by giving them questions *“any difficulty, any question, is it challenging?”*. He realized that he had a responsibility to guide her students to master the topic well. The participating teacher A, believed that by reflecting in teaching material and students' difficulty she could maintain students' motivation in learning.

*“ Since this is EFL class, it is very important to reflect on teaching material. We need to maintain that teaching material is suitable for our students. In this case, it is not too hard and not too easy. If it is too complicated, they will come to the conclusion that English is difficult. On the other hand, if it is too easy, it leads to boredom. So we need to evaluate it during our action. Instead, looking at students' difficulties in learning is also essential. Considering the status of English as a foreign language, English teachers need to be creative in maintaining students motivation in learning English. One of the ways to check their understanding is by asking a question ”. (Teacher J, Interview on February 21, 2018)*

From the above statements, it is obvious that English teachers participating in this study are really aware of their roles as a teacher. Instead of reflecting on the level of difficulties of teaching materials, they are also caring of their students understanding of the topics being taught.

#### 4.1.1.2. Classroom management

Classroom management is also an important component in the process of teaching-learning English. Through a good classroom management, the teacher can create a more effective teaching and learning process. In this study, classroom management involved teacher's action in handling the class situation such as students' seats and crowds. It could be seen from teacher A's statement in her class when giving instruction to her students:

*"Now I'm going to divide you into groups. Then you can discuss the question on the worksheet. Do it with your group. I will distribute the worksheet. So, please make a group of four"*

The instruction above was given before teacher A began a discussion session. She realized that a group of four sounds better to be formed in achieving the lesson objectives. In this case, teacher A was teaching about discussion text. She considered that this topic was quite difficult. Thus, to make sure that teaching and learning process could run well, she divided class member into group of four. It is to provide collaboration and discussion among her students.

The participating Teacher A also reflected on how to handle the crowd during her teaching. For example, she said to her students,

*"Okay all, can you hear her answers?"*

That type of question was delivered to the students when one of the students was presenting the result of her group discussion. At that time, teacher A noticed that the class was noisy and the student spoke at a low voice. She wanted the whole class members could pay attention to their friend who was presenting the result of their group. To achieve her goal, she asked this type of question to her students. This strategy worked effectively. The students then paid their attention to the presenter.

Regarding this strategy, participating teacher A, said,

*"Teaching vocational school students is very challenging. We need to be smart in giving warning when they make noise. If we remind them in a wrong way, they will not hesitate to leave our class" (Participating Teacher A, Interview on February 19, 2018)*

Another interesting finding arose from the observation of participating teacher J's class. This teacher was really good at controlling her class. In one of her lesson, Teacher J asked her students whether they understood the lesson or not. Unfortunately, the whole class was just silent. By looking at this situation, Teacher J knew that her students were bored. So, she offered her students to play a game. Surprisingly, the students were excited when teacher J said that they were going to play a game. The following statements are dialogue extracted from the observation of Teacher J's class

*"Now it's time to me to substitute and continue the lesson, but before that, umm, I'd like to play a game. Wanna play a game?" (Teacher J)*

*"Of course! Yes" (The students)*

Moreover, teacher J also had good ability in managing the time. From the classroom observation, the lesson, the game, and the explanation he provided take the time properly as the lesson plan. Even though game session was not included in her lesson plan, she could manage the activity well.

## 4.2. Discussion

### 4.2.1. Pedagogical Content Knowledge Reflected by In-service English Teachers

#### 4.2.1.1. *English lesson material and students' difficulty*

The result of classroom observation and interview indicated teachers had essentially realized that not all students can understand English well. This is due to some students may have lower motivation in learning English. They said that they understand this condition since they also experienced the same thing when they were senior high school students. As Farrell (2007) said teachers' experiences are the prominent aspect in reflective practice. In this case, the teachers can refer to their past experience when reflecting on their classroom condition. In doing reflection in action, asking the question and observing directly are the most common actions done by the teacher, as the respondents of this study had done.

It is supported by Soisangwarn and Wongwanich (2014) who state that in reflection-in-action teachers should reflect their teaching directly by using a simple question to find students' problem and be aware of the classroom condition. Responding to this argument, students generally just kept silent even when they have difficulties in internalizing the materials. In overcoming this problem, respondents of this study had demonstrated a solution. In this case, they explained the lesson in a simpler language, even though there was no request from their students.

#### 4.2.1.2. *Classroom and time management*

Balli (2011) argues that classroom management is a prominent issue that needs serious attention during teaching and learning process. Mostly teachers directly reflect the problems and then find a solution in managing the classroom. For instance, when the class is noisy or students are passive, teachers usually spontaneously do something different to attract students' attention. Besides, time management is also an important aspect during teaching and learning process (Nilsson, 2008). Reflection on time management is very important to make sure that teaching and learning process runs well, in another word, it fixes to time allotment as stated in the lesson plan. To do so, teachers must have good ability in demonstrating a particular problem-solving strategy (Ibrahim et al., 2012). A good problem-solving strategy can help the teacher in managing their time, which later on can support teachers to achieve learning objectives.

The finding of this research has revealed that English teachers who participated in this study implemented reflection-in-action in their teaching. The aspects of pedagogical content knowledge being reflected are categorized into the knowledge of learners, knowledge of pedagogy that covers classroom and time management, and knowledge of subject matter.

## 5. Conclusion

Reflective practice as an important feature of teacher professional development activity is expected to lead teachers to their professionalism. Maintaining critical thinking through reflective practice is a must in the educational context. Reflection means teachers look back at the whole process and aspects of teaching-learning activity. In this context, reflection-in-action is expected to help teachers develop their awareness of the effectiveness and the efficiency of teaching and learning process. In reflection-in-action, pedagogical content knowledge is the most important thing to be reflected since it has the crucial role in an educational practice. It requires teachers to master both knowledge of English and the concept of pedagogy and teaching. The result of this current study is expected to bring some implications to English teacher and institution. Since conducting reflection is proven essential in teacher development, English teachers are expected to broaden their knowledge regarding any activities that can be

applied to help them foster their professionalism. The institution is also expected to facilitate their teachers to conduct reflection. Lastly, further research with wider participants is needed. This study only involved two in-service English teachers, so the results can not be used for generalization.

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