EFL Pre-service Teachers' Approaches to English Language Teaching: Insights from Their Reflective Practice

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Abstract

This study delves into the efficacy of microteaching as a pedagogical tool for enhancing reflective practices among pre-service teachers. Employing a case study approach, the research investigates the experiences and reflections of pre-service teachers who participated in microteaching practice over a specified period. The study aims to discern the direct influence of microteaching on the development of reflective practices and explore the underlying mechanisms through which this impact occurs. This research elucidates the nuanced relationship between microteaching and reflective practices through qualitative data analysis gathered from five participant reflections and interviews. Pre-service teachers' written reflections and open-ended interviews are used to collect data on their reflective teaching. The reflective journal records pre-service teachers' experiences during microteaching practice, while interviews provide insights into their reflective practices and their approaches to their professional growth. The findings of this study show that reflecting on teaching practices influences the improvement of pre-service teachers' instructional strategies. This research highlights the importance of instructional strategies in implementing learning innovations. Indicators of instructional strategies were found: teaching plans and approaches, goals and objectives, teaching experiences, methods and strategies, memorable classroom events, and barriers and solutions.

Keywords: *microteaching; pre-service teachers; reflective practices*

Introduction

According to Milan Rianto (2006), the approach is a way of looking at learning activities so that it can facilitate educators in managing learning and students in getting ease of learning. The learning approach is divided into two, namely an approach based on process and a learning approach in terms of material. Understanding instructional strategies, teaching strategies, techniques, and practices is crucial for educators in higher education. Instructional strategies outline the plans and methods used to facilitate learning, while teaching strategies focus on specific methods to convey information and engage students. A teaching strategy is a generalized plan for a lesson that includes structure, instructional objectives, and an outline of planned tactics necessary to implement the strategies (Stone and Morris, in Issac, 2010). Furthermore, Issac (2010) defines teaching tactics as the teacher's behavior in the classroom, such as developing teaching strategies, providing appropriate stimulus for timely responses, drilling learned responses, increasing responses through extra activities, and so on.

Pre-service teachers, according to Ryan et al. (2017), are students enrolled in a teacher education program who must complete all degree requirements, including teaching practice in the field, before graduating from university and becoming teachers. Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, are students who pursue a teaching program education to study, master, and educate the nation's generation to become competent teachers after graduation (Berkup, 2014).

The concept of "reflective practice" is multifaceted and often subject to diverse interpretations among individuals. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) underscore the symbiotic relationship between reflection and experience, while Richards (1990) posits that incorporating reflection and critical thinking can be particularly advantageous for those relying on instinctive teaching strategies. For Richard and Lockhart (1994), reflection is a method of gathering valuable insights about teaching, emphasizing the importance of self-examination in the educational context. Brookfield (1995) extends the notion of reflection, advocating for a comprehensive approach that considers literature, students' perspectives, colleagues' feedback, and personal experiences as both a teacher and learner. Korthagen (2001) posits that a heightened level of conscious behavior is often required for individuals to reorganize their prior knowledge through reflective practices.

At its core, reflective teaching is a learning process derived from experience. This introspective, critical, and explorative method enables educators to evaluate and refine their pedagogical choices within the dynamic context of real-world classrooms (Loughran, 2002; Walshe & Driver, 2019). Consequently, experience assumes a pivotal role in shaping and enhancing the skills of educators. Beyond

refining teaching strategies and elevating educational standards, reflective teaching contributes to the professional development of educators. Larrivee (2008) defines reflective practice as "on-the-job performance," emphasizing a thoughtful approach to daily problem-solving and decision-making. According to Mezirow (1991) and Schon (1983), this form of reflection is a cognitive activity that fosters learning from experiences by combining individual inquiry and collaborative efforts.

In recent years, numerous studies have delved into implementing reflective teaching in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Motallebzadeh, Ahmadi, and Hosseinnia (2018) explored the relationship between EFL teachers' reflective practices and their teaching effectiveness, while Riyanti (2021) investigated teacher professional development through reflective teaching. Gudeta (2022) examined EFL teachers' reflective practice skills and attitudes in their professional learning. Asregid, Mihiretie, and Kassa (2023) focused on how teacher educators utilized feedback to enhance reflective practices among pre-service teachers during microteaching practice.

These studies affirmed a positive correlation between teachers' reflective practices and teaching effectiveness, emphasizing experience's crucial role in professional improvement. The findings advocated for allocating resources for training, mentorship, and support in teacher education programs while also underscoring the need for constructive feedback and dialogue in the evaluation criteria for pre-service teachers.

Given the central role of educators in the educational landscape, this study aims to examine the impact of reflective teaching on pre-service teachers' instructional strategies, hypothesizing a significant influence on individual development in the context of education and learning. Through the exploration of various aspects of reflective teaching, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective teaching practices and professional growth within the field of education. As discussed above, the research question addressed in this study was "How does reflecting on teaching practice influence the improvement of pre-service teachers' instructional strategies?" This study evaluated the approaches of pre-service teachers who had previously participated in reflective teaching and their teaching abilities in terms of instructional strategies.

Method

The design of this study is a qualitative case study technique to explore and analyze the impact of microteaching on pre-service teachers' instructional strategies. Cohen and Manion (1994) recommend that researchers explore the characteristics of specific units, such as a class, school, or community, and try to explain phenomenology by thoroughly examining one case example. It is a fantastic design for understanding and assessing educational events.

This study involved five pre-service teachers who had previously participated in microteaching practice and engaged in reflective teaching.

Table 1. Demography of Participants

Initials	Age	Gender
AA	21	Female
MSY	20	Female
SIM	21	Female
SA	21	Female
RM	21	Female

The reflective journal submitted by pre-service teachers serves as a data collection tool, recording their experiences and learnings during microteaching. Reflective journal writing focuses on professional development, reflective thinking, and critical thinking skills (Chretien et al., 2008; Chittooran, 2015; Laqaei, 2015). Reflective journaling can improve pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and enrich their teaching experiences. Chau & Cheng (2010), Moon (2006), and O'Connell & Dyment (2011) in Cheng (2017) Write a reflection journal that can help students develop what they get from the learning process, build meaning through experience, identify areas of strength and weakness, and plan for future improvement strategies.

In applying this tool to collect the data, the researchers assigned each pre-service teacher to write a reflection after teaching activities. The researchers guided each pre-service teacher to acquire such data, requiring them to select a teaching moment from their classrooms to contemplate. The pre-service teachers, after the assignment period, then analyzed each of their teaching performances by describing the learning innovation activities they had implemented, the benefits of the learning innovations, the challenges faced from the learning innovations, the problem-solving solutions, and the follow-up plans that they would apply to their future teaching.

Open-ended interviews are distributed immediately after the pre-service teachers reflect to determine the influence of reflective teaching on the pre-service teachers' instructional strategy. The interviews aim to obtain further information regarding the pre-service teachers' reflective practice approaches. The researchers interviewed all participants in two phases. For ethical considerations in the research, all participants were informed that the content of the interviews and the documents they provided were kept confidential and used only for research purposes; their names were masked, and personal information was not identified

in the article. They also have the right to withdraw at any stage without reason. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the participant's first language, to preserve small details that might otherwise be lost and to reduce concerns about their English language skills, which could affect "the quality and quantity of data provided" (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The interview instrument was adapted from Ji, Cao, and Wei (2022).

In Phase One, pre-teaching interviews are conducted to explore pre-service teachers' beliefs and expectations through the questions "Can you describe how you plan to teach the English language during teaching practice?" and "What do you think are the objectives or goals in teaching English that you will achieve?" in Phase Two, post-teaching interviews. "Can you describe your recent teaching during the practice?" "Why do you use that method and strategies during your practice?" "Can you give an example of a classroom incident that impressed you the most during the practice?" and "Were there any obstacles you experienced during the practice? What were the solutions?".

The collected data was examined qualitatively using an interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). First, the data from the written reflections were carefully reviewed. The next stage is to classify the data and arrange it into categories and themes when emergent themes are recognized. Similarly, the interviews were examined and coded to identify emergent patterns. However, the interviews are transcribed before they are examined.

Results

This study involved five students who participated in a reflective teaching program in a microteaching practice. The five students wrote reflective journals and were interviewed to describe the pre-service teacher's instructional
strategies employed during microteaching practice. Therefore, based on the results of the data analysis, the following indicators of instructional strategy were found: teaching plans and approaches, objectives and goals, teaching experiences, methods and strategies, memorable classroom incidents, and obstacles and solutions.

Teaching Plans and Approaches

In their reflective journals, AA and MSY planned to teach "Be on Time." AA's interview focused on improving pronunciation through active communication and direct interaction, using materials that align with the student's interests and needs.
"I plan to teach English with an approach that focuses on pronunciation. On pronunciation, we use active communication. I will also introduce students to vocabulary and speaking skills through direct interaction. In addition, I will use materials that match the student's interests and needs."

MSY, on the other hand, aimed to incorporate new learning innovations, including visual learning methods and realia media, tailored to the study topic to create effective lesson plans. She clearly stated this during the interview session with the researcher.

"I plan to teach using new learning innovations; when teachers utilize innovations, students become more interested and perceive learning to be more fun and interactive. I started by reading various papers on what they are to uncover new learning innovations. After that, I discovered and employed visual learning methods and realia media. Then, I tailored it to my study topic to ensure that the learning techniques and media were effective. After that, I decided to create the lesson plan."

SIM and SA outlined their plan to teach "He Always Gets Up at 5 O'clock" in their reflective journals. SIM emphasized the importance of speaking skills, utilizing the student's book "My Next Words" during the interview.

"I plan to teach English primarily for speaking skills; therefore, before heading to the field, I first create a lesson plan, which incorporates the foundation of learning English from the student's book "My Next Words" for elementary school, which concentrates on kids' speaking abilities."

While SA preferred using flashcard media (picture cards) to teach adverbs of frequency, they also integrated games and group activities into their lessons.

"The first step in my planning process is determining the topic I will teach. After deciding on a topic to teach, I first try to comprehend it and then consider what approaches or media will be appropriate. I plan to use flash card media (picture cards) because I believe it is best suited to my learning objectives, where the learning will be on the topic of the adverb of frequency, with games and students divided into two groups (pictures and sentences)."

RM's reflective journal focused on teaching "How Do You Go to School?" The interview highlighted an emphasis on vocabulary and visual media related to transportation.

"The innovation we do in this teaching is teaching students the names of means of transportation using animated pictures and fill-in-the-blank question sheets. In this learning method, we divided the work into two parts: the flash card method (look and say) provided by my friend NA and the method of filling in questions (look and write) provided by myself. The teaching went well; I taught transportation vocabulary using animated pictures."

Objectives and Goals

AA and MSY's reflective journals aimed to teach students to accurately identify time by using analog clocks and correctly specifying sentences about the use of time, which improved their understanding of the use of time. In an interview with AA, she highlighted her goal to enhance students' English proficiency in everyday situations and improve their English skills.

"My goal is to help students understand and use English effectively in everyday situations. I also want to improve their speaking skills and how they write, listen, and read."

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MSY's objective was to teach students how to effectively receive instruction by using innovation, comprehending it, and utilizing it to enhance their English language.

"My objective is to demonstrate to students how to effectively receive instruction so that they comprehend it and can use this innovation to improve their English language proficiency. However, vocabulary instruction must come first for the students."

In their reflective journal, SIM and SA emphasized that their learning objectives involved students correctly writing daily activities, naming, and pairing pictures with sentences using frequency-appropriate adverbs. SIM highlighted in her interview that her learning objectives were that students can identify and articulate learning based on the topic "He Always Wakes Up at 5 O'clock.".

"The learning objective in my lesson plan is for students to mention and explain based on the phrase "He Always Gets Up at 5 O'clock."

Furthermore, SA's goal was to use flashcards in group work to adjust learning by facilitating faster and more compact thinking through pictures and sentences.

"The goal is to adjust to the learning. So, I use flashcards to train students in group work. Determining pictures and sentences using flash cards aims to train their way of thinking faster, and they can be more compact when working with groups."

RM's goal in the reflective journal was for students to mention and recognize vehicle vocabulary clearly and identify vehicle vocabulary correctly, as she described in the interview.

"My goal in teaching English is to improve students' ability to write and pronounce transportation vocabulary correctly."

Teaching Experiences

AA and MSY described their teaching experience using the visual learning method in the reflective journals. This innovative approach utilized students' senses to understand information and used realia media as teaching materials, enhancing the authenticity and memorability of the learning process. Like the interview with AA, she described her teaching experience as having taught 4th grade English, focusing on the pronunciation of "time" and daily life topics by using realia media for visual learning, making learning more enjoyable.

"I teach English to 4th-grade students, where I discuss topics about time and how to pronounce time in everyday life. I use realia media where activities are based on visual learning, which can make learning more interesting."

Similarly, MSY shared her teaching experience of using visual learning, utilizing realia media to facilitate understanding of information and learning material.

"I teach about time, which is a visual learning method. So, visual learning is a learning method that relies on vision to process information and knowledge. So that students will more easily understand information and learning materials in class when they see them. In addition, this visual learning method is accompanied by using realia media as learning media."

SIM and SA shared their teaching experiences in reflective journals; they shared tasks to achieve learning objectives, with the first objective being to innovate through small group discussions where students surveyed each other about their daily activities. SIM filled in the homeroom teacher's class and taught according to her plan, which was successful as students quickly understood the lessons during the interview.

"So, I come to the school and communicate with the homeroom teacher to fill in her class. Then, I started teaching the class using the plan that I had made. Thank God my teaching went well because the students also quickly understood the lessons, I gave elementary school students."

While the SA lesson focused on the adverb of frequency, with introductions and games for classroom interaction, students were tested on understanding through group activities, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the concept.

"So, the lesson was on the adverb of frequency, which I taught at school. Before teaching, I made introductions first so that the interaction in the classroom is better. Students must know what an adverb of frequency is, testing students' understanding of what I have explained. My teaching is also based on games where I ask students to name and pair pictures with adverbs of frequency sentences in groups."

RM's reflective journal focused on her teaching experience. The teaching method involved using animated pictures and a question sheet to be completed by students to teach them the names of means of transportation, which the teachers divided into two parts. Her teaching has been going well, as she said in the interview.

"The teaching process was successful, as I effectively taught transportation vocabulary through animated pictures."

Methods and Strategies

Visual learning is the AA and MSY method and strategy. In their reflective journal, they used visual learning methods because visual learning is an innovative method that can improve the learning process and increase students' creativity and understanding of the subject matter. In the interview with AA, she believed teaching that is interactive and relevant to everyday life is more effective and motivates students by highlighting the direct benefits of their learning.

"My reason is that I believe that teaching that is interactive and relevant to everyday life will be more effective. Students are more motivated when they see the direct benefits of what they are learning."

Like MSY, she used real-media and visual learning methods in her teaching because these methods can improve students' understanding and memory of the material, facilitate the connection between learning and the outside world, and thus increase students' participation in the learning process.

"I employ realia media and the visual learning method in my instruction because these teaching strategies can improve students' comprehension and memorization of material. Additionally, children can internalize the learning material more successfully when vision is the primary channel. Thus, using realia media facilitates students' ability to draw connections between their learning and the outside world. As a result, their comprehension will grow, and their participation in the learning process will rise."

SIM and SA used small group discussions as their teaching method and strategy, which they wrote down in their reflective journals. This method was chosen because it instilled courage, confidence, and motivation in students, thus reducing boredom and attracting their interest in learning. In an interview with SIM, she said she had adapted this method to suit his teaching materials.

"I teach in the 4th grade, so I adjust to the materials that are suitable for me to teach."

In primary education, SA uses games and flashcards to enhance understanding and prevent students from becoming bored during learning.

"Using games and flash card media, elementary students are happier with images (visuals), so that students understand better and are not bored."

RM chose the "Look and Write" session in her reflective journal. Using animated pictures in the classroom helps students remember previously provided material by asking them to write down transportation accurately. Using animated pictures in teaching, the interview outline can increase students' interest and enthusiasm, and they can recognize the given vocabulary clearly and accurately.

"The reason why I use animated pictures when teaching is so that students are interested and enthusiastic. Students can also recognize the given vocabulary clearly and accurately."

Memorable Classroom Incidents

In AA and MSY's reflective journal, based on their teaching practice at school, they felt that students received the material well and also quickly understood the learning material. Through this visual learning, students get many benefits, that visual learning can create more intensive interaction between students and subject matter. Visually presented information tends to be easier to remember than just the written word. Also, visual engagement and realia can increase students' learning motivation as they feel engaged and interested in a more fun way. AA's interview described her memorable classroom experiences, including conducting simulations with students before starting activities.

"Regarding memorable classroom experiences, when I teach, we conduct a simulation with the students before beginning the activity. For example, I, as a teacher, state something like the number of the clock; they check to see whether what they put in their books is correct at that moment, the first time. The definition of teaching is the first time someone learns something. So, when I asked, the students reacted promptly and easily, which is why I was impressed when teaching. Because they had previously recorded what they intended to learn, it is more like they catch, understand, and comprehend quickly."

On the other hand, MSY described how ice breaking can make learning more memorable by involving students actively and interactively, making learning more exciting and fun, and thus improving the overall learning experience.

"Perhaps for memorable events, when students are actively involved and interactive as well as excited when explaining about learning material, especially when we do ice breaking, this is very useful because through ice-breaking we can get students' attention. So, they feel that learning is not monotonous; not only the teacher explains, but students also participate."

Based on the reflective journals, SIM and SA expressed the excellent things they felt during teaching. The small group discussion method encourages constructive expression of opinions, builds social space, and improves thinking skills among students. AA's interview revealed that ice-breaking made the classroom atmosphere more exciting.

"When I do ice breaking, the class atmosphere becomes exciting, and the students are fun and not bored. So, we are inherently happy to teach in class, which is very impressive."

While SA's most impressive things were the enthusiastic students, good classroom interaction, and active listening to learning.

"The most impressive thing for me when teaching is that the students are enthusiastic, welcome, and listen to the learning by listening. The interaction in the classroom is also good."

RM shared in her reflective journal the good things or benefits they got from the teaching process at school. The welcome from the very friendly and polite students made them feel appreciated, and they also felt the enthusiasm of the students who liked learning English with the method they used. The students were also brilliant and quickly understood what they said. During the learning process, they were pleased with the guess the picture game and mentioning the picture's name, making the students' enthusiasm on that day even more exciting. As she said in the interview, she felt deeply appreciated during her teaching.

"I was quite touched because I felt very appreciated during the teaching, and the students could quickly understand the learning."

Obstacles and Solutions

In AA and MSY's reflective journals, they Implemented learning innovations with limited time (35 minutes), a challenge they faced, especially in utilizing visual learning with realia media. To overcome these challenges, teachers must focus on careful planning, effective material selection, and efficient time allocation. This includes prioritizing relevant material, dividing the material into smaller sections, and ensuring the most impactful material can be covered in a limited time. In the interviews, the initial obstacle that AA experienced was the selection of teaching methods.

"Before practicing, I took a method whose level was too heavy for elementary school children. As for the solution, I immediately looked for methods by the level I would teach, starting with my observations related to the lessons I would teach and looking for appropriate methods."

Furthermore, MSY explained the time constraints they faced when teaching and the solutions they applied as teachers.

"The constraints when teaching that I feel are the limited time, a challenge and obstacle faced when implementing this innovation, especially with a limited time of 35 minutes. In this short period, covering material that involves several points of material seems rushed, as if we are pressuring students to understand from one material to another. Also, using visual learning with Realia media is challenging for us as teachers because we are more into media and flashcards than Realia. As a teacher, the solution is that I can carefully plan each learning session and prioritize the most important and relevant material to be covered in that limited time. After that, how do I choose learning content that provides maximum impact and can be achieved quickly? Moreover, finally, how do I divide time efficiently? So, we break down the material into shorter, clearer sections and efficiently determine the time allocation for each section so that students can understand the specific material."

In contrast to SIM and SA, they used the small group discussion method in their reflective journals but faced obstacles. Some students did not want to interview their friends. To overcome this, we approached students and encouraged them to be brave and fair. Finally, students wanted to be interviewed in groups, as SIM described.

"The obstacle I experienced was that I used the small group discussion method, but when applying it, not all students were willing or able to discuss with their friends. Some students were introverted, so they found it difficult to communicate with their friends. We as teachers motivated these students to be willing and brave to communicate and express opinions with their friends so that they could participate with their groupmates."

Meanwhile, SA overcame problems with noisy students, difficulty in selecting drawing groups, and some disinterest in participating in the game by determining the groups before starting.

"The obstacle I experienced was that during the implementation of the games, the students were noisy, struggling to choose the drawing group, and some students did not want to participate. Therefore, the solution I use is that, before starting the game, I determine the group so that it is not

chaotic when the game has started."

In RM's reflective journal, she faced challenges in starting the lesson due to a lack of preparation, the student's lack of confidence, and a lack of listening due to peer influence. To improve learning, teachers can prepare materials in advance, be assertive, and set classroom rules to ensure students understand and respond calmly. Meanwhile, her teaching challenges in the interview were inadequate facilities and infrastructure, including a projector to display animated images. Instead, she used a laptop to show the images to the students.

"The obstacles we face when teaching are the lack of facilities and infrastructure, such as the absence of a projector, where we need a projector to display animated images so that all students can see the animated images directly. The solution is to take turns showing students how to use a laptop closely."

Discussion

Based on the research analysis, this study shows that reflecting on teaching practices influences the improvement of pre-service teachers' instructional strategies. Their reflective practices show that pre-service teachers' teaching plans and approaches include active communication, direct interaction, and materials aligned with students' interests, where the goals and objectives are to teach students to identify learning with various practical methods and use innovation to improve English proficiency. Reflective teaching experiences also showed that all pre-service teachers felt their methods were successful. The innovative methods and strategies used in reflective teaching include visual learning, realia media, and small group discussions, making learning more enjoyable and effective.

Innovative learning involves new approaches, strategies, and technologies to create more effective, relevant, and engaging student learning experiences (Akbar et al., 2023, p. 1). The pre-service teachers also shared about memorable classroom activities, such as the excellent response students received from them. The pre-service teachers also used games, flashcards, animated pictures, and ice-breaking during learning, which made the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable and effective. Issac (2010) defines teaching tactics as the teacher's behavior in the classroom, such as developing teaching strategies, providing appropriate stimulus for timely responses, drilling learned responses, increasing responses through extra activities, and so on.

Writing a teaching reflection journal can benefit pre-service teachers in continuing professional development activities. This study also proves that reflective teaching can affect pre-service teachers' abilities in terms of instructional strategies. Hiemstra (2001) states that writing reflective journals can provide several benefits. One of them is that reflective journals can be an investment in self-

development through sensitivity to thought patterns and feelings.

Conclusion

The researchers found several indicators of instructional strategies based on the results and discussion of pre-service teachers' approaches to English language instruction. The instructional strategies found were teaching plans and approaches, goals and objectives, teaching experiences, methods and strategies, memorable classroom events, and barriers and solutions. The results of this study also confirm previous research on the positive correlation between pre-teachers' reflective practice and teaching effectiveness and emphasize the critical role of experience in improving professionalism. In conclusion, the above information suggests that reflecting on teaching practices influences the improvement of pre-service teachers' instructional strategies. Various innovative strategies and methods can help pre-service teachers improve their professionalism in education. In the end, the instructional strategies that have been implemented can be used to become pre-service teachers' future instructional strategies.

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