In-Service EFL Teachers' Reflections on Their Instructional Practices: A Study in Indonesian Instructional Context

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Abstract. Reflective teaching is a means to improve teacher professionalism. By applying reflective teaching, teachers can not only find out their strengths and weaknesses during teaching, but also re-examine their principles and beliefs. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which in-service EFL teachers understand the concept of reflective teaching, the reflection strategies they apply, and the obstacles that might hinder them in reflecting. This research is categorized as a descriptive-qualitative study which involved six junior high school in-service EFL teachers from four districts in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This study administered 3 data collection techniques, which are in-depth interviews, stimulated recall, and close-ended questionnaires as the data triangulation. The findings indicated that of the six participants, only two had heard or knew about the term reflective teaching. However, they have integrated reflection to their teaching practice and showed their ability to reflect within the level of *dialogic reflection*. *Descriptive writing* as the lowest level serves as their point of departure before they came to the higher levels (*descriptive reflection* and *dialogic reflection*). There was no evidence to show that the participants had reached the highest level of reflection, which is *critical reflection*. Further examination found that there were two major issues that hindered participants from reflecting, i.e. their lack of knowledge about the concepts and strategies of reflective teaching and a heavy number of administrative workload which reduced their reflection time.

Keywords: *Reflective Teaching, EFL, Reflective Practice, Reflection*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are substantial assets of any education system. In cultivating the world of teaching, teachers are required to be diligent in innovating and doing reflection including teaching language, in this case, English language education. The increasing demand for the English language in every single level of education and research over the last decades has often been assumed to be a parallel and inevitable process in producing better international academic communication throughout the world (Bai, 2019). The Indonesian government considers equipping students with English as necessary in relation to this inevitability of globalization and the status of English as an international language (Lauder, 2008). Essentially, the purpose of English learning affects how English is going to be taught (Harmer, 2007). The way English teachers formulate their instructional design must be adjusted to the needs of their students. Some learners may learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP), such as English for hospitality, tourism, banking, nursing, and business. In Indonesia, students especially in secondary and high schools learn English as a Foreign Language or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) considering its status as a mandatory subject in the school. They need to access English-language academic texts to study abroad or at least to complete their course. This is why the role of teachers becomes crucial, which one of these roles is developing children's interest in learning a subject or language (Archana & Rani, 2017).

In this regard, English teachers have to always improve and reflect on their classroom activities to identify the problems that emerge, find out drawbacks, and provide treatments that should be taken. In the Indonesian education context, reflective practice is a necessity since the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia (2007) has recommended it as one of the teacher competency standards that centralizes on having good pedagogical, social-awareness, and intrapersonal skills. However, the implementation of this policy among educators in Indonesia remains vague (Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). Yanuarti and Treagust (2016) found that many teachers do not understand the notion of reflective teaching because of the lack of seminars, training, and other information dissemination that focus on reflective practice. Teachers' lack of understanding about the concept of reflective teaching will lead them to implement teaching methods that are routinized, which may have been influenced by their teaching habit with no critical awareness of improving their professional development (Lubis, 2018; Mesa, 2018; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). It denies John Dewey's (1933) idea of reflective thought which encompasses "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it tends" (p. 6). In addition, teachers who remain complacent in their comfort zone without making any endeavors to self-reflect for improvement may risk their career commitment and professionalism (Akbari, 2007).

Reflective teaching requires teachers to not only transform their daily classroom routines but also being aware of what problems are arising (Mesa, 2018). In so doing, teachers will be able to analyze and self-evaluate the process of learning and monitor their development (Heydarnejad et al., 2018; Sabgini & Khoiriyah, 2020). It is true that teacher training and development can be a good supporting medium to

introduce the concept of reflective teaching to teachers. However, according to Richards and Farrell (2005), teacher training simply focuses on short-termed goals of learning and accentuates on specific skills and responsibilities; while teacher development originally revolves around long-termed teacher proficiency to improve their teaching abilities and skills.

In order to engage in teacher development, an English teacher needs to have a systematic and thoughtful collection of his/her own self-inquiry and teaching practices in order to have 'high-quality standards of learning and teaching methodology' (Zahid & Khanam, 2019, p. 32). Unfortunately, many teachers lack information about what they have done in the classroom (Afshar & Farahani, 2018; Bawaneh et al., 2020; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). Richards and Lockhart (1996) stated that teachers rarely examine their own teaching practices until they are told to do so by the educational authorities. Many research arouse that experienced teachers apply classroom routines and strategies almost automatically without involving a great deal of 'conscious thought' (Parker, 1984, cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 4). Accordingly, there have been many experts talking about teacher development. In addition, joining teacher workshops and training, Richards and Farrell (2005) explain that the teachers' competencies could be developed by keep applying some reflective teaching strategies like teaching journals and portfolios, audio or video recording, stimulated recall, peer observation, and self-monitoring. Teachers should also keep thinking about and questioning themselves their goals and values in teaching – and examining his/her teaching assumption (Zeichner & Liston, 2014).

In sum, reflective teaching provides many positive effects. Therefore, teachers are recommended to conduct reflective practice in their teaching activities. There are studies that investigate the importance of reflective teaching for educators, especially pre-service teachers (Astika, 2014; Nurfaidah, 2018; Rozimela & Tiarina, 2018; Sabgini & Khoiriyah, 2020). However, reflective practices carried out by in-service teachers who have been teaching for decades are necessary to discuss considering that they are the source of reference and role models for prospective teachers. In addition, exposure deficiency about the concept and strategies of reflective teaching will lead them to implement teaching methods that are routinized, which may have been influenced by their long teaching habit with no critical awareness of improving their professional development (Lubis, 2018; Mesa, 2018; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). Their dependence on this routine-based mindset makes them lack information about what they might be able to gather from their classrooms (Afshar & Farahani, 2018; Bawaneh et al., 2020; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). Hence, this study attempts to reveal the English teachers' understanding of the reflective teaching, to what extent they established their reflective practice, and the issues surrounding their reflective practice – particularly in junior high schools where English is first formally taught.

After discussing the rationale and theoretical framework, the research questions can be formulated as follows:
1.   How do in-service English teachers comprehend reflective practice in teaching?
2.   To what extent is reflective teaching implemented in their teaching practices?

3. What are the hindering factors that prevent in-service English teachers from practicing reflective teaching?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Reflection and Reflective Practice

The practice of reflection is a fundamental aspect to consider good teaching and learning process in the nature of professionalism in education (Yanuarti & Treagust, 2016). Now, related terms such as 'reflection', 'reflective thinking', 'reflective practice', 'reflective teaching', 'teacher as decision maker', and 'teacher as reflective practitioner' are widely used in various educational contexts and being discussed by different types of theoretical frameworks (Çimer et al., 2013, p. 133; B, 2016, p. 427). Fat'hi and Behzadpour (2011) contend that the conceptions on reflection and reflective practices already come to "loose and fuzzy treatment" (p. 245).

If we traced back to Dewey (1910; 1933) theory of reflective and reflection, we may found that both are "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it tends" (p. 6, p. 9). He or she, as a reflective practitioner, keeps questioning their action: whether my practice work or not, what thing restricts my practice, why my practice did not work, and what should I do next (Sünbül & Kurnaz, 2016). Furthermore, Farrell (2018) mentions that reflection is a tool that prevents such a routine from reaching the burnout phase because practitioners take a time to stop and examine their experiences rather than engaging in repetitive habits.

In the 1970s, Freire (1972) and Habermas (1974) initiated deeper discussions on how critical reflection may enter teachers' professional domain. Critical reflection is a portray when teachers make sense of their practice's intricacies and reinterpret their own experiences from a diverse points of view (Kitchen, 2017). More broadly, it places them as 'transformers', which reflect not only for themselves but for the institutions and communities in which they interact (Gorski & Dalton, 2020, p. 359). There are some understandings that make reflection critical. First, reflection may be critical because it is a 'suspended judgement' (Dewey, 1910, p. 74) or strong 'presuppositions' that leads to the essential solution (Mezirow, 1991, p. 23). In this case, critical is about the ability to transform, involve, and aiming at the fundamental change in perspective. Second, it could be considered critical because of its focus on the 'accuracy and validity' of our teaching assumptions (Brookfield, 2017, p. 3).

Later, John Dewey's theory of reflection was developed by Donald Schön. He proposes two types of reflection as *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1987). Reflection-in-action refers to a practitioner's thought where he/she withstands the action that has occurred, recompiles it, and attempts to sense it from a different perspective (Scales et al., 2011; Schön, 1983). Reflection-on-action means that the practitioner thinks about the whole logical outcome of the activity at the end of the action (Zahid & Khanam, 2019). O'Donnel et al. (2005; in Yanuarti & Treagust, 2016) suggest a new process that is called, reflection for action, which uses reflection itself as an origination to plan further decisions so the next action will be more

beneficial for teachers. In short, reflection-in and on action applies during and after teaching practice while reflection for action is concerned with using reflection as a starting point for planning future action for further benefits of self-continuous improvement for teachers.

Definition and Perspectives Toward Reflective Teaching

In a very general stage, the term reflective teaching stresses a thought about someone's teaching (Mathew et al., 2017). Liu and Zhang (2014) assume that this thought is more about ongoing activities in the classroom teaching and learning process by setting alternative actions to achieve better goals or aims. Reflective teaching deals with the movement in the area of education in which student-teachers or practicing teachers examine their own practice and its underlying framework, and then distinct alternative means get better outcomes (B, 2016). In short, reflective teaching indicates an action when practitioners "explore connections between their beliefs with what actually happened in their practices" (Farrell, 2021, p. 60).

Qing (2009) sees reflective teaching as an approach which assumes that teachers can improve their understanding and the quality of their teaching by formulating a critical reflection based on their own tutoring experiences. Moreover, Richards and Lockhart (1996) state that reflective teaching is an activity in which teachers and student-teachers collect data about teaching, analyze their own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the gathered information as a fundamental consideration for critical reflection about teaching. Kalbani (2007) mentions the definitions of reflective teaching through five different perspectives which are: technical perspective, contextual perspective, social perspective, experiential or deliberative perspective, and critical perspective.

From the technical point of view, the teachers while applying their reflective practice pay attention to strategies and methods to be used to predetermined goals (Bartlett, 1990 in Kalbani, 2007). Thus, it puts practitioners as the 'instrumental problem solvers' who choose the best suited technical means to particular purposes (Schön, 1987, p. 3). In seeing from a contextual perspective, teachers may connect concepts, contexts, and theoretical bases toward classroom practices and are be able to assess their implication to student growth (Maulid, 2017). By this, 'clarification of and elaboration on the underlying assumptions' of classroom practice are involved in the reflective strategies used (B, 2016, p. 428).

The third is the definition of reflective teaching from the social perspective. In this focus, reflection is not only an independent process involving a teacher and his or her situation, but also as a social process that could sustain and support each other's growth (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). It also means that teamwork between colleagues is essential. This two-way dialogic endeavor permits teachers to share mutual knowledge and bridge them with what they have encountered in their practices (Huang et al., 2020; Silcock, 1994). Next, an experiential or deliberative perspective, which requires teachers to develop their consciousness towards the previous actions and ideas that frame their strategies and come out with their own values, beliefs, and teaching perspectives in making their decisions when they are doing reflection (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). This point of view leads teachers to not only rely on what they must do next, but they also consider their own practical

theories, teaching experiences, values, and beliefs in making their decision (B, 2016). The last, the critical perspective means that teachers in their reflections also put ethical and political consequences into account rather than just classroom-matters (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

In particular, critical reflection was initiated by Stephen Brookfield in 1990s who put critical reflection as an implicit assumption that contains the result of immersion from the professional and cultural atmosphere that surrounds the practitioners (Brookfield, 2017). Furthermore, other factors such as historical and socio-political factors are also taken into consideration in critical reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Now, there have been many studies that discuss reflections, reflective practice, and reflective teaching. On the other hand, the roles of the three key players, John Dewey, Donald Schön, and Stephen Brookfield, will always be vital and fundamental.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, an outline can be drawn which concludes that reflective teaching is a cyclical process of teacher professional development. Reflective teaching is the use of opportunities by a teacher in his/her daily life to systematically explore, question, and reframe his teaching practice holistically to be able to make correct interpretations based on conditions in the field and then be able to make the right choices to improve his performance. In the other words, teachers do not only act as educators, but also as researchers, clinical supervisors, and critical pedagogical actors

The Levels of Reflection

According to Van Manen (1977), there are three levels of reflection. First, *technical rationality*, which concerns with the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching activity without being connected to any specific incident in the classroom. It is indicated by the application of tacit knowledge that leads to rigid objective and daily performance (Manen, 1977). In the other words, teachers just focus on the aspects of their own practice without paying attention to social context.

The second is *practical rationality*, which pays attention to the assessment of educational goals and how they are achieved by the learners. It is identified by the process where assumptions, experiences, goals, meanings, and perceptions which initiate classroom activities are analyzed and clarified (Manen, 1977). Teachers become more aware by consequently checking their assumptions in addressing pedagogical consequences. Inline, Hatton and Smith (1995) stated that this phase occurs when teachers' assumptions alongside the teaching and learning process are embedded in language and being negotiated through it.

The last is *critical rationality*, which considers the worth of educational goals, how well they are being accomplished, and to whom it is beneficial from the successful accomplishment of those ends (Gimenez, 1999). In this rationality, instead of their routines, teachers also monitor moral and ethical aspects of the classroom. Teachers pay attention to the worth of knowledge and social circumstances which are necessary to bring up questions of 'worthwhileness' in the first place (Manen, 1977, p. 227). They involve cultural, social, and political elements in their practice. They also challenge their own assumptions and answering their actions as they realize that "universal consensus, free from delusions or distortions, is the ideal of a deliberative

rationality that pursues worthwhile educational ends in self-determination, community, and on the basis of justice, equality, and freedom" (Manen, 1977, p. 227).

Meanwhile, Hatton and Smith (1995) in their study at the University of Sydney developed Van Manen's level of reflection. They coined four levels of reflection by the way teachers express their reflective thought unit, which are *descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection,* and *critical reflection*. *Descriptive writing* is the lowest level where practitioners only tell what is on their minds without going through a systematic thought process. There are no attempts by teachers to justify certain events that they have gone through (Hatton & Smith, 1995). In the second level, *descriptive reflection*, even though the reflections carried out by the teachers were still in the form of descriptions, there were attempts to justify certain events in their practices. Hatton and Smith (1995) provided an example of a reflective thought unit at this level as below.

> "I chose this problem-solving activity because I believe that students should be active rather than passive learners." (p. 48)

The reflective thought unit represents alternate viewpoints which were shown by participants in the circumstance which is reported. However, there are no certain drawbacks about what students need to engage in to reach certain levels.

In the third level, which is *dialogic reflection*, teachers are invited to have self-discourse in reasoning and looking for possibilities that might occur in their next practices. This is what Hatton and Smith (1995) called a 'stepping back' action in the form of alternatives and hypotheses as a result of their deep reasoning and justification toward their experience (p. 48). At this level, teachers begin to show creative and critical thinking patterns and provide innovation in judging a particular problem.

The highest level, *critical reflection* is a stage where teachers – in their reflection – involve several facts about what to do based on historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. They do not only see the reflection from the scope of practice and theory but also from multiple perspectives. The following is an example of a student teacher's thought who is able to view reflection in a broader context between teachers, students, and institutions as a society.

> "What must be recognized, however, is that the issues of student management experienced with this class can only be understood within the wider structural locations of power relationships established between teachers and students in schools as social institutions based upon the principle of control" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 49)

Reflection at this stage requires not only self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-assessment, but also experience in developing reflective practices (Farrell, 2009). By involving these considerations, it is hoped that teachers can become reflective practitioners not only in classroom language teaching but also as a social entity (Pishghadam et al., 2012). In connection with this study, the reflectivity level proposed by Hatton and Smith (1995) is used as a parameter to measure the extent to which reflective practice has been applied by the participants. The reflective level denomination was adjusted to the points described above.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study belongs to descriptive qualitative research which is designed to find out the ways junior secondary in-service teachers implement reflective practice on their instructional design. The data was garnered through a survey and then analyzed through descriptive qualitative analysis. Such a method suits this study considering that it investigates teachers' perspectives and practice regarding the nature of reflective English teaching. In detail, this research focuses on how the participants interpret what reflective teaching is, how and to what stage they apply their reflective practices, and the issues that prevent them from reflecting. The details will be explained in the next sub-section.

Participants

To locate potential informants, the researcher exerted criterion purposive sampling which aimed to dig deeper into research questions, goals, and purposes in accordance with the required parameters (Gay et al., 2012; Tracy, 2020). 18 English teachers from 4 junior high schools in Central Java and The Special Region of Yogyakarta were sorted as the participant candidates. Of these 18 teachers, six in-service teachers who have been teaching for more than 10 years were deemed potential and thus chosen based on the compliance, accessibility, teaching experiences, and demographic diversity for maximum variations (Tracy, 2020). The participants' data information can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. The Data of the Participants

Participant	Major	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Assigned Place
IST1	English Teacher	Male	50	27 years	Sleman
IST2	English Teacher	Female	34	11 years	Sleman
IST3	English Teacher	Female	36	12 years	Kebumen
IST4	English Teacher	Female	45	21 years	Banyumas
IST5	English Teacher	Female	57	35 years	Cilacap
IST6	English Teacher	Male	53	22 years	Cilacap

Instruments

In this study, the researcher carried out multiple data collection techniques to gather the data. Close-ended questionnaires, stimulated recall, and in-depth interviews were employed to acquire information from the data sources. The questionnaire consisted of some factual, behavioral, and attitudinal questions which aimed to reveal facts and thoughts about the participants' general knowledge of

reflective teaching (Dornyei, 2007). The items were adapted from the theory offered by Ho and Richards (2000) which contains general points that describe their reflective practices. The second technique was stimulated recall, which serves to explore participants' thoughts, strategies, or reflections after they have conducted a pre-determined activity (Gass & Mackey, 2017). The last instrument, interview guideline, was served to gain a rich description of the participants' understandings, practices, and 'historical information' on reflective teaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 264). Since the data were obtained through several data collection techniques, data triangulation was applied to this study to set up coherent justification for the consent theme and ensure the validity of the instrument (Cohen et al., 2018, Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The instrument was also validated by a dedicated lecturer and piloted before being carried out to the field (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). To ensure the reliability, research questions were made as clear as possible and the elements of the study design were tangential with them (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, an inter-coder agreement was also carried out by the researcher and the supervisor to prevent possible drift in the interpretation and avoid meaning-shift during the coding process (Creswell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

The questionnaires were printed and administered to the participants at the initial stage to prevent opinion arousal that may occur during the next phase; which are stimulated recall and in-depth interviews. Stimulated recall was used by the researcher to elicit participants' ideas in reviewing their reflective practices after teaching and learning activities. As stated by Gass and Mackey (2017), stimulated recall serves to explore participants' thoughts, strategies, or reflections after they have conducted a pre-determined activity. In this study, each participant was invited to conduct a stimulated recall interview in the form of a question-and-answer session after completing two consecutive meetings. The researcher asked several questions regarding the reflective practices that the respondents applied in the two previous meetings and audio-recorded. The results of the stimulated recall audio recordings were transcribed, translated into English, and interpreted according to the level of reflective teaching parameters. In-depth interview was the last data gathering method in this study which aimed to reveal participant's 'historical information' in more detail as well as explored how they implemented their reflective practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 264). The data taken were recorded, transcribed, and translated before being analyzed. An appointment was set before the researcher interviewed the respondents and the interview was carried out by using Bahasa Indonesia to make it easier for participants in giving more detailed data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the analysis model of Miles et al. (2014) which includes data condensation, data coding, data display, data interpretation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The transcript of the stimulated recall and interview were translated first from Bahasa Indonesia to English before being condensed and coded (Saldaña, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The data were condensed to distill the breadth of responses expressed by participants.

The data that had been condensed were re-assembled to be coded. The condensed or "winnowed data" were coded according to the segmentation of data sources, which represent concepts, thoughts, and practices related to participants' reflective teaching activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Particularly, in recognizing participants' level of reflections, Hatton and Smith's (1995) reflective criteria were used as the primary guideline. Issues related to the participants' understanding of reflective teaching and obstacles surrounding their reflective practice are synthesized with related theories and previous studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Understandings of the Notion of Reflective Teaching

The participants involved in this study were six in-service EFL teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience. Of the six participants, only IST4 and IST6 who had ever heard of the term reflective teaching. IST4 said that she received knowledge of Reflective Teaching in a teacher training, as illustrated below.

"Yes, I think I've heard the term (Reflective Teaching), during a teacher training few years ago." (IST4)

Meanwhile, IST6 uttered that he first recognized the term when he attended Curriculum 13 training in 2015.

"Once, I've studied it. That was when I attended the Curriculum 13 (K-13) training around 2015." (IST6)

From the aforementioned portrayal, it is true if Nurkamto and Sarosa (2020) said that becoming senior teachers with long teaching experience does not guarantee that they know many things about teaching. The participants' confusion might lead to misconceptions in defining what reflective teaching is. Yanuarti and Treagust (2016) – at their study – found that three of their six participants assumed that reflective teaching is a kind of reflective activity before closing the lesson, which involves only the students to conclude what they already got during the lesson. This misconception was also experienced by IST5, who thought that reflective teaching is a physical activity that involves teachers and students, as illustrated in the interview vignette below.

"Reflective Teaching? Which invites the children to…, umm…? What are the examples? What kind of sport is that?" (IST5)

However, not understanding the concept of reflective teaching does not mean that they do not reflect at all. They continue to reflect as part of their obligations as teachers even though they do not realize that what they are doing belongs to the concept of reflective practice. It supports Yanuarti and Treagust's (2016) findings that teachers keep reflecting their own way even though they did not recognize it as reflective teaching. The participants of this study realized that being a teacher is a profession that carries great responsibility. As suggested by Richards and Farrell (2005), they have set up their 'self-awareness' and engage their 'understanding of learners' in order to find out their strengths and weaknesses

during teaching (p. 9). For example, as shown by IST2 in the interview session as follows.

> *"… yes, (I do reflection) every day. Because of what? For example, if we want to teach again, we will definitely remember what we achieved last week. Then, (I could identify) what are the students' obstacles and my obstacles. So, if possible, (it is hoped that) the obstacle should not happen again." (IST2)*

As presented before, IST4 heard the term in a regional teacher training and IST6 learned it when he attended 2015 Curriculum-13 training. This is in line with what was said by Richard and Farrell (2005) that opportunities for in-service teacher training are crucial for their program development in any educational institution they work. Teacher training and development for in-service teachers will always be essential because "not everything teachers need to know can be provided at pre-service levels" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 1). Moreover, the lack of pre-service and in-service teacher training and development programs is an 'acute' problem that will cause the practice of English teaching to lag behind (Harun & Al-Amin, 2013, p. 69). Nevertheless, in-service workshops are designed only for short-term and immediate goals, so consistency and awareness are needed for all parties to employ ongoing renewal of professional teaching skills and knowledge (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

With the existing knowledge they have, the participants express their reflective thought and reflective practice mostly by writing – whether it is in the form of teaching journals, special notes, or through chats. IST1's reflective notes, for example, not only are useful for recording the continuity of the lesson, but they can also mark special events that occur in class, or what he calls 'anecdote'.

> *"… it (reflection) is teachers' duty. We must take a note every day. After we teach, we must record events happened in the classroom. For example, when a student is not present, what we teach now, we note it because it is attached, yes. But for an anecdote, we just take a note when it happens. So, we term special events as anecdote." (IST1)*

This is the same as what Thomas Farrell said that such reflective writing can accommodate not only lesson progress but also perceived issues/problems, including critical incidents (Farrell, 2021). In addition, all participants are also helped by reflective teaching journals that have been provided by their respective schools because the journals enable them to keep a record of their classroom progress and set better strategies for their future teachings. This is why Farrell (2021) recommended reflective writing as one of the essential strategies. It is because, without such a record, teachers often lack a substantial recollection of what is happening in the classroom and cannot really use their successful or unsuccessful teaching experience only as a source for further development (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Teachers' Level of Reflective Teaching Practices

Based on the findings focusing on the levels of the EFL ISTs' reflective practice, all participating teachers in this study were at the level of *dialogic reflection*

due to their reflective thought units and practices. Hatton and Smith (1995) considered a practitioner to be at the level of *dialogic reflection* when he/she is having a "discourse with self and exploring the experience, events, and actions using qualities of judgments and possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesizing" (p. 48). This is characterized by the participants by their ability to make possible decisions based on their previous experience. Each participant, with their strategies, could purposefully analyze problems that occur in the classroom and provide solutions to overcome their predicted problems as well as set up preventive actions. For example, we can take a look at the reflective thought unit below.

> *".… In the past, I used Power Point to start with. As time goes by, I tried something else to make it (teaching and learning process) more interesting. I made an animation using Protagon. It turned out that because of this, the students became happier. Then, I provided a task to create a dialogue. I allowed students to make a mini-comic involving pictures or animation. Apparently, they liked it too. … It means that there is a slight improvement. From the past where only fifty percent of students have collected assignments. … Then, yesterday I tried using a live worksheet, with the hope that the students will be more enthusiastic too. But apparently there were also difficulties, for example, to check-in you have to be online. Ma'am I don't have an email, they said. Sometimes you have to conduct more interaction. …* (IST2)

This is in line with the findings of Kholis and Madya's(2021) study which revealed that the majority of EFL teachers have achieved similar reflection parameters. In their study, EFL teachers were one level below critical reflection, meaning that they were able to integrate their pedagogical knowledge in EFL language teaching with their classroom practice (Kholis & Madya, 2021). The same result was also obtained by the study conducted by Daley et al. (2019) and Kheirzadeh and Sistani (2018) which found that their respondents had implemented reflective practice up to this phase.

In addition, the participants' level of *descriptive writing* echo Hatton and Smith's (1995) concept that reflective practitioners – at their early stage – begin their reflection by describing events that occurred during their teaching activities, as exemplified below. The data is still in the form of a report of literature and there is no attempt by the participants to provide justification for the events. It is because, as stated by Tsui (2011), teachers at the beginning stage tend to be interpretive and less analytical, which directs them to tell what they experienced with a limited span of reasons about their actions. However, as also found by Nurfaidah et al. (2017), *descriptive writing* usually serves as their stepping stone before moving on to the next level. In the latter entries, the participants further justify and judge their descriptive events. For example, when they noticed that the teaching approach they brought into the classroom did not really attract students' attention or made them felt less motivated to participate –as indicated by the fifth participant's reflective thought unit below.

> *"I often write notes and I use it as a reference for the next teaching. For example, while the students are being less active or passive, I have to find*

another way. It is like… in this class, I'll try to use this method; and for the other classes I'll administer a new model. That is what I usually do." (IST5)

This way of thought positioned her at the level of *descriptive reflection*, where teachers show some effort to provide justification for events or actions (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Their shift of thoughts –from only describing to the attempt of justifying their events or actions– is also to represent Donald Schön's (1987) *reflection-on-action* at the early stage.

Along with further exploration, they displayed development from just a justification to deeper consideration by providing possible alternatives toward the issues they face. The participants demonstrated what Hatton and Smith (1995) called a 'stepping back' from the events/actions which led them to did quality judgments (p. 48). On the other hand, there is no evidence to show that any of the participants achieved the highest reflectivity level, which is *critical reflection.* It is because – at this level – teachers need to be aware that events and actions are not only explicable by reference to multiple perspectives, but also predisposed by historical and socio-political context (Hatton & Smith, 1995). This fact was acknowledged by –for example, one of the participants. IST3 admitted that:

"I think it is too far. (We have to) traversing politics as well? I don't think so. Unless it becomes an obligation for us to correlate it. But so far, we have reflected only within the school corridor." (IST3)

It marks that the participant only reflected based on aspects within the school corridor without involving the aforementioned external factors. This entry resonates with Hatton and Smith's (1994) findings at their proceeding which mentioned that critical reflectivity is only experienced by a small portion of teachers since this level requires a broader perspective, knowledge, and more experiential bases that take some time to develop.

Hindering Factors

There were two major issues that hinder the participants from applying their reflectivity. In substance, they did reflection in their teaching activities because they realized that this activity aids them in various aspects of their teaching. This is as stated by Farrell (2015) that both pre-service and in-service teachers feel obliged to reflect because they see it beneficial toward their future practice. However, their lack of recognition of the concepts and strategies of reflective teaching made them only reflect based on what is happening in the classroom without considering the broader aspects that may affect students' interest in learning. It supports Nurkamto and Sarosa's (2020) emphasis that teachers' understanding of the concept of reflective teaching significantly affected their reflective pace. This is why the need for an early introduction to the nature of reflective teaching is very necessary. As suggested by Rozimela and Tiarina (2018) that any education departments at university need to involve reflective teaching as part of pedagogical competence in order to provide space for prospective teachers to develop.

The second problem faced by the participants was the large number of school administrative tasks assigned to them, which took up their time for reflection. This is as expressed by the first participant as follows.

> *"Personally, I am burdened with a lot of curriculum matters. Sometimes, I (initially) want to do this, but I have to do something else for the benefit of the Madrasah and the fellow teachers as a whole. Of course, I and my fellow teachers do what they are obliged to do, which is teaching. (But) For me, my job is not only teaching but also that kind of work (curriculum), which is even possess a bigger portion."* (IST1)

This issue is in line with what Farrell (2018) said that teachers "are always trying to follow the million mandates sent from the administration, curriculum developers, school boards, and/or ministry of education officials, which leave little time or energy for reflecting on their teaching" (p. 2). Tabassi et al. (2020) and Valdez et al. (2018) in their studies also found that teachers are often shackled by severe workloads that they have to complete in their daily professional routines. Moreover, too much administrative burden will also limit their professional voice, reduce teacher autonomy, and confine their freedom in making pedagogical reasoning (Minott, 2010; Ostorga, 2006; Tajik & Ranjbar, 2018).

CONCLUSION

There are three major key findings that can be drawn from this study regarding the research questions acknowledged in the previous sections. The first investigation regarding in-service teachers' understanding of the notion of reflective teaching found that although not all participants understood the concept of reflective teaching, they had integrated reflective practice as part of their teaching routine. It is because they realized that reflection is – not only a part of their obligations as teachers but also a strategy to investigate the strengths and weaknesses within their teaching and learning activities. Therefore, the participants managed to implement reflective practice by writing their reflections in their special notes or teaching journals provided by their respective schools.

The second key finding is about the extent of reflective practice they apply, which is classified into the 4 levels of reflectivity proposed by Hatton and Smith (1995). Based on the data garnered, overall ISTs' level of reflection is at the *dialogic reflection* level. This is indicated by their ability to evaluate their instructional activities using quality judgment, justification and provide solutions and alternatives to deal with the weaknesses that arose in their previous meetings. *Descriptive writing* as the lowest level serves as their point of departure before they came to the higher levels (*descriptive reflection* and *dialogic reflection*). There is no evidence to show that the participants have reached the highest level of reflection, which is *critical reflection*. It said so because the participants do not meet the criteria for *critical reflection* which requires practitioners to consider multiple extraneous aspects such as historical and socio-political context.

Regarding the last research focus, which is the issues surrounding their reflective practice, participants complained that too many administrative tasks reduced their reflection time. The high teaching hours followed by the curriculum

workload also hindered the participants from reflecting on their teaching practices. In addition, the participants' lack of knowledge about the concepts and strategies of reflective teaching also affects their performance in reflecting.

Based on the findings, although the participants had integrated reflective practice in their teaching activities, they still did not fully understand the concepts and strategies of reflective teaching. This resulted in the lack of their method of reflection which was only limited to writing events that occurred in the classroom without considering other aspects such as social, political, and cultural that might affect students' interest in learning. In addition, teachers also need to be aware of their teaching practices and cultivate their willingness to change for the better outcome. To build such a level of awareness, it is important to introduce reflective teaching concepts as early as possible. The addition of Reflective Teaching discipline in the lecture curriculum – especially education study programs – will help provide a basic overview of the terms, aspects, and strategies of reflective teaching. In this way, prospective teachers will be better prepared to engage in teaching and learning practices and carry out their routines on a reflective basis.

For in-service teachers, this is why teacher training and teacher development programs have become essential. Comprehensive teacher training or seminars on reflective teaching will serve teachers with solid knowledge of the concept of reflection, its strategies, and its significance to teaching. Furthermore, these training will encourage in-service teachers to implement reflective practice with proper reason-generating strategies that integrate teachers' critical, analytical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Thus, teachers will become accustomed to and regard reflective practice as an inevitable part of their teaching careers. In the other hand, policies regarding teacher administrative burdens also need to be compromised. It is hoped that teachers will be more flexible to involve reflections as part of their lesson preparations with less unrelated activities or duties that consume valuable class time. The educational stakeholders or supervisors need to pay closer attention to the timetables of teachers and reconsiders the workloads they have to do within the school scope.

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