



Strategies to Develop Preservice English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence: A Focus on Critical Reflection as a Potential Strategy

M. Zaini Miftah^{1,2}(✉), Utami Widiati¹, Anik Nunuk Wulyani¹,
and Tengku Intan Suzila Tengku Sharif³

¹ Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
m.zaini.2102219@students.um.ac.id

² Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Palangka Raya, Indonesia

³ Universiti Teknologi Mara Pahang, Pahang, Malaysia

Abstract. Preservice teachers' critical reflection on teaching practicum experience is essential to discuss in the field of teacher education programs. To highlight this issue, this paper conceptually discusses the current issue regarding national and international calls for teacher education, mainly critical reflection on teaching practicum in English teacher education programs. It highlights the concept of critical reflection as a potential strategy to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence. The discussion covers the role of critical reflection in English teacher education, critical reflection on English teaching practicum, and critical reflection as a potential strategy to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence. It is argued that critical reflection on English teaching practicum as a potential strategy or tool to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence can transform them into their identity as a teacher for the future teaching profession. As a personal evaluation strategy, critical reflection can be used to explore preservice English teachers' weaknesses and strengths of teaching experiences for effective and efficient learning. To practically implement it, preservice English teachers need more in-depth reflection activities and a higher level of thinking. Moreover, the critical reflection would be as learning support mechanisms in the classroom during professional development, and it would raise teacher candidates' identities as English teachers and transform them into reflective practitioners. Hence, critical reflection in the English teacher education program becomes a key element for preservice teachers' professional development, particularly for pedagogical competence development. Finally, the paper contributes to enlightening readers or researchers in understanding critical reflection as an alternative strategy to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence.

Keywords: Critical Reflection · English Teaching Practicum · Pedagogical Competence · Preservice English Teachers

1 Introduction

In light of recent events in the field of English teacher education, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the existence of critical reflections on teaching practicum for preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence development. Critical reflection tends to be urgent to discuss since it is a potential strategy or tool to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence during their professional development in the teacher education program [2, 8, 15] [23]. Critical reflection is conceptually believed to be the main component in supporting the growth and success of preservice English teachers in teacher education programs [7, 24, 31]. Critical reflection is a process where preservice English teachers identify assumptions of their actions, find sources of problems related to the teaching experiences, inquiry the meaning of their assumptions about events or experiences, and develop alternative ways to take corrective actions [22, 32]. Through a process of critical reflection, preservice English teachers can interpret and develop pedagogical competence and take corrective actions from their experiences, both ordinary and extraordinary [8, 23, 31]. Thus, the purpose of critical reflection is to integrate learning through real experiences in teaching activities and theories and techniques of teaching to develop and further shape the construction of new knowledge and behavior with new insights.

One of the greatest challenges in an English teacher education program is to develop preservice teachers' pedagogical competence. The role of pedagogical competence is very influential for preservice teachers in undergoing the teaching and learning process to achieve successful learning [17, 23] and improve students' learning achievement [29, 30]. Empirical studies showed that researchers had developed different conceptualizations and taxonomies of pedagogical competence, e.g., [13, 20, 25, 28, 29, 33]. [33] reported that the concepts of pedagogical competence and different taxonomies and various taxonomies could be organized into efficient education, individual development such as preservice teachers, and societal changes. Hence, the role of pedagogical competence for preservice English teachers is a distinctive competence distinguishing them from other professions. It also determines the level of success in learning processes and learners' outcomes.

This paper discusses critical reflection as a potential strategy or tool to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence during English teaching practicum in the teacher education program. A potential strategy to support the development of preservice teachers' pedagogical competence, critical reflection is a powerful way and becomes an integral part of the English teacher education program in higher education [8, 23, 31]. In addition, the practice of critical reflection for preservice English teachers can be used as a theoretical framework to understand learning more deeply. It is a practical approach to developing learning English in the classroom [3] to be professional in the teaching profession for a future career [14]. However, critical reflection for many preservice teachers does not automatically occur. The process of critical reflection needs to familiarize and engage preservice teachers from earlier to achieve more pedagogical competence. The process needs to be strategically targeted in higher education, especially in teacher education programs such as English education programs [4, 16]. Furthermore, preservice teachers need to have control during the process of critical reflection as their professional reflective practice [12]. In this regard, preservice

English teachers should have confidence in the process of critical reflection for pedagogical competence development toward professional teachers for future careers [14, 27]. Therefore, this paper urgently discusses this issue more, focusing on critical reflection as the potential strategy to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence. It would be contributed to the insight of the researchers to comprehend the concept of critical reflection in English teacher education.

2 Critical Reflection to Develop Pedagogical Competence

To understand critical reflection as a potential strategy for preservice teachers' pedagogical competence development in English teacher education, it covers the discussions as follows: First, the role of critical reflection in English teacher education, Second, it includes critical reflection on English teaching practicum, and finally, it deals with critical reflection as a potential strategy to develop preservice English teachers' pedagogical competence.

2.1 The Role of Critical Reflection in English Teacher Education

As an integral part of English teacher education in higher education and a theoretical framework for understanding teaching, critical reflection in teacher education can be a learning support mechanism in the classroom [1, 3]. During the reflection, preservice teachers might critically evaluate the problems that arise during the learning process and make decisions to solve problems concerning the pedagogy base [1]. Not all of the reflection activities preservice teachers carried out can directly improve pedagogic competence, but the reflections need time and strategically developed programs sustainably [9]. Furthermore, [3] and [11] suggest that preservice teachers should control activities on professional reflective learning processes with well-preparation and be ready to face the challenges ahead. Hence, during the reflections in teacher education programs such as teaching practicum, preservice teachers can use reflections for their identities as English teachers [10] and transform them into reflective practitioners [6].

In the current study of teacher education, critical reflection is believed to be a key element in the professional development of preservice teachers. The essence of critical reflection is related to identity in teacher development [3, 10, 16, 19]. Critical reflection on preservice teachers' personal and professional problems is fundamental in learning practice in the teacher education program [24]. If the reflections are not conducted systematically, preservice teachers' professional development will stagnate, and they will not develop their pedagogical competence [15]. Furthermore, the reflections support the development of growth competencies that preservice teachers can develop professionally based on individuals internally directed to learning practices [14]. Through techniques or tools practiced in reflection, preservice teachers can understand and assess their teaching experience to understand the beliefs and assumptions that underlie their experience [14, 27].

2.2 Critical Reflection on English Teaching Practicum

Critical reflection is mentioned as a type of reflection requiring more in-depth reflection activities [12, 22]. Critical reflection tends to be a higher level of thinking [18]. Apart from differences in understanding reflection, researchers agree that there is no one right way to reflect [4, 11, 12, 32]. [32] describe critical reflection as the focus of professional development, which is the core of experiential learning that involves preservice teachers investigating themselves according to their previous knowledge and practical experiences. Critical reflection is the process of thinking critically about behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are important factors in formal and informal learning processes [12]. Therefore, critical reflection becomes an individual evaluation strategy to explore weaknesses and strengths critically when preservice teachers are conducting teaching practicum [11].

In the English language learning practicum, preservice teachers can reflect on their class experience, which allows them to reflect in real-time and also from previous class experiences done in other reflections, for example, from the reflection document they wrote at the end of the lesson [34]. According to [21], critical reflection is a reflective practice in which preservice teachers critically review to form a new conceptual framework for practices. This process of reflection exists only to show evidence of changes in conceptual frameworks based on teaching experience [23]. Critical reflection occurs when a preservice teacher presents behavior from the teaching experience and what will be done for the next teaching [21]. In short, the critical reflection process includes, among other things, “analyzing, questioning, and criticizing the assumptions that have been set on an ongoing basis, and applying changes to previous actions that have been supported by the assumptions that have been set” [18].

2.3 Critical Reflection as Potential Strategy to Develop Preservice English Teachers’ Pedagogical Competence

Everyone becoming a teacher, such as an English teacher, should have pedagogical competence to succeed in English teaching and learning. Based on the theoretical basis of competence, pedagogical competence is defined as “the ability of an individual to use a coordinated, synergistic combination of tangible resources (e.g., instruction material such as books, articles, and cases and technology such as software and hardware) and intangible resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, experience) to achieve efficiency and/or effectiveness in pedagogy.” [20, p. 201]. According to [23], pedagogical competence refers to the teacher’s specific knowledge to create an effective teaching and learning environments for all students. Furthermore, [13] explained that pedagogical competence includes professional knowledge and situation-specific cognitive skills possessed by teachers, such as perceiving, interpreting, and making decisions toward the observation in class. Thus, teachers’ pedagogical competence is closely related to three important factors in education: educational achievement, educational success, educational efficiency, professional development, and societal change [33].

Critical reflection becomes a potential strategy or tool to develop preservice English teachers’ pedagogical competence. It is used as a personal evaluation strategy to critically explore weaknesses and strengths when experiencing better and more effective

teaching practices [11]. Critical reflection enables preservice English teachers to truly understand their ways and styles of teaching to improve their pedagogical competence in the challenge of applying traditional teaching practices [2] [8] [23]. In addition, critical reflection develops preservice teachers' abilities to grow and become more effective teachers in their future careers [5, 26, 31]. Furthermore, practically, preservice teachers check everything they observe and do it regularly in their classes as a result of their engagement in reflecting on their experience of the teaching practices [7] [10, 31, 34]. Hence, preservice teachers have a deeper understanding of their accomplishments from seeing past teaching experiences to the next practices for teaching effectiveness. In this regard, preservice teachers' critical reflection should emphasize things happening in daily teaching practices in a micro class atmosphere rather than those happening in macro social education [18].

3 Conclusion

It has been discussed in this paper that critical reflection becomes a potential strategy or tool for preservice English teachers to develop their pedagogical competence. Critical reflection can be used for personal evaluation strategy to explore the weaknesses and strengths of teaching practices to improve their pedagogical competence. Its implementation needs more in-depth reflection activities and higher thinking skills. The process of critical reflection thinks critically about behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are important factors in formal and informal learning processes. More practically, in the English language learning practicum, preservice teachers can reflect on their class experiences, enabling them to reflect in real-time and on previous class experiences in other reflections. As a powerful way and integral part of the English education program, the critical reflection would be not only as learning support mechanisms in the class during preservice teacher professional development but would also raise preservice teachers' identities for the teaching profession as English teachers and transform them into reflective practitioners. Critical reflection in English education programs becomes essential element for preservice teachers' professional development, particularly in developing pedagogical competence. In this regard, the essence of critical reflection is related to identity in teacher professional development.

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