ENGLISH STUDENT TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENT IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE DURING MICROTEACHING: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This study scrutinizes the process of reflective practices carried out by English student teachers in their microteaching practices. The focus of this study exposes the student teachers' engagement when they implement reflective practice. Student teachers' challenges that they face during the process of reflection and teaching practices are also revealed. This study is a qualitative case study that involved 5 English student teachers consisting of 1male student and 4 female students who enrolled in Microteaching class. They experienced microteaching practices and went through several stages: planning, teaching, feedback, re-planning, re-teaching, and re-feedback. To gain the data, student teachers' interviews and their reflective journals were used to dig for information about their engagement in reflective practice during their microteaching and also information about their challenges in this process. The data from interviews and reflective journals were analyzed qualitatively and revealed that the student teachers showed their active participation during the reflective practice in microteaching. They experienced how reflective practices gave them opportunities to learn how to evaluate their teaching practice. However, they also faced some challenges such as particularly in critically evaluating their practices. The results of this study are expected to increase student teachers' awareness and knowledge and their professional skills as prospective teachers. In addition, the results of this study can explore the challenges and opportunities experienced by them as a reference for improvement in implementing reflective practice and microteaching.

Keywords: Student Teachers' Engagement, Reflective Practice, Microteaching

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of reflective practice in education has increased attention, especially in the context of microteaching. Microteaching is one of the key components that provides student teachers with many benefits for improving their teaching skills or pedagogical skills through a scaled-down teaching practice or in miniatured classroom teaching (Skinner, 2012). Reflective practice, when it is integrated into this microteaching class, promotes student teachers' critical self-analysis and ongoing teaching improvement. It is a crucial component of teachers' education to be reflective practitioners in their daily educational environment (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018). Through reflection, student teachers analyse their teaching decisions, behaviours, and methods which they implement for their teaching practice. This reflection engages the student teachers to participate actively during the microteaching

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process. Understanding their viewpoints and experiences is essential for enhancing teacher education programs.

Microteaching provides opportunities for both students and experienced teachers to practice, improve, and refine their specific teaching skill practices in a controlled setting. By focusing on specific teaching skills, it enables them to focus on key aspects of their pedagogy. Through the cyclical process of teaching practice, receiving feedback from peers and lecturers, and reflecting on their practice provide the student teachers to build their confidence and foster their self-awareness and professional growth (Monika, 2023). The student teachers were supposed to prepare a mini-lesson plan for them to practice in front of their classmates, and they will have some feedback from peers and the lecturer. After performing the microteaching practice, they receive constructive feedback from peers and the lecturer. Then, they are asked to revise their lesson plan and teaching strategies to improve their performance in the next cycle. Therefore, this cyclical process gives them the opportunity to develop their teaching competency which will be very beneficial for them when they are going to begin their professional careers as teachers (Ogeyik, 2009). Moreover, the student teachers' cognitive engagement will emerge through some process of critically analyzing their teaching method, revising strategies, and applying the revised strategies to improve their teaching performance.

Recent studies stated that reflective practice plays a major role in the teachers' teaching competency that offers a methodological way for them to assess their strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practices. It is stated that reflective practice is a compass that allows teachers to stop for a while and consider how they can create more learning opportunities for students (Farrell, 2013). Furthermore, Farrell argues that reflective practice for teachers can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become more proactive in their teaching. In the context of microteaching, reflective practice helps student teachers identify their difficulties when they practice teaching, modify their methods, and control classroom dynamics. The process promotes their behavioural engagement as they actively participate in the discussion, implement feedback, and refine their teaching strategies. This practice helps them to obtain valuable tools to shape their teaching strategies for the future when they become teachers.

There is still limited research about how English student teachers view and experience reflective practice during microteaching. Examining their viewpoints can highlight both the difficulties they faced and the benefits of the practice they obtained to enhance their ability to teach. In order to understand their experiences and strategies for navigating the reflective practice, this study explored how they engage in reflective practice during microteaching, particularly, cognitive, behavioural, and relational engagement through the process of analysing teaching performance, processing feedback, engaging in discussions and interactions, refining strategies, and implementing the refined strategies. This investigation will also uncover their challenges and opportunities throughout the reflective practice in microteaching. By offering insights into the English student teachers' reflective practice, this study aims to acknowledge the gap in how reflective practice can be successfully included in teachers' education programs, especially in the setting of English language teaching.

METHODS

This study used a case study design to investigate the English student teachers' experiences in reflecting their microteaching practices. The case study provides with the opportunity to understand deeply the detailed information about their microteaching practices particularly when they came to reflection session. This study was conducted at Microteaching Class in English education program at a state university in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This class aimed to provide English student teachers opportunities to establish, develop, and practice their basic teaching competencies on their teaching that including: understanding the basics of microteaching, compiling a lesson plan, forming and improving the competence of limited basic language teaching skills, integrated teaching basic skills

competencies, forming personality competencies, and forming social competencies. This class also taught the English student teachers how to train themselves to reflect on their teaching practice to see how it might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes. Therefore, this course will prepare them for the actual teaching, school-based internship or teaching practicum program.

The flow of microteaching practices in this class consisted of several stages: the planning, the teaching, the feedback and reflection, and the re-planning. This refers to micro-learning cycles (Kimaro et. al, 2021; Koross, 2016; Solanki, 2017; Yong-jik & Davis, 2017). The steps that had been implemented in the microteaching activities in this study are as follows:

1. Planning – the students were asked to make mini lesson plan for them to practice teaching. The students arranged activity steps or strategies that they would carry out according to the stages of microteaching skills such as the practice stage of opening and closing learning, the practical stage of explaining, asking questions, etc.
2. Teaching - In this stage, students in their groups took turns doing learning practices according to the teaching skills practised in a limited time, which is around 5-10 minutes for each skill. The other students and the lecturer were observing the process of the practice conducted by the group
3. Feedback - After students carried out learning practices for each skill, students got feedback from friends in their groups and lecturers regarding what things had been achieved and what things needed to be improved in these practices. Students were given assessment guidelines related to learning practices that have been carried out so that they could assess and provide feedback based on predetermined criteria. In this stage, the lecturer also gave the students and group who practiced teaching feedback, the strengths and weaknesses in the practice they have achieved and some advice for better improvement.
4. Re-planning - After getting feedback, students were given time to re-prepare before practising which they then practiced for the next cycle.
5. Re-teaching - In this step, the students practiced teaching skills for the second time after they received feedback and replanted the teaching process. This activity evaluated their teaching improvement.
6. Reflection - After the students completed the practices, students were invited to reflect on what had been done at each stage. It was in this activity that the focus of this research took place to see how students' participation was not only in practical activities but also in reflecting on the practices that have been carried out.

For the research participants, this study involved five English student teachers who enrolled in the Microteaching class. They came from the same class consisting of one male and 4 female students. They were recruited based on their availability to take apart in this study, and ensure that they could actively participate in the research process. Each of five participants had already finished a number of important courses that supplement Microteaching course such as Lesson Planning, Methodology in ELT, and Language Assessment courses. Since they just started experiencing teaching, they brought difference perspectives on the reflective practice in microteaching.

To obtain the data, this research used students' reflective journals and interviews with the five students who take apart in this research. The reflective journals were written by the students containing their experiences in microteaching practices, their strengths and weaknesses in practices that they received from the lecturer or the peers. They also evaluate what they have done in the practice, what they understand, and why they did it. From the reflective journals, the researchers also found how their engagement in the microteaching practices, how their challenges, and solutions they did. Another data collection the researcher used is interview. The interview was focused to obtain further data related to their engagements during the practices. There were three areas that the researchers focused in the interviews related to their engagements, their behaviours, cognition, and emotions.

Data obtained from reflective journals and interview results were analysed using Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), proposing the steps: (1) familiarising with the data, the researchers transcribed the data from the interview and then read and re-read the data from the interview and the reflective journals to understand the data. (2) Generating initial code: in this step, the researchers highlighted the meaningful and relevant data to the research questions and labelled those highlighted data with initial codes. (3) Searching for themes, after labelling the data by codes, the researchers grouped the codes into some potential themes. (4) Reviewing themes, the researchers re-checked the codes and group of codes to ensure they were valid. (5) Defining and naming themes: in this step, the researchers articulated what each theme is about and named all the themes (6) generating reports is the final step of this thematic analysis that involves presenting the analysis result and compiling the final report. The results were summarised into two major themes according to the focus of the study: student participation in reflective practice activities in the Microteaching class and the challenges and opportunities that students face and get while carrying out the reflective practice. Below is a detailed explanation of this study's findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Student Teachers' Engagement in Reflective Practice in Microteaching Practice

Learning engagement is one of the key factors that support students' success in the learning process. Having engagement during the learning process will allow them to actively learn by persistently coming to the class, paying attention during the learning process, performing active participation and contribution during the discussion, showing efforts to comprehend the materials by asking questions, and completing the tasks or assignments assigned to them. In the context of reflective practice in microteaching class, the students showed positive engagement, such as participating in reflective discussions, sharing their experiences and showing interest in exploring the challenges and overcome. Generally, all participants agreed that the process of reflection has a lot of benefits for them, especially how they had been inspired to search and improve their knowledge about teaching. This practice also provided an opportunity for them to know and be aware of the aspects that became their strengths and weaknesses from the practice.

Excerpt 1
Participants' reflective journals:

I found that reflection was a bit challenging for me because I didn't know what to write in my reflection. Then I tried to watch again my video of teaching and saw again what happended there. …. (Participant 1)

When I got input from friends and lecturers, especially regarding deficiencies in teaching practice, I realised that I had to find out what and how I should do in the future, for example, by watching videos on YouTube. (Participant 2)

I try to understand the input they give and evaluate myself through the videos I take so I can see my weaknesses and improve them at the next meeting. (Participant 3)

I evaluate myself by imagining a better version of how I look before practising alone. Like when I should use hand gestures, eye contact, and moving steps. (Participant 4)

Through feedback and reflection activities, I can find out how I can improve and try to work on my weaknesses and strengthen my strengths based on other people's feedback. For example, if students find it difficult to focus in class because I am too focused on explaining the material with lectures, I will use a different delivery method to get students' attention in class. (Participant 5)

The data reveals that the participants showed various engagement during the reflective practice in the Microteaching class that can be seen in terms of attitude (behavioural engagement), cognitive (cognitive engagement), and emotion (emotional engagement). In terms of attitude, they have shown active participation as shown by wanting to share and evaluate their colleagues and receive input from their colleagues and are actively involved by seeking supplementary knowledge, watching teaching videos to support their teaching skills, identifying their weaknesses and making strategies for improvement, etc. According to Cooper (2014) behavioral engagement is the extent to which a student exhibits the behaviors expected in a classroom—listening, doing assignments, following directions, participating, and so on."

Furthermore, Cooper argues, "Cognitive engagement is the extent to which a student applies mental energy, such as by thinking about content, trying to figure out new material, and grappling with mental challenges." Activities that show their cognitive engagement are represented by their mental investment to study harder, understand feedback, evaluate their performance, and critically think about how to improve their teaching practice, such as by watching teaching videos from YouTube, practicing on their own, and so on.

Data also shows that the participants were emotionally engaged during reflective practice in microteaching. They felt comfort during reflective practice activities by showing that they motivated to improve their practices. Cooper (2014) states, emotional engagement denotes the extent to which a student feels positively about a class, such as by enjoying it, feeling comfortable and interested, and wanting to do well. Thus, it can be concluded that students in this reflective practice activity have good engagement so that they can evaluate, realise, and want to find ways to improve and enhance it. When students have good engagement in microteaching activities and reflective practice, they will have the opportunity to continue to develop and improve their abilities and skills as prospective teachers. In line with Mathew et. al (2017), reflective practice is an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where people learn from their professional experience to enhance their professional development.

Challenges and Opportunities Faced by Students in Reflective Practice

During their engagement in reflective practice in microteaching class, the participants undoubtedly encountered various challenges, such as their incapability to critically reflect on their microteaching practice, feeling uncomfortable with feedback from peers and lecturer, and time constraints to reflect. The following are the participants' interview results.

Excerpt 2

Although this reflective activity is not the first time, I still have difficulty really understanding what has happened so it is also difficult to determine what to do. (Participant 1)

I'm still confused about whether I can really reflect on my learning practice. Sometimes I feel that I am only describing the surface, without getting to know much more deeply what I have truly experienced. The time to reflect is also sometimes less effective because it is usually done at the end of a learning activity, although some are done after it's finished because it clashes with other activities; I like to feel like I can't dig deeper. (Participant 2)

I feel nervous and afraid when I'm in a session listening to friends' assessments, especially if the ratings are negative because they usually change my mood. I also sometimes feel that I can't accept their negative opinion about my teaching performance. I realise this shouldn't be done but still. (Participant 3)

Time for reflection seems so limited that it's hard for me to dig deeper into what really happened. (Participant 4).

I think reflecting on what we have done is very challenging. I didn't know what exactly I should reflect. I wrote my reflection but I think there is something important missing there. (Participant 5)

In addition to students feeling that reflecting on microteaching practices that they have carried out has challenges or obstacles, they also benefit from reflection activities during microteaching activities, such as an increased understanding of who they are as prospective teachers, an awareness of the importance of reflecting on teaching and learning activities so that they continue looking for better ways for further practice, and through this reflection activity, they also felt an increase in their ability to teach.

Excerpt 3
This reflection activity provides a very valuable experience for me to assess how I did my teaching practice. As I mentioned before this is my first time teaching English in class, so of course, I will make a lot of mistakes. And that can be seen from the feedback my friends gave me. After accepting and correcting my mistake according to my friend's input, they said I had made a good change. (Participant 1)

Feedback provided by friends is invaluable input as material for my reflection so that I feel motivated to improve my teaching skills. Even though every time you practice, the results are not perfect. But by evaluating it, I know more about my strengths and weaknesses. (Participant 2)

Of course, this feedback is for reflection. For example, like in every practice, there must be input, there I make good use of it. I re-watched my video and then my friends' videos to compare and find out more about where I was lacking and why so I could fix it. (Participant 3)

My friends and I seem to agree that reflection activities are very useful for us in terms of our practice. Starting with listening to the results of the assessments of friends and lecturers and then also assessing our practice, I am very interested in continuing to improve my teaching skills, so I know what I need to improve, and it is very useful for me. (Participant 4)

From the interviews, the researchers found that the participants not only faced challenges but also got benefits from doing reflective practice on their microteaching. The data shows that the participants faced challenges in understanding the reflection process, doing in-depth reflection, facing negative emotions towards reflection, and having limited time for reflection. These challenges indicate that while the participants engaged positively during the reflective practice in their microteaching class, they struggled with some challenges especially related to their cognitive and emotional aspects. Cognitively, they faced challenges how to reflect their experiences in microteaching deeper. This is in line with de Bruin (2019) who noted that novices in the learning process often find difficulties in making implicit knowledge explicit. This highlights that the student teachers need to be introduced to reflective practice earlier and get more guidance to learn and to reflect not only on a surface level but also on critical analysis. Even teachers still find challenges in reflecting on their teaching (Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020; Sunra et al., 2020; Wei Ann et al., 2018). From their emotional challenges, they were afraid of facing criticism from their peers and lecturers. Wei Ann et al. (2018) stated that emotional discomfort becomes one of the issues that usually hinders reflective practitioners because they need to confront their feelings during the reflections. This can cause the student teachers to avoid engaging actively in reflection.
Despite the challenges, the participants acknowledged that they got some opportunities when doing the reflective practice in microteaching class, including self-awareness, self-improvement, and self-confidence. Through reflective practice, the

participants assess their teaching performance by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practice. This stage contributes to student teachers' awareness of their experience (Priddis & Rogers, 2018). They also got constructive feedback from peers and lecturer to refine the practice and this made them implement changes and refine their teaching strategies. By recognising their strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practice and improving their knowledge and capability made the participants more confident and comfortable with their roles and prepared better for their teaching practice. The benefits of reflective practice specifically in microteaching are regarded to increase the student teachers' deeper learning, awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, understanding of professional development needs, gaining new skills and knowledge, and personal confidence (Davies, 2012; Farrell, 2018; Priddis & Rogers, 2018).

In conclusion, the result shows that the participants demonstrated their engagement by actively participating in reflective discussions, sharing their experiences, and improving their ability to teach. In addition to their engagement, the process of reflective practice in microteaching has offers them both opportunities and challenges. Although it was emotionally and cognitively challenging for participants to take criticism and engage in in-depth contemplation, these challenges also offered opportunities for development. Reflective practice encourages student teachers to continuously evaluate and enhance their teaching methods by fostering critical self-awareness when supported and given constructive feedback. In the end, it promotes their professional growth by improving their skills, self-confidence, and readiness for teaching in the real world. The harmony between conquering obstacles and appreciating the advantages of reflection highlights how important it is in creating capable and thoughtful teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the English student teachers' experiences in reflecting on their practices in their microteaching course. Reflective practice in the micro-teaching class plays a pivotal role in boosting both the personal and professional growth of English student teachers. It helps them to think, reflect and evaluate their own teaching. The findings of this study revealed that reflective practice has positive contributions in triggering the student teachers' critical thinking that ended up by increasing their self-awareness, promoting the student teachers' self-efficacy, and improving the student teachers' ability to manage their classes, such as in facing an unexpected situation, managing time and controlling gesture while teaching. Further, those improvements are fruitful for them to conduct better instruction, and finally, it can improve their teaching qualities.

Moreover, the researchers realizes that this study is still far from perfect. This current study only focuses on student teachers' experiences in practising reflective practice in micro-teaching classes. However, the results of this study show that reflective practice on micro-teaching practices contributes positively to student teachers' development in only 3 aspects, such as self-awareness, self-efficacy, and classroom management. Therefore, in-depth research about this issue with richer data can emerge as a wider aspect of student teachers' development. Thus, the researchers recommend that future studies utilize other data collection such as by using observations, questionnaires, or other supporting data. Further, the researchers suggest micro-teaching stakeholders to provide a clear understanding to student teachers regarding the importance of doing reflective practice on microteaching practices so that they are able to develop personal and professional development well.

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