



## In-Service English Teacher's Perceptions of Reflective Teacher Diary to Promote Professional Development

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### **Abstract**

To be a professional, teacher as a learner must continuously increase the experiences and knowledge with aiming at earning or maintaining the academic quality. Automatically, a teacher needs to apply particular technique or strategy and utilize a certain tool to meet the standards of excellence in teaching. Thus, reflection is considerable as one of the indispensable strategies that can be applied to lead teacher's practice becomes more qualified. Reflection in teaching essentially refers the opportunity of educators to think back critically after teaching students. Several previous studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of teacher journal in the education field. However, only a few studies investigated teacher's perceptions toward the use of teacher's journal. Correspondingly, this study was set in Indonesia and involved an English teacher of Junior High to fulfill the gap. It aimed at determining the components reflected from teacher diary. In order to investigate the research questions, the researcher made open-ended questionnaire related to teacher's experiences in utilizing teacher journal, then continued by in depth-interview to confirm and explore further the teacher's answer. Thus, this study used qualitative method since it was considered as the proper design to conduct this research. Ultimately, Interactive Model was used to analyze the data. The researcher concluded that teacher's diary or teacher's journal has a valuable contribution for English teacher to be more skilled and professional to help students in mastering English skills and more well-prepared for the next English teaching.

**Keywords:** Teacher diary; Teacher journal; Professional development; Reflective practice; English teacher

### **Introduction**

People commonly understand that teacher has the significant role in education to convey knowledge and guide students in class activity. Then, every teacher is recently demanded to be reflective and evaluative towards what they have given in their teaching (Fatemipour., 2013). Reflective toward the teaching activity lead a term reflective practice. It is nowadays considered as a famous model since many studies investigated this regard and linked with the way to promote professional development of teacher. Relating this circumstance to the needs of EFL classroom, teachers are highly required to provide qualified teaching in order to reach the condition in which students can understand what they learn and become more skilled in every prior element of English language. Several investigations about reflective

practice found that there are many tools, strategies, and techniques can be applied to reflect teaching practice: teacher journal or teacher diary, peer-discussion, student's feedback, audio recording, peer-coaching, peer-observation, action research, and video recording (Lee., 2007; Fatemipour., 2013; Soisangwarn & Wongwanich., 2014; & Susoy., 2015).

Reflective journal writing is a model for a teacher to reflect their teaching that is mostly used in classroom activity. This is categorized as the term of reflection that has a significant impact for the teacher to develop their professionalism. To emphasize, reflective teaching is a model can be used to reach professional development in teaching (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan., 2001). The previous study comes from Indonesia in which Astika (2014) examines 40 journals of teaching reflection produced by 40 pre-service English teachers in Indonesia. They are instructed to write teaching reflection about 500 to 600 words long. It should contain several issues relating to teaching such as materials, lesson plans, classroom activities and classroom management. The student teachers are under the teaching practicum period of the investigation in which every student teacher must teach English in a school that is near from the university. That investigation reports that teaching journals written by pre-service English teachers contain more reflection on the personal and contextual domains of teaching. It appears that the student teachers are more concerned with their judgments, reactions, and teaching behavior in relation to the teaching and learning process in the classroom and how the classroom contexts affected, determined, or influenced their teaching practice.

Therefore, several studies had been conducted to found out the efficiency of the tools/techniques to reflect teacher teaching but only a few studies examined teachers' perception about journal writing. However, those commonly focus on the challenges confronted in writing a reflective journal. With those in mind, this research focused on examining several elements of teaching reflected and written in journal writing. To reveal something novel for the specific field, this study involved English teacher as the participant to expose the role of reflection in English classroom.

### ***Professional Development***

Professional development is a term that cannot be separated from educational field and 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning. Professional development is defined as practitioners' opportunity in the way of seeking or utilizing particular techniques to improve teaching practices and students' learning (Guskey., 2000). Teaching improvement can be indicated when the practitioners are involved in such activities that seek to enhance knowledge and skills, which may also contribute to their personal, social, and emotional growth (Desimone., 2009). Additionally, teaching practices lead to significant improvement in teaching abilities and intelligence and teacher quality has also a major influence on student achievement. Hence, a teacher should develop the professionalism by practicing reflection toward classroom activities. This occurs in situations where the action yields unexpected consequences and refers to teachers being aware of their decisions as they work, while the latter refers to reflecting back on and critiquing one's practice. In any case, the use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the premise that teachers may improve their teaching by systematically reflecting on experiences Farrell (2004, 2007)

### ***Pedagogical Knowledge Base in Teacher's Reflective Journal Writing***

Reflection, as the original term of reflective practice, is classified as a strategy to improve teachers' quality in teaching. Dewey, the pioneering of reflection, defines reflection as a way to help teachers in guiding students to learn in a meaningful way by using the competent skills and practices, thus leading to genuine understanding (Loughran., 2002). According to Schön (1982), it is important to reflect on experiences as they occur. McGregor & Cartwright (2011) highlights reflection often begins when

someone pauses to ‘think back’ something unexpected occur from the previous activity. It is becoming more purposeful, useful, and beneficial when the one follows the finished activity with some questions, such as ‘why did it happen’, ‘how to overcome with it’, and ‘what should I do to avoid it’.

It is undeniable that reflective practice can help the teachers to utilize the reflection of their teaching. Further, reflective practice is examined and subdivided into three categories: (1) Reflection-in-action; (2) Reflection-on-action; and (3) Reflection-for-action (Farrell., 2012). Reflection-in-action called as interactive reflection means the process of teachers’ thinking towards teaching and learning activities while on the job. In reflection-on-action, the practitioners think his/her previous teaching whether there is any problem or not and also to find out the alternative way to deal with. The last, reflection-for-action or anticipatory reflection means teachers consider the problem or situation will happen in future teaching. Moreover, the reflective teacher requires three attributes to be a reflective teacher. Those considerable attitudes are open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility (Farrell., 2015).

Therefore, reflective journal writing, however, is one of the most commonly used around the world. Writing reflective journals is assumed to enhance critical thinking of student teachers since it helps them think about different aspects of teaching in light of personal and contextual factors and revisit their understanding of their teacher selves through a process of discovery (Farrell., 2004; Lee., 2007). Reflective journal writing, among other things, helps teachers identify their weaknesses, seek improvements, and connect their existing knowledge with new information.

In the field of English language teachers, there are four major components of pedagogical base concerned by teachers: (1) knowledge of language and related disciplines, (2) knowledge of ELT theories, skills, and techniques, (3) knowledge of context and social relations, and (4) knowledge of class, time, and learning management (Moradkhani, Akbari, Samar, & Kiany., 2013). Additionally, language management, learning management, knowledge management, and classroom management are classified under the term of teacher’s pedagogical knowledge base. It could be concluded that those components are considerably reflected in teacher’s diary.

## ***Methodology***

The underlying notion of this study was to find out several elements reflected by the teachers from teaching learning activity and written in teacher journal. Considering the purpose, descriptive-qualitative was considered as a proper method to use in this study in which the data were qualitatively gained through questionnaire and interview to an in-service EFL teacher who teaches English in one of Junior High School in Indonesia. The participants of this study were purposively selected in accordance with the experiences of utilizing teacher journal writing, and henceforth, the data collected through those techniques were considerably convenient to answer the main research question as follow:

What are the components of pedagogical knowledge base being realized by pre-service EFL teacher in their reflective teacher diary?

The data of this study included (1) questionnaire, the participant was given an open-ended questionnaire which investigated the elements of teaching English reflected by participant and written in a diary, and (2) records of interviews, in depth-interview was conducted to confirm the participant’s answer and to gain more detail information that could not be found in questionnaire answer. Ultimately, the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, (2014) was applied to analyze data obtained in this research which ranged into three phases: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) drawing and verifying conclusion.

## **Discussion**

The teacher's pedagogical knowledge bases reflected and written in teacher diary were described as follows:

“There are several elements that can be reflected in teaching and learning process. The prominent thing is to find out the weaknesses of the teaching technique, procedures, media, and etc. It is to evaluate the teaching process and evolve the next teaching process, thus the same situations will not happen at the next meeting. The second element that should be considered to be reflected in the teaching process is the students' attitude. This point gives a lot of contributions in order to comprehend the students' needs and to help the students' achieving the intended learning outcomes. The students expected to have a positive attitude toward the teaching process, otherwise, the teachers should evaluate the teaching process and find the suitable method/technique, media, process that apt with the students' characteristics and needs. It also expected to build a good classroom atmosphere.”

According to participants' answer on the questionnaire, it could be categorized that pedagogical components in teaching reflected were: (1) Teaching techniques/procedures/media; and (2) Students' attitude. By using teacher diary or teacher journal in class teacher can write several aspects such as challenges confronted from classroom activity and according to this action, teacher can find some components in teaching needed to improve: students' behavior, students' performance, teaching strategies, instructional content, classroom management, students with special needs, and problems on keeping journal entries (Chien., 2013).

The researcher then explored the answer in the interview phase. It is found that the participant in one occasion taught Reading subject in English class grade 7 of Junior High School. This was the subject that usually made students become sleepy and unmotivated to learn. However, the participant used a media in the form of powerpoint slides containing the passage with a colorful background. She still considered the legibility of the text which means such colors and attributes were placed properly on the slide. Moreover, the participant also inserted sound effects and created the animation for particular sentences and words that are usually difficult for grade 7 students. Then, it was added with the explanation of difficult vocabularies and related to the context of the text. And the result was students were motivated and attracted to read and follow teaching and learning activity. Students' had great attention which was less of cheating. However, this interesting media still had the weaknesses since the process consumes a lot of time. So that, not all passages of the topic could be included on the slides. When students had to read other passages and answered the questions in their textbook, they seemed like lack of motivation to read. However, the participant taught that teaching activity that day was going well. She could improve the way of teaching at that time. Both strength and weakness of using the media were written in her diary directly.

Relating to teaching English, the researcher found the teacher's perception from the interview below,

”Well, if we talk about English class, I think that I wrote many times the challenges in my journal. When I had good time to write I will directly write it. For speaking activity for example, after some students made conversation in front of the class, before I continued calling other students, it is usually I...we had a minutes time to prepare. Like resting time for one minute. Students prepared their conversation. At that time I wrote on my journal such as pronunciation of student A, and the word he or she spells previously, because I heard that when he or she speaks in conversation, his/her pronunciation was not true. Hmmm or other situations the class was crowded because they were discussing difficult vocabularies, but it is not discussion session. So I will write in my diary the phrase or word crowded, difficult vocabulary. Yeah this..”

From the interview, the participant wrote the word in her journal such as pronunciation of student B followed by the word student pronounced, crowded, and difficult vocabulary. Here, the researcher categorized those keywords of pedagogical components reflected by the teacher into three types: (1) students' performance, (2) classroom management, and (3) lesson material. Students' performance and classroom management are classified into knowledge of class time, and learning management. Moradkhani et al. (2013) explain that the teachers should understand the knowledge of lesson planning and classroom and time management as well as differences in learning teaching among language teachers. Then, lesson material in English learning is categorized into knowledge of research and professional development in which Moradkhani et al. (2013) argue that this category relates to types of research and available ELT sources. In this part, language teachers need to consider the proper lesson materials for the students in the English learning. Further explanation from the participant, she thought deeply about what she wrote at home. Starting from students' performance, she would resume some words that students did not pronounce well, why this happened, and how she would improve students' pronunciation. Then, she usually used these questions as the consideration what she would do at the next meeting. Finally, the participant asked students to pronounce properly some words that they could not pronounce well in the beginning of next class by sometimes displaying or playing the audio relating those words. Furthermore, in classroom management aspect, the participant sometimes had no idea to handle students when they were crowded. She preferred discussing with other teachers to find out the best techniques to handle class. And the last about lesson material, she would learn from the previous teaching about students' difficulties. As an illustration, there were some difficult vocabularies in reading a passage. Before teaching, she would make a preparation of the lesson and predicted or anticipated the words students did not know so that she made a good explanation in an interesting way.

Additionally, as seven years teaching English in Senior High School the participant had written several pedagogical components that can be reflected from teaching. If referring to Chien (2013), all elements had been reflected, yet for element "students for special needs" was rather reflected because she rarely found such students since she had no any disability students.

On the other hand, this research also found some others findings from the participant relating to writing teacher diary. The participant stated two problems she found in writing challenges teacher journal. Those were limited time and the students didn't answer objectively. She explained the reason why timing is the most problematic thing found in writing journal when teaching English in class. When a teacher taught a particular subject in class, automatically he or she would ensure whether the activity was going well or not. If not, the teacher must anticipate the conditions and directly found out the way to deal with such conditions. In addition, a teacher must think more critically to explain the lesson and found a solution to the students. Teacher's focus was on the activity. As a result, sometimes teacher did not have time to write the challenges in the journal directly. It is owing to writing a journal while teaching was considered as time-consuming because of teacher highly concerned on the process of teaching and learning activity. By all means, the teacher needed time to write the students' difficulty as her reflection in class.

The result of this research was in line with a study that examined several student teachers as the participant in writing teacher journal, and then it is found that some pre-service teachers argued that writing journal was time-consuming and difficult and the structure they were required to follow was limiting. Another research from Degago (2007) also found that the participants agreed that teacher diary was really helpful, but to write what they reflect in teaching learning process on their journal was time-consuming. Following is participant's opinion about the challenges of writing journal.

"The most difficult one in conducting reflective journal is the limited time. In teaching process, I usually focus on the procedures of teaching and ignore the journal. The other challenges are the students who didn't answer objectively when I asked them to write down what they have

learned, which parts that they cannot understand or difficult to understand, and etc. The students usually write down or answer the questions based on his/her friends' statements".

On the contrary, the participant proposed a solution she utilized in her experience. Dealing with time-consuming in writing teacher journal, writing an important problem in the form of keywords as the key to remind what should be fixed in her teaching was the efficient strategies in order to break the limited time. Another way was recording or video-recording the whole activity in class so that teacher could play the video or audio after class and wrote down challenges confronted in teaching. While remembering what had happened during the activity, the teacher might reflect and think critically those problems. Recording teaching activity, in particular, Abednia et al. (2013) claimed that to collect rich data teacher might video-record the process of teaching, continued by writing down in the journal. Degago (2007) considered writing a journal as a valuable opportunity for a teacher to improve their competency and skill. Writing regularly in a journal is highly recommended because it could help teachers clarify their own teaching, explore their own beliefs and practice, and monitor their own practice (Farrell., 2007; Orland-Barak & Yinon., 2005).

### **Conclusion**

To be a professional English teacher, one needs to look at several aspects that can help them to improve their English teaching practice. Reflection, in particular, is a model that is considerably more significant to involve an English teacher in developing professionalism. Reflection means English teachers are required to look back what they have done in English classroom, how the activity is going, how students performance and achievement, why that could happen, and others. In this phase, English teachers must think critically and link to the English lesson. Accordingly, EFL teachers can use their journal to reflect the English lesson. Teacher journal or teacher diary is beneficial for practitioner since it can be implemented in teaching and gives several feedbacks relating to teaching-learning process. When English teachers are involved in reflection, they automatically will concern about reflection in-action, reflection on-action, and reflection for-action. The feedback found in reflective teaching can be used as a benchmark to find out the solutions from teaching problem and improve teaching skills and practices. It sometimes presents some pedagogical components in classroom activity such as method/technique, classroom management, students' comprehension, and students' attitude.

Further, utilizing reflective practice in teaching leads the teacher for becoming a reflective teacher in which the way of teacher's thinking and the thinking outcome seems highly be more rational and guaranteed because what teacher says and what teacher does after doing reflection are based on the evidence. Thus, they can consider some valuable techniques to guide the students to understand and master English skills. Therefore, a teacher can also judge how good the students' competency and ability in using English both written and oral. Guided by teacher diary, a teacher seems highly to possess large chance to analyze every student's skill and the difficulty they confronted in learning English. To emphasize, a teacher has a main role to find out the problems and solutions. With this in mind, it could be justified that EFL teacher has a great opportunity to develop the professionalism by reflecting his/her teaching practice with teacher diary. As the implementation, educational institutions need to involve the English teachers in reflective practice since it gives a significant impact on teacher quality. Moreover, it can be suggested that student English teachers who are studying in education program need to engage in reflective practice in order to become more skilled and qualified.

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