A CASE STUDY OF THE CRITICALITY OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE (TESL) STUDENT TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE ENTRIES

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kekritisan refleksi yang ditulis oleh guru pelatih Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (TESL) semasa mengikuti kursus dalam program TESL. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menilai komponen refleksi dalam entri reflektif guru pelatih. Penakulan pedagogi yang mempengaruhi pemilihan tajuk guru pelatih dalam proses penulisan refleksi mereka juga dikaji dalam penyelidikan ini. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kes di mana data dianalisis secara kualitatif. Entri reflektif guru pelatih dikumpulkan, dan data dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan. Data dari temu bual separa berstruktur dianalisis mengikut 5 tema utama yang kemudian dibahagikan kepada beberapa sub-tema. Terdapat 29 orang guru pelatih, pada semester enam mereka di universiti pendidikan guru di Malaysia, yang mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Mereka mengikuti kursus pedagogi yang mempersiapkan mereka untuk latihan mengajar mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan dua instrumen iaitu entri jurnal reflektif dan wawancara separa berstruktur. Analisis dokumen digunakan untuk menganalisis data yang diperoleh dari entri reflektif pelajar perguruan. Penilaian entri reflektif bertulis mereka menggunakan protokol empat kategori Kember et al. (2008) dan kerangka holistik Lau (2016). Sebilangan besar guru pelatih menunjukkan bahawa mereka hanya mencapai tahap kekritisan refleksi iaitu "pemahaman" diikuti dengan "refleksi", "tidak reflektif" dan "refleksi kritis". Terdapat tiga komponen yang telah dibincangkan dalam kajian ini iaitu kekuatan dan kelemahan, peningkatan kemahiran, dan perubahan tingkah laku. Terakhir, terdapat dua puluh alasan pedagogi yang digunakan oleh guru pelatih dalam proses menulis entri reflektif mereka. Hasil kajian ini dapat mempengaruhi proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran dan juga perkembangan profesional guru.

A CASE STUDY OF THE CRITICALITY OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE (TESL) STUDENT TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE ENTRIES

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the criticality of the reflection written by the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) student teachers while undertaking a course in the TESL programme. In addition, the study also aims to assess the reflection components in the student teachers' reflective entries. The pedagogical reasoning that influences student teachers' choice of topics in writing their reflection is also being studied in this research. This study employs a case study design in which the data were analysed qualitatively. The reflective entries of student teachers were collected, and the data were analysed using content analysis method. The data from semi-structured interviews were analysed according to 5 main themes which are further branched out into several sub-themes. There were 29 student teachers, in their sixth semester in a teacher education university in Malaysia, who participated in the study. They were taking a pedagogical course which prepared them for their teaching practice. This study used two instruments: reflective journal entries and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from the student teachers' reflective entries. The assessment of their written reflective entries made use of Kember et al. (2008) four-category protocol and Lau (2016) holistic framework. The majority of the student teachers demonstrated that they achieved only the second level of the depthness of reflection, which is "understanding" followed by "reflection," "non-reflective," and "critical reflection." There were three components discussed in this study: strengths and weaknesses, skills improvement, and behavioural change. Lastly, there were twenty pedagogical reasonings that the student teachers employed in writing their reflective entries. The findings of this study can impact the teaching and learning process in a teacher education programme and teachers' professional development.

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

IPTA	Public Institutions of Higher Learning
KPM	Malaysian Ministry of Education
LPM	Malaysian Examinations Board
MOE	Ministry of Education
SKPMg2	Malaysian Education Quality Standards Wave 2
TESL	Teaching English as Second Language

LIST OF APPENDICES

A   Sample data of student teacher's reflection

B   Interview Protocol

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

This study aims to analyse the depth of the reflection exhibited by the student teachers
in their post reflections done after their micro and macro teaching sessions. In this
chapter, the background of the study is being described to set the context of the
research. This chapter explains and positions the research to further understand the
research purpose. The statement of problems provides insights into the problems
within the scope of this study. This chapter also explains the objectives and the
research questions to be achieved at the end of the study. It explains the theoretical
framework underpinning the theories involved in this study. The significance of the
study and the operational discussion is also presented in this chapter.

1.2   Background of the study

The Malaysian education system has been experiencing many changes to cater to the students' needs at the current time with the emergence of modern technologies such as smartphones and other digital appliances (Hughes et al., 2020). Since technology has evolved, our education must also undergo some changes to adapt to the type of target students in our classroom. We can no longer expect the teaching and learning to occur only in the classroom, but the process is ongoing even outside of the classroom (Thomas & Brown, 2012; Vogel, 2018). The teachers are not the only variable that can make tremendous changes in the quality of education. However, they are the agents of change in determining the future of education reforms. Teachers are among the important elements for improving educational quality, especially in determining learning outcomes (Jamil, 2014; Saqipi & Vogrinc, 2020). Thus, it is important to ensure that Malaysia has the quality and effective teachers capable of making sure that our education system progresses continuously.

In accordance with this move, the Ministry has launched a strategic education blueprint called the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which aims to improve the standard of Malaysian education. The core strategy of this move is to make the teaching profession a prestige profession by ensuring that only quality and qualified teachers are chosen for the teaching profession. One of the significant changes in the development of the teaching and learning process is the use of 21st-century learning. Teachers need to utilize and incorporate technology in their teaching and learning. In order to achieve this, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has recommended various types of courses, such as the integration of 21st-century skills in teacher lesson plan courses and the Malaysian Education Quality Standards Wave 2 (SKPMg2) course, which can help teachers in implementing technology in their lessons. The cooperation between

teachers and MoE should be built to ensure effective communication, leading to greater success in implementing any new system in education. Teachers should be empowered to give feedback and report any shortcomings in the new system introduced by our ministry for improvement purposes.

Since the teacher is the key to this measure, the teacher must be skilled enough to ensure that the students are able to understand and apply the knowledge using various teaching tools and strategies. One of the ways that make a quality teacher is the ability to reflect effectively. Teacher's reflection is undeniably a very effective tool in democratizing the teaching and learning process as its nature is to change the teacher's practices based on the students' needs (Galea, 2012; Gorski & Dalton, 2020). Many types of research have been done extensively in the area of teacher education, such as the importance of having teacher education programs that provide a teaching and learning environment which are broad and interactive; and prepare student teachers to face challenges in the real context they are going to teach (Raja Nor Safinas & Amreet Kaur, 2015; Evens et al., 2018). Incorporating reflection in the teacher training program could provide a conducive environment for student teachers to improve their reflective skills and justify their pedagogical decisions.

1.3   Statement of the problem

The researcher has identified a few problems that set the purpose for this research. The first problem is that the student teachers could not produce effective reflection to guide their improvements in the next lesson. This means that the reflection they wrote was not critical and did not contain the elements needed by student teachers to see the problems during their teaching, and to find possible solutions to improve in the next

lesson (Sargent, 2015; Nurfaidah et al., 2017). After each teaching and learning session, the reflection that they usually did was just a mere expression of their feelings due to lack of understanding of the real meaning of reflection (Hebert, 2015; Nyaupane, 2018). Besides, some students have reflected poorly in their reflective entries because they had insufficient reflective skills and could not relate to their learning process (Lew & Schmidt, 2011; Töman, 2017). There are many types of reflective writing in education, but the main traits are the existence of evidence and solution for improvement (Quigley and Jane, 2013; Valdez et al., 2018).

The second problem that the researcher has identified was the lack of guidelines for the student teacher to refer to when writing the reflection (Stevenson and Cain, 2013; Nurfaidah et al., 2017). Even if the teacher educator has given guidelines on how to do reflection, they were not aware of the importance of doing reflection after the post-teaching sessions which should guide them in improving their subsequent lessons. Studies have found that the quality and criticality of the students' reflection varied greatly and these studies have indicated the need for student teachers to be exposed to more guidelines and structure for them to be engaged in their reflections (Becker & Renger, 2017). In addition, it was found that the student teachers were writing reflections based on their interests (Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Töman, 2017). This could be seen through their choice of topics for reflection. Thus, there is a need for a universal guideline and approach to ensure reflective writing is more systematic (Roberts et al., 2016; Becker & Renger, 2017). The teacher educator needs to train the student teachers on how to reflect. Even though it takes time to for them to be a reflective practitioner, but such practice yields detailed data on multiple topics and dimensions in their reflections which can be useful for future references and various purposes (Kuhlman et al., 2016).

The next problem was the lack of confidence among the student teachers when writing reflections (Brown et al., 2011; Snyder, 2011; Hayman et al., 2012; Butani et al., 2017). This was due to the student teacher's inability to relate to theory and practice, which made them feel demotivated and considered reflective writing a form of burden rather than a special tool that could aid them in teaching and learning (Nambiar and Thang, 2016). For the teacher to critically reflect on their teaching, they must have confidence and know the subject matter that they need to pay attention to when reflecting. Reflection is pursued with intent and not just a mere daydreaming but purposive activity toward an achievable goal (Boud et al., 2013; Van Beveren et al., 2018). In the Malaysian context, the purpose of writing a post reflection is to guide the teachers in improving their lessons, and act as a tool to record their teaching for future reference. Even our Malaysian Education Policy Research Development (EPRD) has made writing reflection after teaching sessions compulsory for all teachers to train them to become reflective practitioners.

Studies have been conducted to analyse the engagement in reflective practice and self-reported change in the teacher's instructional practice (Camburn & Han, 2015; Valdez et al., 2018). These studies have suggested a positive result in the teacher's engagement towards reflective practice, but the deeper reflection on their practices is less prevalent. However, there are a lot of positive changes in the classroom practices that are under the teacher's control, but the aspects that are influenced by external factors are not significantly reported. On the other hand, other research have also suggested that most of the teachers have reflected on environment and behaviour, and most of their reflections did not reflect on their competencies in teaching (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017). Based on past research, there is a gap in analysing the depth of reflection and there is a need to find out the sources of reflection. Thus, there is a need to research more on the depth of student teachers' reflection and the extent to which their reflection assists them in improving their teaching and learning process.

1.4   Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to: 1) Examine the depth of the reflection done by the (Teaching English as a Second Language) TESL student teachers while they are undertaking a course in the TESL programme; 2) assess the reflection components used by the student teachers in writing their reflection; and 3) investigate the pedagogical reasoning that influences student teachers' choice of topics in writing their reflections.

1.5   Research Questions

1. To what extent is the depth of the student teachers' micro and macro teaching reflection?

2. How does the assessment of reflection components describe the student teachers' reflection?

3. What is the pedagogical reasoning which influences student teachers' choice of topics for reflection?

1.6   Theoretical Framework

Criticality or depth of reflection has long been discussed and recognized as one of the aims in education (Newman, 1996; Gorski & Dalton, 2020), but the process of reflection which involves the choice of topic and pedagogical reasoning behind it has not been discussed at length. Criticality or depth of reflection should be understood over a range of domains (knowledge, self and the world) which was suggested by Ron Barnett (1997) in his theoretical framework. The idea of his framework is similar to Wilkes and

Ashmore's (2014) reflective rational enquiry model that focuses on several domains: experience, self, knowledge. Thus, we should not see the depth of reflection as a tool that merely affects self-knowledge and its justifications, but it covers a wider range of domains. In addition, the resources needed in order to function critically are also considered in relation to one's knowledge, behaviour and self-qualities (Bailin, 1999; Butani et al., 2017).

The reflection cycle model and four-stage experiential learning cycle are two main models that inform reflection (Gibbs, 1988). The reflection cycle model focuses on the process of reflection, which occurs in cycle continuously based on the event that occurred, which is being experienced by the person (Gibbs, 1988). The model is also inspired by Kolb (1984) four-stage experiential learning cycle. Kolb's model is often recognized as an experiential learning model, which means learning through experience, while Gibbs's model is also known as an iterative model, which means learning through reiteration. Gibbs's model has been widely used in education, especially in reflective writing (Bulman and Schultz, 2013; Adeani et al., 2020). The model is best used to challenge one's assumption, improve self-knowledge, explore something new in that particular field and make a relation between theory and practice.
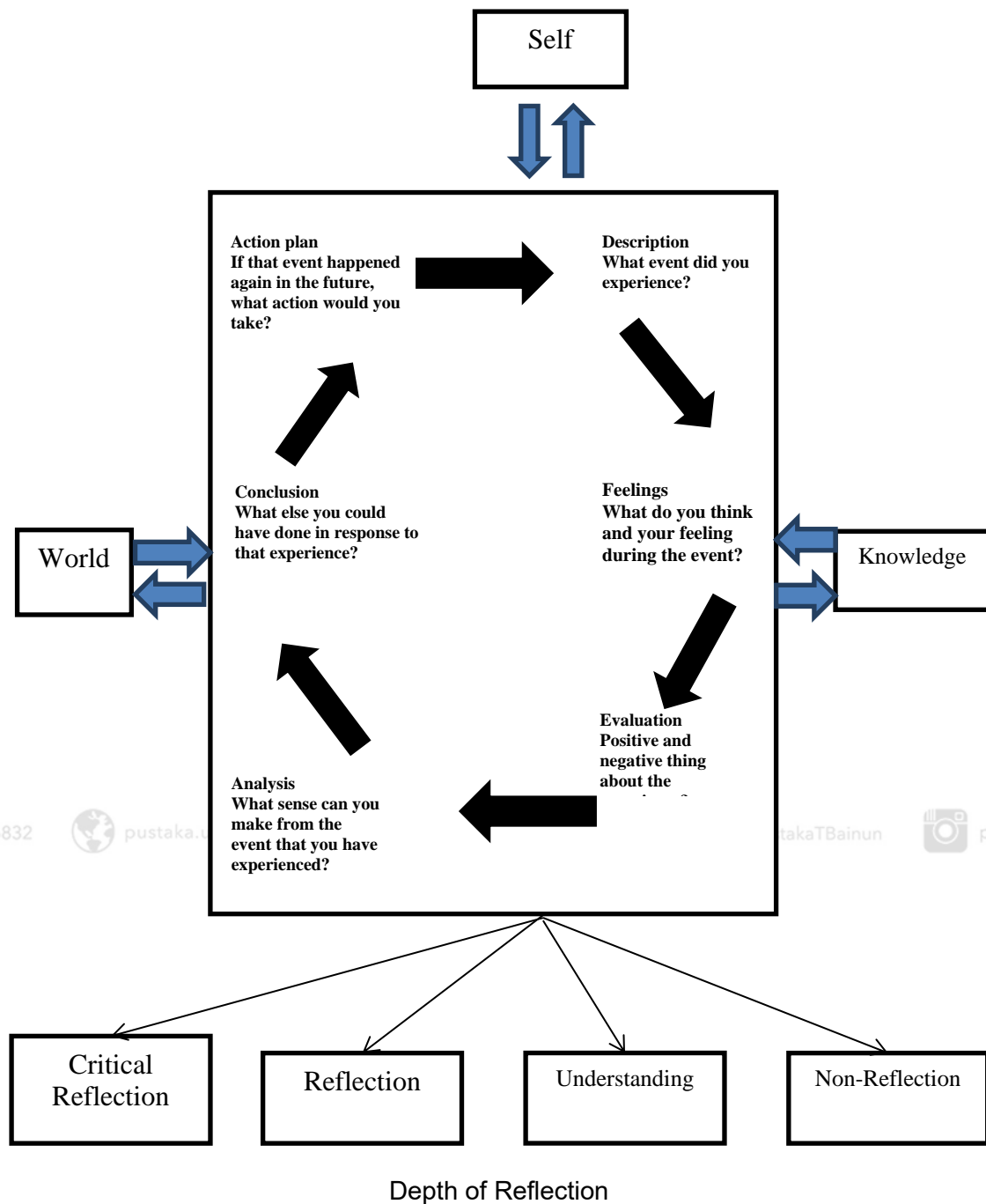
Figure 1.1. Framework for Depth of Reflection (Barnett, 1997; Gibbs, 1988; and Kember, 2008)

By analysing both Barnett (1997) and Gibbs (1988) reflective theoretical framework, an integrated framework is designed for the depth of reflection that underpins this study's purpose. This framework is suitable to be used alongside the Kember et al. (2008) protocol. It serves as the lens for analysing the depth and criticality of reflective writing. The cycle in the rectangle indicates the depth of

reflection, which is an ongoing process to ensure the criticality of the reflection is done. Using Kember et al. (2008) protocol, the depthness of reflection and the process of getting into that depth in reflection can be assessed through this cycle. Firstly, reflective writing coded as habitual or non-reflective does not show any evidence that the student teachers understand the materials or concept of the discussion that they are trying to discuss in the reflection (Kember et al., 2008). Secondly, reflective writing coded as showing understanding shows evidence in the students' reflection that they understood the concept and materials in the discussion but lacked relationship with their experiences (Kember et al., 2008). While reflective writing coded as reflection shows that vivid relationship is made in their reflection about the conceptual knowledge and experience (Kember et al., 2008). The highest code, critical reflection, requires the student teachers who wrote the reflection to shift or change the deep-seated belief, which leads to the formation of a new belief (Kember et al., 2008). When the student teachers are writing the reflection, the process continues in a cycle until the problem or the issue that arises has been resolved. There are six stages of reflective cycles: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. These are all the stages that can determine the depth of the reflective writing. The criticality of a piece of reflective writing can be discerned through the analysis, description, explanation and actions taken.

In addition, the resources of a reflection play an important role in the cyclical process of reflection. With reference to Figure 1.1, the resources involve knowledge, self and the world. When writing a reflection, the student teachers would need to relate to the knowledge that they currently have with the experience being reflected in their writing. This knowledge can be in the form of their academic knowledge, life principles, and beliefs. On the other hand, the self plays a crucial part in relating to oneself and the context. In order to become critical, there is a need to develop a certain quality of self-awareness in a situated context. In order to be a critical self, we would need to

prepare ourselves to reconstruct any existing belief or understanding. Finally, the world refers to world knowledge. In reflective writing, one could relate or engage critically with the experience in the world beyond universities or the focus of the issue. However, such disposition must always be supported by relevant knowledge and willingness to accept any flaws and findings contradicting existing beliefs on a particular knowledge that can influence change.

This framework is relevant to be used in this study to measure the depth of the student teachers' reflective entries because the researcher analysed the process involved in writing them. The researcher also focused on the source that influences the process of writing the reflection which has been clearly described in this framework.

1.7   Significance of the study

This study can benefit teacher education programme providers by integrating reflection as a part of the teacher education programme to encourage student teachers to be reflective practitioners. This would ensure that all the student teachers are being exposed to the reflection in which they can apply this skill in the real teaching world.

This study can also benefit curriculum developers for teacher education programmes. They can design a course that can embed the reflective skill. This will allow the student teachers to apply their reflective skills in teaching and habituate them into become critical reflective practitioners.

This study can guide the teacher educators in introducing reflective skills to the student-teachers. They can educate their student teachers about the benefit of reflection, the reason for using reflective teaching and how to write a critical reflection to improve their teaching and learning practice.

1.8   Operational Definitions

There are several definitions that have been operationalized to support the purpose of this study.

Reflective skills

Reflective skills, also known as meta-cognitive skills, are essential components of being an autonomous and self-regulated learner (Yu, 2013; Straková & Cimermanová, 2018). Thus, these skills are really important for an educator, especially student teachers, to build their reflective ability as these skills are not related to any subject and can be adapted to any situation. In this research, the participants show reflective skills or abilities through writing online journal entries. Reflective writing in this research refers to the student teachers' reflective entries that they have posted via the Padlet platform.

Reflection Cycle

The reflection cycle discussed in this study revolves around the cognitive process in writing reflection (Gibbs, 1988). The process includes six stages of the cycle: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. The term "description" in the cycle refers to the description of an event that the student teachers encountered during their reflection. While "feelings" refer to the student teachers'

emotional state during the critical events. "Evaluation" is the student teachers' assessment of the events, which can be positive or negative. The "analysis" is the student teachers' way of making sense of their experience. The "conclusion" stage involves the student teachers making deductions and interpretations based on their experiences. Finally, the "action plan" is when the student teachers intervene based on the previous process. Throughout the process, these six stages are repeated in a cycle. These stages are used in this study to evaluate the student teachers' reflective entries.

Criticality or Depth of reflection

The criticality or depth of reflection in this research refers to the results obtained from analysing the reflections using Kember et al. (2008) four categories protocol to group the written reflective entries into four categories: non-reflective, understanding, reflection and critical reflection. First, reflective writing coded as reflection shows, vivid relationships are made in their writing about the conceptual knowledge and experience (Kember et al., 2008). Second, reflective writing coded as habitual or non-reflective does not show any evidence that they understand the materials or concept of the discussion that they are trying to write in the reflection (Kember et al., 2008). Third, reflective writing coded as showing understanding shows evidences in their reflection that they understood the concept and materials in the discussion but lacks relationship with their experience (Kember et al., 2008). The highest code, critical reflection, requires the person who wrote the reflection to shift or change the deep-seated belief, which leads to the formation of a new belief (Kember et al., 2008). The depth of reflection in this study is used to analyse the source of the reflection. The focus is to identify the sources that affected the process of reflection that contributed to the diversity in the level of depth of reflection.

Student teachers

The student teachers in this research refer to the semester 6 TESL undergraduate students who are undertaking instructional courses. These students were required to write their reflection right after they have ended their weekly lectures for 14 weeks of the study period.

Components or sources of reflection

Components or sources of reflection refer to the themes and topics of reflection that student teachers have written in their reflective entries. The components here include their past experience, current knowledge, and the relation between theory and practice. In this research, the researcher focused on three groups of sources of reflection: world, self, and knowledge. Components of reflections focus on the stimulus, content, process, and outcome of reflective writing (Nelson and Sadler, 2013; Green, 2019). The components or sources of reflection are used in this study to explain the process involved in producing reflective writing by the student teachers which caused the diverse level of reflection exhibited in their writing.

Pedagogical Reasoning

According to Shulman model (2002), pedagogical reasoning focuses on the processes involved in teaching, including the transformation of knowledge so that others can learn from it. Pedagogical reasoning in this research refers to the reasons given by the interviewees to describe the process involved in their classroom teaching and learning. It helps others to understand the teacher's decision and find the rationale behind their behaviour based on their experience and knowledge (Hughes et al., 2020).

Reflective Entry

Reflection represents the individual collection of memories and experiences, which is translated into the form of writing (Nückles et al., 2020). In this study, reflective entry

refers to the student teachers' reflective essay which they write every week right after each of the lecture sessions. The students wrote their reflective entries and uploaded on the Padlet platform from week one until week 14. Reflective entries are used as one of the instruments to collect the data in this study.