The Journal of Asia TEFL

EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Knowledge Construction in Reflective Mentoring: Insights from Indonesia

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Introduction

Pre-service teacher education in the Indonesian context is organized as a four-year undergraduate degree program that emphasizes practice-centered models. It integrates academic coursework with teaching practicum in the curriculum, a structure also common in other Asian countries (Nguyen, 2017; Novita, 2021). In the EFL teacher education program, the academic coursework centers on the acquisition of content knowledge (English skills, linguistics, and literature), and technological pedagogical content knowledge for teaching English. This coursework is directed toward building EFL pre-service teachers' (PSTs) theoretical knowledge of teaching, which is general and conceptual. On the other hand, the teaching practicum focuses on the provision of professional learning, in which EFL PSTs enact teaching practices and subsequently value their hands-on teaching experiences while still being part of the academic milieu (Miftah et al., 2024). The practicum, hence, represents the culmination of PSTs' academic journey in becoming English teachers within EFL teacher education program, where they apply theoretical concepts learned in coursework to teaching practices in specific classroom settings and transform contextual teaching experiences into professional knowledge of practice. In this regard, professional knowledge is acquired through the integration of theoretical concepts and practical experiences within specific teaching contexts, allowing PSTs to take ownership of their teaching roles and enact their agentic actions (Du Plessis & Dreyer, 2024).

While the teaching practicum provides valuable practical professional experiences that envision EFL PSTs as future teachers (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022), their dual identity, transitioning from students to teachers, pose challenges for the construction of professional knowledge. Navigating the simultaneous roles of English learners and teachers can create cognitive dissonance, i.e., the discomfort caused by the disconnect between beliefs and actions, since PSTs struggle to meet the expectations of both roles (Ardi et al., 2023;

Flores, 2020). This challenge is compounded by ongoing issues with English proficiency among Indonesian EFL PSTs (e.g., Hayati et al., 2018; Nue & Manara, 2022; Syamdianita & Cahyono, 2021; Wulyani et al., 2019), which are critical due to English's dual role in the practicum as both a medium of instruction and subject matter. The PSTs are simultaneously learning English while using and teaching the language in the classroom. This dual role often leads them to either rely on their instincts in making pedagogical decisions or adhere strictly to context-free pedagogical rules and techniques learned in their EFL teacher education programs. Consequently, the divide between theoretical understanding and classroom context hinders their ability to meet their students' needs and create adaptive classroom dynamics. With this caveat in mind, achieving the construction of professional knowledge is challenging as it relies on integrating theoretical knowledge with practical and contextual situations in classrooms. To help with the construction of professional knowledge, PSTs are encouraged to make meanings of their practicum experiences.

Previous studies (e.g. Dobrowolska & Balslev, 2017; Hamdan et al., 2024; Mena et al., 2017; Nesje & Lejonberg, 2022; Tutyandari et al., 2022) have reported that the meaning making of PSTs' professional learning experiences in the teaching practicum was influenced by the opportunities they received to engage with their guiding teachers and supervisors in mentoring sessions. During the sessions, PSTs had the opportunity to talk about their actions and tensions. The guidance and support from experienced individuals are paramount in helping PSTs derive meaning from their articulated hands-on teaching experiences. This process allows PSTs to make meaningful connections between theories and specific teaching events. At this juncture, professional knowledge is acquired from the interplay between theoretical understanding and practical experiences. However, PSTs hardly acquire professional knowledge without reflecting on the interplay, underscoring the importance of infusing reflective practices into mentoring sessions (Amalia et al., 2020). For this reason, the integration of reflective mentoring activities into the practice-centered models of EFL teacher education is indispensable for PSTs' professional knowledge development and growth. Through reflective mentoring processes, with the help of mentors, PSTs (re)construct and (re)negotiate their systems of beliefs about EFL teaching, aligning them with specific contexts (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022; Daly, 2022). In this reflective endeavor, their cognitive dissonance is examined and further geared toward professional knowledge construction. Hence, the support and guidance received in the reflective mentoring are instrumental in shaping PSTs' professional knowledge construction.

Recognizing the pivotal role of mentoring in PSTs' construction of professional knowledge, an EFL teacher education institution in Indonesia initiated a reflective mentoring program for PSTs. The program, conducted within a small group, was implemented during a six-month teaching practicum encompassing both campus and school-based practical teaching experiences. This initiative is unique in the Indonesian context since such programs are not systematically formalized by the government in the curriculum, unlike in many other countries where similar programs have been widely recognized and implemented. Consequently, there is a scarcity of studies on teacher mentoring within the Indonesian EFL context, with only a limited number documented by scholars (e.g., Nugroho et al., 2020; Suryati et al., 2023; Suryati et al., 2021; Tanjung et al., 2021). For this reason, this study contributes to the expanding knowledge on mentoring within the EFL context in Indonesia by examining the extent to which professional knowledge is constructed during the reflective mentoring. The research question addressed is "How does the reflective mentoring during the teaching practicum foster EFL PSTs' professional knowledge construction?" As mentoring supports PSTs' professional development and helps them navigate challenges, it can be formally implemented in Indonesia to ease the transition from teacher education to real classrooms.

Method

To answer the inquiry, this study employed a discursive case study design. A case study basically focuses on an entity, including a program or a person, within its social context (Hood, 2009). Considering the distinct characteristics exhibited by the mentoring program in the Indonesian context, the reflective mentoring program was conceptualized as the case itself (cf. Creswell & Poth, 2018). To guide the scrutiny of the case,

this study utilized an analytical lens of PSTs' professional knowledge construction to approach the program (cf. Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2018). Moreover, we focused on the discursive interactions in reflective mentoring as it could reveal the process of EFL PSTs' professional learning.

Participants

This study involved a reflective mentoring group consisting of a teacher educator (TE), a serving teacher (ST), and four PSTs (two males and two females). They were enrolled in a reflective mentoring program conducted in an Indonesian private EFL teacher education institution. The institution embraces Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (reflective pedagogy) as a signature pedagogy, emphasizing the introspection and thoughtful consideration to examine thoughts and behaviors (Go & Atienza, 2019). Both the TE and ST had prior experiences in mentoring EFL PSTs and had participated in mentor training programs. The PSTs, aged 21 to 23 and in their third year of ELT studies, became the primary focus of the mentoring efforts as they were in the trajectory of their teaching practicum.

Using convenience sampling, we invited the mentoring members to participate in this study by filling out and signing written consent forms. Before completing the consent forms, they were informed that their involvement was voluntary, that they could withdraw any time, and that this research project received ethical exemption from the Research Ethics Committee at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia (No.2.2.1/UN32.14.2.8/LT/2024).

Data Collection

To collect the data, the first author video-recorded ten English reflective mentoring sessions, adopting a non-participant observer role to minimize possible influence on the natural flow of interaction. Conducted within a six-month period, from September 2023 to February 2024, the mentoring program consisted of two phases. The first phase delved into PSTs' experiences during a four-month campus-based teaching practicum, while the second one focused on their teaching experiences during a two-month school-based practicum. The practical experiences of EFL PSTs served as the primary source for the reflective mentoring sessions. In this regard, the issues of reflective mentoring were derived from their teaching practice. Despite the conversational nature of reflective mentoring, the time allotted for each session was 1-1.5 hours. The overview of the mentoring program is depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Design of Mentoring Program

Session	Focus
Campus-based practicum	
Mentoring 1	Embracing my Inner Teacher
Mentoring 2	Setting Induction/Closure, and Stimulus Variations and Questions
Mentoring 3	The First Integrated Teaching Practice
Mentoring 4	The Second Integrated Teaching Practice
Mentoring 5	The Third Integrated Teaching Practice
Mentoring 6	The Fourth Integrated Teaching Practice
School-based practicum	
Mentoring 7	The First Teaching Practice
Mentoring 8	The Second Teaching Practice
Mentoring 9	The Third Teaching Practice
Mentoring 10	The Fourth Teaching Practice

Data Analysis

Ten recordings of the mentoring sessions were transcribed verbatim. To ensure accuracy, the transcripts

were thoroughly reviewed multiple times. A member checking strategy was employed by inviting the participants to verify and validate the information in the transcripts (Candela, 2019). During this step, they were asked to give input, suggesting deletions or clarifications for any sections requiring attention. Some participants requested the removal of sensitive details, such as accounts of their trauma, which were subsequently deleted from the transcript.

Upon ensuring the accuracy of the ten transcripts, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading the transcripts repeatedly and decided to use utterances as the unit of analysis for the study. A thematic analysis of the transcripts was then conducted. Open codes were developed based on the interpretations of utterances conveyed by the PSTs in the transcripts regarding the professional knowledge construction. We highlighted the parts of the transcripts revealing PSTs' professional knowledge construction. The utterances of TE and ST were also identified as they shaped the process of professional learning within the reflective mentoring. Next, the open codes were grouped into similar categories, as in Table 2. At this juncture, we employed the professional learning grid by Vanhulle et al. (2016) to deeply examine PSTs' professional knowledge construction. The broader categories of the codes were then clustered into themes aligning with the research objective. Throughout the analysis processes, we reviewed the codes and emerging themes to ensure accuracy and clarity. Any discrepancies were resolved through consensus, utilizing data evidence to ensure themes reflected the participants' narratives.

TABLE 2
Example of Coding Process

Theme	Category	Code	Excerpt
Recalls of CIs	Contextualization	Context of CIs	*The first meeting was in the morning.* […].
	Discursive forms	Enacted expositive	*I learned the principles of collaborative learning in ELT.* *[…]*
	Positioning	A teacher	*As a teacher, I need to …*

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis revealed that EFL PSTs' professional knowledge construction in the reflective mentoring involved the recall of critical incidents (CIs) experienced during the teaching practicum and the cognitive-reflective framing of the CIs. This professional knowledge construction was heavily reliant on the two intertwined processes, without which such knowledge was hardly acquired. Figure 1 illustrates how CIs were recalled and framed cognitively and reflectively to construct professional knowledge.
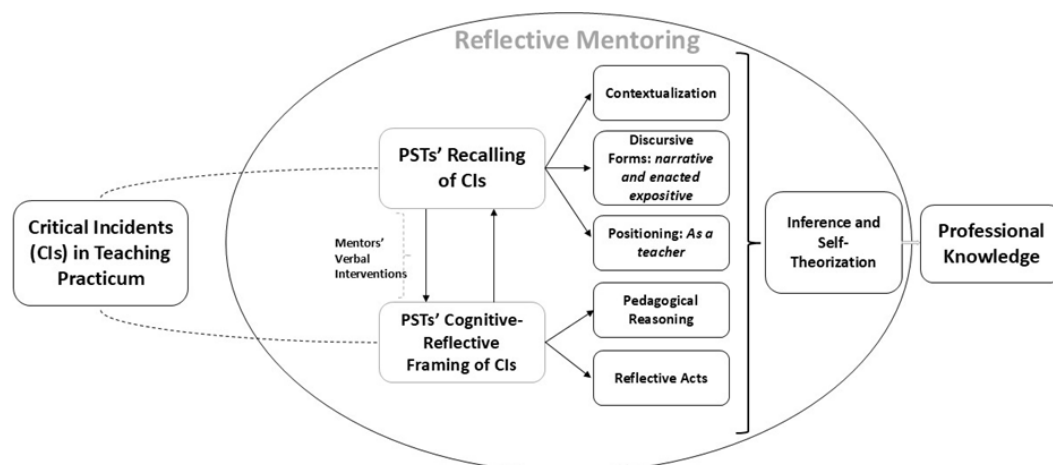

Figure 1. Professional knowledge construction in reflective mentoring.

The results suggested that CIs served as the fund of PSTs' professional knowledge in mentoring. While the PSTs underwent a series of professional experiences in the teaching practicum, the experiences considered CIs were so specific and meaningful that they were vividly remembered by the PSTs (Mena et al., 2024). As such, CIs were intentionally recalled and discerned in the mentoring. This result corroborates the paramount roles of CIs in PSTs' professional learning during teaching practicum, as resonated by previous studies (e.g., Karim et al., 2024; Mena et al., 2024). The corroboration indicates that CIs serve as the starting point for raising professional awareness, formalized later into professional knowledge. However, this study offers a more distinctive process in formalization due to the reflective and dialogic nature of the mentoring, encouraging the PSTs to critically think about, narrate, and frame CIs in a way that fostered their professional understanding and skills as EFL teachers. During the process, the mentors acted as critical companions guiding and shaping PSTs' professional knowledge construction.

The analysis underscored recalling CIs in the reflective mentoring involved three elements, namely the contextualization of CIs, use of discursive forms, and PSTs' positioning. The recall process began with contextualizing the CIs, in which the PSTs referred to and described specific classroom situations, as exemplified in Excerpt 1. This grounding in specific classroom experiences set the stage for a detailed examination.

> Excerpt 1
> PST 2 : *The first meeting was in the morning. […]. They did not answer my question. So, I repeated it five times until they answered me. […] I knew they wanted to say something but they were probably shy. […] Then, I asked them to work in a group of three […]*
> ST : *So, why did you ask them to work in a small group?*
> TE : *Did you have a theoretical justification from the courses you have attended?*
> PST 2 : *… to make them confident in sharing their opinions in English. […] Yes, I learned the principles of collaborative learning in ELT. Small groups make students actively engage with materials and experience meaningful interactions with their friends. As a teacher, I need to encourage my students to actively engage in their learning […]. I am responsible for making them learn English.*

Following the contextualization, as in Excerpt 1, the PSTs used a continuum of narrative and enacted expositive forms, to articulate the CIs. The narrative form involved the PSTs recounting CIs as stories, during which they engaged in a dialogue with their mentors. This dialogical narrative approach allowed for a deeper discernment of the CIs as the mentors reformulated the stories and directed the PSTs to see the CIs from a theoretical lens. In this regard, the narrative was shifted into an enacted expositive form (cf. Vanhulle et al., 2016). This discursive form was more analytical, with the PSTs breaking the incidents into episodes and linking them to theoretical concepts. During the enactment of the discourse, the PSTs positioned themselves as teachers. This positioning enabled the PSTs to see themselves in real teaching and raise their sense of professional identity (cf. Othman & Senom, 2020). The analysis also revealed that the enacted expositive form was deliberately exercised by the PSTs in the last five mentoring sessions, indicating that the mentors successfully scaffolded the discourse through their verbal interventions in previous sessions. Therefore, through the enacted expositive discourse, the PSTs started making sense of their professional experiences and building situation-specific professional knowledge, referred to as narrative knowledge (Mena et al., 2017).

The narrative knowledge was continuously deepened through the cognitive-reflective framing, fostering the PSTs to introspect about their practices. Through narrating the CIs, with the help of the mentors, the PSTs revisited and justified their professional actions, as illustrated in Excerpt 2.

> Excerpt 2
> PST 3 : *[…] I used the traditional way of teaching, […] and the source of materials provided for the students was only books. […]*
> ST : *[…] Why did you teach in a traditional way?*
> PST 3 : *I teach in a suburban area. The sources and tools are limited, but my teaching was successful because I engaged them in learning English. […] I used English songs […]. I will use physical games to make students excited.*
> TE : *It's good. We need to consider our students' conditions. […]*

Excerpt 2 highlights that pedagogical reasoning was echoed by PST 3 during the mentoring sessions,

revealing that the professional action within the CIs was grounded in a pragmatic reason, which focused on practical aspects of achieving English learning outcomes. The results of the analysis reveal two other types of reasons, namely deontic (pertaining to ethical and professional standards) and appreciative (driven by valuing positive aspects of teaching). Excerpt 3 illustrates PSTs' deontic reason and Excerpt 4 provides an example of PSTs' appreciative reason.

Excerpt 3
TE : […] *Even though you knew that some of your students did not understand, why did you use English all the time?*
PST 1 : *Because I want to be a role model for them.* […]

Excerpt 4
ST : *Why did you choose Project-based learning?*
PST 4 : *Well, it can help students solve real life problems and see the connection between what they are learning and how it is used outside the classroom* […] *It will improve their ability to use English in real situations*

The reflective endeavor during the mentoring sessions was more challenging when the PSTs discerned their actions within problematic situations in the classroom, in which the PSTs often experienced a cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and actions. Among practices causing cognitive dissonance was the use of English or mixed languages in the classroom (cf. Ardi et al., 2023). Excerpt 5 exemplifies this case in the reflective mentoring.

Excerpt 5
PST 4 : *I really believe that the use of full English is useful for providing my students with linguistic inputs and improving their English. But I found myself switching to Indonesian a lot of more than I wanted to.*
ST : *Why did you feel you need to switch to Indonesian?*
PST 4 : *I saw my students were confused. I felt that they did not understand my English instructions. My English hindered them from engaging with the English lesson. I thought that switching to Indonesian was the easiest way to engage them.*
TE : *So, you focused more on their immediate understanding. How did your students respond?*
PST 4 : *They were able to follow the instructions but again I felt I did not achieve my goal by doing so.*
TE : *Well, in teaching English in the Indonesian context, it is important to be flexible and responsive to your students' needs, while achieving your goal. You need to balance your students' needs and your goal. So, how will you deal with the issue in the next teaching?*
PST 4 : *I will still use English continually but I will provide quick clarifications in Indonesian if they do not understand.*
ST : *It is good. As you learn more about your students, you will adjust your teaching.*

With the help of the mentors, the dissonance was valued and addressed in the mentoring to achieve reconciliation, through which the PSTs made inferences and developed self-theorization from their practices. The PSTs reconstructed their belief systems by aligning them with specific contexts and students' needs. Indeed, the discernment of the professional actions within specific contexts instigated professional knowledge construction (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022; Dobrowolska & Balslev, 2017; Mena et al., 2017). Hence, as different PSTs conducted the teaching practicum at different institutions, they developed distinct professional knowledge in each mentoring session, which shaped their next practices.

Despite fostering professional knowledge construction, the cognitive-reflective framing would have not been accelerated without the reciprocal interplay between the mentors and PSTs that encouraged reflective thinking. During the mentoring sessions, the PSTs used deeper analytical and evaluative speech acts in constructing professional knowledge. The acts encompassed an introspective and thoughtful examination of

their actions within the CIs, such as analyzing the outcomes of pedagogical actions, relating the actions to theoretical concepts, evaluating their effectiveness, valuing successful strategies, and planning future improvements. Responding to the acts, the mentors intervened verbally to direct the PSTs to enhance their understanding of specific pedagogical contexts. Their interventions generally involved inquiring into PSTs' reflection on their professional actions, confirming their insights, encouraging further exploration, and giving constructive feedback. Hence, the reflective dialogic interactions between the mentors and PSTs in the reflective mentoring catalyzed the transformation of PSTs' actions into professional knowledge (Daly, 2022; Dobrowolska & Balslev, 2017; Mena et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This study aims to elucidate the professional knowledge construction of Indonesian EFL PSTs during the reflective mentoring. The findings underscore the importance of the recall and cognitive-reflective framing of CIs as integral parts of the knowledge construction. In this vein, CIs were paramount in the construction as they served as the sources of professional knowledge, which provided specific pedagogical situations for the PSTs to infer and self-theorize during the mentoring sessions. By contextualizing, narrating, and analytically framing CIs, the PSTs engaged in meaningful professional learning. Hence, following Mann and Walsh's (2017) idea that reflection should be data led, the study suggests using CIs as data in reflective mentoring or any reflective endeavors since CIs provide specific and meaningful contexts (Karim et al., 2024; Mena et al., 2024).

This study recommends integrating systematic dialogic reflection into teacher education programs to enhance PSTs' professional development. Nevertheless, due to the expertise and training of the mentors in this study, the results may not be generalizable to other contexts. To ensure high-quality mentoring experiences, teacher education programs need to provide specific training for mentors. Future research could investigate how mentors with diverse levels of experience guide PSTs in developing professional knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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