

The Phenomenon of Pre-Service Teachers' Reflective Writing: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: Multiple approaches, strategies, and experiments have been used in studies to determine the quality of reflective practice in teacher education. It includes research on both general education and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) pre-service teachers. Most of these studies focus around the testing and development of tools for the practice of reflection, as well as testing and developing the assessment of reflective practice. Furthermore, by analyzing studies on the forms, features, and evaluative aspects of reflective writing, this literature review paper attempts to go deeply into the area of reflexivity and personal reflection. The research analyzed in this paper should have established the study's position and goals in terms of the style of reflective writing and theoretical approaches to assessment and appraisal attitude. It has stated its role in enhancing students' learning and identity, as well as the importance of affective meanings in this category. Nonetheless, research on this component of reflective writing and how students' perspective and identity are shaped appears to be restricted, suggesting a lack of decent knowledge. Examining the various techniques to evaluation and conducting research on writer position in student teachers' discourse highlighted the necessity to create a framework based on an attitude appraisal system.

Keywords: pre-service teacher, reflective practice, reflective writing.

ABSTRAK: Berbagai pendekatan, strategi, dan eksperimen telah digunakan dalam studi untuk menentukan kualitas praktik reflektif dalam pendidikan guru. Ini mencakup penelitian tentang pendidikan umum dan guru pra-jabatan/PPL TEFL (Teaching of English as A Foreign Language). Sebagian besar studi sebelumnya berfokus pada pengujian dan pengembangan alat untuk praktik refleksi, serta menguji dan mengembangkan penilaian praktik reflektif. Selanjutnya, dengan menganalisis studi tentang bentuk, fitur, dan aspek evaluatif dari tulisan reflektif, artikel studi pustaka ini mencoba untuk masuk lebih dalam ke area refleksifitas dan refleksi pribadi. Penelitian yang dianalisis dalam artikel ini seharusnya telah menetapkan posisi dan tujuan penelitian dalam hal gaya penulisan reflektif dan pendekatan teoretis terhadap penilaian dan sikap penilaian, dan telah menyatakan perannya dalam meningkatkan pembelajaran dan identitas mahasiswa, serta pentingnya makna afektif dalam kategori ini. Meskipun demikian, penelitian tentang komponen tulisan reflektif ini dan bagaimana perspektif dan identitas mahasiswa dibentuk tampaknya terbatas, menunjukkan kurangnya pengetahuan yang layak. Meneliti berbagai teknik untuk mengevaluasi dan melakukan penelitian tentang posisi penulis dalam wacana guru siswa menyoroti perlunya membuat kerangka kerja berdasarkan sistem penilaian sikap.

Katakunci: guru pra-jabatan, praktik reflektif, tulisan reflektif

INTRODUCTION

In studies to determine the quality of reflective practice in teacher education, researchers used a variety of methodologies, strategies, and experiments. It encompasses studies on both pre-service teacher in general education and TEFL-specific (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). Majority of

the studies revolve around experimentation of tools regarding the practice of reflection as well as testing and developing the assessment of reflective practice.

This paper, however, tries to venture deep into the realm of reflective practice and reflective writing, by reviewing research on the types, features, and appraisal aspects of reflective writing. There are three sections of reviews of research pertaining to those phenomenon. The first section looks back to review the content and types of reflective writing among the pre-service teachers, which gives us an idea about the characteristics of student's reflective writing. The second section focuses on the linguistic features of reflective writing produced by students in various methods, which gives us an idea about how language represents the personal values of the reflective writers. The last section provides a review of studies of evaluative and appraisal aspects of students' reflective writing.

Content and Types of Reflection in Students' Reflective Writing

Studies on the content and types of reflection in students' reflective writing usually related to the determination of the students' reflective writing quality. Cohen-Sayag & Fischl (2012) conducted a study on the levels of reflective writing of 24 pre-service teachers in special education. They used structured journals which consist of 14 questions developed by Zimmet, Roznau & Verner (1999). The questions correspond to Jay and Johnson's (2002) typology of reflective writing which consist of three levels of reflection: descriptive, comparative, and critical explanation. They try to identify students' explanatory statements and coded them into three types of reflection: descriptive, comparative, and critical. The result revealed that majority of students still explained their experience descriptively. The researchers argued because the students are still in training program with limited teaching exposure. Most of the students' explanations centred around pupil difficulties and their own concerns to keep control in the classroom (classroom management). It was also revealed that the students tended to shy away from their own difficulties in the classroom and instead emphasised the problems relating to their pupils. The majority of the students also seemed to be reluctant to describe relations and interactions within the classroom. This emerging phenomenon was partly due to their hesitancy to express their personal opinion (to distance their authorial stance) and instead their tendency only to focus on their teaching activities and ways to improve their teaching performance (their instructional objectives).

Poldner, Van der Schaaf, Simons, Van Tartwijk, & Wijngaards (2014) investigated the levels of argument and content of reflective writing of 34 student teachers of Dutch primary teacher education in applied science. The students were assigned to write reflective essays about managing a group and implementing lessons, such as preparing, acting, evaluating, and communicating with pupils. They implemented a qualitative content analysis (QVC) in analysing the level of argument. All of students' reflective texts were identified and grouped into five categories: description (e.g. classroom situation), evaluation (e.g. pupils' behaviour), justification (e.g. student teacher's choice of action), dialogue (e.g.

comparing known knowledge and its' realisation in the classroom), and transfer (e.g. evidence of awareness and learning gain). The results showed similar findings to Cohen-Sayag and Fischl in that the majority of the content of students' writing revolved around student teacher's efforts to their instructional acts in the classroom, with little critical self-reflection. They often described how they implemented new actions, with or without justifications.

In a similar study, Yesilbursa (2011) determined the dominant types and content of reflection of 28 Turkish ELT student teachers during their field practicum. Having developed her own coding categories based on Hatton and Smith's (1995) and Jay and Johnson's (2002) levels of reflection, her study revealed the emerging theme of students' style of reflection, such as reflection on self (personal), others (interpersonal), task (contextual), and reflection on past and future experience (experience). The study revealed that the most frequently occurring reflective categories were evaluative (positive and negative reflection), where the majority of the students reflect negatively on their personal capability as teachers (self). Dialogic and comparative types of reflection on how the students justified their teaching action and solution to the problems encountered showed moderate patterns. The majority of the reflection provided little elaborative explanation of their learning gains.

Astika (2014) drew the problem of the success of reflective practice among Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers. She analysed the depth of reflection of 40 teaching journals from 40 pre-service teachers during their 3-month field teaching practice in assigned schools. Astika used a Teaching Practicum Handbook provided by the teacher program and analysed the journals based on the theoretical framework of reflection proposed by Smith (2011), which comprises the aspects of personal (the students as teachers), interpersonal (their relationship with others such as to fellow students and host school), contextual (teaching methods), and critical (social aspect of teaching). Astika found that the majority of the content of reflection from the student teachers' teaching journals revolved around the contextual and personal types of reflection. It appeared that the student teachers were more concerned with their judgments, reactions, and teaching behaviour during the teaching and learning processes in the classroom situation and how it can affect their teaching performance. In contrast, the students showed little to no evidence of being critical. Astika reasoned that it is because the limitation of method and the students' unawareness of its benefit for their professional career and development.

Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati, and Sukyadi (2017) conducted a case study of four Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' reflective practice during their 3-month field teaching practice at primary and secondary schools. The students were instructed to compose their reflective journals based on a reflection guideline developed by Richards and Lockhart (1996). The types of students' reflective writing were grouped according to the levels of reflection based on Hatton and Smith's (1995) framework of reflection. Their study showed that the students' level of reflectivity was mostly within the range of dialogic reflection (low and moderate). It indicates their ability to mentally evaluate their instructional

activities during their field teaching experience using qualities of judgment, analysis, evaluation, posing alternatives, and raising awareness through self-evaluation or metacognition. They argued that it was quite understandable for the student teachers not to reach to the deepest level of critical level as it needed more time, knowledge, and experience to develop their professional understanding in teaching.

These researchers conducted studies to provide evidence of reflection and the level of reflectivity and use content analysis for interpreting the data. However, this type of analysis might risk producing biased and subjective identification as they solely rely on their impression of reflective meaning in the text, thus making it quite problematic to account for the identification of evaluative and appraisal language in the students' reflective text. Despite the purpose of reflective writing studies might not to provide a linguistic characteristic for each levels of reflection, incorporating evaluative and appraisal approaches to analyse its lexical and grammatical features, and the characteristic of writer stance might provide valid evidence. This could inform both the teacher educators and the student teachers on methods to develop better strategies to demonstrate deeper reflective stance. Moon (2004) argues that students might struggle to understand the characteristic of deeper reflection and suggests that familiarising the students with examples of critical reflective writing is a useful strategy. However, familiarising these examples means the students should understand the structure and the characteristic of evaluative and appraisal language in reflective texts. It needs a systemic approach to account for their identification.

This section has provided an explanation of the process of reflection applied in student teachers' reflective writing, which demonstrates that achieving a critical level of reflection is a challenging task for the student teachers. The studies also reveal that the process of reflective writing progresses from description of the experience, which is an important phase in which the students need to incorporate their previous knowledge and skills to make assumption and justification from the thoughts, events, or problems arising out from the experience and consider their implication for their learning improvement.

Linguistic Features in Students' Reflective Writing

In this section I would like to provide explanations on the linguistics features of students' reflective writing which will bring insights into basic structure of reflective writing and the characteristics of writers' stance.

Earlier, Howe, Barrett, and Leinster (2009) conducted a study to identify the typical themes expressed by the students when reflecting on an experience. They selected 50 reflective reports written by medical students in a British university from years 1 to 5. By conducting a content analysis, they found that the students refer to 5 topics: facts (e.g. setting, patient contact, and outcomes), judgments on actions (e.g. what needs to be done), personal perspectives (uncertainties and beliefs), understandings (emotional triggers and expectations) and ideals (reference to their wishes and future actions). These themes indicated that reflective reports comprise a system of writer attitudes partly towards their

personal identity and towards their surroundings. They also found that the students are willing to explicitly express uncertainties and emotions but tend to be cautious when making judgements or attempting to solve problems.

Wagner (2006) found similar results in her analysis of metaphoric expression produced by junior science students in their reflections about writing tasks. Four main meanings occurred: cognitive (knowledge status), emotional (affects), social (environment), and metacognitive (self-awareness).

Considering the themes mentioned in the above studies, it can be inferred that reflective writing is a complex form of action in which the writer expresses a wide range of meanings, e.g. feelings, perspectives, knowledge, future actions, and social and professional contexts. Moon (2004) noted that the metacognitive, the affective, and the experiential dimensions of reflective essays demonstrate the social function of reflective writing and are to some extent different from the topics seen in academic essays, which tend to be objective and impersonal. Both academic essays and reflective writing require argumentative strategies to convince the reader of the validity of the writer's claims.

Balgopal and Montplaisir (2011) analysed the strategies implemented by undergraduate Biology students to justify their knowledge about the concepts of natural selection in their reflective essays. Through coding of 190 essays written by 19 students, they found that the acts that students perform fall into one of four categories: an *Authentic writer* integrates both content knowledge and personal feelings; an *Objective writer* solely relies on content understanding without reference to personal experience; a *Subjective writer* tends to disclose their feelings without showing understanding of the content and a *Superficial writer* shows minimal or no evidence of their claims, either by reference to their prior knowledge or personal experience. The study found that 16 students were equally divided between authentic and objective style which have an influence on the projection of the writer's voice. Whereas the authentic writers tended to reveal their identity by reference to the personal pronoun *I*, in contrast the objective writers concealed their self through the use of passive structures and third person pronouns. This connection between the type of justification and authorial voice appears to be logical. That is because the incorporation of both content knowledge and personal experience could trigger more use of personal pronouns than reliance on scientific knowledge, which could prompt the writer to retain their objective stance.

While these previous studies have applied content analysis to classifying themes of reflection, others have investigated the generic structure and the linguistic characteristics of reflective essays. Ryan (2011) uses the SFL approach to describe academic reflection as a social genre and develop a model which describes structure and its linguistic features, with the argument that they are applicable to any discipline. According to Ryan, reflective writing comprises several genres from the SFL perspective: recount, description of practice, explanation to provide reasoning/evidence, and discussion. These genres include a range of linguistic resources, e.g. first person pronoun *I*, mental process (e.g. feel, consider), nominalisation, technical terms, comparison/contrast connectives,

adjectives, adverbials, temporal connectives, and future tense verbs. She recommended that by raising the students' awareness of appropriate linguistic choices and the structural elements of academic reflection they would be able to critically reflect on the context. Although the study provides insight about the genre of reflective writing and types of linguistic features, it assumes similarity in the use of these linguistic features across the different writing genres (e.g. description, discussion) and rhetorical sections in academic reflection. It is worth exploring how each section utilises these linguistic features in a way that serves its social function, which would consequently guide the students in structuring their reflective writing.

In her analysis of personal pronouns within group interaction in 12 assessed reflective texts, Wharton (2012) noticed the influence of the learning context and assessment in shaping the type of attitudes and the transparency of self in writing. Through investigating personal pronouns, verb processes and semantic relations, she found that students appeared to mitigate their agency when describing problems by attributing them to their groups via the use of nominalisation and passivisation. However, they projected their identity when accounting for their learning gains and gave the credit to the group work instead of their individual contributions. The study indicated students' awareness of the group's expectations through their acknowledgement of problems and their improvements; yet, they strategically refer to the group as a protective shield from self-threatening situations. The type of analysis conducted contributes to our understanding of the writer's positioning of self towards the learning experience and other participants in the group. Yet, investigating writer identity through analysing personal pronouns might not give a comprehensive account of writer stance towards entities in the learning experience which is relevant to realising their critical reflection and their learning gains from the reflective practice.

To address this aspect of writer identity, Reidsema and Mort's (2009) study investigated the distinctive linguistic features of reflection in a corpus of 20 high and low-graded reflective essays produced in an engineering design course. Through analysing the appraisal resources and the temporal and causal connectives, the study found that high-graded essays rely more on expressions of attitude, particularly on the resources of Judgment, and on temporal and causal relations than low-graded essays. Unlike poor essays, successful writers were found to be skilful in expressing on a wide range of attitudinal and causality expressions to provide elaborative information, precise descriptions of the problem and justification of their perspectives, thus showing a clear understanding of the content and achieving a high level of reflection. It seems that there is a positive relation between demonstrating a deep level of reflection and the effective use of attitudinal expressions.

Mena-Marcos, Garcia-Rodrigues, and Tillema (2013) conducted a similar study of the writers' perception of professional knowledge in 104 reflective accounts produced by student teachers during their field practicum. The content analysis showed the writer tendency to position their evaluative stance in relation to three themes: pupil learning, teaching strategies, and family. The findings

revealed that a negative appraisal stimulates the writers to be more focused and elaborative in their argument about 'wrong' practice and its solutions, leading them to refer to its consequences in order to establish solid stance for their opinions. They concluded that the effective expression of positive and negative stance contributes to better realisation of the practice through establishing the causal relations between the rules and the artefacts of practice (the implementation of teaching). This confirms the findings of Reidsema and Mort's (2009) study about the important role of implementation of stance in achieving a high level of reflection.

In the aspect of a corpus-based study, Nesi and Gardner (2013) in their analysis of the genre family in the BAWE corpus found that reflective writing was used to serve different purposes. In the Professional Development Plan (PDP) sub-corpus, reflection was used as a preparatory phase for employability after the students graduate, whereas other reflective texts focus on self-appraisal of work performance. Despite these variances, the analysis showed that the positive keywords in the sub-corpus include the first pronoun *I*, affective and cognitive processes (e.g. feel, think), followed by emotive lexis; conversely, notions related to systems, models, and society are not key in this type of writing. Their findings indicated that reflective writing in the BAWE corpus is personal and subjective and reflects generic features rather than disciplinary specific context (pg. 240). They also noticed that nominalisation is not dominant in this genre compared to other academic writing, which is contrary to Ryan's finding. In regard to evaluative expressions, the analysis showed that reflective writers in the BAWE seem to negatively judge others' behaviour, while being positive in assessing their personal features of capability and tenacity. The writers also tend to convey emotions of willingness and enthusiasm.

Similarly, Wickens and Spiro (2010) applied corpus analysis in their study of reflective writing of students enrolled in a Master's education program. Their top ten 4 N-grams include *I would like to*, *it is important to*, *to be able to*, *has enabled me to* and *that I need to*. They found that the meaning categories which co-occur with the pronoun *I* and the clusters above revolve around competencies, requirements, emotions, and mental processes.

To sum up, this section has reviewed the studies that investigated the linguistic features of reflective writing with a specific focus on the writer's evaluative stance. These studies evidence on the relevance of expressing writer identity by the use of personal pronoun *I* and the projection of authorial stance towards the broad aspects of the reflective experience, which seem to play an important role in demonstrating critical reflection. Although these studies have been conducted across various disciplines, i.e. Engineering, Science, and Education, such disciplinary differences do not seem to divert from the generic structure of interpersonal meaning and evaluative writer stance.

This section has reviewed the studies that have focused on the linguistic characteristics, the structure of reflective writing and the nature of writer stance, emphasising the relevance of interpersonal meanings in shaping reflective voice. To extend our understanding about this feature, the next section will provide an

explanation of the various approaches to the study of evaluative and appraisal language its utilisation in students written discourse.

The Writer Stance in Students' Written Discourse

The study of interpersonal meaning in student writing has received important attention from several researchers who aimed at exploring the characteristics and the factors generating evaluative stance, notably establishing argument and engagement in academic writing (Hyland, 2002). Some of them have followed a comparative approach in their analysis of stance between effective/less effective essays or experts/students in order to realise the strategies employed by successful writers to persuade their readers. For instance, Lee (2010) analysed command strategies through the expression of necessity in high and low-graded essays written by undergraduate students. Lee noticed that what is featured in effective essays is because of the implementation command strategies to provide evidence to the stance positions and inconsistent forms of modulation through nominalisation (necessity) and modals (*would need*). She argued that these features helped successful student writing become interpersonally interactive and soften the authority of their commands, therefore it will lead the writers to produce a higher level of engagement with the reader than in low-graded essays.

In an earlier study, Barton (1993) investigated validity and the attitudinal markers in expert and university students' texts. she focused on four rhetorical strategies used in academic writing: problematisation, persona, citation and argument, and assigned certain types of evidential for each category. Problematisation, for example, was mainly expressed by experts through the use of the evidential markers of contrast (*but, however*) and the attitude markers (*unfortunately*) in their introduction and as the argument develops, yet this strategy was not evident in students' essays. Although students were able to identify the problems in their writing, they were shown to be less critical when trying to unfold the issue using contrastive evidentiality, which hinders an overall sense to their propositions. Her findings are similar to Mei (2007) who explored the problematisation strategies in high and low-graded essays using appraisal resources. She found that successful writers were skilful in utilising the contrastive stance, and furthermore providing dialogic voice with the readers in the introduction of essays, which helped them achieve a clear identification of the problem. This was fulfilled by aligning or countering the information contained in the attributed proposition, in contrast to low-graded essays which lacked clarity in authorial stance due to the delayed and ineffective use of opposition and contrastive markers.

In regard to attitudinal expressions, Hood (2004) investigated the management of interpersonal stance using appraisal resources in research articles and undergraduates' essays. The findings showed that although both types of writers tend to express the value of appreciation, they vary in their selection of its sub-categories as their expressions are construed as valuation in research articles, but as reaction in students' essays. Unlike experts, students also tend to convey

their emotional feelings as affect and ethical judgments. However, what is interesting in her findings is the ability shown by the experts to maintain the various patterns of evaluative stance when unfolding text through referring to explicit attitudes and intensifying strategies, which was not clearly presented in students' texts, resulting in ambiguity in their stance.

This emphasis on evaluative stance was similarly observed in Lee's (2008) study of good and poor undergraduate essays. She noticed that successful writers express ethical judgment through multiple affect-triggered attitudes, intensifiers and engagement to implicitly limit a judgment of propriety. They also tend to project a depersonalised authorial stance in their argument using nominalisation of in/security and dis/satisfaction expressions and valuation and composition sub-categories of appreciation. Unsuccessful writers, on the other hand, appear to construct an overtly subjective argument through explicit expressions of affect, judgments of propriety and appreciation attitudes of reaction and social valuations.

Furthermore on appraisal patterns, recent studies of Wang (2017) and Ngongo (Ngongo, 2017) investigated the appraisal patterns of college English majors' academic essays. In her study, Wang aimed to give recommendation on how the English teachers can develop academic writing materials by focusing on how the students can construct the content of their writing by evaluative language. Key word lists were generated based on the adjectives, adverbs, verb, and nouns which contain evaluative meaning. The findings suggested that the majority of appraisal words were expressed in attitudinal stance, followed by graduation and engagement expressions. Wang speculated that the attitudinal markers appeared more prominently in the essays because students put much more emphasis on the narratives and descriptions rather than venture upon the arguments.

Ngongo (2017) investigated the undergraduate students' interaction to some writers' views. The results of the study show that the students Judgmental stance occurs more prominently rather than Affect and Appreciation, showing that the students display more behaviour toward the topic of their writing. In the subtype of Engagement, the students put more emphasis on their entertain and attributive stance, indicating that the students are more concerned to use citation rather than paraphrase and summary. Ngongo also indicated that the students are more concerned with intensifier and qualification tone and have very limited concern or even ignoring sharpening and softening the resources. It might be assumed that the writers use these markers to put forward a strong claim about their proposition in their writing. However, Ngongo did not provide further explanation on why this tendency occurs. Another thing to mention is the use of citation more prominently indicate that the students might not get any specific training on the use of paraphrasing and summarising when referring sources. The overall results could also indicate the emerging tendency of monoglossic patterns in student's writing. In this case, the academic writing teacher should be recommended to provide students with adequate and comprehensive material in learning academic writing.

In a more recent study, Yuliana & Gandana (2018) try to analyse the relevancy of writer's voice and engagement in students' analytical exposition texts with different proficiency levels. They claim that a good criterion of an analytical exposition depends on the writer's ability to present their clear stance and show their voice in their writing, and in order to achieve such criteria, the engagement skill is needed. Their study also draws on the occurrence of monoglossic and diaglossic stance to indicate the writer's choice in aligning or disaligning a proposition on the observed subject matters. Their study reveals that students who are more proficient in English are able to use the resources necessarily in order to construct a well-argued text, while across all the proficiency, all students are capable of presenting a clear position. The students show dominant preference on the use of 'entertain' and 'acknowledge'. Entertain subtype suggests that the students readily recognise the alternative voices on the issues presented. Meanwhile, 'acknowledge' subtype was used by the students to indicate external voices without heavily aligning or disaligning their stance with their voices. Yuliana and Gandana speculated that the students try to provide a preliminary background to their argument. In the end, both authors recommend that this study could benefit for academic writing teachers in composing adequate teaching material for argument essays.

To conclude, so far the studies on writer stance draw primarily on the interpersonal quality of students' academic writing genre, and it might be interesting to expand the study to another genre such as reflective writing to identify its distinctive features. It is also interesting to see the tendency of less proficient non-native English speakers to produce their reflective writing by selecting particular appraisal expression affected by their first language.

We have seen how affective meaning is essential to the genre of reflective writing, implemented in both of the reflective learning models (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985) and in the linguistic research (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Reidsema & Mort, 2009), which leads to the idea that writers are expected to be explicit in conveying their judgments and emotional reaction to their experience. So, it does not primarily mean that when the students express this evaluative behaviour, it will hinder them to construct a persuasive argument. Understanding that, it can be inferred that the appropriate choice of value judgment and other evaluative and appraisal stance will help the researchers, the students, as well as the teachers/teacher educators to construct a genuine reflexivity in student teacher's reflective writing.

CONCLUSION

The studies reviewed in this paper hopefully clarified the position and the aims of the study with regard to the mode of reflective writing and the theoretical approaches to evaluation and appraisal stance. Reviewing the literature about reflective writing has indicated its role in promoting students' learning and identity, and the relevance of affective meanings to this type of genre. Nevertheless, the range of research about this aspect in reflective writing and how students' stance and identity is structured seems to be limited, indicating a lack of

available knowledge. Appraising the various approaches to evaluation and research on writer stance in student teachers' discourse revealed the need to develop a framework based on the appraisal system of attitudes to fit the type of data. The framework will follow a combining approach to identifying and making meaning of the written discourse, represented in categories of appraisal meanings and forms.

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