

Reflective Practice and Teaching Philosophy: Insights from Experienced EFL Teachers in Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

Understanding teachers' teaching philosophy is central to their professional growth, yet research on experienced EFL teachers' reflective practice in Indonesia remains limited. This study addresses the gap by exploring how experienced teachers conceptualize their teaching philosophy through reflection. A qualitative case study was conducted with three experienced Indonesian EFL teachers, each holding more than nine years of teaching experience and a master's degree in English education. Data were collected through six rounds of semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, guided by established reflective frameworks. Triangulation was applied to ensure trustworthiness, and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Eight themes emerged: (1) the role of English in formal schooling, (2) external influences on teaching, (3) perceptions of being a teacher, (4) experiences of teaching English, (5) challenges in English instruction, (6) strategies for managing classroom problems, (7) adaptation of teaching methods, and (8) critical incidents shaping professional identity. These findings highlight how personal experiences, contextual constraints, and reflective engagement shape teachers' philosophies and practices. The study demonstrates that reflective practice enables teachers to align pedagogical choices with their evolving philosophy, fostering professional identity and responsiveness to learners' needs. The results resonate with global literature on reflective teaching while emphasizing the Indonesian context.

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INTRODUCTION

The professional growth of teachers is closely tied to their ability to understand and articulate the underlying principles guiding their classroom practices. In many educational contexts, however, teachers often focus on procedural aspects of teaching without systematically reflecting on the beliefs and philosophies that shape their pedagogical choices (Aliakbari, Khany, & Adibpour, 2019). In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where instruction is influenced by diverse cultural and institutional factors, the challenge of articulating a coherent teaching philosophy becomes even more critical. This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where EFL teachers face unique constraints related

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to curriculum policies, students' sociocultural backgrounds, and the growing demand for English competence in globalized education. Despite its importance, limited attention has been devoted to how experienced Indonesian EFL teachers reflect on and develop their teaching philosophy as part of their professional identity.

Reflection has long been recognized as a key component in teacher development. Dewey (1933) first emphasized reflection as an active, persistent, and careful consideration of practice, while Schön (1983) later conceptualized reflective practice as a cyclical process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Within language education, reflective practice enables teachers to evaluate not only what happens in the classroom but also why they make certain pedagogical decisions (Farrell, 2015). By engaging in reflective practice, teachers can align their actions with their beliefs and adapt their methods to the needs of their students (Farrell & Ives, 2014). This reflective process is closely linked to the articulation of a teaching philosophy—a set of personal beliefs and values about teaching and learning that inform teachers' choices, from classroom management to curriculum implementation (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998; Richards, 2010).

Several studies have highlighted the significance of teaching philosophy in shaping teachers' professional practice. Brookfield (1990) identified four functions of teaching philosophy: personal, pedagogical, professional, and political. Similarly, Ramsey and Fitzgibbons (2005) demonstrated how teachers' identity and philosophy directly influence classroom activities, materials selection, and teacher–student interaction. In the EFL context, Akbari et al. (2008) showed that reflective teachers positively affect students' motivation and achievement, while Borg (2018) stressed that teachers' beliefs and philosophies, though often tacit, are central to understanding classroom practices. Nevertheless, there remains a disconnect between teachers' stated philosophies and their enacted practices, as Kim's (2004) study of novice preschool teachers in South Korea revealed. This discrepancy raises questions about the ways in which reflection can bridge the gap between belief and practice.

In Indonesia, the situation is particularly complex. Studies on reflective practice among Indonesian EFL teachers are still relatively scarce and have often focused on pre-service or novice teachers (Yumarnamto, 2017). Much less is known about how experienced teachers—those who have taught for many years and developed professional identities through accumulated practice—engage in reflection on their teaching philosophy. This gap is significant because experienced teachers are positioned to serve as models and mentors for their less experienced colleagues. Their reflective accounts can also provide valuable insights into how professional identity evolves over time in response to contextual challenges such as limited resources, administrative burdens, and diverse student needs. Korthagen (2017) has argued that teacher learning requires going beyond technical skills toward deeper awareness of personal beliefs and values, a view that aligns strongly with the exploration of teaching philosophy.

Another dimension of significance is the cultural and institutional context. Teaching philosophy is not a fixed or universal construct; rather, it is shaped by the social, cultural, and policy environments in which teachers work. In Indonesia, EFL teachers often operate within an exam-oriented system that prioritizes measurable outcomes over holistic learning (Marcellino, 2008). This creates tensions between teachers' personal philosophies—such as fostering communicative competence or critical thinking—and the systemic pressures of preparing students for standardized assessments. Reflective practice offers a way for teachers to navigate these tensions, yet empirical research on how Indonesian teachers articulate and reconcile such dilemmas remains underdeveloped.

Moreover, reflective practice has broader implications for professional identity. Mann and Walsh (2017) emphasized that reflection in language teaching not only enhances classroom effectiveness but also contributes to a deeper sense of professional self-awareness. Similarly, Barkhuizen (2016) highlighted how teachers' narratives and reflections reveal the complex interplay between identity, power, and pedagogical decisions. In this sense, studying experienced teachers' reflections on their philosophy is not only about improving teaching techniques but also about

understanding how teachers construct their identities and navigate the sociocultural realities of their profession.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to explore how experienced Indonesian EFL teachers reflect on their teaching philosophy and what themes emerge from their reflections. By focusing on teachers with substantial experience, the study moves beyond the dominant focus on pre-service or novice teachers in existing research. It contributes to the literature by offering insights into the lived experiences of teachers who have developed mature perspectives on their professional practice. The significance of this study lies in three aspects. First, it enriches the theoretical understanding of reflective practice by linking it to the exploration of teaching philosophy in the Indonesian EFL context. Second, it provides empirical evidence of how experienced teachers articulate and adapt their philosophies in response to contextual realities, thereby contributing to the field of teacher cognition and professional identity. Third, the findings have practical implications for teacher education and professional development programs, which can incorporate reflective activities aimed at helping teachers articulate, examine, and refine their teaching philosophies.

While reflection has been widely acknowledged as essential for teacher development, there is still limited research on how experienced EFL teachers in Indonesia conceptualize their teaching philosophy through reflective practice. This study addresses that gap by examining the reflections of three experienced teachers, aiming to uncover how their philosophies are constructed, challenged, and reshaped through professional experience. In doing so, it situates the Indonesian experience within the broader global discourse on reflective practice and teacher philosophy, offering insights that may resonate with EFL educators and policymakers across diverse contexts.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate how experienced EFL teachers in Indonesia reflected on their teaching philosophy. A case study was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth and contextualized exploration of a bounded phenomenon, enabling researchers to capture the complexity of teachers' lived experiences and professional reflections (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). Given the study's focus on understanding teachers' philosophies through their narratives and reflections, the case study design provided a means of generating rich and descriptive insights that could not be obtained through quantitative approaches.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants of this study consisted of three experienced English teachers who were purposively selected based on three criteria: length of teaching experience, educational background, and established habits of reflection. All three participants had more than nine years of teaching experience in secondary schools, had completed a master's degree in English education, and regularly engaged in reflective thinking about their classroom practices. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout the study: Bella, Sarah, and Safira. Bella had taught English in a private senior high school in Bandung for a decade, Sarah had nine years of experience in a vocational school in Serang, and Safira had been teaching for thirteen years in vocational schools in Karawang. Their varied contexts provided different vantage points from which to examine how teaching philosophies are shaped by professional experience, school culture, and personal reflection.

Data were gathered through two primary instruments: semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant on six occasions over a three-month period. The interview guide was developed based on Farrell's (2015) framework for reflective practice on teachers' teaching philosophy, allowing flexibility for follow-up questions while ensuring coverage of key issues. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to elicit nuanced reflections and to provide participants with opportunities to articulate their philosophies in their own words (Cohen et al., 2005; Menter et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). Alongside the interviews, participants were

asked to keep reflective journals across one semester. The journals were designed to capture ongoing reflections and critical incidents in their teaching and were guided by prompts adapted from Richards and Ho (1998). The use of both interviews and journals enhanced the depth of data and supported triangulation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied methodological triangulation by cross-checking information obtained from interviews and journals. Triangulation strengthened the credibility of the study by confirming consistency across data sources (Merriam, 2009). In addition, member checking was carried out by sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify interpretations, while detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were provided to support transferability.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is widely recognized for its ability to identify, interpret, and report patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts and journal entries to achieve familiarity with the data. This was followed by the generation of initial codes that captured significant features of the participants' reflections. Codes were then compared and grouped into broader categories, which were refined iteratively until themes were identified and defined. The themes were continually reviewed against the data to ensure that they reflected the participants' perspectives accurately. From this process, eight major themes emerged that provided insights into the participants' teaching philosophy. These included: the importance of English teaching in formal schooling, external influences shaping teaching practices, perceptions of what it means to be a teacher, experiences of being an English teacher, challenges encountered in English instruction, strategies for managing classroom problems, adjustments to teaching methods, and critical incidents that shaped professional identity. These themes not only illustrate the multifaceted nature of teaching philosophy but also highlight how personal histories, contextual demands, and reflective engagement intersect in shaping teachers' professional orientations.

The qualitative case study design, supported by multiple instruments of data collection and rigorous thematic analysis, allowed the study to uncover deep insights into how experienced Indonesian EFL teachers reflected on and constructed their teaching philosophy. By grounding the analysis in both established frameworks of reflective practice (Farrell, 2015; Richards & Ho, 1998) and contextual narratives, the study demonstrates methodological coherence and reliability, while also offering implications for broader research on teacher cognition and professional identity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Different themes emerged in the three participants' reflections on their teaching philosophy, as indicated in the answer to the research question. The themes that were gained from the collected data are explained as follows.

Importance of English teaching at formal schooling

The participants' reflections reveal how formal schooling played a pivotal role in shaping their engagement with English and their evolving teaching philosophy. Although each teacher experienced English differently, early exposure in classrooms and extracurricular contexts consistently emerged as formative influences on their professional identities. Bella, for instance, recalled how her cousins' English comics initially sparked her curiosity, but it was participation in writing competitions, membership in an English club, and additional tutoring from supportive teachers that consolidated her confidence. These experiences fostered long-term motivation, though she later observed that her proficiency plateaued once she began teaching. Her reflection illustrates Korthagen's (2017) view that professional growth requires continuous attention to teachers' own learning trajectories alongside their teaching roles.

Sarah's trajectory also highlights the importance of formal education, complemented by extracurricular opportunities. From elementary school onwards, she enriched her exposure through English clubs, literature courses, and university-level engagement with academic texts. Such recollections confirm Borg's (2018) argument that teachers' beliefs and practices are rooted in personal learning histories. By revisiting her formative experiences, Sarah demonstrates how early encounters with English became the foundation for her pedagogical philosophy.

Safira emphasized both school instruction and self-directed exposure. Reading magazines, attending courses, and watching English films cultivated sustained engagement with the language. Notably, her early opportunity to teach in a language course while still in school provided an apprenticeship that informed her later philosophy. As Barkhuizen (2016) argues, teachers' narratives highlight the interplay between identity, history, and professional practice, and Safira's case illustrates how early learning contexts shape both linguistic competence and teaching identity.

Collectively, these accounts underscore that formal schooling provides more than linguistic knowledge: it establishes enduring attitudes toward learning and teaching. As Farrell (2019) notes, reflective practice enables teachers to connect formative experiences with present decisions, reinforcing that teaching philosophy is grounded in lived histories. In this study, the importance of English in formal schooling is positioned not merely as a practical requirement but as a cornerstone of professional identity and reflective practice.

Influence from beyond school life

The participants' reflections also revealed how influences outside of formal schooling shaped their teaching practices and philosophies. These influences, ranging from institutional support to personal role models and media exposure, highlight the multifaceted ways in which teachers construct their professional identities.

Bella emphasized the empowering role of institutional support. Upon joining her current school, she was encouraged by the principal to innovate and experiment in the classroom. This freedom motivated her to design learning activities that extended beyond traditional classroom walls, such as conducting lessons in the basketball field or mosque. Her reflections demonstrate how institutional environments can empower teachers to adapt pedagogy to students' characteristics, aligning with Farrell's (2019) notion that reflective practice thrives when teachers are granted autonomy to align their beliefs with instructional choices.

In contrast, Sarah highlighted interpersonal influences. She credited her English course teacher for modeling a responsive teaching style that accommodated students' diverse needs, which she later incorporated into her own practice. Furthermore, her involvement in the MGMP community provided collaborative spaces where teachers shared strategies to address heterogeneous student competencies. Such collegial interactions resonate with Borg's (2018) claim that teacher beliefs and practices evolve through dialogue with peers and communities of practice. Sarah also noted the importance of senior colleagues who guided her in designing assessments and selecting appropriate media. These experiences illustrate how peer mentoring and professional networks support reflective growth and pedagogical refinement.

Safira's reflections pointed to the role of media as a source of inspiration. She reported drawing teaching ideas from English-language films, including those portraying classroom practices and immigrant struggles in English-speaking contexts. By incorporating such films into her lessons and prompting students to reflect on characters' challenges, she sought to enhance students' motivation and awareness of English as a global necessity. Her strategy exemplifies Barkhuizen's (2016) perspective on narrative resources, showing how teachers draw upon cultural texts to frame learning as both linguistic and social engagement.

Collectively, these narratives highlight that teaching philosophies are shaped not only by formal education but also by external influences such as institutional support, role models, collegial exchanges, and cultural media. These factors reinforce that reflective practice extends beyond

classrooms, encompassing broader social and professional ecosystems that shape teachers' identities and approaches to instruction.

The definition of a teacher

The participants' reflections on what it means to be a teacher reveal overlapping yet distinct perspectives that highlight the multifaceted role of educators in shaping not only linguistic competence but also character, motivation, and life skills. Their responses illustrate how teaching is perceived as an act of guidance and moral responsibility that extends beyond knowledge transmission to encompass relational, ethical, and social dimensions.

For Bella, being a teacher is not confined to delivering lessons but is fundamentally about nurturing students as whole individuals with the potential to grow. She emphasized the importance of establishing personal connections with learners, believing that trust is the foundation of effective teaching. In her view, once students trust their teacher, they are more likely to engage, follow instructions, and develop intrinsic motivation. To foster such relationships, Bella adopts informal strategies such as conversing with students during recess, integrating personal storytelling games in class, and even accompanying students on their way home. These practices reflect her belief that proximity and care cultivate intrinsic motivation, which in turn accelerates learning. Her approach exemplifies Farrell's (2019) notion that reflective teachers align their philosophy with classroom practices, ensuring that pedagogical choices resonate with learners' affective needs.

Sarah defined the teacher primarily as a role model. For her, teaching goes beyond academics to include character formation and ethical modeling. She observed that students often imitate teachers' behaviors more readily than they internalize spoken advice, meaning that even small habits such as posture or tidiness become influential. This perspective aligns with Borg's (2018) emphasis on the relationship between teacher beliefs and enacted practices, underscoring that teachers' self-awareness of their conduct shapes the classroom environment as much as formal pedagogy does. Sarah's reflections highlight the teacher's responsibility to embody values that students may adopt as part of their character development.

Safira offered yet another dimension by framing the teacher as a guide in developing life skills. She argued that while students can acquire subject knowledge independently through books or digital resources, it is the teacher's responsibility to contextualize learning within real-life challenges. Safira routinely introduces social issues into her lessons, asking students to reflect critically on societal problems. By linking language learning with life skills, she positions English not merely as an academic subject but as a tool for navigating the complexities of modern life. This resonates with Barkhuizen's (2016) perspective on teacher identity, where professional practice is shaped by broader social concerns and teachers act as mediators between classroom learning and societal realities.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that the role of the teacher is deeply relational and extends far beyond language instruction. Teachers are perceived as mentors, role models, and facilitators of personal growth, requiring sensitivity to students' needs, awareness of their own behaviors, and commitment to equipping learners with skills for life. This echoes Yumarnamto's (2017) assertion that understanding learners' characteristics enhances both pedagogy and professional development, reinforcing that effective teaching is as much about who teachers are as about what they teach.

How it is like to be an English teacher

The participants described their experiences of being English teachers as both exciting and challenging, reflecting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the profession. Their reflections highlight not only the rewards of teaching but also the persistent difficulties of sustaining learner motivation, addressing contextual barriers, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

Bella emphasized the reciprocal nature of teaching, describing it as "interesting, challenging, and intense." For her, teaching is exciting because it offers opportunities for mutual learning, where

students not only acquire knowledge from her but also contribute new perspectives through their critical thinking and personal experiences. She reflected that engaging with students' diverse viewpoints helped her grow not only as a teacher but also as a homeroom mentor and even as a parent, since conversations with students and their families provided insights into adolescent development. Bella's account underscores Farrell's (2019) observation that reflective practice often extends beyond instructional concerns to encompass teachers' personal growth and evolving identities.

Sarah similarly viewed teaching as both gratifying and demanding. She found satisfaction in witnessing students grasp concepts, present projects in English, and perform confidently in front of audiences. These moments of success reinforced her passion for teaching and her sense of accomplishment. Yet, Sarah also acknowledged that the process of facilitating such outcomes was difficult. Designing lessons, selecting methods, and using appropriate media posed continuous challenges, particularly when faced with students who lacked motivation. Encouraging disengaged learners to see the value of English emerged as one of her most pressing concerns. Her reflections resonate with Borg's (2018) argument that teachers' practices are inseparable from their beliefs about student learning and the realities of classroom contexts.

Safira also identified the dual nature of teaching. She enjoyed sharing not only curriculum-based knowledge but also broader linguistic and cultural content such as word histories, pronunciation variations, and world accents, which captured students' interest. However, teaching in a rural area introduced unique challenges, as many students prioritized agricultural or domestic duties over academic pursuits. She observed that persuading such learners to value English as a future asset required considerable effort. Additionally, Safira found administrative tasks burdensome, particularly given her dual responsibilities as a teacher and mother. Her reflections align with Barkhuizen's (2016) view that teachers' identities are shaped by the interplay of professional roles, personal lives, and contextual demands.

Collectively, these narratives illustrate that teaching English is characterized by a complex balance of fulfillment and difficulty. The participants' reflections highlight the importance of resilience and adaptability, qualities that are essential for sustaining motivation in both teachers and students. Their accounts demonstrate how reflective practice enables teachers to frame challenges as opportunities for growth, thereby strengthening their professional identity and commitment to language education.

The challenging aspects of teaching English

Although the participants shared a general recognition that teaching English is both rewarding and demanding, their reflections revealed different perspectives on the specific challenges they encountered in their professional practice. These accounts illustrate the interplay between classroom realities, teacher emotions, institutional conditions, and learner characteristics, highlighting how such factors shape the enactment of teaching philosophies.

For Bella, the most persistent challenge lay in the unpredictability of classroom dynamics. Despite preparing lesson plans for an entire semester, she often found that the reality of the classroom disrupted her plans. For instance, when she intended to begin a lecture, she sometimes entered a classroom where students were restless or disorganized, forcing her to spontaneously adjust her activities. This constant need to improvise initially created stress, but over time she developed strategies to cope with such unpredictability. Bella also identified emotional regulation as a challenge; irritation or fatigue from earlier classes sometimes carried over into subsequent lessons, affecting her professionalism. Her reflections echo Farrell's (2019) observation that reflective practice requires teachers to acknowledge the emotional dimensions of teaching as part of their professional development. Furthermore, she stressed that earning students' trust was crucial yet difficult, since trust was, in her experience, the foundation of effective classroom engagement.

Sarah identified her primary challenge as addressing the needs of low-achieving students, particularly in speaking and pronunciation. She found it difficult to build students' confidence and

competence in oral performance, which required extensive repetition and tailored support. Additionally, Sarah noted the difficulty of adapting assessment procedures. The standardized formats provided by the curriculum did not align with her students' abilities; without modification, many would fail. She therefore felt compelled to redesign assessments to ensure they remained fair while still meeting curricular expectations. Such dilemmas highlight Borg's (2018) assertion that teachers' beliefs interact with contextual constraints, often leading to tensions between institutional demands and classroom realities. Sarah also pointed to structural limitations, such as the small size of her school and the lack of alternative learning spaces. She observed that the monotonous environment contributed to students' demotivation, suggesting that physical context can significantly shape learner engagement.

Safira's reflections focused on material and motivational challenges. She expressed frustration with the limited teaching facilities at her school, where she had to compete with colleagues to access projectors and speakers. This scarcity of resources constrained her ability to use multimedia, which she considered vital for engaging students. More critically, she observed that many of her students showed little motivation to complete assignments, even when instructions were repeated and opportunities for support were offered. She noted that homework was frequently neglected, and students seldom sought clarification, reflecting what she perceived as a lack of awareness about the importance of effort in learning. Safira's account underscores Mann and Walsh's (2017) argument that reflective practice is not only about self-improvement but also about grappling with the socio-cultural realities of learners, particularly in under-resourced or rural contexts.

The participants' reflections highlight the multifaceted challenges of teaching English: managing unpredictability in classrooms, addressing diverse learner abilities, modifying assessments, coping with infrastructural constraints, and sustaining learner motivation. These challenges demonstrate that teaching philosophy is continually tested in practice, requiring adaptability, resilience, and reflective engagement. As Korthagen (2017) emphasizes, teacher learning must account for these "inconvenient truths" of practice, where idealized conceptions of teaching often collide with the complexities of real classrooms. In this way, the participants' experiences not only reveal their struggles but also underscore the necessity of reflective practice for professional growth and sustained commitment to language education.

Dealing with problems that occur while teaching English

Classroom problems are inevitable in teaching, yet the ways teachers respond to them reveal much about their underlying philosophies and reflective capacities. The participants in this study described distinct approaches to managing challenges, illustrating how individual dispositions, contextual realities, and professional beliefs shape problem-solving strategies.

Bella reported that her most common classroom problem was dealing with excessively talkative students. Her initial strategy was to communicate directly with them, asking why they were being disruptive and encouraging them to reflect on their behavior. If this approach failed, she employed non-verbal cues: standing still, maintaining silence, and fixing the students with a neutral expression. Bella believed that, because her students were accustomed to her active and expressive teaching style, this sudden shift in demeanor served as a powerful signal that prompted them to self-correct. This approach reflects Farrell's (2019) argument that reflective teachers adapt their responses to classroom realities while also acknowledging the emotional and relational dynamics of teaching. Bella's strategy underscores how consistency in teacher identity can be leveraged to regulate student behavior in subtle but effective ways.

Sarah identified different challenges, particularly students with short attention spans or varying levels of knowledge attainment. To address inattention, she repositioned students at the front of the classroom and frequently questioned them to maintain engagement. To bridge disparities in student achievement, she implemented mixed-ability grouping, pairing high-achievers with low-achievers so that peer support could supplement teacher guidance. Furthermore, when lessons concluded earlier than expected, she used games to sustain student interest, while technical issues with equipment

prompted her to revert to more traditional interactive activities. Sarah's solutions demonstrate adaptability and a recognition that classroom problems require flexible, context-sensitive strategies. This aligns with Borg's (2018) assertion that teachers' beliefs about learning strongly influence how they manage classroom interaction and design interventions.

Safira, by contrast, took a firmer stance in managing disruptive behavior. When confronted with noisy students, she initially asked them to quiet down. If they ignored her, she escalated the response by asking them to leave the classroom, a strategy that underscored her expectation of discipline and respect for the learning environment. Interestingly, she noted that some students would choose to remain, apologize, and adjust their behavior, suggesting that her approach communicated clear boundaries and accountability. In addition to behavioral issues, Safira faced the recurring problem of insufficient time to complete planned lessons. Rather than compressing content, she opted to extend activities into subsequent sessions, treating lesson plans as flexible frameworks rather than rigid prescriptions. This decision reflects Mann and Walsh's (2017) perspective that reflective practice involves negotiating between pedagogical ideals and the practical constraints of real classrooms.

Despite their different strategies, all three participants expressed a common concern: the need to ensure that students remained attentive, quiet, and engaged in the learning process. Their reflections reveal that dealing with classroom problems is not merely about discipline but about cultivating a classroom environment conducive to learning. As Kheirzadeh (2018) argues, reflective engagement allows teachers to refine their beliefs and practices, which in turn shapes student behavior and motivation. By reflecting on their responses to classroom challenges, the participants demonstrated how problem-solving strategies become opportunities for professional growth, reinforcing the central role of reflection in shaping teaching philosophy and identity.

Adjusting the teaching practice

The participants' reflections highlighted the importance of flexibility in teaching and the continuous adjustment of pedagogical strategies to suit students' diverse needs. Although each teacher adopted different approaches, all underscored the significance of responsiveness to classroom realities rather than rigid adherence to pre-planned lessons.

Bella emphasized that while she prepared lesson plans for the entire semester, she frequently modified them in response to her students' emerging characteristics. She noted that the first few sessions were particularly valuable for observing students' learning styles, personalities, and preferred activities. Based on these insights, she revised her plans to sustain engagement and motivation, often replicating activities that students found enjoyable. Bella's reflections align with Farrell's (2019) view that reflective teachers adapt practice in real time, treating lesson planning as a dynamic process rather than a fixed blueprint.

Sarah similarly regarded teaching as an iterative process shaped by reflection on past experiences. She drew lessons from previous cohorts, retaining effective methods while refining less successful ones. Importantly, she also recognized the need to differentiate tasks according to students' levels of achievement. At the start of each semester, she identified high and low achievers and then adjusted assignments accordingly, offering flexibility in whether students worked individually, in pairs, or in small groups. This practice illustrates Borg's (2018) claim that teachers' beliefs about student abilities strongly influence the pedagogical choices they make, often leading to more personalized and inclusive learning opportunities.

Safira's account revealed another layer of adaptive teaching. At the beginning of each semester, she conducted diagnostic activities such as student introductions and initial assignments to gauge proficiency and learning preferences. Using this information, she redesigned her lesson plans to match the class's specific needs and selected teaching media that would maximize learning outcomes. Her approach echoes Mann and Walsh's (2017) argument that reflective practice is fundamentally about responsiveness, enabling teachers to make principled adjustments that align with learners' contexts.

The reflections of Bella, Sarah, and Safira underscore the centrality of adjustment as a marker of effective reflective teaching. Their practices demonstrate an understanding that students' needs and classroom conditions are neither homogeneous nor static, requiring continuous monitoring and adaptation. This is consistent with Ahmad et al. (2013), who found that reflective teachers who attend to learner characteristics are more effective in fostering comprehension and engagement. Ultimately, the participants' adaptive strategies illustrate how teaching philosophy is enacted through the practical negotiation of planned instruction and emergent realities in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how experienced Indonesian EFL teachers reflect on and articulate their teaching philosophy, revealing how personal histories, contextual realities, and reflective practices converge to shape professional identity. The findings demonstrated that teachers' philosophies are not static but are continually negotiated through experiences both within and beyond formal schooling. The eight themes identified—ranging from the importance of English in education, external influences, and perceptions of being a teacher, to challenges, problem-solving, adaptations, and critical incidents—underscore the complex and dynamic nature of teaching philosophy.

The participants' reflections highlighted that effective teaching requires more than technical mastery of methods; it involves cultivating trust, modeling character, guiding life skills, and adjusting pedagogy to diverse learner needs. These insights affirm that reflective practice plays a critical role in bridging personal beliefs with classroom realities, enabling teachers to transform challenges into opportunities for professional growth. This supports the view that teacher development should be conceptualized as a lifelong, context-sensitive process (Farrell, 2019; Korthagen, 2017).

For practice, the findings suggest that teacher education and professional development programs in Indonesia and similar contexts should integrate reflective activities that help teachers articulate and critically examine their teaching philosophies. By encouraging narratives, peer dialogues, and self-reflection, institutions can support teachers in aligning their beliefs with effective classroom practices. For research, this study adds to the limited literature on experienced teachers' reflective practices in EFL contexts and points to the need for further inquiry into how teaching philosophies evolve across career stages.

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