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Pre-service TESOL teachers' professional-awareness building through reflecting on reflections of critical incidents

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Abstract

Scholars have questioned the effectiveness of reflective practice for gaining professional awareness or attaining professional development. In addition, the prevalence of inadequate comprehensive framework for pre-service teachers' reflective practice and insufficient support of teacher educators have been noted in the literature. Against these backdrops, the present study attempted to demonstrate how reflecting on reflections, a form of reflective practice, of Critical Incidents (CIs) contributes to building pre-service TESOL teachers' professional awareness. The study involved ten pre-service teachers (PSTs) in reflecting on reflections of CIs during the teaching practicum. Following the interpretive phenomenological approach, the study unfolded the CIs associated with pedagogical factors, including passive participation of the students, students' late arrival in the classroom, disobedience to teachers' instructions, the chaotic environment in the classroom, students' rude behavior, and disruption caused by technical glitches, and CIs associated with intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, comprising students' emotional exhaustion and unprofessional behaviors by senior teachers. Subsequently, it illustrated how PSTs cultivated their professional awareness through reflecting on reflections of CIs. The study presented a reflective practice framework applicable to pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. It also provided practical suggestions for pre-service and novice teachers to address and overcome the CIs. Teacher educators and trainers can harness the findings to prepare PSTs to conduct interactive and productive English language classes.

Keywords: TESOL education, Reflective practice, Pre-service teachers, ESL, Critical incidents, Reflecting on reflections, Professional awareness, Professional development

Introduction

Since its inception in the seminal work of Schön (1983) in teacher education, reflective practice has gained much attention in literature. As a core element of reflective practice, reflection-on-action refers to teachers' involvement in reflecting on their teaching practice after the class (Schön, 1983). In contrast, reflection-in-action means to continue reflection while teaching (Schön, 1983). In pre-service teacher education,

the constructivist perspectives support the inclusion of reflective practice so that pre-service teachers (PSTs) can reflect on their teaching by combining theoretical knowledge, a personal sense of teaching, and new experiences encountered in the process of teaching during their teaching practicum (Gungor, 2016; Hendriwanto, 2021; Kabilan, 2007; Lee, 2007). The widely cited value of the reflective practice, as echoed in the literature, is to yield new insights and enhance critical thinking and problem-solving ability for those who perform it (Bartlett, 1996; Farrell, 2016; Gungor, 2016; Yesilbursa, 2011). Understanding the benefit, the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program has remained at the forefront in sensing the allure of reflective practice and embracing it as a compulsory component to render PSTs' enhanced ability in teaching (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Farrell, 2016). Through teaching practicum, reflective practice embedded in the TESOL program paves the way for PSTs to reflect on their beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and practices and eventually aiding them in gaining professional development (Hendriwanto, 2021; Karim et al., 2019a, 2020, 2023; Körkkö et al., 2016; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Walkington, 2005).

Yet reflective practice is criticized, and its credibility in rendering PSTs' professional development is questioned in the literature (Beauchamp, 2015; Yuan, 2023). According to Beauchamp (2015), it lacks real reflection in teacher education; it may be more talked about than practiced. It is commonly seen in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, the core elements of reflective practice (Schön, 1983), that teachers reflect on what they do and how and why they do it (Farrell, 2015; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019). In reflection-on-action, the teachers ponder what happened in the class and critique it, while in reflection-in-action, they report a surprising problem and share what they think during the class (Farrell, 2004). Farrell (2018) notes that such a norm of reflective practice is limited to playing a retrospective role in identifying what works and does not work in the classroom. Farrell expresses concern that such conventional reflection may work as a fix-it approach and yield uncritical insights. Before Farrell's (2018) assertion, Freeman (2016) also identifies reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as 'post-mortem' forms of reflective practice that play a perfunctory role of 'reflection-as-repair' (p. 217). Freeman argues that maneuvering reflective practice in such a way confines reflection to a problem-solving tool that only encompasses the technical aspects of teaching while leaving many critical aspects of teaching unexplored.

In terms of teaching practicum, Mann and Walsh (2017) believe that PSTs' reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are routinized activities that need to be accomplished to obtain good grades and not actual learning. Regarding professional development, Akbari (2007) doubts the effectiveness of reflective practice in improving teachers and teaching. Likewise, Russell (2013) questions, "Has reflective practice done more harm than good in teacher education? He contends that focusing less on real action in the classroom and classroom experience limits teachers from making reflective practice relevant to their professional development. This is likely because reflective practice is not as deeply ingrained in teaching practice as its motto envisions (Beauchamp, 2015). Besides, teacher educators have not conveyed a clear and precise meaning of reflection that would facilitate PSTs' total understanding (Russell, 2013).

The shortcomings enacted to supervision and/or mentorship to make reflective practice relevant to PSTs' professional growth are evident in the literature (see Gu, 2013; Nguyen & Loughland, 2018; Senom et al., 2013). Apart from the problems linked to supervision and/or mentorship, Hourani (2013) notes some barriers that impede PSTs' attempts to reflect. For instance, language barriers, the complexity of multi-layered tasks, insufficient skills in reflection, and the absence of internal control are the major constraints that make PSTs suffer from perfunctory reflection. Besides, the absence of PSTs' critical reflection also hinders them from sensing the relevance of reflective practice with regard to the teaching profession (Akbari, 2007; Beauchamp, 2015; Enfield & Stasz, 2011). The denouncement of reflective practice, as voiced by scholars, indicates that conventional forms of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action generate little insight to stimulate professional development. Sensitized by the aforesaid backdrops, the researchers of the present study embraced PSTs' active and independent participation to generate in-depth reflection for growing a sense of professionalism to support their future teaching.

In-depth reflection situates the PSTs in the trajectory of developing professional sense (Flynn, 2019). To produce in-depth and meaningful reflections and acquire knowledge from these, Akbari (2007) advocates the idea that "it is good to reflect, but reflection itself also requires reflection" (p. 2005). Hence, the researchers applied 'reflecting on reflections' in this study, which is effective for ensuring the active participation of the PSTs to produce in-depth and comprehensive reflections and thus render professional learning (Kabilan, 2007). They selected critical incidents (CIs) as the element of focus to perform reflecting on reflections (the detailed application of reflecting on reflections of CIs is explained in the 'Methods' section). CIs were chosen as the element of focus in this study as Dursun et al. (2023) emphasize the inclusion of diverse elements of focus in reflective practice in teacher education programs to equip PSTs with multifaceted knowledge. Moreover, CIs are instrumental in providing in-depth reflections because reflections on CIs stretch beyond the conventional form of reflection by encapsulating more reasoning and meaning-making of the unanticipated event(s) (Griffin, 2003). CIs faced by PSTs are scarcely investigated in the literature, which is contrastive to the proliferation of research on in-service teachers' or young teachers' CIs (Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023). Most importantly, as Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) argue, existing literature provides inadequate evidence on how CIs can be applied in teacher education programs to grow PSTs' sense of professionalism. Although reflections on CIs and their contribution to PSTs' professional development through gaining ability in reflective and critical thinking have been studied (e.g., Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Farrell, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Kilgour et al., 2015; Nejadghanbar, 2021; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023), PSTs' involvement in reflecting on reflections concerning CIs and its contribution to their professional development remain underrepresented in the literature. To bridge the knowledge gap, the present study intended to report how PSTs cultivated their professional awareness by performing 'reflecting on reflections' of CIs.

The context of the research was Malaysia. The research site was Universiti Sains Malaysia. The School of Educational Studies offers a Bachelor of Education (TESOL) with Honors degree program, a four-year professional program aiming to produce English teachers to teach English as a second language in Malaysian secondary schools. As

practiced in all Malaysian universities, teaching practicum is a compulsory course for the PSTs doing Bachelor of Education (TESOL) at Universiti Sains Malaysia. The PSTs are asked to reflect on various aspects of teaching during the teaching practicum. In Malaysia, the teaching practicum course is perceived as a professional development platform to learn “in, from, and for” their future teaching (Johnson, 2009, p. 26). We believe that if we, being teacher educators, fail to familiarize PSTs with CIs and reflections on these to develop their competencies in dealing with these during the teaching practicum course, we would leave a significant aspect of teaching schoolers unexplored by them, which may disrupt their future endeavors as TESOL teachers (Garton & Copland, 2019).

Literature review

Theorizing reflecting on reflections of critical incidents

Collin and Karsenti (2011) advocate that reflection should be done at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, and reflective practice should be interactive. Before that, Sikka and Timoštšuk (2008) propagate that reflective practice offers incremental benefits when programmed in an interactive environment. Reflecting on reflections is an interactive form of reflective practice (Kabilan, 2007). To put reflecting on reflections into practice, the researchers embraced the idea of dialogic reflective practice (Farrell, 2019) since it connects PSTs face-to-face or online for interactive reflective practice. Mann and Walsh (2017) note that dialogue adds further insights to reflections. According to them, interactive reflective practice is a crucial device to continue the “reflection-action-further-action” cycle since it allows PSTs to gain better clarification through questioning and provides enhanced understanding (Mann & Walsh, 2017, p. 8). Farrell (2019) concurs that reflection becomes effective when it involves dialogue with peers in reflection groups. Such groups can be formed and operated online, tailoring mutual aid-type collaboration through exploring various issues that directly impact their teaching (Farrell, 2013a, 2013b). By stepping into a discursive environment and immersing in discussions with peers, the PSTs can experience an enhanced opportunity to learn something from each other because individual PSTs have a unique perspective to analyze and interpret a phenomenon (Farrell, 2019). This means that dialogic reflections ultimately provide PSTs with valuable insights, perspectives, and understanding, offering an optimal opportunity to enhance their professional awareness. This opportunity might be missed when reflection is conducted in isolation (Farrell, 2019). Mann and Walsh (2017) also point out that the zones of proximal development are better ensured when dialogues are embedded in reflective practice. Hence, TESOL PSTs should be afforded the opportunity for a continuous dialogical reflective practice, enabling them to reap the benefits of heightened reflections (Farrell, 2019).

The impetus for the current study to explore the practice of reflecting on reflections is set by Farrell’s (2019) dialogic reflective practice. In the process of reflecting on reflections, pre-service teachers (PSTs) engage in ‘the interaction of experiences,’ wherein everyone employs their critical lens to analyze and interpret experiences within a “collegial environment” (Newell, 1996, p. 568). This collaborative setting allows everyone to benefit from additional insights into the success (or failure), clarity (or uncertainties), and difficulties, issues, and challenges that may arise in future

teaching or that were encountered in the initial reflecting process (Kabilan, 2007). Reflecting on reflections allows the PSTs to share, analyze, and interpret diverse experiences yielded by direct teaching during teaching practicum in either face-to-face or online modes (e.g., online chat group and Facebook group) (Kabilan, 2007; Karim et al., 2023). Fundamentally, reflecting on reflections comprises reflecting on self-reflections and reflections of others (Karim et al., 2023). Karim et al. (2023) clarify that in reflecting on reflections, each PST shares classroom experiences gained from direct teaching during the teaching practicum along with his or her reflections on the experiences, which paves the initial gateway to commence interactions. For instance, based on one's shared experiences and reflections, others are invited to share their reflections. Once the individual receives others' reflections, he or she can elicit his or her reflections on others' reflections. At this stage, they can argue over peers' reflections and accept or reject the ideas, new knowledge, and professional insights divulged in their reflections (Karim et al., 2023). That is how multi-layered reflections evolve in reflecting on reflections, which is expected to create and develop professional knowledge, awareness, and insights relevant to the teaching profession (Kabilan, 2007). One can question: Why should reflecting on reflections be incorporated as a form of reflective practice? Reflective practice can take a back seat when PSTs' primary concern is to complete the reflection reports and submit them to the supervisors to obtain good grades in teaching practicum instead of emphasizing professional knowledge acquisition (Ramasamy, 2002; Mann & Walsh, 2017). That is why, as Kabilan (2007) notes, the conventional form of reflective practice often shows limited success in fulfilling its actual aim. Reflecting on reflections, in contrast, is more operational because of its interactive model, which involves PSTs' active participation (Karim et al., 2023). For example, Macpherson (2002) assigned students to reflect on their reflective writing and found that it helped improve their writing. Similarly, Kabilan (2007) found that reflecting on reflections enhanced students' fundamental pedagogical knowledge and increased their awareness of meaningful and effective classroom practices, thereby building confidence for future teaching endeavors. More recently, Karim et al. (2023) engaged PSTs in reflecting on reflections of CIs and concluded that it helped construct their professional identity. Therefore, it becomes conspicuous that CI can be an essential element of focus to engage PSTs in the process of reflecting on reflections.

For capturing and reflecting on CIs, Farrell (2008) recommends a description of incidents that occurred during teaching. He proposes some prompted questions to be answered in the first phase. For instance, the answers to 'what happened exactly,' 'who was involved,' 'where did it take place,' and 'when did it take place' constitute the initial description of CIs. Farrell (2008) consciously advises teacher educators to avoid asking PSTs to add reasons (i.e., explanation and interpretation driven by the question 'why did it happen') so that PSTs can note the detailed description of CIs without being overwhelmed by the focus on explaining and interpreting these at the primary stage.

In the second phase, as Farrell (2008) suggests, PSTs should be guided to add their explanation and interpretation of the incidents. PSTs' reactions (i.e., what was done to overcome or minimize the incidents) to the incidents can be reported at this juncture. In addition, the reflections on the incidents may include their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning the English language. Thiel's (1999) suggestion to reflect

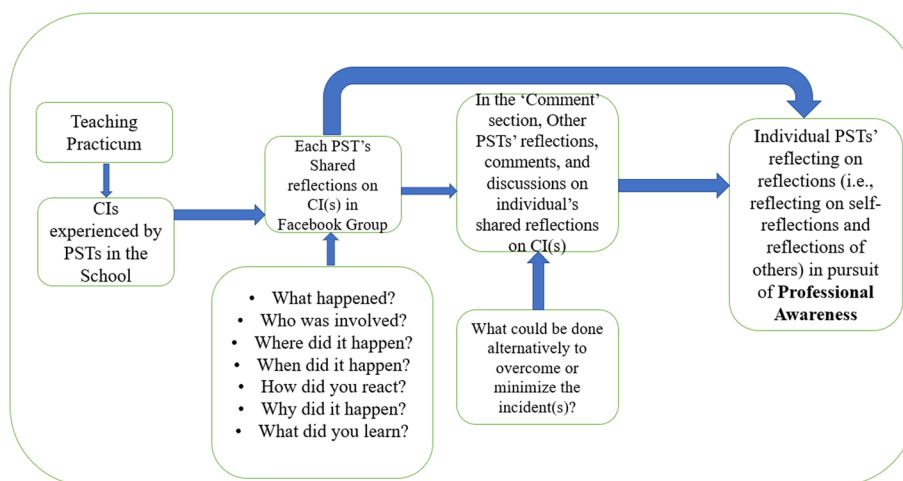


Fig. 1 Framework for reflecting on reflections of CIs for PSTs' professional-awareness building

on CIs is reverberated by Farrell (2008), with one exception: Thiel prefers PSTs to answer how the CIs led to a change in understanding and practice of teaching, which adds additional insights about the professional awareness building.

In the third phase, Farrell (2008) wants teacher educators to engage each PST in sharing their reflections with other PSTs so that others can reflect on an individual's CIs. Others can share their reflections on the incidents by including suggestions of alternatives concerning what the person could do to overcome or minimize these (Nazari & De Costa, 2022). They can also generate discussions on the incidents to offer more insights (Farrell, 2008). Subsequently, this process gives birth to dialogic reflective practice, which can also be performed online (Farrell, 2019). Hence, the researchers maintained an anonymized Facebook group for PSTs to share their CIs and reflections and reflect on reflections. In the designated group, each PST shared his or her reflections on CIs, received others' reflections, and finally reflected on self-reflections and reflections of others in pursuit of professional awareness, as theorized in the practice of reflecting on reflections in Kabilan (2007) and Karim et al. (2023). Since reflecting on reflections concerning CIs is incorporated in this study and it is performed on the Facebook Group, the following framework guides the study (Fig. 1).

Critical incidents, reflective practice, and professional awareness

CI was first devised as a technique in the Aviation Psychology program for selecting and categorizing aircrews of the US Air Force, and later, the American Institute for Research conceived it as a focus to study (Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023). The earlier definition of CI, as illustrated by (Brookfield, 1990), presented it as a “vividly remembered event which is unplanned and unanticipated” (p. 84). Farrell (2008) defined CIs, from a pedagogical perspective, as events that occur in the classroom and are unplanned or unanticipated. It could also be referred to as the event or situation that significantly impacts pre-service teachers' view and practice of teaching (Tripp, 1993). However, Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) regard CIs as unfavorable events or negative occurrences that young teachers face due to a lack of competencies while teaching

young learners. Other CIs that are undesirable in nature may include collegial non-conformity, learner behavior, clashes, passive engagement in class participation, and teachers' unpreparedness (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023).

Engaging PSTs in the realities of the world through reflecting on CIs as a way of preparing them for future professional endeavors is well explored in literature. For instance, Farrell (2015) argues that second-language teacher education programs should allow PSTs to face CIs to sense real-world classroom challenges, and reflections on these will support them in the initial years of their teaching careers. Since CIs will occur during the in-service teaching profession, involving PSTs to analyze these through reflective practice certainly adds value to their professional awareness (Farrell, 2019). Professional awareness is teachers' awareness of 'being' or 'becoming' a teacher (Žydzūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020), and it shapes their professional positionality (Beijaard et al., 2004; Richardson & Shupe, 2003) and determines perceived role (Žydzūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020). Professional awareness is also the result of teachers' constant involvement in reflective practice that continuously enjoins them to (re)think and understand their actions depending on the situational demands (Žydzūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020). To illustrate, professional awareness, gained through reflective practice, determines self-attitude and makes them capable of interpreting present actions in light of pedagogical and contextual needs (Canrinus et al., 2011). The analysis of CIs in reflective practice enables the PSTs to explore and scrutinize all possibilities before reaching a conclusion (Dewey, 1993) to be prepared to face multi-faceted problems and govern their actions in response to them (Griffin, 2003). Furthermore, Poudel (2019) postulates that in reflecting on CIs, PSTs have the privilege of questioning their actions, which results in fine-tuning their future practices. In other words, such reflective practice ignites professional awareness by identifying what went wrong or what could have been done differently (Poudel, 2019). Cultivating professional awareness is crucial for teachers, especially PSTs, as it is tied to their professional satisfaction, status, and pride. These factors empower them to remain committed to teaching (Frelin, 2010; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

A notable number of studies reported that novice teachers gained professional knowledge by reflecting on CIs. For instance, 28 PSTs in Griffin's (2003) study presented 135 CIs and reflected on these in pursuit of enhanced ability in reflective inquiry. It was found that the participants' reflective ability was increased, shifting their positionality from "concrete thinker to alert thinker" (Griffin, 2003, p. 218). Farrell's (2008) investigation of 18 PSTs' reflections on their CIs resulted in 36 critical incidents and enhanced their professional knowledge. When such reflections on CIs were shared with others, the reflecting teacher became professionally sensitized to her future teaching as she developed a greater awareness of herself as a teacher and her practices (Farrell, 2013a, 2013b). These types of reflections also raise PSTs' consciousness and awareness of their learners and own teaching processes (Bruster & Peterson, 2013), improve their future teaching (Kilgour et al., 2015), enhance their professional learning (Hall & Townsend, 2017) and, identify and understand specific tenets important for successful learning such as individual learner differences, classroom management strategies and instructional, strategies (Chien, 2018).

Further reflections by PSTs on how they dealt with the CIs, alongside sharing the reasons for dealing with those CIs, led to PSTs' professional learning, particularly when mentor teachers read their reflections and provided them with feedback on what they could do better. Such feedback by mentors appears to be effective in facilitating PSTs' meaningful professional development experiences during practicum. The practice of prompting critical questions (by mentors) resulted in imagined responses (by PSTs) (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2016; Nejadghanbar, 2021) and unpacked their interpersonal, pedagogical, and professional CIs (Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023). In igniting and enabling such professional development experiences, the framework fashioned by Richards and Farrell (2005) and further refined by Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) could be applied. It contains six questions: (i) the description of the incidents, (ii) the reasons for the incidents, (iii) the reactions to the incidents, (iv) the analysis of the reactions, (v) the learning from the incidents and, (vi) the intention to collect written responses to continue subsequent discussions. Based on this framework, Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) outlined the outcome, suggesting conceptual, practical and personal-professional changes in treating PSTs' CIs in their future teaching. Nejadghanbar and Atai (2021) illustrated that reflections on CIs and comments given by fellow colleagues facilitated the teachers in "getting more confidence" to face future CIs and "getting practical solutions to the existing problems in classes" (p. 97).

The above studies present insights of reflections on CIs from Iran, Singapore, Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan following the case study research design (Chien, 2018; Farrell, 2008), narrative inquiry (Farrell, 2013a, 2013b), critical incident technique (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Hall & Townsend, 2017), qualitative approach entailing critical incident research design (Kilgour et al., 2015), qualitative and exploratory design (Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023), and mixed-mode research design (Nejadghanbar & Atai, 2021). The review transpires how PSTs in various contexts got involved in diverse forms of reflective practice concerning CIs and how they developed professionally. However, professional development is an endless journey (Wallace, 1991), indicating PSTs' continuous involvement in pursuing professional development through various means. Hence, teacher educators and researchers should make constant efforts to determine what variety can be added to the trajectory of continuous professional development. The incorporation of reflective practice is of no difference. Various forms of reflective practices should be introduced to tailor PSTs' continuous professional development. The demand for more research on capturing how reflective practice can contribute to the growth of professional awareness is voiced in the literature (Akbari, 2007; Beauchamp, 2015; Hourani, 2013; Nguyen & Loughland, 2018; Russell, 2013). In addition, Farrell (2008) and Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) called for more investigation into how reflections on CIs contribute to building PSTs' professional awareness (Farrell, 2008; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023). In response to the calls from scholars, the current attempts to present a form of reflective practice (i.e., reflecting on reflections, as illustrated above) on CIs and its contribution to building Malaysian PSTs' professional awareness by espousing the interpretive phenomenological approach.

The present study

The present study aims to demonstrate how Malaysian PSTs build professional awareness through reflecting on reflections of CIs during teaching practicum. The following question guided the current study:

- How does reflecting on reflections of critical incidents contribute to building PSTs' professional awareness?

Methods

The context of teaching practicum

The Malaysian Quality Agency (MQA) mandates that teacher education programs must include teaching practicum, which requires PSTs to teach for at least 20 weeks in schools. Under this provision, Universiti Sains Malaysia makes it compulsory for the PSTs who are doing the Bachelor of Education (TESOL) with Honors degree program to complete the teaching practicum course. Following the provision, the PSTs of this study had to complete the course. All 10 PSTs were placed in different secondary schools in different states, except for two who taught in the same schools. Each PST was assigned to teach secondary school students (aged between 13 and 16) for a maximum of 12 h per week for four months. They were assigned to teach the English language during the teaching practicum. In the first two months (April and May 2021), the PSTs experienced face-to-face classroom teaching. Yet, with soaring COVID-19 cases and the eventual nationwide lockdown, the PSTs had to resort to online teaching in June and July (Annamalai et al., 2021; Sabani & Istiqomah, 2021) where the students learned via online platforms. Like in-service teachers, the PSTs were asked to carry out all responsibilities in the assigned schools. The researchers believed that CIs would be a common phenomenon that PSTs might encounter daily inside and outside the classroom.

Research design

The goal of the current study was to present the trajectory of PSTs' professional-awareness building through reflecting on reflections of CIs. As such, we utilized the interpretive phenomenological approach (Heidegger, 2019) as this study involved the "lived experiences" and realities of the PSTs' "narratives of their experiences of and feelings" of "specific phenomena" and "in-depth descriptions" of experiences during their teaching practicum (Cilesiz, 2009, p. 240). Usually, researchers employ this strategy when they opt to learn about how individuals perceive the meaning of significant experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the researchers adopted the interpretative phenomenological approach to understanding how PSTs perceive the meaning of CIs by reflecting on reflections in building their professional awareness.

Participants

This study involved 10 PSTs specializing in TESOL at the focal university. They enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (TESOL) with Honors degree program, a four-year professional program. They opted to be English teachers to teach English as a Second Language in Malaysian secondary schools. Teaching practicum is a compulsory course for them. Out of the 10 participants (with an average age of 23 years), nine were female PSTs and one was male PST. Though they hail from different parts

of Malaysia and of different ethnicities (i.e., Malay, Indian, and Chinese), the PSTs have quite a similar secondary educational background as all Malaysian secondary school students received education following the same curriculum and syllabus before furthering their studies at the tertiary level. For our study purpose, we issued an invitation letter to participate in our study. We informed the participants about the purpose of the study, how the findings will be disseminated, what their rights were, their choice to withdraw from the study, and the guarantee of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All the participants electronically signed the consent form. To safeguard their identities, we use pseudonyms such as PST1, PST2, PST10.

Research instruments

The first instrument of this study entailed individual PST's reflective writing on CIs posted on the Facebook group and peers' reflections enveloping criticisms and suggestions in the 'comment' section. To illustrate, PSTs were asked to share the CIs encountered and their reflections on these in the Facebook Group. Based on the individual's shared CI(s) and reflections posted on the Facebook Group, other PSTs wrote their reflections in the 'comment' section. For example, when PST1 posted the CI she faced and shared her reflection on it, other PSTs (PST2, PST3...PST10) were instructed to share their reflections on PST1's CI and reflection. After that, PST1 reflected on self-reflections and her peers' reflections to perform reflecting on reflections of CI for gaining professional awareness. The detailed guidelines for reflective writing on CIs are illustrated in 'Involving PSTs in Writing Reflections on CIs and Reflecting on Reflections of CIs' section.

Premised upon the first instrument, reflecting on reflections was put into practice. Building on the encountered CIs, self-reflections and reflections of others, the PSTs reflected on reflections whereby the prime focus was to answer the following open-ended question circulated in the anonymized WhatsApp Group.

- What kind of professional awareness have you built through reflecting on reflections of CI(s) that you experienced?

The PSTs were instructed to email the response to this question to the third author. The answers to the open-ended question enabled the researchers to understand how reflecting on reflections of critical incidents contributed to PSTs' professional-awareness building, which is the fundamental concern of the main research question in this study. Alongside this, we attempted to reveal the answer to the following question:

- Since you have read multiple CIs (shared by you and others), reflected on them, and reflected on reflections, how do you see the contribution of reflecting on reflections of CIs to building your professional awareness as a TESOL teacher?

After circulating the question in the WhatsApp Group, we asked the PSTs to write and share the answer to this open-ended question in the group. The purpose of administering this was to ensure and verify that this teaching practicum course substituting reflecting on reflections of CIs has the possibility of contributing to building

PSTs' professional awareness (Guskey, 2002). Tarrou et al. (1999) necessitated such an investigation since it would inform the teacher educators about the possible revisions and unveil the room for improvement for further quality assurance.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

We merged the data collected via an open-ended questionnaire and Facebook group, resulting in 10 sets of data that constituted the raw data of the study. We espoused Van Manen's (1997) three approaches—the detailed reading approach, the selective reading approach, and the holistic reading approach. We started with “The Detailed Reading Approach” which entails reading and rereading the participants' raw data, facilitating data analysis. We considered significant phrases and words to consider what the data reveals about the phenomenon. The “Selective or Highlighting Approach” was the next method we used. In this method, significant words, phrases, and statements were highlighted, and then those words and phrases were copied, tabulated, and pasted into a Word document in order to look for implicit meaning and classify them into concepts and later categories. The subthemes that gave meaning to the phenomenon emerged at this point. The data from each participant underwent the same procedure. The data was then reviewed holistically under “The holistic reading approach,” and the subthemes that were shared by every participant were used to generate the final themes.

In establishing the trustworthiness and rigor of this study, we utilized Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In fulfilling the credibility of this study, we collected data from two different sources and their findings were triangulated to ensure findings were grouped into respective and suitable themes. Transferability was established by providing evidence in the ‘Discussion’ part and informing how findings could be applied in other contexts in the ‘Conclusion’ section. A thorough description of methods facilitated the transferability of this study to other similar contexts (Guba, 1981). Dependability was achieved as we ensured findings were consistent with the raw data collected by facilitating a member-checking process with the PSTs after the data were analyzed (Varpio et al., 2017). Confirmability, which refers to “data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392), was established using a rigorous method of data analysis, how codes were assigned, and how themes were generated (Kaur et al., 2021).

Research procedures

Researchers' input

We arranged a Webex meeting with the PSTs to guide them about reflecting on reflections of CIs. In the first session of the meeting, we drew their attention to CIs. We informed them that CIs are unanticipated events that can happen inside and outside classrooms in the school during teaching practicum (Farrell, 2008) that have a significant impact on changing the PSTs' view and practice of teaching during teaching practicum (Tripp, 1993). We also told them these are critical episodes in teaching that they can note to reflect on to gain professional awareness. Additionally, we presented examples of CIs including the undesired behavior of the students and teachers, language proficiency, clashes, individual differences, class participation, and teachers'

unpreparedness are identified as the potential source of CIs in the classroom (see Nejadghanbar, 2021 for details).

In the second session of the Webex meeting, based on Kabilan (2007), we introduced the writing, sharing, and reading of reflections on CIs. We asked the PSTs to understand and espouse Richards and Lockhart's (1994) suggestion that "the process of reflecting upon one's own teaching is an essential component in developing knowledge and theories of teaching and hence is a key element in one's professional development" (p. 202). We ensured that the PSTs understood what it meant to be reflective and critical during their TP, especially in terms of identifying and reflecting on the CIs they experienced and how it could contribute to building their professional awareness. We elucidated professional awareness as a simple notion that is connected to professional development by drawing their attention to sensing the needful "to develop an individual's skills, knowledge and expertise as a teacher" (OECD, 2014, p.528) aiming at improving teaching and learning (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019; Kabilan, 2013; Wei et al., 2009). This fundamental understanding of professional awareness would enable the PSTs in this study to easily identify what would be the relevant professional development activities and the related outcomes of these, which would not only "facilitate change-making, but also to contribute to the endurance of change" (Guskey, 2002, p. 389). That is how we strived to implant the sense of professional awareness that could be engendered by reflecting on reflections of CIs.

Involving PSTs in reflecting on reflections of CIs

We guided them to write their reflections with the help of prompted questions echoed by Farrell (2008), Thiel (1999) and Nazari and De Costa (2022) in the designated Facebook Group. We also supplied them with the pattern of reporting and reflecting on CIs (Fig. 2), as modeled by Richards and Lockhart (1994).

Today, I gave my class a reading activity, which focused on skimming. I gave them an article to read called "Study Paints Grim Pictures" and asked them to skim through the article to identify the social problems mentioned. After a few minutes, I checked the answers and asked the students to number the paragraphs. They had to dig the paragraph, which contain information on each of the social problems. Then I gave one handout, which contained five paragraphs and another handout, which contained five headlines. Students had to match them.

Timing again was a problem. I originally planned to check the answers of the matching exercise but there was not time.

Less time should have been spent on explaining expressions as it defeated the objective of my lesson – skimming.

I should have allocated a specific amount of time to practice skimming.

I should have opened the lesson with a discussion of social problems so that students could compare their answers with what they found in the article.

Fig. 2 Reflections and afterthoughts (Adopted from Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 8)

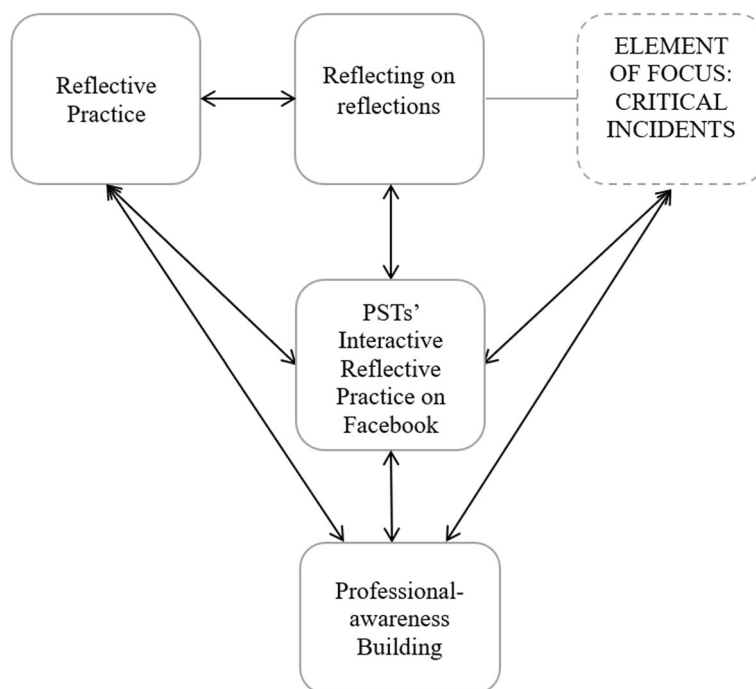


Fig. 3 Framework espoused to involve PSTs in reflecting on reflections of CIs to build professional awareness

In activating PSTs' reflecting on reflections, we espoused the following framework (Fig. 3), which was discerned from Fig. 1.

In addition, we issued the following guidelines:

- i. Four PSTs will post their respective CIs on the Facebook Group each week. A schedule was drawn, indicating the selected two PSTs who would post on Thursday, and the other two who would post on Monday. The CIs should be linked to their professional awareness.
- ii. Based on the CI(s) posted by individual PSTs, the remaining nine PSTs were asked to read, comment, and reflect on the posted reflections. They were reminded that reading should lead to critical understanding; commenting could include providing suggestions, new ideas, and criticisms.

The researchers continuously monitored whether PSTs were active in writing and sharing reflections of CIs on the Facebook group, commenting, criticizing, and yielding suggestions to each other's reflections.

Timeline of the study

The study was carried out during the final two months of the practicum, i.e., June and July of 2021, as PSTs gained the needed experiences of teaching, as well as the experiences of functioning and performing as a 'real' English language teacher in an actual school environment in the first two months (Kabilan, 2013). Without these experiences, the phenomenon we wanted to explore and identify in this study would not be reified

since teaching experience has “a catalytic effect on how teachers perceive the teaching process” (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018, p. 564).

Findings

The present study intended to show how reflecting on reflections of CIs, as a form of reflective practice, contributes to building PSTs’ professional awareness. The findings are categorized into four broad themes: CIs associated with students’ behavioral problems leading to professional awareness, CIs related to technical glitches leading to professional awareness, CIs linked to the absence of collegiality leading to professional awareness, and the contribution of reflecting on reflections concerning CIs to gain professional awareness. While the findings presented under the first three themes showed the trajectory of how reflecting on reflections of these CIs grew professional awareness among PSTs, the data under the fourth theme indicated the contribution of reflecting on reflections of CIs to gain professional awareness.

CIs associated with students’ behavioral problems leading to professional awareness

The passive participation of the students and professional awareness

Students’ inhibition to take part in classroom activities is a commonly experienced phenomenon of the teachers. However, for the PSTs, the phenomenon is intriguing and spins them into a spot of bother. Hence, the passive participation provoked the PSTs to perceive it as a CI. For instance, PST1 reported,

In one of my classes, students were not responding to my instructions. I was frustrated since I felt like I was talking to myself rather than actually teaching someone. I tried to make them speak through questioning, but none of them responded and did not participate in the activities. I was taken aback because this was a new experience.

In reflection, she noted, “I designed an interesting lesson plan for introducing a new topic along with some videos and pictures for students to participate in the discussion but they remained silent. What seemed interesting to me might bring boredom to them”. After sharing CI and reflection, she received other’s reflections that were intriguing and provoked her to reflect more critically on the incident she faced. In others’ reflections, instructional clarity was prioritized to avoid such a CI. For instance, PST2 emphasized attaining instructional clarity, mentioning, “Instructions should be delivered clearly so that they can understand how to respond and what to respond.” The reflection of PST2 also entailed the significance of understanding students’ body language and reacting accordingly.

Sometimes, your way of teaching might be correct, but they remain less active in involving themselves in the lesson [...] feel afraid and shy too. From their face and body language, we must understand their enthusiasm level. We have to bring changes to the plan. For example, instead of engaging them in activities at the beginning, we can discuss something interesting so that they happily participate in the discussion. Having their energy back, we can introduce a new topic and activities.

Similarly, performing a full retrospect of the materials, teaching style and lesson plans was also highlighted in others' reflections. While PST3 appreciated the step to "reassess the materials to examine the credibility of these in engaging students", PST 4 saw it as a positive initiative to "reflect on teaching style along with materials and lesson plan to avoid such a silent class". In addition, PST6 suggested to "start conversing about something funny and exciting in order to energize the students for the class activities."

PST1 reflected on the reflections of her peers and reported her "professional awareness being linked to understanding students' moods and acting accordingly without being stuck to the prior plan," which would help her "to avoid such situations" and enhance her capability "of managing a class." To her, "the incident was an eye-opener." She understood that "the students might not be motivated sometimes. Things do not always go the way we planned." Hence, "the teacher has to bring immediate change in self-strategies." These constituted the professional awareness of PST1.

Students' late arrival in the classroom and professional awareness

The late arrival of students gave birth to a CI for PST5. She reported, "the lesson was designed based on a funny debate, but the late arrival of the students did the blunder." She explained, "the discussion on rules and preparation took a long time, leading to a messy classroom." In her reflection, she illuminated the need "to consider the level of the students and plan the activities for English classes" that "suits students better". She also admitted the need to be "practical" instead of being "ambitious" about choosing an activity. "I could avoid incorporating debate in my initial days of teaching", she added. Others also reflected on her CI and reflection. The proper management of class time was echoed. PST2 illuminated the need to "take note of the time for accommodating everyone in the debate and ask the students to speak in an orderly manner. This will be a good listening practice for others." Similarly, PST4 drew attention to some relevant factors, e.g., students' mood, their level of enthusiasm, time constraints, and the learning environment, to be considered while selecting activities." Differently, PST8 noted an alternative way to assess learners' speaking. She added her experience to provide a comprehensive reflection.

During face-to-face class, I did a debate activity with my students, and they were very active. However, they were quite reluctant to speak during an online class, which made me think of an alternative way. I asked them to record their speech individually on specific topics and send them to me so that I could provide them with feedback on spoken English.

Reflecting on her prior reflection and reflections of others, PST5 realized,

Trial and error are common phenomena in teaching [profession]. I should have clearly guided them about how the procedure of debate would go on and asked them to take preparation prior to attending the class. In the future, I will select activities commensurate with the students' level and be careful about time management.

Diverse aspects were noted in the reflections of others, which led to PST5's professional awareness entailing the reification of teaching strategies and planning activities.

Disobedience to teachers' instructions and professional awareness

The advent of technology offers multiple sources of learning (Karim et al., 2019b), which shifts students' utmost attention to learning from conventional forms of teaching to other modes of teaching, e.g., private tutoring, online learning, and so on, and disrupts their consistent endeavor to learn in the classroom. PSTs doing teaching practicum feel shocked to see the absence of students' undivided attention to their instructions. Such disobedience formed a CI for PST5. She reported,

I asked my students to complete some activities based on the reading text. The students were reluctant to speak when I asked them to share their completed tasks with everyone. I kept calling a few names, but no one had the courtesy to reply and respond to any of the instructions.

In her reflection, she explained, "It is a normal phenomenon that students may not adhere to the instructions given by the teacher." She acknowledged that "things do not necessarily turn out the way I want them to, but I should deliver my best to retain their motivation and never give up just because they are disregarding instructions." Others also shared reflections on this, which added more insights to PST5's understanding of the phenomenon. Instructional clarity was underscored in the reflections of other PSTs. For instance, PST3 stated,

Sometimes, it is difficult to determine whether all the students understand and follow the instructions [...] Breaking down the steps of instructions for them to follow gradually and complete the tasks accordingly would have been effective.

The reflections also subsumed the need to understand the level of the students. On this note, PST9 pointed out, "Sometimes the students are overestimated by the teachers [...] an activity perceived easier for them can turn out to be much harder."

After reflecting on self-reflections and reflections of her peers, PST5 shaped her "professional awareness being linked to the instructional clarity and well-defined objectives of the activities," which would help in gaining students' interest. This is how pre-service teachers learn various aspects of teaching through reflecting on CIs encountered during the practical teaching in teaching practicum (Karacan & Kesen Mutlu, 2023).

The chaotic environment in the classroom and professional awareness

The fighting of the students created a disturbance and gave birth to a CI. PST9 described,

When I was conducting a class, two students started cursing each other loudly and then started fighting physically [...] The other students kept cheering for them. I stood in the middle of the two students, hoping that they would stop fighting, but I failed. I was feeling helpless and blank. When I investigated, I came to know from one of them that his classmate came and started sharing dirty jokes and adult stuff. The continuation of the perverted conversation caused the fighting. I scolded them.

In reflection, PST9 asserted, “I should possess a more active instinct to infer consequence. I should have stopped them immediately when they started cursing at each other to avoid their involvement in the fighting. Also, instead of scolding them, I could counsel them.” The other PSTs also shared their reflections on it. Most of the reflections noted by the PSTs were suggestive concerning what could be done instead of what was done. PST2 suggested to “stop the fight before it starts.” According to her, “the students’ verbal attack towards each other is a sign”. She advised to “separate their seats far from each other to maximize the distance between the two and give them some timeout to calm themselves down.” PST4 also advanced the suggestions stating, “you could transfer the case to the Discipline Division and Student Affairs who are experienced in handling such situations” while PST5 elaborated the need for “sending them to the counseling unit [...]”. “Or you could ask them to meet you after the class to discuss the issue and prohibit them from repeating it in the class,” PST5 added.

PST9 reflected on self-reflections and reflections of others and embraced her professional awareness, having linked to “advising why it is wrong to do so [watching adult stuff] at an early age.” She felt the importance of “good communication between teachers and students in stopping such discussions publicly. Beyond teaching the syllabus-oriented contents, I should also teach them what to do and what not to do. I should not confine myself to teaching relevant content only.” With the proliferation of and easy access to electronic devices and internet connections (Karim et al., 2019b), children get exposed to things that they should not have at such an early age. Hence, the teacher’s role is to instill a sense of right and wrong among the students, as conceived by PST9 by reflecting on reflections of this CI.

Similarly, another CI took place in PST2’s class due to students creating unwanted chaos. PST2 described,

They acted out of control by talking, laughing, and screaming in my class. They randomly got in and out of the class without my permission. I tried to be nice initially but had to raise my voice to control the situation.

In reflection, PST2 acknowledged the incident as “changing the outlook on drawing a thin line between being a friendly and strict teacher.” Others also shared their reflections where setting rules and sharing these with pupils beforehand were highlighted as important responsibilities of the teachers. PST4 outlined, “[...] it would be nicer to give them some advice, set class rules, and occasionally remind the students about these.” Advancing further, PST6 added,

You can make a good impression at the first meeting to gain their respect. Yet, be serious when needed and be a friend to them when necessary. You must maintain a balance between being a friendly and strict teacher.

While reflecting on reflections to gain insights from the incidents to embrace professional awareness, PST2 learned that students tend to be “noisy” but “a teacher must set the rules and boundaries for the students to follow.” Additionally, she realized that “motivating students to retain their positive attitude for learning is instrumental.”

Students' rude behavior and professional awareness

The rude behavior constituted a CI. PST3 stated,

One outspoken student in my class started sharing jokes about a certain religion. I told him to be quiet. I was mentally disturbed, and my teaching was disrupted [...] no matter how light the joke was, it was rooted in racism and disrespect for someone else's belief.

In her initial reflection, she noted, "I should have addressed this issue in class instantly. They live in a multi-racial country [...] if their mindset is not changed, then it will be difficult for them to cope in the same society with others." In response to this incident, the other PSTs yielded their reflections, which comprised their personal experiences and attempts to minimize students' misbehavior. For instance, PST8 noted,

I had a student who used to address me with endearing terms and make jokes about me in the classroom. I messaged him and addressed the mistakes he made, as well as explained to him why it was wrong. So, we must advise what they should and should not do.

PST4 shared, "I implemented a rule in the classroom that everyone is a family member and must protect each other." PST4 suggested to "plan a lesson on cultural diversity to activate listening and/or speaking and/or reading and/or writing activities." PST6 also elicited, "You could have a general discussion with the class on how such improper manners can negatively affect someone's self-esteem and lead towards causing discrimination and bullying in the classroom."

After reflecting on reflections, PST3 defined her professional awareness in the following way:

I should teach students how to differentiate between right and wrong. Such incidents may occur in the classroom due to ignorance, but as an educator, I should not condone behavior like that [...] I needed to teach them to be sensitive as they live in a multicultural society with people from different origins. Planning an in-class activity that informs the students about how to behave in a multicultural society would be useful.

The reflections of others were useful in positively impacting PST3's professional awareness. She felt the need to teach such things by planning listening/speaking/reading/writing activities. This is an innovative idea to inculcate a sense of conscience in a language classroom. Numanee et al. (2020) showed how empathy can be taught in a language classroom by using audio-visual aids that accelerate writing and speaking activities in the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classroom.

CIs related to technical glitches leading to professional awareness

CI was also generated in the classroom due to technical problems, as illustrated by PST8. PST8 noted,

I started the class [...] but suddenly, an irritable sound started coming from my laptop. I tried everything to stop the noise [...] but had to change the mode and conduct my class online via WhatsApp.

Based on the CI, PST8 reflected,

I discussed with my friends how to solve such a problem. Through that, I learned there is nothing wrong with asking for help from others and making the lesson plan flexible for shifting the mode if such a situation occurs.

Other PSTs also reflected on it, which resembled the solutions to the CI. For instance, PST7 stated that one solution to this problem can be using the phone to join the session and speak, while the laptop can be used to share slides and other teaching materials." PST4 added, "It is also imperative to make the lesson plan flexible so that the mode can be switched instantly without exterminating class timing." After reflecting on self-reflections and peers' reflections, PST8 implanted the following professional awareness.

Having better technical equipment for conducting a class is quite challenging. However, the teachers should not panic and strategize on how to complete the rest of the lesson. The teachers must also be prepared for any situation and design lesson plans and activities accordingly, which ultimately helps us grow with expertise.

Similarly, PST3 reported the technological disruption that she encountered in her class. "The quizzing platform that I created did not work. Google Meet got disconnected. I faced a complete blunder [...] I did not think of an alternative quizzing platform." In initial reflection, she wrote that she could have been more "aware of keeping alternative quizzing platforms." She should have been "prepared with technical support or a backup plan." Her peers also shared their reflections, which informed PST3 about the features a teacher should embody. For example, PST4 characterized teachers, stating, "Teachers must be flexible and adaptable, as these two skills complement each other. Therefore, applying these two skills in ourselves and our teaching will bring more remarkable outcomes." PST5 supplemented, "Things might not always fall into place exactly how we want them to, and we always need to expect the unexpected because these will help us develop our intrapersonal skills."

During reflecting on reflections for professional awareness, PST3 discerned that "as a teacher, I should be perfectly prepared with the teaching plan, materials, internet connectivity, and examination platforms," and if things spiral out of control, "I need to be ready to combat the technological glitches."

CIs linked to the absence of collegiality leading to professional awareness

A senior teacher wrongly accused PST4 of skipping the assigned task, which was sensed as a CI by her. She described,

I did everything that I had been asked to do. I got the module photocopied and distributed and even informed my senior, and she acknowledged it. Yet she claimed that I did not follow her instructions. She brought the issue to English panels, questioned my responsibility, and accused me.

In her reflections, she highlighted,

My senior teacher was anxious that I could not finish the task. She was concerned about the students. I should have informed her after the completion of the job. It was partly my fault. Being a teacher, I am not just dealing with the students but also fellow teachers.

In her narrative, PST4 acknowledged that the prevalence of the communication gap gave birth to the CI. Other PSTs also reflected on it, with multiple aspects being enveloped. PST1 illustrated, “When all responsibilities are imposed on a teacher, he/she is bound to mishandle things, misbehave with others, malfunction, or perform miscommunication. The senior teacher you refer to might be occupied by many activities that dismantle her patience.” PST2 highlighted, “Everyone should have mutual respect, especially in teaching.” PST9 linked her reflections to the need to maintain regular communication. While noting the professional awareness she gained through reflecting on reflections of this CI, PST4 deduced, “Everyone should hold respect for each other. Maintaining proper communication from both sides is inevitable.”

A similar incident happened to PST8. She faced an improper action from her colleague. She explained,

I had made extensive preparations to conduct a class. When I reminded the students about the class, I learned that their history teacher had scheduled his class at the same time without informing me. He killed my excitement and threw away [...] I was infuriated as I should not be treated like this for being a practicum teacher.

In her reflection, she highlighted, “I would not behave like him whenever I need to exchange class schedules with other teachers. I should inform them before deciding to exchange the class. I will maintain mutual respect and professionalism.” Other PSTs contemplated their reflections on it. They acknowledged the prevalence of workplace conflict and essentialized maintaining proper communication in the teaching profession. PST3 outlined, “It is impossible to avoid workplace conflict; if it arises, we must solve it professionally.” For this to be accomplished, PST4 necessitated “teachers’ proper communication skills with their colleagues.

After reflecting on reflections, PST8 gained the enhanced understanding that “as a language teacher, I not only need to have good skills in teaching but also great interpersonal skills to maintain healthy communication with my colleagues.” The outcome of the incident led to a change in the outlook of PST8. In her initial reflection, she stated that she would not do the same to others. Moreover, after reflecting on reflections, she remarked that having prior discussions with other teachers is essential when such cases emerge. An emergency may arise, but teachers should not forget to maintain courtesy, or one should not undermine or disregard others.

Contribution of reflecting on reflections concerning CIs to gain professional awareness

The PSTs confirmed that reflecting on reflections of CIs gave them an opportunity to gain professional awareness and shape their actions in future teaching. PST1 remarked, “The reflections on CIs were useful...prepared me for deciding what to do if the same situations arise.” PST2 added,

We did TP in different schools [...] our CIs and experiences varied, and we reflected on various CIs [...] reflections prepared me to handle those situations better. I think reflecting on reflections of CIs helps elevate my readiness/prepare me to become a teacher.

Similarly, PST3 highlighted that the “insights shared would be effective to be a strategic TESOL teacher.” Besides, PST4 also acknowledged that various perspectives “emerged during reflecting on reflections of CIs” would help frame her as a TESOL teacher. “Teaching is something to be critically thought of with various lenses, and the norm of such reflective practice concerning CIs paved the way,” she explained. She added, “I learned a lot that would boost my professionalism as a TESOLIAN.” According to PST6, teaching “is not just about teaching a subject, but stretches beyond that. Teaching should encapsulate norms, values, behavior, and conscience, apart from the subject matter” and something that should be “critically thought with various lenses.” PST7 clarified how reflecting on reflections of CIs has engaged her in a meaningful and thoughtful trajectory of professional awareness,

Reflection concerning CIs was a prolific initiative that paved my growth as a TESOL professional. We shared thoughts and discussed various situations during the teaching practicum. It gave us a new perspective on how an incident can change teaching practice. Moreover, it made us aware that the problem in every school is different and prepared us for various unexpected things.

The responses of other PSTs were commensurate with the ones described above. By and large, reflecting on reflections of CIs offered an open platform for the PSTs to discuss critical events that occurred in the classroom. Without feeling of being judged, they freely shared the CIs and reflections. Everyone actively reported CIs, wrote and read, and reflected on reflections. Each reflection was insightful, thought-provoking, and change-maker in terms of the teaching profession. As a result, they stimulated their professional awareness.

Discussion

Griffin (2003) explained that CI is an instrument that engenders “a deeper and more profound level of reflection” by including a detailed description of an event in conjunction with adding a critical analysis of that event to make meaning of it (p. 208). Reflecting on reflections subsuming reflecting on self-reflections and reflections of others (Kabilan, 2007) on the presented CIs added more value to professional awareness by making meaning of the reported incidents. To cast light on it, through reflecting on reflections of CIs, the PSTs obtained a deeper and more profound level of reflections since a multi-layered analysis of CIs enabled them to generate meanings of the CIs (Kabilan, 2007; Karim et al., 2023). In the first phase of reflection or during the initial reflection, the

PSTs had to be critical by going beyond simply describing the details in writing their reflections on the encountered CIs by answering ‘what happened,’ ‘who was involved,’ ‘where did it happen,’ ‘when did it happen,’ ‘how did it happen,’ ‘how did you react,’ ‘why it happened,’ and ‘what did you learn.’ Although the answers to ‘what happened,’ ‘who was involved,’ ‘where did it happen,’ ‘when did it happen,’ ‘how did it happen,’ and ‘how did you react’ required PSTs’ relatively less criticality, answering to ‘why did it happen’ and ‘what did you learn’ demanded the employment of more critical lens. For instance, a CI, outlined by PST3, included a student’s negative comments or mockery of a specific religion, which was the simple answer to ‘what happened.’ The setting of the incident was a classroom, the agent of this incident was a boy, and the incident occurred during the lecture were the simple answers to ‘where did it happen,’ ‘who was involved,’ and ‘when did it happen’ respectively. Likewise, “I told him to be quiet” was the PST’s answer to ‘how did you react.’ By contrast, answering ‘why did it happen’ and ‘what did you learn’ required the PST to think more critically. The reason was that she had to think critically to capture the reason behind it. Subsequently, she pointed out the negativity implanted in the captious student’s mind, which stimulated him to upbraid another student’s religion. Such causality sensitized the PST to think about her learning. Eventually, she noted, “I should have addressed this issue in the class instantly. They live in a multicultural country [...]”. That is how the first-level reflection on the CI embedded her critical lens. In addition, in the second-level reflection on this incident, she reflected on others’ perspectivizations concerning the phenomenon, which acted as an additive to her insights. Hence, after reflecting on self-reflections and reflections of others, she understood the need to “teach students how to differentiate between right and wrong.” Since we had set the focal point (i.e., professional awareness in this study) as the ultimate goal of PSTs’ reflecting on reflections of CIs (see Fig. 2), PST3 noted, “I needed to teach them to be sensitive as they live in a multicultural society [...]”. She opted to contrive “an in-class activity that informs the students about how to behave in a multicultural society [...]”. The reflections of PST3 comprehended the meaning-making process attached to reflecting on reflections of CIs, which was developed through two-layered reflections on the same CI (Griffin, 2003).

The revelation of the meaning of the CIs through reflecting on reflections led to building professional awareness since PSTs’ involvement in reflective practice enjoined them to (re)think and understand their actions depending on the situational demands, and through rethinking, they envisioned their role that constitutes professional awareness (Žydžiūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020). As depicted in the literature, professional awareness is teachers’ awareness of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ a teacher (Žydžiūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020), and it shapes their professional positionality (Beijaard et al., 2004; Richardson & Shupe, 2003) and determines perceived role (Žydžiūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020). In light of the case of PST3, the religious humiliation caused by a student posited her professional awareness inclined toward a material designer (e.g., her plan to design an in-class activity) who opted to educate the students to behave sensitively in a multicultural country by being guided by her perceived role: eliminating the possessiveness of superiority concerning own religion and inferiority subject to other religions because the prevalence of such a sentiment may destabilize a multicultural society.

Another contention is that the analysis of CIs in reflective practice enables the PSTs to explore and examine all possibilities before reaching a conclusion (Dewey, 1993) in order for them to be prepared to face multi-faceted problems and govern their actions in response to that problem (Griffin, 2003). Reflections on CIs grow professional awareness by identifying what went wrong and what could have been done differently. For example, PST9 witnessed a fight between two students because of one's forced sharing of dirty jokes and adult stuff with the other. Her immediate reaction was to scold the student to stop perverted conversations and fight. However, in her initial reflection, she questioned her action to scold them. Hence, she noted, "I could counsel them." After reflecting on self-reflections and reflections of others, she gained more insights, and her professional awareness was linked to "advising why it is wrong to do so [watching adult stuff] [...]". She necessitated "good communication between teachers and students [...]". She opted to stretch the classroom lecture beyond "syllabus-oriented content." She perceived her role to "teach them [students] what to do and what not to do" without confining herself "to teaching relevant content only." Here, we saw the emergence of all possibilities before reaching a conclusion (Dewey, 1993). To illustrate, from scolding the students instantly (her reaction in the classroom) to counseling them (her learning reported in the initial reflection), we sensed her shift from one possibility to another with the growth of professional awareness. Her conclusive remark, after reflecting on reflections for professional awareness, entailed maintaining good communication with the students and enveloping conscience in teaching by going beyond the programmed content of the syllabus. That is how he fine-tuned her awareness for future teaching. Professional awareness gained through reflective practice determines self-attitude and makes PSTs capable of interpreting present actions in light of pedagogical and contextual needs (Canrinus et al., 2011).

Furthermore, in the process of reflective practice, as Poudel (2019) postulated, PSTs have the privilege to question their actions, which results in fine-tuning their future practices. Here, the pressing thing is that questioning the previous actions was a two-way process in reflecting on reflections of CIs, whereby not only did an individual PST question their own action, but other PSTs played an agentive role in questioning an individual's action through sharing their reflections. For instance, observing the reluctance of the students to speak and share their completed tasks with everyone, PST5 reported a CI. She identified such behavior as a normal phenomenon in her initial reflection. She questioned her earlier effort and felt it was insufficient to grab the students' attention. Hence, she expressed the need to employ more effort to retain students' motivation to follow her instructions. However, PST3 questioned her instructional clarity and suggested "breaking down the steps of instructions for them [students] to follow and complete the task [...]". Similarly, PST9 also questioned her perception of students' level and the activity designed for them. Subsequently, by reflecting on reflections, PST5 found her "professional awareness linked to the instructional clarity and well-defined objectives of the activities," which would maximize students' interest. That is how the two-way process of questioning the action and thought of a PST strengthened him or her to generate the meaning of an unanticipated event and realize the changes to be brought to his or her future endeavors (Beijaard et al., 2004; Richardson & Shupe, 2003; Žydzūnaitė & Daugėla, 2020).

Advancing further, reflecting on reflections of building PSTs' professional awareness through reflecting on reflections of CIs since this form of reflective practice encapsulates interpersonal and intrapersonal reflections (Collin & Karsenti, 2011) in an interactive environment (Sikka & Timoštšuk, 2008). Dialogue is instrumental for PSTs to externalize their thinking skills and shape their own point of view (Griffin, 2003). Sharing reflections in a dialogic environment assists in validating, expanding and enriching professional knowledge (Costa & Kallie, 2000). Our PSTs performed the dialogic reflective practice that incorporates their frequent interactions in a Facebook group (Farrell, 2019), conferring additional insights to the CIs and reflections by activating mutual aid-type collaboration (Farrell, 2013a, 2013b; Mann & Walsh, 2017). By stepping into a discursive environment and immersing in discussions with peers, the student-teachers learn from each other because all are advised to reflect on an individual's CIs by employing their unique perspectives (Farrell, 2019) and elicit unique suggestions (Nazari & De Costa, 2022) that act as an additive in building their professional awareness in a collegial environment (Kabilan, 2007; Newell, 1996). From a pedagogical perspective, Ohlemann et al. (2023) purport that teacher educators should incorporate innovation in teacher education depending on their level of knowledge and experience. With the knowledge that we gained through the review of relevant literature (e.g., Kabilan, 2007; Karim et al., 2023; Beauchamp, 2015; Farrell, 2015; 2018; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Flynn, 2019; Freeman, 2016; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Nguyen & Loughland, 2018; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023; Russell, 2013) and experience of educating TESOL students for years, we embraced the criticisms revolving around the conventional reflective practice, addressed the gap prevailing in it, felt the urge to induct PSTs into reflecting on reflections of CIs and extended our study to trace how this form of reflective practice contributes to building their professional awareness. It was evident from the data that our initiative contributed to building their professional awareness.

By and large, the findings of the study suggested that motivating students and maintaining good communication with them, communicating properly with colleagues, understanding the necessity of delivering instructions clearly, selecting proper materials and activities, managing time, building rapport with the students, and taking preparation for technological glitches cement the professional awareness of the PSTs. Their professional learning was the result of encountering CIs linked to students' behavioral problems, their late arrival in the classroom, disobedience to the teachers' instructions and rude behavior, chaotic classroom, technical glitches, and absence of collegiality. As the PSTs, akin to the in-service ones, were asked to carry out all responsibilities in the assigned schools, they encountered CIs inside and outside the classroom. Hence, their professional awareness, transmitted by reflecting on reflections of CIs, was not only limited to improving teaching, but it also enveloped how to communicate with colleagues. Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) also found that identifying and describing CIs generate subsequent discussion, which young-learner teachers see as beneficial to conceptual, practical, and personal-professional changes in treating CIs in their future teaching. Nejadghanbar (2021) showed that individual and group reflections on CIs contribute to PSTs' professional development by highlighting how these should be treated in future teaching. Unlike the participants in these studies, the PSTs of this study gained professional awareness that stretched beyond the notion of carefully handling CIs. For

example, communicating properly with colleagues, understanding the necessity of delivering instructions clearly, selecting proper materials and activities, managing time, and building rapport with the students did not indicate the strategy to avoid or minimize CIs in future teaching. These have also implications for maintaining professionalism in their teaching career. In this capacity, the current research resonated with Chien (2018), who unfolded the growth of PSTs' professional awareness pertaining to individual learner differences, classroom management, and instructional strategies, which would serve the PSTs in the long run. It also echoed Hall and Townsend (2017), reporting the stimulation of PSTs' professional awareness enacted to teaching methodology, which would secure their prolonged stay in the profession.

As regards the contribution of reflecting on reflections of CIs to building PSTs' professional awareness as TESOL teachers, the participants unequivocally admitted that such reflective practice enabled them to be strategic, critical and insightful TESOL teachers. As teacher educators, we opted to learn the extent to which it was conducive to learning the possible revisions to be brought or the rooms for improvement for further quality assurance (Tarrou et al., 1999). Although they confirmed the contribution of reflecting on reflections concerning CIs to building their awareness as TESOL professionals, we do not discount the possibility of their biases. We asked them to share their remarks in the WhatsApp Group, whereby the individual sender's identity was not concealed, which might arise their biases to highlight the positive aspects. At the same time, we argue that a wholesome professional awareness of PSTs attained during their teaching practicum would be an overstatement. In the reflective model proposed by Wallace (1991), professional development is presented as an endless journey. Wallace (1991) argues that teachers continue to pursue professional development throughout their lives. What we advocate in this regard is that reflecting on reflections of CIs familiarized the PSTs with the professional-awareness building process through which they embraced the necessity of sharing reflections, continuing dialogues, questioning the present actions and fine-tuning current practices. Having any aspects of teaching or facing any challenges, they, as we assert, would be able to bring these to the table of discussion in pursuit of professional learning during their in-service teaching career.

Implications of the study

The present study shares an enhanced understanding of dialogic reflective practice propagated by Farrell (2019). By putting reflecting on reflections in practice, it demonstrates how dialogue can be embedded in the reflective practice and how peers or colleagues can simultaneously continue the dialogue and reflective practice, which confers a nuanced understanding of the dialogic reflective practice. In addition, the study showed how buddy groups (Farrell, 2019) can be formed and guided to perform collaborative analysis of CIs by discerning tools depicted in Fig. 1. Furthermore, it offers valuable insights into teacher education and teacher educators. The design of reflecting on reflections with diverse elements of focus and involvement of PSTs in such a reflective practice may galvanize professional awareness and cement their knowledge about the role of a teacher. The teacher educators and researchers may replicate the framework in different contexts and settings, including PSTs and/or in-service teachers (INSETs). The incorporation of reflecting on reflections can benefit building INSETs' professional awareness since the

in-service teacher development and training programs seem to observe limited success in contenting teachers with professional knowledge due to little or no space for reflective practice (Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim et al., 2019c, 2021). In this study, we put reflecting on reflections into practice quite extensively with PSTs, but we postulate that researching INSETs' CIs (or any other elements of focus) using the suggested framework would be exciting and invigorate new areas of discussions and investigations.

The framework should operate as a cyclical structure and not as a hierarchical one, where one aspect leads and/or contributes to other aspects. This is because, as the PSTs in this study were constantly going back and forth in terms of reflections on CIs in pursuit of professional awareness, we hypothesize that reflecting on reflections is complex, continuous, recurring, repetitive, and formative in nature and requires PSTs to make connections of ideas, knowledge and meaning while revisiting and reflecting on their own ideas and thoughts (and of others) at various points when they want to, and crucially, when they need to in ensuring comprehension and total grasp of an issue. Hence, this framework should be fluid and dynamic to allow teacher educators, as planners and providers of professional development programs, to develop one that allows PSTs and INSETs to interact and engage meaningfully as a member of a community of practice with others. In such circumstances, real conversations are usually transpired, engaging critical discourses are triggered, and critical reflections are made ongoing. Therefore, professional development programs should be characterized and facilitated by the above activities if the aim is to cultivate and advance one's professional learning, professional awareness, professional development, or any predetermined element of focus.

Through this framework, teacher educators may plan the reflective practice of diverse elements of focus (CI was the focal point for this study), as it would help PSTs grow as professional teachers. To achieve this, teacher educators may consider the following tenets as a pedagogical apparatus, as they were applied in this study:

- a. Identifying personal CIs that strongly impact a PST's beliefs, practices, emotions, etc.
- b. Reflecting and sharing on those CIs in a community of practice (CoP)
- c. Reading, grasping, reflecting, supporting, and questioning the initial reflections shared by others i.e. reflecting on reflections as a CoP
- d. Developing appropriate research tools and integrating them meaningfully to achieve the following objectives:
- e. PSTs becoming aware and conscious of professional (re)actions; and
- f. PSTs becoming critical and dissecting their own practices

The above suggests how reflecting on reflections should be practiced pedagogically and how the phenomenological research approach may shed clarity on understanding PST's professional awareness. This study advocates the importance of outside classroom activities (e.g., maintaining interpersonal communication), apart from the inside classroom activities, as a source of professional awareness. Future studies are recommended to report on the retention and continuation of PSTs' professional awareness resulting from reflecting on reflections of CIs related to inside and outside classroom activities and discern the different types of (re)actions that each PST would embark upon when different classroom activities are prioritized. We postulate that examining such scenarios

in different cultures and contexts would also be enticing as the beliefs and praxis of PSTs against these backdrops would certainly divulge diverse professional awareness. In addition, how could this framework be manipulated to position and address these situations? In what ways and how effective it could be? Indeed, with more research, the suggested framework could be refined and revised or even reconceptualized and reconstructed.

Limitation of the study

The study covers the accounts of 10 PSTs, which forms the first limitation of the study. Second, the study has not explored their professional awareness of the teaching profession and/or language teaching prior to the teaching practicum. Hence, the extent to which reflecting on reflections of CIs has boosted their professional awareness remains undefined in this study. Moreover, having CIs as the element of focus, the present study involved the PSTs in reflecting on reflections. However, their professional awareness in light of specific components, including philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice (Farrell, 2016), has not been directly reflected by the participants of this study. Hence, the authors call for further research to be conducted to report the outcome of PSTs' reflections on reflections concerning CIs in light of PSTs' teaching philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice (Farrell, 2016). Besides, the teaching practicum and the study were held during the height of COVID-19, and hence, the PSTs conducted half of their classes offline, with the rest held online. At that time, it was challenging for the supervisors and supervisees to focus on many aspects. A thorough mentorship and scholarly guidance, usually offered in normal times, were absent. Therefore, critical reflections on CIs and relating the reflections to the prevalent teaching theories and concepts, which would purportedly render a deeper understanding of the issues presented by CIs, remained unexercised. Due to COVID-19's strike across the globe, teacher education, in particular teaching practicum, suffered a lot from unusual disruptions (Kadir & Aziz, 2021). Likewise, Malaysian teaching practicum also succumbed to despair. The sudden appearance of the pandemic and the unpreparedness of the students and teachers paralyzed the teaching practicum, and consequently, teacher educators and PSTs had to resort to instantly revised form of teaching practicum and reflective practice (Annamalai et al., 2022; Awee et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2023), curtailing PSTs' reflections on some aspects.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| PSTs | Pre-service teachers of TESOL |
| TESOL | Teaching English to speakers of other languages |
| CIs | Critical incidents |

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Author contributions

The first and third authors conceptualized the study. The first author wrote the 'Introduction,' 'Literature Review,' 'Methods,' and 'Discussion and Conclusion' sections. The third author, in collaboration with the first author, developed the instruments and collected the data. He also commented on the first draft of the manuscript and performed proofreading. The second author assisted to first author in reporting the 'Findings' of the study. The fourth and fifth authors equally contributed to amalgamating the resources for shaping 'Introduction' and 'Literature Review.'

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Availability of data and materials

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Declarations**Competing interests**

The authors declare no financial and non-financial competing interests associated with this research.

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