

Collegial Practicum Journey of EFL Teacher Trainees through Vignette-based Reflections

İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Vinyet Tabanlı Yansıtma Aracılığı ile Meslektaş Dayanımlı Staj Yolculuğu

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ABSTRACT: With the intent of facilitating the professional development of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) teacher trainees, the impetus of this qualitative study is to evaluate the depth and breadth of teacher reflection using vignettes within an initial teacher education program. To this end, this study utilized the vignette technique to reveal 12 EFL teacher trainees' reflectivity from a collegial perspective. Over a nine-week time period, the participants worked in pairs, and each pair first created vignettes based on their observations or teachings in practicum. Afterwards, they generated reflective responses to the pre-designed questions, which led them to think about the problematic or critical issues raised in the vignettes of their pairs. At the end of the process, a total of 108 vignettes were gathered. The whole qualitative data was exposed to the analysis in light of the two-dimensional framework of Fund et al. (2002), which focuses on both the depth and breadth of teacher reflection. Results indicate that the vignette-based reflections showed more balanced variety in breadth, whereas they did not contain a great number of comments made at deeper levels of reflection. Therefore, it is recommended that all the stakeholders should take more active roles to foster reflectivity and criticality toward educational matters raised in the vignettes.

Keywords: Reflection, vignette, teacher trainees, practicum, teacher education.

ÖZ: İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının mesleki gelişimine katkı sağlamak amacıyla tasarlanan bu nitel çalışmada bir öğretmen eğitimi programı kapsamında öğretmen adaylarının yansıtıcı fikirlerinin derinliği ve genişliği vinyet tekniği ile değerlendirilmiştir. Bu amaçla 12 İngilizce öğretmen adayının meslektaş dayanışması bağlamında yansıtıcılığını ortaya çıkarmak için vinyet tekniği kullanılmıştır. Dokuz hafta boyunca katılımcılar çiftler halinde çalışmış olup her bir çift ilk olarak stajdaki gözlemleri veya öğretimleri ile alakalı vinyetler oluşturmuştur. Daha sonra, her bir katılımcı çift olarak çalıştığı katılımcının oluşturmuş olduğu vinyetlerde ortaya çıkan sorunlu veya kritik konular üzerinde düşüncelerini sağlayan önceden belirlenmiş sorulara yansıtıcı yanıtlar üretmişlerdir. Bu süreç sonunda toplam 108 adet vinyet elde edilmiştir. Tüm nitel veriler, Fund ve diğerlerinin (2002) öğretmen yansıtmasının hem derinliğine hem de genişliğine odaklanan iki boyutlu çerçevesi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, vinyet tabanlı yansıtmanın genişlik boyutunda daha dengeli bir çeşitlilik gösterdiğini, buna karşın daha derin yansıtma düzeylerinde yapılan çok sayıda yorumu içermediğini göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, tüm paydaşların vinyetlerde dile getirilen eğitim konularına yönelik yansıtma ve eleştireliliği teşvik etmek adına daha aktif roller almaları önerilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yansıtma, vinyet tekniği, öğretmen adayları, staj, öğretmen eğitimi.

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The theory and practice dilemma in teacher education has been discussed for a couple of decades. In order to eliminate the negative consequences of such a dilemma, teachers can be engaged in reflective practices in which they look at educational issues through critical lenses. It is vital for teacher training programs to offer reflective practices so that the gap between theory and practice can be minimized (Ibrahim-Didi, 2015). Indeed, not only the gap between theory and practice but also the complexity of teaching requires teachers to question their practices with the ultimate intent of promoting professional development as well as student performance. Thus, reflective practices should be at the forefront since it is only possible to benefit from the process of continuous learning with reflection. Therefore, it is highly crucial to incorporate reflective practices into both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. The key rationale behind the integration of reflective practices throughout a teacher's career is that experience alone may not necessarily lead to learning; purposeful reflection on specific experience is a must (Mathew et al., 2017). A reflective teacher is the one who not only looks back on previous actions and events but also examines emotions, experiences, actions, and responses from a reflective stance. Relatedly, within the scope of this paper, reflection is regarded as a flashback that teachers need to mediate for their improvement (Mathew et al., 2017).

Reflective practice is defined as an activity that involves continuous examination of one's own experiences in practicing theory under the guidance of professionals (Schon, 1983). In teacher education contexts, those professionals are teacher educators/supervisors and mentors. With the guidance of these professionals, teachers and teacher trainees have the chance to analyze their feelings, evaluations, practices, experiences, and so forth (Gibbs, 1988). Further, reflective practice is linked to lifelong learning, which leads to the development of autonomous, qualified, and self-directed teachers who have a good level of expertise in the teaching profession (Jasper, 2003). More importantly, reflective teachers should be able to move beyond the basic concern of how-to questions about instructional methodologies; instead, they should ask what and why questions about instructions and managerial techniques as a part of a broader educational end (Bartlett, 1990). Asking what/why questions is essential because such awareness helps teachers manage their teaching effectively, resulting in the emergence of autonomous teachers. From Dewey's (1933) point of view, reflection is a cyclical and iterative process in which one deals with solving problems. In this process, teachers become more aware of their experiences and apply professional knowledge to these experiences (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Osterman and Kottkamp (2015) highlight the dialogic nature of reflective practice in which teachers can move back and forth among past, present, and future events by generating various perspectives on the same practices or observations. To add more, this dialogic travel can be accepted as a form of self-evaluation which flourishes the production of new opinions and learning/teaching modes (Boud, 2001; Moon, 2004). Apart from these reflective self-evaluations, peer sharing and observations are mostly preferred by teachers owing to their time-saving nature in a busy school schedule (Kharlay et al., 2022). Particularly for foreign language teaching, EFL teacher trainees are found to believe in the power of reflection for their professional development (Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018), and there are certain slight changes in their views toward language teaching as a result of reflection (Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2023). Yet, EFL teacher trainees could not reflect at a higher level of

criticality in time as they took part in systematic and regular reflective practices (Turhan & Kırkgöz, 2018, 2023).

Being a significant element of initial teacher training programs, reflective practice could be utilized as a way to renew teacher trainees' teachings and realizations of the impacts of their teaching (Jacobs et al., 2011), especially when they evaluate whether their teaching is sound and opens doors for fruitful learning. Akbari (2007) supports this statement by suggesting that reflective practice allows teachers to question clichés learned in the first years of their career; hence, they become able to design and implement more informed teaching practices. Especially for teacher trainees, it is important to question the clichés so that they can later recognize multiple possibilities that they can employ in their future classrooms. However, to accomplish this kind of questioning, teachers need to have critical reflection skills that do not develop naturally or by automatic occurrence for many of them (Yang, 2009). Moreover, despite all the aforementioned positive ties between teaching and reflection, it is a fact that not every reflective practice guarantees effective teaching (Boud & Walker, 2015). If the objective is to create changes in teachers' actions or thinking, we should question the quality of reflection in order to make sure that reflection leads to adequate judgment in teachers' actions (Yılmaz & Akar, 2022). Likewise, Davis (2006) distinguishes between productive and unproductive reflection. She considers reflection to be unproductive if it fails to analyze teaching by backing claims with evidence, questioning assumptions, and considering alternatives. In fact, evolving into a qualified reflective teacher is similar to a skill development process. For this reason, learning reflective skills necessitates a classroom designed as a kind of laboratory where teacher trainees can relate theory to practice in the accompaniment of teacher educators. In those laboratories, the potential reflective techniques are typically reflective diaries, collaborative learning, recording lessons, peer observation, educators' feedback, action research, reverse mentoring, and so on. Unfortunately, the appropriateness and effectiveness of such instruments in facilitating quality reflection is unclear (Ambler, 2012; Stecher et al., 2006). As an alternative to those typical techniques, as in the current study, teacher educators can also adapt the use of vignettes as a reflective tool during practicum. Using vignette-based instruments is a more suitable way of obtaining important clues on the quality of reflection (Jeffries & Maeder, 2011), and this notion shapes the main logic behind the integration, examination, and assessment of vignettes in this study.

Vignettes are short, authentic stories that can be employed in differing formats, such as written documents, videos, or even cartoons, all of which trigger thinking and discussion (Henderson et al., 2016). Jeffries and Maeder (2011) define vignettes as a sort of short story describing an identified problem. They additionally argue that vignettes are useful because they are brief and easy to construct and administer, present a well-designed stimulus for critical thinking, are valuable in dealing with sensitive topics, and can be used with individuals and groups in both face-to-face and online settings. They also list the four criteria for defining vignettes: (1) the story describes a problem in a maximum of 200 words; (2) it simplifies a real-life/real event in a way that any other individual can understand even though they do not have expertise in the field; (3) its set of tasks/questions is connected to a scoring scheme; and (4) it is deliberately incomplete so that multiple solutions to the story's problem can be offered. As it is clear, vignettes are, if used in the right way, reliable tools for rating what is learned.

They can be utilized as a method for creating open-ended discussion sessions where participants explore topics and share multiple views. Topics of vignettes might be diverse, ranging from professional practices with a problem to excellence in teaching (Jeffries & Maeder, 2011). Examining other definitions of vignettes in the literature, a vignette is an effective written or visual stimulus to which participants are invited to answer (Hughes & Huby, 2004). Vignettes are incomplete short stories used for reflecting on real-life situations, and they gauge discussions in order to produce multiple possible solutions to problems (Jeffries & Maeder, 2005). In Torres's (2009) words, vignettes depict specific cases involving problems with the intent of probing individuals about the way they understand these. In other words, vignettes primarily illustrate descriptive episodes associated with real incidents and are presented either in a written or visual format (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Even though visual vignettes can generate rich information (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014) and produce more trustworthy data (Torres, 2009), the written formats of vignettes can be advantageous since they might include dialogic texts, comic annotations, or mathematical representations (Friesen & Kuntze, 2016, 2018) at the same time.

Vignettes have been used for various research purposes (e.g., Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014; McGarr & Gallchóir, 2020; Skilling & Stylianides, 2020; Tasar, 2006; Torres, 2009; Volkmann, 2000). To exemplify, they are found to protect research participants by offering chances to take the role of another person (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014), and thus, they can provide more reliable data about sensitive issues. Similarly, asking teacher trainees about educational policies might prevent them from sincerely putting their views into words. Considering this, McGarr and Gallchóir (2020) create a realistic context through the use of vignettes, thanks to which they can elicit the teacher trainees' justifications about the policies of technology integration into education. Beyond these, Torres (2009) claims that vignettes help one interpret value-laden conceptions. As one of the value-laden conceptions, teacher beliefs can be investigated through the use of purposefully constructed vignettes (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Tasar (2006) claims that teacher trainees' scientific knowledge can be evaluated with carefully chosen vignettes. Besides, Volkmann (2000) suggests that vignettes are helpful tools to create an environment for teacher trainees to apply educational theory to their own teaching experiences and observations. Similar to the procedure followed for the EFL teacher trainees in this study, Wilkerson et al. (2018) apply a Vignette Activity Sequence in which teacher trainees are first acquainted with a vignette, and second, they write vignettes, unravel that it is a beneficial procedure to help trainees make critics on effective teaching practices in the field of math. Some other studies employ vignettes with in-service teachers and conclude that teachers could also benefit from vignettes for professional development (Ambler, 2012; Angelides & Gibbs, 2006; Jeffries & Maeder, 2005). Depending on the above summary, the value of the present study is to encourage teacher trainees to design their own vignettes and make the analyses collaboratively rather than analyzing ready-made vignettes individually. Such a procedure makes vignettes revolve around the real educational issues encountered and detected in practicum. In parallel with this, the following research questions guide the study:

- a) What are the depth and breadth of vignette-based reflections written by the EFL teacher trainees?

- b) Does the depth and breadth of the EFL teacher trainees' vignette-based reflectivity develop as they progress throughout the practicum? If yes, how?

Method

From a qualitative standpoint, this study was conducted using the vignette technique, which relates research to practice and results in transformative experiences by practitioner-researchers (Nind & Pepin, 2009). The main rationale for the use of the vignette technique is to better understand the participants' interpretation of specific situations in the light of their subjective views, especially in educational settings where the interconnections among emotional, social, and cultural factors are strong (Stecher et al., 2006). A written format of vignettes was preferred in the current study because they provide more variety and details in relation to observed or experienced issues. For the sake of ethical considerations, the necessary permission to conduct the study was obtained from Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the 902-01-FR 006 document number (07.04.2023).

Research Context and Participants

The research site of this study is a state university in the southern part of Turkey. Within the faculty of education, the students studying in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Program are under scrutiny. This program offers teacher trainees a four-year undergraduate study. After students are enrolled in the program, depending on their scores in the University Entrance Examination, they receive a language proficiency exam, and if they successfully pass this exam, they start the ELT department as freshmen. If they fail the exam, they have to take part in the preparation class for one academic year, and they receive a language proficiency exam at the end of the preparation class so that they can start their first year of study in the department. The current teacher education curriculum implemented in the department includes both theoretical and practical courses; in the first three years, theoretical courses such as ELT Approaches, Language Acquisition, Teaching Language Skills, Teaching English to Young Learners and English Literature are dominant. In the last year of study, the Teaching Practice course gives teacher trainees chances to make teaching practices in real English classes at practicum schools for two semesters. The current study was carried out in the scope of this Teaching Practice course, and a total of 12 EFL teacher trainees (four females and eight males) attended the practicum schools, which were determined by the Ministry of National Education during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic years. They attended either a secondary or a high school for six class hours (240 minutes) a week. Both of the practicum schools were located in the city center and can be regarded as advantageous schools in terms of educational facilities at the time of the study. The participants were between the ages of 22-23 and had neither previous teaching experiences, apart from the micro-teaching sessions in the third year of study at university, nor reflective practice experiences.

Procedures

The research procedure was organized in parallel with the steps followed in the Teaching Practice course on a weekly basis. However, the way of teaching was

organized and applied differently from its traditional way of teaching, which includes teacher trainees' individual work evaluated weekly by mentors and supervisors in light of an official observation checklist. Instead, during this study, 12 EFL teacher trainees worked in pairs; namely, six pairs were always in an attempt to provide collegial support to one another during practicum. In the first week, the participants received an introductory session to the Teaching Practice course and its core requirements. In the second and third weeks, they were informed about the content and the method that would be utilized during the course. More specifically, they collaborated with the supervisor with the intent of developing a vignette-based instrument (see details in the subsection of data collection instrument) to be employed for reflective purposes. In the remaining nine weeks, they followed the steps illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Steps Taken During the Teaching Practice Course for Nine Weeks



As evident in Figure 1, the first task of the participants was to carry out observations and practice teaching at practicum schools by paying attention to their mentors' comments and advice. Afterwards, they were required to write a vignette that presented a critical or problematic issue encountered during the practicum day each week. Their second task was to share the vignettes with the pairs so that the pairs could analyze the issue/s raised in the vignette through critical and reflective lenses. Lastly, their third task was to be involved in an evaluation session with the pairs and the supervisor. In those evaluation sessions, the objective was to look back on what happened that week and share ideas about the knowledge gained with the help of the vignette writing process, followed by vignette-based reflections. As understood from Figure 1, the procedure was a cumulative knowledge-shaping process, and each week's learning outcomes were an opportunity to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the upcoming week's outcomes.

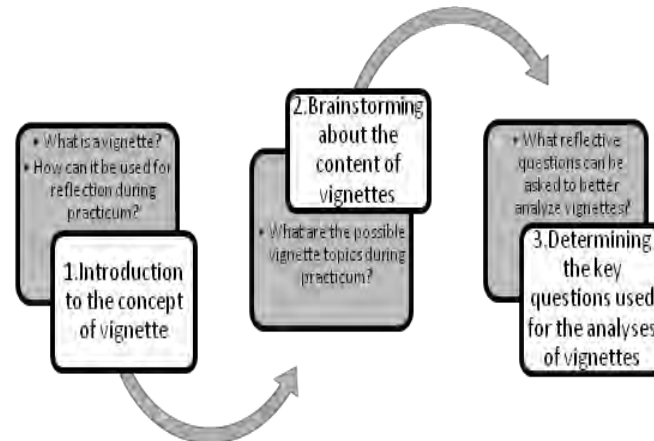
Data Collection Instrument

The vignette-based instruments are normally generated or adapted by the teacher educators or instructors (Jeffries & Maeder, 2011) and are not prepared by teacher trainees or students themselves. Yet, in this study, teacher trainees were asked to prepare their own vignettes based on their observations and experiences during practicum. This could be accepted as an innovative approach in that sense since EFL teacher trainees took two roles as both vignette generators and vignette analyzers. As clarified in the previous subsection, after the introductory week, the instrument

generation was finalized in two weeks. The flow of the instrument generation process is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Generation Process of the Vignette-based Instrument



Based on Figure 2, the details concerning the collaborative generation process of the vignette-based instrument are as follows:

Week 1: At the beginning of the term, the teacher trainees became familiar with the different definitions and samples of vignettes from different teacher education fields. Additionally, how vignettes are used as a professional teacher development activity was discussed. It was also decided that vignettes would be mainly written, but it was possible for the participants to add quotes, cartoons, or images into their vignettes so as to enrich the meaning they wanted to convey.

Week 2: In a brainstorming session, the teacher trainees and their supervisor, who was also the researcher, reached a consensus on the possible observation topics, some of which were teaching context, school facilities, the existing curriculum, dominant teaching methods, student characteristics, subject matter, organization of a typical English lesson, lesson delivery, materials, building rapport, classroom management, feedback, assessment, physical aspects of the classroom, the role of teacher trainees, teacher identity, and expectations from teacher trainees.

Week 3: The supervisor shared information about the varying reflection levels in terms of depth and breadth, the nature of reflective questions, and how to produce reflective responses to the issues or problems raised in the vignettes. To achieve this, the supervisor presented sample responses to reflective questions prepared for an example vignette for the participants. Following this, the participants prepared these questions for their own vignettes: (a) What are the issues or problems raised in the vignette? Why do you think so?, (b) What would you do in a similar case as a teacher? How would you cope with the issues or problems?, (c) How do you feel about the issues or problems raised in this vignette? Besides, the supervisor provided more focused reflective questions during the process: (a) Would you personally be in favor of your pair's way of dealing with the problem?, (b) Could you suggest a different rationale for your

argument?, (c) Should teachers take a similar stance with you?, (d) Did you experience or observe this situation in your own teaching as well?, (e) Could you find any ties between this situation and what you have learnt in the methodology courses at university?

Data Analysis Framework

In evaluating teacher reflection, the usual way is to resort to a hierarchical typology that starts from a low level of reflection (e.g., making technical and descriptive comments) and moves towards a higher level (e.g., considering moral and ethical rationales). To exemplify, Jay and Johnson (2002) regard reflection as a decision-making process composed of three core stages, which are description, comparison, and criticism. Later, Larrivee (2008) suggests the categories of pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection for scrutinizing teacher reflection. In addition, Kayapinar and Erkus (2009) refer to three dimensions of reflection, ranging from being non-reflective and reflective to being critically reflective. The danger in such typologies is reducing teacher reflection to one dimension, considering a set of rigid and pre-packaged categories or stages. To eliminate such a danger, in this study, a two-dimensional framework designed to evaluate written reflective tasks in teacher training courses (Fund et al., 2002) was utilized. This framework's first dimension is related to the breadth of reflection, and the second dimension is for exploring the depth of reflection. For the breadth of reflection, there are three cells (subject-matter content, didactic content, and personal content) in it. *Subject-matter content* is linked to what question and the educational issues debated in the vignette. *Didactic content* deals with how-to questions, strategies and methods to teach or learn the content. *Personal content* reveals one's views toward themselves (the I) as a teacher. Moreover, for the depth of reflection, there are four cells (description, personal opinion, linking, and critical bridging) in the framework. *Description* level requires one to describe the event or case without any further comment or evaluation. *Personal opinion* level is associated with one's own non-theoretical stance rather than attaching importance to evidence from the relevant literature. *Linking* concerns the bonds between educational issues and previous knowledge or literature without any further elaboration. *Critical bridging* necessitates one to deliberately discuss and find possible alternative opinions from the literature, as well as to decide how to take action in the future. In light of this framework, the analyses were conducted twice by the researcher so as to ensure intra-rater reliability and member check was achieved through telephone calls. For each cell in the framework, sample evidence from the collected data is outlined in the Appendix.

Results

The Depth and Breadth of EFL Teacher Trainees' Vignette-Based Reflections

Vignette-based reflections were scrutinized in a way that the reflectivity of the EFL teacher trainees throughout the practicum was explored with regard to the depth and breadth dimensions, as illustrated in the following graphs.

Figure 3

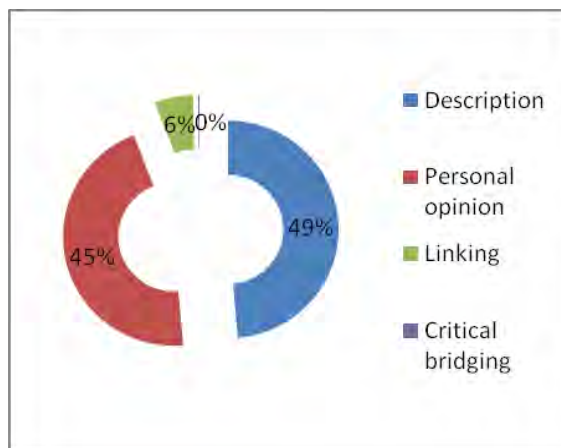
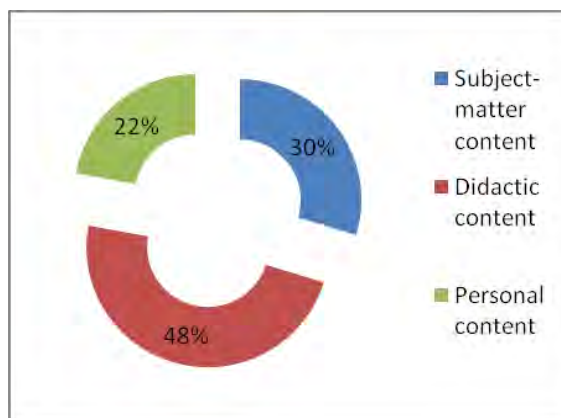
The Overall Depth of Reflections

Figure 4

The Overall Breadth of Reflections

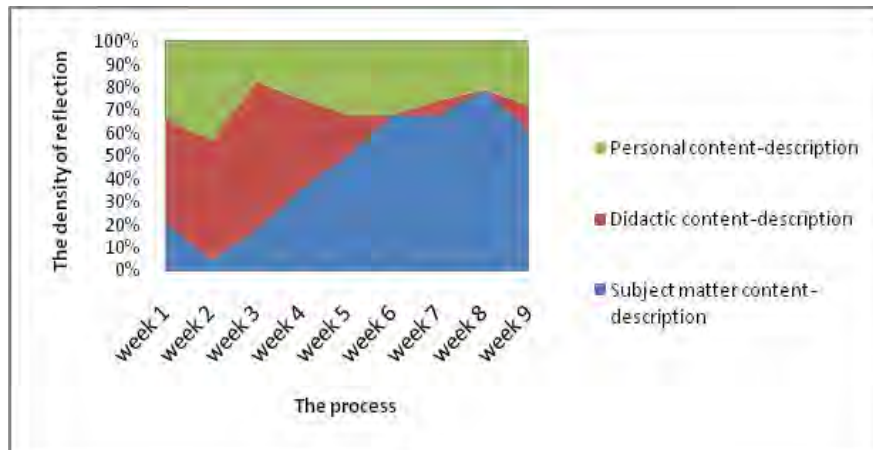
As it is clear in Figure 3, in terms of the depth dimension, the participants tended to write reflections on both their own vignettes and responses to their pairs' vignettes at the level of either description or personal opinion most of the time. This shows that their reflection tendency mostly led them to describe or share personal concerns about what was happening in the teaching/learning environment. As for the other levels, it is obvious that the participants almost never resorted to critical bridging in their reflections, whereas they reflected at the level of linking a few times. That is, it is unlikely to assert that the participants were able to exhibit deep reflective thinking skills. This is an indication of their unawareness or inability to reflect on educational issues encountered in practicum through a comprehensive analysis of reasons, rationales, and alternatives or building associative ties to previous scientific knowledge. Further, regarding the breadth dimension, Figure 4 shows that the employment of different reflection levels indicated a more balanced distribution contrary to the depth dimension. In other words, the participants wrote about didactic issues the most, yet they paid attention to subject matter and personal issues to a certain extent as well. To compare, it is evident that the participants' focus on themselves as a human, a student, or a teacher did not seem to be as dominant as their focus on what and how lessons are taught in their reflections.

The Reflectivity Flow of EFL Teacher Trainees throughout the Practicum

In order to unravel whether the vignette-based reflectivity of the participants develops as they practiced teaching during the practicum, the obtained data were examined on a weekly basis, considering the depth and breadth dimensions of reflection. The results are presented for each reflection level included in the depth dimension, one of which is demonstrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

The Reflectivity of the Participants for the Description Level on a Weekly Basis



Based on Figure 5, the participants were inclined to describe the issues in relation to subject-matter content more frequently, beginning from week 3 to the end of the process. In the first five weeks, they generally reflected on the didactic content; however, reflections on the subject matter and personal content seem to be much more dominant in their vignettes toward the end of the process. Interestingly, the density of descriptive reflection on the subject matter and didactic content fluctuates in opposite directions. Namely, the references to didactic content decrease as the references to subject-matter content increase or vice versa. Yet, the density of personal content appears to be more balanced in the reflections throughout the nine-week period, even though the participants did not draw attention to personal issues as much as they did for the didactic and subject-matter issues on the whole. The below excerpts exemplify the descriptions of subject matter, didactic, and personal content consecutively.

“With 6th graders, I conducted an activity related to the unit of At the Fair. [The trainee explains that they listen to a song and complete the missing words in the lyrics of the song.] Then, I continued with a vocabulary quiz to check whether students could comprehend concepts about being in a fair.” (Week 9, P5)

“The teacher struggled for 10 minutes to ensure silence in the classroom. For some reason, all the students were very active today. Later, the teacher listened to the complaints and desires of the children who raised their hands.” (Week 3, P4)

“It is very sad to observe that students are reluctant and do not bring the necessary materials to the class. Unfortunately, such setbacks demotivate me as a future teacher.” (Week 7, P2)

In accordance with the level of personal opinion, Figure 6 represents to what extent the participants reflected on the subject matter, didactic, and personal content in light of their current intuitions, feelings, or insights during the whole process.

Figure 6

The Reflectivity of the Participants for the Personal Opinion Level on a Weekly Basis

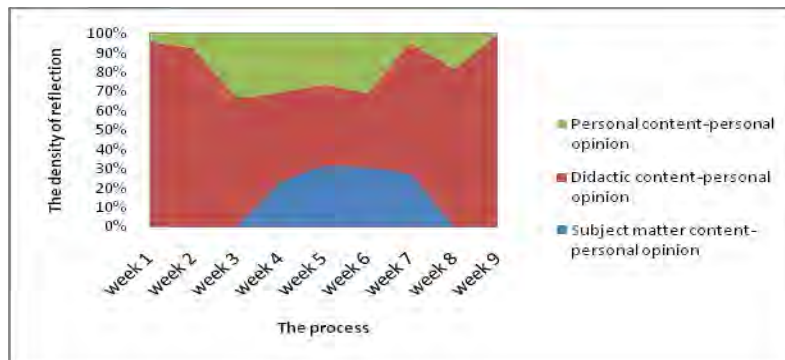


Figure 6 clearly shows that the participants' reflections at the level of personal opinion are densely full of their references to didactic content that they observed or taught in practicum. In fact, the density of didactic content seems to be less between weeks 3 and 8. This is most probably because of their tendency to write about subject matter or personal issues during this time period. It should also be noted that the participants did not share their personal views or comments about subject-matter content at the beginning and at the end of the process. Besides, they reflected on personal issues at the level of personal opinion more or less throughout all weeks, even if this type of reflectivity did not dominate all of their reflections. The related examples of personal opinions on subject matter, didactic, and personal content are presented respectively in the excerpts below.

"This week, the teacher used an extra activity related to the unit of Hobbies. It seemed really enjoyable at first, but I realized that most students were unfamiliar with the content of the activity. This made things complicated for them." (Week 6, P8)

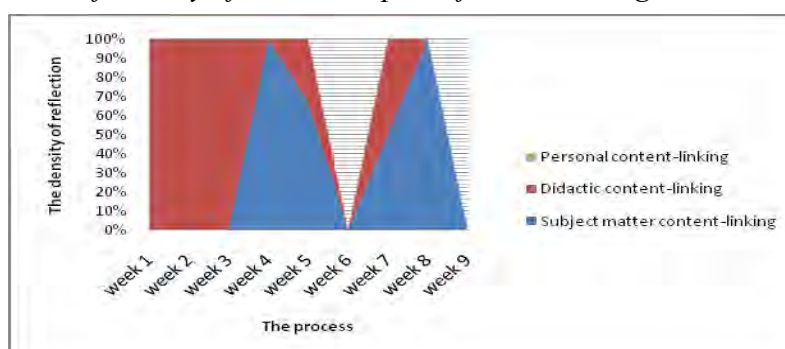
"I think that children should be approached considering their ages. By doing so, we can reach better learning outcomes because children need interest, care, and concern." (Week 1, P12)

"It was annoying to witness that students had a communication problem, in fact, a misunderstanding. At first, I had no idea about how to react, and for this reason I did want to be a part of this. Later, I thought I should intervene in the situation because students see us as a guide who leads them to the right road." (Week 6, P5)

Following this, a different type of fluctuation is revealed for the level of linking, as pictured in Figure 7.

Figure 7

The Reflectivity of the Participants for the Linking Level on a Weekly Basis



Depending on Figure 7, it is possible to state that the participants never resorted to the level of linking when they reflected on personal issues, which means they did not have an explicit awareness of the linking and connecting processes they were going through. However, they were involved in reflections which were concentrating on didactic and subject-matter issues. That is to say, they were capable of creating connections between what and how lessons are taught and prior knowledge acquired from the relevant literature or teacher training courses. It is also understood from Figure 7 that the participants could suggest possible reasons for didactic issues in light of previously learned concepts or theories more frequently than they could for subject-matter issues. The following excerpts present examples from the data for reflections on only subject matter and didactic content at the level of linking, respectively, since there is no reference to reflections on personal content at the level of linking.

“Teaching unmotivated students may be both tedious and difficult for teachers. I think as teachers, we have lots of opportunities to make sure our students have positive attitudes toward English. We can achieve this through the integration of English cartoons into our lessons so that students can gain cultural awareness. This is like culture-focused teaching.” (Week 4, P3)

“I would try to choose activities that would not create excessive competition in the classroom but rather strengthen the unity and relations of the students. The reason behind this is all about the social nature of language learning, which is also highlighted by socio-constructivist teaching techniques.” (Week 3, P10)

As for the last level of reflection for the depth dimension, Figure 8 summarizes the extent to which the participants reflected at the level of critical bridging.

Figure 8

The Reflectivity of the Participants for the Critical Bridging Level on a Weekly Basis

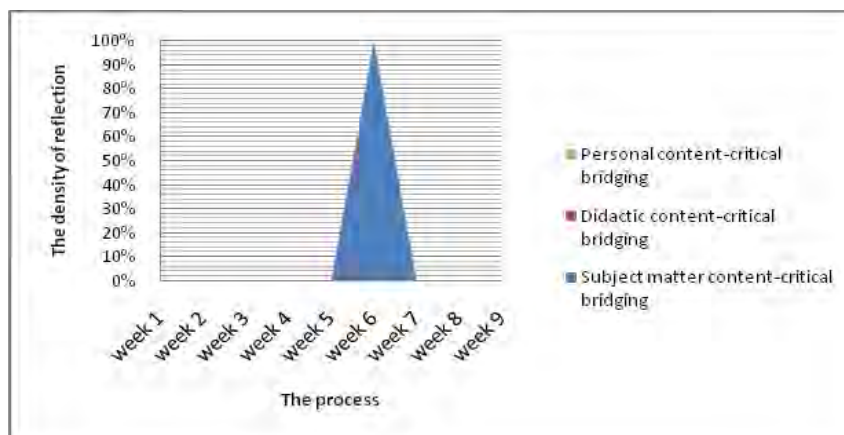


Figure 8 is an indication of the very rare employment of critical bridging by the participants in their vignette-based reflections. To be more precise, the participants reflected on subject-matter content at the level of critical bridging toward the end of the practicum process. Personal and didactic issues were not touched upon in this level of reflectivity even once. Overall, it should be emphasized that the participants were unaware of the fact that they could pose considerations, make judgments about the way of teaching, or critically analyze themselves in order to be more reflective teachers. Maybe they were just unable to do that. The only example of this level is evident in the below excerpt.

“We have to use the mother tongue when teaching a foreign language to students at this age because cognitively immature students need to be exposed to content in their mother tongue [The teacher trainee suggests his own way of content design combining contents in the mother tongue and in English] Thus, students can connect previous and new concepts in their minds in a more structured and memorable way.” (Week 6, P11)

Discussion and Conclusions

With the purpose of understanding the nature of EFL teacher trainees' reflections via the vignette technique, this study reveals how the breadth and depth of teacher reflection develop throughout a certain period of time. Based on the results, a great deal of the participants' reflections was found to be at the description and personal opinion levels despite the supervisor's weekly support of how to reflect at deeper levels. Namely, the analyses of the depth dimension showed that the participants did not reflect at deeper levels, which require one to generalize, give reasons, analyze from critical perspectives, and so forth. Identical findings in relation to the dominance of descriptive shallow comments in the EFL teacher trainees' reflections were reached in the studies of Turhan and Kırkgöz (2018, 2023). In terms of breadth, it is obvious that the participants could focus on multiple topics ranging from subject-matter content to didactic and personal content in their vignette-based reflections. Among these different content types, the least frequent references in the overall reflections were observed in personal content. This might be interesting and unexpected because the main aim of integrating a vignette-based reflection process into the practicum was to equip the participants with knowledge and awareness of oneself as a future teacher. Rather than this, the participants concentrated more on didactic content in their reflections, which pinpoints the fact that the way of teaching or learning drew much attention and needed to be analyzed more frequently. In fact, this could be a hopeful finding because reflection enhances informed teaching practices (Akbari, 2007) and is a road for renewing teaching as well as raising awareness toward the impacts of teaching (Jacobs et al., 2011). Additionally, the flow of reflectivity during practicum did not show a specific or meaningful change. Normally, it is expected that the participants become more reflective toward the end of the practicum process as they reflect more and more in time. However, in this study, no systematic flow toward a more reflective or critical stance was detected as a result of the vignette-based reflections. This is most probably because they were not able to approach issues in a similar level of reflectivity, and the content of issues may be a determinant for the reflective skills of the participants, who were really novice and new to the teaching profession. Another reason might be that they did not have any previous teaching and reflection experiences, which they could use as a reference point for comparing and contrasting their prior conceptions with new realizations. In other words, becoming more reflective may not be directly or solely related to the participants' involvement in reflection over longer time periods. As Yang (2009) claims, critical reflection skills do not seem to be acquired naturally. Maybe the best way is to deliver explicit instructions on how to become reflective practitioners. This arises from the fact that reflective skills are crucial to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Volkman, 2000). Even so, it is valuable to be a part of such vignette-based reflection processes in the sense of assessing the scientific knowledge of teachers (Tasar, 2006) to ensure the quality of reflection (Jeffries & Maeder, 2011) and building critical connections to effective teaching practices (Wilkerson et al., 2018). The

reason behind incorporating any type of reflection is the desire to construct a quality base for teacher action and thinking (Yılmaz & Akar, 2022).

Suggestions

The main conclusions shed light on a few suggestions that could be beneficial for the supervisors or teacher educators who aim to design a similar collegial practicum process for teacher trainees, either in ELT or other teacher training programs. First, a great number of explicit examples for deeper levels of reflection were provided by the supervisor in the beginning weeks of this study, but the expected outcomes were not obtained in terms of criticality and reflectivity. Therefore, it would be better for the supervisors to be models of how to reflect more effectively with think-aloud protocols in which they exemplify each level of reflection concretely. By doing so, they can display how they direct and shape their thinking on diverse issues, especially for deeper levels of reflection. To achieve this, supervisors should ensure that teacher trainees have metacognitive thinking ability. Second, considering the breadth dimension, the results show that the least frequent content that teacher trainees were interested in was personal content, even though they mentioned personal issues at varying degrees throughout the practicum. To increase opportunities for looking back and forth on personal issues, supervisors could provide teacher trainees with guidance in relation to introspection more often. Third, in order to make such a process more collegial, mentors could be involved in vignette-based reflection processes since they are the models of teacher trainees in the field. For instance, mentors could also prepare vignettes covering issues observed around their own educational environments or lived teaching experiences in their own classes. Afterwards, they could share their vignettes with teacher trainees in regular face-to-face or online sessions organized for the critical analyses of vignettes in a collaborative way. Even, as a way to maximize reflection quality and create a sense of togetherness among colleagues, mentors can combine vignettes with such other self-development tools as digital narrative storytelling (e.g., Craig, 2013), video self-reflections (e.g., Arya & Christ, 2013; Calandra et al., 2014; Christ et al., 2012; Walshe & Driver, 2019) and video reflections with peers (Arya et al., 2015; Christ et al., 2012; Eröz-Tuga, 2013; Shanahan & Tochelli, 2014). All these tools have the potential to develop a greater understanding of trainees' strengths and weaknesses in a way that they expand their pedagogical knowledge through solidarity and collaborative professionalism. Thus, variety in the uses of reflective tools may trigger critical thinking more effectively because each trainee will most probably be successful at reflecting with different tools. Variety in this regard is also vital for boosting motivation and autonomy toward reflective practices by giving trainees chances to make their own choices among numerous reflection tools. More crucially, this could be an official procedure guided by supervisors, applied by mentors, and supported by the Ministry of National Education as an in-service professional development activity. This suggestion, if put into practice, can yield fruitful outcomes since some other studies also find vignette-based reflections beneficial for improving in-service teachers' expertise (e.g., Ambler, 2012; Angelides & Gibbs, 2006; Jeffries & Maeder, 2005). To add more, reflection is important for training qualified teachers, lifelong learning (Jasper, 2003), and professional and pedagogical development of teachers. In this regard, collegial support among teachers, trainees, supervisors, teacher educators, and mentors need to be encouraged in a well-designed vignette-based reflection practice. All in all, purposeful

reflection on specific experiences is essential (Mathew et al., 2017), and to accomplish this, vignette-based reflection may be incorporated into methodology courses offered in teacher training programs before the practicum experience. A further study could adopt a more collegial perspective and involve teacher trainees from different regions of Turkey or from different countries in a way that they collaborate for the analyses of their vignettes generated in different contexts through online platforms.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. With its small-scale focus on vignette-based reflections of EFL teacher trainees, this study includes participants working in pairs, totaling 12 in number. To make the study more comprehensive, it would be sound to encourage all the senior students in the aforementioned ELT department to participate in the study so that the case of senior EFL teacher trainees at a state university could be investigated through the vignette technique utilized as a tool to explore content and criticality of reflection. With the use of vignettes, the participants searched for educational issues that were appropriate to be presented in a story-like format. However, this might cause them to miss or ignore other problematic issues that they believe were impossible or difficult to present in a story-like format. Hence, with the collaboration of trainees and supervisors, mentors might be informed about the details of the vignette-based reflection beforehand if they are not knowledgeable enough. This is because trainees could write better vignettes with the support of mentors. Last but not least, the sole data collection instrument used in this study was vignette-based reflections. Yet, it could be combined with other data collection instruments such as open-ended questionnaires or focus-group interviews. Thus, the views of all the parties about the process could be examined.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no potential conflict of interest for this study.

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Appendix

- Cell 1: Subject Matter-Description: “The teacher started today’s lesson with the subject of Kitchen Tools in the 5/H class.” (Week 1, P7)
- Cell 2: Didactic-Description: “I benefited from some tactics that I learned from humanistic teaching approaches like Suggestopedia in order to calm students down.” (Week 4, P8)
- Cell 3: Personal-Description: “I felt frustrated and helpless because students never listened to me.” (Week 7, P9)
- Cell 4: Subject Matter-Personal Opinion: “The topic was games and hobbies. He presented concepts such as like, dislike, enjoy, love, hate and so on. However, I think he should have used images.” (Week 4, P4)
- Cell 5: Didactic-Personal Opinion: “The teacher was teaching Directions in the 3-D class, and for that topic today, she brought a real map to the classrooms. After working on this map, the teacher conducted an interactive activity through the smartboard on which she showed a map again. I realized that the map on the smartboard attracted the attention of students more.” (Week 1, P1)
- Cell 6: Personal (Content)-Personal Opinion: “But at least now I know how I should not behave in a young learner classroom. Trying to be the only authority did not work as I expected.” (Week 8, P6)
- Cell 7: Subject Matter-Linking: “The lack of sufficient physical space and equipment for role-play or storytelling activities was a major problem for the teacher. Unfortunately, there are regional inequalities in this regard in the country. We discussed this last week after a micro-teaching session at university.” (Week 7, P11)
- Cell 8: Didactic-Linking: “There are many Syrian students in our practicum school. Their existence is good for raising awareness of cultural richness in language classes. Both Turkish and Syrian students can learn how to be respectful toward cultural differences. On the other hand, this can create cultural conflicts among students, which in turn can hinder effective teaching from time to time.” (Week 2, P3)
- Cell 9: Personal (Content)-Linking: No example was detected in the data.
- Cell 10: Subject Matter-Critical Bridging: “We have to use the mother tongue when teaching a foreign language to students at this age because cognitively immature students can need to be exposed to content in their mother tongue [The teacher trainee suggests his own way of content design combining contents in the mother tongue and in English] Thus, students can connect previous and new concepts in their minds in a more structured and memorable way.” (Week 6, P11)
- Cell 11: Didactic-Critical Bridging: No example was detected in the data.
- Cell 12: Personal (Content)-Critical Bridging: No example was detected in the data.

