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Exploring Language Teacher Candidates' Reflective Competence in Microteaching Evaluation Practices

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Abstract

This study examines language teacher candidates' reflective competence in critically evaluating peers' instructional practices and materials during microteaching. In language teaching contexts, limited research has examined the quality and depth of peer evaluation during microteaching, despite its role in bridging theory and practice. Data were collected from 12 teacher candidates through peer evaluation notes, instructional materials, and recorded teaching sessions. Using a qualitative design, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by triangulation with five supervisors. Findings reveal that teacher candidates predominantly engage in surface-level evaluation, emphasizing technical and procedural aspects rather than conceptual pedagogical reasoning. The study argues that significant gaps reflect limitations in pedagogical content knowledge and reflective practice, especially in implementing problem-based and project-based learning, process-oriented assessments, and communicative language teaching to foster interaction and meaning negotiation. A structured reflective microteaching cycle is proposed to strengthen language teacher candidates' reflective competence, comprising three stages of replan, reteach, and reobserve. The findings highlight the urgent need for quality education through systematic critical reflection and pedagogical reasoning in language teaching education.

Keywords: language teacher; quality education; microteaching; pedagogical content knowledge; peer evaluation; reflective competence

Introduction

In language teacher education, teacher candidates' competence is the center of professional development. To create effective classroom practice in language education, they require the design, facilitation, and evaluation of communicative, interactive, and meaningful tasks (Burns & Richards, 2018; Johnson, 2009). Integrating subject matter and pedagogy in language teaching aligns with pedagogical content knowledge theory, which holds that

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teacher candidates design communicative tasks, scaffold interaction, and support language acquisition (Jeon, 2025; Pytash & Morgan, 2025; Rizal & Zulaefa, 2023; Shulman, 1986). Teacher candidates need to translate extensive coursework into skills beyond content knowledge. To bridge this gap, microteaching provides opportunities for developing reflective competence through planning, teaching, observing, and reflecting. However, studies showed descriptive reflections rather than analytical ones among language teacher candidates (Farrell, 2025; Mulyani, 2018; Yuan & Lee, 2015). Reflective practice can improve teaching professional competence only when teacher candidates engage in the critical examination of their teaching experiences (Farrell, 2022). To support interaction and meaning-making in communicative language teaching, understanding pedagogical approaches such as problem-based and project-based learning is critical. Otherwise, language teacher candidates might follow the correct procedures but remain pedagogically ineffective because they fail to evaluate these dimensions critically.

At the undergraduate level of the pre-service program in Indonesia, the teacher candidate completes coursework over three years before taking microteaching and an internship during the last year. Experiential learning theory frames learning as a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Calavia et al., 2023; Kolb, 1984; Navarro-Ibáñez & Grau Cárdenas, 2026; Prayogi et al., 2025; Sato, 2025). Experiential learning theory aligns with microteaching when structured reflection is completed within the cycle. Microteaching in Indonesia is a two-week session to prepare teacher candidates before a semester-long teaching internship at a school. In microteaching, teacher candidates must plan, teach, and observe (Hull & Vígh, 2026; Jay, 2024). In planning, teacher candidates develop instructional materials. The development starts with choosing the subject, learning competencies in the curriculum, subject topic, teaching methods, and learning strategies to make a lesson plan. Developing learning materials, learning assessments, and teaching reflection follows the creation of the lesson plan. Teacher candidates then peer-teach the instructional materials, with some peers playing the role of students and others as observers.

Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture advises teachers to use student-centered teaching methods, including two main teaching methods (i.e., project-based learning and problem-based learning). Within the Indonesian Teacher Professional Education Curriculum using Emancipated Curriculum, the current Indonesian curriculum, the microteaching course is advised to use both teaching methods because they benefit developing students the most through the core of communicative language teaching, in which there are opportunities for students' talk, output, and feedback (Brandl, 2026; Kolsut, 2026; Richards, 2006). Meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and authentic communication create effective language teaching.

In microteaching practice with project-based learning, students are expected to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes by engaging in the inquiry process through a project (Thomas, 2000). Project completion in project-based learning is not assigned solely by teachers at the end of a lesson as an extension and

implementation of knowledge (Heitmann, 1996). The characteristics of project-based learning are distinctive in both its process and its results (Mayer, 2016). The inquiry process is independent and includes group collaboration to plan and execute the project based on the teacher's essential questions. The results are the answers to the essential questions, after being tested and publicly presented, and are assessed using the teacher's rubric specifically created for the project.

In microteaching practice using problem-based learning, a student-centered teaching method allows students to solve an open-ended, real-world problem through group collaboration and communication (Karthikeyan, 2021). To develop deep knowledge and perspective, students in groups determine key issues to solve problems through learning by doing. The problems provide students with a stimulus for learning because new learning issues are explored in a conceptual context and as an ongoing learning process, which helps them retain and apply knowledge (Duch et al., 1997; Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board Samford University, 2024). The teaching method helps students learn to learn, giving them opportunities to think analytically and critically. Their curiosity to find answers cooperatively with peers to solve problems is the initiation for learning. Critical analysis in the group process encourages individual student accountability in developing social skills. Using this teaching method, the teacher is a facilitator of group processes, a resource person for content and procedural matters, a sounding board, a guide to supplementary resources, and a learner.

Teachers' performance is significantly influenced by professional competence developed throughout the pre-service program (Beshah & Anshu, 2024). Teacher candidates' professional competence is developed in the pre-service program through coursework and practice. Coursework provides teaching knowledge, including pedagogical theories, curriculum, methods, strategies, supervision, subject content, and instructional materials such as lesson plans, lesson materials, learning media, and learning assessments. In the teaching practice, teacher candidates can engage in peer teaching before an internship in a real school setting commences.

Pedagogical competencies required of teacher candidates may not be fully understood, as factors contribute to the low quality of pre-service programs and to teacher candidates' inability to reflect on their teaching and instructional materials (Revina, 2022). Instead of focusing on critical reflection on classroom teaching quality, the teacher education curriculum equips teacher candidates with administrative requirements to ensure uniformity in curriculum guidelines and instructional materials formats. There is a discrepancy between the college-based coursework (training) and the reality in the primary school classroom. Few credit hours of teaching practice are dedicated to the last year of the undergraduate program in pre-service training. Thus, teaching practices and instructional materials do not receive adequate constructive clinical supervision. Opportunities for teacher candidates to evaluate their teaching practice and instructional materials are valuable for developing their professional skills. The question is whether they can evaluate critically. This research was conducted to answer this question.

Assessing teaching practice requires teacher candidates to have the pedagogical knowledge of a teacher professional in the 21st century (Pellegrino, 2017). There are at least three domains of pedagogical competencies. The cognitive domain comprises knowledge, cognitive processes, creativity, and strategies. Comprehending the cognitive domain means that teacher candidates have the skills to think critically, innovate, argue, and reason (Setiono et al., 2026). The intrapersonal domain confirms metacognition, self-regulation, intellectual openness, and tolerance competencies. The interpersonal domain concerns communication and cooperation skills in conflict negotiation and resolution. Placing the three domains within the requirements of a professional teacher will provide teacher candidates with the skills to evaluate and reflect on their teaching quality. Reasoning and thinking critically and reflectively about teaching practice, strategically communicating findings, and appreciating them through intellectual openness are exactly what teacher candidates need during microteaching evaluation sessions. When teacher candidates engage in critical dialogue, peer evaluation can facilitate collaborative meaning-making and create learning through socially mediated interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Peer-teaching opportunities and reflective practice sessions in microteaching are proven to be more effective in influencing teacher candidates' readiness. While coursework provides knowledge and ideal pictures of a classroom, it does not necessarily connect to a real classroom context (Yin, 2019). Pre-service courses do not provide real experience in coping with challenges, surprises, and discrepancies in a classroom context, as if teacher candidates were doing peer teaching or teaching practice. Peer teaching is recorded to observe the process and provide feedback to the teacher candidates. Analyzing recorded teaching supports teacher candidates' learning and reflection for future practice (Sudrajat et al., 2024). The increase in pedagogical skills provides professional development as a model teacher.

Existing research explores reflective practice generally, but few studies investigate whether teacher candidates in language microteaching have adequate pedagogical reasoning to critically evaluate peers' teaching (Bock et al., 2024; Calavia et al., 2023; Knochel et al., 2022; Mulyani, 2018; Pytash & Morgan, 2025). Previous studies mainly investigated reflective journals (Farrell, 2022; Navarro-Ibáñez & Grau Cárdenas, 2026; Pham, 2026a), teacher professional development outcomes (Calavia et al., 2023; Ibarrola-García, 2014; Jeon, 2025), or self-reflection (Knochel et al., 2022; Navarro-Ibáñez & Grau Cárdenas, 2026; Prayogi et al., 2025). This study aims to identify gaps in teacher candidates' pedagogical understanding of language teaching by analyzing the quality of their reflective evaluations. A model of reflective competence is proposed to contribute to language teaching education. This study addressed the following research questions: How do language teacher candidates demonstrate reflective competence in peer evaluations? What components of pedagogical reasoning do language teacher candidates often struggle to articulate? How can these findings inform a systematic reflective microteaching framework?

Method

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design (Creswell, 2014) to investigate reflective practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) during microteaching among 12 final-year teacher candidates (9 female and 3 male, in their twenties) in an Indonesian university offering an elementary school teacher education program. The researcher employed the concept of information power (Malterud et al., 2016) to guide participant selection because the research subjects shared similar educational backgrounds and provided deep qualitative data over quantity, which provided sufficient information power for the research.

12 teacher candidates with the independent user English proficiency level agreed to join the research. There were only 23 teacher candidates (among 394 students taking the microteaching course of the same academic year) who chose English as the subject for their microteaching session. The researcher offered the research opportunity to the 23 teacher candidates, and only 12 agreed to join. Their English proficiency level was independent user (upper-intermediate), which showed their competence to produce effective command and understand concrete and abstract topics of complex texts as well as communicate and write fluently. These competencies were the reason why they chose English for their microteaching session.

They had limited teaching experience, with the microteaching course as the only course that gave them their first full teaching simulation experience in the teaching education program among the other courses in the curriculum. From a total of 144 credit hours, 24-30 credit hours were pedagogical content distributed in 12-15 courses. These pedagogical courses aimed to prepare teacher candidates to teach different subjects in elementary school using different teaching methods, strategies, and techniques, with different points of view from grand educational theories. The teacher candidates could have gained teaching experience in these pedagogical courses by completing course assignments that required them to observe, plan, and/or practice some of the theories inside or outside the classroom. However, the teaching simulation experience was limited within these contexts.

The research setting was one of the leading Indonesian universities that has offered pre-service training degrees for decades. The graduate employment rate for the education faculty at this university was high (i.e., over 90%), with thousands of teacher candidates being admitted and graduating annually. Given the institution's achievement and pedagogical courses in its curriculum, the researcher sought to analyze the quality of the teacher candidates, particularly their reflective competence in microteaching evaluation practices.

Data for the research included documents (i.e., peer reflection notes by teacher candidates, observation notes by the researcher and 5 supervisors, instructional materials), and audiovisual materials (i.e., teaching session recordings). The documents collected in this study included 108 teacher candidates' reflection notes, 12 researchers' observation notes, 60 supervisors' observation notes, and 12 instructional materials. The instructional materials comprised lesson plans, lesson materials, learning media, and learning assessments. The main data (i.e., peer reflection notes) were coded. The video recordings, along with the instructional materials and observation

notes, were supplementary data used to verify and resolve discrepancies during analysis and during the triangulation discussion with the supervisors. Thus, transcription procedures for video recordings were not applied. Data were presented in a thematic narrative from the peer reflection notes by 12 teacher candidates, coded as RN1-12 for anonymization. The 12 teacher candidates were coded TC1-12 when describing their teaching sessions for anonymization in the data presentation.

As assigned by the researcher, each teacher candidate was evaluated by two others, while the remaining served as students. The researcher designed a Google Sheet to record the peer evaluation notes for teacher candidates. Each teacher candidate was provided with access to the Google Sheet. The researcher provided guidelines for completing the Google Sheet, instructing that the peer reflection notes should provide critical evaluation and suggestions for the teaching practice. Each teacher candidate's microteaching session lasted 70 minutes (i.e., 2 academic credit hours in the lesson plan). Each teacher candidate did one teaching session. All 12 teacher candidates held a language teaching session. A total of 12 teaching sessions were video recorded. As 1 teacher candidate had a teaching session, 2 teacher candidates evaluated the teaching. They wrote peer reflection notes, and 9 teacher candidates acted as students during the session. Teacher candidates who took on the role of students during the sessions completed the peer reflection notes after each session. The teaching practice was recorded and uploaded to YouTube. The recordings functioned as confirmation tools to be replayed when notes' confirmations were required. Observation and peer reflection notes focused on teaching sessions and were corroborated with the instructional materials.

Qualitative validity was ensured through triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation provided information by examining evidence to build a coherent justification. The researcher observed all 12 teaching sessions in person. To ensure validity, triangulation with five supervisors was conducted. Each supervisor was assigned to observe all 12 teacher candidates. The 3 supervisors were assigned to observe each of 2 teacher candidates in person. The 2 supervisors were assigned to observe each of 3 teacher candidates in person. They observed the ones they did not observe in person by watching video recordings. The observation sheet was provided by the researcher. It consisted of a checklist of main teaching components (i.e., structural and pedagogical) and columns for open notes on the components. Five microteaching supervisors corroborated the observation notes on the teaching practice with instructional materials and teacher candidates' peer reflection notes.

The documents (i.e., peer reflection notes, observation notes) were coded manually, initially assisted by ATLAS.ti to browse general themes. Data analysis included several steps of preparation and organization, including reading peer reflection and observation notes, corroborating with the instructional materials, and confirming themes by watching the teaching session recordings. Descriptions and themes were generated to interpret the findings.

The researcher ensured researcher reflexivity. The researcher's multiple roles could influence data interpretation in designing the instrument, organizing the teaching session, assigning peer evaluators, collecting data, and analyzing data. Recognizing this risk, the researcher adopted strategies to minimize the potential bias. First, peer reflection notes were the primary data for analysis. In contrast, observation notes, instructional materials, and video recordings served as supplementary data to corroborate interpretations and resolve disagreements. Second, five microteaching supervisors continuously observed emerging themes and coding decisions through triangulation. Interpretation disagreements were reevaluated to reach a shared interpretation by examining the supplementary data. Evidence drove the researcher's analysis, allowing refined themes and emerging interpretations to support the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Data analysis employed a combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These approaches enabled the researcher to be theoretically informed while upholding sensitivity to unforeseen patterns in the data. The initial codes in this study were informed by the conceptual framework (i.e., deductive coding) on reflective competence, grounded in the key components of teaching: opening (motivation and apperception), main (teaching method, course content, teaching competencies, learning media), and closing (reflection and assessment) (Susilowaty et al., 2023a). Peer reflection notes were anticipated to be written by the teacher candidates based on the three key components. Thus, initially, coding focused on the three components of the teaching sessions.

As the researcher was open to changing codes based on emerging findings when analyzing peer reflective and observation notes (i.e., inductive coding), the researcher shifted to four coding units: descriptive, critical, comparative, and action-oriented. Coding results generated themes to describe. Because the general themes on the three components of teaching in the initial codes did not provide a deeper analysis of the reflection notes, the codes evolved toward four units. The coding units were thematic because the reflective competence expressed in the teacher candidates' reflective notes should have included complete thoughts, reasoning, and assessments. The reflective notes were isolated into units in four codes: descriptive units, which the notes only stated what happened with no analysis; critical units, which provided reflections with deeper analysis on the ethical impact of the teaching practices; comparative units, which provided different alternatives on teaching practices based on their knowledge; and action-oriented units, which reflected how they would do the teaching practices differently in the future based on the evaluation.

As the coding process progressed, negative cases were found as the researcher identified unpresented reflections that the teacher candidates should have written in their notes. Corroborating with the observation notes, instructional materials, and video recordings, the final four codes represented the negative cases found in the reflection notes; findings on the main factors that the teacher candidates failed to reflect completely. There were four code categories: first, surface-level reflective

practices, which described procedural evaluation focusing on surface features such as teaching structure, presentation slides, etc. The second category was limited pedagogical reasoning, which described pedagogical reasoning for analyzing teaching methods and learning processes. The third category was a lack of communicative language teaching, which explained the interaction analysis on participation and communication. The fourth category was the assessment insight on the alignment of the assessment.

The researcher coded the teacher candidates' reflection notes, triangulating them with the researcher's observation notes, 5 supervisors, instructional materials, and teaching video recordings. Significant findings in the observation notes that were missed in the teacher candidates' reflection notes were noted to support the researcher in analyzing and interpreting the data. The coding results were consulted with the supervisors for triangulation. To address disagreements, discussions were conducted while cross-checking the teacher candidates' instructional materials and video recordings.

To establish the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher conducted a comprehensive audit trail to document coding decisions, theme refinement, and revisions throughout the analysis process. The emerging themes and coding results were evaluated and discussed with five microteaching supervisors through peer debriefing sessions to test interpretations and consider alternative perspectives. Coding discussions were conducted when disagreements arose and were addressed through discussions triangulating peer reflection notes, observational notes, instructional materials, and teaching video recordings to reach consensus.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Surface-Level Reflective Practices

Peer reflection notes (RN) indicated descriptive rather than analytical reflection. Instead of focusing on pedagogical reasoning, approximately three-quarters of the peer reflection notes were descriptive comments focused on observable aspects of classroom procedures, such as classroom management, attendance checking, slide design, or activity sequencing.

"The slides are interesting and easy to read." (RN 4)

Instead of emphasizing the reasons and impacts beyond students' and teachers' actions, most evaluation notes were merely listing them. Across almost all teaching sessions and topics, teacher candidates showed a consistent pattern. In the opening teaching session, for example, the notes listed several warm-up activities before the lesson.

"The teacher started by making agreements on classroom rules." (RN 1)

"The teacher made clapping activities with students before teaching." (RN 5)

"The teacher checked the students' attendance." (RN 4)

"The teacher started with a prayer, and then the students sang the national song as the introduction activity." (RN 9)

Findings showed that peer evaluation notes listed observed actions rather than critically evaluating teaching. Although several described

the observed activities, none explained the essential meanings and purposes.

"The teacher looked at the screen most of the time." (RN 1)

"No students ask questions." (RN 12)

"Other students agree on the project presentations." (RN 10)

Notes from the closing session listed what the teacher did. While providing details on the activities, there was no analysis or interpretation of the teacher's decision on the closing activity choices.

"The teacher provided a different evaluation sheet to the students." (RN 3)

"Before she ended the lesson, there was a word wall activity after students completed a written test." (RN 9)

"Students completed the reflection sheet from the teacher." (RN 2)

Several teacher candidates questioned instructional decisions that indicated emerging reflective competence, although dominantly merely describing classroom activities.

> "The teacher should provide a detailed explanation of the activity completion by firstly making sure that every student has enough understanding of the content before completing the task, or else not everyone could greatly participate and contribute to the group project. Some students seemed lost." (RN 6)

The teacher candidates' limited pedagogical reasoning was reflected in their focus on procedural implementation instead of conceptual justification. The reflection notes suggested that the teacher candidates' interpretation of quality teaching was observable classroom performance rather than confirmation of instructional decision-making. The notes showed patterns in which teacher candidates tended to provide immediate, observable teaching attitudes that were easier to identify than conceptual and abstract understanding of pedagogical principles.

Limited Pedagogical Reasoning

Limited understanding of the pedagogical principles underlying problem-based and project-based learning was evident from peer reflection notes corroborated with instructional materials, observation notes, and video recordings. The result showed that the majority of teacher candidates failed to use the reflective practitioner framework to define teaching practice, focusing predominantly on technical-rational components. Some teacher candidates occasionally connected pedagogical principles with classroom observations when discussing lesson structure and student involvement. However, descriptive comments predominated. Nine of the twelve showed this pattern across different teaching components. Agreement about the fixed and clear ends in technical rationality action led to a resolution without using techniques derived from applied research (Schön, 1983). Analysis of how teaching methods supported learning was limited to only a few among teacher candidates. Among the few, there was a lack of conceptual understanding of references to problem-based and project-based learning as teaching methods, despite several hours of compulsory pedagogy courses on teaching methods in the Emancipated Curriculum before taking the microteaching course.

Five supervisors indicated in their observation notes that teacher candidates implemented project-based learning without presenting essential questions with real-life problems, confirming the peer reflections' lack

of pedagogical reasoning. Analysis of the teacher candidates' instructional materials confirmed that both problem-based and project-based learning were included in the lesson plan. However, the teaching essential components and formulated steps did not represent the methods. The findings showed that the teaching sessions did not practice the fundamental steps and components of both teaching methods. For example, teacher candidates omitted or delayed asking essential questions about the lesson topic, which should be the first fundamental step in both teaching methods. Both the lesson plan and teaching practice showed that essential questions were not posted at the beginning of the lesson. The questions should provide a topic-related problem for the students to solve through group discussion. Few teacher candidates asked questions at the beginning of the lesson, but the ones they did ask were yes-or-no questions with no problems to solve. Students did not have the opportunity to analyze or use their background knowledge to think critically to answer the problem.

Reflection notes contained no discussion of the fundamental components of the learning phases of problem-based and project-based teaching methods. The notes recorded the students' activities, with no analysis of the reasoning or careful assessment of achievement for each learning phase within the teaching methods.

"Students are working in the assigned group to create the project." (RN 7)

"They present their project in front of the class." (RN 9)

"After the presentation, the teacher distributed the students' reflection sheets." (RN 10)

Although uncommon, a few reflection notes showed deeper pedagogical reasoning by explaining the reasons for instructional decisions that influence students' learning.

> "The essential questions did not represent the core of the learning but instead only informational questions." (RN 6)

While most reflection notes on teaching methods described the observed activities related to the teacher's methods, input or critique on the decision-making was not provided. Evaluation was based on checklist thinking with an administrative orientation. The teacher candidates' reflection notes that relied on visible classroom events instead of evaluating instructional quality suggested that these types of notes needed less pedagogical interpretation. It was easier to observe appearance rather than pedagogy. They associated observable classroom management and lesson organization with effective and quality teaching. Analysis of instructional decisions was not available, which suggested limited reflective competence. This tendency may reflect an educational culture during teacher preparation that emphasizes technical compliance over pedagogical reasoning.

Lack of Communicative Language Teaching

Most teacher candidates implemented teacher-centered discourse despite student-centered instructional approaches, while only a few attempted to increase participation through questioning strategies. Despite claims of student-centered approaches using problem- and project-based teaching methods, teaching remained teacher-centered, lacking key elements of communicative language teaching.

Teacher candidates (TC) in this study provided minimal student talk time in teaching sessions. Strategies to reduce teacher talk were not applied. Instructions found in the recorded teaching sessions used long, complex sentences when teachers gave directions to students on project-making. These sentences, for example, were delivered by a teacher candidate for the students to choose one message from the lesson to make a poster with their group:

> "After our discussion on the influence of a clean environment on society, there are several messages that you want to convey and make sure people understand. You can discuss in your group which message you decide to deliver to society through a poster you will make with your team members. I want you to make sure that the project uses the information that we discussed earlier without omitting the details that I provided at the beginning of the lesson." (TC 4)

The teaching sessions showed that several teacher candidates did not model completing the activity. Students were asked to read and follow the instructions individually, which resulted in different project outcomes, predictably due to the groups' differing understandings at the end of their project presentations. These sentences, for example, asked students to read the instructions on contrasting dark and bright colors in poster-making, without modeling the examples.

> "Please follow the instructions I wrote in the project guide on how to create a contrasting color between the poster background and the message. There are tips on how to use bright versus dark colors to contrast the writing on the poster and how to use wordings to convey a certain meaning." (TC 8)

Two teacher candidates consistently used short eliciting questions, along with other lengthy explanations, that provided students with opportunities to elaborate on their responses.

The teacher candidates tended to speak indirectly to the students rather than using short, simple, and direct sentences to instruct them on completing assignments throughout the lesson. An example was when a teacher candidate asked the students in each group to divide themselves into different roles based on the handout. Instead of directly reassuring the students about the specific roles in each group, the teacher candidate stated the following:

> "Earlier, I provided a handout that you should read about the guide to create a better project by working in a team with different responsibilities for each member. Please make sure you follow the directions in the handout to help you go through the process and achieve better results. Not following the direction will cause you chaos when finishing the project, which you do not wish to happen" (TC 10)

Based on observations of teaching sessions, only a few teacher candidates asked the elicited questions to the students. Most questions were leading or informational, prompting a specific desired answer with basic facts and requiring short or single-word answers.

"Now, you understand the meaning of rotation, right?" (TC 1)

"What time did the incident happen? Who caused the problem?" (TC 12)

"Mention the life cycle of a frog!" (TC 3)

"What is the animal's classification?" (TC 7)

Negotiation of meaning occurred to a limited extent during classroom conversation and discussion. The students' different understandings of the indirect and complex instruction showed that neither students nor teachers made any effort to resolve the problematic utterance stemming from the teacher candidates' unclear message. Most of the teacher candidates asked only leading questions and continued the lesson without confirming students' understanding. On the other hand, the majority of students did not signal or communicate their confusion to the teachers, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of expectations and resulting in outcomes that differed from expectations.

"Any question? No? Do you understand? Yes? Okay, please start working in your group" (TC 5)

Reflection notes (RN) further validated the teacher candidates' lack of comprehension of communicative language teaching practices. Their notes mostly documented observed content recall activities rather than the teachers' communicative competence and students' communication skills during the learning process.

> "The students did not ask questions during the lesson. They seemed to understand and could answer the questions in the quiz." (RN 6)
> "The teacher explained the complete metamorphosis of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly using pictures in the student book, and then asked the students to draw the bee's metamorphosis." (RN 4)

Pedagogical Misalignment

Microteaching sessions showed misalignment between lesson objectives, instructional methods, and assessment practices. However, teacher candidates consistently overlooked it in their peer evaluation. Teaching sessions showed a mismatch between lesson objectives, teaching methods, and assessment practices. The peer reflection notes showed a lack of teacher candidates' understanding of the essential components of the main teaching session. Learning methods should activate students to collaborate and create fun learning experiences (Pham, 2026; Yuan & Lee, 2015). There was no comment in the notes on this major point. Collaborative learning enhances student achievement when aligned with qualified learning outcomes (Kumar, 2017). Students who feel fearful can benefit from collaborative learning activities, as they help improve achievement and persistence by changing attitudes and self-concept. Reflection notes on the closing teaching sessions, for example, included a checklist of whether tasks were completed at the end of the lesson. However, the teacher candidates did not specify the essential purposes of each closing step (i.e., reflection and assessment) in the reflection notes (RN).

"The lesson delivery was varied and interesting, using songs communicatively." (RN 8)

"The teacher provided evaluation and reflection to the students." (RN 12)

The teacher candidates could have explained that the essential purpose of the closing session is for the teacher to reflect and assess. In the reflection session, students are allowed to share their difficulties, interests, motivational factors,

and benefit from controversy in the learning setting (DeBacker & Crowson, 2008).

Stages in developing classroom reflective competence involve noticing events, analyzing pedagogical intentions, and evaluating instructional effectiveness. The reflection notes suggested that the teacher candidates only stopped at the noticing stage, where they were aware of certain activities without further analyzing and evaluating the instructional principles and objectives. Instead of instructional reasoning, observable indications drove reflective judgment. Instead of analytical processing, the teacher candidates relied on perception to evaluate peers using immediate visual cues from classroom activity features rather than constructs of pedagogical alignment, communicative interface, and assessment authenticity.

Discussion

The teacher candidates' teaching competencies were reflected in their teaching practices and peer reflection notes. Corroborating the supervisors' observations during the teaching sessions, confirmed by the researchers' video recording and the teacher candidates' peer teaching notes, yielded several themes. There were surface-level reflective practices, limited pedagogical reasoning, a lack of communicative language teaching, and pedagogical misalignment.

Surface-Level Reflective Practices

Many hours of pedagogical courses as teacher candidates should have provided them with a grasp of educational theories, enabling analytical reflection on teaching practice rather than surface-level comments (Alifia et al., 2022). Analytical reflection was only found in the peer reflection notes. While some reflection notes provided suggestions for the learning activities, few stated the essential learning components. Notes on the introduction session, for example, did not discusshe achievement of the two main essential purposes in the opening of the lesson: motivation and apperception (Susilowaty et al., 2023b).

The teacher candidates did not discuss in detail in the peer reflection notes the implementation of the chosen teaching method during the main session of the lesson. While they were aware of the government's recommendations on teaching methods in the latest Indonesian curriculum, the teacher candidates did not specifically discuss the main components of these methods. In the Indonesian current curriculum, Emancipated Curriculum, teachers are recommended to use problem-based and project-based learning as teaching methods (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kemendikbudristek RI, 2024). One of the main steps in both teaching methods, for example, is asking essential questions on the lesson topic that pose real-life problems for students to solve. None of the reflection notes discussed the completion and quality of the essential real-life problem questions that the teacher gave students during the teaching sessions. Problem-based learning uses real-world problems to promote concept learning in students (Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning, 2026). A good problem motivates students to find a deeper concept to defend, decide, connect with previous understanding, and then find a solution with other group members. As important as problem-based learning, real-world problems encourage inquiry-based education for the students to

make sense of why and how to apply their knowledge (Baines & DeBarger, 2021). As real-world problems become an essential component of problem-based and project-based learning, the teacher candidates in this research unfortunately did not demonstrate analytical reflection on the problems' occurrence, quality, and implementation. This research found that students created the projects completed during the teaching sessions to recreate the lesson materials that the teacher had explained earlier in an educational video or slide presentation. The projects were not the answers to real-life problems that should have been provided at the beginning of the lesson.

Lack of Communicative Language Teaching

Observations of teaching sessions showed the teacher candidates' lack of communicative language teaching, as they continued to practice teacher-centered talk, in contrast to the teaching methods that enforced student-centered learning activities. The teacher candidates in this study used indirect, long, and complex sentences when communicating with students, yet did not model completing the activity. Leading and informational questions were given to the students rather than eliciting questions, indicating no negotiation of meaning. The communicative strategies should include teachers' efforts to keep instructions short and simple, model activity completion, speak directly, and ask eliciting questions (Minnesota Literacy Council, 2026). When students were confused, both teachers and students should make an effort to clarify the message, leading to a negotiation of meaning. Strategies for negotiating meaning did not occur, as teacher candidates did not ask for clarification, rephrasing, or confirmation of what students thought they had understood (Pham, 2026). Students establish primary-level critical thinking when negotiating with teachers and peers. A shared learning community provides opportunities for students to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and self-regulate throughout the learning process.

Teaching sessions in this research indicated limited authentic interaction between the teacher candidates and the students. Volunteer or selected students should follow the classroom interaction through the teacher's question-answer initiative to respond (Hemphill, 2010). While many questions do not immediately elicit the desired responses, the teacher candidates should have repeated or reshaped the original question. Instead, the teacher candidates immediately provided refined answers to the students.

Limited Pedagogical Reasoning

Competent practitioners are reflective professionals who continually 'reflect in action' and 'reflect on action' using surprise and uncertainty as opportunities for learning. "Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena" (Schön, 1983, p. 49). While teaching, unexpected events occur that prompt a teacher to turn their attention back to students or themselves. Although research-based theories and techniques can be used, teachers also need to rely on skillful judgment to assess students' performance. Peer reflection notes on knowing-in-action during microteaching sessions could have made sense if teacher candidates had dug deeper into interesting phenomena that can be puzzling or troubling, and then critiqued, surfaced, and restructured their actions (Farrell, 2025).

When opening activities were unclear or unavailable, for example, reflection notes could have provided suggestions not only for a list of warm-up activities but also emphasized the pedagogical reasoning and impacts behind activities like making agreements on classroom rules, checking background knowledge, stating learning purposes, or having fun activities related to learning. The teacher candidates should have understood that one of the main purposes of motivating the students in the opening session is to attract their attention. When students pay full attention to the teacher, they will be fully involved in the lesson, as it is important to connect the information to students' real-life and background knowledge.

Observations on teaching sessions found patterns during group discussion, such as one-student domination, passive team members, and passive followers. Teacher candidates had limited or no intervention on this matter. The teaching sessions showed that students focused on completing a group of worksheets and presenting to the class. The study showed that while teacher candidates gave a group assignment, students' collaboration and teamwork were not evident because they were not enforced. Students' main motivation for completing the assignment took over the joy, fruitful discussion, and relationships when working with other team members. Conversations between students were limited, as they cut off discussion once the assignment was complete. Opportunities for all team members to speak up, deny, criticize, analyze, and decide on the teamwork were rare. The students develop critical thinking skills when given the chance to solve problems with the team (Manchem, 2025). Students need the opportunity to present their opinions, critical thinking, analysis, and solutions to real-life problems posed from the beginning of the lesson.

Pedagogical Misalignment

Teacher candidates' knowledge is critical to the development of their classroom practice; otherwise, misalignment could lead to misassessment of learners (Esfandiari & Husseini, 2023). While teachers' comprehension is key, it is more important for teachers to demonstrate competencies to students to help them understand the learning goals. Then, provide clear feedback on students' performance. Feedback can be powerful for students as a means of cognition and motivation (Brookhart, 2008). Students receive the information they need to understand what to do, why, and how to do it. This understanding builds students' motivation, self-esteem, and confidence.

The decline of specialized knowledge and professional skills to inform daily decisions based on factual classroom conditions has contributed to the crisis of confidence in the teaching profession (Schön, 1983). Teachers improve the learning environment at school by putting their personal and professional skills at the service of students (Ibarrola-García, 2014; Mulyani, 2022). Personal competencies and pedagogy are the key to a highly valued teaching profession (López-Martín et al., 2025). To limit the gap between personal and pedagogical competencies, teachers' practical continuous training determines their performance and career development. In microteaching, a comprehensive competence framework should be developed to help teacher candidates reflect

on teaching sessions, enabling them to revisit pedagogical competencies alongside real experiences when serving students in learning. Rather than proposing an alternative reflective cycle, this study identified four dimensions of weak pedagogical reasoning as reflective competence that should become explicit aspects of structured reflective microteaching.

The four themes demonstrated a continuing correlation rather than signifying four impartial findings. Instead of being inferred as isolated deficiencies, they represented interrelated phases of reflective competence. The teacher candidates' competence to evaluate pedagogical reasoning was limited by surface-level reflection. Insufficient pedagogical reasoning led them to overlook principles of communicative language teaching, contributing to pedagogical misalignment between instructional objectives, teaching methods, and assessment practices. These sequences suggested the development of reflective competence through not only observation but progressively sophisticated pedagogical reasoning.

Practical Implications

In light of these findings, this research offers several recommendations for higher education institutions, such as universities that offer pre-service programs. First and foremost, teacher education should require teacher candidates to reflect on and reevaluate their teaching practice, supported by more teaching-practice credit hours each semester throughout the academic year, to expand teaching experiences rather than confining them to the final year through a single microteaching course and teaching internship. This recommendation is particularly pressing given that, while standards for Indonesian teachers have been established in pedagogical skills, personality traits, content knowledge, and social skills, the pre-service program has not yet been oriented toward preparing teacher candidates to think critically and reflectively about their teaching practices. Building on this gap, student-teacher skills that require reflective and critical teaching practice are identified as a basis for future research.

Building on these recommendations, the findings further propose a reflective microteaching style comprising three interactive stages, as described in Figure 1. In the first stage, Replan, teacher candidates revise their instructional design based on peers' and supervisors' feedback. This stage is grounded in prior research showing that effective feedback increases teacher candidates' knowledge of high-quality feedback and, when applied, improves their attitudes towards educational practice and research (Bock et al., 2024; Knochel et al., 2022). Here, although the teacher candidates had prior knowledge from pedagogical courses, the teaching sessions provided a simulated classroom experience that demonstrated their understanding of pedagogical principles.

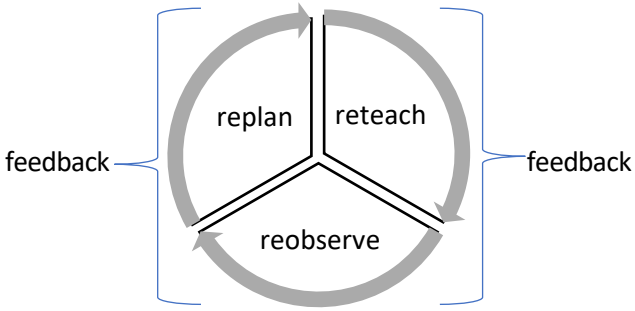
Following this, the feedback gathered in the Replan stage then creates an opportunity to improve the implementation of instruction during the second stage, Reteach. The revised planning, including revised instructional materials, provides a second chance to focus on students' achievements by reteaching the lesson using feedback from previous teaching-practice limitations. Crucially, this feedback should not only be implemented in the lesson plan but, more importantly, applied while reteaching the lesson itself, since a classroom is a dynamic

setting in which students' needs can shift unexpectedly, thereby affecting the teacher's strategies (Rochnia & Gräsel, 2022).

Finally, embedded within the Reteach stage is a third stage, Reobserve, in which teaching is critically reevaluated through pedagogical reasoning. At this point, a supervisor who provided earlier feedback can be complemented by a new observer offering additional feedback. In this way, the feedback from both observers can be cross-checked, whether by adding to, mutually agreeing with, arguing against, or debating the same or differing feedback. Through this reciprocal interaction between the previous and new observers, teacher candidates ultimately benefit from a deeper, analytical reflection on the feedback given during their earlier and later teaching practice and instructional materials, as they confront the different classroom dynamics of the same group of students.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework of structured reflective microteaching cycle



This framework contrasts with the established reflection model that focuses on post-teaching reviews (Navarro-Ibáñez & Grau Cárdenas, 2026; Sato, 2025; Yin, 2019). The proposed methodology embeds peer-generated evaluation as the catalyst that bridges and guides instructional redesign and future teaching practice.

Conclusion

This research answered the research question of whether language teacher candidates had reflective competence in microteaching evaluation practice. The results revealed that the teacher candidates predominantly engaged in surface-level reflective practices, focusing on observable aspects rather than analytical reflection. It was reflected in their focus on technical-rational components, with a lack of conceptual understanding of the two teaching methods, problem- and project-based learning, advised by the Ministry of Education in the Emancipated Curriculum. Consequently, the essential real-life questions that serve as the key to the learning process were not provided. Moreover, although the two teaching methods were student-centered, teacher talk time dominated the learning, indicating a lack of communicative language teaching. Taken together, these findings point to a pedagogical misalignment, in which a mismatch occurred between lesson objectives, teaching methods, and assessment

practices. As a result, when teacher candidates assessed peer teaching during microteaching, they overlooked significant components of instructional materials and teaching practices, including teaching methods and learning assessments. In turn, they were given no opportunity to collaborate in solving problems, nor was the learning process itself assessed.

Based on these findings, higher education institutions offering pre-service teacher programs should require teacher candidates to reflect on and reevaluate their teaching practice, with more teaching-practice credit hours spread throughout the academic year rather than concentrated only in the final year's microteaching course and internship, since current programs are not yet oriented toward building critical and reflective thinking despite established teaching standards. Accordingly, the study proposes a reflective microteaching style made up of three interactive stages: Replan, where candidates revise their instructional design based on peer and supervisor feedback; Reteach, where the revised plan and materials are used to teach the lesson again, applying feedback not just on paper but in the live, dynamic classroom setting; and Reobserve, embedded within the reteaching stage, where a new observer complements the original supervisor so their feedback can be cross-checked and debated, giving candidates a richer, more analytical reflection on their teaching across the different sessions.

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