



## ESP Teacher's Self-Reflection: Teacher Agency and Frustration of the Enactment

Sari Hidayati

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

sari\_hidayati@uny.ac.id

### Abstract:

*Self-reflection is an integral element of teacher professional development and a viable means for sharpening teacher knowledge and skills for subsequent pedagogic applications and improving student learning outcomes. While self-reflection is an individual professional endeavor, it is obviously tied to the professional contexts. As such, the notion of self-reflection is inherently tied to improving teachers' professional agency. However, there is potential for frustration in the enactment of teacher agency if practitioners are not cautious of the contextual constraints within which they have to exercise their agency. For example, changes that require enactment may have wider implications for institutions of employment, institutional policies of assessment and teaching, colleagues, and stakeholders. This paper aims to get an in-depth description of a teacher's reflection on her professional practice as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher at the university level. This study adopted a qualitative case study as the research design and collected data using a semi-structured interview with an English teacher for specific purposes in the tertiary sector in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The findings of this single case study chartered the frustrations experienced by English teachers in enacting agency for specific purposes in Indonesian tertiary education. These are discussed in relation to the implications they have for teacher agency, professional development, English for Specific Purposes classroom practice, and future research.*

**Keywords:** *English for Specific Purposes; ESP teachers; teacher agency; teacher professional development; teacher reflective practice*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Reflective practice has been acknowledged as a platform for language teachers to enhance their professional development (Akbari, 2007; Farrell, 2013, 2015; Hidayati, 2018; Richards & Farrell, 2005). It involves teachers critically examining their own teaching methods, beliefs, and ideology (Borg, 2003; Farrell, 2016) and enhancing the teaching quality, which aims for better student learning outcomes (Borg, 2011; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Reflective practice is also evidenced

to provide opportunities for teachers to develop their professional practice. It assists teachers in improving their grasp of student learning needs and behaviors (Farrell & Avejic, 2020; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004), reviewing the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching methods (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Farrell, 2018), creating and applying innovative teaching techniques (Abdar & Shafaei, 2022; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019), and fostering an environment of ongoing teacher professional growth (Farrell & Kennedy, 2020; Hidayati, 2018; Kabilan, 2007).

In the area of teaching English as a foreign or second language, teacher reflective practice is seen as fundamental in unveiling the belief of experienced language teachers, as the reflection can help explain different attitudes towards teaching in second language classrooms. Research (e.g., Borg, 2003; Farrell, 2016) has demonstrated that there may be a difference between what teachers believe they do in the classroom and what they actually do. One way to bridge this gap is to encourage teachers to reflect on their practice. Reflection is expected to enable teachers to reflect on events, make judgments, and adjust their teaching behaviors in light of teachers' underlying assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning. These are considered to be "the driving force ... behind many of their classroom actions" (Farrell, 2016, p. 225). These teachers are thus proactive decision-makers who take more control of their classrooms and are considered transformative teaching professionals.

Despite the importance of teacher reflective practice at different stages of the teaching career, however, previous studies investigating reflective practice conducted by English teachers both in Indonesian and global contexts have mainly focused on pre-service (Azizah et al., 2018; Kuswando, 2014) and novice teachers (Derinalp, 2022; Hidayati, 2018; Farrell, 2023; Fatemi et al., 2023). Of interest for the present study, despite the importance placed on teachers being reflective practitioners at various levels of the teaching career, studies on the reflecting practices of in-service English language teachers are scant in number. To fill in the gap, the current study explored self-reflection conducted by experienced teachers who, at the time of the study, have taught English for Specific Purposes at the university level for more than ten years. It sought to answer the following overarching questions: 1) how does an experienced teacher of English for Specific Purposes at the university level view reflective practice as a part of professional practice and development? 2) how does the reflective practice encourage the teacher to critically evaluate her professional practice, such as professional agency? This paper, thus, contributes to providing an in-depth description of an ESP teacher's reflection on her professional practice.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Teacher Reflective Practice**

Reflective practice is essential for teachers to avoid impulse and routine behavior (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Farrell, 2022). In a broader sense, reflective practice is not merely thinking about an issue closely related to teaching and learning practice. It goes beyond answering the questions of what teachers do, why they do it, and the student learning outcomes; instead, it encompasses a careful consideration of future action to unite theory and practice (Farrell, 2013, 2022). Indeed, reflective practice may allow teachers to analyze, evaluate, and adjust their teaching practice and become more responsible for their own professional development (Farrell, 2016). Farrell (2015) defined the reflective practice as a cognitive process in which teachers "systematically collect data about their practice, and, while engaging in dialogue with others, use the data to make informed decisions" (p. 123) to enhance not only their inside but also outside classroom practice. By

making use of evidence-based analysis of their teaching and informed decisions, teachers are able to make necessary transformations in their teaching, which avoids the routine circle (Farrell, 2018; Malmir & Mohammadi, 2018).

Research on reflective practice in teaching is crucial for improving teacher quality, shaping policy, and enhancing student learning outcomes. By identifying effective strategies, such research ensures that reflective practices are integrated into teacher development programs, thereby supporting better educational outcomes. In order to enhance teacher quality development, research (such as Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Farrell & Avejic, 2020; Farrell, 2023; Hidayati, 2018; Motallebzadeh et al., 2018) can be made use to pinpoint effective teaching strategies and best practices for integrating reflective practice into teacher professional development. Research also has the potential to influence both policy and practice, including that pertaining to teacher professional development. By providing evidence-based guidance, research can ensure that reflective practice is incorporated into teacher training and development programs in an efficient and sustainable manner (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Kramer, 2018). Finally, research can assist in identifying how reflective practice contributes to improved student learning outcomes. Teachers may learn how to use reflective practice to enhance student outcomes by studying the connection between reflective practice and learning outcomes (Rezapour & Fazilatfar, 2023).

In Indonesian contexts, research highlights the importance of reflective practices for both pre-service and in-service English teachers. For pre-service teachers, teacher reflection mostly took place during teaching practicums and was evidenced to bring advantages for pre-service teacher development. For example, Azizah et al. (2018) found that pre-service English language teachers engage in reflection-in-action during their teaching practicums, reflecting actively while teaching. They also participate in group reflection sessions with mentors, peers, and supervising educators to address teaching challenges and make informed lesson-planning decisions. Exploring how pre-service teachers reflected on their motivation to become educators during the teaching practicum, Kuswandono (2014) highlighted that pre-service teachers' motivations for entering the profession significantly shape their professional identity.

For in-service teachers, reflection aids in managing the complexities of teaching, as seen in studies emphasizing its role in reassessing methods and enhancing the teaching-learning process. Hidayati (2018), for instance, emphasized the value of self-reflection in managing teaching complexities, including merging the theory into practice (praxis). Also exploring novice teachers' views on reflective practice, another study noted the reflection's role as a coping strategy, sharing knowledge, and re-evaluating teaching methods to improve the teaching-learning process (Derinalp, 2022).

These studies collectively argue for integrating reflective practices into the pedagogical content knowledge offered in initial teacher education (ITE). Derinalp (2022) particularly supports dedicating a specific course to help student teachers deeply understand and engage in effective reflective practices. There is a strong advocacy for integrating reflective practices into teacher education curricula, including dedicating specific courses to ensure teachers fully understand and effectively engage in these practices.

In summary, studies in Indonesian contexts reveal that reflective practices are crucial for both pre-service and in-service English teachers. Pre-service teachers engage in real-time reflection and collaborative sessions to improve teaching, while in-service teachers use reflection to navigate

teaching challenges. The integration of reflective practices into teacher education is recommended to enhance professional growth and teaching effectiveness.

## **2.2. Teacher Professional Agency**

Teacher professional agency involves teachers' ability to make independent decisions and implement actions that lead to significant changes in their teaching (Eteläpelto et al., 2014). As such, teachers' professional agency, as Anderson (2010) contends, fundamentally represents their ability to make moral decisions, behave with integrity, and spark significant change. The degree of a teacher's professional agency can be measured by their capacity to make decisions on their own, base these decisions on careful consideration of purpose and value, carry out actions in line with their decisions; and implement real changes in their teaching methods (Priestley et al., 2015).

Teacher agency extends beyond individual action to include collective and relational dimensions, empowering teachers with autonomy and a voice in their professional roles. Eteläpelto et al. (2014) further this viewpoint by emphasizing that professional agency is exercised by individual teachers or communities when they exercise influence, make decisions, and take positions that affect their work and professional identities. Teacher agency is, therefore, characterized by teachers feeling empowered, having a voice, and having autonomy in carrying out their daily professional responsibilities.

In light of the importance of teacher-reflective practice as well as teacher professional agency for transformations in teacher professional development and teacher professional practice as agents of change (Kramer, 2018), this study attempts to explore a teacher's perspectives of her self-reflective practice. While self-reflection is a teacher's professional endeavor, it is obviously tied to the professional contexts. As such, the notion of self-reflection is inherently tied to improving teachers' professional agency. Therefore, the current study can provide an in-depth description of a teacher's reflection on her professional practice, including the exercise of her professional agency as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher at the university level.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design and Participant**

As stated earlier, this study is aimed at exploring a teacher's perspectives and providing an in-depth description of a teacher's self-reflective practice on her professional practice, including the exercise of her professional agency as an English for Specific Purposes teacher at the university level in Indonesia. Aligned with the purposes of the investigation, a single case study was carefully selected (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2009, 2018).

A case study is a research methodology that entails the investigation of a real-world, contemporary, bounded system over an extended period of time (Creswell, 2013). By emphasizing analytical generalization over attempts to demonstrate statistical generalization or prove theory, Yin (2018) emphasizes that the single case study serves the aims of the generation as well as the expansion of theory. These claims highlight the importance of case study research as an exploratory tool. An in-depth grasp of the self-reflection practices of an ESP teacher in the Indonesian tertiary sector is made possible by the study's use of the case study design, which is consistent with the investigative character of the research.

Being a single case study, the data for this study came from one teacher participant. This was a purposeful decision based on the idea that the participant's understanding of their reflective practices made a unique case in a particular setting, according to Yin (2018). The potential participants were selected based on several criteria, such as experienced teachers having more than five years of experience teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the university level at the time of the data collection period. Notably, only one potential participant was willing to be involved in this study and therefore selected.

The participant has been teaching ESP for more than a decade at one of the universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. While she was teaching at the university, she also freelanced at other universities. At the time of her studies, she was teaching only at one university. Academically, she held both a bachelor's and master's degree in English Education from an Indonesian university. The teacher participant's primary responsibilities encompassed teaching ESP courses to undergraduate students across various faculties, such as Engineering, Education, Business, and Social and Political Science.

### **3.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this study were collected through a single semi-structured, open-ended interview that lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview, conducted in English (as requested by the participant), was specifically designed to elicit the participant's perspectives on and experiences with self-reflection as one way to develop her professional practice. Questions were aimed at encouraging the participant to reflect on various elements, including the nature of professional reflection, her engagement in reflective practices, the potential benefits of reflective practice for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers, and its applicability for evaluating and improving teaching practices. The interview was audio recorded to facilitate transcription, coding, and analysis, ensuring a thorough analysis. Apart from conducting interviews, the data were also gathered by closely examining pertinent curricular documents, i.e., the course syllabuses for the university's English for Specific Purposes course.

To analyze the data, selective coding, in accordance with Clarke's (2005) methodology, was used in order to shed light on the complex relationships between the participant's experiences with reflective practice and the theoretical factors that were previously covered in the study with regard to the reflective and professional practice of ESP teachers.

Situated within the body of current literature, the interview material was thoroughly examined as part of the analytical process. Referring to Clarke and Braun's (2017) Thematic Analysis, key reflections were taken from the transcripts to capture the participant's insights on professional reflection and her reflective practice involvement. These were then subjected to a thematic analysis. The study's findings sections included a detailed analysis and discussion of some interesting snippets from the interview data analysis, which are provided as excerpts.

### **3.3. Validity and Reliability**

Careful attention to external and internal validity, as well as the reliability of the study's methodology and data analysis, all contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the current single case study and the interpretations drawn from the participant's reflective practice experiences as well as the analysis of the syllabus document. Many steps were taken to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the results in order to improve internal validity. In order to establish rapport and have a thorough grasp of the situation, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time

with the teacher participant. The participant's response bias was minimized in interviews by using probing strategies and open-ended questions to get the participants' authentic viewpoints.

Although there is limited generalizability in the results of a single case study (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2009, 2018), attempts were made to improve the external validity of the findings by including comprehensive contextual information on the ESP teacher and the learning environment. This aided the researcher in determining how well the results were translated to comparable contexts. The interview protocol was carefully designed and put to the test for clarity in order to guarantee methodological reliability. To ensure the dependability of the study, a systematic strategy to data analysis was adopted, which included independent transcript coding and frequent meetings with a second coder to address differences.

## 4. RESULTS

In the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teachers continually strive to develop effective teaching strategies and foster professional growth. This study explores the reflective practices of an ESP teacher, highlighting the complexities of their experiences, attitudes, and the impact of self-reflection on their professional practice. The findings demonstrate a detailed picture of one teacher's journey through reflective practice, revealing a dynamic interplay of optimism, frustration, and exercise of teacher agency in the pursuit of continuous improvement. The teacher displayed a positive attitude towards reflective practice while also confronting the constraints of mandated policies. This dual experience heightened the teacher's awareness and, paradoxically, empowered her to navigate the unique challenges of teaching ESP. This section illuminates the multifaceted nature of the teacher's reflective engagement, offering significant insights into both individual professional growth and the broader context of ESP.

### 4.1. Teacher Reflective Practice: Unveiling Perspectives

Teacher-reflective practice is an integral aspect of professional growth and instructional improvement. The first theme that emerged from the data analysis indicated the perspectives of the teacher on her own reflective practices, shedding light on the timing, organization, and focal points of self-reflection.

According to the teacher participant, self-reflection is an innate process for teachers, occurring spontaneously at various points in the teaching cycle. As the teacher remarked, "*Self-reflection is something that teachers, whether they realize it or not, always do.*" (lines 6-7) The timing varies, manifesting during, immediately after, or even long after the teaching process concludes, as the teachers elaborated:

"So there is no fixed time for self-reflection. It can be right in the middle of the teaching process, it can be right after the teaching process, it can be way after the teaching process has done, then you realize that there is actually something that you can improve from the teaching process itself." (lines 7-9)

Although the participant acknowledged that reflection could be unconsciously undertaken at any phase of the teaching process, she also emphasized the importance of organized self-reflection. The teacher expressed that "*you basically have a lot of ideas how to improve your teaching or your material, but then, as usual, your ideas will be all over the place,*" (lines 28-29), suggesting the need for structure and direction. Organized self-reflection, driven by clear objectives, plays a pivotal role in enhancing teaching practices (Farrell, 2022).



In her opinion, organized self-reflection involves setting objectives and having a clear focus because *"when the self-reflection is organized, or there is a direction: what am I going to do, what is my objective... having a note really helps in doing self-reflection"* (lines 30-31). This indicates that the teacher's notes or journal could assist her aim for organized self-reflection. Teachers might take a minute to reflect on their work by keeping a written record of occurrences in the classroom and other parts of their practice in their teaching journals (Farrell, 2022). Teachers who keep a teaching diary on a regular basis might gather material that, when reviewed, interpreted, and thought about later, can help them understand their work better.

In addition to self-reflection as an individual professional endeavor, the teacher participant also revealed that collective reflection with colleagues proved to be beneficial in managing pedagogical issues because

it is a good idea for ESP teachers to do a more organized, more directed self-reflection. In the way that it is not a self-reflection anymore, it is more like group reflection because we have several teachers who have expressed the same problems." (lines 214-217)

The teacher engaged in both self and collaborative reflection with the overarching hope for continuous improvement. The participant shared that,

"When I did self-reflection, I hoped that every aspect of my teaching would improve the next time I have to teach the same class. That is my hope. That is why I do self-reflection." (lines 43-44)

The collective reflection was also viewed as an ongoing, spontaneous process that holds the potential for continuous improvement. This was evidenced as the collaborative reflection was used as a space for the teacher and her colleagues to navigate challenges in the pedagogical practices:

"... and we can come together and then discuss what we did in the classroom and then confirm that we are actually facing the same challenges. Because we have the same challenges, we have to come up with solutions for them. And also because group reflection, I think, is actually stronger than self-reflection, in the way that if you have more than one teacher expressing the same constraint." (lines 217-221)

This perspective underscores the forward-looking nature of reflective practice, driven by a commitment to enhancing teaching methods and outcomes (Farrell, 2016; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

With regard to the content of the reflection, the aspects of ESP teaching that teachers self-reflect upon vary, but one common focal point is instructional materials. As the teacher revealed, *"I think the aspect that I self-reflect the most is one aspect that I am concerned about the most, which is the materials"* (lines 75-76). This concern revolves around assessing the suitability of materials for students, addressing questions of difficulty levels, and ensuring optimal engagement:

"My concern is whether this material works or not. And what I mean by whether it works or not is whether the material is really above the students' capability, or whether it is just right for the students, or whether it is too easy for the students." (lines 76-78)

The fact that the primary focus of the reflection is often centered on instructional materials indicates teachers' dedication to tailoring content to the student's learning needs and capabilities

of their students, which are the main characteristics of ESP teaching (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2022).

To sum up, the findings within this theme showcase the teacher's commitment toward her continuous improvement, which includes systematically organizing and deliberately designing either self or collective reflective practice in accordance with ESP teaching principles.

#### **4.2. Teacher's Agency: Reflecting on Challenges and Policy Shifts**

This theme explores the experiences and difficulties that an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher faces, emphasizing the teacher's ability to exert agency in modifying language instruction to fit the different needs of students enrolled in different study programs. The results clarified how changes in institutional policies affect teacher autonomy and the fundamentals of ESP.

Following what the teacher reflected with regard to the teaching principles of ESP (as depicted in the earlier section), the teacher acknowledged as well as celebrated 'the freedom' to design a personalized syllabus for ESP classes, recognizing the diverse and specialized needs of students from different study programs. As the teacher described,

“When I first taught these classes, these ESP classes, I automatically assumed that since my classes were from different study programs or faculty, they had special needs, different needs. So, for example, students who were studying engineering they need English which supports anything about engineering, really, so it is ESP, right?” (lines 116-119)

Reflecting on these tenets of ESP teaching, the teacher conducted a needs analysis as detailed below:

“I got to design my own syllabus, I got to decide “oh, these are the perfect materials for my students”. And I interviewed some of the heads of the departments and asked them exactly “What do you think your students need? And what can I do for your students?” (lines 119-120)

“... so I designed my syllabus based on those informal interviews and also based on my research. It was an informal research, by the way.” (lines 125-126)

The capacity to decide on materials and conduct informal interviews with the Heads of Departments showed a proactive approach to understanding and addressing students' specific language needs. It was also evidenced how, through her reflection, the teacher was able to exert her agency, make independent decisions, and carry out actions that led to significant changes in her professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2014).

However, a significant shift occurred when the university insisted on a "one size fits all" approach for ESP classes. Things then took a big turn. The teacher voiced concerns over this guideline, highlighting that ESP was an approach in English language teaching essentially designed to serve particular functions. The mandated approach, however, went against the core tenets of ESP by assuming that all students, regardless of their academic programs, had the same goals, as reflected in the learning topics and the course description in the syllabus, as presented in Table 1: Syllabus requirements and teacher's reflection upon the syllabus. For instance, the selected course topics did not align with the ESP teaching principles, which placed an emphasis on teaching English to perform in target situations within subject-specific topics. There were no subject-specific resources included in the topics, despite the demand that students created texts pertaining to their disciplines.



**Table 1:** Syllabus requirements and teacher's reflection on the syllabus.

Syllabus requirements	Teacher's reflection upon the syllabus
<p>The course description: The four English language skills covered in this course are speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Students are expected to be able to translate texts from English to Indonesian and vice versa, create texts, speak and understand the rules of English grammar, and rewrite texts related to their subjects by the conclusion of the semester.</p>	<p><i>"I cannot use my syllabus at all because the current policy requires a totally different syllabus from my previous one. So, basically, it renders all of my experience in teaching ESP pointless. So they are useless. So now I have to start something from the very beginning, which is teaching English for academic purposes for university students and assume that everybody does not have specific needs."</i> (lines 139-143)</p>
<p>Topics included: English as a global language Constructing English sentences Micro skills in reading Speed reading Academic reading skills Note-taking skills Academic writing skills Academic speaking skills Making an academic presentation</p>	<p><i>"... I think that beats the purpose of ESP because ESP is English tailored for specific purposes. But the current policy... it assumed that everybody has the same purpose. Whether you are a student studying engineering, or music, or arts, doesn't matter. You have the same purpose which is to study in university."</i> (lines 133-135)</p>

As the teacher reflected,

*"... I think that beats the purpose of ESP because ESP is English tailored for specific purposes. But the current policy... it assumed that everybody has the same purpose. Whether you are a student studying engineering, music, or arts, doesn't matter. You have the same purpose, which is to study at a university."* (lines 133-135)

The teacher articulated the challenges and conflicts arising from the imposed policy shift. The requirement for a standardized syllabus rendered the teacher's previous experience and tailored approach obsolete. The tension stemmed from the belief that the new policy negated the essence of ESP, where language instruction should align with the unique linguistic demands of students in diverse academic disciplines (Hyland, 2022).

In response to the policy change, the teacher expressed the need to embark on a new teaching approach, now focusing on English for academic purposes for university students. This shift, however, meant assuming a uniformity of needs across disciplines, overlooking the specific language requirements inherent in ESP. The teacher argued that

*"I cannot use my syllabus at all because the current policy requires a totally different syllabus from my previous one. So basically, it renders all of my experience in teaching ESP, pointless. So they are useless. So now I have to start something from the very beginning which is teaching English for academic purpose for university students and assume that everybody does not have specific needs."* (lines 139-143)

The results of a detailed examination of the course syllabus as a teaching document, which showed a departure from the principles of ESP, corroborated the teacher's statement. The course description, for example, explained that reading, writing, speaking, and listening were the

four English language skills that were covered in the course. The ability to translate subject-specific texts from English to Indonesian and vice versa, write and speak in English, and understand the rules of English grammar were all skills that students should acquire (see Table 1. Syllabus requirements and teacher's reflection upon the syllabus).

The findings underscore the intricate relationship between teacher agency, institutional policies, and the principles of English for Specific Purposes. While the teacher initially enjoyed the autonomy to tailor language instruction, the imposed 'one size fits all' policy created challenges and frustrations. The shift towards a uniform syllabus contradicted the core principles of ESP, highlighting the tension between teacher agency and institutional directives in the pursuit of effective ESP education. The teacher's reflection called attention to the importance of preserving teacher agency in ESP contexts to ensure meaningful and tailored language instruction for students with diverse academic pursuits.

#### 4.3. Teacher's Frustration: Navigating Constraints on Teacher Agency within Mandated Policies

This theme encapsulates the teacher's frustrations in trying to put her ideas into practice while working within the constraints of an enforced policy. A closer look at the interview data revealed the teacher's difficulties exercising teacher agency and the uncertainty surrounding the acceptance of their innovative ideas within the current policy framework.

The interview transcripts illuminated the frustration experienced by the teacher attempting to enact her agency within a mandated policy. For instance, the teacher mentioned that while as an ESP teacher, she should aim *"for accommodating the differences in students' learning needs"* (line 122), she was not sure if that principle could be put into practice. This unpredictability foreshadows the topic of frustration:

"Because I have a lot of ideas and I know that there are a lot of things that requires fixing in my class because of this new policy. But the thing is I am not really sure whether the authority will actually listen to my idea and then consider my idea into the practice of teaching." (lines 198-200)

"the thing is when there is this new policy coming and then all that result from the self-reflection will be for nothing, if the policy is the complete opposite of what I want to achieve in the class. And so if there is no interference from the institution, I would say applying a new direction based on self-reflection is quite easy because you know your class, you know the characteristics, and you have been doing this for ages. So it is easy except when somebody tells you "change direction." (lines 172-177)

When asked how she felt about this situation, she succinctly answered, *"Obviously, frustrated"* (line 195). The teacher elucidates their frustration by articulating the dichotomy between having innovative ideas and the concerns that higher authorities might not consider or implement those ideas in the teaching practices. As the teacher reflected,

"So, my way of overcoming these challenges is to take things into my own hands. By this, I mean I have to do some self-reflection. in the way that my self-reflection has to be based on, for example, something real like a student interview, I interview them, or I give them a survey, I ask them directly, "What do you think about today's lesson?" And I reflected on that, and I try to fit everything into the policy because, obviously, I cannot change the policy, so I have to change my method; I have to change whatever it is that I can change while still applying the policy." (lines 185-191)

"I don't think they have a forum for discussion for this. And I am not really sure whether they are open for feedbacks or not. Because I think they have a different concern than the teachers." (lines 203-205)

The uncertainty surrounding the reception of innovative ideas and the absence of established channels for teacher feedback contributed to a sense of disempowerment among ESP teachers. This underscored the need for a more collaborative and responsive approach to policy implementation (Kramer, 2018), one that considers and incorporates the valuable insights and ideas of teachers in shaping effective teaching practices. The teacher recounted that.

"I used to have full autonomy, but now well, they have decided on the material, they have decided on how to do this. And so we can only do things in secret... we secretly give them supplementary materials when it comes to fulfilling their specific needs." (lines 150-152)

because "*we cannot completely ignore the students' needs, so we give the supplementary materials which are relevant to their field of study in secret*" (lines 157-159). Teachers were encouraged to have a sense of responsiveness and open-mindedness as the requisite to be reflective teachers (Lubis, 2018). The teacher's reflection above demonstrated such important characteristics, comprising being adaptive and responsive to changing situations.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The current case study spells out the exploration of teacher reflection that unveils the inherent and often spontaneous nature of teacher's self-reflective practice. The teacher, as reflected in her narratives, engaged in reflective practices throughout various phases of the teaching process. This natural inclination toward self-reflection serves as a testament to the dynamic and continuous nature of professional growth (Akbari, 2007; Farrell, 2013, 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2005). It was also evidenced how the teacher's self-reflective practice led to her exercise of agency, which allowed her to customize her teaching methods to each student's specific needs.

Teacher agency is central to successful pedagogy (Priestley et al., 2015; Eteläpelto, et al., 2014). When it comes to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teachers first take pride in the freedom that is granted to them, which permits them to create customized curricula based on unstructured interviews and research (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Sharpling, 2002; Widodo, 2015). The introduction of a 'one size fits all' approach, however, changes the course of the story. Afterward, this study particularly captures how the discourse shifts when institutional policies intervene, shaping the situation within which the ESP teacher functioned accordingly. Teachers' agency was being challenged by this change. Thus, the teacher participant must re-evaluate and adjust her methods to comply with the new guidelines. It is in line with what Jenkins (2019) termed as a proactive agency.

The findings also charter the teacher's frustrations with the enactment of the agency. The current study shows how frustration emanated from the clash between the teacher's pedagogical expertise, grounded in understanding the unique needs of students, and the institutional directive advocating a more general approach. In response to the challenges posed by the institutional policy, the teacher faced the need to adapt and reset their teaching approach. This finding is aligned with the results of previous studies by Liyanage et al. (2014) and Priestley et al. (2015), arguing that teachers should or could achieve agency over the curriculum they enacted that comes from top-down control of curriculum through input regulation, such as prescription of content, teaching methods, and teaching materials. However, this adaptation meant a departure

from the principles of ESP, moving towards a broader focus on English for Specific Purposes for university students. This shift implied an assumption of uniform language needs, potentially overlooking the specialized requirements inherent in ESP (Harper & Widodo, 2018). The shift towards a standardized syllabus posed challenges to the teacher's agency, rendering the previously designed syllabus and accumulated experience seemingly obsolete.

This discussion on teacher agency in ESP raises critical questions about finding a balance between institutional directives and the pedagogical principles of ESP (Suherman, 2024). Preserving teacher agency becomes pivotal in ensuring that educators can continue to make informed decisions (Kramer, 2018), design tailored language instruction, and address the specific linguistic demands of students across diverse academic disciplines. The frustration encapsulated in the narratives of teachers reflects the clash between the desire for autonomy and the imposition of institutional directives. A similar finding is also demonstrated in the study by Liyanage et al. (2014), which captured struggles and dilemmas experienced by English language teachers in Inner Mongolia in attempts to exercise agency amidst the instructional demands. Teacher frustration surfaces prominently in the context of ESP, where policies deviate from the inherently tailored nature of language instruction. The challenges faced in enacting teacher agency within mandated policies manifest in the uncertainty of implementing innovative ideas, particularly when faced with rigid, one-size-fits-all directives.

The intricate relationship between teacher agency, institutional policies, and the fundamental goals of ESP underscore the challenges the teacher participant faced in navigating her professional agency within structured educational environments. This concern calls for a reconsideration of policies that may compromise the tailored nature of ESP and emphasizes the importance of fostering teacher agency to enhance the effectiveness of language instruction in specific academic contexts.

This frustration experienced by the teacher also emphasizes the need for a more collaborative and responsive approach to policy formulation and implementation (Kharlay et al., 2022). Recognizing and preserving teacher agency within ESP and similar specialized teaching contexts is crucial to ensuring that teachers of ESP can continue to exercise their expertise in addressing the diverse linguistic needs of students (Abdar & Shafaei, 2022; Anderson, 2010; Eteläpelto, et al., 2014).

In moving forward, educational institutions must also establish channels for meaningful teacher input, allowing for a symbiotic relationship between policy and practice (Harper & Widodo, 2018; Suherman, 2024). This collaborative paradigm would not only mitigate frustration but also contribute to the creation of policies that are more attuned to the dynamic and specialized nature of language education, in this case, ESP education in particular (Chan & Lee, 2021). In this symbiosis, teacher reflection can become a powerful tool for informing and shaping policies (Farrell & Avejic, 2020; Sellyta & Fithriani, 2024; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004), thereby fostering an environment where teachers can exercise agency effectively and contribute to the continuous enhancement of language education.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study has demonstrated a teacher's positive attitude towards reflective practice, embodying a commitment to continuous improvement. This journey, however, was not devoid of challenges, as the teacher grappled with conflicts arising from mandated policies in the teaching of ESP. The

awareness of frustration became a crucial aspect of the reflective process, highlighting the nuanced interplay between teacher agency and external constraints. As the ESP teacher navigates the complex landscape of teaching in diverse contexts, this study provides valuable insights into the potential of reflective practice as a tool for professional development. The positive attitude, coupled with the acknowledgment of challenges and the cultivation of agency, accentuates the transformative power of reflective engagement.

In conclusion, the interplay of teacher reflection, agency, and frustration within the context of institutional policies reveals a delicate intertwining between professional autonomy and systemic directives. Teacher reflection, an intrinsic element of professional development, becomes both a source of empowerment and vulnerability when confronted with policy shifts. The imposition of standardized approaches challenges teacher agency, prompting a reconsideration of teaching methodologies and a potential departure from the essence of tailored ESP language instruction.

The relatively small sample size of the study is acknowledged as a limitation that may affect the generalizability of findings. Nevertheless, rather than being a critique, this limitation is acknowledged as a fundamental feature of the case study research. Prioritizing in-depth analysis of the findings' generalizability allowed the case study researcher to better grasp how the teacher participant may exercise agency through self-reflective practice. Future research might aim to investigate how teacher reflection might be used to navigate potential pedagogical problems in the enactment of the agency.

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