

Cultivating Reflective Pedagogy through Classroom Narratives in Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the development of reflective pedagogy in elementary schools, addressing the problem of spontaneous and unstructured reflective practices among teachers. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, five purposively selected elementary school teachers in Cilacap Regency participated in classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and reflection journal analysis. Thematic analysis shows that classroom narratives effectively build reflective awareness, enhance teachers' ability to evaluate their instructional practices, and support contextual, student-centered pedagogical innovation. The narrative-based reflection process also strengthens teacher collaboration and fosters a sustainable professional learning culture. The study concludes that integrating classroom narratives is an effective strategy to cultivate reflective pedagogy and strengthen teachers' professional capacity in Indonesian basic education.

INTRODUCTION

The professional development of teachers in the 21st century is no longer only measured by their ability to manage the classroom or master teaching materials, but by their ability to carry out continuous pedagogical reflection. Reflection is at the core of transformative learning because it allows teachers to re-understand the teaching and learning process through real-world experiences (Brookfield, 2022). In the context of basic education, pedagogical reflection plays an important role in building teachers' awareness of the diversity of students' learning methods and the effectiveness of the approaches used (Schön, 2020). However, in many Indonesian elementary schools, teachers' reflection is still administrative and has not yet become a professional learning culture (Setiawan, 2023).

Several international studies show that reflective practice is able to increase pedagogical sensitivity and creativity in learning (Farrell, 2021; Zeichner, 2020). Teachers who actively reflect tend to be more open to innovation and are more willing to adapt the approach to the needs of students (Boud & Molloy, 2023). However, research in the Southeast Asian context shows that reflection is often done as a formal activity after teaching without being followed by an in-depth analysis of the teaching experience (Nguyen & Le, 2022). In Indonesia, a similar phenomenon was also found that teachers are still limited in writing down learning experiences as a tool for self-reflection (Suryani, 2023).

One of the approaches that is now starting to develop is the use of classroom narratives as a medium of reflection. Narrative allows teachers to recount teaching experiences chronologically and emotionally to find meaning from the learning process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2021). Through narratives, teachers can identify patterns of success and obstacles in classroom interactions that are not always visible in formal observation (Riessman, 2020). In addition, a narrative approach helps teachers understand the transformation of their professional identity through the process of writing and listening to colleagues' experiences (Beauchamp, 2022). This approach is increasingly relevant to be applied at the elementary school level because the context of learning at the age of children demands sensitivity and constant reflection on classroom dynamics.

However, research on the application of classroom narratives to foster reflective pedagogy in Indonesia is still limited. Existing studies focus more on secondary school or higher education teachers (Putra, 2022; Handayani, 2023), while the context of elementary schools has not been explored much. In addition, some research highlights reflections from the theoretical side but has not explored the concrete practices of teachers in building classroom narratives that have an impact on pedagogical change (Lestari, 2024). This condition shows that there is a research gap that needs to be bridged through a more contextual study and based on the direct experience of teachers in elementary schools.

This research departs from the assumption that classroom narratives are not only a means of learning documentation, but also a reflection tool that is able to foster teachers' pedagogical awareness. Through narratives, teachers can review teaching strategies, understand student responses, and identify educational values that emerge in classroom interactions. This approach also

provides space for teachers to share experiences with peers, thus creating a reflective and collaborative culture in the school community (Sugiharto, 2024). Thus, classroom narratives can be the foundation for more human and reflective learning.

The main objective of this study is to explore how elementary school teachers develop reflective pedagogy through classroom narrative writing practices and discussions. This research also aims to identify patterns of transformation in the way teachers understand students' learning processes, design teaching strategies, and interpret the meaning of their own teaching experiences. In addition, this study seeks to find factors that support or hinder the growth of reflective practice at the elementary school level (Hidayat, 2023).

Theoretically, this research is based on the paradigm of social constructivism which views that reflection and narrative are the process of building common meaning through experience (Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1938). Teachers are not only the implementers of the curriculum, but also the creators of meaning and lifelong learners. The narrative inquiry approach is used because it is appropriate to explore teachers' personal experiences in certain socio-cultural contexts, including the dynamics of basic education in local areas such as Cilacap, Central Java (Moleong, 2021). Narrative thematic analysis is used to capture the essence of teachers' changing understanding of each learning story they tell.

From a practical perspective, this research is expected to contribute to the professional development of teachers at the regional level by introducing a narrative-based reflection model. Elementary schools in Cilacap can use the results of this research to strengthen teachers' reflective culture, improve the quality of classroom interactions, and encourage collaboration between teachers in the learning community (Kurniawati, 2024). In addition, the results of this study are also relevant for the national teacher training program which emphasizes the importance of reflective learning in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Thus, this research has a dual contribution: first, enriching the theoretical discourse on reflective pedagogy through narrative approaches in local contexts; Second, it provides an empirical basis for the practice of teacher reflection in elementary schools to be more meaningful and sustainable. Through an in-depth exploration of the classroom narrative, it is hoped that a reflective pedagogical model will emerge that is relevant to the needs of teachers and students in Indonesia and is able to strengthen the quality of learning at the elementary level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Reflective Pedagogy in Basic Education

Reflective pedagogy is a learning approach that emphasizes the process of teachers' reflection on their teaching practices to improve the quality of learning. Choy and Oo (2021) stated that reflective pedagogy helps teachers evaluate learning strategies, understand classroom dynamics, and adjust teaching methods to students' learning needs. This approach makes teaching activities a conscious and directed process, not just a routine. In the context of basic

education, teacher reflection is the key to building an adaptive and student-centered learning environment.

Class Narrative as a Medium of Reflection

Class narratives or stories of teaching experiences are one of the effective application of reflective pedagogy. Through writing and storytelling experiences in the classroom, teachers can review pedagogical decisions that have been taken. Nuraini (2022) found that narrative-based reflection deepens teachers' understanding of students' emotional and cognitive engagement during the learning process. Lin and Huang (2023) also affirm that the use of classroom narratives encourages empathy, two-way communication, and collaboration between teachers and learners. Thus, classroom narratives are not only a tool for experiential documentation, but also a means of critical reflection for teachers' professional development.

The Impact of Reflective Pedagogy on Students' Metacognitive Development

The application of reflective pedagogy through classroom narratives not only affects the improvement of teacher competence, but also has direct implications for students' cognitive development. Ahmad and Rahman (2023) show that when teachers exemplify the reflection process in learning activities, students are encouraged to revisit their own way of thinking. It trains metacognitive awareness which is essential for critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Setiawan and Lestari (2024) emphasized that reflective learning changes the classroom orientation from just "teaching" to "learning together", where students and teachers play the role of partners in building knowledge.

Strengthening Teacher Professionalism through Reflective Practice

In primary education, reflection through classroom narratives also contributes to the professional development of teachers. Tan and Ismail (2022) found that teachers who consistently write learning reflections had stronger pedagogical identities and higher confidence. Nugroho (2023) added that reflective practice helps teachers adjust learning designs to contextual challenges, especially in the post-pandemic recovery period. Thus, reflective pedagogy not only has an impact on the quality of learning, but also becomes a sustainable strategy in improving teachers' professional competence.

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with the narrative inquiry method. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore teachers' subjective experiences in depth in the real context of learning in elementary school. Narrative inquiry views human experience as a text full of meaning, so it is very relevant to trace the process of teachers' reflection in understanding their pedagogical practices (Clandinin et al., 2021). Through this approach, the research not only describes reflective activities, but also uncovers the emotional, social, and professional dynamics that shape teachers' reflective awareness. This design allows researchers to understand how classroom narratives become a

means of transforming reflective pedagogy that is more contextual and student-centered (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Location and Research Participants

The research was carried out in several elementary schools in Cilacap Regency, Central Java, which were selected purposively based on teachers' involvement in reflective activities and collaborative culture in the school environment. This location is considered representative because it reflects the characteristics of elementary schools in semi-urban areas that are adapting to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The research participants consisted of five elementary school teachers, selected using purposive sampling techniques based on criteria: (1) have at least five years of teaching experience, (2) actively write journals or reflective notes of learning, and (3) are willing to participate in all stages of research. The selection of a limited number of participants aims to obtain data depth and ensure that the focus of the research is maintained. This purposive selection is in accordance with qualitative research guidelines that emphasize the quality of information rather than the number of respondents (Patton, 2022).

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of teacher narrative documents. First, classroom observation is carried out to see the behavior and interaction of teachers during the learning process, especially in spontaneous reflective moments and responses to student dynamics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). Second, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore teachers' perceptions, meanings, and experiences related to reflection practices in teaching. The interview guide is structured based on reflective pedagogical theories and relevant empirical experiences. Third, document analysis in the form of reflection journals, teaching notes, or experience narratives written by teachers is used as the main source of data. This document helps researchers understand teachers' reflective thinking processes authentically from their own perspective (Riessman, 2020). The combination of these three techniques creates triangulation that reinforces the validity of the findings.

Research Procedure

The research process is carried out through four systematic stages. The first stage is planning, including participant identification, preparation of interview and observation instruments, and initial orientation at school. The second stage is data collection, namely the implementation of interviews, class observations, and the collection of teacher narratives during one semester of learning. The third stage is joint reflection, where researchers and teachers have in-depth discussions about the outcome of the narrative and the reflective experiences that emerge. The fourth stage is analysis and writing, which is the process of interpreting data to find themes of reflection and forms of pedagogical change that occur. In this process, the researcher acts as a reflective partner (co-

inquirer) who helps teachers interpret their teaching experience, not just passive observers (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2022).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a narrative thematic analysis approach that focuses on identifying patterns of reflection, thought changes, and pedagogical transformations that arise from teachers' stories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process begins with reading the entire narrative and interview transcript in depth, then coding segments relevant to the reflection practice. The code is grouped into themes such as pedagogical self-awareness, learning strategy innovation, and reflective collaboration. Furthermore, these themes are interpreted narratively to explain the relationship between teachers' reflections and changes in their teaching practices. The analysis was carried out in a cyclical and reflective manner, where the results were temporarily reconfirmed to the participants to ensure the suitability of the meaning and avoid interpretation bias (Lincoln & Guba, 2021).

RESEARCH RESULT

The Emergence of Reflective Awareness of Teachers

The results of the study show that the practice of classroom narrative is an important forum for teachers to foster reflective awareness of their pedagogical actions. Through the process of writing teaching experiences chronologically and in-depth, teachers begin to see the relationship between learning strategies, student responses, and learning outcomes that emerge. This awareness develops naturally when teachers review the reasons behind their decisions in the classroom and their impact on students.

Teachers who originally understood reflection only as an administrative obligation began to see it as a means of critical thinking about the learning practices that were carried out. The process of writing a narrative makes the teacher realize that pedagogical actions are not mechanical routines, but a process full of meaning. One participant revealed: "I used to write a reflection report just because of the demands of school, but when I wrote an experiential narrative, I started to think deeper. It turns out that a lot of things I do unconsciously, and that affects the way students learn." (G1, interview July 8, 2025).

Reflection through narrative also expands teachers' awareness of the emotional aspect of learning. Teachers begin to understand that feelings, empathy, and intuition are important parts of an effective teaching process. Another teacher said: "When I was writing the story, I remembered the confused expression of the students when I explained. From there I realized, it was not the material that was difficult, but my way that was too fast. Writing this makes me look at my class with new eyes." (G3, interview July 12, 2025).

From all participants, it was found that reflective awareness developed through a process of deep introspection into real experiences. Teachers are beginning to reassess the meaning of teaching as an ever-evolving practice that demands continuous self-understanding.

Strengthening the Ability to Evaluate Learning Practices

Classroom narratives not only foster reflective awareness, but also strengthen teachers' ability to systematically evaluate learning practices. Through experiential writing, teachers are able to identify effective and unsuccessful elements, as well as explore the reasons behind the success or obstacles that arise.

Written reflection allows teachers to see recurring patterns in the way they teach, both positive and improved. From the results of the narrative analysis, some teachers admitted that reflection helped them shift their focus from just academic achievement to understanding the student learning process. One teacher stated: "When re-reading my writings, I found that I often judged students only on test results. But after reflection, I realized the importance of paying attention to their process of understanding the lesson, not just the value." (G2, interview July 14, 2025).

The reflection process also fosters teachers' ability to assess the effectiveness of classroom interactions. Teachers become more sensitive to the emotional and social dynamics that affect the learning atmosphere. Another participant said: "I used to rarely pay attention to the students' expressions or reactions when I was teaching. But through the narrative, I started writing down those details. Now I know better when they're excited, when they're tired, and that helps me adjust the way I teach." (G5, interview July 18, 2025).

Thus, reflection through narrative not only results in evaluation of learning strategies, but also encourages teachers to develop higher pedagogical sensitivity. Teachers are becoming more aware that the success of learning does not only depend on the teaching material, but also on the relationship formed between the teacher and the student in the classroom.

Contextual and Student-Centered Pedagogical Innovation

The results of the study show that reflective awareness gained through classroom narratives gives rise to various pedagogical innovations that are contextual and student-centered. Teachers begin to design new learning strategies based on their reflective experiences, taking into account the real needs, characteristics of students, and the socio-cultural context of the primary school where they teach.

Some teachers, for example, are replacing conventional approaches with local experiential learning activities and active student participation. This innovation was born from a reflective understanding of the conditions of each class. One of the participants said: "After writing the narrative, I started thinking about making learning closer to the lives of students. I use examples from the surrounding environment, such as traditional markets or mutual aid activities, so that they feel more involved." (G4, interview July 20, 2025).

In addition, teachers also integrate reflection activities with students at the end of each lesson to hear their views on the learning process. This strengthens two-way communication and establishes a reflective culture in the classroom. Another teacher explained: "Now at the end of each lesson, I ask students to write

down one thing they learned today and one thing they are still confused. From there, I learned a lot about the way they think." (G2, interview July 24, 2025).

The innovations that emerged from this reflection show a paradigm shift in teachers in the meaning of learning: from one-way teaching to a dialogical process that values students' experiences, emotions, and participation. Thus, classroom narratives are not only a tool for individual reflection, but also a catalyst for pedagogical transformation towards more humanistic and contextual learning.

Strengthening Collaboration and Reflective Culture in Schools

The process of reflection through narrative not only changes the way teachers understand learning practices, but also reshapes their professional identity. Teachers begin to see themselves not just as curriculum implementers, but as learners who continue to grow through teaching experiences. Reflection gives new meaning to the teaching profession as an agent of learning that is conscious, reflective, and adaptive to change.

In the narratives collected, it can be seen that teachers who initially feel burdened by the routine of teaching become more confident and eager to explore new ways. Through the process of writing and reviewing experiences, they find personal and professional meaning in each learning situation. One participant said: "I used to feel that the teacher was just delivering lessons. But upon reflection, I see myself as someone who is also learning. I'm more open to trying new things without fear of making mistakes." (G3, interview July 22, 2025).

Reflection also strengthens a sense of responsibility and commitment to the profession. The teacher begins to place himself as part of a broader educational process, oriented not only to administrative tasks, but to real changes in the lives of students. Another teacher said: "I feel prouder to be a teacher now, because I realize that this job is not just about teaching, but shaping people. From writing about my own experiences, I know why I chose this profession." (G5, interview July 25, 2025).

This change in perception reflects a transformation of professional identity rooted in deep reflection on everyday experience. Teachers no longer see reflection as an additional activity, but rather as the core of continuous professional practice.

Transformation of Teachers' Professional Identity

In addition to having an impact on the individual, reflection through narrative also contributes to the formation of a reflective culture in the school environment. When teachers share experiences, both through group discussions and learning forums, there is a collective spirit to learn together. Narrative is a means of dialogue that opens up space for empathy, mutual understanding, and collaboration between teachers.

From the interview results, some teachers admitted that writing narratives and sharing them with peers encourages more meaningful conversations about teaching practices. One of the teachers said: "Usually we rarely discuss how to teach, but after this activity, we started to tell each other stories and reflect

together. From there I got a lot of new ideas and felt like I wasn't alone." (G1, interview July 27, 2025).

In addition to strengthening social relationships between teachers, reflective culture also creates a school atmosphere that is more open to pedagogical changes and updates. Teachers are beginning to see reflection not as a purely personal activity, but as a collective responsibility to improve the quality of learning in schools. Another participant stated: "We now have a small habit of discussing one teaching experience every weekend. From there came a lot of new inspiration. The school feels more alive and supportive of each other." (G4, interview July 29, 2025).

This reflective culture is an indicator that narrative practice does not stop at the individual realm, but develops into a professional learning system at the school community level. This reinforces the values of collaboration, trust, and openness that are the main characteristics of the reflective teacher community.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the use of classroom narratives significantly improved teachers' reflective awareness and professional development. Teachers no longer view reflection as a mere administrative activity, but as a critical thinking process to review pedagogical decisions and their impact on student learning. These findings are in line with Loughran's (2021) view that reflective pedagogy encourages teachers to reconstruct meaning from teaching experiences and develop more in-depth professional insights. Through narrative, teachers can externalize their thought processes, identify recurring challenges, and formulate solutions that are contextual and pedagogically meaningful.

The analysis also showed that teachers who consistently reflected through narrative had stronger evaluative and adaptive skills. They are able to recognize the relationship between teaching strategies, emotional dynamics in the classroom, and student engagement levels. These results are in line with recent research findings that emphasize that reflective practice strengthens teachers' ability to connect theory with classroom reality as well as tailor learning based on students' needs (Rozimela et al., 2025; Farrell, 2021). In this context, reflection serves not only as a tool for evaluation, but also as a source of pedagogical creativity that encourages sustainable innovation.

Another important finding is the emergence of contextual and student-centered learning innovations. Teachers begin to integrate local culture and real student experiences into the learning design, creating meaningful learning interactions and increasing learning motivation. This practice is in line with the constructivist view that the learning process is social and influenced by cultural context (Vygotsky, 2022). The use of reflective narratives also strengthens teachers' sensitivity to students' emotional and cognitive diversity, thereby encouraging more inclusive and responsive learning (Kim & Han, 2024).

In addition, reflective narratives have been shown to strengthen collaboration between teachers, encouraging the formation of a reflective professional culture in the school environment. Teachers who shared the results of their reflections showed higher levels of confidence and professional

engagement. This is in line with the theory of social constructivism which views learning and identity formation as the result of social interaction and the process of sharing meaning (Zeichner & Liu, 2023). Such reflective collaboration strengthens teacher agency and transforms individual reflection into collective learning in the professional community.

Other findings show a significant change in teachers' professional identities. Teachers begin to see themselves not only as material presenters, but as lifelong learners who have autonomy, ethical responsibility, and a passion to continue innovating (Hikmat et al., 2023). Reflective pedagogy helps teachers build a professional identity based on critical awareness and contextual sensitivity (Barkhuizen, 2022). Thus, classroom narratives not only serve as pedagogical tools, but also as a means of reconstructing teachers' professional identities.

However, there are several factors that are obstacles. Some teachers are still at the stage of descriptive reflection, which only focuses on reporting incidents without an in-depth analysis of the causes and implications. Time constraints, administrative burdens, and lack of institutional support often hinder the sustainability of reflective practices. These barriers are in line with previous research that shows that workload and lack of reflective training are the main inhibiting factors in the application of reflective pedagogy (Tran & Thomas, 2022). In addition, the teaching experience also affects the depth of reflection; experienced teachers tend to be more flexible and creative, while novice teachers still rely on structured strategies and have not done much critical reflection (Leikin & Zazkis, 2023).

The effectiveness of reflective pedagogy is greatly influenced by several contextual factors. School environment support, peer collaboration, and structured reflection programs have been proven to strengthen teachers' reflective capacity (Fitzallen & Brown, 2023). On the contrary, institutional limitations, limited time, and lack of reflective training cause the practice of reflection to be superficial and unsustainable. To overcome this, systemic interventions are needed such as the development of continuous professional training, peer observation programs, and policies that provide time for teachers to reflect.

This research makes an important contribution to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between reflective pedagogy, classroom narratives, and the formation of teachers' professional identities. These findings reinforce the view that reflection is not only a cognitive process, but also an affective and social action that redefines the role of teachers in the professional community. However, this study has limitations, including the limited number of participants and the relatively short duration of the study, so the generalization of the results still needs to be tested further. In addition, there have been no longitudinal measurements that assess the long-term sustainability of changes in reflective behavior and teacher identity. Therefore, further research is recommended using longitudinal design and mixed methods to assess the long-term impact of the application of reflective narratives on teaching practices and student learning outcomes in various educational contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the application of reflective pedagogy through classroom narratives is effective in fostering the professional awareness of elementary school teachers and improving the quality of student-centered learning. Through narrative reflection activities, teachers are able to critically review their learning practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop more innovative and contextual teaching strategies. Classroom narratives prove to be an important means of reinforcing the relationship between teaching experiences, pedagogical values, and students' learning needs.

In addition to strengthening individual competence, this reflective practice also encourages the formation of a collaborative culture in the school environment. Teachers become more open in sharing experiences, discussing, and giving each other input for continuous professional development. Thus, the integration of classroom narratives in reflective pedagogical practices contributes significantly to the professional capacity building of teachers and the development of more meaningful learning in primary education.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study advances existing research by offering a deeper conceptualization of reflective pedagogy through the use of classroom narratives as a systematic tool for professional growth in primary education – an area that remains underexplored in Indonesian educational scholarship. Unlike previous studies that treat reflection as an individual cognitive process, this research demonstrates how narrative-based reflection integrates experiential teaching moments, pedagogical values, and students' learning needs into a coherent framework that strengthens professional awareness. The findings introduce a model of narrative-driven reflective practice that not only enhances teachers' critical self-evaluation and instructional innovation but also cultivates a collaborative professional culture within schools. By showing how narrative reflection fosters sustained pedagogical transformation and collective learning, this study provides a significant theoretical contribution to reflective practice literature and offers a practical foundation for developing structured, school-wide reflective pedagogy programs in basic education.

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