



Exploring Student-Centered Instructions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning in Indonesia through Trioethnographic Reflections

Ratu Nur Rozi Sekar Wungu^{1,a}, Meilinda Choirun Nisa^{2,b}, Muhammad Hanif Ali Firdaus^{3,c}, *Usep Syaripudin^{4,e}, Turini Erawati^{5,d}

^{1,2,3,4,5}Department of English Education, Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia

ratunurrozi@gmail.com^a, meilindachoirunnisa12@gmail.com^b,
muhhammadhanifalifirdaus5@gmail.com^c, syaripudin.usep@gmail.com^d,
turinierawati335@gmail.com^e

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*Correspondence Author:

syaripudin.usep@gmail.com

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This article examines professional development through the lens of trioethnographic reflections to enhance student-centered teaching practices. Trioethnography, derived from duoethnography, is a qualitative research method where two or more researchers engage in reflective dialogue to explore an issue. We collected data through four reflective conversations, guided by faculty advisors, during our teaching practicum. Our analysis identified three key themes from these dialogues: (1) reexamining our beliefs about student-centered instruction, (2) recognizing sociocultural barriers to this approach, and (3) sharing experiences of relearning teaching methods. These conversations created a safe space to exchange insights and collaboratively build understanding. The findings have significant implications for teachers and teacher education. First, teachers must continually reassess the beliefs and assumptions that underpin their teaching. Second, understanding students more deeply is crucial for effectively implementing student-centered teaching, especially in EFL contexts. Third, preservice teacher education should emphasize the importance of self-reflection and critical examination of teaching beliefs, fostering both personal and professional growth. Lastly, future research should narrow its focus on specific practical issues within student-centered EFL teaching to further enrich the field and improve teaching practices. Collaborative reflection should become a routine part of teacher education programs to better prepare future educators.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a complex endeavor that requires teachers to continuously reexamine their practices for professional development (Mathew et al., 2017). This article explores our professional

development practices, where we reexamine our teaching practices in terms of implementing student-centered instructions through duoethnographic reflections. Although we refer to our work as trioethnography, this term was adapted

from duoethnography to emphasize the collaboration and reflective dialogue between us and our faculty advisors. According to Lowe et al. (2021), trioethnography is a synthesis of cooperative autoethnographic narratives that enable researchers to "draw from their own life histories and experiences in order to explore personal manifestations of social and cultural phenomena."

The original framework of duoethnography (Sawyer and Norris, 2016) guides our methodology, emphasizing reflective dialogue between two individuals. In our case, we extend this concept by involving faculty advisors in the reflective process, which inspired us to adopt the term trioethnography. The reflective inquiry took place during our teaching practicum, where we engaged in reflective conversations facilitated by our university faculties. These dialogues allowed us to share stories and critically reexamine the student-centered instructions we implemented in our classrooms.

The context of our reflective inquiry was the school teaching practicum we experienced at the beginning of our senior year in the teacher education program. We engaged in trioethnographic reflective conversations facilitated by our university faculties. We shared stories from our teaching practices and asked each other questions that encouraged us to reexamine the student-centered instructions we implemented in our classrooms.

In our teaching practicum, we conducted teaching in a public junior high school in our hometown of Cirebon, West Java. The practicum lasted for four

months. In the practicum, we were assigned to teach English in two classes at the second grade. We shared our stories from our teaching practices in the reflective dialogues facilitated by faculty advisors.

Our trioethnography was sustained by previous studies identifying the value and benefits of reflective practice for preservice teachers. Researchers have acknowledged the critical role of reflection in preservice teacher education (Faghighi & Sarab, 2016; Pandey, 2012; Tiainen et al., 2018). Previous studies have found that reflection on teaching practices helped preservice teachers make a connection between the conceptual knowledge they learned in college and the realities they found at schools (Yesilbursa, 2011) and to "build a sense of agency as future professional teachers and develop their autonomy and self-confidence" (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018, p. 922). Furthermore, researchers have taken numerous aspects of reflection to be investigated, such as the use of video recording to facilitate reflections (Susoy, 2015), preservice teachers' levels of reflection (Nurfaidah et al., 2017), reflection and preservice teachers' self-efficacy (Moradkhani et al., 2017), and preservice teachers' reflection of their reflective teaching (Afshar & Farahani, 2018).

Moreover, our trioethnography was also informed by previous research claiming that the preconceptions of teaching held by preservice teachers were influenced by sociocultural factors that shaped the way how society views teachers and their works (Bjork, 2013;

Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2006). In Indonesian society, teaching is regarded as a socially respected profession. The word for teachers in Indonesian is *guru* – a Sanskrit word for a mentor or someone who masters specific knowledge. In Sanskrit, a *guru* is more than a teacher. They are counselors who instill values and experiential knowledge and assist in the birth of the mind and one's self-realization. A *guru* is a role model who inspires and assists students' spiritual development (Mlecko, 1982).

Meanwhile, in Indonesian, the word *guru* is composed of the syllables 'gu' from *digugu* (to be obeyed, followed, and trusted) and 'ru' from 'ditiru' (to be imitated). Therefore, *Gurus* in Indonesia are noble people whom students must obey, follow, trust, and imitate because they are the sources of knowledge, wisdom, and inspiration. *Gurus* are responsible for providing guidance and serving as role models of noble characters. That is why Indonesian sociocultural values put teachers in second place after parents in the hierarchy of people to whom students must give the highest respect. This socio-cultural definition of teachers as *gurus* in Indonesian society is further strengthened by the religious values dictating disobedience to teachers as a sin.

The definition of a teacher as a *guru* has influenced Indonesian teachers' and students' beliefs about their respective roles and responsibilities in teaching and learning activities. According to studies by Dardjowidjojo (2006) and Wachidah (2001) in Dardjowidjojo (2006), Indonesian teachers believe that they are

the primary source of knowledge. They see themselves as knowledge providers and consider students merely the recipients of knowledge. These beliefs are manifested in the teaching strategies, material selection, student-teacher interactions, and other activities the teachers use in classrooms. Meanwhile, since the students also view teachers as *gurus* they must obey and imitate, Indonesian students are mostly defendant learners (Wachidah, 2001) in Dardjowidjojo (2006). They are reluctant to actively participate in the classroom because they believe their role is to receive the knowledge the teachers transmit. Therefore, Bjork (2013) claims that it is unsurprising that teacher-centered instruction still dominates Indonesian classrooms.

Our trioethnography was motivated by our interest in understanding student-centered instructions more deeply. In 2021, the Indonesian government introduced a new curriculum named *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which exclusively mandated the implementation of student-centered instructions. As future English teachers, we are responsible for supporting the implementation of such a teaching approach. However, our analysis of previous studies has revealed that student-centered instructions have not yet been fully implemented in Indonesian school classrooms. Many studies claimed that teachers' competence, large classrooms, and limited resources and support systems were the primary contributing factors to the unsuccessful implementation of student-centered instructions in Indonesian classrooms (Musthafa, 2002;

Imperiani, 2021; Hayati, 2010). However, we argue that another fundamental factor has been largely overlooked: the sociocultural values of teachers as *gurus* embraced by Indonesian society. Long before the introduction of the curriculums that mandated the implementation of student-centered learning, studies by Kirkpatrick (1995, 1996) and Dardjowidjojo (1997), cited in Djardjowidjojo (2000) had found that sociocultural values have become the barriers to the adoption of the student-centered instructional approach in Indonesia. These studies claimed that cultural barriers prevent teachers from transitioning from master teachers to learning facilitators.

While numerous studies have claimed the critical value and benefits of reflection for preservice teachers, especially in Indonesia, many of those studies placed preservice teachers as the objects of their study. Our trioethnography took a rather different path to reexamine reflective practice in teaching, where we examined our practice using trioethnography reflective conversations. Instead of examining the issues by studying other teachers' experiences, we used our own experience as the topic to discuss through trioethnography reflection.

In this article, we explore "in what ways did the trioethnographic reflective conversation foster us to reexamine our experience in implementing student-centered instructions in our teaching practicum?" With our inquiry, we expect to contribute to the scholarly conversation about preservice teachers' reflection by

presenting a unique way of examining how they reflect on their practices using trioethnography. We outline more detail about trioethnography in the following section.

METHOD

Lawrence and Lowe (2020) define duoethnography as "a qualitative research methodology in which two researchers utilize dialogue to juxtapose their individual life histories to come to new understandings of the world." Since our inquiry involved more than two researchers, we named our study trioethnography.

We approached our inquiry using trioethnography because we played a dual role as researchers and participants. Trioethnography allows us to be in the context of our own study and explore our topic of interest through dialogues (Lawrence & Lowe, 2020).

As Norris and Sawyer (2016, p. 10) suggested, in our trioethnography, we articulate our emergent thinking and changes in perception to our readers through dialogic storytelling. Moreover, our decision to use trioethnography for our study was also informed by the fundamental tenets of duoethnography outlined by Norris and Sawyer (2016), which matched the purpose of our study. Trioethnography allows us to explore, understand, and adjust our thinking about student-centered instructions through collaborative, reflective dialogues.

In the dialogues, we engaged in a making-meaning process that led to a better understanding of the issues we studied. The polyvocal and dialogic

process of trioethnography has provided a trusting platform to share our experiences and voices about student-centered instruction in EFL learning, leading us to collaborative co-constructions of meaning. As a result, conducting trioethnography has allowed us to challenge our preconceptions about the issue under study and fostered us to reconceptualize our understanding of the issue.

Trioethnography has become an emergent research approach in language learning and teacher education. Many trioethnography studies have been implemented examining numerous topics. Researchers used trioethnography as a methodological approach to investigating numerous issues, such as teacher identity and agency (Banegas and Gerlach, 2021), native speakerism (Lowe & Kiskowski, 2016), English as an international language (Rose & Montikantiwong, 2018), native-speakerism and 'hidden curricula' in English teaching (Lowe & Lawrence, 2018), and language teaching certification (Huang & Karas, 2020). Moreover, other researchers used trioethnography as a reflective tool to examine many issues in teacher education, such as Schaefer & Brereton (2020), Smart & Cook (2020), and Tjandra et al. (2020). These studies indicate that trioethnography is a legitimate approach to studying topics in language learning and teacher education.

Data collection and analysis: the trioethnography process

Our trioethnography occurred within the context of the school teaching practicum we experienced at the beginning

of our senior year in college. In the practicum, we taught English for second graders of junior high school in our hometown of Cirebon. The teaching practicum lasted for about three months. The dialogic reflective conversations in our trioethnography were instructional supervision dialogues with our faculty advisors. In total, we engaged in four conversations.

The conversation took place offline face-to-face as part of instructional supervision practiced by our faculty advisor. Our faculty advisor developed prompt questions to guide the conversations.

The three conversations focused on examining the implementation of student-centered instructions in our teaching practices, and one conversation focused on examining the process of the duo ethnographic conversations. The conversation lasted for about 30 to 45 minutes. In our conversations, we shared stories and artifacts from our practices in implementing student-centered instructions. The faculty advisors played the role of critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993) who asked provocative questions, provided another lens through which to look at the issues we presented in our conversations, and offered critiques to our teaching practicum in supportive ways. The faculty advisors also helped us analyze our conversations and develop trioethnography writings in this article. We followed Braun & Clark's (2021) thematic analysis of our trioethnography conversations. With this approach, we began the analysis process by transcribing all the audio-recorded conversation

datasets. We individually read the datasets and generate initial codes. Our initial codes include phrases that indicated how we felt about the dataset. For example, we generated codes such as belief, understanding, confused, sociocultural, and so forth. We aggregated all the initial codes and reanalysis the dataset to generate themes collaboratively.

Our analysis focused on identifying segments in the conversations that illustrated how engagement in the trioethnographic reflective dialogues facilitated us to reexamine our understanding of student-centered instructions. Then, we shared our codes and collaboratively generated potential and final themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Our inquiry examined how the engagement in instructional supervision conversation using trioethnography dialogues fostered us to reexamine our conceptions and practices in implementing student-centered instructions in our teaching practicum.

Our analysis of our trioethnography conversations has revealed that the conversations can be classified into the following themes: 1) we engage in revisiting our beliefs and perceptions of student-centered instructions; 2) we collaboratively recognize the sociocultural barriers to student-centered instructions; and 3) we shared our relearning experience of student-centered instructions in language learning. Below, we outline these three themes along with the conversation segments that correspond to them. For the brevity of the article, we will

only present the concise segments that clearly correspond to our findings. The original conversation was in Indonesian. We translated the segments to be included in this article.

Revisiting beliefs and perceptions

Engaging in a trioethnography reflective conversation has provided a safe platform to share stories and facts from our teaching practices. Eventually, these sharing sessions have eventually encouraged us to reexamine our beliefs and perceptions about student-centered instructions. The conversation segment below is one of the many sessions where we engaged in a mutual examination of our own beliefs about student-centered instructions. Our faculty advisor asked us to share what we know about student-centered instruction and how we implement it in the classroom.

Rozi : I provide a lot of materials and references from YouTube, the internet, and others. I placed myself as a learning partner. I created a classroom atmosphere that is relaxed, easy-going and focused on the student. I explained the materials and provided my students with the opportunity to ask questions and ask them to perform. Then, I gave them an assignment to work together in groups.

Faculty : How did you see your role in the classroom with that kind of activities:

Rozi : I think I am more like a learning facilitator. I designed varied

activities because I wanted my students not to feel bored and to help them understand the material I explained to them easily.

Hanif : Based on my experience, I began the session by explaining the material. Students are presented with the topic to learn that day and directed to many activities. Then, I usually show videos about learning materials. I also use other media such as pictures, photos, or stories. After that, the students did what I instructed as a teacher.

Faculty : Why did you use different kinds of teaching media?

Hanif : I am a facilitator. I created differentiated instructional materials to help my students understand them better.

Mei : It is more or less the same as Hanif and Rozi. At the beginning, I explained the material using various teaching sources. I give directions that must be clear enough at the beginning so that when students do assignments, they do not miscommunicate or misunderstand. I ask them one by one or in pairs to perform their work.

When our faculty advisor asked us to define our roles in our teaching based on our stories, we agreed to name our role as learning facilitator. Our beliefs and perceptions of student-centered instruction have led us to identify ourselves as

learning facilitators. The conversation segment above marks the beginning of our unlearning process, which started with reconsidering our beliefs and perceptions of student-centered instructions. In the conversation, we shared our stories from practices that shed light on our beliefs about the teaching approach.

The conversations led us to compare our beliefs and perceptions of student-centered instruction in English learning. The polyvocal and dialogic process of trioethnography has provided a constructive environment for us to share our experiences and voices about our practices in implementing student-centered instruction in our practice, which led us to collaboratively co-constructing the meaning of the teaching approach. As a result, conducting trioethnography has allowed us to challenge our preconceptions about the issue under study and fostered us to reconceptualize our understanding of the issue (Norris and Sawyer, 2016). The conversation above also represents one of the benefits and value of reflection for preservice teachers, which is to look inward to themselves and recognize the beliefs and perceptions that sustain their teaching practices (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018; Yesilbursa, 2011; Afshar & Farahani, 2018).

Recognizing sociocultural barriers from ourselves

Another significant experience we had as we engaged in the trioethnography conversations about student-centered instructions was that the conversation had become a mirror for us to reflect on the barriers of student-centered

instructions in our practice. Interestingly, the conversations made us realize that the barriers came from within ourselves – from our beliefs and perceptions.

Mei : I think my role as a learning facilitator is to direct students to learn. I deliver the materials. I explained it to them using a variety of activities. I developed differentiated instructions because I believed that they would help my students learn better.

Faculty : What is the basis of the differentiated instructions?

Mei : My experience. So, I believed that by making the instructional activities and materials differentiated, they would help my students understand the material better and easily.

Faculty : So, were the differentiated instructions based on what you believe to be the best way to teach? Is this not the best way for your students to learn? Not on your students' needs to learn.

Hanif : I did the same thing. I tried to use different materials for different topics based on my experience teaching the same topic in other classes. For example, I gave instructions to the students. Then, I played a video about the topic and told stories about it. I asked the students to raise their hands and ask questions.

Faculty : Why did you use video?

Hanif : Because I thought it would help my students learn better.

Faculty : How do you know that they love the video? Do they love the learning activities? Do they understand better? That was all your assumption.

Rozi : What I did was that I explained the materials. Like Mei and Hanif, I used different teaching media and activities to prevent my students from getting easily bored. Also, to help them understand better.

Faculty : And all of you used your own judgment that those differentiated instructions would fit into your student's learning needs? Was it you who became the center, not your students? Was it you that became the basis for every decision you made in your instructions?

What struck us really hard in this conversation segment was that our faculty asked us the basis of the differentiated instructions we made in our practices. We based all our teaching actions on our assumptions that the materials and the instructional activities would help fit our students' needs and help them learn better. Our faculty questions have just made us realize that we were still at the center of the instructional activities. While researchers have pointed out that teachers' competence, large classrooms, and limited resources and support systems as the primary barriers to the implementation of student-centered instructions in Indonesian classrooms (Musthafa, 2002;

Imperiani, 2021; Hayati, 2010), our trioethnography has revealed that there was one factor that fundamentally inhibited the implementation of student-centered instructions in Indonesia – sociocultural values of teachers as *gurus* embraced by Indonesian society. This sociocultural value has influenced our beliefs and perceptions of our roles as teachers and, eventually, was manifested in our teaching practices.

As a *guru*, we acted as if we were the sole power and knowledge provider in the class. We thought that making our instruction differentiated would automatically make it student-centered. However, since the decision to differentiate the instruction was not based on students' learning context, the instructional activities did not automatically student-centered as every instructional decision was made by and based on our thinking as teachers – *guru*.

Relearning the student-centered instructions: to know our students first

After examining our beliefs and perceptions of student-centered instruction, we realized that the real problem came from within ourselves. The next transformative experience we had from engaging in trioethnography reflective conversations was how we viewed our students.

Hanif : The challenge is now how to understand our students better. How do I make sure that I understand their learning preferences, hobbies, perspectives on English, and everything. I have different

kinds of students with different levels of current English skills. Based on my knowledge of my students' current English skills, I asked them to work in groups to help each other learn the materials at the same pace.

Rozi : I would like to know my students' characteristics better. Some students are super active, while others are too shy to say a word or two. It is not easy to get to know my students better because there are so many of them – I teach a large class. However, I could design differentiated materials that fit their learning contexts when I eventually know them better.

Mei : I found a similar challenge when I tried to know my students better. However, at least now, every decision I make about my instructional activities and materials, I always put my students first; will they like it? Will it be too difficult for them? Will it be too easy for them? How about those whose English is still at a lower level? And so on. Those kinds of questions are the basis of my instructional design activities.

Our new understanding of student-centered instruction was that every teaching decision we made as teachers should be based on our students' learning contexts – their learning preferences, current English level, prior English learning experience, and so on. We now

understand that the smallest step we could take in implementing student-centered instructions is to base our teaching decisions on our students. It would be impossible to implement student-centered instructions without knowing our students. The conversation segment represents the benefits of collaborative reflection on our teaching practice. This benefit is in accordance with previous studies by Schaefer & Brereton (2020), Smart & Cook (2020), Tjandra et al. (2020), Faghighi & Sarab, 2016; Pandey, 2012; Tiainen et al., 2018), (Yesilbursa, 2011), (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018, p. 922), and (Nurfaidah et al., 2017). In our trioethnographic reflection, we engaged in dialogue to juxtapose our practices in implementing student-centered instructions to come to a new understanding of it. The benefits of trioethnography reflections have been acknowledged by researchers.

CONCLUSION

Trioethnographic reflective conversation has become a powerful tool for us to reexamine our own beliefs, understanding, and perceptions of student-centered instructions. As a result, we have come to realize that the sociocultural value of teachers in our society of Indonesia has contributed to shaping our beliefs, understanding, and perceptions of student-centered instruction, which were then manifested in our teaching practices.

In short, trioethnographic reflection has given us a mirror to reflect on ourselves. Reflection would only be powerful and impactful if it fosters us to reexamine our beliefs and preconceptions

about our practice. Moreover, sharing stories and asking questions with each other has also helped us to make our students a priority in designing, delivering, and evaluating our teaching practices.

Our trio of ethnographic reflective conversations has implications for teachers and the field of teacher education.

First, teachers must constantly reexamine all the beliefs and assumptions that sustain our teaching practices. It is possible that the problems might not come from “outside” – our students, materials, etc. The problem might come from within us. Talking with colleagues to examine our beliefs and practices would be a robust professional development practice.

Second, knowing our students better would be the first critical step to implementing student-centered instructions for EFL teaching and learning. It would be impossible to design student-centered learning activities without knowing about them.

Third, for the teacher education program, equipping preservice teachers with the ability to reexamine their own beliefs and perceptions of teaching and the work of teachers would help them develop professionally and personally. Collaborative reflection must become a common practice in teacher education.

Fourth, for future research, our duo of ethnographic has only focused on a big issue in student-centered instruction. Therefore, future studies must examine a more focused practical issue in EFL teaching and learning that would illuminate the field and promote improvement in teaching practices.

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