



## VIETNAMESE PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD COLLABORATIVE REFLECTIVE TEACHING

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**Abstract:** English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional learning has been highlighted as a self-directed and collaborative process, which can be implemented through collaborative reflective teaching (CRT). Although recent studies have documented teachers' attitudes toward various CRT activities, their attitudinal dimensions have not been comprehensively examined, particularly CRT experiences of pre-service teachers (PSTs) in teacher education courses. Thus, this study investigates Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT, focusing on activities of lesson co-planning, peer observations, and peer feedback. Designed as a qualitative case study, the current research utilized semi-structured interviews to yield in-depth data from sixteen Vietnamese EFL PSTs enrolling in a teaching methodology course. The findings clarified teachers' multifaceted attitudes toward CRT, encompassing their cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The majority of the Vietnamese EFL PSTs perceived CRTs' merits in strengthening their teaching competence, critical inquiry skills, professional identity, as well as learning motivation, and they showed their interest and active engagement in CRT activities. Nevertheless, PSTs' obstacles in limited inquiry skills, deficient teaching knowledge, and collaboration issues were also unraveled. Based on these findings, the study presents numerous implications for enhancing the effectiveness of teacher education and professional learning through CRT.

**Keywords:** collaborative reflective teaching, professional learning, pre-service EFL teachers

### 1. Introduction

Since the post-method era, the inquiry-based approach in education has positioned teachers as self-directed and active agents in their professional learning through reflective teaching (Johnson, 2009). It can be performed not only individually but also collaboratively to enhance the depth and breadth of insights gained (Farrell, 2018).

From the lens of sociocultural theory, collaborative reflective teaching (CRT) creates a mediational space where teachers engage in ongoing, in-depth, and systematic examinations of

their teaching practices (Johnson, 2009). CRT encourages teachers to learn from each other's successes and challenges and cultivate critical thinking as they co-examine classroom incidents and attain diverse perspectives from their experiences (Farrell, 2018; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011). Besides, CRT fosters a sense of community and mutual support, creating a shared journey of continuous improvement (Afzali & Salehi, 2022; Loh et al., 2017).

Teachers' attitudes toward diverse CRT have been uncovered in different EFL contexts. Recent studies showed CRT's advantages in enhancing teachers' self-awareness of their professional roles and images, and teaching performance (e.g., Afzali & Salehi, 2022; Çapan & Bedir, 2019; Comoglu & Dikilitas, 2020). Teachers also gradually became more active in CRT activities thanks to their peers' collaboration (Loh et al., 2017). However, other research identified teachers' negative attitudes, including concerns about peer feedback quality, reluctance to engage in critique, and superficial participation due to fear of judgment and perceived inadequacies of personal competence (e.g., Çapan & Bedir, 2019; Yüksel & Başaran, 2020).

Despite such extensive research, limited attention has been paid to the experiences of pre-service teachers (PSTs) engaging in CRT activities within the specific context of micro-teaching, particularly in the Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education programs. Furthermore, to capture the multifaceted nature of PSTs' attitudes towards CRT, several aspects of their attitudinal components need further research, for example, affection for CRT, engagement in CRT activities in teaching methodology courses, and their intention for future CRT.

Accordingly, to build a more comprehensive picture of PSTs' professional learning, the present study investigates the attitudes of Vietnamese EFL PSTs towards specific CRT activities in a teacher education course, namely lesson co-planning, peer observations, and peer feedback. This study, thus, seeks to answer the following research question: What are Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward collaborative reflective teaching for professional learning?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Collaborative reflective teaching as a form of professional learning**

Reflective teaching involves teachers learning from and through their experiences to enhance their expertise (Finlay, 2008) by engaging in thoughtful inquiry into specific incidents encountered in their professional practice (Farrell, 2015). It should be taken as an ongoing journey as teachers not only contemplate prior practices but also modify their teaching to tackle immediate incidents, and strategically prepare for future lessons (Farrell, 2015; 2018). Reflective teaching operates as a systematic cognitive process as it encompasses critical inquiry through identifying problems, analyzing and evaluating the performance, inferring new insights, and

applying them to refine teaching practices (Albakri et al., 2017; Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018; Farrell, 2015). Throughout this cyclical process, teachers can consider personal teaching principles and philosophies, theories, actual practices, and socio-contextual factors impacting their teaching (Farrell, 2015). Ultimately, reflective teaching functions as a transformative tool for teachers' growth of critical thinking and self-awareness, innovating their teaching approaches and integrating new insights into their pedagogical strategies (Çimer et al., 2013; Farrell, 2015).

Richards and Lockhart (2007) suggest that teachers increase the effectiveness of reflective teaching when practicing collectively, which encourages a deeper examination of shared experiences. CRT could be applied through various forms, namely, peer feedback, peer observations, critical friend groups, or peer coaching (Johnson, 2009; Farrell, 2018; Phan & Nguyen, 2021). Notably, in the pre-service teacher training stage, coaching and peer involvement could be common forms of CRT (Kumari, 2014), which foster a supportive environment, exchange essential insights, and give emotional support and encouragement (Fakazli, 2021).

To make their learning effective through CRT, teachers should consider several key principles. They should actively engage in two-way communication by sharing experiences and insights in open, non-judgmental dialogues, hence, promoting a low-anxiety, supportive environment for honest feedback and emotional support (Richards & Lockhart, 2007; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011). Simultaneously, building trusted relationships among participants is vital to ensure critical discussions occur in a supportive manner, fostering ongoing learning (Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011).

From the sociocultural perspective, professional learning is a dynamic process associated with cultural contexts where social interactions and collaborative activities play pivotal roles in the growth of their expertise (Johnson, 2009; Phan, 2017; Nguyen, 2019). Teachers are active learners in this process by constructing knowledge through social engagement and adapting resources to new challenges. Particularly, CRT can create a mediational space that makes teachers more conscious of their performance and assists them in enhancing their competence through dialogue and collaboration (Johnson, 2009; Phan, 2017). To facilitate genuine growth, this collaborative professional learning form necessitates structured, equal partnerships and supportive conditions (Johnson, 2009).

## **2.2. Definition of attitudes**

Pickens (2005) defines attitude as a mental state shaped by individuals' experiences, influencing how they respond to objects and situations. It represents a predisposition or inclination to act in specific ways, impacted by personal experiences and temperament (Pickens, 2005). Likewise, Latchanna and Dagnew (2009) regard attitude as a complex mental and neutral

state, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on an individual's response to objects and situations.

Attitudes are constituted of three interconnected components, namely, cognition, affection, and behavior (Abun et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2018; Pickens, 2005). The cognition component involves thoughts, viewpoints, or beliefs about the phenomena, encompassing individuals' perceptions and knowledge. The affection domain relates to emotional reactions and feelings expressed verbally or nonverbally, such as preferences or dislikes towards an object. Lastly, the behavioral domain, or conative aspect, refers to actions or behavioral tendencies. These components collectively form the basis for understanding and measuring attitudes; thus, they are applied as three constituents to examine PSTs' attitudes toward CRT in the present research.

### **2.3. Previous related studies**

The existing literature has revealed both in-service and pre-service teachers' diverse attitudes toward CRT activities. In this section, teachers' attitudes are reviewed thematically by three attitudinal components, including cognition, affection, and behaviors.

#### *Teachers' cognitive attitudes toward collaborative reflective teaching*

Teachers' cognition of CRT has been examined via their perceived benefits of CRT. First, CRT has been proven to be advantageous for teachers to realize and enhance their teaching performance. Nguyen and Hudson (2012) found that by engaging in CRT in the forms of peer observations and peer feedback in their mentoring groups, Vietnamese EFL PSTs could make sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Studies by Afzali and Salehi (2022) and Comoglu and Dikilitas (2020) consistently highlighted PSTs' perceived benefits in effectively modifying their teaching methods thanks to their peers' feedback. Phan and Nguyen (2021) further confirmed this advantage for Vietnamese EFL novice teachers' growth in classroom management and teaching skills thanks to a critical friend group.

Additionally, CRT could foster teachers' critical thinking skills. Afzali and Salehi (2022) found that by collectively examining their teaching performance, Iranian EFL PSTs could shift from mainly describing teaching incidents to explaining and addressing concerning issues. By the same token, Comoglu and Dikilitas (2020) unveiled that Turkish EFL PSTs could perform a deeper critical analysis of their teaching thanks to reflections in pairs and groups.

Moreover, CRT played a pivotal role in constructing teachers' professional identity. Nguyen and Loughland's (2017) qualitative research with two pairs of teachers in a master's education program in Australia showed that CRT enabled them to better understand their self-image as teachers, refine their teaching principles and philosophies, and cultivate effective classroom management strategies. Likewise, Comoglu and Dikilitas (2020) revealed that

reflections on teaching practices with their peers in the practicum contributed to Turkish EFL PSTs' construction of present and future professional images and their beliefs about effective teaching. Consistent findings were shown by Tiainen and Lutovac (2022), who found that through peer mentoring discussions, three PSTs in Finland clarified their professional roles as pivotal actors in the teaching and learning process.

### *Teachers' affective attitudes toward collaborative reflective teaching*

Prior research showed that PSTs had positive and negative attitudes toward peer collaboration in reflective teaching, yet this attitudinal dimension has still received little attention. On the positive side, Turkish EFL PSTs preferred peer collaboration over mentorship due to a friendly atmosphere, goal-setting opportunities, and familiarity with the lesson in their teaching practicum (Çapan & Bedir, 2019). The Vietnamese EFL PSTs in Phan and Nguyen's (2024) study also approved of involving their peers in the reflective teaching process for comprehensively co-examining their teaching performance.

By contrast, other studies indicated PSTs' negative attitudes stemmed from biased feedback and lack of quality in peer feedback. Çapan and Bedir (2019) revealed Turkish PSTs' concerns about the superficiality and lack of quality in peer feedback on their teaching practices. Similarly, Yüksel and Başaran (2020) found dissatisfaction among Turkish EFL PSTs due to biased peer feedback.

In brief, EFL PSTs' affection for CRT activities is scarcely examined, especially, regarding their affection for peer observations and lesson co-planning.

### *Teachers' behavioral attitudes toward collaborative reflective teaching*

Prior studies have unpacked teachers' varied engagement in CRT activities. As evidenced in Taghizadeh and Zafarpour's (2022) research, Iranian EFL PSTs took peer feedback seriously thanks to a positive and respectful environment, hence, improving their teaching practices. In a case study on a critical friend group of five Vietnamese EFL novice teachers, Phan and Nguyen (2021) revealed that while two teachers actively shared their teaching problems and potential solutions, the remaining three engaged less frequently, possibly due to their introverted personality and discomfort within the group. Afzali and Salehi (2022) also reported senior Iranian EFL PSTs' hesitation in collaborative reflective writing owing to concerns about their peers' negative evaluations.

Meanwhile, other studies underscored teachers' changes in their activeness in CRT thanks to supportive learning sites. Vo and Nguyen (2010) found that Vietnamese EFL novice teachers initially hesitated to critique each other's lessons due to inexperience and fear; yet, with the researcher's facilitation, they became active in idea sharing and cooperative in their teaching and assessment tasks. Aligning with this, Loh et al. (2017) revealed that a hesitant Singaporean

teacher grew more confident and welcoming of lesson observations thanks to her supportive colleagues.

### *Research gaps*

Despite extensive research on teachers' diverse attitudes toward CRT activities, Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT in the context of teacher education courses have been under-researched. Besides, a dearth of previous research has not comprehensively addressed the complexities of PSTs' attitudinal domains to CRT activities, specifically their affective and behavioral dimensions. These gaps necessitate a further investigation of Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes towards CRT in teacher education programs to unveil the effectiveness and feasibility of implementing CRT in their professional learning.

## **3. Research methodology**

### **3.1. Research design**

The present research was designed as a qualitative case study to examine Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT. This research design is characterized by a profound investigation into a small sample and an in-depth examination of a specific and real-life phenomenon related to attitudes, intentions, or behaviors (Cohen et al., 2018; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The qualitative case study design, thus, is appropriate for gaining rich insights into the attitudes of a group of Vietnamese EFL PSTs. Besides, it highlights contextual consideration (Cohen et al., 2018; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007), which allows for a deep understanding of the Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT activities specifically in their teacher education course at a university in central Vietnam.

### **3.2. Research setting and participants**

This study collected data in the setting of a mandatory four-credit course named "Teaching and Classroom Management Skills", which was one of the introductory courses of English teaching methodology in their teacher education program. The course aims to equip the PSTs with knowledge and skills of designing and delivering lessons of English language knowledge and language skills, along with classroom management techniques in accordance with Vietnam's 2018 English National Curriculum for General Education, shortened as 2018 English NCGE (MOET, 2018).

A group of twenty-seven female PSTs enrolled in the course "Teaching and Classroom Management Skills". At the beginning of the course, the PSTs were informed of the research and voluntarily participated in the data collection process. Aged 20-11, the PSTs were in their sixth semester of a bachelor's program in English language teaching and were taking teaching methodology courses for the first time. Concurrently, the PSTs were also taking other teacher

education courses on material development and adaptation, language testing and evaluation, pedagogical psychology, and general education studies. Their English language proficiency was expected to range from B2 to C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

At the beginning of the course, the teacher trainer and the PSTs agreed on the activities that took place every four hours for fifteen weeks. The twenty-seven PSTs were divided into seven groups, named A-G, with three or four self-selected members in each group. For their formative assessment, the PSTs were required to collaboratively work to design and deliver two forty-five-minute lessons on English grammar and language skills, either listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Each group member micro-taught one section of each lesson plan. The target learners were 10th or 11th graders, using Global Success or I-learn Smart World English textbook series in alignment with the 2018 English NCGE (MOET, 2018). The interval between the two micro-taught lessons was a five-week period, as planned in the course. After each lesson plan was commented on by the trainer, the groups revised and practiced their teaching lesson outside the class. As scheduled, each group delivered the lesson to their peers in the class while four other PSTs were invited to act as observers by taking notes and giving oral feedback to the lesson, and other class members acted as students and could voluntarily give oral feedback as well. By the end of the course, sixteen PSTs voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews and these participants are referred to in this paper.

### 3.3. Data collection and analysis

Designed as a qualitative case study, this research adopted semi-structured interviews to gain profound insights into the Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT. Semi-structured interviews were implemented by the end of the course with the voluntary participation of sixteen Vietnamese EFL PSTs. This data collection instrument is valuable in qualitative research for uncovering participants' viewpoints, actions, and events that may not be directly observable (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By employing semi-structured interviews, this study could enlighten the PSTs' attitudes toward CRT activities thanks to predefined questions and flexible elaboration on their responses (Cohen et al., 2018). An interview protocol was designed with a focus on three components of teachers' attitudes, namely, cognition, affection, and behaviors, and piloted in two individual interviews. After that, each one-to-one interview was officially administered and recorded via Zoom Cloud Meetings, using their first language, Vietnamese, for accurate understanding and convenient communication.

The data analysis was conducted by transcribing each recording in Vietnamese, sending transcripts to the participants for verification, and analyzing thematically by categories of cognition, affection, and behaviors as three intercomponents of their attitudes toward CRT. Relevant quotations for each theme were translated into English to clarify the findings, and pseudonyms were used to ensure participants' confidentiality.

### 3.4. Research trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected through semi-structured interviews, the study incorporated multiple strategies addressing dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability (Cohen et al., 2018). To address dependability, the researchers used an interview protocol for all interviews, and carefully examined the consistency of the findings. Confirmability was enhanced by carefully transcribing, analyzing, and translating the data, along with avoiding personal biases in data interpretation. Moreover, this research ensured its credibility by piloting two interviews and sending the data to each participant to check its accuracy. For transferability, although this qualitative case study did not aim at generalizability, detailed information on the research context was provided so that future research can be considered and adopted for relevant settings.

## 4. Findings

The study investigated Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The findings enlightened three interconnected components of their attitudes (cognition, affection, and behavior) toward CRT activities, namely, collaborative lesson planning, peer observations, and receiving and giving peer feedback.

### 4.1. Vietnamese EFL PSTs' cognition of collaborative reflective teaching

The findings from interview data revealed the participants' cognition of CRT, including perceived benefits and challenges in their CRT process.

#### Perceived benefits of collaborative reflective teaching

In examining the perceived benefits of CRT among Vietnamese EFL PSTs, the study unveiled four main emerging advantages. These include the enhancement of critical evaluation and analysis skills, growth in teaching knowledge and skills, construction of professional identity, and increasing motivation for professional learning.

The first merit that most of the PSTs emphasized was the enhancement of their critical inquiry skills as the CRT process enabled them to “observe and evaluate teaching performance” (Khanh), “compare [their] evaluation with others’” (Doan), and “relate others’ strengths and weaknesses to see how [their] performance was” (Hieu). These experiences with CRT, thus, fostered the development of critical inquiry skills among the PSTs, as Nghi stated that “I felt that I made progress in evaluating and providing feedback to others’ teaching”.

All of the interviewed PSTs reported that CRT facilitated the growth in their teaching knowledge and skills. The PSTs enriched their repertoires of teaching techniques and strategies with “experience and new ideas of teaching methods” (Than), “creative and effective teaching



activities" (Hoa), and "teaching methods I had not known before" (Tu). They gained these insights through their teammates' sharing, class members' feedback, and observations of others' teaching performances. Significantly, they reported being conscious of their unnoticed mistakes thanks to their peer feedback, for instance, Thuc remarked, "I committed mistakes while teaching, but I did not realize them until my peers pointed them out".

Additionally, all of the Vietnamese EFL PSTs in this study widely perceived the advantages of CRT in constructing their professional identity, particularly about roles and personalities they should have. By delivering lessons and observing others' teaching, the PSTs were more aware of language teachers' diverse roles in the class. For instance, Lan realized that "the teacher not only delivers knowledge and assigns exercises but also creates a comfortable learning atmosphere and motivates students in learning". Interestingly, teachers' facilitating roles were prevalently emphasized, as Tue stated, "The teacher should mainly observe, monitor, and facilitate students' learning and encourage students' active roles in learning". The CRT process also heightened the PSTs' awareness of essential teaching demeanors and personalities, such as "keeping patient while explaining the lessons for students to understand" (Tue and Nhan expressed in the same words) and "dressing appropriately in the classroom" (Khanh). Interestingly, a few PSTs become conscious of what the teachers should avoid by considering others' shortcomings, as Tu noted, "I noticed several shortcomings of my teammates, for example composing a sketchy lesson plan, so I contemplated that if I work as a teacher, I may avoid such negligent acts".

Furthermore, CRT boosted the Vietnamese EFL PSTs' motivation for professional learning. They were able to mitigate pressure by sharing the workload and receiving support from their teammates. The collaborative environment made them more active inside the classroom, as Tan shared "Instead of passively sitting in class, I had a chance to actively engage in evaluating others' micro-teaching and sharing my opinions and comments". They were also motivated to prepare thoroughly for their lessons and perform the micro-teaching better with the hope of "receiving more positive feedback" (Mai) from their peers and trainers.

### **Perceived challenges in collaborative reflective teaching**

The findings of the present study indicated three main challenges encountered by the Vietnamese EFL PSTs, including limited inquiry skills, deficiencies in teaching knowledge and skills, and struggles to collaborate with their peers.

Despite enhancing their critical evaluation and analysis skills of teaching performance thanks to the CRT experiences, many PSTs admitted having limited critical inquiry skills as they might not have evaluated their peers' performance precisely. They found it challenging to "realize others' shortcomings" (Hoa), "share comments clearly" (Tan), and avoid "focusing too much on ineffective activities rather than well-done sections" (Tue).

Additionally, it was reported that underdeveloped knowledge and skills in teaching the English language hindered the PSTs from providing effective reflective feedback. This was evident in the interview with Thuc who shared that “because my knowledge of teaching methods is not adequate, I do not know what to comment on my peers’ teaching”. Than also shared that “I feel my teaching skills are still limited, so when I observe my peers, I struggle to give them specific suggestions for improvement”.

Furthermore, a common issue encountered by the PSTs was disagreement among their group members in planning teaching activities and distributing their work. This discord gave rise to their demotivation in collaboration, work stagnation, and less coherent teaching performance. Lan noted, “Having differing viewpoints on the lesson’s and activities’ aims, we argued a lot about what aims when designing out the lesson plan”. Similarly, Tue mentioned, “We had various ideas about the teaching contents, techniques, and lesson activities, which wasted much time for negotiation”. Many PSTs also faced difficulties working with inactive or less competent group members who “did not put in the effort as expected for teaching preparation” (Thu) and “seemed not to understand my suggestions” (Hoa), which resulted in their ineffective performance and time consumption. Simultaneously, while collaboratively working on lesson planning, several PSTs encountered challenges in scheduling. For instance, Thuc mentioned, “We were all so busy that it was difficult to arrange the meeting times flexibly. Sometimes, not all group members could attend the meetings”.

#### **4.2. Vietnamese EFL PSTs’ affection for collaborative reflective teaching**

Drawing on interview data, the study explored the Vietnamese EFL PSTs’ affection, as part of the attitude components, for CRT activities (lesson co-planning, peer observations, and providing and receiving feedback). The findings revealed their various emotions, with positive experiences generally outweighing negative ones.

##### **Affection for lesson co-planning**

The Vietnamese EFL PSTs in this study experienced mixed feelings about collaborating with their teammates while preparing for their teaching. Two-thirds of the interviewed PSTs expressed their interest and satisfaction with group work thanks to their group members’ support and shared workload, and they valued the opportunities to learn from their peers. For instance, Han asserted that “When collaborating with my group to prepare for the lessons, I felt satisfied and enthusiastic due to the mutual help and the sharing of ideas for our lesson plan”.

However, five PSTs reported frustration with their members’ irresponsibility, as Nghi complained “I was disappointed with two of my group members for not taking their responsibilities seriously, for example, rarely contributing ideas to our lesson plans”. Besides, three PSTs (Hoa, Nghi, Tan) expressed their demotivation and dissatisfaction with arguments among their group in designing their lesson plans.

### **Affection for peer observations**

The majority of the interviewed EFL PSTs showed a strong interest in observing their peers' teaching, driven by the opportunity to learn more teaching skills and innovative and creative techniques. For instance, Han remarked "I enjoyed observing my classmates' teaching to learn from their lesson delivery and diverse teaching styles", which was similar to Khanh's view that "I was interested in my classmates' lesson delivery to see if they had any fascinating teaching techniques". However, not all of the PSTs shared this enthusiasm; Nghi mentioned that she lost interest if her peers' lessons were boring, and Mai was not yet interested in this activity despite acknowledging its advantages for her professional learning.

### **Affection for giving feedback on their peers' teaching performance**

The Vietnamese EFL PSTs displayed different emotions on giving feedback to their peers. On the one hand, nearly two-thirds of the PSTs reported their enjoyment and openness in providing feedback on their peers' teaching with a view to assisting their peers in identifying effective and ineffective aspects of their teaching. Typically, Doan shared that "I felt comfortable in giving feedback because this contribution might help them improve their future lessons". On the other hand, six PSTs felt reluctant to give feedback owing to concerns about their own limited teaching competence and the potential to offend their classmates, typically, two of them shared that:

"I was a bit worried that I might not be good enough to evaluate certain aspects of my peers' lessons. If my feedback is incorrect, it could negatively affect them." (Hieu)

"I was afraid that I'm too frank in providing negative feedback, which might make them [her classmates] feel uncomfortable or unhappy." (Thuc)

### **Affection for receiving peer feedback on their teaching performance**

Most of the Vietnamese EFL PSTs found it vital and interesting to receive feedback from their peers as they appreciated their peers' attention to the lessons and underscored the feedback's merit in helping them to "address [their] weaknesses and further develop [their] strengths" (Hieu).

Nevertheless, half of the PSTs reported anxiety about receiving constructive feedback due to the pressure of peer evaluation and fear of negative comments, as evidenced by Nhan's statement "I felt very anxious when standing at the podium to receive feedback since I might have made many mistakes. I would be quite disappointed if I received too many negative comments from my peers". Likewise, Thuan shared, "Sometimes I felt pressured because, in addition to the four main observers, many other classmates also participated in the feedback process, and my teaching was scrutinized and analyzed by many people".

Interestingly, Thu and Han reported feeling less anxious over time as they became more accustomed to this reflective activity. Meanwhile, Tu experienced increased nervousness in her last micro-teaching due to her lack of careful preparation, and Thuan's anxiety remained unchanged since she still had many limitations in her performance.

#### **4.3. Vietnamese EFL PSTs' behaviors in collaborative reflective teaching**

The behaviors of Vietnamese EFL PSTs, as the third component of their attitudes toward CRT, were examined with five main themes, namely, engagement in lesson co-planning, attentiveness during peer observations, active participation in giving peer feedback, engagement in receiving peer feedback, and intentions for future CRT.

##### **Engagement in lesson co-planning**

In the interviews, fifteen Vietnamese EFL PSTs reported their active engagement in their group work through various contributions, including adhering to established work divisions and deadlines, sharing ideas for the lesson plan, and providing feedback on their group members' work. Their active participation was derived from the desire for course achievement of high scores (Nghị), enjoyment of assisting their teammates (Han, Hoa), positive group dynamics (Han, Thúc), and expertise growth (Thuan). By contrast, only Tu admitted her inactive participation because her initial feedback on her group members' work was considered ineffective; thus, to avoid being further blamed, she decided not to share her opinions on their teammates' work.

##### **Attentiveness in observing others' teaching**

Most of the interviewed Vietnamese EFL PSTs reported maintaining strong attentiveness when being invited to observe their peers' teaching. Sharing this dedicated focus, Nghị asserted "I paid my full attention to my classmates' teaching to evaluate them" and Thu noted, "I kept high concentration on their teaching and tried to understand all their activities and objectives". However, a few interviewed PSTs (Khanh, Tue) acknowledged occasional decline in their attention to observing and evaluating their peers as each of them played the dual role of an observer and a student in the micro-teaching. Moreover, half of the interviewed PSTs reported their strong focus on their peers' lessons though they were not invited to act as observers, whereas other PSTs were less attentive because they supposed their peers' lessons were boring and "got caught up in personal chit-chat" (Tu).

##### **Engagement in giving feedback on peers' teaching**

Two-thirds of the interviewed Vietnamese EFL PSTs shared that they were willing and active to comment on the teaching performance of the groups that they were invited to observe. For instance, Hoa, Nghị, and Than shared the same viewpoint with Thu about giving feedback that:

“I kept highly focused during the observation process and noted various comments, both on the strengths and aspects for improvement. Therefore, I could provide all those comments for my classmates to know what to be maintained and what to be improved.”  
(Thu)

Meanwhile, one-third of the interviewed PSTs shared that they were less active in commenting on their peers’ lessons. This was due to their lack of confidence in giving feedback (Thuc, Tu), lack of interest in the observed lessons (Hieu), and hesitation to provide constructive feedback (Lan, Nhan).

In the same vein, the study also uncovered the PSTs’ varied participation in providing peer feedback when they were not invited as observers. In the interviews, half of the PSTs shared that they were eager to offer feedback to other groups despite not being invited. In contrast, others only undertook oral peer feedback when being specifically invited (Mai, Nghi, Tu) or even never did this (Lan) as they believed that the assigned observers’ feedback was sufficient and accurate.

### **Engagement in receiving peer feedback**

All of the interviewed Vietnamese EFL PSTs in this study valued feedback from their peers and reported being attentive during feedback sessions in order to improve their performance. Notably, most of the PSTs received their peers’ feedback without further discussion or responses, except for Khanh, Thuan, and Thu, who responded by explaining their teaching techniques in more detail. The reasons for the PSTs’ rare responses included agreement with the given feedback (Nghi, Tan, Than), finding it unnecessary to respond (Doan, Han, Lan, Mai), being too worried to discuss more about their teaching (Nhan), and feeling shy (Tu). Interestingly, many interviewed PSTs reported paying close attention to their classmates’ feedback on others’ teaching to compare it with their evaluation, hence learning from others’ experiences (Han, Tue, Thuc) or contributing additional feedback (Hoa, Nhan).

### **The intention of future collaborative reflective teaching**

The analysis of interview data revealed a strong desire among all of the PSTs to continue engaging in CRT. They constantly emphasized the needs, enjoyment, and significance of CRT for enhancing their teaching competence, as Khanh highlighted “In my teaching process, I really need someone to objectively evaluate my teaching, pointing out my strengths and weaknesses”. All of the PSTs also highlighted the intention to continue CRT activities throughout their future teaching methodology courses, teaching practicum, and even their later teaching career.

Furthermore, the PSTs in this study expressed specific expectations for future CRT. They desired to join future observations of different teachers, as Thu shared “I hope to observe one

lesson delivered by different teachers to see how differently each conveys the activities". The PSTs hoped to receive peer feedback of higher quality that should be clear, focused, and constructive by "giving feedback in Vietnamese" (Tue), "balancing between evaluating strengths and weaknesses rather than just ineffective performance" (Nhan), "avoiding lengthy comments by pointing out the same problems of the whole group once" (Thuan). Simultaneously, they hoped their peers would respect their contributions as Doan shared: "I hope my peers listen to my feedback and see it as a contribution to improve their future teaching".

## 5. Discussion

The study investigated Vietnamese EFL PSTs' attitudes toward CRT employing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The research unveiled three interconnected components of their attitudes - cognition, affection, and behavior - toward CRT activities, including lesson co-planning, peer observations, and receiving and giving peer feedback.

The findings revealed that the Vietnamese EFL PSTs held positive attitudes toward CRT. Most of the interviewed PSTs perceived the benefits of CRT in enhancing their critical thinking skills, particularly through consulting the multi-dimensional perspectives of others. This resonates with previous studies on PSTs' perceived development in critically evaluating teaching performance through CRT with their peers. Moreover, the PSTs reported improvements in their teaching knowledge and skills, particularly heightening awareness of unnoticed issues and accumulating innovative teaching techniques, indicating the outstanding merit of collective reflections over self-reflection (Johnson, 2009; Fakazli, 2021; Richards & Lockhart, 2007). This confirmed the findings in studies by Çapan and Bedir (2019) and Afzali and Salehi (2022) with Turkish EFL PSTs and Phan and Nguyen's (2021) research with Vietnamese EFL novice teachers who enriched their teaching competence thanks to collaborative learning with their peers. Besides, Vietnamese EFL PSTs in this study perceived CRT as beneficial in shaping their professional identity by helping them gain a deeper understanding of their roles and images in teaching. This is consistent with findings from studies on PSTs in various contexts (Comoglu & Dikilitas, 2020; Nguyen & Loughland, 2017; Tiainen & Lutovac, 2022).

Aligned with these positive cognitions, the Vietnamese EFL PSTs also exhibited positive emotional responses, such as interest and satisfaction with collective lesson planning, peer observations, and feedback. All of them expressed a desire to engage in CRT in the future, with specific expectations for their peers to further enhance the effectiveness of collaborative professional learning. These findings imply PSTs' positive emotions and intention toward CRT, expanding the existing literature on affective and behavioral components of PSTs' attitudes toward CRT activities in teacher training courses.

However, the findings indicated varied engagement across the PSTs in collaborative endeavors of lesson planning, observations, and feedback, which aligned with the diverse participation of in-service teachers in studies by Phan and Nguyen (2021) in the Vietnamese context. Teachers' less frequent engagement in CRT activities could be attributed to their personality traits of introversion and shyness (Phan & Nguyen, 2021) along with a lack of collegiality with their peers. In this vein, the Vietnamese EFL PSTs reported collaborative issues in disagreements in group work, and inactive and less competent teammates, which were common problems in CRT shared by Turkish EFL PSTs (Çapan & Bedir, 2019). Besides, the challenges in performing reflective teaching of the PSTs in this study, including limited teaching knowledge and critical thinking skills, were also encountered by the PSTs in Phan and Nguyen's (2024) study in a similar context.

These findings on the PSTs' both positive and negative attitudes to CRT indicate that peer collaboration exerted considerable impacts on their professional learning experiences. The active participation of peers boosted the PSTs' eagerness in CRT activities and brought them numerous benefits, whereas instances of peers' irresponsibility and lower competence demotivated the PSTs in collective activities. Recent studies on teachers' CRT yielded consistent findings on peers' influences on individual teachers' learning experiences (Çapan & Bedir, 2019; Phan & Nguyen, 2021; Taghizadeh & Zafarpour, 2022; Yüksel & Başaran, 2020). From the sociocultural lens, teachers' professional learning is derived from social interactions that either support or hinder their learning effectiveness (Johnson, 2009; Nguyen, 2019). This underscores the crucial role of peer competence and collaboration in determining the effectiveness of the CRT process (Clarà et al., 2019).

In addition to external influences of peer interactions, the study revealed the Vietnamese EFL PSTs' active roles in their professional learning, as emphasized by the sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009; Nguyen, 2019; Phan, 2017). The PSTs in this study had their cognitions of CRT values, engaged in lesson co-planning, peer observations, and peer feedback, and especially voluntarily undertook peer feedback. However, the proactivity in the CRT process varied across the PSTs as many PSTs reported fewer contributions to their group work and oral feedback sessions in class, implying differences in individual teachers' self-regulation in their professional learning (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2010).

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This qualitative case study indicates that the Vietnamese EFL PSTs hold diverse attitudes toward CRT. They commonly perceived significant benefits from CRT in enhancing critical evaluation and analysis skills, teaching knowledge, professional identity, and learning motivation. The majority of these PSTs also expressed their interest and active engagement in CRT activities, along with enthusiasm for future CRT activities. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese

EFL PSTs encountered challenges related to limited inquiry skills, teaching knowledge and skills, and peer collaboration issues, which triggered their frustration and reduced contributions to CRT.

The findings of this study could suggest several significant implications for EFL teacher trainers to enhance the quality of pre-service teacher education. Given the positive attitudes and perceived benefits, teacher trainers could integrate CRT activities, such as lesson co-planning, peer observations, and peer feedback into teaching methodology courses. This integration would promote PSTs' learning from collective inquiry into their practices. Additionally, teacher trainers could support PSTs' collective learning by providing specific guidance on the reflective teaching process and offering advice on what and how to give effective feedback, as well as encouraging the PSTs' engagement in open dialogue and constructive feedback.

Several implications could be drawn for EFL PSTs. Active engagement in CRT activities, including exchanging perspectives with their peers and contributing to group work, is crucial for enriching their teaching competence and critical inquiry skills. Furthermore, effective management of group dynamics is essential for creating productive and supportive learning environments. This could be achieved by working with trusted partners, distributing the workload properly, sharing constructive feedback, and offering emotional support. Individual PSTs could also self-direct their collaborative learning by considering their peer feedback and support to internalize useful lessons, self-assessing their contributions to the CRT process, and managing the workload and commitment with their teammates.

Despite uncovering the multifaceted attitudes of Vietnamese EFL PSTs toward CRT, this qualitative case study remains several gaps to be addressed. Future research could involve data collection over a longer period to better understand the dynamics of teachers' attitudes and learning experiences, particularly in various learning sites, such as their teaching practicum, to further unveil contextual influences on their collective professional learning. Additionally, collecting data from a larger number of PSTs by incorporating a quantitative design would enhance the generalizability of the findings. While this study focused on peer collaboration in reflective teaching, future studies could offer richer insights by examining the CRT of PSTs with their teacher trainers or mentors.

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