

Strategic Knowledge as a Selective Mechanism of Pedagogical Reasoning among Experienced EFL Lecturers

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Abstract

Strategic knowledge remains underexamined in EFL research and is often conflated with ordinary instructional adaptation. This qualitative multiple-case study examined how strategic knowledge shaped pedagogical reasoning and potential pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) development among five experienced EFL lecturers across five subject areas at an Indonesian state university. Data were collected over one semester using Content Representations (CoRes), Pedagogical and Professional-experience Repertoires (PaP-eRs), ten classroom observations, and post-observation interviews; detailed reasoning-chain analysis centred on CoRe and PaP-eR evidence. Framework-guided thematic analysis integrated within-case reconstruction of planned and enacted reasoning with cross-case synthesis based on Shulman's model and six strategic-knowledge indicators. All teachers calibrated content to perceived learner characteristics, adapted instructional representations, and staged small-group-to-whole-class activities. However, the uniformity of these practices was more consistent with professional routines than with strategic knowledge. Stronger evidence emerged only when teachers recognized a conflict between pedagogical principles, diagnosed the resulting misalignment, and constructed a non-routine response. The analysis yielded a tentative four-phase sequence—evaluation, strategic diagnosis, alternative construction, and implementation—strongly evidenced in two cases, partially in one, weakly in one, and absent in one; implementation was confirmed in only one case. The findings position strategic knowledge as a selective and unevenly visible mechanism of pedagogical reasoning rather than an automatic attribute of experience. Only one case provided moderate, self-reported evidence of enacted PCK revision, underscoring the need for longitudinal corroboration.

Keywords: strategic knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; pedagogical reasoning; EFL lecturers; multiple-case study; Indonesia

1. Introduction

Pedagogical reasoning in EFL higher education involves more than applying established methods or following predetermined lesson procedures. Lecturers must relate linguistic content and curricular goals to learners' prior knowledge, proficiency, participation, and emerging difficulties, while also responding to assessment demands and institutional conditions (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Liu & Ren, 2024; Pang, 2016). Experienced teachers often manage recurring demands through professional scripts and routines that help them notice salient cues, recognize familiar problems, and retrieve workable responses efficiently (Wolff et al., 2015; Wolff et al., 2017; Wolff et al., 2021). Such routines are valuable when current conditions resemble previous cases but become insufficient when lecturers confront novel or ill-structured problems involving competing pedagogical priorities (Anthony et al., 2015; Parsons et al., 2018; Weng, 2025). For example, maximizing target-language exposure can conflict with students' need for comprehensible access to content; promoting learner autonomy can require more explicit guidance than lecturers initially intend; and prioritizing curricular coverage can restrict opportunities for sustained, meaning-focused participation (Macaro et al., 2018; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). In such situations, several principles remain individually defensible, yet their simultaneous enactment is difficult. The pedagogical problem is therefore not merely which familiar technique to select, but which aims to



preserve, reconcile, or prioritize in the particular context. Explaining how lecturers make such judgments requires a concept that captures professional reasoning beyond routine adaptation.

Strategic knowledge provides this conceptual lens. It refers here to the context-sensitive professional knowledge through which teachers evaluate and coordinate general principles, previous cases, and possible courses of action when none can be applied straightforwardly to a consequential problem of practice (Gold & Holodynski, 2015; Kuhn et al., 2016; Kavanagh et al., 2020). This definition distinguishes strategic knowledge from ordinary instructional flexibility. Changing the pace of a lesson, simplifying an explanation, reorganizing groups, or repeating an activity demonstrates responsiveness and practical competence, but these actions can also arise fluently from an established repertoire (Bowers et al., 2020; Männikkö & Husu, 2019; Xiang et al., 2022). Observable change alone is thus insufficient evidence of strategic knowledge. A stronger inference requires a connected account in which the lecturer recognizes a meaningful pedagogical tension, explains why a familiar response is inadequate, considers plausible alternatives, and justifies a contextually appropriate resolution or deliberate prioritization. This narrower criterion preserves the concept's analytical value by clarifying both what counts as strategic knowledge and when it should be inferred.

With this conceptual boundary established, the next question concerns when strategic knowledge becomes operative. It is conceptualized here as a selective mechanism rather than a continuously operating attribute of experienced lecturers. In familiar situations, routine expertise adequately supports instruction; strategic knowledge becomes analytically relevant when a lecturer identifies a consequential misalignment among instructional goals, pedagogical principles, learner needs, or contextual constraints that routine responses cannot resolve (Babichenko et al., 2021; Bakker et al., 2022; Brown & Friesen, 2025; Loughran, 2019). Its operation can be traced through four analytically distinguishable phases. Evaluation involves attending to evidence that an existing approach is not achieving its intended purpose. Strategic diagnosis explains the source of the misalignment and identifies the demands that must be reconciled or prioritized. Alternative construction involves recombining or modifying available knowledge to formulate a contextually justified response. Implementation, where feasible, enacts that response and generates evidence for further evaluation (Bastian et al., 2022; Munson et al., 2021). These phases constitute a heuristic rather than an invariably linear or completed sequence. The sequence can stop after a lecturer identifies and diagnoses a problem without developing a viable alternative, or after an alternative is constructed but cannot be enacted because of institutional, temporal, or classroom constraints (Ashton, 2022; Le et al., 2021; Yang & Clarke, 2018). Conversely, an immediate adjustment can occur without strategic diagnosis. Strategic knowledge should therefore be inferred from the coherence of the reasoning chain, not from implementation alone. Establishing this chain also provides a basis for examining whether strategic reasoning changes the professional knowledge that informs later teaching.

The significance of this reasoning chain becomes clearer when strategic knowledge is situated within the broader process of pedagogical reasoning through which lecturers comprehend an instructional situation, transform content into teachable forms, enact instruction, and evaluate and reflect on its consequences. When routine practices fail, strategic diagnosis prompts lecturers to reconsider the knowledge underlying their actions: assumptions about learners' prior knowledge and difficulties, the content features requiring emphasis, the adequacy of particular representations or explanations, and the alignment of instructional strategies with intended learning (Amador et al., 2022; Chan & Yung, 2015; Forsler et al., 2024; Worden, 2018). Through such reconsideration, strategic knowledge provides a pathway for refining pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), understood as the context-sensitive integration of content, learners, representations, and instructional strategies needed to make particular subject matter learnable (Delgado-Rebolledo & Zakaryan, 2020; Sarkar et al., 2024). However, a changed activity does not itself demonstrate PCK development. Such change can represent a temporary response, a familiar technique used in a new setting, or an adjustment that leaves the lecturer's underlying understanding unchanged. A stronger claim requires evidence that strategic reasoning has revised how the lecturer understands the teaching of particular content to particular learners and that this revised understanding informs later planning or

practice (Alonzo & Kim, 2016; Barendsen & Henze, 2019; Mazibe et al., 2020). Accordingly, strategic knowledge is treated as a potential mechanism of PCK refinement rather than automatic evidence that such development has occurred.

Despite this conceptual connection, empirical work has not yet provided a sufficiently discriminating account of strategic knowledge within teachers' professional reasoning. Gold and Holodynski (2015) operationalized strategic knowledge as teachers' ability to evaluate alternative courses of action in contextually defined classroom situations, demonstrating that such knowledge is sensitive to differences in professional expertise. Kuhn et al. (2016) subsequently positioned strategic knowledge as a component of pedagogical content knowledge that enables teachers to evaluate and weigh propositions, previous cases, and potentially contradictory pedagogical principles when confronting complex instructional problems. These perspectives suggest that strategic knowledge concerns more than possessing instructional techniques; it involves judging which knowledge should be applied, modified, combined, or temporarily set aside in a particular situation. Within language education, Pang (2016) identified lesson planning as an important site of pedagogical reasoning in which EFL/ESL teachers transform subject knowledge by relating instructional objectives, learner characteristics, teaching procedures, and anticipated classroom responses. More broadly, Loughran (2019) argued that pedagogical reasoning makes teachers' professional knowledge accessible through the connections among their intentions, decisions, actions, and explanations of why particular approaches are pedagogically appropriate. Research on language-teacher expertise further demonstrates that such reasoning is dynamic and context dependent. Lee and Yuan's (2021) study of L2 writing teachers showed that expertise involved an integrated knowledge base, learner-centred pedagogy, professional vision, agency, reflection, and progressive problem solving rather than the routine reproduction of accumulated experience. Similarly, Xiang et al. (2022) found that an EAP writing teacher's adaptive expertise emerged through the interaction of cognitive flexibility, metacognitive regulation, affective commitment, social relationships, and continuing adjustment to learner diversity. Most directly, Weng's (2025) investigation of experienced EAP writing teachers demonstrated that routine and adaptive expertise were complementary: established routines provided an efficient foundation for instruction, whereas adaptive expertise became important when teachers needed to respond dynamically to curricular restrictions, teaching challenges, and students' emerging needs. These studies establish that experienced teaching involves both fluent routine performance and context-sensitive adaptation. Nevertheless, they do not adequately explain when and how lecturers move from routine adaptation to strategic reasoning or whether such reasoning contributes to PCK refinement.

To address this unresolved transition from routine adaptation to strategic reasoning, the present study examines strategic knowledge as a selective mechanism in the pedagogical reasoning of five experienced EFL lecturers teaching different subject areas at an Indonesian state university. Rather than presuming that experience or instructional adaptation demonstrates strategic knowledge, the study traces whether lecturers recognized a consequential tension, diagnosed the inadequacy of established responses, constructed a contextually justified alternative, and enacted it where conditions permitted. The analysis considers this reasoning across four interconnected processes—comprehension, transformation, instruction, and evaluation and reflection—and investigates its contribution to PCK without equating short-term instructional change with professional-knowledge development. In doing so, the study offers an evidence-sensitive account of when strategic knowledge is and is not manifested across cases. It addresses the following research questions: 1. How does strategic knowledge appear to shape the transformation of lecturers' pedagogical understanding into instructional strategies? 2. How does strategic knowledge appear to shape the adaptation and enactment of those strategies in classroom practice? 3. How does strategic reasoning contribute to PCK development, and for which lecturers and under what conditions is this contribution evident?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine how strategic knowledge operated within the pedagogical reasoning of experienced EFL lecturers. This design was appropriate because strategic knowledge was treated as context-dependent professional judgment rather than a stable personal attribute; identifying it therefore required close analysis of how each lecturer interpreted a particular pedagogical situation, justified an instructional response, and connected that response to practice. Each lecturer constituted one case, bounded by the participant, the subject area taught, the institutional setting, and the semester of data collection. The multiple-case design enabled intensive within-case reconstruction followed by systematic comparison across cases (Yin, 2014).

Fieldwork was conducted over one academic semester in the English Language Education Department of Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, a state university in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. The five cases covered pronunciation, reading and cultural studies, grammar, speaking and drama, and literary studies. This variation supported comparison of recurring reasoning processes across substantively different EFL content domains while retaining contrasting and boundary cases. Cross-case recurrence was interpreted through replication logic rather than statistical representativeness: similar patterns strengthened an analytic explanation, whereas differences defined the conditions and limits of that explanation. The semester established a temporal boundary for examining planned and enacted reasoning; it did not provide longitudinal evidence of enduring PCK change.

2.2 Participants

Five experienced lecturers were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Purposive selection was used to align the sample with the phenomenon under investigation and to include participants capable of providing information-rich accounts of university-level EFL teaching. The inclusion criteria were (a) at least five years of university EFL teaching experience, (b) a master's degree in English education or applied linguistics, and (c) responsibility for different subject areas that enabled cross-case comparison. Teaching experience ranged from 8 to 14 years. Table 1 presents the participant profiles.

Table 1

Participant professional profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Academic rank	Years of experience	Subject area
Muhammad	Male	42	<i>Lektor</i>	14	Reading and American Cultural Studies
Syaiful	Male	38	<i>Lektor</i>	11	Literary Studies
Ridwi	Male	35	<i>Asisten Ahli</i>	8	Grammar
Ahmad	Male	40	<i>Lektor</i>	12	Pronunciation
Rinal	Female	36	<i>Asisten Ahli</i>	9	Drama and Speaking

2.3 Data Collection

Data were generated through Content Representations (CoRes), Pedagogical and Professional-experience Repertoires (PaP-eRs), classroom observations, and semi-structured post-observation interviews. CoRes and PaP-eRs were selected because they provide complementary means of articulating topic-specific PCK: the CoRe foregrounds teachers' organization of key content ideas and the reasoning behind instructional plans, whereas the PaP-eR represents professional knowledge through accounts of teaching events and decisions (Loughran et al., 2004).

Each participant completed a CoRe for a bounded set of content ideas in the subject taught. The prompts elicited intended learning goals, reasons for prioritizing those goals, content deliberately withheld or

deferred, anticipated student difficulties, assumptions about learners, planned teaching procedures and their rationales, and planned assessment strategies. The CoRe therefore served as the primary record of planned pedagogical reasoning.

PaP-eRs documented participants' accounts of how the planned content was taught, the classroom events they regarded as consequential, the instructional decisions they made, and their reflections on those decisions. Most PaP-eRs were generated through semi-structured interviews; one participant instead provided a written lesson-by-lesson procedural account. Interview probes such as "Why?", "How do you know that?", and "What did you do next?" were used to clarify interpretations, rationales, and decision sequences, consistent with the role of probing in producing elaborated qualitative accounts (Robinson, 2023). Because the mode of PaP-eR generation differed for one participant, this variation was retained in the case records and considered when comparing how explicitly reasoning was articulated across cases. PaP-eRs were treated as self-reported accounts of enacted reasoning, not as direct observational records.

Each lecturer was observed in at least two classroom sessions, producing ten observations in total. The observations and corresponding post-observation interviews focused on lessons represented in the participant's CoRe or PaP-eR so that planned reasoning, reported enactment, and classroom events referred to the same instructional episode. Observations and post-observation interviews provided contextual and corroborative evidence for interpreting the CoRe–PaP-eR relationship. The detailed reasoning-chain coding, however, was applied to the CoRe and PaP-eR corpus. Accordingly, all coded excerpts and illustrative quotations reported in the findings are identified as CoRe or PaP-eR evidence; observation and post-observation material was not presented as a separate thematic evidence stream.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were examined through framework-guided thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of familiarization, initial coding, pattern development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting provided the general analytic sequence. The analysis combined deductive coding informed by Shulman's model of pedagogical reasoning with inductive identification of patterns within and across cases, an approach suited to educational studies that integrate theoretical categories with multiple qualitative sources. Analysis proceeded in two consecutive stages: all within-case analyses were completed before cross-case synthesis began.

Within each case, the CoRe was first used to reconstruct planned reasoning across instructional goals, rationales, content boundaries, anticipated difficulties, assumptions about learners, planned strategies, and assessment. The PaP-eR was then used to reconstruct reported enactment and reflection. Corresponding parts of the two records were compared and classified as *consistent* when enactment retained the planned reasoning, *elaborated* when it extended the plan without changing its underlying logic, *modified* when an instructional response changed while the principal purpose remained, or *reconstructed* when the lecturer reconsidered the problem framing, pedagogical principle, or relationship among content, learners, and strategy.

The next step identified pedagogical reasoning episodes. An episode qualified for analysis only when the participant explicitly described (a) a pedagogical situation, (b) an interpretation of that situation, (c) an instructional decision, and (d) a rationale for the decision. For each qualifying episode, the reasoning chain was reconstructed as *perceived* → *interpreted* → *decided* → *implemented* → *reflected*. Implementation and reflection were recorded only when explicitly evidenced; absent links were marked "not explicitly stated" rather than inferred. Direct excerpts, source labels, comparison status, and an evidence-confidence judgment were entered into a case-specific matrix. Confidence was rated *High*, *Medium*, or *Low* according to the explicitness and completeness of the reasoning chain and the degree of corroboration available; the evidentiary basis for every rating was recorded in the audit trail.

Cross-case synthesis began with a matrix comparing the five case summaries. A recurring pattern was retained as a cross-case theme only when supported by at least two cases. A pattern found in one case was

preserved as case-specific evidence rather than generalized across participants. Each candidate theme was also examined against rival explanations and against cases that contradicted, qualified, or extended the pattern. Themes were named from the observed cross-case relationships before they were interpreted through the strategic-knowledge and PCK frameworks.

Shulman's (1987) pedagogical reasoning cycle was operationalized through four higher-order categories: comprehension, transformation, instruction, and evaluation/reflection. Placement within one of these categories established the stage of pedagogical reasoning represented by an excerpt; it did not itself establish strategic knowledge. Strategic knowledge was evaluated separately through six indicators, shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Operational indicators of strategic knowledge

Indicator	Operational question applied to the evidence
Instructional uncertainty	Did the lecturer identify an unresolved, consequential, or insufficiently familiar pedagogical problem?
Competing pedagogical principles	Did the account identify two or more defensible instructional goals or principles in tension?
Context-sensitive judgment	Was the response explicitly linked to particular content, learners, classroom conditions, or constraints?
Explicit reasoning	Did the lecturer state why the situation required the reported decision?
Reflective decision-making	Did the lecturer evaluate an existing response, consider alternatives or consequences, or reassess the decision?
Non-routine instructional choice	Did the account show construction or reconfiguration of a response beyond straightforward use of an established routine?

Strategic-knowledge evidence was rated *Strong*, *Moderate*, *Weak*, or *Insufficient* at the theme level. Strong evidence required a connected reasoning chain that met all six indicators. Moderate evidence retained the conflict–diagnosis–response connection but contained one or two only partially evidenced indicators. Weak evidence contained isolated indicators without a complete strategic reasoning chain. Evidence was insufficient when the account showed routine adaptation, lacked an explicit pedagogical tension or rationale, or did not support a strategic interpretation. These ratings referred to the evidence available for a theme, not to strategic knowledge as a fixed characteristic of a lecturer. Construction of a strategic response and its classroom implementation were coded separately, preventing an unimplemented proposal from being reported as enacted practice.

PCK refinement was evaluated through a further evidence check. A theme supported PCK refinement only when the lecturer explicitly reconsidered how particular content should be represented or taught to particular learners and connected that revised understanding to a subsequent pedagogical decision. A change of activity, reuse of a familiar technique, or temporary contextual adjustment did not by itself meet this threshold. Given the semester-long design, the analysis distinguished situated evidence of PCK reconsideration from claims of stable professional-knowledge development.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Researcher Reflexivity

Intercoder checking was used for the deductive process coding. A randomly selected 20% of coded segments from the CoRe and interview-based PaP-eR data was independently coded by an EFL education researcher external to the institution using the four Shulman categories. Cohen's kappa was $\kappa = .82$, indicating a high level of agreement beyond chance. Intercoder assessment can strengthen the systematicity, transparency, and communicability of a codebook-based qualitative analysis when its scope is clearly reported (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Accordingly, the κ value applies only to the four process categories; it does not represent independent reliability testing of the six strategic-knowledge indicators or the PCK interpretations, which were instead scrutinized through the evidence matrices, rival-explanation analysis, and peer debriefing.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by comparing planned, reported, and observed dimensions of the same instructional episodes, examining contradictory cases, and conducting member checking. Preliminary findings summaries were shared with all five participants, who indicated that the interpretations were plausible and did not request substantive correction. This feedback was treated as a check on resonance and representation rather than as proof of analytic validity, consistent with critical accounts of member checking. Transferability was supported through contextual description and case profiles. Dependability was addressed through a documented audit trail containing source-linked coding decisions, evidence matrices, and revisions to interpretations. Confirmability was strengthened through external coding, structured peer debriefing, and explicit reporting of evidence that did not support the emerging explanation. Together, these procedures provided a coherent and transparent quality strategy rather than relying on any single validation technique.

The researcher was a lecturer in the same department as the participants and was professionally familiar with the institutional, curricular, and disciplinary context. This insider position supported access, rapport, and interpretation of subject-specific reasoning, while also creating risks of taken-for-granted assumptions, under-questioning of colleagues' accounts, and socially desirable responses. Because researcher position shapes both data generation and interpretation, reflexivity was treated as integral to analytic quality. The external coder, source-linked audit trail, explicit missing-step rule, boundary-case analysis, member checking, and peer debriefing were used to expose and check the researcher's interpretations. These procedures did not remove the researcher's influence; they made its role visible and the analytic decisions open to scrutiny.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed the institutional ethical requirements applicable to research involving human participants. Before data collection, the lecturers received information about the study's purpose and procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw without penalty, and the use of their data. All participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used in the dataset and manuscript. Students present during the observed lessons were not treated as research participants, and no student-identifying information is reported. Observation records and reporting focused on the participating lecturers' pedagogical reasoning and instructional decisions.

3. Findings

3.1 Learner-Responsive Content Calibration in Comprehension

Across all five cases, lecturers framed their instructional starting points in relation to perceived learner characteristics or purposes rather than following a generic disciplinary sequence. Ahmad, for example, began pronunciation instruction with general sound awareness because he believed that students lacked a comparable conceptual foundation in their first language: *"The characteristics of pronunciation in these ideas are difficult for students to remember, since there are many rules of language that they do not usually study in their own language"* (Ahmad, CoRe). In the enacted lesson, he elicited the concept through Bahasa Indonesia, explaining, *"I elicit with some questions, for example, in Bahasa Indonesia, how many sounds, 'bunyi,' do you have? ... Most of the student couldn't answer my questions. They answer there are five kinds of vowel sounds"* (Ahmad, PaP-eR).

Muhammad similarly adjusted the entry point to a perceived cultural-knowledge gap. He explained that students' *"limited cultural awareness"* complicated comprehension of American texts and therefore began with a US map and Google Earth to activate relevant background knowledge (Muhammad, CoRe/PaP-eR). Ridwi instead emphasized students' perceived preference for digital media, stating that they expected *"more media, for example from YouTube,"* through which they could listen to native speakers and become

“more familiar” with grammar (Ridwi, CoRe). This account supports a media-related motivational rationale; it does not establish an inductive or discovery-learning orientation.

Content calibration also reflected the lecturers’ understanding of students’ future purposes. Syaiful selected literary-fiction content because the students were prospective teachers: *“I have to teach them how to teach these kinds of stories to their students in the future”* (Syaiful, CoRe). Comparable purpose alignment appeared in the other cases: Ridwi connected grammar to future academic writing, Rinal situated speaking content in campus-based social settings, and the remaining lecturers linked content selection to the anticipated use of the subject matter.

The evidence therefore establishes learner-responsive comprehension as a consistent planning pattern, expressed through linguistic, cultural, motivational, contextual, and professional-purpose calibration. Its consistency, however, should be read in light of the CoRe prompts, which directly elicited lecturers’ knowledge of learners and factors influencing instruction. The pattern demonstrates planned responsiveness across the five cases, but neither the accuracy of the lecturers’ learner perceptions nor the operation of strategic knowledge follows from recurrence alone.

3.2 Constructing Instructional Representations in Transformation

All five lecturers described assembling or adapting instructional representations and activity sequences to translate subject content into teachable forms. Ahmad used the familiar Indonesian word *saya*, represented phonemically as /s-a-y-a/, to challenge students’ assumption that phonetic symbols applied only to English. He explained, *“Before the class finish, I spelled some words that were very familiar to them, for example /s-a-y-a/. How do you say that? ... As a matter of fact, it was their own native language”* (Ahmad, PaP-eR).

Syaiful combined explicit explanation, collaborative analysis, and student presentation because he regarded the elements of fiction as unfamiliar to the class: *“So they need explicit input. In this direct teaching, I teach each element of fiction followed by an analysis task ... done in group and followed by presenting findings”* (Syaiful, PaP-eR).

The other cases displayed comparable combinations. Ridwi connected video input, Kahoot-based quizzing, student presentations, and discussion; Rinal combined video or writing input, pair or small-group rehearsal, public performance, and differentiated feedback across four of five lesson accounts; and Muhammad moved from map-based schema activation to small-group reading and plenary reporting. These cases show lecturers organizing multiple representations and methods around particular content and perceived learner needs. The evidence supports teacher-reported assembly and adaptation of these designs, but it does not establish that the components were original or absent from standard textbooks and syllabi, which were not analyzed.

3.3 Staged Enactment and Embedded Evaluation

In the instruction process, all five lecturers reported a recurring movement from individual, pair, or small-group work to whole-class participation and teacher feedback. Ahmad’s pronunciation lesson incorporated peer checking before collective verification: *“I ask them to cross-check in pairs ... to make sure the symbol that the student wrote was correct or not ... [then] I checked together with them by spelling the word”* (Ahmad, PaP-eR). His subsequent competitive production task created further opportunities to hear individual performance while maintaining whole-class engagement.

Ridwi’s use of Kahoot likewise combined participation with diagnosis. The quiz determined presentation order and, in his later account, indicated which grammar content required additional attention: *“Through Kahoot, [it] can be the diagnosis to highlight whether the student understood or not about the lesson”* (Ridwi, PaP-eR). Muhammad’s map and reading activities and Syaiful’s explanation–analysis–presentation sequence followed the same broad small-group-to-plenary architecture. Rinal’s written PaP-

eR also documented this structure across four lessons, although it did not explain the reasoning that led to its selection.

Thus, the staged architecture is supported across all five cases, but an explicit dual instructional-and-evaluative function is supported only in Ahmad's and Ridwi's accounts. Moreover, the lecturers did not describe choosing the shared structure to resolve a particular conflict or replace an inadequate routine. The finding therefore establishes a common enactment pattern; whether it represents routine competence or strategic judgment depends on the reasoning accompanying its use, examined in the Discussion.

3.4 From Evaluated Misalignment to Instructional Revision

The clearest cross-case differences emerged when lecturers evaluated an existing approach and considered revision. Muhammad and Syaiful provided connected accounts of a specific misalignment, its cause, and an alternative response. Ridwi provided a less complete episode, Ahmad described a general reflective disposition without an instantiated episode, and Rinal's record contained no corresponding evidence.

Muhammad offered the clearest bounded classroom episode. During literature circles, unrestricted student choice did not generate the range or level of reading passages he expected. As he explained, *"Even though there are five groups, only three groups do their best to find appropriate, different, and interesting topics to discuss. The other two groups ... tend to choose the same reading passages, such as fables that involve really simple stories"* (Muhammad, PaP-eR). He identified the basis of his judgment—*"I trace [it] from their reading-passage choices"*—and proposed a revised design in which he would select appropriate passages while preserving student discussion and participation. The account connects evaluation, diagnosis, and alternative construction, but the proposal remained prospective; the data do not show its subsequent implementation.

Syaiful described a broader curricular revision. After previously organizing the literature course around literary history, he judged that approach insufficiently relevant to students preparing to become teachers and shifted the course toward analyzing story content. He recalled, *"When I finished teaching this course ... I think that it is not very useful for the students ... in their future teaching. ... That's why I changed the way I teach literature for the students here, from teaching the history into teaching the content of the story. That's my big decision"* (Syaiful, PaP-eR). Unlike Muhammad's prospective alternative, Syaiful reported that the redesign had already been enacted, and its story-content orientation was also represented in his current CoRe. He also identified a smaller unresolved issue: limited class time constrained analysis of linguistic features, so he planned to move that work into a future homework task (Syaiful, CoRe elaboration).

Ridwi's end-of-unit reflection provided partial evidence. He judged that the learning objectives were *"mostly achieved"* but that student presentations and lecturer feedback *"still need to be better communicated,"* proposing that students consult additional resources and discuss them with the lecturer (Ridwi, PaP-eR). Although the account identifies a gap and an alternative, it does not trace the problem to a specific event or provide a developed causal diagnosis. Ahmad's account was weaker still: *"I sometimes reflect [on] the things [that do] not work in class ... [and] try to change ... [and] find a new strategy for the next meeting"* (Ahmad, PaP-eR). This statement indicates a reflective orientation but provides no identifiable situation, diagnosis, alternative, or implementation.

Rinal's five PaP-eR lesson accounts described procedures but did not report a problem, interpretation, or response decision. This absence concerns the available record, not Rinal's teaching in general. Her written procedural PaP-eR also offered less opportunity than the interview-based accounts for follow-up probes about tacit reasoning.

Across the five cases, the completeness of the evaluation–diagnosis–alternative–implementation sequence varied markedly. Muhammad provided strong evidence of strategic reasoning through a specific literature-circle episode: he evaluated the inadequacy of unrestricted text choice, diagnosed the problem

from students' selection of repetitive and overly simple passages, and constructed an alternative based on teacher-curated texts that retained student discussion. Because this decision remained prospective, however, its enactment was not confirmed. Syaiful likewise demonstrated strong strategic reasoning, but his case was the only one to evidence all four phases. He evaluated his earlier history-centred literature course, diagnosed its limited relevance to students' future teaching, constructed a story-content-focused curriculum, and reported implementing the redesign, which was also reflected in his current CoRe. Ridwi provided moderate evidence: he identified a general communication gap at the end of the unit and proposed additional resource searching and lecturer consultation, but he neither traced the difficulty to a specific causal source nor reported implementing the response. Ahmad offered only weak evidence because his account expressed a general disposition to reflect and change unsuccessful practices without identifying a particular misalignment, diagnosis, alternative, or enacted revision. Rinal's PaP-eR contained insufficient evidence for any phase because it documented lesson procedures without an evaluative or strategic reasoning episode. These cross-case differences show that strong strategic reasoning does not necessarily culminate in implementation and that strategic knowledge was unevenly evidenced rather than a general consequence of teaching experience. The strength classifications refer only to the completeness of strategic reasoning represented in the CoRe and PaP-eR data and remain distinct from confirmed enactment.

3.5 Managing the Boundary Between the First Language and English

A final cross-cutting theme concerned the pedagogical boundary between students' first language and English. It appeared across transformation and instruction in three cases, but the lecturers responded in different ways. Ahmad used Bahasa Indonesia as an instructional resource after students struggled with an English-medium elicitation, re-posing the question through the Indonesian term *bunyi* (sound) before returning to phonological content. Ridwi described students' continuing reliance on the first language despite his encouragement to speak English: *"Again and again, they are still weak ... to speak in English"* (Ridwi, PaP-eR). His account identifies an unresolved difficulty but does not document a revised response. Syaiful, by contrast, repeatedly encouraged students to use English during group and presentation phases, presenting English use as an established expectation rather than a response to a specific incident. The shared finding is therefore not a common language-use strategy. It is that the first-language-English boundary became pedagogically consequential in Ahmad's, Ridwi's, and Syaiful's accounts. Ahmad used the first language responsively to restore conceptual access, Ridwi reported an unresolved problem, and Syaiful enacted a standing English-use policy. Muhammad's and Rinal's records contained no relevant evidence.

4. Discussion

The findings position strategic knowledge as a selective mechanism within pedagogical reasoning rather than a feature of every decision made by an experienced lecturer. All five participants calibrated content, adapted representations, and staged classroom participation, demonstrating the integration of content, learners, and instruction central to pedagogical reasoning (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Loughran, 2019; Pang, 2016). However, these recurring practices largely represented established routines. Strategic knowledge became visible only when a lecturer evaluated an approach as inadequate, diagnosed the misalignment, and constructed a justified alternative, consistent with distinctions between routine expertise and adaptive judgment (Anderson, 2025; Anderson & Taner, 2023; Weng, 2025; Xiang et al., 2022).

4.1 Constructing Instructional Strategies

Regarding the first research question, the lecturers transformed pedagogical understanding into strategies by relating content to learners and instructional purposes. Ahmad used an Indonesian phonological example, Muhammad activated cultural knowledge, Ridwi incorporated digital input, Syaiful aligned literature with future teaching roles, and Rinal situated speaking in anticipated communication settings. These choices reflect PCK as the integration of content, learners, representations, and purposes

(Delgado-Rebolledo & Zakaryan, 2020; Sarkar et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2019). Nevertheless, learner-responsive transformation commonly forms part of routine instructional adaptation (Männikkö & Husu, 2019; Parsons et al., 2018; Weng, 2025). Strategic knowledge required evidence that familiar responses were inadequate and had to be reorganized (Gold & Holodyski, 2015; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2025).

Muhammad and Syaiful crossed this boundary most clearly. Muhammad reconciled student autonomy with the need for suitable texts by proposing lecturer-selected materials while retaining collaborative discussion, combining structure with participation (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Patzak & Zhang, 2025; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Syaiful resolved a tension between literary-history coverage and professional relevance by shifting toward story analysis, reflecting conflicts between content coverage and meaningful learning (Borda et al., 2020; Petersen et al., 2020; Shadle et al., 2017). Both cases show strategic knowledge coordinating competing priorities rather than producing novel techniques (Caspari-Gnann & Sevia, 2022; Ding & Wang, 2018; Roos & Bagger, 2024). Ridwi identified a gap and proposed an alternative but provided only partial diagnosis; Ahmad offered general reflection without a bounded episode; and Rinal's procedural account revealed no reasoning chain. This graded evidence reinforces professional reasoning as movement from noticing through interpretation to justified action (Barnhart & van Es, 2015; Santagata & Yeh, 2016; Stahnke et al., 2016).

4.2 Classroom Adaptation and Enactment

Regarding the second research question, the shared movement from individual or group work to whole-class participation was better interpreted as an established script than as strategic adaptation, since no lecturer linked it to a specific tension. Experienced teachers commonly use knowledge-rich scripts to manage familiar events (Weng, 2025; Wolff et al., 2015, 2017, 2021). Ahmad's peer checking and Ridwi's Kahoot activity also combined instruction with information about understanding, consistent with the integration of assessment and classroom practice (Wang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Evaluation became strategic only when used to diagnose a misalignment and justify a non-routine response (Gold & Holodyski, 2015; Kavanagh et al., 2020).

The first-language-English boundary further demonstrates this distinction because language choice affects access to content and interaction (Macaro et al., 2018; Pun & Macaro, 2019). Ahmad's temporary use of Bahasa Indonesia restored conceptual access but lacked a developed diagnosis, Ridwi recognized first-language dependence without constructing a response, and Syaiful's English-use expectation represented routine policy. Thus, a significant problem did not itself demonstrate strategic knowledge (Gold & Holodyski, 2015; Parsons et al., 2018; Weng, 2025). The cases also separate reasoning from implementation: Muhammad constructed a justified alternative without reported enactment, whereas Syaiful implemented his redesign. This distinction accords with research differentiating reported or planned knowledge from enacted practice (Barendsen & Henze, 2019; Blömeke et al., 2015; Mazibe et al., 2020) and recognizes that implementation is conditioned by institutional opportunities and constraints (Ashton, 2022; Le et al., 2021; Yang & Clarke, 2018).

4.3 The Four-Phase Mechanism and PCK Refinement

Across cases, the analysis supports a four-phase heuristic, evaluation, strategic diagnosis, alternative construction, and implementation, that specifies the evidential links distinguishing strategic reasoning from routine adjustment (Caspari-Gnann & Sevia, 2022; Gold & Holodyski, 2015; Santagata & Yeh, 2016; Stahnke et al., 2016). Muhammad evidenced the first three phases, Syaiful completed all four, Ridwi's diagnosis remained partial, Ahmad provided general reflection, and Rinal's record contained insufficient evidence. This unevenness supports expertise as context-sensitive and distributed across routine and adaptive forms rather than automatically produced by experience (Anderson, 2025; Anderson & Taner, 2023; Blömeke et al., 2015; Brown & Friesen, 2025). Strategic knowledge therefore operates selectively on

existing professional knowledge when prioritization and reconfiguration are required (Gold & Holodynski, 2015; Männikkö & Husu, 2019; Weng, 2025).

Regarding the third research question, strategic reasoning contributed to PCK refinement only when revised content-specific understanding informed subsequent planning or practice. A changed activity alone was insufficient because reported, dynamic, and enacted PCK are not equivalent (Alonzo & Kim, 2016; Barendsen & Henze, 2019; Fraser, 2016; Mazibe et al., 2020). Syaiful provided the strongest but still moderate evidence: he redefined literature content, enacted the redesign, and represented the revised content–learner–instruction relationship in his current CoRe (Chan & Yung, 2015; Forsler et al., 2024; Mazibe et al., 2020). The claim remains bounded because the change was retrospectively reported and not traced longitudinally (Suh & Park, 2017; Vázquez-Bernal et al., 2022). Muhammad demonstrated strategic reconstruction without confirmed PCK development, while the remaining cases provided weaker evidence. Stronger claims require movement from content-specific diagnosis to reconstruction, enactment, and repeated evaluation (Chan & Yung, 2015; Han et al., 2021; Worden, 2018, 2019; Wu & Yu, 2017). Strategic knowledge thus functions as a pathway to PCK refinement, not proof that refinement occurred.

5. Conclusion

This study examined strategic knowledge as a selective mechanism in the pedagogical reasoning of five experienced EFL lecturers. Although all participants used learner-responsive content, representations, and participatory routines, these common adaptations did not themselves demonstrate strategic knowledge. Strategic knowledge became visible only when an existing approach was evaluated as misaligned, its underlying problem was diagnosed, and a justified alternative was constructed. The analysis produced a tentative four-phase heuristic: evaluation, strategic diagnosis, alternative construction, and implementation. Muhammad evidenced the first three phases without confirmed implementation, whereas Syaiful alone completed the sequence. Ridwi provided partial evidence, Ahmad expressed only general reflection, and Rinal's available record revealed no connected strategic episode. Experience therefore supplied a rich pedagogical repertoire but did not automatically generate strategic reasoning.

Strategic reasoning contributed to PCK refinement only when revised content-specific understanding informed subsequent planning or practice. Syaiful provided moderate evidence of this change, while Muhammad demonstrated only a prospective pathway toward it. The study therefore distinguishes routine adaptation, strategic reconstruction, enactment, and PCK refinement rather than treating them as equivalent. Its four-phase heuristic can support teacher education and reflection by focusing attention on pedagogical misalignment, diagnosis, alternative construction, and implementation. Because the evidence came from five lecturers in one institution over one semester, longitudinal research is needed to examine whether reconstructed understanding becomes enduring PCK. Overall, strategic knowledge operates selectively when established pedagogical routines no longer provide an adequate response.

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