

Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Reflective Teaching as a Tool for Professional Development

Duong Minh Tuan

Nam Can Tho University, Can Tho City, Viet Nam
dmtuan@nctu.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

Growing professionally is considered a crucial goal that language teachers may wish to achieve in their teaching careers. Although tools for professional development can be varied in different contexts, reflective teaching as an essential and ongoing job is likely to be among the most common ones. The contributions of reflection on pursuing teacher professional development have been proved in numerous studies. However, research on the views and implementation of such a tool by EFL teachers in the Vietnamese context is insufficient. To narrow this gap, this descriptive study was conducted to investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching as a tool for teacher professional development. A mixed-methods design was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for the study. Specifically, quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire, and qualitative data were attained using a semi-structured interview. As regards participants, twenty-five university EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam participated in this study. The results indicated that the participants held positive perceptions towards reflective teaching and perceived it to be "very significant" to teacher professional development. Nevertheless, it was found that their overall level of reflective practices was identified as "average". By comparison, a statistically significant difference between the participants' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching was observed. The results also showed that the participants' strategies of reflecting on their teaching practices were not diverse, with *sharing classroom experiences with colleagues* and *conducting peer observation* being the popularly used ones.

1. Introduction

Central to educational research in the 21st century has been the multi-faceted issue of teachers' professional development because it is seen as a significant attribute to the emergence of a high-quality education system. In the Vietnamese context, a drive to motivate EFL teachers to engage in professional development activities has in recent years been a conspicuous matter of concern among educational policymakers and language educators. Vietnamese EFL teachers at the tertiary level are expected to well equip themselves with precise knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogy, and soft skills so as to train university students to be able to use English effectively after graduation in response to a time when Vietnam is on the way of regional integration and global participation. To achieve this, there is a strong need for EFL teachers to take charge of developing their professionalism since this is found to influence

their students' learning and learning outcomes. One common tool for maintaining professional development and accordingly enhancing qualities necessary to teachers of English is reflective teaching (Li, 2008; Qing, 2009).

Reflective teaching as a powerful paradigm in foreign language education has been of particular interest to those who would like to grow professionally on their own (Mathew et al., 2017). According to Nguyen (2017), the development of the ability to reflect on teaching and practise reflection is an essential determinant of the recognition of a capable reflective teacher. Increasingly evident is the impact of reflective teaching on EFL teachers' self-directed professional growth. As claimed by Qing (2009), reflective teaching has decidedly been considered an effective path towards teachers' professional development as it helps to bring about

positive changes in their teaching practices and thus in their careers. In addition, engaging in reflective practise can help teachers make pedagogical decisions that desirably benefit their students' learning outcomes (Rahimi & Weisi, 2018). In Vietnam, notwithstanding the widespread agreement on the significant role of reflective teaching, few studies have been conducted to investigate how it is perceived and practised by teachers of English, especially those working in higher education contexts.

As stated by Nguyen et al. (2015), reflection is deemed to be one of the essential elements in the standards for teachers, but it has yet to be fully explored and has been considered a novel concept in the context of Vietnam. Nguyen (2011)'s study revealed that surveyed teachers' reflection on their teaching practice was primarily driven by the technical dimension, also known as a less deep reflection level, in which much emphasis was placed on formal supervision and collegial support as significant strategies for reflective teaching. To contribute to bridging this gap, the present study is intended to first investigate the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL teachers towards reflective teaching and subsequently explore how they practise this tool to enhance their professionalism. In addition, to provide a fuller picture of the situation, the study also seeks to identify strategies that teachers use to conduct reflective teaching in their teaching contexts.

It is expected that results gained from this study would give an account of how reflective teaching is perceived and practised by Vietnamese EFL teachers, whereby further research-based evidence can be added to the existing body of knowledge concerning the nature of reflective teaching. Besides, this study is of the significance that it can provide educators and policymakers with relevant information for their decision-making in executing plans and strategies of teacher professional development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is originally coined by Dewey (1933), who refers to it as "an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it tends" (p.9). He claims that teachers have to be critical of their teaching practices to become effective practitioners. Pennington (1992) describes reflective teaching as "deliberating on experience, and that of mirroring experience" (p.47). She also proposes the idea of reflective orientation, which is advocated as a means of promoting the achievement of classroom goals and boosting both teachers' and learners' confidence and

self-motivation. Roberts (1998) simply defines reflective teaching as thoughtful practices; it is assumed to be nothing more than mindful teaching.

However, this conception is regarded as a weak version of the conception of the term. This is because, according to Wallace (1998), thinking more about teaching does not always lead to improvements in reality. Another definition of reflective teaching suggested by Qing (2009) shows that reflective teaching is a valuable means for teachers to collect and examine data about what they have done in the classroom, from which they can gain an understanding of their teaching practices and improve their teaching qualities. More recent is a somehow similar conception put forwards by Ferdowsi and Afghari (2015). In their study, they state that reflective teaching is a teaching approach that demands teachers to obtain information about their classroom practices and attend closely to their teaching behaviour and instructional strategies in critical ways. Farrell (2015) identifies reflective teaching as a three-level model which comprises descriptive reflection (focus of teacher skills), conceptual or comparative reflection (the rationale for practice), and critical reflection (examination of socio-political, moral, and ethical results of practice).

Of the three levels, critical reflection is considered by some scholars as the most important one, and as such, teachers are inclined to have a stronger desire to achieve this level in comparison with the others. Tabassi et al. (2020) view reflective teaching as teachers' critical reflection on their perception and performance of teaching so as to enhance the quality of their classroom practices. More generally, reflective teaching can be seen as "either an approach or a method for improving the quality and depth of student learning, where it focuses on practitioners and their practice, and it also allows teachers to value, utilise, and learn from experience" (Gupta, 2019, p.39).

In this research, reflective teaching is defined as a multi-faceted approach that requires teachers to continuously evaluate and adjust their teaching practices. To be specific, such an evaluation involves teachers in observing, understanding, and analysing different aspects of their teaching, which is followed by proper adjustments.

2.2 Components of Reflective Teaching

Having attracted much attention for about a decade, six components of reflective teaching proposed by Akbari et al. (2010) are constituted as a valid and reliable model for elucidating teachers' reflective practices, as summarised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Summary of six components of reflective teaching (Akbari et al., 2010)

Components	Description
Practical	Implementing the actual practices of reflection using different tools, such as journal writing, lesson reports, observation, group discussions, and surveys and questionnaires
Cognitive	Developing professionally as teachers by conducting action research, engaging in conferences and workshops, and reading literature relevant to their specialism
Affective	
Metacognitive	Attempting to understand learners, especially their emotions and attitudes in behaving in class
Critical	Focusing on teachers' personal beliefs and personalities, their definitions of teaching practices, and their identity as teachers
Moral	Looking at teaching from socio-political perspectives Emphasising moral issues concerning justice, empathy, and values

The practical component deals with teachers' use of reflection tools and their actual practices of reflection. Various tools employed for the reflection purpose consist of journal writing, lesson reports, observation, group discussion, and surveys and questionnaires, to name but a few. Regarding the cognitive component, professional development needs are the focus of reflective practice. The need to grow professionally involves teachers conducting different cognitive activities, such as doing action research, attending conferences and workshops, and reading the professional literature. The affective component is concerned with teachers' attempts to reflect on their students, especially in regard to students' emotional behaviours and attitudes in the classroom. Another element emphasises the metacognitive aspect of reflection in which teachers reflect on their personal beliefs and personalities, their perceptions of teaching practices, and their identity as teachers. The critical component refers to the social-political aspects of pedagogy that address teachers' reflection on the political importance of their practice and introduction to such topics as race, gender, and social class. In relation to the moral component, reflection is performed around the notion of morality and on moral issues like justice, empathy, and values.

2.3 Strategies of Reflective Teaching

To undertake reflective teaching effectively, it is necessary for teachers to triangulate and critically examine relevant information garnered from as many directions as possible or through varied strategies whose characteristics of contextual applicability and feasibility are of paramount importance. Brookfield (1995) suggests four lenses as fundamental tools for critical reflection, which are autobiographies, students' eyes, colleagues' experiences, and theoretical literature. These lenses are connected with the processes of self-reflection, student feedback, peer assessment, and involvement in reading scholarly literature, respectively.

Reflection can also be collaboratively implemented through sharing ideas about teaching practices with teachers working in the same context (Farrell, 1999).

One of the ways of sharing is that of getting a group of teachers talking with one another about how they manage classroom disciplines, correct students' assignments, and teach a particular subject. As a prerequisite for sharing in that way, teachers could conduct a formal analysis of their teaching and problems they regularly encounter. The results collected are the foundation for doing later experiments and finding out what things work for each individual. In addition, teachers could gain data about their teaching situations and then discuss relevant findings with a group in a professional manner after the data are analysed, evaluated, and interpreted with reference to their contexts. However, this is by no means an easy job for teachers as it requires critical thinking and knowledge of methods for collecting classroom data.

Furthermore, reflection could be done using self-observation either with audio or video cameras, and another way is to be observed by a colleague or a group acting as a mirror in describing all the happenings worthy of attention in class. This latter way allows teachers to send their messages of teaching beliefs to their colleagues as observers, especially to themselves. Keeping a journal, be it a personal or a shared one, is one common strategy to conduct reflective teaching, on which teachers can write all aspects of their work. If a journal is for sharing with a group, constructive comments can be written on it by other group members for the betterment of its author's teaching practices. Conducting action research is the last reflection tool proposed by Farrell (1999), which involves teachers in working on a specific project by themselves or with other people as a group. Reflection here occurs when teachers have an opportunity to look back on things that have been causing dilemmas during their classroom practices.

As to the design, the research project starts with identifying the problem and continues with figuring out the possible reasons behind that problem. These are followed by devising potentially workable measures, using these measures and evaluating them based on the results found, and subsequently making implications for future research.

Qing (2009) suggests five fairly analogous modes for reflective teaching in EFL contexts. To begin with, teachers can apply peer observation in gaining access to a variety of teaching styles and opportunities to have a critically objective reflection on their own teaching. Before observation, teachers should spend time having a discussion with each other on all relevant aspects of the lesson that need observing, such as the nature of the class, materials to be taught, teaching methods, and possible patterns of classroom interaction. Another way of participating in the reflection process is to use written records of experiences, including self-reports and teachers' diaries. With respect to the former, an inventory or a checklist of teaching practices should be used, on which teachers rely to figure out what has happened in the class after each lesson. This can be performed individually or in groups. As regards the latter, it is widely agreed that keeping a frequent account of teaching experiences through writing a journal or a diary is a viable tool deemed as a basis for later reflection. Despite requiring a large amount of commitment, this is believed to provide teachers with a greater chance of better understanding not only themselves but their learners, which in turn is a rewarding experience for those involved.

The following way of reflection is through the use of video recordings. By implementing this, implementers can have an accessible source to obtain valuable data of essential classroom events, which can be afterwards reconsidered and analysed for their reflection. Another strategy of reflective teaching is the application of reflective inquiry groups. Specifically, after identifying an issue of concern in class, teachers can bring it to a group of staff members for discussion. This is followed by a feasible plan to address that issue and improve subsequent teaching practices. Finally, also included in Farrell (1999)'s implications for reflective teaching, action research is a tool that should be taken into consideration. Qing further recommends that cognitive learning styles should be discovered so that teachers can better understand their students, which may offer them different perspectives on problems facing their students in class. This is likely to be associated with a need for reflection on what possibly causes these problems, by which significant changes can be made accordingly. Besides, according to Dikilitaş (2015), action research is a reflective teaching approach that could substantially enhance EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

2.4 Reflective Teaching in EFL Contexts

By virtue of the agreement on the significance of reflection in professional development among many researchers and educators, a large body of research has been done on teachers' reflective teaching in different EFL contexts, especially since Dewey (1933)'s concept of the term was introduced.

Ansarin et al. (2015) conducted a study to investigate one hundred Iranian EFL teachers' levels of reflective teaching, specified as pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. The roles of gender, years of experience, and qualifications in the reflection process were also investigated. To obtain data for the study, a 53-item questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants online. The results indicated that Iranian EFL teachers' reflective teaching was mainly at the pedagogical level, with the lowest proportion reflecting at the pre-reflection level. The critical and surface reflections ranked second and third, respectively, in terms of popularity among the poll sample. A significant relationship between qualifications and the two levels of pedagogical reflection and critical reflection was observed in the study. The same pattern was repeated for years of experience. Then, one year later, in Iran, Faghihi and Sarab (2016) did a study whose aim was to find out sixty EFL teachers' levels of reflection inferred from their perceptions and practices. Two instruments employed to collect data for the research were a questionnaire and classroom observation. As for the latter, the teachers' questioning practice was observed as an indication of their degrees of reflection. The study showed different results compared to those of Ansarin et al. (2015)'s in the sense that the participants were of the level of description, which is regarded as the lowest level of reflection. This was because they tended to depend on their own reflectivity in teaching. The researchers, therefore, suggested that teachers should engage themselves more in uncovering their students' learning styles and critical characteristics of the teaching context so that they could achieve higher levels of reflective teaching.

In Turkey, Kömür and Gün (2016) studied the levels at which English language teachers self-reflected on their practices of reflective teaching using a 29-item questionnaire designed based on Akbari et al. (2010)'s the English language teaching reflection inventory. The questionnaire was comprised of five distinct components: (1) practical, (2) cognitive, (3) learner, (4) metacognitive, and (5) critical. The participants were thirty-seven teachers working at different state schools in Muğla province, ranging from primary to high schools. When it comes to the results, the participants actively participated in reflective teaching, and they mostly reflected on the meta-cognitive and learner components. The study also further suggested that Turkish teachers were aware of the importance of understanding their students' learning styles and preferences in their reflection processes.

Implemented from a different angle, Fakazli and Gönen (2017)'s research sought to examine eight EFL university instructors' perceptions towards reflective practices, focusing on the implementation of different reflective teaching tools, namely reflective diaries,

reflective video analyses, and reflective peer sessions. Data were gained through written reflections, a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. It was concluded from the study that all the participants showed a consensus on the important role that reflective teaching play in teacher development, and they held positive views about the application of the surveyed tools of reflection in their teaching settings. The participants further assumed that different tools of reflection should be applied systematically.

Motallebzadeh et al. (2018) reported on an investigation into the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflective practices and their teaching effectiveness. There were 115 participants being involved in the study by using convenience sampling. As for research instruments, the English language teaching reflection inventory and effective teaching questionnaire were used to gather data for the study. The results revealed that there was a positive relationship between the two variables mentioned, whereas the opposite was true of that between teachers' level of teaching effectiveness and experience.

Moradkhani (2019)'s study was of certain contributions to the reflective teaching domain as it aimed to examine EFL teachers' perceptions of two reflection approaches: teaching journals and peer observation. The participants included two cohorts of ten and eleven EFL teachers who attended two separate practicum courses. Data collected for the study were based on the participants' submission of five teaching journals and five observation forms throughout the course. Focus group interviews were also used to obtain further information on their perceptions of reflection experiences. Research results showed that the participants had a preference for peer observation over teaching journals. They suggested that teachers should have chances to receive feedback on journal entries and conduct classroom observation before keeping their journals. Besides, establishing criteria to guide writing journals was also necessary to help teachers further benefit from the two reflection approaches.

More recently, Cholifah et al. (2020) carried out a study to explore two in-service teachers' use of reflective teaching tools. An in-depth interview was employed as the research instrument for data collection. It was found that there were individual differences between the two participants in their preferences for implementing reflection in teaching practices. The results also manifested that peer observation and student feedback were the most utilised tools by the participants, followed by teaching journals and video/audio recordings. The reasons behind the participants' use of these tools were twofold. That is, the tools were believed first to allow them to identify their students' learning needs and second to have opportunities to discuss with other

teachers, which in turn could help them come up with more effective teaching plans.

In the same year, another study was conducted by Sunra et al. (2020) with the aim of investigating EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of reflection in teaching. Seven Indonesian EFL teachers at a junior high school in Makassar were recruited as participants of the study through the purposive sampling technique. The qualitative method was designed to collect data for the study using a semi-structured interview, a focus group discussion, classroom observation, and documentation of teaching records. It was found that the participants perceived reflective teaching as an evaluative process to their classroom practices. They all agreed that reflective practice was one of the characteristics of an effective language teacher, and it could enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, their practices of reflection were not at a satisfactory level due to some challenges facing them during the reflection process, two of which were teaching workload and inadequate knowledge of reflective teaching.

In short, reflective teaching, which is considered a contributory element of teachers' professional development, has been an issue of interest to many researchers and educators. As shown in the aforementioned studies, different theoretical frameworks were adapted to elaborate EFL teachers' perceptions, practices, and levels of reflective teaching in varied contexts. Some divergences in the extent to which teachers reflected on their teaching practices were also recorded. In addition, two of the studies (Ansarin et al., 2015; Motallebzadeh et al., 2018) did not share a consensus on the relationship between EFL teachers' reflective practices and years of experience. Regarding similar points, as commonly perceived by EFL teachers, reflective teaching had a role to play in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Besides, the surveyed teachers in Moradkhani (2019)'s and Cholifah et al. (2020)'s studies showed a preference for peer observation over other reflection approaches like teaching journals.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions

To gain evidence on Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching as a tool for their professional development, the present study sought to answer the following research questions.

- a) What are Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the significance of reflective teaching in teacher development?
- b) To which extent do Vietnamese EFL teachers reflect on their teaching practices?

3.2 Participants

The participants included 25 EFL teachers at different universities in the Mekong delta of Vietnam, with 14 females (N=14, 56%) and 11 males (N=11, 44%). Their ages ranged from 27 to 42 years old. They were selected to participate in the study using convenient sampling. Regarding their educational attainment, all of them earned a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language and had knowledge of reflective teaching. While most of these participants, namely 64%, had at least five years of teaching experience, 36% were low-experienced teachers with only 1 to 5 years in service.

3.3 Research Instruments

The present study employed a mix-methods approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. By using the mix-methods approach, rich and diverse sorts of data can be obtained to elaborate the research topic more fully (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Two main research instruments were employed in this study, namely a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part 1 was aimed to collect the participants' demographic information. In parts 2 and 3, most of the items were presented according to a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly

agree and 1=never to 5=always in turn. Part 2 was comprised of 10 items investigating how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive the significance of reflective teaching in professional development. To this end, results gained from the questionnaire were subjected to SPSS (version 20.0) for data analysis in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Part 3, with 29 items were adopted from Akbari et al. (2010)'s English language teaching reflection inventory dealing with the teachers' practices of reflective teaching in their teaching contexts. An open-ended question was also provided in this part to ask the teachers to give their opinions as free responses. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked using the Scale Test.

The result showed that the reliability coefficient of this instrument was fairly high ($\alpha=.77$). As for the interview, six participants were randomly chosen to be interviewees. In each interview, in addition to the main interview questions, probing questions were used to collect extra information from the participants so that more profound insights into their perceptions and practices of reflective teaching could be drawn out.

In this study, the overall mean scores obtained from The Descriptive Statistics Tests were interpreted as follows:

Table 3.1 Interpretation of mean scores

Ranges of mean scores	Perceptions	Practices
	Interpretation of mean scores	
1.0 to approximate 1.8	Very insignificant	Very low
1.8 to approximate 2.6	Insignificant	Low
2.6 to approximate 3.4	Average	Average
3.4 to approximate 4.2	Significant	High
4.2 to 5.0	Very significant	Very high

As seen from Table 3.1, the participants who have mean scores ranging between 1.0 and approximate 2.6 are regarded as having negative perceptions towards reflective teaching. Specifically, the mean cores from 1.0 to lower than 1.8 and between 1.8 and under 2.6 denote that the participants perceive reflective teaching as “very insignificant” and “insignificant”, respectively. The mean scores from 2.6 to approximate 3.4 mean that the participants consider reflective teaching as “averagely important” in their professional development. Above this level is classified as “significant” when the participants' mean scores of perceptions lie between 3.4 and approximate 4.2. The mean scores from 4.2 onwards manifest that the participants regard reflective teaching as a “very significant” contribution to enhancing their professionalism. Similarly, different ranges of mean scores show different levels of the participants' practices of reflective teaching, including “very low”

(1.0 - approximate 1.8), “low” (1.8 - approximate 2.6), “average” (2.6 - approximate 3.4), “high” (3.4 - approximate 4.2), and “very high” levels (4.2 - 5.0).

4. Findings

4.1 Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Significance of Reflective Teaching in Teacher Development

To elucidate Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the significance of reflective teaching in teacher development, data gained from the questionnaire and the interview were analysed. Regarding quantitative data from the questionnaire, the Descriptive Statistics Test was run to check for the overall mean score of the participants' perception of the extent to which reflective teaching is significant to the process of teacher growth. Table 4.1 displays the results of this test.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics for the participants' perceptions of reflective teaching

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Perceptions	25	3.50	4.70	4.19	.29

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the overall mean scores of the participant's perceptions of the significance of reflective teaching are 4.19 on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0 (SD=.29). The One-Sample T-Test was performed to compare the mean scores and the test value 4.2. The result showed that no significant difference between these variables was observed ($t=-.20$, $p=.84$). It could be concluded that the participants perceived reflective teaching as "very significant" to teacher development.

To gain further understanding of the participants' perception of the significance of reflective teaching, qualitative data from the interview were analysed. The results revealed that all the six interviewees agreed on the importance of reflective teaching in teacher development and considered it an integral part of their teaching practices, as shown in three of the interviewees' responses.

"I think that reflective teaching is indispensable in the process of growing professionally as teachers of English. It is definitely important although practising it is not an easy task." (Teacher 2)

"I believe that reflecting teaching is a significant tool for professional development, and it should be routinely practised by all teachers of English." (Teacher 5)

"From my own perspective, reflective teaching plays an important role in teacher development. Therefore, in educational organizations, especially universities, teachers should have a high level of awareness of practising reflective teaching." (Teacher 6)

As part of enhancing teachers' professionalism, almost all the participants stressed the values of reflective teaching in strengthening students' learning outcomes. Specifically, they agreed that reflective teaching would offer them opportunities to reflect on their teaching beliefs and classroom practices, through which they could know what aspects of their teaching should be deployed and what part of their work need modifying. In addition, by making the most of strengths and minimising weaknesses, they believed

in the likelihood of an enhancement in their effectiveness of teaching, which would directly affect their students' learning. The following responses from two of the interviewees reflected these opinions in detail.

"Thanks to reflective teaching, we [teachers of English] can identify our strong and weak characteristics. Analysing these characteristics, we can know what we should do inside and outside the class to be better teachers. Furthermore, once we develop ourselves to be more competent through reflective practices, we can better facilitate our students' learning." (Teacher 2)

"Reflective teaching undoubtedly contributes to teacher development, which is likely to have positive effects on students' learning outcomes. Therefore, I suppose that reflective teaching is closely associated with the possibility of teachers' continuous practices of promoting their students' learning outcomes." (Teacher 4)

To sum up, the results from the questionnaire and the interview indicated that the participants had positive perceptions towards reflective teaching in helping teachers develop professionally. In other words, they regarded reflective teaching as "very significant" in the process of teacher development. Additionally, they highly valued the effects of reflective practices on students' learning outcomes. The majority of them believed that students could benefit from teachers' improvement in the level of reflective teaching. That is, the higher their level of reflective teaching is, the more benefits they can bring to their students.

4.2 Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching

The degree to which the participants have reflected on their teaching practices was measured using the questionnaire and the interview. In the quantitative stage, the Descriptive Statistics Test was performed to identify the overall mean scores of the participants' reflective practices. The results from this test are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Descriptive statistics for the participants' practices of reflective teaching

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Practices	25	2.59	3.62	3.23	.30

As shown in Table 4.2, the participants' overall mean scores for their practices of reflective teaching were 3.23 on the 1.0-5.0 scale (SD=.30). To identify whether there was a significant difference between the

mean scores and the test value 3.4, the One-Sample T-Test was employed. The result signified a significant discrepancy between them ($t=-2.90$, $p=.01$). Therefore,

it can be inferred that the participants' level of engagement in reflective teaching was "average".

In the qualitative phase, the interview was employed to gain more data on strategies the participants employed to reflect on their teaching practices. The results from the interview showed that the interviewees undertook reflection in two main periods, which were during and after their teaching, as specified in the responses below.

"I am always aware of what I am doing in class, especially things that I am doing well and things that need improving. In addition, after each lesson, I often spend some time thinking back on what I have done and answering myself the questions of whether I am satisfied with my teaching and what should be done for the betterment of my subsequent teaching performances." (Teacher 1)

"I am always concerned about whether things that are happening in class can help me achieve the objectives of the lesson and whether there are any aspects of my teaching that need to be modified. My reflection is not limited to thinking about what I am doing in class, and I also reflect on what I have done for my students after I finish my teaching." (Teacher 5)

Of the strategies of reflective teaching reported by the interviewees, *sharing classroom experiences with colleagues* was the most popular (five out of six), followed by *conducting peer observation* (four out of six) and *collecting feedback from students* (three out of six). These results were reflected in the following responses.

"I regularly share my classroom experiences with my colleagues and talk to them about my successful and unsuccessful aspects of a particular lesson... Also, I sometimes observe my colleagues' lessons so that I can learn about things that they have done effectively." (Teacher 2)

"After taking notes of what I have done in class, I often have a discussion about my teaching with my colleagues and ask for their suggestions or advice, when necessary, to improve my classroom performances... I sometimes collect my evidence on my past teaching experiences through informal conversations with my students... Besides, at my university, peer observation is mandatory, and this is a good opportunity for me to reflect on my teaching experiences." (Teacher 6)

Surprisingly, only one interviewee said that *keeping teaching journals* was used as a strategy for reflecting on her teaching experiences, and two respondents sometimes undertook reflection through *doing action research*. The other four interviewees admitted that *doing action research* was not their prioritised choice for reflective teaching practices. They explained that this was because they did not have time to engage in such a strategy, and they

viewed it as difficult work, as said by the following interviewer.

"I know that doing action research is a good tool for reflective teaching because, to the best of my knowledge, it can help teachers address certain problems occurring in class. However, it is kind of difficult work and requires much time for conduction. Therefore, to be honest, carrying out action research is not my preferred choice." (Teacher 2)

When being asked about in what ways they employed to improve their teaching, more than half of the interviewees claimed that they often read books about language learning and teaching to widen their knowledge of teaching methods. However, there were just two interviewees reporting that they sometimes attended conferences or workshops on English language teaching.

In short, it is evident from the results of the questionnaire that the participants' level of reflective practices was identified as "average". In addition, as can be seen from the results of the interview, the participants had their own ways of practising reflective teaching, but the strategies employed for their practices in this regard were not diverse. The popular strategies were *sharing classroom experiences with colleagues* and *conducting peer observation*, with *keeping teaching journals* and *doing action research* being recorded as by far less used ones.

5. Discussion

It is acknowledged that reflective teaching can benefit language teachers in many ways, one of which is that of helping them grow professionally. As for the effects on student learning, reflective teachers are likely to bring positive changes to their students' learning outcomes as they are able to "plan more effective lessons, persist when students face challenges, and search extensively for appropriate strategies and materials to improve student achievement" (Baleghizadeh & Javidanmehr, 2014, p.30). Drawing on the results of this study, it could be concluded that the participants had positive perceptions of reflective teaching and highlighted it as a very significant tool for teacher development. In addition, they viewed reflective teaching as a useful tool for teachers' recognition of their strengths and weaknesses whereby appropriate modifications can be made to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

This finding is consistent with those of Fakazli and Gönen (2017)'s and Sunra et al. (2020)'s, showing that EFL teachers under survey were sufficiently aware of the importance of reflective teaching in strengthening their professionalism. Furthermore, Sunra et al. (2020) concluded in their study that reflective teaching is an indispensable attribute of an effective teacher, and it could help to

improve the quality of teaching and learning. It can be inferred that reflective teaching has recognised values in, but is not limited to, various EFL contexts like Vietnam.

Nevertheless, in this study, the extent to which the teachers reflected on their teaching practices was not very high but at the average level instead. Compared to other studies (Faghihi & Sarab, 2016; Fakazli & Gönen, 2017; Sunra et al., 2020), the current study had a different result. That is, Faghihi and Sarab (2016) and Sunra et al. (2020) concluded in their research that the teachers did not have a desirable level of reflective teaching practices since they had the lowest and unsatisfactory levels of reflection, respectively. A reason behind these results may be due to the participants did not have a deep understanding of reflective teaching, making it be an unexploited area in the teaching process.

Likewise, Nguyen (2011) found that the teachers under survey did not deeply understand the concept of reflective teaching until they partook in a reflection process initiated by their institution. As such, the quality of their reflection on teaching became more technical, with much dependence on formal supervision and collegial support. This was in sharp contrast to the result revealed in Fakazli & Gönen (2017)'s study, which indicated that the teachers actively got involved in reflective teaching by using different reflection tools, with metacognitive and learner components attracting their most attention. These tools included reflective diaries, reflective video analyses, and reflective peer sessions. In the current study, given that all the participants were teachers at the tertiary level and had knowledge of reflective teaching, their level of reflective practices was not very desirable.

Furthermore, there was a statistically significant discrepancy between their perceptions and practices of reflective teaching ($t=13.56$, $p=.00$). It can be implied that although the participants perceived reflective teaching as "very significant" to teacher growth, they did not practise such a tool in a satisfactory manner in reality. This discrepancy may be attributable to several factors, such as overloaded teaching schedules and inadequate knowledge of reflective teaching, as pointed out by Cholifah et al. (2020). Thus, it is recommended that the teachers should be well-prepared for better understanding the concept of reflective teaching and take more self-initiated actions towards reflection in their teaching practice. Besides, teachers should have more encouragement and support from their institutions in this regard so that they can make use of reflective teaching to the fullest. Also, teachers should be given more rights to make decisive decisions in the practice of reflective teaching.

Regarding reflective teaching strategies identified from the interview, while *sharing classroom*

experiences with colleagues was ranked first in terms of popularity, *keeping teaching journals* was used the least. This result was different from that of Cholifah et al. (2020)'s in the sense that, in their study, participating in peer observation and receiving student feedback were the most utilised reflection tools. In the present study, as identified in Akbari et al. (2010)'s six-component model of reflection, the participants' practices of reflective teaching were just at the practical level. They tended to prefer practising reflective teaching on a collaborative basis as they preferred to share their records of teaching performances and discuss issues regarding their teaching with one another. The result also differs from that of Kömür and Gün (2016)'s, which showed that the teachers mainly reflected on the metacognitive and affective components of reflective teaching.

Meanwhile, the participants in the present study did not give enough attention to these components, partly explaining why the level at which they practise reflective teaching was not high. For instance, although more cognitive strategies, such as *doing action research*, were considered effective tools for teachers to practise reflective teaching, they were not generally favoured by the participants. It was also found that the teachers restricted themselves to using strategies (e.g., *sharing classroom experiences with colleagues* and *conducting peer observation*) that are of their preferences. Some strategies, such as *keeping teaching journals* and *doing action research*, were taken for granted, albeit with their recognised effectiveness, as they are perceived to be hard and time-consuming to implement. However, these accounts for not utilising such optimal strategies of reflection are not insolvable barriers in case teachers are substantively assisted by authorities in the reflection process, and teachers themselves have to make commitments to reflective teaching as an inherent element of teacher development.

6. Conclusion

Reflective teaching has been regarded as an integral component of teacher development. According to Gupta et al. (2019), reflecting on classroom events "enables teachers and teacher educators to understand how they use their knowledge in classroom situations and how they combine theory and practice in a more effective manner" (p.37). In general terms, it can provide teachers with information to reflect on their pedagogical behaviours and beliefs regarding their teaching practice whereby changes can be made for better educational outcomes in improving the quality of teaching and learning (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Kramer, 2018). Faghihi and Sarab (2016) state that reflective teaching can be undertaken when EFL teachers are provided with ample opportunities for reinforcing their professional knowledge and for engaging in reflective teaching practices. This study suggests that, from the objective perspective, there should be institutional

policies as stimuli to support teachers to enhance their levels of participation in reflective teaching. Organising workshops or seminars, for example, helps to offer teachers professional development platforms where they can reflect on and share their teaching experiences with their colleagues and educators in the field. Subjectively, teachers should be more active in the reflective teaching process, showing their reflective practices by doing specific actions and employing different strategies rather than putting limits on themselves in this process.

Although this study has achieved its aims, the results generated from a limited sample of participants may not offer strong generalisations to other EFL contexts. Hence, this research should be replicated with larger groups of participants in various EFL contexts to provide more substantial evidence on how reflective teaching is perceived and practised by EFL teachers. The results from such research may also provide a fuller picture of contextual factors affecting teachers' performances of reflection in their teaching.

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