

Exploring Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Using Reflective Practice as a Tool for Professional Development

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of male and female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers regarding using reflective practice as a professional development tool and the obstacles that hinder them from adopting reflective practice. To achieve this, a quantitative approach was employed to collect data. A questionnaire with a study sample of 73 teachers was utilized as a research instrument. The findings showed that EFL teachers have positive perceptions towards reflective practice in general and that they believe it is a helpful tool to enhance their professional development. However, it was evident from the data that teachers rarely implemented the reflective tools such as reflective journal, lesson reports, and peer observation. Female EFL teachers were found to be more involved in reflective practice than male teachers. The results also revealed that the biggest obstacle that hinder EFL teachers from utilizing reflective practice was related to the institution fixed policies. Based on these findings, this study provides some implications and recommendation that will hopefully foster

Saudi EFL teachers understanding and use of reflective practice.

Keywords: EFL teachers, professional development, reflective practice, reflective tools, teachers' perceptions

1. Introduction

Teachers play an essential role in the success of any educational institution as they are the individuals who are responsible of the transmission of knowledge, values, and skills to their students. According to Mathew et. al., (2017), the quality and success of education depend on the quality of teachers and teaching. Therefore, teachers need to constantly improve and update their teaching practices in order to meet their students' needs and to contribute to the success of the educational system. One way to achieve this is by adopting reflective teaching practice. Reflective teaching practice can be defined as " a process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analyze how something was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes" (Mathew et. al., , 2017, p. 112). Constantinou (2009) demonstrated that reflective practice assists teachers to update their teaching practices which results in enhanced student performance. Through reflection, teachers can examine and evaluate their own teaching to make decision on necessary changes in order to improve their teaching beliefs and practices. Thus, reflective practice is an important concept that is worth investigating as it is the key element that contribute to the success of teachers, students, the educational process and the educational system as a whole (Borg, 2003; Zwozdiak-Myers, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective practice as a tool to enhance their professional development and discover the obstacles that they perceive to hinder them from adopting such reflective-practices in their teaching.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

In recent years, research into reflective teaching practice has been flourished rapidly, given its importance to the enhancement of teachers' professional development (Alsuhaibani, 2019). Different research studies have been conducted to investigate reflective teaching practices among EFL teachers (A'Dhahab ,2009; Alsuhaibani, 2019; Azzizh et. al., 2018; Fakazli & Gonen ,2017; Shukri, 2014; Sibahi ,2015). However, there is a lack of research investigating EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective teaching practice as a tool to enhance their professional development in the Saudi Arabian EFL educational context. In particular, a clear understanding of what constitute reflective teaching practice and its influence on teachers' professional development from Saudi EFL point of view have not been adequately explored. Therefore, this study seeks to enrich the body of literature and explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of reflection.

Additionally, researchers have demonstrated that although language teachers need to think and act reflectively and involve their cognition to resolve complicated educational situations (Afshar & Farahani, 2015; Minott, 2010; Moon, 1999; Ostorga, 2006), they are sometimes impeded by some obstacles which hinder their reflection process. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to explore the obstacles preventing language teachers from adopting reflection on

their teaching practices. However, the number of research studies on the existing obstacles in implementing reflective teaching practice, specifically from EFL teachers' point of view, is limited and EFL teachers' perceptions in this regard have not been adequately explored. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap in order to enhance the knowledge regarding the obstacles of reflective teaching practice and, ultimately, enhance the quality of teaching for EFL teachers.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective practice as a tool for professional development, and the activities that EFL teachers implement to reflect on their teaching practices. In addition, it is aimed by this study to investigate the obstacles that hinder EFL teachers from adopting reflective practices in their teaching. To achieve these aims, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: What reflective activities do Saudi EFL teachers use to measure their reflective teaching practice?

RQ2: Is there any statistical differences between male and female Saudi EFL teachers' involvement in reflective practices?

RQ3: What are Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective practice as a tool for professional development?

RQ4: What are the obstacles that hinder Saudi EFL teachers' reflective practices?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study lies in its contribution to the literature of reflective teaching practice as there is a lack of studies that investigate teachers' perceptions of reflective practices and the activities that they implement to reflect on their teaching practices. Specifically in the Saudi EFL context, there is limited research that examined Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of reflective practices, thus this study will fill a gap in the literature specific to this context. Furthermore, the findings of this study would be of great significance as it provides a holistic understanding of teachers' perceptions and views of reflective teaching practice at the English Language Institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University (KAU). This holistic understanding of teacher' perceptions of reflective teaching practice may provide valuable insights to the administrations and policy makers at the ELI who are seeking to foster a culture of reflectivity in the workplace with the intention to improve the quality of teaching.

2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature related to the concept of reflection and teacher professional development. It starts by defining the construct of reflection and illustrating its models. It then displays the characteristics of teachers as reflective practitioners. Next, it reviews previous studies related to teachers' perceptions of reflective practice. In addition, it highlights the obstacles of adopting reflective practice and the factors which affect teachers' reflective practices. Finally, it concludes by reviewing similar studies specific to the Saudi EFL context

and presenting the theoretical framework of the current research study. It must be noted that the words "reflection", "reflective practice" and "reflective teaching" are used interchangeably in this chapter.

2.1 Definition of Reflection

Various attempts have been made in the existing body of literature to define the construct of reflection or reflective practice. However, due to the different philosophies that have embraced the concept of reflective practice, establishing a clear-cut definition of the term for all its components is simply problematic (Akbari et al., 2010).

Dewey (1933), who is considered the pioneer of introducing the concept of reflection in the field of education, defines reflection as an action that is based on “the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it” (p. 9). In one of his famous books: *How we Think* (1933), Dewey contrasted reflective action with the action that is routine. Routine action is guided by traditions, impulse, and authority. With this kind of action, there are taken for granted definitions of reality which serve as a barrier to look for and experiment other alternatives. By contrast, reflective action is a holistic way of accepting and dealing with everyday problems which involves intuitions, emotions, and passions. Thus, reflective teachers, for Dewey, consider that there is more than one way to frame every problem.

Furthermore, according to Schon (1983) who is an influential thinker in reflective practice, reflection can be seen in two-time frames: *Reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action*. Reflection-on-action occurs either before or after the action or a lesson. That is, when teachers prepare and think for their lesson and after the instructions when they consider what has occurred. In contrast, reflection-in-action occur during the action or a lesson in which teachers try to solve problems on the spot. According to Schon, reflective teachers reflect both "in" and "on" action.

A more recent definition that is distinct to teachers in the EFL context was proposed by Farrell & Ives (2015) in which they defined reflective practice as "a cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which teachers systematically collect data about their practice, and use this data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom" (p. 123). In a similar vein, Mathew et. al., (2017) proposed that reflective practice as " a process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analyze how something was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes" (p. 112). They consider reflection as an intentional and systematic process rather than an incidental one for it to have results in learning.

2.2 Definition of Professional Development

In a broad sense, the term 'professional development' (PD) refers to the development of an individual in his/her professional role. More specifically, teacher professional development (TPD) is defined as “the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically” (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41). Similarly, Avalos (2011) defined TPD as “a wide variety of specialized training, formal

education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness” (p. 54).

Teacher professional development can take place in formal contexts, such as attending PD courses, seminars or workshops, or informally within the classroom (Ganser ,2000). Research revealed that there is no single form or model of PD that can work for all teachers or be implemented in any educational institutions. Rather, schools and institutes should evaluate their needs, practices and cultural beliefs in order to decide which PD model or form would be suitable to their particular context (Avalos ,2011). Therefore, to be effective and successful, TPD should be relevant to teachers' needs.

In the PD literature, researchers and scholars have established an apparent consensus on the characteristics of effective PD (Caena, 2011; Desimone, 2009; Van Driel et. al., 2012; Wei et al., 2009). These characteristics are:

- Ongoing
- Collaborative
- Job-embedded
- Subject specific
- Practical Application

Firstly, PD is said to be effective if it is sustained over time. Research revealed that the more engaged the teachers are in PD, the more likely their teaching practice is to develop (Porter et. al., 2003; Quick et al., 2009). Secondly, PD is considered to be effective if it happens in groups where the teacher works with multiple colleagues or ‘community of practice’. Thirdly, PD can be more effective if it addresses teachers' specific needs and concerns regarding their daily responsibilities, and thus make the teaching learning more authentic and relevant. Fourthly, PD is more effective if it incorporates training in the subject knowledge rather than training in general pedagogical techniques. Finally, PD can be more effective if it incorporates opportunities to practice what have been learned. In doing so, the teacher can better apply what has been learned in real classrooms settings. When guided by the aforementioned characteristics, teacher education programs or institutes can design beneficial and meaningful learning experiences for teachers.

Reflective practice has been widely acknowledged by researchers as a mean that could promote the professional development of teachers and improve the quality of teaching. Jacob et. al., (2011) demonstrated that reflective practice offers the opportunities for teacher to examine the incidents of their teaching, evaluate it, and learn from it with the potential to apply what has been learned on future actions. Furthermore, Shukri (2014) maintained that, with reflective practice, teachers can be more receptive and productive in their career, and this will assist them to make the right decisions for improving their professional practices. Akbari (2007) suggested that reflective practice helps the teacher to question what they have learned in their pre-service training program. He further stated that the integration of the knowledge that the teachers gained during their teaching education with their practical experiences will help teachers to make informed choices. Lui and Zhang (2014) established a need for a reflective

practice in the EFL settings and identified its critical role in enhancing teacher professional development. Through reflective practice, EFL teachers have opportunity to examine their roles, change their taken-for-granted teaching beliefs, and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

2.3 Models of Reflection

Scholars have developed a number of models to illustrate the reflective thinking process in different fields of education and professional practices. According to Ghaye and Lillyman (1997), there are five different types of reflection models: hierarchical, structured, holistic, synthetic and iterative. For instance, Van Manen's (1977) hierarchical model identified three levels of reflection: *technical*, *practical*, and *critical*. In the technical reflection, which is considered the lowest level of reflection, teachers are more concerned with the degree to which the technical application of their teaching skills is effective in the classroom settings. In other words, educators focus on how effective the means are to achieve a certain goal. In the practical reflection, teachers are more concerned with analyzing and examining the assumptions, beliefs and consequences underlying their teaching actions. The critical reflection, which is the highest level of reflection, incorporates examining the moral, ethical and social aspects of teaching. Akbari (2010) asserts the importance to consider the moral dimension of reflective teaching since teachers are asked to think about themselves as practitioners and consider the ethical and social consequences of what they do.

Another useful model which was proposed to represent the reflective thinking process is that of Jay and Johnson (2002). They regarded reflection as consisting of three important stages: *description*, *comparison*, and *criticism*. The *descriptive* stage involves the identification and the recognition of the problem to be reflected on in teaching. The *comparison* stage incorporates thinking about the incident of reflection from different perspectives or frames. In this stage, a reflective teacher tries to make sense of others' ideas and consider other alternatives which might run counter to his/her points of view. The last stage, i.e. *criticism*, involves “teachers looking at all the different perspectives of a situation or problem and at all of the players involved: teachers, students, the school, and the community” (Farrell, 2004, p.22). This stage is considered as the decision-making stage since it results in the formulation of alternative ways of approaching the problem.

Additionally, Farrell's (2018) model for reflecting on practice involves a holistic approach to reflection that encompasses not only the cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of teaching practice but also the moral, emotional and spiritual aspects of teachers in their teaching practices. His five-levels model starts from reflecting on philosophy, which allow teachers to better understand their teacher identity origins, formation, to reflecting on sociocultural issues outside the classroom. Farrell (2018) mentions that reflecting on a specific aspect of teaching assists reflective teachers to make modifications on other aspects of teaching through understanding why they do things in specific way or hold a particular assumption.

In short, all the above hierarchical models imply that the lower level of reflection is associated with the technical aspects of teaching while higher level of reflection is linked to the social, moral and critical aspects of teaching.

2.4 The Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

During the last two decades, many researchers and scholars expressed a need for preparing more reflective teachers in today's teaching context (Tsangaridou & Siedentop, 1995). This need can be attributable to the current complexities of teaching besides increased concern about the moral and political aspects of teaching.

In the education history, much emphasis was directed to the technical skills of teaching. Zeichner and Liston (2013) consider the movement to reflective teaching as a reaction to viewing teachers as being merely technicians since they devalue the inherited knowledge in their teaching practices. Furthermore, the movement towards reflective teaching goes against the view of teachers as being “curriculum consumers” who do not acquire “the requisite skills to create or critique that knowledge” (Paris, 1993, p. 4).

Additionally, the reflective teaching movement asserts the importance of empowering teachers to value the knowledge embedded in their daily teaching practices. This knowledge is termed by Donald Schon (1983) as *knowledge-in-action* which teachers accumulate over time through their teaching practices in schools. In the tradition view of technical rationality, there is a separation between theories, which are exclusively generated in universities, and practice, which exists in school. The reflective teaching movement signifies a recognition that the new knowledge of teaching is not a property of universities, rather it is a recognition that teachers have theories too which can contribute to the betterment of teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

In reflective literature, there are some characteristics which are used to describe the reflective practitioner. Dewey (1933) provides three characteristics prerequisites for teachers to be reflective:

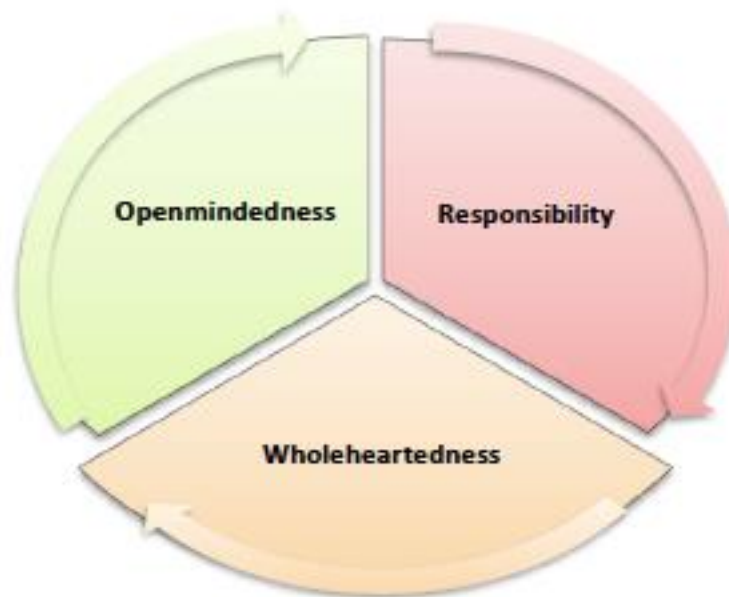


Figure 1. Dewey's Attitudes of Reflective Actions (Adopted from Althaqafi, 2015).

The first is *open-mindedness* which refers to the active desire to listen to more than one side and give attention to alternative possibilities. Being an open-minded teacher involves having the ability to recognize the possibility of error in the taken-for-granted beliefs and even in the beliefs that are dearest to them. Also, open-minded teachers do not stick to one perspective, rather they consider the strengths and weaknesses of their own and others' perspectives. The second precondition for reflection, according to Dewey, is *responsibility* which involves a careful consideration of the consequences of one's actions. Reflective teachers are seen as responsible for the consequences of their teaching on students' life chances, their self-concept, and intellectual developments. *Wholeheartedness*, which is the third attitude necessary for reflection, involves the capability of teachers to examine their own beliefs and assumptions with the attitudes to learn new things. Wholehearted teachers are always strived to understand the ways in which their own teaching impact their students (Zeichner & Liston ,2013) . According to Dewey, the possession of the aforementioned attitudes helped teachers towards becoming more reflective.

Dewey (1933) demonstrated that experience is used by reflective practitioners as their source for learning. However, not all experiences educate. Experiences should encompass two key elements for learning to happen (Ghaye, 2011). The first is *continuity* which involves teachers' ability to connect aspects of the new experience to modify or improve their previous knowledge. The second element is *interaction* which refers to teachers' ability to actively interact with colleagues in the workplace to test or modify what they learn in the company of others. It must be noted that reflective moment is triggered when teachers face discomfort or difficulty in their teaching (Dewey, 1933). Reflective practitioners can be described as good observers since they not only observe what went wrong in their teaching but also observe positive aspects of the teaching practices (Ghaye, 2011).

Some studies proposed that the task of preparing teachers to be reflective practitioners is the duty of language teacher education programs (Gore & Zeichner, 1991). They must familiarize student-teachers with the necessary skills to be open to multiple perspectives, to make decisions based on different sources of information, and to continue learning from experiences. According to Pacheco (2005), reflection allow EFL professionals to improve their beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices through reacting, examining, and evaluating their teaching to make decisions on necessary changes.

2.5 Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Practice

Understanding teachers' perceptions towards reflective practice is crucial as they affect their teaching behavior and practices. Borg (2003) demonstrated that teachers' cognitions, beliefs, and perceptions have an influence on their pedagogical choices. Therefore, a number of studies have been conducted to explore teachers' perceptions towards implementing reflective practice in their teaching.

A'Dhahab (2009) conducted a study to investigate seventeen EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of using reflective writing as a tool to apply reflection in their teaching in the Oman context. Analysis of the questionnaire, the interview and the reflection documents revealed that teachers, in general, have positive perceptions about reflective practices. However, only have

of them practice reflection on a daily basis. Further, their reflective writings represented a sufficient understanding of reflection as most of their writing were descriptive or narrative in nature. Choy and Oo (2012) demonstrated that teachers did not reflect on their teaching experiences deeply. This can be attributable to the lack of adequate knowledge and opportunities for teacher to engage in reflective practice. Similarly, Fakazli and Gonen (2017) explored eight EFL teachers' perceptions regarding different reflective practices. The findings indicated that the majority of teachers recognize the usefulness of reflective practices to their teaching and professional development.

Pertaining the Saudi context, Shukri (2014) investigated female Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of reflective practice as a tool for teacher development. Her findings suggested the critical role of reflective practice in enhancing teacher development according to the participants' views. Similarly, Sibahi (2015) investigated Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions towards reflective practice in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study revealed that almost all the teachers have positive perceptions towards reflective practice despite the fact that some of them have never been trained or exposed to the concept of reflection in their previous teacher education programs. Further, the findings showed that some teachers were unconsciously reflective and they did not realize this fact until they were introduced to the concept during the study. In a similar line, Alsuhaibani (2019) also explored Saudi pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of reflection in teaching. The results demonstrated that teachers' perceptions are generally positive and they viewed reflection as useful in their teaching practice. However, they considered the usefulness of reflective practice to be temporary at the beginning of the teaching and then it became only routine action with time. This might indicate that teachers in this study have misconceptions about reflection since they consider it only as a way of writing down the incidents of their teaching rather than a process to examine and de-routinize teaching.

More recently, Alsayeed & Almuhammdi (2020) utilized a mixed-methods approach to explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions about their reflective teaching. They found that some teachers had a positive perception in regards to reflective teaching and they implemented some reflective tools.

In general, the studies presented above indicated EFL teacher have positive perceptions regarding reflective practice and they recognize its usefulness to their teaching and professional development despite the fact that some of them lack a full realization of the concept of reflection.

2.6 Obstacles of Reflective Practice

Although language teachers need to think and act reflectively and involve their cognition to resolve complicated educational situations, they are sometimes impeded by some obstacles which can hinder their reflection process. Therefore, a growing number of studies were conducted to investigate the obstacles which EFL practitioners faced in their process of reflection (Akbari, 2007; Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Harun & Al-Amin, 2013; Minott, 2010; Ostorga, 2006; Rashidi & Javidanmehr, 2012; Tajik & Ranjbar, 2017).

Grant & Zeichner (1984) found that the limited class time and the conflict between the institutional policies and the teacher's desired action were inhibiting factors to practice reflection. To solve these issues, they further suggest that the practice of reflection does not necessarily need to occur during the class time, rather, it can take place before or after the class. Additionally, they suggest that an active role should be given to teachers to actualize reflection in their teaching even if they disagree with the viewpoints of the teaching place. Similarly, Ostorga (2006), in his review of the challenges with implementing reflective teaching, stated that the constraints imposed on teachers by the institutional norms discourage them from becoming reflective.

A few years later, Minott (2010) found that teachers' heavy workloads, administrative requirements, and poor interpersonal relational skills were the main barriers the teachers face in practicing reflective teaching. In the same direction, Akbari (2008) argued that long teaching hours hinders teachers to act as reflective practitioners. He further resembled teachers to workers in factories with high-working hours. To overcome such demotivating factors, Minott (2010) suggested that teachers utilize prepared lesson plans and ready-to-use teaching materials to decrease their workloads.

Additionally, Harun and Al-Amin (2013) conducted a study to explore English teachers' unwillingness in applying reflective practice in their teaching. They found that the majority of the teachers lack understanding of reflective teaching techniques and practices. Teachers seemed that they do not know about reflection because of the lack of proper teaching education programs. In the same line, Rashidi and Javidanmehr (2012) interviewed Iranian English teachers to find out why they were not reflective. Analysis of the interviews revealed that most teachers were unfamiliar with the concept of reflection and they did not perceive it to be advantageous.

Further, Tajik and Ranjbar (2018) conducted a study to investigate the obstacles of applying reflective teaching principles from the teachers' perspectives in ELT settings. Inductive analysis of the results identified three categories of obstacles of reflective teaching: (1) institutional problems, (2) self-directional problems, and (3) problems with reflective teaching principles. The institutional problems are the obstacles which are imposed by the institute such as administrative requirements and mandated policies. Teachers were unsatisfied with the institute policies which restrict their potentials of being reflective. Self-directional problems which are related to the teachers themselves include teachers' lack of interest to practice reflection, their low-language proficiency, their long teaching hours and the low amount of payment. Problems with reflective teaching principles refer to the nature of reflection itself. Teachers found it too challenging to possess the reflective teacher characteristics like open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.

More recently, Sunra et. al., (2020) conducted a study to investigate EFL teachers' challenges of utilizing reflective practice in their teaching. Analysis of the interviews indicated that insufficient knowledge of reflective practice besides the teaching workload were the main causes that challenged teachers to reflect.

In the Saudi context, Sibahi (2015) conducted a study to explore Saudi EFL teachers' challenges

of applying reflective practice in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. The findings indicated that the restrictive educational system hinders teachers' creativity and has a negative influence on their performance. Besides, the lack of guidance and training programs impede teachers of being reflective. This finding supports what Larrivee (2008) argued, that without carefully constructed guidance, teachers seem unable to be engaged in critical reflection to enhance their teaching practices. Thus, teachers should be trained to interpret and reflect on their own teaching settings, make decisions accordingly, and follow up on them.

Overall, the studies presented thus far provide evidence that a full understanding of the concept of reflection and reflective teaching principles and practices is of great importance for teachers towards becoming reflective practitioners.

2.7 Factors Affecting Reflective Teaching Practice

Previous studies which investigated EFL teachers' reflective practices were also devoted to investigate the factors influencing it. These factors include teachers' beliefs related to self and others, gender and the length of teaching experience. Teachers' beliefs towards themselves or others affect the way they teach, plan and deliver curriculum contents (Alsayed & Almuhammadi, 2020). Hatton and Smith (1995), in their comprehensive literature review on teachers' reflection in education, found that teachers' reflection on their teaching experiences is often subjective and rely on their preconceived assumptions and beliefs. Likewise, in Minott's (2008) study to investigate the types of reflection which teachers utilized by analyzing their reflective writings, he found that teachers' reflective writings were mostly a reflection on their teaching philosophy.

The influence of gender in reflective practice has been the focus of a limited number of research. Clegg (2010) investigated reflective practice in various professions and concluded that engaging in reflective practice is more common in female-dominated professions such as nursing, teaching and social work. This finding has been also supported by Connolly (2016) who demonstrated that a reflective practice is often absent in masculine professions such as construction, engineering and business. Connolly (2016) attributed this to the fact that males in general tend towards logic and rationality, and are more autonomous and less empathetic than females which gives females an advantage in their ability to adopt reflective practice.

In most studies, female teachers showed a greater degree of involvement in reflective teaching more than their male counterparts (Almusharraf & Almusharraf, 2021; Alsayed & Almuhammadi 2020; Poyraz and Usta , 2013; Rashidi and Javidanmehr, 2012). For example, in a study conducted on 226 male and 207 female Saudi EFL teachers to determine whether gender affected teachers' engagement in reflective practice, Almusharraf and Almusharraf (2021) found that female EFL teacher adopted reflective practice more than their male counterparts. On the other hand, few studies have found that male EFL teachers outperformed their female counterparts in regards to reflective teaching (Afshar & Farahani, 2015; Ring et al., 2016).

Besides gender, the length of the teaching experience has been found to influence teachers' engagement in reflective practice. Researchers have found that teachers with many years of

teaching experience had a higher level of reflection compared to low experienced teachers (Afshar & Farahani, 2015; Ansarin et. al., 2015; Impedovo & Malik, 2016). For instance, Ansarin et. al., (2015) found significant differences among varied levels of teaching experience and levels of reflection. They concluded that a higher level of teaching experience is related to higher level of reflection, and teachers with few years of teaching experience function at lower level of reflection. However, other researchers have found that there is no significant correlation between the levels of teacher's reflection and the length of teaching experience, thus novice teachers could be as reflective as their experienced colleagues (Odeh et. al., 2010; Rezaeyan & Nikoopour, 2013).

2.8 Reflective Practice Tools

Reflective tools contribute to the teachers' understanding of their teaching practices, their role as teachers, and their students and institutions. Various reflective tools have been suggested in the literature to encourage the practice of reflection among teachers. Examples of these tools are reflective journals, peer observations, lesson reports, peer discussion, online blogs and video and audio recordings (Farrell, 2015).

Reflective journals appear to be the most effective reflective tool in the educational field (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). It allows teachers to explore and document their teaching-learning process and see their strengths and weaknesses. Fatemipour (2013), in his study to evaluate the effectiveness of different reflective tools in the EFL settings, considers reflective journals to be the most effective tool. Similarly, Lee (2008) also found that reflective journals are useful instrument which give teachers a voice and help them in constructing their professional identities.

Subsequent to reflective journals, peer observation is considered as the second effective reflective tool (Fatemipour, 2012). For example, Motallebzadeh et. al., (2018) found that peer observation had a positive influence in providing teachers with valuable feedback that leads to better classroom performance. However, Hammersely-Fletcher & Orsmond (2005) argued that peer observation could be of little benefits as some teachers do not prefer to be observed by their peers; thus, they do not teach normally in the presence of other colleagues.

Another useful instrument to be utilized while reflecting on teaching practice is peer discussion or peer sharing (Farrell, 2015). In the peer sharing process, teachers give each other feedback and recommendations, for instance, on a new approach to teaching. Thus, they engage in constructive professional discourse (Vidmar, 2006). Soisangwarn & Wongwanich (2014) found that the use of peer discussion enriched teacher reflection on their teaching practice. The study also showed that peer discussion not only provided language teachers with suggestions to refine their instructional practices, but also fostered a community of reflective teachers who are willing to improve their teaching skills.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) which is one of the well-known theories of adult development. According to this theory, learning is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge

results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.41). Unlike cognitive learning theories which emphasize cognition over affect, and the behavioral learning theories which deny the role of subjective experiences in the learning process, ELT theory considers experience as the core element in the learning process. However, according to Dewey (1933), experience alone does not guarantee effective learning. A process of careful reflection on the experience is essential to the overall learning. To further illustrate the role of reflection in the learning process, Kolb (1984) developed a model which encompasses four cyclic steps: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE) that leads to experiential learning as depicted in Figure 2 below.

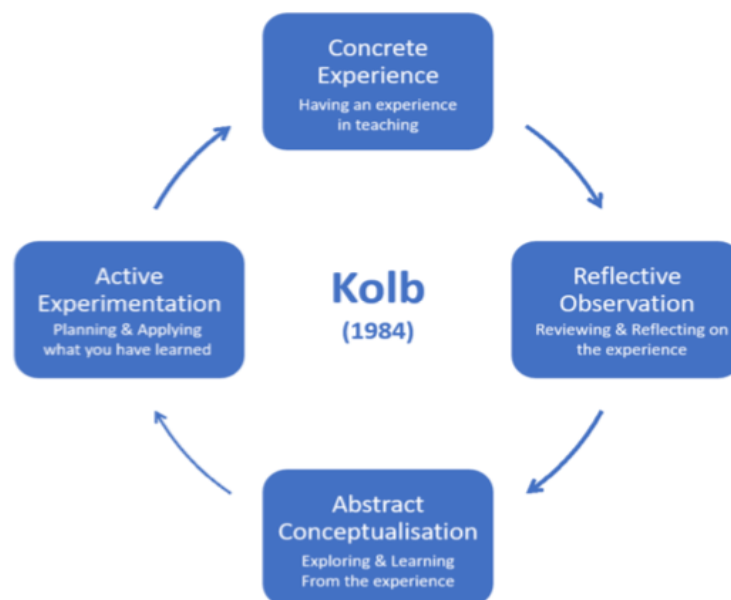


Figure 2. Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (1984).

Based on this model, teachers can begin their learning by having concrete experiences (CE) and then trying to reflect on these experiences from different perspectives (RO). After that, teachers can reach new conclusions and relate them to previous concepts (AC) to finally experiment what has been learnt within other contexts (AE). Hence, this model emphasizes the importance of the reflection component in the learning cycle. Through reflection, EFL teachers can evaluate and examine their own teaching experiences to make necessary changes on their teaching practices, which in turn lead to the enhancement of their professional development. Thus, Kolb's experiential learning theory provides a holistic framework within which a continual process of teachers' professional development can occur.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants and Context

This research study was carried out at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where the participants were EFL teachers who teach English to the Preparatory Year Program students (PYP) at the English language Institute (ELI). The reason for choosing this context was the accessibility of the participants to the researcher as it was convenient to administer the research instruments and collect the data. Furthermore, the sample was not gender biased since it involved both male and female teachers who works at the ELI, KAU. The study was conducted at the first and second semesters of the academic year 2022-2023. The sample size for the quantitative phase of the current study was 73 EFL teachers at the ELI, KAU. The participants were from different ages, had varied teaching years' experience and educational qualifications. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic data of the participants in the quantitative phase in terms of gender, age, educational qualification and teaching experience.

Table 1. EFL Teachers' Demographic Data in the Quantitative Phase.

Demographics		N	%
Gender	Male	34	47.2%
	Female	39	52.8%
Age	25-29	8	11.1%
	30-34	13	18.1%
	35-39	19	26.4%
	40-44	9	12.5%
	45 or more	23	31.9%
Teaching experience	1-5 years	15	20.8%
	6-10 years	16	22.2%
	11 years and above	41	56.9%
Qualifications	Bachelor degree	13	18.1%
	Master degree	43	59.7%
	PhD degree	16	22.2%
Total		73	100%

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The researcher used a snowball sampling strategy to collect the quantitative data. According to Dorneyi (2007), snowball sampling is a recruitment strategy in which research participants are asked to help the researcher to reach other potential participants. The reason behind using this type of sampling strategy is due to the fact that it was difficult for the researcher to reach a large number of participants from both gender within the provided time.

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to collect the quantitative data necessary to answer the second and the third research questions. The content of the questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section collected demographic information about the participants such as gender, age, educational qualifications, and the teaching experiences. The second section was developed and validated by Akbari et. al., (2010) to measure EFL teachers' reflective practices. It was slightly modified to suit the context of the study. It included 25 items that covered five different dimensions of reflective practice. Table 3.2 below describes these dimensions of reflective practice. These 25 items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), to Always (5). Table 2 depicts the weighted means for five-point Likert scales.

Table 2. Dimensions of Reflective Practice.

Dimensions of Reflective Practice	Description	Items
Practical dimension	Items that measure the tools and the actual practice of reflection.	1-6
Cognitive dimension	Items that measure teachers' efforts to engage in PD.	7-12
Affective dimension	Items that measure teachers' attempts to understand learners' knowledge and their affective state.	13-15
Meta-cognitive dimension	Items that measure teachers' attempts to reflect on their teaching beliefs, knowledge, and personality.	16-22
Critical dimension	Items that measure teachers' attempts to know the social aspects of teaching.	23-25

Table 3. The Weighted Means for Five-point Likert Scales.

Answer	Scale	Weighted Means
Never	1	$1 \leq 1.80$
Rarely	2	$1.80 \leq 2.60$
Sometimes	3	$2.60 \leq 3.40$
Often	4	$3.40 \leq 4.20$
Always	5	4.20 to 5

3.4 Procedures

As mentioned earlier, this study followed a quantitative approach in which a questionnaire was utilized to collect the quantitative data. The questionnaire was administered electronically

through using Google Forms, which is an online software used to design and formulate surveys and send it to participants via a link. Before distributing the questionnaire to the target population, it was first piloted on a similar group of participants to ensure the clarity of both the questionnaire instructions and items. According to the participants' feedback, certain amendments were made. After that, to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient test in SPSS software was run. According to Crano et. al., (2014), reliability means the extent to which the questionnaire provides consistent results in different circumstances and whether the items of the scales are interrelated. As shown in Table 5 below, the result of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was 0.89, which is within the acceptable range of reliability (Dörnyei, 2007). Finally, the questionnaire was distributed to the ELI male and female teachers via their official emails.

Table 4. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's alpha	No. of Items
.89	25

3.5 Means of Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data, the responses of the participants were organized using the Excel software, and then passed through the SPSS software version 26.0 to be coded. After coding the data in the SPSS, the normality of the distribution of the data was checked and descriptive statistics were run to find the frequencies and the percentages of the responses in the questionnaire, and the mean. In addition, inferential statistics such as independent t-test was employed to find the difference between male and female EFL teachers' reflective practice.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in data collection were taken into considerations in the current study. First, a permission for collecting the data was obtained from the administrations of King Abdulaziz University. Second, all the participants were asked to sign a consent form to answer the questionnaire, and they were informed of the study aims, objectives and procedures. The participants were also informed that their anonymity will be ensured while collecting the data and that they can withdraw at any stage of the research without any consequences. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the qualitative data instead of the participants' real names.

4. Data Analysis & Results

This study aims to explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective practice as a professional development tool, the activities that teachers implement to reflect on their teaching practice, and the obstacles that they believe to hinder their reflective teaching practices. This

part presents the analysis and results of the quantitative data that were obtained from the questionnaire according to the research questions.

4.1 Results of the First Research Question

RQ1: What reflective activities do Saudi EFL teachers use to measure their reflective teaching practice?

To answer this question, the items of each dimension in the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating the frequencies, percentages, and means. The results are as follows:

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages of Teachers' Answers to the Practical Dimension

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		M	Response level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. I have a journal where I keep my accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes.	11	15.1	13	17.8	18	24.7	17	23.3	14	19.2	3.13	Sometimes
2. I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice/feedback.	3	4.1	5	6.8	19	26.0	27	37.0	19	26.0	3.73	Often
3. After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/ failures of that lesson or I talk about the lesson to a colleague.	17	23.3	21	28.8	25	34.2	8	11.0	2	2.7	2.41	Rarely
4. I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.	3	4.1	13	17.8	31	42.5	16	21.9	10	13.7	3.23	Sometimes
5. I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices.	20	27.4	24	32.9	22	30.1	6	8.2	1	1.4	2.23	Rarely
6. I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching	19	26.0	27	37.0	20	27.4	6	8.2	1	1.4	2.21	Rarely

performance.

Total

2.83 Sometimes

The practical dimension, which is the first dimension of reflective practice, measures the reflective tools that teachers use to reflect on their teaching practice such as reflective journals, lesson reports, and peer observation. Table 6 shows the frequencies, percentages and the means of teachers' responses to each item in this dimension. In general, the total mean score for the practical dimension is 2.83 and lays in the range of $2.60 \leq 3.40$, which indicates that the majority of teachers sometimes use the reflective tools of the practical dimension to reflect on their teaching.

According to the mean value of each item, item two has the highest mean at 3.73, and the level of response is (Often), which indicates that most teachers often engage in practical reflection by talking to their colleagues about their classrooms experiences to seek their advice. However, item six has the lowest mean at 2.21, and the level of response is (Rarely), which shows that teachers rarely ask their peers to observe and comment on their own teaching.

Table 6. Frequencies and Percentages of Teachers' Answers to the Cognitive Dimension

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		M	Response level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance.	3	4.1	7	9.6	14	19.2	23	31.5	26	35.6	3.84	Often
2. I participate in workshops/ conferences related to teaching issues.	1	1.4	1	1.4	10	13.7	23	31.5	38	52.1	4.31	Always
3. I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences.	10	13.7	18	24.7	23	31.5	9	12.3	13	17.8	2.95	Sometimes
4. I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my	4	5.5	10	13.7	18	24.7	16	21.9	25	34.2	3.65	Often

profession are.													
5. I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of teaching processes.	6	8.2	11	15.1	25	34.2	12	16.4	19	26.0	2.95	Sometimes	
6. I think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them.	7	9.6	10	13.7	22	30.1	16	21.9	18	24.7	3.38	Sometime	
Total											3.58	Often	

The cognitive dimension, which is the second dimension of reflective practice, measures teachers' conscious efforts for professional development such as attending conferences/workshops and reading books and journals to look for recent development in the teaching profession. Table 7 shows the frequencies, percentages and the means of teachers' responses to each item in this dimension. In general, the total mean score for the cognitive dimension is 3.58 and falls into the range of $3.40 \leq 4.20$, which indicates that the majority of teachers often do the reflective activities of the cognitive dimension to reflect on their teaching.

According to the mean value of each item, item two has the highest mean at 4.31, and the level of response is (Always), which indicates that most teachers always participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching issues. However, item three has the lowest mean at 2.95, and the level of response is (Sometimes), which reveals that teachers sometimes consider doing research based on their classroom experiences to aim for professional development.

Table 7. Frequencies and Percentages of Teachers' Answers to the Affective Dimension

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		M	Response level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences.	2	2.7	4	5.5	12	16.4	23	31.5	32	43.8	4.08	Often

2. I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities.	1	1.4	3	4.1	18	24.7	21	28.8	30	41.1	4.04	Often
3. I ask my students whether they like a teaching task or not.	4	5.5	4	5.5	21	28.8	22	30.1	22	30.1	2.54	Rarely
Total											3.95	Often

The affective dimension, which is the third dimension of reflective practice, measures teachers' attempts to reflect on their students by learning about their backgrounds, and learning styles. Table 8 shows the frequencies, percentages and the means of teachers' responses to each item in this dimension. In general, the total mean score for the affective dimension is 3.95 and lays in the range of $3.40 \leq 4.20$, which indicates that the majority of teachers often do the activities of the affective dimension to reflect on their students.

According to the mean value of each item, item one has the highest mean at 4.08, and the level of response is (Often), which indicates that most teachers often reflect on their students by learning about their learning styles and preferences. However, item three has the lowest mean at 2.54, and the level of response is (Rarely), which shows that teachers rarely ask their students' preferences about their opinions on whether they like a certain task or not.

Table 8. Frequencies and Percentages of Teachers' Answers to the Metacognitive Dimension

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		M	Response level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching.	2	2.7	3	4.1	12	16.4	23	31.5	33	45.2	4.12	Often
2. I think of the ways my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher.	8	11.0	4	5.5	10	13.7	26	35.6	25	34.2	3.21	Sometimes
3. I think of the meaning or	2	2.7	2	2.7	7	9.6	20	27.4	42	57.5	4.34	Always

significance of my job as a teacher.													
4. I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction.	1	1.4	1	1.4	9	12.3	24	32.9	38	52.1	4.32	Always	
5. I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.	0	0	4	5.5	9	12.3	18	24.7	42	57.5	4.34	Always	
6. I think of the positive/ negative role models that I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice.	4	5.5	0	0	19	26.0	22	30.1	28	38.4	3.95	Often	
7. I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice	3	4.1	6	8.2	18	24.7	22	30.1	24	32.9	3.79	Often	
Total											4.09	Often	

The metacognitive dimension, which is the fourth dimension of reflective practice, measures the activities that teachers implement to reflect on their strength, weaknesses, personality and own teaching beliefs. Table 9 shows the frequencies, percentages and the means of teachers' responses to each item in this dimension. In general, the total mean score for the metacognitive dimension is 4.09 and falls into the range of $3.40 \leq 4.20$, which indicates that the majority of teachers often do the activities of the metacognitive dimension to reflect on their own teaching.

According to the mean value of each item, items three and five have the same highest means in this dimension at 4.34, and the level of response is (Always), which indicate that most teachers always think of the strengths and the weaknesses of them as teachers and the significance of their job as teachers. However, item two has the lowest mean at 3.21, , and the level of response is (Sometimes), which shows that teachers sometimes think of how their backgrounds can affect their teaching profession.

Table 9. Frequencies and Percentages of Teachers' Answers to the Critical Dimension

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		M	Response level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. I think about the instances of major social events in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes.	23	31.5	12	16.4	23	31.5	9	12.3	6	8.2	2.49	Sometimes
2. I think of outside social events that can influence my teaching inside the class.	9	12.3	3	4.1	28	38.4	17	23.3	21.9	41.1	3.38	Sometimes
3. I think about the social aspects of my teaching and the way I may affect my students' perspectives.	38	52.1	14	19.2	8	11.0	5	6.8	8	11.0	2.05	Rarely
Total											2.54	Rarely

The critical dimension, which is the last dimension of reflective practice, refers to teachers reflecting on the social issues which affect their teaching and classroom settings. Table 10 shows the frequencies, percentages and the means of teachers' responses to each item in this dimension. In general, the total mean score for the critical dimension is 2.54 and lays in the range of $1.80 \leq 2.60$, which indicates that the majority of teachers rarely do the activities of the critical dimension to reflect on their teaching.

According to the mean value of each item, item two has the highest mean at 3.38, and the level of response is (Sometime), which indicates that most teachers sometimes think about how the outside social events can affect their teaching inside the class. However, item three has the lowest mean at 2.05, and the level of response is (Rarely), which shows that teachers rarely think of how the social aspects of their teaching may affect students' perspectives.

a) Results of the Second Research Question

RQ2: Is there any statistical differences between male and female Saudi EFL teachers' reflective practices?

In order to select the appropriate inferential statistic test to answer this question, a test of normality was computed first to decide whether the data were normally distributed or not. Table

11 below shows that the data is normally distributed as the significance value is greater than 0.0.

Table 10. The Distribution of Data

Gender		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
The overall mean of teachers' reflective practice	Male	.091	34	.200*	.960	34	.251
	Female	.081	39	.200*	.974	39	.487

Note. *. This is a lower bound of the true significance; a. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Since the data is normally distributed, the parametric independent t-test was carried out to find the difference between male and female EFL teachers' responses to each dimension of reflective practice and to the total score of the questionnaire. According to Dörnyei (2007), the parametric tests are employed if the data follows the normal distribution. Table 12 below shows that there is a statistical difference between male and female teachers' reflective practices in general as the p-value is less than 0.05, and the difference is in favor of female teachers with the higher mean 3.48. Hence, it can be said that female teachers engage in reflective practice more than their male counterparts.

As for the difference between male and female teachers' responses to each dimension of reflective practice, the p-values for the first and second dimensions (Practical and Cognitive) are 0.533 and 0.364 respectively, which is greater than 0.05. Hence, there is no statistical difference between male and female teachers in the practical and cognitive dimensions of reflective teaching. In the third and fourth dimensions (Affective and Metacognitive), the p-values are 0.042 and 0.032, respectively, which is less than 0.05. Thus, there is a statistical difference between male and female teachers in the affective and metacognitive dimensions of reflective teaching in favor of female teachers with the higher means. As for the last dimension (Critical), the p-value is 0.525, which is greater than 0.05, thus there is no statistical difference between male and female teachers in the critical dimension of reflective teaching.

Table 11. Independent T-test Results for the Differences between Male and Female EFL Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	T	Df	Sig.
Practical	Male	34	2.91	0.67	0.965	71	0.553
	Female	39	2.75	0.69			
Cognitive	Male	34	3.58	0.94	-0.051	71	0.364
	Female	39	3.52	0.82			
Affective	Male	34	3.83	0.82	-1.135	71	0.042

	Female	39	4.05	0.86			
Metacognitive	Male	34	4.04	0.80	-0.515	71	0.032
	Female	39	4.13	0.67			
Critical	Male	34	2.66	1.00	0.172	71	0.525
	Female	39	2.62	1.10			
Total	Male	34	3.31	0.65	-0.889	71	0.037
	Female	39	3.48	0.52			

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of this study in relation to the relevant literature. It is divided into four parts according to the research questions. Part one relates to the reflective activities that EFL teachers implement in their teaching practices. Part two describes the differences between male and female EFL teachers' involvement in reflective practice. Part three discusses EFL teachers' understanding and perceptions of reflective practice as a professional development tool. In the last part, the obstacles that hinder EFL teachers' reflective practices in this study are discussed.

5.1 First Research Question: What Reflective Activities do Saudi EFL Teachers Use to Measure their Reflective Teaching Practices?

The first research question aimed to measure EFL teachers' reflective teaching practices by investigating the reflective activities that they implement in their teaching. To address this question, descriptive statistics were employed by calculating the frequencies, percentages, and means of each item in the questionnaire.

The findings showed that the metacognitive reflective activities were the most frequently used activities by the participants. Nearly more than half of the participants reflect over their strengths and weaknesses as language instructors and consider the significance of their teaching jobs. These findings are consistent with previous studies where they found that most teachers reported a positive involvement in the metacognitive aspects of reflective teaching (Almusharraf & Almusharraf, 2021; Moghaddam et. al., 2019; Noormohammadi, 2014). For example, Almusharraf & Almusharraf (2021) found that the metacognitive activities were the most frequently used activities among EFL Saudi instructors. Phelps et. al., (2004) demonstrated that reflection and metacognitive learning processes are essential to effective teaching practices and central to lifelong learning.

On the other hand, the practical reflective activities, which include the actual use of the reflective tools such as reflective journals, lesson reports and peer observation were found to be the least frequently used activities among EFL teachers in this study. Although the effectiveness of keeping reflective journals has been well established in the literature (Fatemipour ,2013; Stevens & Cooper, 2009), teachers in this study rarely implemented reflective journals and lesson reports as reflective tools in their teaching. This finding corroborates the finding of Alsayeed & Almuhammdi (2020), who found that EFL instructors

were less engaged in the practical aspects of reflective teaching and they did not consider the use of reflective journals. It also aligns with the finding of Almusharraf & Almusharraf (2021), who concluded that teachers rarely utilized written reflection such as reflective journals, lesson reports, and teaching portfolios to improve their teaching practices. A possible explanation for these results may be, as noted by Day (1993), due to the fact that writing reflection is beyond teachers' job descriptions. In addition, Candy et. al., (1985) argued that teacher would not automatically engage in written reflection unless they are taught and provided with reflective practice guidance. Therefore, it is important to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of these reflective tools and teach them how to effectively implement such tools; this in turn would likely make them to act as reflective practitioners.

Similarly, despite its effectiveness in providing teachers with valuable feedback on their classroom performance (Motallebzadeh et. al., 2018), peer observation was not commonly practiced by the teachers in the present study. The findings indicated that more than half of the participating teachers did not prefer to either observe or be observed by their peers. This result is in accordance with the outcomes of Alsayeed & Almuhammdi's (2020) study that peer observation was the least used reflective tool among teachers. It seems possible that these findings are due to concerns about teachers' confidentiality to be observed besides feelings of anxiety that may arise when teachers give and receive feedback from each other.

Thus far, this part has discussed the reflective activities and tools that Saudi EFL teachers implement in their teaching practices and compared them to the relevant literature. The following part tackles the differences between male and female Saudi EFL teachers' involvement in reflective practices.

5.2 Second Research Question: Is There any Statistical Differences between Male and Female Saudi EFL Teachers' Involvement in Reflective Practices?

The second research question attempted to investigate the statistical differences between male and female EFL teachers' involvement in reflective practices in general and the differences towards each dimension of reflective practice in particular. This question was addressed in the questionnaire and the differences were found using the parametric independent t-test since the data followed the normal distribution.

The results of the independent t-test revealed that there is a statistical difference between male and female EFL teachers' reflective practices in general and the difference is in favor to female teachers with the higher mean 3.48. Hence, female EFL teachers were found to be more engaged in reflective practices compared to their male peers in the present study. This finding aligns with those of other researchers (Almusharraf & Almusharraf, 2021; Alsayeed & Almuhammdi 2020; Poyraz and Usta, 2013; Rashidi and Javidanmehr, 2012), who all found that female EFL teacher adopted reflective practice more than their male counterparts. However, another study by Afshar & Farahani (2015) reported a contradictory result as they found that male EFL teachers outperformed their female counterparts in regards to reflective teaching. This finding (i.e., that female teachers were more involved in reflective practice than male teachers) is not surprising because engaging in reflective practice is more common in female-dominated professions such as nursing, teaching and social work (Clegg, 2010). This finding

has been also supported by Connolly (2016) who demonstrates that a reflective practice is often absent in masculine professions such as construction, engineering and business. Connolly (2016) attributed this to the fact that males in general tend towards logic and rationality, and are more autonomous and less empathetic than females which gives females an advantage in their ability to adopt reflective practice. Furthermore, a possible explanation could also be, as noted by Fendler (2003), related to the fact that females' capacity to reflect verbally and vocally is a characteristic, which gives them an advantage to be more reflective than males.

Regarding the differences between EFL male and female teachers' involvement in the different dimensions of reflective practice, the findings revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female involvement in the practical and critical dimensions of reflective teaching. However, there is a statistical difference between male and female teachers in the metacognitive dimension as female teachers reflect and think more over their strengths and weaknesses as language instructors and consider the importance of their teaching jobs. This finding could be attributed to the fact that females are better than males in expressing and thinking about their internal thoughts and feelings (Lee and Mori, 2021). Additionally, there is a statistical difference between male and female teachers in the affective dimension as female teachers tend to reflect more upon their students by asking them whether they like a teaching task or not and learn about their learning styles and preferences. This finding is in compatible with Stacks et. al., (2013), who concluded that female teachers engaged more in the emotional and affective reflection and implemented actions which can foster social emotional relationships with their students.

This part has highlighted the differences between EFL male and female teachers' involvement in reflective teaching in general and in its dimensions in particular. The next part will discuss EFL teachers' understandings and perceptions of reflective practice as a professional development tool.

Third Research Question: What are Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Using Reflective Practice as a Tool for Professional Development?

The third research question addressed Saudi EFL teachers' understanding and perceptions of using reflective practice as a professional development tool. The findings indicated that teachers' perceptions towards reflective practice in this study are mainly positive. They believe that it has a positive influence on their professional development as it helped them to learn new teaching skills and develop their teaching strategies. Such findings echo the findings in previous studies (A'Dhahab, 2009; Alsayeed & Almuhammdi, 2020; Alsuhaibani, 2019; Sibahi, 2015). For example, in her study of EFL teachers in the Saudi context, Alsuhaibani (2019) found that Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions about reflection were generally positive and that they perceived it as a helpful tool which assists them throughout their teaching experience. Furthermore, teachers in the current study added that a reflective practice can aid in the professional development for not only novice teachers but also for teachers with long teaching experiences. This finding contradicts that of Alsayeed & Almuhammdi (2020), who concluded that reflective practice has a positive effect on the professional development of only new teachers. However, according to Aalto et. al., (2019), the length of the teaching experience does

not necessarily guarantee the awareness of one's teaching practice and might only give repeated teaching practices. Thus, it is necessary for both novice and experienced teachers to nurture the practice of reflection in order to become thoughtful teachers.

5.4 Fourth Research Question: What are the Obstacles that Hinder Saudi EFL Teachers' Reflective Practices?

The fourth research question sought to identify the obstacles that hinder Saudi EFL teachers from adopting reflective practice in their teaching profession. The findings revealed that the biggest obstacles which impede EFL teachers from utilizing reflective practice were related to the institution fixed policies such as not including teachers in the decision-making process. Teachers in the current study attributed their lack of voice as a remarkable obstacle which would discourage their potentials to be reflective practitioners. This finding is in concurrence with that of Sibahi (2015), who found that the restrictive educational system in two Saudi colleges which leaves no place for teachers' voice and creativity contributes negatively to teachers' willingness to reflect. Furthermore, in his study of the challenges in applying reflective teaching, Ostorga (2006) mentioned that teachers are sometimes stripped of their professional voice which gives them little freedom to make pedagogical reasoning. Hence, to actualize reflective teaching, Ostorga (2006) suggested that an active role should be given to teachers in their institution so that they can reflect on their teaching practices and make necessary changes based on sound reasoning.

In addition to that, one of the major obstacles related to the institution was teachers' heavy workloads. According to the teachers, having heavy schedules and long teaching hours leave them with almost no time or willingness to reflect on their teaching inside the classrooms. This finding aligns with previous research studies (Minott, 2010; Sunra et. al., 2020; Tajik and Ranjbar, 2018), who concluded that assigning heavy schedules to teachers restricts their chances of being reflective. Teachers seemed dissatisfied with the length of English classes in the Preparatory Year Program PYP at KAU which discourage their potentials to reflect on what has been done in the class time. Hence, it might be important to assign some time for teachers to reflect upon their teaching practice. Moreover, teachers in the current study considered teaching large classes as a significant barrier to implement reflective teaching as large number of students necessitated teachers to spend a huge part of the class time on checking students' assignments and learning pace which leaves no time for teachers to reflect on their teaching.

In addition to the obstacles related to the institution, the participants in the present study demonstrated that some obstacles are associated with the teachers themselves. For instance, teachers attributed their lack of knowledge of reflective teaching principles and tools as an inhibiting factor to employ reflective practice as most of them have not received any formal training on how to adopt reflective practice during their previous teacher education programs. This finding is in agreement with those of (Harun & Al-Amin, 2013; Rashidi and Javidanmehr, 2012; Sibahi, 2015; Sunra et. al., 2020; Tajik & Ranjbar, 2018), who all concluded that low engagement in reflective practice among EFL teachers might have originated from their inadequate knowledge of reflective practice in general. This finding also seems to lend support to what Larrivee (2008) argued, that without carefully constructed guidance and knowledge,

teachers seem unable to be engaged in reflective teaching to enhance their professional development. Hence, the present study infers that reflective teaching practice should be earlier introduced at pre-service teaching education programs so that teachers can have adequate knowledge about reflective practice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research sought to investigate Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of using reflective practice as a tool for professional development, and the activities that EFL teachers implement to reflect on their teaching practices. It has also examined the obstacles that hinder EFL teachers from adopting reflective practices in their teaching. Based on the analysis of the quantitative data that were obtained from the questionnaire, it was found that EFL teachers have positive perceptions towards reflective practice in general and that they believe it is a helpful tool to enhance their professional development. However, the findings showed that EFL teachers in the present study rarely implemented reflective tools such as reflective journals, lesson reports, and peer observations to reflect on their teaching performance. This finding can be attributable to the fact that EFL teachers in the current study were found to have only a basic knowledge of the reflective practice principles and tools as the majority of them have not trained or introduced to this concept in their previous teacher education programs. This result further suggests that there is a need to develop teachers' in-depth knowledge and awareness of reflective practice, so that they can apply the reflective tools effectively. Furthermore, results revealed that female EFL teachers were found to be more engaged in reflective practices compared to their male peers. Additionally, further findings showed that the biggest obstacle that hinder EFL teachers from utilizing reflective practice was related to the institution fixed policy which leaves no room for teachers' voice and creativity. This result suggests that an active role should be given to teachers in their institution so that they can reflect on their teaching practices and make necessary changes accordingly.

6.1 Implications

Based on the study findings, the following implications are put forward to foster teachers' engagement in reflective practice:

- 1) The findings indicated that there is a lack of knowledge of reflective teaching principles and tools among EFL teachers. Therefore, regular workshops and conferences should be provided to teachers not only on reflective practice and what it constitutes, but also on how to practically engage in reflective practice.
- 2) Although many teachers perceived reflective practice as an effective tool to increase professional development, they rarely implemented the reflective tools such as reflective journals, and lesson reports. Therefore, offering systematic rewards plans for sustained reflective practices could encourage teachers to employ reflective practice tools.
- 3) The findings showed that the most remarkable obstacle which prevents teachers from using reflection in their teaching were related to the institution restricted policies. Therefore, this study suggested that language teaching institutes should give teachers more authority and

freedom of expression and involve them in the decision-making process of the institute in order to nurture and encourage teachers' reflective practices.

- 4) The findings also draw our attention to the importance of creating a safe environment in which teachers can disclose and share the teaching practice problems with their colleagues without being afraid of being looked at as less qualified EFL practitioner.

6.2 Limitations

Although this study generated many promising findings and practical implications for EFL teachers and other policy makers, some limitations exist which must be acknowledge to provide opportunities for future research or replication. First, the scope of this research was limited to EFL teachers who teach in the ELI at KAU and did not explore other contexts. Second, this study did not examine all the factors that may affect teachers' adoption of reflective practice such as teachers' motivation, their years of teaching experience and educational qualifications, thus limiting its scope. Third, the size of the study sample was relatively small, which makes it difficult to generalize the data to other EFL contexts.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

By keeping all the limitations and implications mentioned so far, this study sets forth several recommendations for future research. Although using reflective practice appears to be an effective tool to enhance teachers' professional development, there has been relatively few studies in this field, specifically in the Saudi context (Rihimi & Weisa, 2018). Therefore, further research in this direction is recommended. In addition, to examine EFL teachers' reflective practices on a larger scale, the replication of the current study would be encouraged with a significant sample of participants across a wider geographical area such as other universities of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it would be beneficial to explore the factors that may motivate teachers to engage in reflective practice and apply this to the professional development programs and activities. Finally, exploring EFL teachers' understanding and perceptions towards reflective practice in other contexts such as public schools and private institutions and comparing them with the present study would be a fruitful area for future research.

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