Enhancing ELT Instructors' Effectiveness through Reflection: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract

In the last few years, the idea of reflection has been extensively employed in different teacher education programs to assist teachers in the process of explaining their ideas about their teaching activities and improving their teaching practices. The present study aimed at examining the relationship between EFL instructors' reflective teaching and effective teaching. To this end, 120 ELT instructors from different colleges and universities in Khorasan Razavi province were asked to participate in the study. The participants were asked to fill in two reliable questionnaires to measure their reflective and effective teaching. The results of the data analysis exhibited a positive correlation between reflective teaching and effective teaching and the results of the Pearson correlation also demonstrated that there are positive meaningful relationships between instructors' reflective teaching and all four subscales of effective teaching. Specifically, the highest correlation is observed between instructors' reflective teaching and their self-awareness. A meaningful correlation was also demonstrated between effective teaching and teaching experience.

Keywords: Effective Teaching, ELT instructors, Reflective Teaching, Structural Equation Modeling.

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1. Introduction

In the present century where quick changes happen, education is considered significant for the triumph of all people. In line with this view, instructors need to improve their levels of attainment in the educational system to get great standards of teaching. Therefore, educating teachers should be a normal issue in the context of teaching language, and particular emphasis is devoted to this. As Partovi and Tafazoli (2016) and Malmir and Mohammadi(2018) mentioned, EFL teachers' professional practice is linked with many features such as self-regulation, resilience, previous teaching, reflection, and so forth. One of the great principles of teaching is flexibility which different features could seriously affect teaching, and offer different roles to instructors, and is the intention for the presence of various approaches to teaching (Javadi & Khatib, 2016). To this end, in many different teacher education courses the idea of reflection has been extensively employed by instructors in explaining their concepts about their teaching activities, and in considering and assessing these concepts believing that those will increase the ability to estimate as well as develop their teaching practices (Beattie, 1997; Conway, 2001; Freese, 2006). As a result, in teacher education courses, reflection has the utmost status, and such expressions as 'reflective teaching', and 'reflective practice' are currently employed in different educational situations, and nowadays many different theoretical frameworks have supported this concept (Bengtsson, 1995; Waks, 1999).

In Dewey's opinion (1933), teachers should have an active role in educational enhancement. It is also asserted that teaching should be regarded as an activity comprising a course of theorizing, examining, interpreting, and evaluating, resulting in modifying and if necessary more exploring and this manner of training are whatever he regarded as "reflective teaching".

Reflective teaching is an approach in which paying attention to the significance and concepts that report everyday activities, by examining activities reflectively and reflexively emphasized. It specially reflects a process of self-monitoring and self-assessment of teachers in their teaching. Dewey (1933) mentioned that reflection is a determined effort to consider teaching and teaching experiences, leading to student and teacher developing and learning. As mentioned by Grant and Ziechner (1984), reflective teaching permits teachers to know themselves more purposely and deliberately and to free themselves from tedious and irrational activities. Furthermore, reflection is regarded to be a key factor considering

Richards's (1990) opinion. According to Farrell (2004), three major types of activities are associated with teacher reflection. *Reflection-in-action* considers teachers' immediate decision-making, and it relies on teachers' relationship with learners and occurs when teachers deduce their understanding of teaching when most of their practices have become common (Farrell, 2004). On the other hand, *Reflection-on-action* entails projecting and recalling one's experience, and pondering what was carried out to realize how understanding at the time of teaching might have come up with an unpredicted action, therefore it is considered as a metacognitive process that encompasses conscious thinking (Farrell, 2004). He believes that the last category of reflection is *Reflection-for-action* which is so practical. Since all the understanding established through other categories of reflection would not be practical until they are utilized as conduct for the upcoming action, this last category is the desired result of the first two kinds of reflection (Farrell, 2004).

Generally speaking, there seems to be extensive attention and investigation done concerning effective teaching. Within a wider range, nearly all teachers across the world seem to be highly concerned with knowing what might work best in their classroom and how it is feasible for them to improve their teaching outcomes for the further satisfaction of their learners. As stated by Sullivan (2001), effective teachers are knowledgeable in designing curriculum, treat each student as a unique individual, use different techniques in their teaching, and therefore they noticeably enhance students' achievement.

One could define reflective activities as an exercise of problem-solving and forming of meaning, and succeeding reflective decisions as teachers are involved with new practices. Reflecting on new practices results in learning as well as cognitive improvement though abstaining from reflection could result in becoming reliant on teaching while teachers wish to admit the conditions without asserting any inquiries or questions (Efe, 2009). Reflective thinking allows people to judge earlier knowledge and make new knowledge using experiences, hence helping teachers develop professionally (Finlay, 2008).

It might also be noted that reflection is a constant formative assessment process, while teachers collect and employ feedback to examine and develop their teaching practice. There is a correspondence between reflection and meta-cognitive thinking since it offers a cognitive construction that makes us express how people can adapt and alter their judgments and actions in a way that corresponds to their objectives (McAlpine et al., 2004).

Employing the reflective procedure to improve teachers supports their inner uncertainty and disappointment concerning what they do, which inspires them to reflect on their practices, play the role of the investigator in gathering data, and practice critical thinking to grasp a profound comprehension of the problem, and consequently develop suitable explanations for that (Rayan, 2014). Moreover, it is believed that one of the most significant issues affecting student achievement is teacher reflection and teacher consciousness of reflection in improving the learning of their students (Ghorbani et al., 2020; Goldhaber, 2002).

The notion of effective teaching is significant for all teachers. Learners' opinions, beliefs, and/or practices about effective teachers are dissimilar. An effective instructor is believed, at times, as a perfectionist, promising, and helpful, sometimes as smart, but principally as enthusiastic, smart, effective, as well as, considerate and open in teaching (Rubio, 2009). Stronge et al (2004) declared that teaching is a career, and many effective instructors are careful about their selected occupation. Though, he also mentioned that effective instructors are continuously in a continuous learning process because of alterations regarding the learners' characteristics, the program, the society, and economics.

In 2002, Gibbs noted that an effective educator requires the ability to be constant, as well as innovative in teaching practice. According to Stronge et al. (2004), an effective instructor has a psychological effect on the learners and can influence their attainment. As stated by Killen (2006), the effective instructor has obvious goals and possesses purposes for teaching. An instructor offers the learners the response to a question, which could be operatively provided that his chief aim is merely to compare as well as examine diverse outcomes. Though, if the aim wish to make the learner consider the idea of presenting many probable answers, the instructor, might be considered ineffective.

Until the 1960s, studies on effective teaching were mostly governed by efforts to recognize characteristics of teachers, such as personality traits, sex, age, knowledge, and training, which may influence their effectiveness. Many investigators think that effective teaching motivates learners' interest and leads to active learning, supports the learners' critical, and rational thinking, and enhances their intention and ability for learning in the future (Hopkins, 1999; Mills & Satterthwait, 2000). Literature is abundant considering features of effective teaching and teachers (Gurney, 2007; Silcock, 1993; Yates, 2005). These researchers believe that effective teaching needs instructors to have knowledge of the

subject they teach, great realistic aims, obvious principles for class activities, positive relations with their learners, the ability to choose as well as employ appropriate material for the teaching, different teaching strategies, as well as suitable educational techniques. They also need to have the ability to offer expertly the material to satisfy learners' desires; to check learners' development, also to offer feedback and chances for learners to use whatever they have learned; and a range of evaluation techniques; as well as to permit learners' independence by listening to them as well as to promote different voices of learners and give them accountability. It is assumed that the relation of these potentials presents the basis for great teaching, and generating an operational learning situation.

Effective teachers are required to emphasize learners' realization. Gurney (2007) believed that to be an effective instructor there must be a relation among many varied factors. One of those factors is called the instructors´ knowledge, interest, and accountability for learning. The other feature is that effective teachers are required to support the learners with exercises and assessment that inspires them to study and provide effective feedback. Lastly, to construct a warm setting and an association with the learners in which admiration would improve learning.

There has also been enormous attention and significance given to the concept of effective teaching by other language experts and investigators in recent years. For instance, some have tried to scientifically classify various behaviors related to teaching as well as to investigate the relations between these classifications and learner attainment and consequently many studies have dealt with particular abilities needed in effective teaching (Kyriacou, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2005), different teaching styles (Opdenakke & Van Damme, 2006), and various forms of teaching, that identify specific kinds of learning context and approaches to teaching (Joyce et al., 2008). These investigations revealed that differences in teaching activities relate to instructors' effectiveness in the class. Furthermore, they demonstrated a high degree of agreement regarding the general characteristics of effective teaching (as cited in James & Sammons, 2013).

Regardless of the presence of some theoretical investigations considering both variables understudy, very few studies have been conducted to address the question of whether or not reflection relates to effective teaching. To fill the gap, the present study is to consider the relationship between reflective teaching and effective teaching.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Numerous studies have considered the ideas of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action (Burhan-Horsenali & Ortketep, 2016; Moumin et al., 2020). However, scant information is available about the reflection that can be realized. There is very little practical evidence about what teachers do or reflect on in each progressive type of reflection (Abazari et al., 2022).

In a study carried out by Tabassum and Malik (2014), teachers′ ideas about reflective teaching at different schools in Pakistan were investigated. Their investigation was to discover teachers′ ideas about the significance of reflective activities while teaching, besides their ideas about using those activities to better understand the challenges students encounter during learning. The outcomes of the study showed that teachers did not completely recognize the requirement to have reflective practices to realize the challenges their learners encounter.

In another study, Tok and Dolapçıoğlu (2013), examined how usual reflective activities were found among teachers in Turkey. The results of their study demonstrate that teachers resort to employing different reflective activities in the class; however, fail at employing activities that deal with appreciating learners who tell their ideas easily which allows learners to show their criticism and ideas orally or in a written form. Moreover, the investigation demonstrates that teachers did not use a daily to record their professional development and efficacy in teaching the subject matter.

Ostaz (2011) investigated to reveal science instructors′ capabilities to use reflective thinking in explaining educational problems they encounter in the class while teaching at the primary level and to see if teachers' gender, years of teaching experience, academic degree, and the organization they are worked at had any influence on thinking reflectively. The sample of the investigation was composed of 108 teachers, and for gathering the required data a questionnaire about reflective thinking was used which included 9 problems any teachers teaching science would probably encounter while teaching. The outcomes of the investigation showed that science teachers′ levels of reflective thinking were far below what was estimated (below 70%) and years of teaching experience meaningfully affected reflective thinking.

Choy and Oo (2012) were two authors who worked on the associations between teachers' reflective thinking and critical thinking and intended to identify their levels of

reflection as a sign of levels of critical thinking. The results showed that many teachers did not reflect on their teaching activities deeply, and little was practiced about the four processes of learning namely; examination of theories, mindfulness of situation, creative assumption, and reflection. Besides, the study revealed that teachers hardly practice critical thinking.

Mahmoodi and Ghaslani (2013) studied the association among teachers' burnout, emotional intelligence, and reflectivity. The sample of the study consisted of 125 Iranian EFL teachers. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey, Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire, and Bar-OnEQ-IScale were used to gather data. They observed that emotional intelligence and reflectivity are negatively associated with burnout, and they could both predict the level of burnout. There were also important differences in teachers' levels of emotional intelligence regarding their teaching experience.

The study conducted by Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018) found a meaningful association between EFL teachers' assessment literacy and reflective teaching. Besides, a positive association was observed between teachers' reflective teaching and years of teaching experience. Many investigators accept that teachers are one of the most significant resources in school while evaluating students' future academic achievement and outcomes in their life (for instance: Chetty et al., 2014; Rockoff, 2004). As a result, there was a strong stress on increasing teacher effectiveness as a way to improve student learning. Goe (2007) is one of the scholars who described teacher effectiveness regarding improvement in student learning, usually evaluated by student consistent evaluation results. Chetty et al. (2014) observed that students who were instructed by highly effective instructors, as described by the student development percentile, and value-added measures were more expected to be accepted in college, make more money, save more money for the future time, and were less expected to have children when they are at their teens. This prospect of an effective teacher meaningfully improving the quality of their learners' lives makes it necessary that investigators and other decision-makers in educational settings appropriately realize the features that donate to a teacher's effectiveness.

Abazari et al. (2022) examined the extent to which EFL teachers are engaged in reflective teaching. To this end, 120 male and female EFL teachers were selected based on convenience sampling and were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. After a five-week treatment of reflective journal writing, a reflective teaching questionnaire

was given as a post-test to the two groups to examine the effect of the treatment. The results of the data analysis showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in taking advantage of reflective teaching.

Giovannelli (2003), aimed to find out the association between reflective disposition concerning teaching and effective teaching using a sample of 55 teachers. To gather data two questionnaires were employed. The first questionnaire estimates teachers′ feeling about reflective teaching, and the second questionnaire assesses effective teaching activities. The findings revealed a meaningful, significant association between feeling about reflection and effective teaching, principally when considering teaching behavior, classroom management, and teacher beliefs.

As stated by Ferguson and Womackl (1993), the effective transfer of content knowledge is regarded as a symbol of good teaching. Though, being proficient in content knowledge is regarded as one of the different important features and potentials that an effective teacher is required to possess to improve learning and attainment.

Desimone et al. (2013) recommended that teachers' professional development might affect the quality of teaching, but many other investigators observed that teachers' professional development has just a partial relationship with effectiveness, while mathematics instructors who passed more content-focused preparation might be exceptional (Blomeke et al., 2016). Blank and De Las Alas (2009) carried out a meta-analysis, and observe important and meaningful associations between professional development and learner realization.

1. Is there any significant relationship between ELT instructors' Reflective Teaching and their effective teaching?

2**.** Is there any significant relationship between ELT instructors' Reflective Teaching and their teaching experience?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

The present study was conducted in different colleges and universities in Khorasan Razavi province. The design of the study is a correlational one, and the writers aimed to find out whether there is an association between reflective teaching and effective teaching. Also, teaching experiences were examined for reflective teaching.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the current study consisted of 120 ELT male and female instructors (46 male and 74 females) from different colleges and universities in Khorasan Razavi province which were selected randomly. They were Ph.D. holders or Ph.D. candidates. The instructors were selected from different age ranges (30-above 50), with average teaching experiences of 5 to 15 years. The aforementioned participants were asked to fill in two valid, reliable questionnaires, one measures instructors' reflective teaching and the second one relates to effective teaching.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Reflective Teaching Questionnaire

To assess teachers' reflective teaching, an inventory developed by Behzadpour (2007) was used. It consisted of 42 items on a five-point Likert scale from *never* to *always*. It has a reliability of .90.

3.3.2. Effective Teaching Questionnaire

The instrument used to measure effective teaching was the one designed by Kafi and Motallebzadeh (2015). The questionnaire consisted of 4 categories of effective teaching (Engagement, Delivery of Instruction, Behavior Management, and Self-awareness of Personal Features) each of which embraced up to 16 items. The reliability using Cronbach Alpha was estimated at .87.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

120 EFL instructors from various colleges and universities of Khorasan Razavi were randomly selected. They were from both genders and different ages (30-above 50), with different years of experience (5 to -above 50). To collect the required data, both instruments were given to different English Language instructors. Gathered data were examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Besides, the relationship between effective teaching and teaching experience was calculated using SPSS software.

3.4. Data analysis Procedure

To observe the association between the variables, a structural model was presented. Likewise, the Correlation Coefficients between the variables were conducted.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics regarding reflective teaching and four subscales of effective teaching, Students' Engagement, Teachers' Delivery of Instruction/Goals, Teacher's Behavior Management and Teacher's Self-awareness and Assessment of his Own Personal Features Affecting the Teaching/Learning Process, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Descriptive Statistics for Reflective Teaching and Subscales of Effective Teaching*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*Std*. Deviation
Reflective Teaching	120	93.00	183.00	122.37	15.517
Total Effective teaching	120	121.00	204.00	165.41	20.044
Students' Engagement	120	14.00	46.00	35.07	3.540
Teachers' Delivery	120	23.00	71.00	52.09	6.793
Teacher's Behavior	120	16.00	51.00	40.77	5.210
Teacher's Self-awareness	120	22.00	72.00	51.39	7.318

The probable range of score for the reflective teaching instrument is between 42 and 210, and Total Effective teaching is between 53 and 265, for Students' Engagement is between 12 and 60, for Teachers' Delivery is between 14 and 70, for Teacher's Behavior is between 11 and 55, and for Teacher's Self-awareness is between 16 and 80. As shown by table 1 the mean score of the instructors' report in reflective teaching was 122.37 with a standard deviation of 15.517. In addition, the mean score of the instructors'' report in Effective teaching was 165.41 with a standard deviation of 20.044.

To answer Research Question 1, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. As shown by Figure 1, ELT instructors' reflective teaching is a positive and important predictor of Students' Engagement (β= .392, *p>0.05*), Teachers' Delivery of Instruction/Goals (β= .431, *p>0.05*), Teacher's Behavior Management (β= .527, *p>0.05*) and Teacher's Self-awareness and Assessment of his Own Personal Features Affecting the Teaching/Learning Process (β= .579, *p>0.05*).

Figure 1.

The Schematic Representation of the Relationships among Reflective Teaching and Four Subscales of Effective Teaching
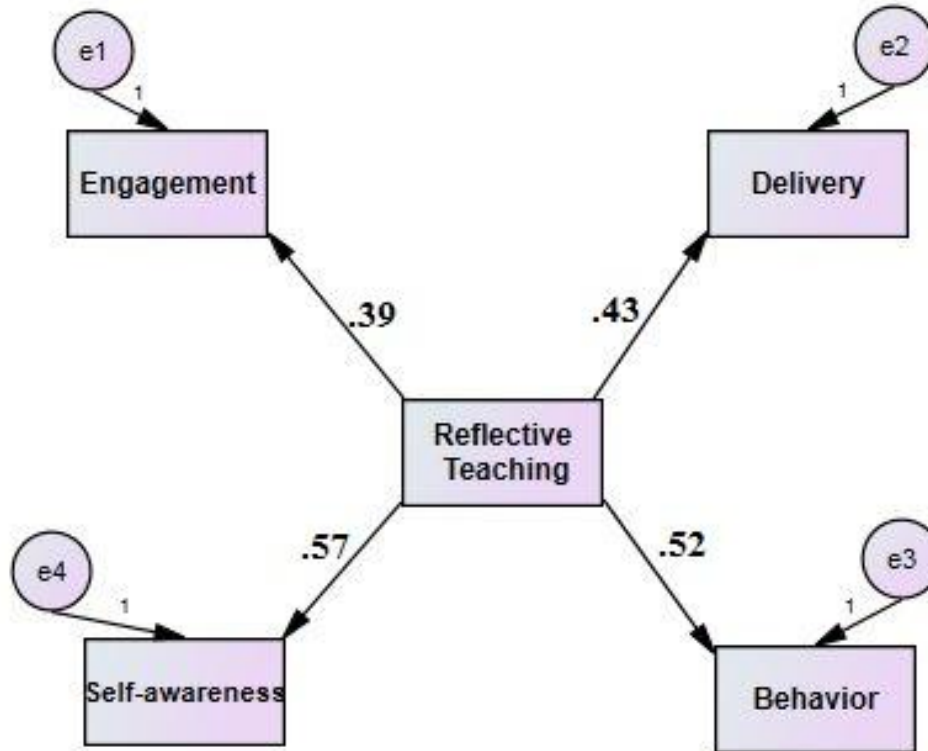
To check the model fit, Goodness of fit indices were used. The goodness of fit indices was shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
The goodness of Fit Indices

	X^2	Df	X2/df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit			<3	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	8.002	3	2.667	.921	.906	.094

As demonstrated by table 2, the chi-square value (8.002), the chi-square/df ratio (2.667), RMSEA (.094), GFI (.921), and CFI (.906), all the fit indices except the RMSEA, are within the suitable fit thresholds. Therefore, it can be claimed that the proposed model had an acceptable fit with the empirical data. The results of the Pearson correlation are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

The Correlation Coefficients among Teachers' Reflective Teaching and Subscales of Effective Teaching

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Reflective Teaching	1.00					
2. Total Effective teaching	.63**	1.00				
3. Students' Engagement	.51**	.59**	1.00			
4. Teachers' Delivery	.56**	.66**	.43**	1.00		
5. Teacher's Behavior	.69**	.70**	.31**	.49**	1.00	
6. Teacher's Self-awareness	.79**	.71**	.17*	.33**	.65**	1.00

Note. **Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01, *Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05.

Table 3 indicated that there are positive significant associations between teachers' reflective teaching and all four subscales of effective teaching. As shown by the table, the highest correlation is perceived between *teachers' reflective teaching and their Self-awareness (r = .79, p < 0.05),* and the lowest correlation was obtained between *teachers' reflective teaching* and *their Students' Engagement (r = .51, p < 0.05).*

To answer the second research question, aiming at exploring the association between ELT instructors' total Effective teaching and teaching experience, SPSS was conducted. The results of the Pearson correlation showed that there exists a highly meaningful relationship between teachers' reflective teaching and their teaching experience ($r = .863, p < 0.05$). Table 4 indicates the outcomes of the association between teachers' Effective teaching and their teaching experience.

Table 4.

Results of Correlation between Teachers' Effective Teaching and Their Teaching Experience

	Teaching Experience
Total Effective teaching	.86**

Note. **Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

Table 4 demonstrates that there exists a meaningful relationship between ELT instructors' effective teaching and their teaching experience. This suggests that the more experienced teachers are, the more effective they are.

5. Discussion

The first research question was to find out the relationship between ELT instructors' reflective teaching and their effective teaching. The results of the analysis showed a positive, significant association between teachers' reflective teaching and all four subscales of effective teaching. This result confirmed the result obtained by Malmir and Mohammadi (2018) which demonstrated that reflective teaching was a key element in predicting EFL teachers' success in the Iranian setting. He claimed that teachers with high reflective thinking skills can perform better in EFL classrooms.

The results are also in line with the results of the studies conducted by Behzadpour (2007) and Fatemipour and Hosseingholikhani (2014) who mentioned that training in reflective teaching to EFL teachers could lead to their successful performance in the classroom. Reflective teaching makes the teachers aware of their classroom realities and helps them find out the appropriate steps to take in managing their work. Black's (2015) study on developing teacher candidates' self-efficacy through reflection also emphasized the value of EFL teachers' reflective teaching as a crucial factor in their future professional success. Besides, the findings are also in accord with the findings of Giovannelli (2003), which showed a meaningful, significant association between feeling about reflection and effective teaching.

The second research question aimed to find out the relationship between ELT instructors' reflective teaching and their teaching experience. The result of the analysis showed a meaningful relationship between ELT instructors' effective teaching and their teaching experience. The results are in line with the study conducted by Afshar and Frahani(2015) which showed the strong relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' reflective teaching and teaching experience.

6. Conclusion

Teachers have always been one of the most significant leaders of education. The way they teach, their characteristics, their behavior towards their students and colleagues, and their performance in the classroom are among the important concerns in educational investigations (Qhazalbash & Afghari, 2015). As stated, the central objective of the present research was to consider whether there is an association between reflective teaching and effective teaching among ELT instructors. To attain this goal, two different questionnaires

were utilized, while each focused on one feature of the teachers, that is, teacher reflection and effective teaching. It is worth mentioning that, the reliability and validity of all questionnaires were checked, before their administration. As illustrated through the data analysis and results, there existed a positive relationship between ELT instructors' reflective teaching and effective teaching. The results of the Pearson correlation also demonstrated that there are positive meaningful relationships between instructors' reflective teaching and all four subscales of effective teaching. Specifically, the highest correlation is seen between instructors' reflective teaching and their self-awareness. A meaningful relationship was also found between instructors' reflective teaching and teaching experience, indicating that the more experienced they are, the more reflective they would be.

Studies considering effective teaching in the last recent years have demonstrated that effective teaching is related to the investigation, reflection, as well as constant professional development (Harris, 1998). Reflection could be a valuable type of professional growth in teaching. By attaining a better consideration of teaching styles over reflective activities, instructors can develop their effectiveness in the class.

EFL teachers can decide on different activities that enable reflective teaching throughout their professional careers. Various ways that language teachers can choose when reflecting are outlined below, and some of these can be used alone or in combination with peers, depending on each teacher's level of comfort in sharing their ideas, issues, and concerns. Thus, language teachers can choose to reflect with and through teaching journals, critical friends, teacher development groups, classroom observations, and/or action research.

The results of the present investigation provide practical evidence for suggesting that EFL teachers should invest in improving their knowledge. They should also examine the models of reflective teaching and improve their awareness of it. The findings of the present study emphasize the significance of reflective teaching in teacher education programs even further.

The present study has some implications for EFL experienced and novice teachers and teacher trainers to include reflection in their teaching process, for the providers and developers of educational materials and language institute owners, also for syllabus designers to include reflection in the syllabus of pedagogy as to pay more attention to the important concepts of reflectivity and autonomy. The findings of this investigation also can be useful for teacher educators, institute managers, and government officials to increase

language teachers' familiarity with the significance of reflecting on their teaching experiences to recognize the phenomenon of language teaching and learning from a deeper standpoint and come to a better understanding of the emotions they experience throughout their teaching career.

Like many different research studies, the present study has suffered from different limitations. The first limitation of the study was the sample size. As the recent study used a questionnaire among a limited number of participants, further studies with a larger sample size are required to guarantee results. The second limitation was that the participants in this study were selected only from Khorasan Razavi province. The third limitation of this study was that it only used the questionnaires as instruments for data gathering, but the interview protocol can also be used to enrich the results.

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