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Effects of Journal Writing on EFL Teacher Trainees' Reflective Practice

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Abstract

Journal writing is believed to be a significant tool to promote reflection. Some studies have been carried out to test that, most of which have been solely concerned with the participants' perceptions, leaving the actual application of reflective practice in EFL teaching practice untouched. Hence, to fill this gap in the literature, the researchers initiated this study. The participants were 24 EFL teacher trainees at a teacher training center in Guilan province. A questionnaire, including closed- and open-ended items, and an observation checklist were utilized. The researchers conducted matched *t* tests to investigate the possible differences between the perceptions and application of reflective practice before and after treatment. The questionnaire and checklist data were analyzed quantitatively and descriptive analyses were run. A qualitative content analysis was also employed for the open-ended item of the questionnaire. The results indicated that journal writing had a significant effect on promoting reflective practice in teacher trainees. There was also a significant difference between participants' perceptions and application of reflective practice before and after treatment.

Keywords: Journal writing, Reflective practice, Teacher training

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1. Introduction

Reflective practice has been a dominant paradigm specifically within the past two decades (Akbari, 2007; Postholm 2008) since the emergence of the post method era (Kumaravadivelu, 2001), though it can be traced back to Dewey (1933), who viewed teachers as reflective practitioners and as professionals who could be active in developing curriculum and reforming education. Reflective practice, according to Spadling and Wilson (2002), is "essential to identifying, analyzing, and solving the complex problems that characterize classroom teaching (p. 1394). Larrivee (2008) considers reflective practice as the hallmark of professional competence for teachers. Reflection helps prospective teachers examine their practice critically and make rational and practical judgments about what to do in particular circumstances (Leather & Popovic, 2008). However, despite widespread emphasis on reflection in teacher education (Akbari, 2007), studies of reflective thinking in preservice teachers often yield disappointing results. Many studies have pointed to lack of reflective practice in teacher training programs. More recently, Koh and Tan (2016), for example, address the problem in teacher education: "what has been relatively under-researched is the nurture of reflective abilities in pre-service teachers" (p. 1).

Many scholars in the field of teacher education argue that reflective practice can be taught (Koh & Tan, 2016). Russell (2005) maintains that "results of explicit instruction seem far more productive than merely advocating reflective practice and assuming that individuals will understand how reflective practice differs profoundly from our everyday sense of reflection" (p. 199). Larrivee (2008) also suggests that it is possible to instruct teachers to promote their reflection (Larrivee, 2008). He talks about some mediation processes such as journaling, providing deliberate prompts and developing judgmental questions as effective ways to promote higher order reflection. Along similar lines, Ho and Richards (1993) believe that a variety of approaches can be used to help teachers to promote a reflective approach to their teaching, including action research, ethnography, and journal writing. Reflective learning journals have become a significant tool to promote active learning among students (Thorpe, 2004).

In literature, reflection has been studied through different angles. Some studies have addressed the nature of reflection (e.g., Boud & Walker, 1998; Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Smyth, 1992; Valli, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Some have probed into the relationship between reflection and students' achievement (e.g., Hosseini Fatemi, Elahi Shirvan, &

Rezvani, 2011; Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi, 2016; Takaesue, 2012); still others have been concerned with the effects of reflection on improving teaching quality (e.g., Farrell, 2010; Fatemipour & HosseingholiKhani, 2014; Moradkhani, Raygan, & Moein, 2017). The effects reflection might have on individuals' beliefs (e.g., Farrell, 1999, 2006; Sykes, 2011) have also been examined. Finally, some studies have targeted reflection instruction and its effects on promoting reflective practice (e.g., Boud, 2001; Gray, 2000; Ho & Richards, 1993; Lee, 2008; Mansvelder-Longayroux, Beijard, & Verloop, 2009; Russell, 2005; Wach, 2015). It is in the last category that studies on journal writing mostly fall. However, the positive role of reflective practice instruction, specifically journal writing, has mainly remained at the level of speculation, and few empirical studies in EFL teacher training have targeted the effect reflective practice instruction might have on the pre-service teacher trainees' reflection.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

The terms reflection and reflective practice are very broad and lend themselves to many interpretations (Korthagen, 2001). One of the first definitions was provided by Dewey (1933). He defined reflection as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends"(Dewey, 1933, p. 9). Likewise, Williams (1998) viewed reflection as "a theory of metacognition which directs skilled behavior during professional activity or assists in the deliberative processes which occur during problem solving" (p. 31).

More recently, Black and Plowright (2010) have provided a more comprehensive definition of reflective practice:

> Reflection is the process of engaging with learning and/or professional practice that provides an opportunity to critically analyze and evaluate that learning or practice. The purpose is to develop professional knowledge, understanding and practice that incorporates a deeper form of learning which is transformational in nature and is empowering, enlightening and ultimately emancipatory' (p. 246).

A key building block of Dewey's theory is the reconstruction of experience, because it gives learners the opportunity to transform what is known to new experiences. Such transformation is built upon the notion of constructivism, where learners actively construct their own knowledge and skills through personal experiences. Accordingly, progressivism is

closely related to constructivism. Through the constructivist lens, the teachers are seen as reflective practitioners with the ability to theorize about their practices and practice their personal theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Reflection helps the prospective teachers examine their practice critically and make rational and practical judgments about what to do in particular circumstances (Leather & Popovic, 2008).

Dewey's ideas provided a basis for the concept of 'reflective practice' which became more influential with the Schon's (1983) work. Schon's (1983) main concern was to enhance the development of reflective practitioners. His most important contribution was to identify two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Schon (1983) argued that a major attribute of effective practitioners is that they can reflect on their experience and learn from it. This is what he called reflection-in-action. In another type–reflection-on-action-reflection occurs away from the press of immediate action. Valli (1993), in line with Schon (1983), added some other types of reflection in addition to in-action and on-action reflections: technical; dialectical (experiential); deliberative (conceptual and theoretical); and critical. Zeichner and Liston (1996) also differentiate between five different levels at which reflection can take place during teaching: rapid reflection, repair, review, research, and re-theorizing and reformulating.

In one of the most influential models of teacher development, Wallace (1991) put forward the reflective model. On the basis of Schon's (1983) ideas, Wallace (1991) demonstrated that teacher education has two main components: received knowledge and experiential knowledge. The basic elements of the reflective model can be presented in Figure 1 below. Unlike traditional teacher training models, reflective model places teachers at the forefront of their own development as they evaluate their own practice, modify it, and monitor the effects of this change (Wallace, 1991). He suggests that trainees' received knowledge can be related to experiential knowledge through a reciprocal reflective model. In this reflective model, teacher trainees can reflect on their received knowledge through observation and teaching practice, which in turn, can shed light on knowledge they receive in the training program. The figure shows that as teachers make use of experiential and received knowledge in their practice, they engage in reflection which helps them re-examine their practice with respect to their decisions, experiences, and knowledge, and this reflection, in turn, feeds back into their practices (Jourdenais, 2009). The model begins by emphasizing the role of teachers' prior experience in learning to teach which constitutes their personal theories

or beliefs. According to Hall (2011), a two-way relationship exists between beliefs and practice, with beliefs informing practice and, vice versa. As the model suggests teachers' beliefs or mental constructs are derived from and influenced by a range of sources including both received knowledge and experiential knowledge.

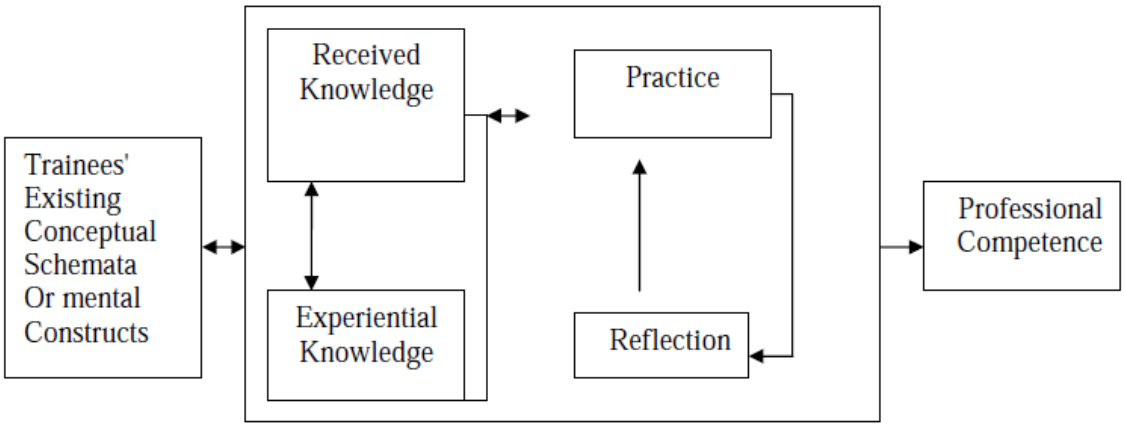

Figure 1. Reflective model (Wallace, 1991, p. 49).

The rise of reflective teaching can also be pinpointed in the discussion of the post method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 2001), amidst the clash between method and elective camps (Akbari, 2007). In comparison with the traditional teacher education which saw teachers as passive recipients of transmitted knowledge (Wallace, 1991), the post method condition is practice-driven and experientially-oriented, which seriously questions the traditional conceptualization of teachers as a channel of received knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Moreover, it raises serious questions regarding the traditional dichotomy between theorizers and practitioners with a view to empowering teachers whereby they can "theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 545).

2.2. Journal Writing

According to Ho and Richards (1993), journal writing is seen as an opportunity for teachers to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices. Boud (2001) asserted that journal writing can be viewed through many different lenses: as a form of self-expression, a record of events, or a form of therapy. It can be a combination of

these and other purposes. Journal writing can be used to enhance what we do and how we do it. As a vehicle for learning, it can be used in formal courses, our professional practice, or any aspect of informal learning. In addition, it can be regarded as reflection-on-action as it is a means of puzzling through what is happening in our work and our personal lives (Boud, 2001).

Writing reflective journals develops critical thinking in teacher trainees: It helps them reflect on various aspects of teaching within the context they are engaged and revisit their conception of what being a teacher means through a process of discovery (Lee, 2007). It helps teachers identify their weaknesses, seek improvements, and connect their existing knowledge with new information (Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad, & Ghanbari, 2013). Similarly, Spadling and Wilson (2002) believed that reflective writing can promote reflective thinking. They talked about the following benefits of journal writing:

> (1) journals serve as a permanent record of thoughts and experiences; (2) journals provide a means of establishing and maintaining relationship with instructors; (3) journals serve as a safe outlet for personal concerns and frustrations; and (4) journals are an aid to internal dialogue. Furthermore, as instructors we benefit because (1) journals serve as windows into our students' thinking and learning; (2) journals provide a means of establishing and maintaining relationship with students; and (3) journals serve as dialogical teaching tools. (p. 1396).

Moon (1999), by the same token, believed that journal writing can promote the writing quality; it can increase critical thinking and questioning abilities; it can help learners understand their learning processes; it also fosters learners' engagement and professional practice; it also enhances creativity, reflective and creative interaction in a group. Along the same lines, Varner and Peck (2003) presumed that learning journals encourage learners to be self-directed and focus in assignment; to connect new learning in experience; and, finally, to solve actual learning problems.

2.3. Empirical Studies on Reflective Journal Writing in EFL Teacher Training

Ho and Richards (1993) instructed journal writing in the beginning of the course on ten EFL teachers enrolled in an in-service teacher education program in Hong Kong. The study sought the type of journal writing teachers involved; whether their writing could be considered as critically reflective; and whether the journal writing experience promoted

teachers' critical reflectivity over time. The teachers' journal entries were then examined. Earlier and later journal entries were compared to check evidence of change. Results showed that the teachers were mainly concerned with problems faced in their teaching and there was little change in the critical reflectivity of teachers over time.

Liou (2001) conducted an EFL teacher training project in Taiwan to investigate reflection in EFL TTs. The teacher trainees were required to do lesson plans, write observation and practice reflective reports. The study provided trainees' reflective practice by examining 20 trainees' observation reports and 20 practice teaching reports over a six-week period. The findings revealed that the teacher trainees talked about topics mainly related to practical teaching issues and evaluation of other teachers or their own teaching; they could do more critical reflection, however, they did not show substantial development of critical reflection within a six-week period.

Along the same lines, Lee (2007) conducted a study to probe the effect of journal writing on pre-service EFL teacher trainees' reflective practice. More specifically, she tried to explore how dialogue journals and response journals can be used to encourage reflection among pre-service teachers. Thirty-one pre-service EFL teachers from two Hong Kong universities participated in the study. One group wrote dialogue journals and the other group wrote response journals throughout two semesters on two separate ELT methodology courses, both taught by the author. Data were gathered from their journal entries and post-study interviews. The findings showed that dialogue and response journals provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in reflective thinking, and all of them found the experience of journal writing beneficial.

Similarly, Minott and Young (2009) made use of reflective journaling as the main source of teacher training program evaluation and they put forward the idea of a hybrid evaluation approach initiated through survey and reflective journaling. They found that such journaling helped participants to carry out in-depth 'thinking about', and formulating written perceptions of various aspects of the program**.**

Roux, Mora and Tamez (2012) in a case study investigated the level of reflection in the essays written by 15 Mexican English language teachers. Semi-structured interviews were held to examine the challenges experienced with reflective writing and the usefulness

attributed to it. Findings revealed that the categorization scheme was applicable to reflective writing in EFL, although almost half of the participants still wrote in a non-reflective mode throughout the course. Different problems, including low proficiency level in English, lack of familiarity with reflective writing, challenges of deductive reasoning, and the absence of productive feedback, were reported. Reflective writing was found useful as it facilitated participation in class discussion, a thorough completion of course readings, the adoption of a new stance towards SLA theories, and improvement of academic writing ability.

Abednia et al. (2013) explored teacher trainees' own perceptions on the effectiveness of journal writing in an EFL teacher training program. To this end, a focus group discussion was conducted among six in-service EFL teachers on the benefits and challenges of the journal writing task in a BA course they had attended. Thematic analysis of the discussion demonstrated that the participants perceived their writing journals had led to self-awareness, better understanding of language teaching issues, reasoning skills, and dialog with the teacher educator. They also referred to two major challenges in writing journals: "necessity of in-depth reading of course materials and full participation in discussions to be able to write quality journals and the tension between their schooling background and the reflective nature of journal writing" (p. 503).

More recently, Moradkhaniet al. (2017) initiated an empirical study to demonstrate the effects of reflective practice on improving teaching quality. To this end, the relationship between EFL teachers' reflective practices and self-efficacy was investigated. Data were collected from 102 Iranian EFL teachers through a survey and follow-up interviews. The results of correlational analysis demonstrated that, except critical reflection, all the other reflection subscales had significant positive relationships with teachers' self-efficacy. It was also found that metacognitive reflection was the only predictor of teachers' self-efficacy.

Most studies aforementioned have been solely concerned with the participants' perceptions, leaving the real application of reflective practice in actual teaching practice untouched. Hence, to fill this gap in literature and to shed more light on the effect journal writing might have on EFL teacher trainees' reflective practice, the researchers initiated this study. Hence, the following research question was formulated:

Does journal writing have a significant effect on EFL teacher trainees' reflective practice?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 24 senior EFL teacher trainees at a teacher training center in Guilan Province, Iran. They had successfully passed several courses on language teaching methodology. Hence, they were at least theoretically familiar with related issues in L2 teaching and assessment. All participants, who were male, were selected through a non-probability sampling, namely convenience sampling, a technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. They were, in fact, the researcher's (first author) students at the "practicum" course in the second semester of the academic year 2016. Their ages ranged from 20 to 34. Their age mean was 26. None of them had a teaching experience in high schools but they had observed high school classes several times to fulfill their practicum course requirements. There was no control group in this study.

3.2. Instruments

The reflective practice inventory was adapted from Akbari, Behzadpoor and Dadvand (2010). The inventory consisted of 29 items on a 5-point Likert format. It included affective, cognitive, metacognitive, practical, and critical dimensions. To get more insights regarding reflective practice, an open question was added to the end of the inventory. It asked whether the trainees used reflective practice in their teaching and why. The inventory enjoys high reliability and validity as a measuring instrument for teacher reflectivity (Akbari, et al., 2010). However, to ensure its reliability, the researcher conducted Chronbach's alpha to determine its reliability. The results indicated a high reliability index of .90 for the whole questionnaire. A reflective practice observation checklist was also used. The checklist in a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 corresponding to 'Observed most of the time' and 4 corresponding to 'Never observed', was developed on the basis of current theories of reflective practice (Akbari, et al., 2010; Christie & Kirkwood, 2006). The observation checklist was piloted with a similar class and its Cronbach's alpha estimate indicated a good reliability index (r =.78). Besides, its content coverage and relevance was judged on a Likert scale by eight TEFL professors.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

To get some information regarding their reflective practice, the researcher observed trainees' performances before and after the treatment. Before the treatment began, the trainees were asked to have their own teaching presentations. They also underwent these practices

right after the treatment. This was done to see whether they significantly applied more reflection in their later practice. Bell (2007) argues that such microteaching equips trainees with invaluable teaching experiences and raises their awareness of the relationships between theory and practice. In addition, the reflective practice inventory was administered to them before and after the treatment.

As the trainees had never been required to write reflective journals in other courses, the task was concisely introduced to them in the first session. Abednia, Hovassapian and Teimournezhad and Ghanbari (2013) rightfully propose that EFL teacher trainees mainly come from a lecture-oriented schooling background and, as a result, are likely to lack the skills necessary for reflective practice. Therefore, to provide reflective practice, teacher trainers should provide trainees with helpful guidelines about how to carry out reflective activities. Accordingly, to instruct reflective journal writing, the researchers followed Ho and Richards (1993): Teacher trainees were introduced to journal writing in the third session of the course and given guidelines (adopted from Ho & Richards, 1993) to follow. Furthermore, to help trainees have better understanding of reflective journal writing, the first author provided them with a journal writing sample as a model. He discussed the benefits of journal writing with the trainees, as well. The trainees were then requested to make journal entries on a regular once a week basis either as a response to the general reflection guidelines, or in response to the teaching topic the trainees were exposed to in different language teaching courses during the week or previous weeks. The class met once a week for 14 weeks. As the treatment began on the third session, on average, each participant wrote 8 entries, i.e. almost one per week, as part of course assignments. In the early sessions, the researcher gave feedback on each entry in English and, sometimes, in Farsi. More precisely, he gave feedback on the trainees' opinions and arguments, provided other relevant points and questions, asked for clarification if necessary, and presented his own ideas. However, in the later sessions, as Lee (2007) recommends, the instructor's role was mitigated and teacher trainees themselves discussed and worked on their peers' entries. In using journals, according to Lee (2007), it is important that teacher trainees develop an authentic interest in writing reflective journals, even without the instructor's presence or his/her commands. To this end, it is recommended that the teacher trainer gradually reduce input /feedback and let trainees take stronger responsibility for learning. According to her, for example, teacher trainees forming journal groups can read each other's journals regularly, so that they can support each other in the learning-to-teach process. Such group journaling experience can also "help them understand

better how collaborative learning (for example, peer review) works in language learning, and can better prepare them to use similar techniques when they become teachers" (p. 328). Moreover, as Lee (2007) suggests the trainees were required to read and reread their own journals at different time points and to write reflections on their own journals to trace their own reflection development.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

To probe the possible differences between the perceptions and application of reflective practice before and after the treatment, the researchers conducted matched *t* tests. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire and checklist were analyzed quantitatively and descriptive analyses (frequency, percentage, means and standard deviation) were run. For the open question of the questionnaire, a qualitative content analysis was employed. SPSS version 22.0 was used to analyze the data.

4. Results

The descriptive analysis of the reflective practice questionnaire results both before and after the treatment is presented in Table 1. The results of the questionnaire before treatment indicated that the three highest means were for item 20–*I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher* (*M* = 3.12, *SD* = .78), item 15–*I ask my students to whether they like a teaching task or not (M* = 2.63, *SD* = .62), and item 7–*I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance* (*M* = 2.51, *SD* = .93). The lowest means were observed in item 1–*I have a file where I keep accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes* (*M* = 1.34, *SD* = .73), item 26–*I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way it may affect my students' views* (*M* = 1.48, *SD* = .84), and item 6–*I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance* (*M* = 1.53, *SD* = .87). For after the treatment, similarly the highest mean was for item 20 (*M* = 4.37, *SD* = .72). However, the second and third highest means were observed for item 4–*I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues* (*M* = 4.33, *SD* =.48), and surprisingly item 6 (*M* = 4.29, *SD* = .63), which was one of the lowest perceived items before the treatment. The lowest means were for item 25–*In my teaching, I include less discussed topics such as old age, AIDS, and poverty* (*M* = 3.04, *SD* = .55), again item 26 (*M* = 3.31, *SD* = .56), and item 28–*I think about the ways gender, social class and race influence my students' achievements* (*M* = 3.41, *SD* =.77).

Table 1.

Descriptive Analysis of the Questionnaire Results Before/ After the Treatment

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
1.I have a file where I keep accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.0	1.34/3.62	.49/.64
2. I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.45/3.75	.67/.60
3. After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lessons to a colleague	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.29/4.20	.93/.65
4. I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues	1.00/4.00	3.00/5.00	2.04/4.33	.63/.48
5. I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.95/3.62	.55/.58
6. I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.53/4.29	.87/.63
7. I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.51/4.00	.93/.65
8. I participate in workshops/ conferences related to teaching/learning issues	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.00/3.95	.51/.69
9. I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.87/4.16	.53/.70
10. I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are	1.00/4.00	4.00/5.00	2.33/4.00	.70/.82
11. I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes	1.00/2.00	3.00/5.00	1.79/3.70	.50/.69
12. I think of classroom events s potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.95/3.83	.62/.70
13. I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences	1.00/4.00	3.00/5.00	1.54/4.00	.58/.65
14. I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.70/3.91	.62/.71
15. I ask my students to whether they like a teaching task or not	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.12/4.15	.62/.74
16. As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.04/4.16	.55/.56
17. I think of the ways, my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.16/3.66	.63/.81
18. I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.04/3.95	.55/.69
19. I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.20/4.08	.65/58
20. I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher	2.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	3.12/4.37	.87/.62
21. I think of the positive/ negative role models I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.00/3.70	.72/.78
22. I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice	2.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.45/3.91	.58/.65
23. I talk about instances of social injustice in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.16/4.16	.56/.63
24. I think of ways to enable my students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.33/4.00	.56/.65
25. In my teaching, I include less discussed topics such as old age, AIDS, and poverty	2.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.02/3.04	.50/.55
26. I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way it may affect my students' views	1.00/2.00	3.00/4.00	1.48/3.33	.84/.74
27. I think of the ways through which I can promote tolerance in my classes and in society	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	2.12/3.50	.53/.67
28. I think about the ways gender, social class and race influence my students' achievements	1.00/3.00	3.00/5.00	1.87/3.41	.53/.77
Total	1.00/3.00	4.00/5.00	2.33/3.91	.63/.65

Regarding the difference between the participants' perceptions before and after the treatment, apparently in almost every case, a difference in the mean could be observed. However, to find out whether such difference was significant, the researchers ran paired-sample *t* tests for the items of the questionnaire. The results (Table 2) indicated there was a significant difference in scores for the perceptions of participants on reflective practice before treatment (M = 2.01, SD = .87) and after treatment (M = 3.88, SD = 0.95); t (23) = 10.46, p = 0.001.

Table 2.

Paired-samples T-tests for the Participants' Perceptions on Reflective Practice Questionnaire Items Before and After Treatment

Item	**Mean Difference**	**SD**	***t***	***df***	***Sig.***
1.I have a file where I keep accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes	2.62	.92	13.92	23	.000
2. I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice	2.29	.75	8.43	23	.000
3. After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lessons to a colleague	1.91	.92	10.11	23	.000
4. I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues	2.29	.85	13.07	23	.000
5. I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices	1.66	.81	10.00	23	.000
6. I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance	2.70	.95	13.89	23	.000
7. I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance	1.62	.87	9.09	23	.000
8. I participate in workshops/ conferences related to teaching/learning issues	1.95	.69	13.89	23	.000
9. I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences	1.66	1.00	8.10	23	.000
10. I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are	1.91	.82	11.31	23	.000
11. I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes	1.87	.85	10.80	23	.000
12. I think of classroom events s potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them	2.45	.93	12.92	23	.000
13. I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences	2.20	.97	11.07	23	.000
14. I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities	2.03	1.17	8.30	23	.000
15. I ask my students to whether they like a teaching task or not	2.12	.79	13.05	23	.000
16. As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching	1.50	1.06	6.91	23	.000
17. I think of the ways, my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher	1.91	.77	12.10	23	.000
18. I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher	1.87	.74	12.93	23	.000
19. I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction	1.25	.79	7.71	23	.000
20. I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher	1.70	.85	9.74	23	.000
21. I think of the positive/ negative role models I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice	1.46	1.02	7.00	23	.000

22. I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice	2.00	.78	12.55	23	.000
23. I talk about instances of social injustice in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes	1.66	.86	9.40	23	.000
24. I think of ways to enable my students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias	1.02	.93	7.63	23	.000
25. In my teaching, I include less discussed topics such as old age, AIDS, and poverty	1.85	.62	8.73	23	.000
26. I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way it may affect my students' views	1.37	.87	7.69	23	.000
27. I think of the ways through which I can promote tolerance in my classes and in society	1.54	.97	7.73	23	.000
28. I think about the ways gender, social class and race influence my students' achievements	0.70	.85	4.04	23	.000
Total	1.88	.91	10.46	23	.001

In addition, results of observation checklist (Table 3) revealed that the most highly observed variable of reflective practice before the treatment was item 3, *Preparing lessons before teaching them* (*M* = 2.95, *SD* = .67) and the least observed variable was item 8, *Helping students to know about instances of social injustice and changing their perceptions,* (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = .38). However, for after treatment, the most highly observed variable was item 6, *Writing about the accomplishments and failures of that lesson at the end of the class,* (*M* = 1.70, *SD* = .69) and the least observed one was item 4, *Providing equal opportunities for all students regardless of their capabilities,* (*M* = 2.40, *SD* = .72).

Paired-samples *t* tests were also conducted to compare trainees' application of reflective practice before and after the treatment. The results (Table 4) indicated there was a significant difference in scores for reflective practice implementation before treatment (*M* = 3.44 *SD* = .54) and after treatment (*M* = 2.04, *SD* =.70); *t* (23) = 10.46, *p* = 0.00.

Table 3.

Descriptive Analysis of the Observed Variables of Reflective Practice Before/After Treatment

Reflective Variable	**Mean**	**SD**
Developing teaching on the basis of the learning outcomes	3.12/2.04	.61/.69
Employing new approaches of L2 teaching and assessment	3.25/1.95	.75/.62
Preparing lessons before teaching them	2.95/2.05	.67/.69
Providing equal opportunities for all students regardless of their capabilities	3.20/2.40	.60/.72
Getting feedback from students and making modifications to the lesson plan whenever necessary	3.79/1.91	.41/.77
Writing about the accomplishments and failures of that lesson at the end of the class	3.75/1.70	.44/.69
Asking students to talk about their perceptions of the class (i.e., their likes and dislikes)	3.70/2.00	.48/.82
Helping students to know about instances of social injustice and changing their perceptions	3.83/2.25	.38/.67
Total	3.44/2.00	.54/70

Table 4.

Paired-samples T-tests for the Participants' application of Reflective Practice Before and After Treatment

Reflective Variable	**Mean Difference**	**SD**	***t***	***df***	***Sig.***
Developing teaching on the basis of the learning outcomes	1.08	.83	5.21	23	.000
Employing new approaches of L2 teaching and assessment	1.30	1.07	6.07	23	.000
Preparing lessons before teaching them	.90	1.04	4.60	23	.000
Providing equal opportunities for all students regardless of their capabilities	.80	.83	4.65	23	.000
Getting feedback from students and making modifications to the lesson plan whenever necessary	1.88	.99	9.26	23	.000
Writing about the accomplishments and failures of that lesson at the end of the class	2.04	.80	12.40	23	.000
Asking students to talk about their perceptions of the class (i.e., their likes and dislikes)	1.70	.73	11.62	23	.000
Helping students to know about instances of social injustice and changing their perceptions	1.58	.77	10.00	23	.000
Total	1.44	.97	10.46	23	.000

Finally, a qualitative analysis of the open question of the questionnaire answers revealed that for the majority of the interviewees (around 80%), the Iranian high school EFL teachers were not or could not be reflective in their own practice. They had mainly two reasons. The first was related to their education in the program. They believed that seemingly no systematic procedure was utilized to teach reflective practice in the program. Again, they believed teacher trainees somehow theoretically became familiar with such practice, but the actual implementation was seldom practiced. As a result, they believed that the majority of teachers had no idea or very vague ideas regarding reflective practice. For most interviewees (nearly 75%) rarely such reflective practice was implemented in the program. One interviewee, for example believed:

> *Perhaps in some courses, the notion of reflective practice is introduced but the point is that the [teacher] trainees do not become familiar with it practically. Moreover, few teacher trainers use reflective practice in their own teaching methodology, hence, the trainees do not have a good model to follow, as a result, they are not able to implement it in their actual teaching practice*.

A majority of the interviewees (around 90%) believed that most high-school EFL teachers actually did not know how to teach reflectively. They believed that in order to be reflective, prospective teachers are required to be aware of their belief systems, something rarely happens in the training program. They, then, can act upon such

system, evaluate their own teaching, and find their strengths and weaknesses to improve their own teaching.

The second main reason, according to the participants, was social. To be reflective, trainees need to be collaborative. Most interviewees (more than 80%) believed that pair-work was not well-appreciated in the program and in almost all cases the projects were done by the students individually. As in majority of classes, trainee/trainee or trainee/trainer interaction was rare; the collaborative practice was not established, so directly affecting trainees' reflection. Accordingly, when the high school EFL teachers enter the profession, little interaction and collaboration with colleagues occurs, as a result, the reflection which could arise from such interactions never takes place. Related to this was the idea that to be reflective one should take into account larger social and political context than that of the classroom itself. Again, such social orientation toward reflection was largely neglected in the program.

5. Discussion

The results revealed that there was a significant difference between participants' perceptions and application of reflective practice before and after treatment. It shows that the instruction had significant effects on the trainees' perception and application of reflective practice. This finding rhymes with those of Gray (2000), Liou (2001), Abednia et al. (2013), Fatemipour and HosseingholiKhani (2014), and Koh and Tan (2016). It may be due to the fact that experience itself acts as the context for personal learning (Pavlovich, 2007), a kind of experiential learning. Moreover, learning from situations can lead to a change in behavior in the future (Johns, 1994).

Moreover, the finding that journal writing has significant effects on promoting reflective practice is in line with those of Spadling and Wilson (2002), Martin (2005), Lee (2007), Pavlovich (2007), Minott and Young (2009), and Roux, Mora and Tamez (2012). Writing, in general, can contribute to learning and the enhancement of learning and memory, and this has led to the assumption that journal-writing can also bring about learning (Moon, 2006). Reflective journal helps the prospective teachers to grasp or find out some important issues which might otherwise be neglected (Bolton, 2010). Journal writing, according to Williams and Wessel (2004) as cited in Pavlovich (2007), enhances students' understanding of experiences and promotes thinking skills. It helps to create a personal dialogue to better

understand and to develop beliefs through social collaborative, discourse (Brooke, 2014). As Lee (2007, p. 321) contends it provides "a venue for teacher learners to establish connections between content and practical experience". Spalding and Wilson (2002), in the same vein, briefly talk about the following benefits of journaling as "serving as a permanent record of thoughts and experiences; providing a means of establishing and maintaining relationship with instructors; serving as a safe outlet for personal concerns and frustrations; and, as an aid to internal dialogue" (p. 1396). Journal-writing has also been effective in the promotion of metacognition directly (Boud, 2001; McCrindle & Christensen, 1995). Reflection arising from journal writing, indeed, makes it possible for learners to implement their metacognitive knowledge "during each stage of the regulatory process: planning, monitoring and evaluating" (Ertmer & Newby, 1996, p. 16).

Regarding perceptions of participants, it was found that item 20, *I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher,* was among the highest perceived variables, both before and after the treatment. Such inclination may be due to the general nature of the item. It might encompass many issues, including linguistic, educational, psychological, sociopolitical and many other factors contributing to successful language teaching. In addition, item 26, *I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way it may affect my students' views*, was one of the least perceived variables, both before and after treatment. It might show that trainees were not inclined to engage in political issues or other issues beyond language teaching–for example, items 25 and 28. In not only developing but also developed societies, such low tendency of l2 teachers to talk about disputable issues is not uncommon. Okazaki (2005), for example, traces the root in the SLA research methodology. He believes that SLA itself is cognitively-oriented, hence "fails to consider the social and political complexity of language learning" (p. 176). It may also due to the fact that in teacher education, a critical pedagogy, is not practiced (Oazaki, 2005). Accordingly, less discussions in classes are geared to political and social issues. Additionally, regarding item 6, *I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance*, interesting result was obtained. While it was less perceived item before the treatment, it ranked one of the highest variables after the treatment. It seems engaging in a collaborative and reflective practice and its benefits had significant effect on trainees' perceptions on sharing ideas with peers.

With regard to the application of reflective practice, it was observed that the most highly observed variable of reflective practice before the treatment was item 3, *Preparing lessons before teaching them* and the least observed variable was item 8, *Helping students to know about instances of social injustice and changing their perceptions*. However, for after treatment, the most highly observed variable was item 6, *Writing about the accomplishments and failures of that lesson at the end of the class*, and the least observed one was item 4, *Providing equal opportunities for all students regardless of their capabilities*. As it can be observed, after treatment, the trainees engaged in a reflective practice, now were convinced to think about their positive and negative aspects of teaching as they did in their learning journals, hence more willing to reflect on their teaching practice.

Finally, as it was found that EFL teachers to be reflective need to work collaboratively, both with their students and their colleagues. Collaboration, in fact, is a prerequisite for reflective practice. The concept of reflection as a social process has attracted a lot of attention in the literature (Parsons & Stevenson, 2005). According to them, the benefits of practitioners working together to discuss shared problems have been recognized. McMahon (1997) contend that, "if one accepts Vygotsky's arguments that thinking begins on a social plane before it becomes internalized, then asking prospective teachers to ascribe words to what they are considering related to practice may prompt reflection or, at the least, provide a basis for dialogue between the learner and "more knowledgeable others" (p. 201). Through such dialogue, Parsons and Stevenson (2005) believe trainees "might also engage in the telling of stories about their practice and experiences and through this, reveal to themselves the values, feelings and attitudes that influence their practice" (p. 104). In fact, according to social constructivist theories of learning, the mediation afforded through such collaborative endeavor helps trainees to better analyze 'their learning how to teach' and to be in a better position to make appropriate decisions. Finally, the partnership and collaboration permits the trainees to engage in problem solving, which might be one of the characteristics of reflective practice (Leitch & Day, 2000)

6. Conclusion

According to Larrivee (2008), many consider reflective practice as the hallmark of professional competence for teachers. Reflection helps prospective teachers examine their practice critically and make rational and practical judgments about what to do in particular

circumstances (Leather & Popovic, 2008). Ball (2009) discusses that in order for teachers to become reflective of their teaching practices, they must be motivated to change their teaching strategies when needed. In order to help pre-service teachers to teach reflectively, they have to acquire this skill from the very beginning of the learning-to-teach process (Lee, 2007). Some mediation processes such as journaling, providing prompts and asking critical questions can be considered as effective ways to promote higher order reflection. To this end, supplying a framework of tasks focusing on observation and analysis of trainers and trainees' teaching practice would perhaps help both trainers and trainees concentrate more on their strengths and weaknesses (Parsons & Stevenson, 2005). This framework can provide the trainees with experience of reflection through clearly defined situations (Korthagen, 1999). These tasks can require trainees to discuss with each other different aspects of teaching practice they have observed or experienced. Moreover, class assignments should be designed in a form of collaborative inquiry projects to promote reflection in teacher trainees.

Although the present study shed some light on the issue of reflective practice, it had some limitations in its methodology, which can be considered in future research. Only two data collection tools, namely questionnaire and observation checklist were used while other data collection tools such as interviews and think-aloud protocols would increase the validity of the study. Moreover, longitudinal case studies may provide better evidence for the effectiveness of reflective practice instruction. Moreover, due to problems, only male teacher trainees constituted the participants of the study. Further research can be initiated on female trainees, as well.

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