

## Engaging EFL Teachers in Reflective Practice As A Way to Pursue Sustained Professional Development

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### ABSTRACT

Reflective practice has become a significant aspect of determining good teaching and learning practices and is an important part of professional practice and professional growth. However, many English teachers in Indonesia are still unable to reflect on their teaching in order to improve their teaching practice. This study reports the results of intensive training conducted by a community service team of the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University to help teachers develop a reflective teaching habit. The participants were 30 English teachers of Islamic Senior High School in Surakarta. The documents of observation fieldnotes and teacher assignments were used as the main data sources. From this programme, it was found that the English teachers encountered a plethora of challenges in developing reflective practice due to their lack of understanding of reflective teaching. However, after participating in the training, the teachers showed improvement in implementing reflective teaching strategies. A recommendation to include reflective practices in professional teacher development programmes is drawn based on the findings.

**Keywords:** reflective practice; training; english teacher; professional development

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching as a profession demands a continuous effort in the professional development of teachers as the main teaching practitioners. Becoming a professional teacher does not end with one's pre-service or even in-service teacher education; rather, it is a lifelong endeavour and a way of being. With this in mind, a teacher needs to develop professionally (Wong, 2013). The focus of professional development is the acquisition of competences for teachers to provide enhanced learning experience for their students. Additionally, professional development should be relevant to the needs of teachers and lead to positive changes in teaching behaviour (Stroupe dan Kimura, 2013). From the 11 professional development strategies proposed by Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001), this study focuses on reflective teaching due to its urgency in the Indonesian context.

The teaching of English in Indonesia seems to be merely seen as a blindly strict lesson with plan-oriented activities, which do not consider fundamental behaviours within the classroom context: curiosity and reflectivity (Yanuarti & Treagust, 2016). Teachers are often found to follow mechanical steps in teaching and use the same procedures day in day out. As a result, these procedures lack a real sense of teaching. Additionally, teachers do not show an awareness that informs their teaching practices (Astika, 2014). These issues call for an improvement of teacher reflectivity to harness a critical awareness of the consequences of their classroom teaching on the success of teaching and learning activity.

To tackle this issue, teaching reflection is included in the regulations of the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia No. 16/2007, which states that teachers, at all stages of education, are expected to implement reflective practices to enhance the quality of learning. As part of language teachers' professional development in Indonesia, reflective teaching is promoted as a goal of the learning teacher programme, which aims to enhance teachers' professional skills; one of these skills is being able to reflect on current perspectives, practices, and circumstances in ELT trends. This encourages English teachers to apply approaches to help them achieve their teaching and learning goals (Richards and Rodger, 2014).

However, the realisation of the above-explained policy remains vague. Yanuarti and Treagust (2016) report that teachers do not understand the concept of reflective teaching due to a lack of information dissemination, training, and guidelines from the government. With no exposure and training, it is unrealistic to place increasing pressure on teachers to implement reflective teaching in their classrooms. Therefore, it is common for teachers to stick with their habits of mechanical teaching with no critical awareness to help them improve the quality of their teaching.

To address this issue, a community service team of the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University conducted a training project to nurture the reflective practices of

English teachers in Surakarta City. The goal of this training was to introduce the concepts of reflective teaching and provide teachers with opportunities to practice their skills of reflection on classroom teaching, especially their own. This intensive teacher training was conducted for eight months with a variety of activities related to reflective practice. This paper will report the results of the training and the issues that affect the achievement of the training goals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. The Concept of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice or reflection was firstly proposed by John Dewey (1933) as ‘an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it and the conclusion to which it tends’ (as cited in Loughran, 2002, p.14). In a similar vein, Zwodiak-Myer (2012) postulates that reflective practice is ‘a disposition to enquiry incorporating the process through which students, early career and experienced teachers structure or restructure actions, beliefs, knowledge and theories that inform teaching for the purpose of professional development’ (p. 5). Such a process promotes a cyclical but continuous series of reflective actions to strengthen teachers’ self-awareness, not only in improving the quality of their knowledge, but also in bringing about positive social change to either the teachers or individual students through in-depth, regular thinking and considerations (Farrel, 2018). These definitions propose that reflective practice is a transformational activity that enables practitioners to consistently link practice and theory to examine their own beliefs and inform better practice. As with reflective practices in teaching activities, it is strongly recommended that reflection should be based on teachers’ teaching and learning practice and student test results; and classroom action research should be conducted to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Schön (1983) expands the concept of reflective practice into two types: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Mannen (1991) and Killon and Todnew (1991) propose a third type of reflection named reflection-for-action. Reflection-in-action refers to the teacher’s reviewing activity while teaching. Reflection-on-action refer to the teacher’s review of what has taken place in the classroom after the teaching-learning process has ended. Reflection-for-action refers to the preparation that a teacher does ready for their next lesson. Most studies in this area show that reflection can increase a teacher’s ability to deliver learning materials, develop better teacher-student relationships and develop classroom management skills (Mann and Walsh, 2017). Furthermore, the habit of teachers’ reflection also aims to develop a critical reflection dialogue and the meaningful storage of knowledge (Ghaye, 2011).

To maintain reflective practice, there are several ways for teachers to be reflective. Richards and Farrell (2005) argue that a teacher may use strategies to reflect on their teaching and improve their teaching skills. These strategies could be in the form of a workshop, self-monitoring, teacher support group, teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolio, analysis of critical incidents, case

analysis, peer coaching, team teaching and action research. Other recent studies add students' feedback as another method of reflection (Soisangwarn & Wongwanich, 2014). Additionally, videotaping teachers' teaching activities can potentially document richer and more complex events and situations within teaching and learning. These also provide teachers with the necessary context to observe and carefully reflect on different issues of teaching and learning in action (Susoy, 2015).

## 2. Aspects of Reflective Practice

Drawing from the literature, Smith (2011) describes four domains of critical reflection across healthcare professionals, which, in our view, are relevant to language teaching. Smith (2011) proposes four domains of reflection as illustrated in Figure 1. The four domains are: (1) Personal domain, which involves thoughts and actions; (2) Interpersonal domain, which involves interactions with others; (3) Contextual domain, which involves concepts, theory and methods; and (4) Critical domain, which involves ethical and social contexts. Smith (2011) illustrates the relationship between the domains in a concentric circle, which moves from the internal milieu of the teacher to a broader teaching context as shown in Figure 1.

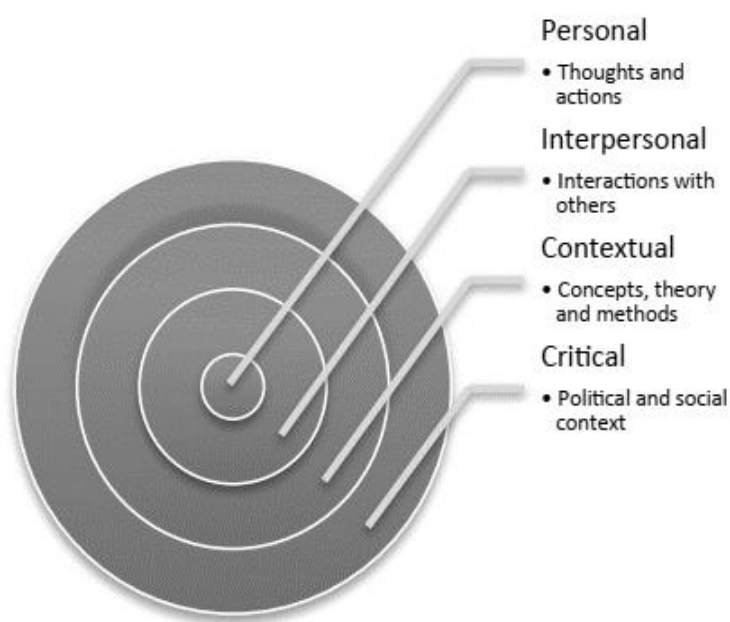


Figure 1. Domains of critical reflection (Smith, 2011)

Zwodiak-Myer (2012) presents nine dimensions of reflective teaching practice for action as key features of this process: (1) Study your own teaching for personal improvement; (2) Systematically evaluate your own teaching through classroom research procedures; (3) Link theory with your own practice; (4) Question your own personal theories and beliefs; (5) Consider alternative perspectives and possibilities; (6) Try out new strategies and ideas; (7) Maximise the learning

potential of all your pupils; (8) Enhance the quality of your own teaching; and (9) Continue to improve your own teaching.

As seen from the above explanation, reflective teaching covers a broad range of domains and developmental stages. Reflective teachers can examine their beliefs on the internal and external aspects of their teaching. Additionally, reflective teachers systematically go through all of the stages and aspects of reflective practices to provide better teaching for their students.

### 3. Models of Reflective Teaching

There are several models of reflective teaching proposed by scholars in the education field. Lane et al. (2014) propose a continuum of reflective teaching consisting of four major levels: descriptive, evaluative, reflective and imaginative.



Figure 2. The model of reflective teaching by Lane et al. (2014)

At a descriptive level, teachers describe events they notice in the classroom. At the evaluative level, teachers include a value judgement about what has been observed. The reflective level allows teachers to analyse what is effective or ineffective about a lesson and why. At the imaginative level, teachers can look at classroom scenarios and make suggestions about how lessons could be taught differently or improved.

The next model of reflective teaching is proposed by Wallace (1991). The model has four major aspects: received knowledge, experiential knowledge, reflective cycle and professional competence. The model is illustrated in Figure 3.

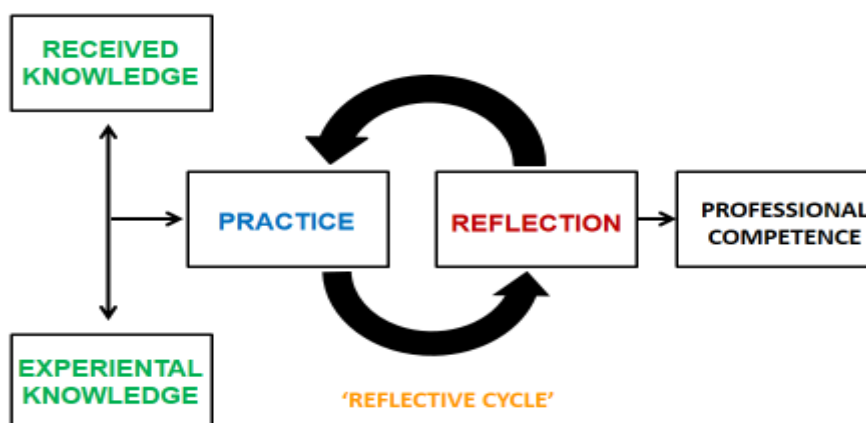


Figure 3. The reflective model by Wallace (1991)

Received knowledge is knowledge associated with the study of a particular field (e.g. linguistics). Experiential knowledge is knowledge-in-action through practice of the field (e.g. classroom practice). A reflective cycle is the continuing process of reflection on received knowledge and experiential knowledge in the context of professional practice. Professional competence is when the teacher meets a certain minimum requirement in their professional expertise.

The next model of reflection is proposed by Bartlett (1990). This is a cyclical model with five major stages: mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting. The flow of the model can be analysed in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The reflective model by Bartlett (1990)

Stage 1: *Mapping* -- *What do I do as a teacher?* Mapping involves the observation and collection of evidence about our own teaching, by ‘recording’ our practice (e.g. video-recording a lesson and keeping a diary or journal). Stage 2: *Informing* -- *What did I intend?* Having mapped out our images about our teaching, we turn to look for meaning behind the maps. During this phase, we begin a search for principles that underlie our teaching and the reasons that are the basis for our theory of teaching. Stage 3: *Contesting* -- *How did I come to be this way?* This phase involves judging our ideas and the reasons we have for teaching in particular ways. Contesting involves a search for inconsistencies or contradictions in what we do and how we think. During this phase, we may begin to dislodge the theory for our teaching. Stage 4: *Appraising* -- *How might I teach differently?* Contesting logically leads to a search for alternative courses of action -- appraisal. During this phase, we begin to search for principles that are consistent with our new understanding. We may ask, ‘What happens with my teaching if I apply this new method?’ Stage 5: *Acting* -- *What and how shall I now teach?* During this phase, we ‘rearrange’ our teaching practice after mapping what we do, unearthing

the reasons and assumption for these actions, subjecting these reasons to critical scrutiny, appraising alternative courses of action and then acting upon them.

In this study, Bartlett's (1990) model of reflective practice is chosen to inform the procedures of training activities. This is because of its beneficial characteristics: (1) It is cyclical, so reflection and action form a continuous cyclical process; (2) It is also flexible, hence, we can begin to reflect on practice from a different starting point; (3) It is focused on directions and its goal is to enable meaningful learning to take place; (4) It is holistic and enables us to review teaching and learning comprehensively. As the goal in conducting this training is to create a sustained professional development habit through reflection, due to the above-explained characteristics, we believe that Bartlett's (1990) model serves its purpose well.

### **PROCEDURES FOR THE TRAINING**

The training of reflective teaching was conducted for eight months. The participants were 30 senior English teachers coming from 30 Islamic Senior High Schools in Surakarta area. The training consisted of three stages: (1) Preparation, (2) Implementation and (3) Evaluation and report. The preparation stage involved (a) a meeting of internal coordination among the members of community service committee, (b) coordinating with the core officer of the *Association of English Teacher of Islamic Senior High Schools of Surakarta City*, which is the teachers' union in the Solo Raya area, (c) preparing training materials, (d) preparing the media to showcase the training materials, and (e) preparing the instrument for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the training.

The implementation stage covered several activities, including (a) the presentation of the the materials (Reflective Teaching), (b) question and answer session, (c) the practice of reflective teaching, (d) the discussion of the results of the reflective practice, (d) structured assignment for the participants the training; (e) the discussion of assignment results; and (f) reflection.

The last stage is evaluation and reporting, which consisted of (a) monitoring the implementation of training, (b) conducting a complete evaluation of the implementation of the training, (c) writing a report of the community service program, (d) writing a scientific article from the results of the training, and (e) submitting the article to a reputable national journal.

### **FINDINGS**

Two major themes inform the success of the training: the development of teachers' understanding of the reflective teaching concept and their knowledge about the concept of good English language teaching.

#### **1. Teachers' understanding of reflective teaching: during and post training**

##### **1.1 During training**

Before scrutinising to what extent teachers understand the concept of reflective teaching during training, it is intriguing to uncover their prior exposure to the term "reflective teaching" as this would most likely affect the development of their understanding during the training. Prior to the training, almost all participants in



this study had never heard of the term reflective teaching. When asked, “*Sebelum mengikuti pelatihan ini, apakah Bapak/Ibu pernah mendengar istilah pembelajaran reflektif?*” (*Before the training, had you ever heard of the term reflective teaching?*), almost all participants claimed that the term “reflective teaching” was completely new to them. Only two out of 30 participants admitted that they were familiar with the term. This indicated that there was a noticeable gap between the government policy of making reflective teaching an imperative practice for professional teachers and what was really happening in the field.

The teachers’ very limited understanding of reflective teaching significantly affected the pace and timeline of the training. From the five stages of reflective teaching by Bartlett (1990) comprising of mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting, only the first stage had been completed. This schedule mismatch was caused by the fact that teachers had an extremely limited understanding of the reflective teaching concept. For instance, during the first phase of the training, teachers were presented with the key concepts of reflective teaching and asked to complete the assignment, which was peer observation of teaching in their own school. The results were far from satisfactory. Teachers tended to summarize what they had observed. There was lack of critical analysis and awareness, which are crucial during the mapping stage (Bartlett, 1990). The following are two examples of field note made by the participants.

Teacher 1:

*Menayangkan sebuah power point presentation yang bertuliskan “recount text”*

(Showing a power point presentation entitled “Recount Text”)

*Mengatakan, “Today we will learn about recount text.”*

(Saying, “Today we will learn about recount text”)

*Menanyakan, “What do you know about recount text?”*

(Asking a question, “What do you know about recount text?”)

Teacher 5:

*Menjelaskan 4 skills dalam bahasa: listening, speaking, reading and writing.*  
(Explaining the four skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing)

*Menanyakan maksud dari masing-masing skill. Siswa menjawab bersahutan.*

(Asking students about the meaning of each skill. Students answer simultaneously.)

As we can see from the above examples, both teachers did not comprehend the aim of reflective teaching. They merely provided descriptive accounts of their peers’ teaching practice without giving any critical evaluation on what went right or wrong during the teaching session. As a result, we had to provide a re-explanation on the mapping stage of reflective teaching. After that, teachers were asked to re-do the peer observation field notes assignment. This process was repeated three times until, finally, the teachers were able to provide evaluative



remarks. The repeating of this presentation and assignment costed time, which completely disrupted the schedule. However, it can be inferred that, although slowly, the teachers made improvements in their understanding of the concepts of mapping in reflective teaching during the training.

### 1.2 Post-training

After the mapping (the first phase of reflective teaching) was completed, the teachers showed improvement in navigating and reflecting on the problems in their peers' classroom teaching. This was indicated by their self-reported assessment on the improvement of their understanding of reflective teaching in their final assignment. To the question item "*Setelah mengikuti pelatihan ini sebanyak 3 kali pertemuan, apakah Bapak/Ibu memiliki pemahaman tentang konsep pembelajaran reflektif?*" (After participating in this training for three meetings, have you developed an understanding about the concept of reflective teaching?), all of the teachers answered "yes" with slight variation on how much their understanding had improved. The teachers were also able to explain their understanding of reflective teaching practice in their assignments. These are the examples.

Teacher 10:

*Pembelajaran reflektif adalah tentang asosiasi gagasan-gagasan, mengaitkan data-data yang ada, validasi keontetikan gagasan, dan menjadikan pengalaman baru untuk pelaku refleksi mendorong berkembangnya ketrampilan mengajar atas kebutuhan gaya belajar dan model belajar dilapangan. (Reflective teaching is about the association of ideas, available data, validation of the authenticity of ideas, transformation of new experiences and the practice of teaching to foster the development of teaching skills based on students' learning styles and models.)*

Teacher 8:

*Pembelajaran reflektif adalah pembelajaran yang dilakukan berdasarkan pengamatan atas pembelajaran sebelumnya, dengan melihat kekurangan, kelebihan, keefektifan, ketidakefektifan, serta masalah yang muncul di dalam prosesnya. (Reflective teaching is the teaching conducted based on the observations of previous teaching by evaluating the weaknesses, strengths, effectiveness, ineffectiveness and problems emerging during the process.)*

As we can see from the above excerpts, both teachers were able to articulate their understanding of reflective practice. Compared to the response of most teachers at the beginning of and during the training, when asked about their understanding of reflective teachers, the above answers demonstrated an improvement in their understanding. Furthermore, teachers were also able to critically observe their colleagues' teaching and report their observations in reflective field notes.

Teacher 3:

Deskripsi

*Setelah jam pergantian berbunyi, guru memberikan pekerjaan rumah yaitu (1) Coba temukan mana thesis dari text, mana argument, mana reiteration.; dan (2) Coba temukan contoh kalimat compound sentence dan complex sentence. Setelah itu guru mengakhiri dengan salam. (When the bell rang, the teacher assigned homework: (1) Locate the thesis, argument, and reiteration of the text; (2) Find compound sentences and complex sentences. After that the teacher ended the lesson with a farewell bid.)*

Refleksi

*Guru tidak memberi kesimpulan dan konfirmasi terhadap pekerjaan siswa. Menurut saya, di akhir pelajaran guru perlu menggarisbawai atau menyimpulkan apa yang telah dipelajari dalam pembelajaran tersebut. Guru juga perlu memberi balikan terhadap apa yang dikerjakan siswa agar siswa memahami apa yang sudah ereka kerjakan. Perlu disampaikan secara jelas apa tujuan memberikan pekerjaan rumah sebagai evaluasi terhadap kemajuan dalam membaca. (The teacher did not give a conclusion and confirmation on the students' work. In my opinion, at the end of the lesson, the teacher should underline or highlight what has been learned in the lesson. The teacher also needs to provide feedback on the students' work so the students understand what they have done. It is also important to explain the goal of the homework as the evaluation of reading progress.)*

The extract shows that Teacher 3 could provide critical reflection and evaluation on his colleague's issues in teaching and how it could have been improved. Not only was Teacher 3 able to navigate the problems in the teaching, but he was also able to propose what could have been done to make the teaching better.

From these two sections, it could be inferred that albeit slowly, the teachers' understanding of the concepts of reflective teaching improved from an initial absence of knowledge about reflective teaching to a better understanding of reflective teaching. However, this lack of understanding about reflective teaching before and during the training negatively affected the timeline for the training activities. By the end of this phase, the only completed stage was mapping. This fact implies that knowledge and information about reflective teaching has not reached teachers at the lowest grass root level of education.

## **2. Teachers' lack of understanding about the concept of good English Language Teaching (ELT)**

Another important issue discovered in the study was teachers' lack of understanding about the principles of good teaching. Teachers were often unable to analyse a teaching situation based on ELT theories. As a result, the teachers could not demonstrate their ability to connect theory and practice and/or understand how theory can be used to improve teaching. This issue was reflected in one of the sections during the teachers' final assignments. In this section,

teachers were asked to analyse a teaching situation based on their understanding and experience of good reading instruction.

Teacher 1:

*Pada kasus tersebut guru sebagai satu-satunya sumber belajar. Guru berperan secara penuh dalam kegiatan belajar mengajar. Semua kegiatan dilaksanakan di bawah kendali guru. Peserta didik kurang aktif, mereka cenderung pasif dalam kegiatan belajar.* (In this case, the teacher is the only source of knowledge. The teacher has full authority in the teaching and learning activity. All activities are controlled by the teacher. The students are not active in their learning activities.)

Teacher 4:

*Proses pembelajaran tersebut masih berbasis teacher centre. Terus terang cara saya mengajar masih seperti itu, karena ketika siswa kami minta untuk mandiri untuk langsung menjawab pertanyaan, sangat tidak mungkin tanpa bimbingan dan panduan dari guru, mengiungat motivasi dan kemampuan siswa sangat rendah, lengah sedikit siswa sudah tidak fokus ke pelajaran.* (The teaching and learning activities are teacher centred. Honestly, I also teach that way because it is impossible to ask students to work on their own in answering reading comprehension questions without the teacher's guidance. Students' motivation and ability is low, so they are easily distracted.)

The above extracts indicated that the teachers did not have an adequate concept of a good teaching. Their evaluations on the teaching situation were very brief and focused only on one small aspect of teaching, i.e. the teacher's dominant role in the classroom. It seems that the teachers did not have adequate understanding of the concept of good teaching. Proper understanding of the principles of good teaching would have enabled them to assess more substantial issues within their teaching, e.g. whether the teaching had facilitated students to develop their reading comprehension and whether the teaching systematically followed pre-, during-, and post-reading stages. This calls for better opportunities for professional development in which a teacher learns the principles of good teaching practice. Sound pedagogical knowledge is an inevitable element that will make reflective practices more effective.

## DISCUSSION

The result of the training indicated that in the beginning of the program, the participants did not understand the concept of "reflective practice" and its application in teaching. After participating in the training, however, they started to demonstrate the adequate understanding of the concept. The phenomenon shows that becoming senior teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experiences does not guarantee that they know many things about teaching. It seems that they need to update their knowledge and skills that are relevant to the latest development of science and technology. It is right when Wong (2013) contends that becoming a professional teacher does not end with one's pre-service or even in-service teacher education; rather, it is a lifelong endeavour and a way of being.

Teacher professional development refers to a process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers, both before and throughout their career (Bailey, Curtis, dan Nunan, 2001). With this self-development, it is hoped that there will be positive changes in the teacher's cognition, professional attitude and identity, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and professional experiences (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, and Kyndt, 2017: 48). These positive changes to the teacher's competence, in turn, are supposed to improve the quality of education and learning in general (Prenger, Poortman, and Handelzalt, 2017: 77).

There are a number of different strategies used in teacher professional development. Some of the more practical ones that are easy for the teacher to implement include attending workshops, sharing ideas to help others develop, keeping a teaching journal, teaching portfolios, self-observation, peer observation, team teaching, mentoring, reflective teaching, and action research (Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan, 2001; Richards and Farrel, 2005).

The development of teachers' professionalism can also be carried out in a collaborative manner. In this context, a collaboration refers to "the involvement of members in developmental activities with consequences for more than one person, and goes beyond superficial exchanges of help, support, or assistance. The participants must be engaged in opening up their beliefs and practices to investigation and debate. Feelings of interdependence are central to such collaboration" (Prenger, Poortman, and Handelzalt, 2017: 78). One of the forms of collaboration in teacher development is a professional learning community (PLC), that is, a community consisting of teachers, and sometimes school leaders, which works collaboratively in order to promote and sustain the learning of all members in the community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, and Kyndt, 2017: 49; Prenger, Poortman, and Handelzalt, 2017: 77). Another form of collaboration is language teacher association. A study which investigated the role of language teacher association in providing for and improving the continuous professional development of teachers suggest that the events could help teachers to develop professionally and improve their teaching overall (Elsheikh and Effiong, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that English teachers participating in the training do not reflect on their teaching practices in any formal way or recognise reflective teaching. However, after participating in the training, they could develop their reflection habits and build their understanding of reflective teaching practice. Through the training, albeit slowly, the teachers' understanding of the concepts of reflective teaching improved from an initial absence of knowledge about reflective teaching to a better understanding of reflective teaching. This lack of understanding about reflective teaching before and during the training negatively affected the timeline of the training activities. By the end of this phase, "mapping" was the only completed stage. In addition, the teachers had limited knowledge about the principles of good teaching. The lack of the knowledge has prevented teachers from properly and critically evaluating teaching situations.

This study suggests that the benefits of reflective teaching training should inspire teacher education stakeholders to conduct similar programmes to facilitate teachers in developing reflective teaching habits. Furthermore, reflective practices should also be incorporated in pre-service and in-service teacher training to foster a culture of reflective practices.

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