
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflexive and Reflective Practices: A Catalyst for Novice EFL Teachers' Sustainable Professional Development

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| ABSTRACT

Reflective and reflexive practices are a prerequisite for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' personal advancement and continuing professional development. Although extensive research has been carried out on the role of these practices in fostering EFL teachers' ongoing involvement in professional development, scant attention has been paid to novice EFL teachers. Engaging in a systematic critical reflection on practical experience engenders a deep immersion in sustainable professional development, a much-needed endeavor to navigate early challenges and harsh classroom realities, promote lifelong upskilling, foster a mindset of perpetual growth, and maximize professional potential. Therefore, this review sets out to consolidate understanding of how engaging in reflexive and reflective practices supports novice EFL teachers' continuing professional development and to provide an overview of practical ways and tools to facilitate the effective integration of these practices into their vocational journey. This paper encourages novice EFL teachers to adopt a reflexive and reflective approach regarding their teaching practice and encourages its formalized integration into teacher education programs, workplace culture, and professional practices.

| KEYWORDS

Reflective practice, reflexivity, Moroccan EFL novice teachers, sustainable professional development

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Reflective and reflexive practices are processes that entail systematically reflecting on the professional practice by adopting a critical analysis and a rigorous evaluation approach. For this reason, they are a sine qua non for novice EFL teachers' sustainable professional development across different academic levels. Reflective teaching helps educators engage in a critical analysis and assess their teaching methods, classroom interactions, and teaching experience (Kolajo, 2025). The flexible nature and comprehensive scope of reflection facilitate the process of analysis and critical evaluation of personal teaching philosophy, instructional strategies, pedagogical skills, and professional experience. These potentials would facilitate Moroccan novice EFL teachers' lifelong learning and continuous improvement.

Reflection is a cyclical process. Consequently, engaging in this reflective process makes EFL teachers think back of the experience, analyze and evaluate their actions and affective parameters, learn from what happened, and take an action plan to improve their teaching practice. Most importantly, reflexivity enables EFL teachers to dig deeper. Bolton and Delderfield (2018) posit that reflexivity implies "finding strategies to question our own attitudes, theories-in-use, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions; to understand our complex roles in relation to others" (p. 10). Therefore, given the significance of this issue, several studies (e.g., Cirocki et al., 2024; Farrell, 2020; Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021; Martinez, 2021; Ustuk, 2021; Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2024; Zoelfakar & Charles, 2024) have investigated the role of reflective practice in promoting language teachers' professional development. However, scant attention has been paid to novice EFL teachers. Therefore, the aim of this literature review is to explore how reflective and reflexive practices bolster novice EFL teachers' sustainable professional development. The

outcome of this review would contribute to formalizing reflective practice in teaching, fostering a reflective teaching approach, and cultivating novice EFL teachers' skeptical outlook in workplace and professional practices as well.

2. Theoretical Foundation of Reflective and Reflexive Practices

The theoretical roots of reflection were established by several philosophers, psychologists, and educationalists (e.g., Socrates; Aristotle; Dewey, 1910, 1933; Van Manen, 1977; Schon, 1983, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Gibbs, 1988; and Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997); all of whom have constructively deepened and enriched insights into reflection.

The historical and philosophical origins of the concept of reflective practice trace their roots to ancient times (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006). For example, Socrates used the "Socratic method", which is a kind of reflective questioning, to promote the skills of Plato (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006). Additionally, with his concept of "practical wisdom", Aristotle focused on the significance of reflecting in the "real world" and generating experience out of it (Bulman, 2013). These ancient Greek philosophers shed light on the significance of adopting a reflective stance in approaching things. Therefore, the true value of reflection arises from its foundational base in philosophical theories to learning and thinking that positions such a concept as a pedagogy despite the fact that some situations involve superficial reflective activities (White et al., 2019).

In contemporary times, Dewey (1910, 1933) has played an influential role in shaping the understanding of reflection and has brought considerable contributions to this concept. He is acknowledged as the founding father of reflective thinking conceptualization within learning and education (Kember, 1999; Kember et al., 2000; Thorsen & DeVore, 2013). Dewey (1933) defines reflection as an "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 constitutes reflective thoughts" (p. 9). To him, this thinking mode entails adopting a skeptical position regarding the tacit beliefs and assumptions that shape our actions and thinking as well.

David Kolb, another seminal figure, has pioneered experiential learning theory (1984) which focuses on the crucial role of both experience in learning and reflection in engaging learners in the learning process. To him, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Learning is cyclical; it involves four stages, namely experience, reflection, conceptualization, and testing (Kolb, 1984). Although experience stimulates learning, reflection is a crucial component that facilitates learning from the experience (Osterman, 1990). Accordingly, learning takes place through reflecting on experience.

Schon (1983, 1987) has contributed to the promotion of reflection, specifically in professional education (Bulman, 2013) and to the understanding of this dynamic concept mainly in professional development (Phan, 2007). Essentially, he focuses on the concept of the "reflective practitioner" which relates reflection to practice and actions within a professional context. Reflective practitioners constantly reflect on their actions to ameliorate the professional practice. Schon's approach is centered around the notion of using reflection to enhance practice (Ryan, 2011; Ryan, 2013). With his notions of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action", Schon (1983, 1987) adds further aspects to the concept of reflection through shedding light on its temporal dimension as reflection can take place in two different time frames, namely during and after the action. From this perspective, reflection serves a dual purpose: turning off this automatism and mechanical reasoning by consciously thinking while performing actions and mulling over past experiences. Accordingly, reflection is an indispensable requisite for making thoughtful actions, learning from past experiences, and improving the practice.

More recently, Gibbs (1988) has developed a cyclical model to shed light on the importance of "learning by doing". To him, learning from experiences entails engaging in a reflective cycle that involves describing the experience, describing the feelings and emotional response to this specific experience, evaluating the positive and negative aspects, analyzing them, drawing conclusions, and taking an action plan. Consequently, learning from experience is an iterative process involving a set of cyclical steps.

Lately, Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory, which is designed for adult education, focuses on perspective transformation. To him, transforming frames of reference is effectuated through critically reflecting on the tacit assumptions that ground our beliefs, interpretations, and points of view or habitual modes of thought (Mezirow, 1997). Along the same lines, Dewey (1933) sheds light on the importance of reflection. He perceives it as a deliberate and active cognitive process that entails sequences of interlinked ideas which consider the underlying assumptions and knowledge (Hatton & Smith, 1995). This reflective process allows practitioners or professionals to express skepticism and be critical rather than be credulous and take for granted the received information and tacit beliefs.

3. Demystifying Reflection, Reflective Practice, Critically Reflective Practice, and Reflexivity

Although reflection, reflective practice, critically reflective practice, and reflexivity share a common conceptual basis, there is a nuanced difference between them. Each one carries a distinct meaning based on the specific highlighted aspect, and dissensus continues (Watts, 2018). Reflection is an umbrella term that focuses on the act of engaging in the reflective process. To Finlay (2008), reflection means "thinking about" something after the experience. On the other hand, reflective practice is more focused; it refers to the process of "learning from experience to improve practice" (Bassot, 2016, p. 2). Specifically, it is centered on the application of reflective skills in examining and developing practice, therefore adding depth, purpose, complexity, and

context to the act of reflecting (Fook et al., 2006). Osterman (1990) distinguishes reflection from reflective practice by pointing out that reflection means deep consideration and attention, while reflective practice is the thoughtful examination of one's actions, in particular professional ones. To him, reflective practice is a reasoned process where both action and thinking are interconnected, whereas reflection plays a key role in the experiential learning process. Dewey (1933) highlights the importance of reflection in professional practice by arguing that "it converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action" (p. 17). This process of systematically linking the mental act of reflective reasoning to action enables practitioners to produce thoughtful actions and improve their performance. This explains why reflective practice is pivotal to grow professionally because it enables practitioners to constantly engage in the reflective cycle to consider the different aspects related to their teaching practice and look for development areas.

To go deeper and move beyond taking a retrospective view of what happened, engaging in critically reflective practice and reflexivity is required because this entails challenging the underlying beliefs and assumptions and questioning the why of things. To refine understanding of the concept of critically reflective practice, it is important to deconstruct it. As explained earlier, reflective practice is a dynamic process that involves reflecting on actions to promote the quality of professional practice. The word "critically" has been recently added to reflective practice (Thomson & Thomson, 2008, as cited in Bassot, 2016) which means that simply reflecting on experience is insufficient; adopting a critical approach is needed (Bassot, 2016). Critical reflection permits the act of detaching from the practice to allow room for a critical consideration of actions by deconstructing the hidden biases and critically examining the validity of our beliefs and those of others (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011). This does not only entail engaging in a deep analysis of things but also questioning the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide actions and influence the teaching practice. Questioning these taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions is termed reflexivity (Taylor & White, 2000) which means being aware of the what, how, and why of things (Bassot, 2016; Mezirow, 1991). Archer (2012, as cited in Feucht et al., 2017) defines reflexivity as an inner conversation that drives action so as to transform practices within the classroom. Reflection is transformed into reflexivity when purposeful and conscious inner conversation triggers changes in beliefs, teaching practices, and expectations (Feucht et al., 2017). Therefore, critically reflective practice and reflexivity play a key role in bringing to the surface all the ingrained assumptions that guide our actions, and most crucially, they lead to changing the frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991).

4. Sustainable Professional Development for Novice EFL Teachers

Achieving professional development is an end goal in all professions, including teaching. Novice teachers' professional development has a cardinal role in influencing students' performance and education quality (Kereyeva et al., 2025). Professional development is centered not only on teachers' learning but also on their meta-learning ability and the conversion of their knowledge into practice to facilitate learners' development (Avalos, 2010). Additionally, effective teachers' professional development results in improving both learning and teaching. It has advantages both at the "macro-level", i.e., impacting the educational system as a whole, and at the "micro-level", i.e., focusing on students' learning and teachers' practice (Galaczi et al., 2018). For this reason, engaging in sustainable professional development is undoubtedly essential for effective teaching, specifically with contemporary exigencies (e.g., the technological breakthroughs and the fast-changing educational landscape). This would unequivocally enable novice EFL teachers to navigate the intricacies of teaching efficiently, face the actual challenges efficaciously, and ultimately realize their vocation effectively. To that end, the importance of putting efforts into this endeavor becomes de rigueur.

5. Synthesis of the Evidence for the Role of Reflective and Reflexive Practices in Enhancing Sustainable Professional Development

Reflective and reflexive practices are an important aspect of sustainable professional development for novice EFL teachers in particular. Osterman (1990) considers reflective practice as a professional development method that allows practitioners to be proficient and effective. Similarly, Feucht et al. (2017) note that the systematic and thoughtful consideration of one's own practice lies at the heart of what it means to be a professional in a classroom setting. Reflective and reflexive practices capacitate novice EFL teachers (1) to get engaged in an ongoing process of lifelong learning, a skill that helps them sharpen existing abilities and acquire new ones, (2) to challenge their underlying assumptions and tacit beliefs (Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 1990), and (3) to rise their self-awareness (Osterman, 1990).

Firstly, reflective and reflexive practices enable novice EFL teachers to engage in lifelong learning through this constant drive for improving and updating their knowledge base, skills, and know-how. During the process of their career development, novice EFL teachers face various challenges due to the dynamic changes in teaching and learning, specifically in this digital era with the outbreak of artificial intelligence. Confronting these challenges requires the immediate response and the effective adaptation by means of adopting a systematic reflective practice approach, which supports the process of building new skills and knowledge and refining practical competencies. As discussed earlier, reflection is a goal-oriented process. In the context of teaching, EFL teachers reflect to achieve a purpose, inter alia solve educational problems, make pedagogical decisions, resolve ambiguities, detect weaknesses and skill gaps, learn from past experiences, and improve teaching performance.

Furthermore, reflection has a flexible nature since it can target different time frames (i.e., present, past, and future). First, reflection-in-action takes place during the action; it involves the act of thinking and doing simultaneously (Schon, 1983). To Schon (1983), professional practice entails repetition. The knowing-in-action of the practitioner has the tendency to become more mechanical, implicit, and impulsive (Schon, 1983). Consequently, since the practice becomes routine and knowing-in-practice becomes implicit and impulsive, the practitioner may pass up chances of thinking about their actions (Schon, 1983). Reflection-in-action helps to turn off this mechanical cognitive state and make practice a conscious and a thoughtful activity rather than a routine act. Second, reflection-on-action takes place after the action (Schon, 1983). Reflecting on their knowing-in-practice permits practitioners to look back on their actions or practice (Schon, 1983). The aim of this retrospective act is to evaluate and analyze all aspects of past teaching experience and the effectiveness of the teaching methods and strategies used, look for areas that require improvements, and take an action plan. Third, reflection-for-action takes place before the action (Killion & Todnem, 1991) because it has this forward-thinking perspective. It “is thinking about future actions with the intention of improving or changing a practice” (Olteanu, 2017, p. 350). The purpose of this prospective act is to improve professional practice, anticipate potential challenges, plan for what is coming, and optimize the outcomes. Thus, engaging in this reflective continuum enables novice EFL teachers to overcome automaticity and consciously consider the effectiveness of their teaching practice, perform thoughtful actions, improve their performance, and get engaged in the process of lifelong learning.

Secondly, reflective and reflexive practices help novice EFL teachers to critically evaluate their underlying assumptions and taken for granted beliefs. At the beginning of their career, language teachers have various feelings and assumptions regarding the way of conducting their classes that are mainly unaware of (Farrell, 2023). Additionally, Brookfield (2017) notes that teachers’ actions are built on assumptions about how to make learning effective. These assumptions originate from different sources, including teachers’ personal experiences as learners, their perception of students’ response, their reference to approved theory and research, and guidance from reliable peers (Brookfield, 2017). For this reason, being mindful of these feelings and assumptions is crucial for novice language teachers in order to critically reflect on their importance, specifically during this difficult period (Farrell, 2023). Brookfield (2017) highlights that critical reflection is “the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” (p. 3). From this perspective, critically reflective teaching takes place when teachers integrate in their practice the systematic identification and examination of the assumptions that guide their actions (Brookfield, 2017). Examining these assumptions leads to uncovering their possibilities and limitations, turning off this automatism in actions and thinking, and developing consciousness of various possibilities and perspectives as well as the need of transforming traditional methods of managing and theorizing (Cunliffe, 2004). In simple terms, engaging in reflexive and critically reflective practices is a conscious and intentional effort that enables novice EFL teachers not only to mull over and evaluate their teaching practice but also to consider the underlying assumptions and beliefs that shape both their professional practice and thinking as well. Such practices help them to adopt a skeptical approach regarding all the components that guide the whole process of teaching, including their teaching philosophy, personal values about education, and instructional framework. This dynamic reflective process facilitates the development of their English teaching theories or the advancement of existing ones; helps them to link theory to practice and explore their assumptions about teaching; and makes them adopt an inquisitive mindset to solve problems, embrace evidence-based teaching practice, and promote their professional competence and self-belief (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017). For this reason, critical reflection leads to perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991, 1997), personal transformations (Mezirow, 1997), and transformative practice (Ryan, 2013). At this level, EFL teachers review “the manner of the functioning of internal experience, what frames of references are used, and how they are used” (Moon, 2006, p. 40).

Lastly, reflexive and reflective practices promote self-awareness which is a foundational element for professional development. Self-awareness enables EFL teachers to be aware of their affective state, biases, values, strengths, areas for growth, and personal teaching philosophy, amongst others. Reflection is an introspective act that engages practitioners in an inner dialogue to carefully examine personal emotions and interpretations (Finlay, 2008). This process of mindfulness is activated by the act of stepping back from the experience to have a neutral outlook in order to objectively evaluate and analyze one’s own motives, affective variables, and actions. For this reason, self-reflective language teachers are “integrated”; they possess a deep understanding of themselves and are aware of their professional responsibilities, teaching practice, and their underlying motivations as well (Farrell, 2024). In addition to that, Cook (1999) notes that “through self-awareness teachers develop their values, attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, assumptions, feelings, counter transferences, personal motives and needs, competencies, skills and limitations” (pp. 1293-1294). Building on this, self-awareness helps EFL teachers not only to shape all these parameters but more importantly to recognize how they affect them and influence the different spheres of teaching context. In short, reflective and reflexive practices serve as a means to develop self-awareness which leads to the improvement of professional practice and vocational advancement. Diseth (2025) portrays this transformative journey by noting that reflections at the beginning are centered round challenges faced during the teaching practice, but they gradually expand the scope to involve complex matters. Moving from solving technical problems to critically reflecting on the practice constitutes a significant step in professional development (Diseth, 2025). Therefore, the role of reflective practice in career development is embodied in turning experience into expertise (Cornish, 2024).

6. Facilitating Reflective and Reflexive Practices

6.1 Reflective Practice Frameworks

Many reflective models exist in the literature; they provide a framework for reflective practice (e.g., Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Driscoll, 2007; Farrell, 2024; Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984). The purpose of these models is to help practitioners engage in reflective and reflexive practices and frame their thinking since they break down the reflective process into stages starting with describing the experience, critically reflecting on it, and evaluating the underlying assumptions that shape their professional practice and thinking. Therefore, these frameworks guide practitioners' thinking to achieve critical reflection and reflexivity, focusing on bringing the unconscious and tacit beliefs to the surface. Mann et al. (2009) advocate that these frameworks share two key dimensions, namely "vertical" and "iterative". The former highlights the hierarchical nature and depth of reflection, and the latter focuses on the cyclical nature of the reflective process, including reflecting on the experience, identifying areas for improvements, and informing future actions.

The model of Atkins and Murphy (1993) includes three stages ranging from superficial reflection to deep reflection. The first stage is activated by the awareness of awkward thoughts and feelings. The second stage entails analyzing the situation through examining both knowledge and feelings. The third stage implies developing new insights on the situation.

Kolb (1984) model of experiential learning includes four stages, namely a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. To learn from an experience, practitioners have to undergo an experience, reflect on what happened, formulate abstract concepts about it, and apply these concepts and ideas to future experiences.

Gibbs (1988) reflective model breaks down the reflective act into six stages, namely describing the experience, describing one's feelings about the experience, evaluating the experience, analyzing it from different angles, drawing conclusions, and taking action plans. By engaging in this reflective cycle, practitioners critically consider the experience, learn from it, draw conclusions, and take action plans.

Driscoll (2007) reflective model includes three questions: What? So what? Now what? This framework enables practitioners to critically reflect on an experience by describing what happened, interpreting and analyzing the experience, and taking action plans.

Farrell (2024) reflective framework encompasses five interrelated levels, namely philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. The philosophy stage explores the teacher as a person; it is important to know this personal side because teacher's philosophy has evolved since their birth. In the principles stage, teachers reflect on their beliefs, assumptions, and view on learning and teaching. The theory stage entails reflecting on the underlying theories that guide the practice. The practice stage involves examining the visible actions during teaching. Finally, the beyond practice or critical reflection stage examines social, ethical, emotional, political, and moral parameters that have an impact on teachers' practice within the classroom walls and even beyond (Farrell, 2024).

In essence, these reflective models provide a structured and concrete approach to reflective practice and reflexivity. They enable novice EFL teachers to reflect on their teaching practice, learn from the experience, and improve the teaching performance. More than that, these models empower them not only to answer the what of things but also the how and why, hence delving deeper in their scrutiny process. In so doing, novice EFL teachers get engaged in an ongoing process of self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-analysis of both personal assumptions and pedagogical practices, which heightens awareness of their influence on classroom dynamics and leads to a change in their frames of reference.

6.2 Practical Ways and Tools to Engage in Reflective and Reflexive Practices

Various ways can be used to enable language teachers to reflect, namely self-reflection, peer-reflection, group-reflection, and online reflection (Farrell, 2024). Accordingly, reflection can be collaborative or collective and individual, each of which can be facilitated through various practical tools.

First, collaborative or collective reflective practice involves teacher development groups, critical friends (Farrell, 2018), peer observation (Gudeta, 2022), reflective dialogue (Brockbank & McGill, 2007), and group discussion. The shared objective underlying these tools is that reflection can be a social practice, where novice EFL teachers can share their thoughts and experiences in a group of professionals and with their peers. The aim is to identify professional weaknesses, gain new insights, and improve their teaching practice. To Boud (2010), practitioners who have common purpose and interest and belong to the same or different professional communities can get together for the purpose of reflecting on things related to the work improvement.

Second, individual reflective practice involves keeping personal reflective journals, teacher portfolio, lesson report (Gudeta, 2022), teaching journals, action research (Farrell, 2018), critical incident analysis, and classroom observations (Farrell, 2024). The purpose of these tools is to help novice EFL teachers engage in self-reflection and consider deeply their teaching practice, as well as encountered challenges. This process leads to self-awareness by becoming aware of areas for improvement, skills gap, biases, and responsibilities.

In short, engaging in reflexive and reflective practices makes teaching a thoughtful and conscious activity rather than a mechanical act. To that end, Eyler et al. (1996) shed light on the importance of critical reflection and the centrality of nurturing a reflective mindset by advocating that

It is the critical questioning of why things are and the attempt to fully understand the root causes of observable events and behaviors. This depth of critical reflection grows of the instinctual reflective process but must be cultivated purposefully as a habit of the mind. (p. 14)

From this perspective, infusing reflection and reflexivity into professional practice is fundamental to build self-awareness, enhance teaching performance, and foster lifelong learning.

7. Conclusion

Engaging in reflective and reflexive practices is a momentous activity for novice EFL teachers' sustainable professional development, which is a goal that never ends. This article adds knowledge by explaining how engaging in reflective and reflexive practices helps novice EFL teachers be immersed in professional enhancement and also by providing an overview of practical ways and tools to facilitate the effective integration of these practices into their vocational journey. Unequivocally, the literature positions reflective and reflexive practices as a vital component in this endeavor. Such practices enhance the ongoing process of lifelong learning that empowers novice EFL teacher to build new skills and knowledge and refine their practical competencies, critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, and develop self-awareness. Additionally, they empower them to achieve excellence by making teaching experience meaningful instead of a routine activity. To that end, reflective frameworks and reflective strategies exist to facilitate the effective engagement in this process of reflective practice and reflexivity and ultimately to enhance the immersion in sustainable professional development.

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