| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Reflective Journals and Pre-service EFL Teachers' Professional Development: A Correlational Study

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| **ABSTRACT**

Teacher professional development is essential for any teacher training program. To achieve this, pre-service teachers should engage in various activities and practices. One important practice is reflection, which can help teachers improve both their professional and personal performance. In Morocco, English Language Teaching (ELT) training programs, such as those at the Regional Center for Education and Training (CRMEF), use reflective portfolios to foster the professional development of pre-service teachers. This article examines the relationship between Moroccan pre-service EFL teachers maintaining reflective portfolios and their professional development. Data were collected from n=49 teacher trainees from different Moroccan CRMEFs. This correlational study was conducted using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which indicated that the items had relatively high internal consistency. The Alpha coefficient for the items related to maintaining reflective portfolios was $\alpha = .939$, and for those concerning teacher professional development was $\alpha = .976$. The survey, created using Google Forms, was shared with participants via institutional emails and social media platforms. The collected data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Due to the violation of some assumptions in this study, a Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient test was employed. The results demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between keeping reflective portfolios and teacher professional development, $r = .572$, $N = 49$, $p = 0.000$. This study also offers pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research.

| **KEYWORDS**

Reflective journals, teacher professional development, reflection, Moroccan pre-service teachers

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

The field of Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is continually evolving. Thus, there is a need for new practices to accommodate this continuous change. Teachers commonly use reflection and reflective practices to keep up with the advancements of this ever-changing field. Thus, reflection has emerged as a component of teachers' professional development. Thus, the current study investigates the relationship between reflective portfolios as a reflective tool and pre-service EFL teachers' professional growth.

This study aims to answer the following research questions and test the related research hypothesis:

RQ1. Is there a relationship between keeping a reflective portfolio and pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development?

RQ2. To what extent does reflecting in a portfolio contribute to pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development?

H$_a$. There is a statistically significant relationship between keeping reflective portfolios and pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development.

2. Review of the literature

Teacher education encompasses both teacher training and teacher development. According to Richards and Farrell (2005), teacher education is "a process that takes place over time rather than an event that starts and ends with formal training or graduate education" (p. 3). They differentiate between teacher training, which focuses on short-term objectives, and teacher development, which aims for long-term goals. Pre-service teachers need not only short-term goals but also activities that help achieve these long-term objectives. This highlights the significance of teacher development within any teacher education program.

2.1 Teacher professional development

Numerous scholars have attempted to define the term Teacher Professional Development (TPD), but no clear consensus has emerged. Evans (2002) explains that TPD enhances the performance of both teachers and schools (p.1). When implemented effectively, TPD fosters professional growth among teachers, positively impacting schools overall. Keiny (1994) describes TPD as a process of professional growth, emphasizing that teachers who engage in TPD opportunities can develop their skills further. According to Larouz (2014), professional development helps teachers enhance their skills and think critically (p. 26), and critical thinking is indeed a vital aspect of TPD. Teachers who actively engage in critical thinking can continuously improve their teaching practices. Additionally, Benamor and Guerroudj (2018) highlight the significance of reflection in achieving professional growth for teachers. They assert that effective critical thinkers utilize reflection as a tool to evaluate their knowledge, skills, and teaching methods.

2.2 Reflection

Reflection is a concept that can be defined in various ways. According to Richards (1991), it is "an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose" (p. 2). When teachers engage in reflection, they carefully select their experiences for evaluation. Evaluation and reflection are closely interlinked; when one occurs, the other often follows.

Another perspective on reflection highlights its active nature. Dewey, as cited in Spalding and Wilson (2002), describes it as "the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it leads" (p. 1394). Reflection also plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' routines and practices. Richards and Farrell (2005) assert that reflection is a "process of critical examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one's teaching practices and routines" (p. 7). When reflection is practiced effectively, teachers become more aware of their teaching methods and experiences.

Loughran (2002) emphasizes that reflection involves thinking critically about teaching practices rather than merely executing them flawlessly. It is a habit that teachers should cultivate, and their attitudes toward reflection are essential (Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

2.3 What reflection is NOT?

The best way to understand a term is often by examining its opposite. To fully grasp the meaning of reflection, we must consider what it is not. According to Mezirow (1990), "simply reflexively drawing on what one already knows in order to act is not the same thing as reflection" (p. 4). In simpler terms, reflection is not solely based on existing knowledge; rather, it is a continuous process of acquiring new knowledge and skills. Furthermore, while taking action can be seen as a form of reflection, it becomes truly reflective when those actions are critically examined (Mezirow, 1990). Therefore, reflection and action should be intertwined to achieve effective outcomes.

Many scholars have discussed the concept of critical reflection. Mezirow (1990) describes critical reflection as "reflection on presuppositions" (p. 4). It is a process through which teachers examine their prior beliefs about teaching practices. This active consideration involves assessing one's acceptance of various experiences and distinguishing between effective and ineffective teaching methods. In essence, when teachers engage in critical reflection, they do not accept every idea as an absolute truth; rather, they remain open to change. Critical reflection serves as a means of reevaluating and testing previous assumptions (Mezirow, 1990).

2.4 Reflection and professional development

Reflection plays a significant role in the professional growth of teachers. Numerous scholars and practitioners have highlighted its effectiveness in enhancing daily practices. According to Dreyer (2015), reflection is an essential element of teachers' professional development. In other words, teachers who utilize reflection as a tool are more likely to improve their work.

Additionally, critical reflection offers the advantage of improving both teaching and learning (Mezirow, 1990). Loughran (2002) also asserts that reflection is fundamental to effective teaching practice. In essence, reflection serves as a valuable learning tool that can foster the growth of anyone who engages in it. It leads to diverse learning outcomes (Loughran, 2002, p. 35). Simply having experiences is not sufficient for learning to occur; learning requires reflection (Loughran, 2002).

Various reflective tools can be employed to support professional development. Carl Rogers, as cited in Hubbs and Brand (2005), advocates for the use of journals. Reflective journals, in particular, are commonly utilized in Moroccan higher education institutions, especially at CREMF. These journals serve as a valuable learning tool that helps pre-service teachers become autonomous and skilled educators. This type of learning is characterized as "self-discovered and self-appropriated" (Carl Rogers as cited in Hubbs and Brand, 2005, p. 62). Journals exemplify the principles outlined by Carl Rogers regarding learning, as they are primarily directed by the teacher trainees themselves.

2.5 Reflective journals

Researchers have defined the concept of a "journal" in various ways. Richards and Lockhart (1996) describe a journal as "written or recorded accounts of teaching experiences" (p. 6). Teaching journals can take many forms, including written, electronic, paper-based, or oral formats, and they encompass all that occurs in the classroom. A journal may also include feedback and comments from peers or supervisors regarding a teacher's experiences (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

Additionally, Benamor and Guerroudj (2018) define PDJ as "any script or electronic written form through which teachers keep records of their continuous reflections, evaluations, as well as the issues they confront and the events or incidents they witness" (p. 193). In essence, a journal—whether written or electronic—serves as a record of everything a teacher does, thinks, and experiences. It includes the actions taken in the classroom and the teacher's reflections on those actions (Scales, 2008). Reflective journals may be utilized solely by the teachers themselves or can be shared with colleagues for peer reflection (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

2.6 Journal writing and professional development

Journal writing is essential for teacher development as it addresses three levels of teacher learning: cognitive processes, personal construction, and reflective practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Schön, 1983). The learning that teachers engage in is what ultimately leads to their professional development. One effective tool for facilitating cognitive processes is journal writing. When teachers regularly write in their journals, they are more likely to enhance their cognitive learning. In terms of personal construction, students are seen as active learners, which supports a learner-centered approach. Journal writing is one effective method for fostering this type of learning. Lastly, reflective practice involves teachers contemplating the nature and significance of their teaching experiences (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The authors recommend using journals to facilitate this reflective learning. There is a strong connection between journal writing and professional development, and reflective journaling can significantly enhance professional growth (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

2.7 Previous studies and research gap

Previous studies have qualitatively explored the perceptions of both in-service and pre-service teachers regarding the use of reflective teaching methods (Abednia et al., 2013; Alsuhaibani, 2019; Azizah, Nurkamto, & Drajati, 2018; Azizah, Nurkamto, Drajati, et al., 2018; Fakazli & Gönen, 2017). Additionally, other research has examined various tools for implementing reflection in teacher education, such as journal writing, e-portfolios, and seminar techniques (Abednia et al., 2013; Bala et al., 2012; Dos Santos, 2019; Fakazli & Gönen, 2017). However, to our knowledge, there are no studies that quantitatively investigate the correlation between maintaining a reflective portfolio and teacher professional development within the context of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Morocco. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap and help teachers understand the significance of reflective teaching, enabling them to better navigate the challenges of the teaching profession.

3 Method
3.1 Research questions
1. Is there a relationship between keeping a reflective portfolio and pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development?
2. To what extent does reflecting in a portfolio contribute to pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development?

3.2 Research hypothesis

There is a statistically significant relationship between keeping reflective portfolios and pre-service EFL Moroccan teachers' professional development.

3.3 Research design

This study is correlational in nature, as it seeks to examine the relationship between reflective portfolios and teacher professional development. Thus, it is a quantitative study that seeks to determine the association between both variables.

3.4 Participants

Data were collected from 49 (N=49) teacher trainees from different Moroccan CRMEFs. The researcher used a convenience sampling technique with the assistance of professors and teachers at different CRMEFs in Morocco. The sample consists of 24 males (49%) and 25 females (51%), whose age ranges between 18 and 44, 18-24-year-olds (51%), 25-34-year-olds (30.6%), and 35-44-year-olds (18.4%).

3.5 Research instrument

A Google Form questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was sent to the teacher trainees' emails and shared on various social media platforms. This questionnaire features a five-item Likert-type scale, which includes the following response options: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), uncertain (U), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA). The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section consists of 22 questions that ask participants if they reflect on their portfolios during and after activities, both in class and outside of class (e.g., conferences, workshops, internships, etc.) (see the questionnaire in Appendix A). The second section includes another 22 questions that explore teacher trainees' perceptions of professional development. These questions cover concepts such as continuous learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses, monitoring progress, preparing for future professional life, and total immersion in the field of ELT in Morocco (see the questionnaire in Appendix B).

The reliability of both questionnaires was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. As shown in Table 1, there is a good reliability of keeping reflective portfolios questionnaire because Cronbach's Alpha in our example equals α= .939, which is more than .7. Table 2 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha for teacher professional development is α= .976. Thus, there is good reliability among items. This suggests that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of 22 items representing keeping reflective portfolios

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.939	22

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha of 22 items representing teacher professional development variable

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.976	22

4. Results

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Parametric assumptions were checked to decide whether parametric or non-parametric tests should be used.

4.1 Assumptions for a parametric test

A Shapiro-Wilk's test (P<.05) and visual of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots and box plots (see tables below) showed that keeping reflective journals and teacher professional development were not normally distributed, with skewness of -0.928 (SE= 0.340) and kurtosis of 1.102 (SE= 0.668) for the teacher professional development a skewness of -1.993 (SE= 0.340) and kurtosis of 5.778 (SE= 0.668). Therefore, a non-parametric test (Spearman Rho) was used instead of Pearson's R.

Table 3. Skewness and Kurtosis of keeping reflective portfolios and teacher professional development

Descriptives			Statistic	Std. Error
Keeping reflective portfolios	Mean		3.8219	.09772
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.6254	
		Upper Bound	4.0184	
	5% Trimmed Mean		3.8637	
	Median		3.9545	

	Variance		.468	
	Std. Deviation		.68401	
	Minimum		1.64	
	Maximum		4.95	
	Range		3.32	
	Interquartile Range		.91	
	Skewness		-.928	.340
	Kurtosis		1.102	.668
Teacher professional development	Mean		4.0445	.11637
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.8105	
		Upper Bound	4.2785	
	5% Trimmed Mean		4.1385	
	Median		4.1364	
	Variance		.664	
	Std. Deviation		.81462	
	Minimum		1.00	
	Maximum		5.00	
	Range		4.00	
	Interquartile Range		.70	
	Skewness		-1.993	.340
	Kurtosis		5.778	.668

Table 4. The Shapiro-Wilk test P-value

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Keeping reflective portfolios	.107	49	.200[*]	.948	49	**.030**
Teacher professional development	.166	49	.002	.820	49	**.000**

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
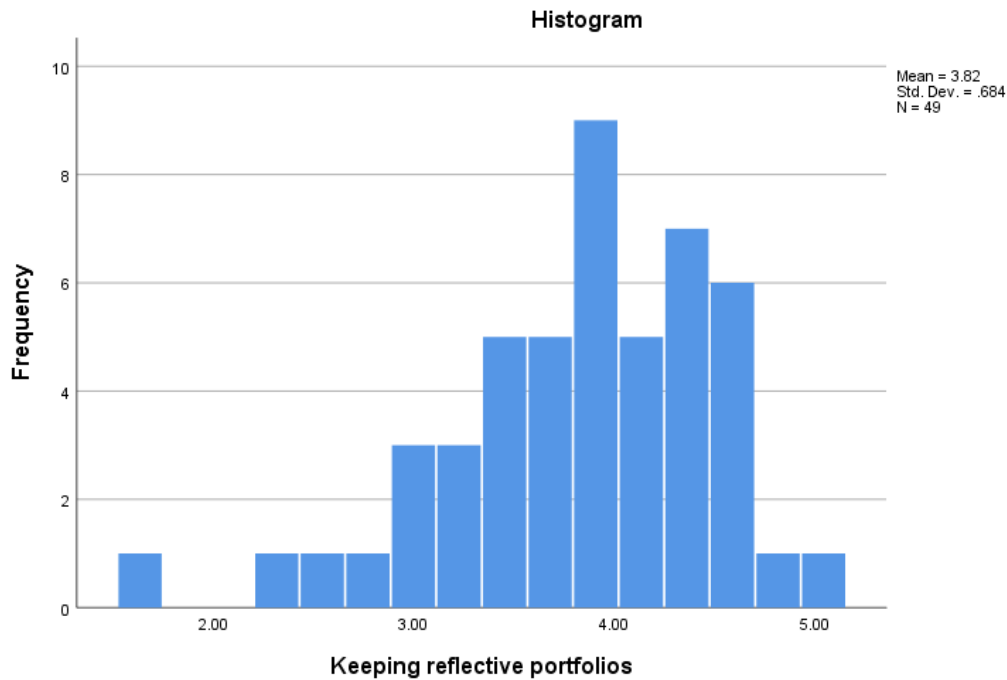a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
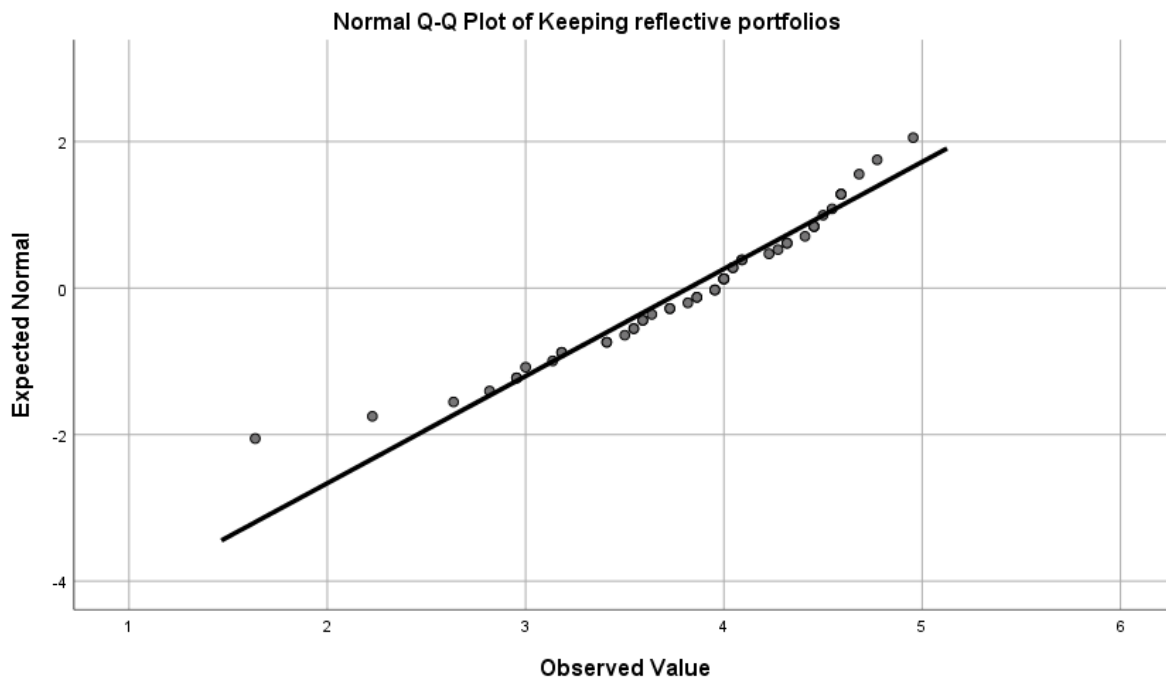
Figure 1. Histogram of keeping reflective portfolios

Figure 2. Q-Q plots for keeping reflective portfolios and teacher professional development

4.2 Spearman Rho correlation test results

Spearman's Rho correlation test yielded a positively strong relationship (0.572 and 1.000) between keeping reflective portfolios and teacher professional development (see Table 5 below). Therefore, there is enough evidence to reject the Null hypothesis stating that there is no association between both variables. That is, pre-service teacher professional development is associated

with keeping reflective portfolios. The P value indicates if there is a true relationship between the variables or if it has just happened by chance. Therefore, we compare it to our alpha value. Our Alpha value is 0.01. In our data, the P value (0.000) is less than the Alpha value (0.01), so there is a strong relationship between both variables. In short, a statistically significant positive correlation existed between V1 (teacher professional development) and V2 (keeping reflective portfolios), r=.572, N=49, and p=0.000.

Table 5. Spearman's Rho correlation test on teacher professional development and keeping reflective portfolios

Correlations

			Teacher Professional Development	Keeping Reflective Portfolios
Spearman's rho	Teacher Professional Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.572**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	49	49
	Keeping Reflective Portfolios	Correlation Coefficient	.572**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	49	49

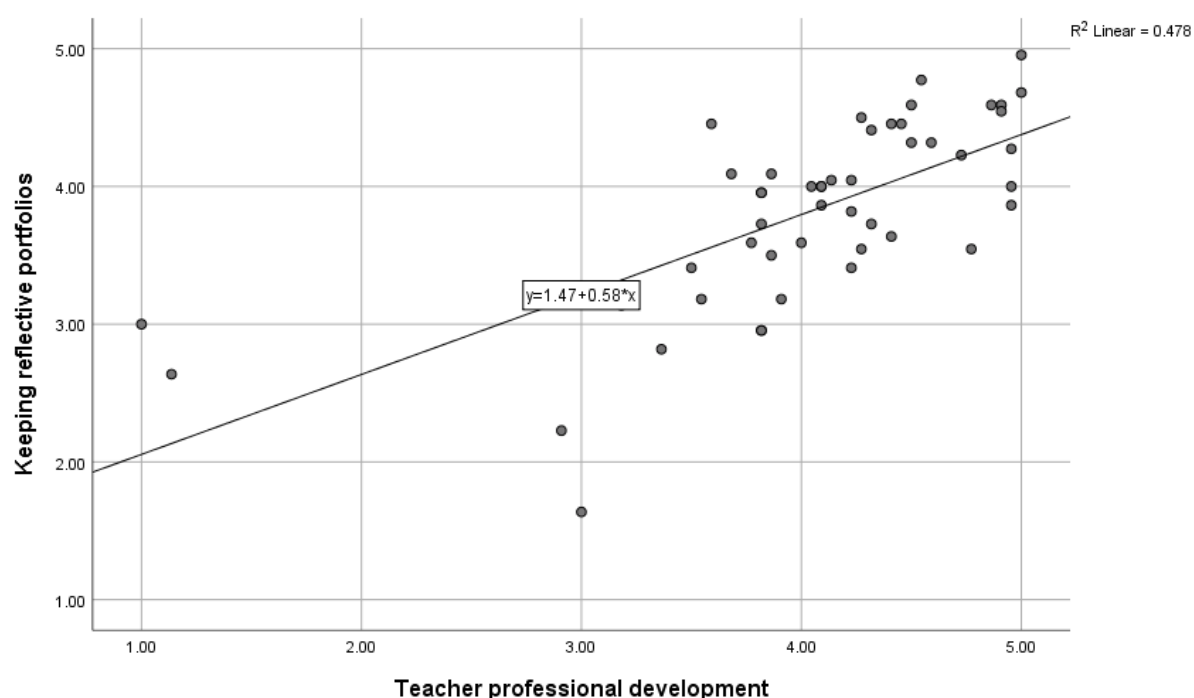**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 3. Scatterplot of keeping reflective portfolios and teacher professional development

5. Discussion

The data from the current study indicate a positive correlation between the use of reflective portfolios and the professional development of pre-service Moroccan EFL teachers. Specifically, the more teacher trainees engage in reflection on their practices, the greater their professional growth is likely to be. This finding aligns with existing literature. For instance, Alsuhaibani (2019) reported that participants in her study had positive perceptions regarding the use of reflection. Similarly, Abednia et al. (2013), Azizah et al. (2018), and Benamor and Guerroudj (2018) found that reflective journals serve as effective tools for professional development.

Abednia et al. (2013) discovered that journal writing enhanced self-awareness and understanding of issues related to English Language Teaching (ELT), as well as improved reasoning skills and dialogue with teacher educators. Azizah et al. (2018) noted that teacher journals helped English teachers become more skilled and professional. Additionally, Benamor and Guerroudj (2018) observed that analyzing teachers' journals revealed concepts related to ELT and professional development. Furthermore, a study by Bala et al. (2012) found that e-portfolios contributed to teachers' professional growth. Other researchers, such as Fakazli and Gönen (2017), have also suggested that reflection, regardless of the tool used, is effective for teacher development.

Pre-service EFL teachers need to reflect on their practices for several reasons. It stands to reason that entry-level teachers often find that their teaching methods do not achieve the desired outcomes. While some strategies may be effective, others may fall short. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to reflect on their approaches and refine their techniques.

Pre-service teachers come equipped with a wide range of theoretical teaching methods, strategies, learning theories, and classroom management techniques. However, when they begin teaching, they may attempt to apply all these theories without considering their students' age, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds. By engaging in reflective practice, teachers can tailor their methods to better meet their students' needs, fostering a more engaging and active learning environment.

Reflection also helps address various classroom issues, such as student misbehavior or disengagement. By critically analyzing these situations, teachers can develop creative solutions to the problems they encounter. Regular reflection after each class enables teachers to become more aware of their own teaching styles and strategies, which is essential in the ever-evolving field of education. Ultimately, this self-awareness supports the professional growth and development of English teachers.

Professional development is a vital component of any teacher training program. Some teachers have twenty years of experience, and some others have one year repeated twenty years. This differentiates between a professionally developed teacher and a teacher whose development needs more attention. Reflection is just one tool of professional growth. It should be supported in many other ways, such as attending conferences and workshops, reading evidence-based articles, observing other teachers, and collaborating with other teachers.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study serve as a blueprint for teachers, educational leaders, and school administrators to serve as a basis for implementing reflective journals. Indeed, reflective portfolios are an effective tool to enhance EFL teachers' professional growth. Reflection can promote teachers' competence (the what?) and teaching style (the how?). By engaging with their portfolios, teachers become lifelong learners, continuing their education beyond their initial teacher training. Reflection distinguishes between teachers with a fixed mindset and those with a growth mindset.

Additional research can be conducted by replicating this study in different contexts. Other researchers may also explore various reflective tools and examine their effectiveness in relation to teacher professional development. While this study focused on pre-service teachers' perceptions, future research could investigate the attitudes of in-service teachers in the Moroccan context. Given that this is a correlational study outlining the relationship between maintaining reflective portfolios and the professional development of pre-service EFL teachers in Morocco, further research from a hermeneutic perspective is necessary. This approach could help identify which elements of the

reflective portfolio included in the questionnaire contribute most to, and which contribute least to, professional development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Keeping a Reflective Journal Questionnaire
- strongly disagree (SD)
- disagree (D)
- uncertain (U)
- agree (A)
- strongly agree (SA)

I reflect on my portfolio after/to:

1. I attend my classes
2. I attend a workshop
3. I attend a conference
4. I attend a webinar
5. I observe my host teacher
6. I observe my fellow trainees
7. I practice teaching in my micro-teaching class
8. I practice teaching in my practicum
9. I receive feedback from my supervisor on my teaching practices
10. I receive feedback from my host teacher on my teaching practices
11. I receive feedback from my fellow trainees on my teaching practices
12. I attend extra-curricular activities
13. To write about my weaknesses as a novice teacher
14. To write about my strengths as a novice teacher
15. To jot down ideas related to my teaching philosophy
16. To write new concepts I learn from my own readings
17. To write about new ideas I learned about the field of ELT
18. When I have an idea that will develop my career as a teacher
19. To monitor my progress as a teacher trainee
20. To monitor my progress as a novice teacher
21. To get used to using it in my future professional career
22. To stay updated about the field of ELT in Morocco

Appendix B: Reflective Portfolios and Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire
- strongly disagree (SD)
- disagree (D)
- uncertain (U)
- agree (A)
- strongly agree (SA)

1. Keeping a reflective portfolio provides opportunities to apply knowledge acquired in class/workshops/webinars, etc., in the field (teaching practice).
2. It facilitates my ongoing learning in the ELT (English Language Teaching) theoretical domain
3. It helps me realize my weaknesses as a novice teacher
4. It guides me to discover my strengths as a novice teacher
5. It encourages me to do some research about concepts I didn't understand in class
6. It encourages me to fill out some knowledge gaps I didn't pay attention to in class
7. It provides a better understanding of taking responsibility for learning as a pre-service teacher
8. It allows me to monitor my own progress as a pre-service teacher over time
9. It helps me to reach the objectives of the course
10. It helps me to reach the objectives of the practicum
11. It helps me to reach the objectives of the extra-curricular activities
12. It provides a file that I can use in my future professional life
13. It provides experience for me as a pre-service teacher on how to use portfolios in education
14. It encourages me to use portfolios in my future professional life

15. It provides me with an opportunity to learn from my own teaching practices
16. It helps me learn from my fellow trainees' teaching practices
17. It helps me learn from my host teachers' comments and constructive feedback
18. It helps me learn from my supervisor's constructive feedback and comments
19. It helps me learn from my fellow trainees' comments and constructive feedback
20. It helps me construct my own knowledge about the type of teacher I want to become
21. It helps me develop my teaching philosophy
22. It helps me get immersed in the field of ELT and language learning