

REFLECTIVE TEACHING: IMPACT, SUPPORTS, AND BARRIERS

FROM UAE-BASED ESL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to all language teachers with inquisitive minds and open hearts... and an orientation toward growth and perfection.

## Abstract

A reflective practice requires conscious efforts by teachers to critically examine their pedagogy with the aim to enhance the quality of their teaching and instill positive transformations in their classrooms. Reflective teachers constantly engage in a cyclical process of inquiry and self-assessment, as they re-examine their underlying assumptions about teaching and work on aligning their practices with their beliefs. Practitioners delve into this rigorous examination, typically using introspective reflective teaching (RT) tools and techniques that may include surveys, interviews, journals, case-studies, peer observations, session recordings, and action research. While previous studies have investigated the impact of reflective teaching on pre-service teachers during their teacher training periods, few studies addressed the impact of reflective teaching on in-service teachers and its status in real-life classrooms. This paper probes the perspectives of seven ESL in-service teachers based in the UAE on the impact of reflective teaching. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews conducted after the teachers' participation in a six-week RT program. Regarding the status of reflection in classrooms, the candidate selection procedure revealed that while many teachers recognize the significance of RT, few of them implemented reflective tools and engaged in systematic, evidence-based reflection in their daily practices. Following the RT program, the teachers indicated that RT provided valuable insights into teaching, allowed teachers to monitor their students' progress, and deepened the teachers' understanding of classroom events. Many of the teachers, also, reported that the RT approach enabled them to re-examine their teaching beliefs and enhanced their critical thinking and problem solving skills. Furthermore, the participants identified the teacher's openness to change and improvement as a main supporting factor to teacher reflection. Conversely, the teachers found time constraints, culture, and the teacher's own resistance to be major inhibitors of reflection.

**Search Terms:** *reflective teaching, teacher reflection, evidence-based reflection, critical thinking, introspection, self-assessment, teacher journals*

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Thinking is a central part of teaching. Teachers are constantly making decisions about virtually every aspect of their teaching. Teachers think about the methods they employ, the materials they select, and all the actions and choices they make before, during, and after their lessons. While thinking is a fundamental human activity, the ways in which people think considerably vary. Some people think better than others do. According to Dewey,

The person who understands what the better ways of thinking are and why they are better can, if he will, change his own personal ways until they become more effective; until, that is to say, they do better the work that thinking can do and other mental operations cannot do so well. The better way of thinking... is called reflective thinking: the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration. (1933, p. 3)

Based on Dewey's above definition, reflective thinking is a deliberate activity that involves probing and persistence. Reflective teaching (RT), which employs reflective thinking, requires conscious efforts by teachers to critically examine their practices, gather information about their teaching and classroom events, analyse this information, and use it to enhance the quality of their teaching. Reflective teachers constantly engage in a cyclical process of inquiry and self-evaluation, as they re-examine their underlying assumptions about teaching and work on aligning their practices with their beliefs. Practitioners delve into this rigorous examination, typically using introspective RT tools and techniques that may include surveys, interviews, journals, case-studies, observations, session recordings, and action research. It is this strong version of reflection - one that is systematic, cyclic, and evidence-based - that is endorsed in the present study.

A number of benefits to both teachers and students have been attributed to reflective teaching. A reflective practice is associated with empowering teachers (Barlett, 1990; Killion & Todnem, 1991; Moon, 1990) enhancing their decision-making and critical thinking skills, and deepening their knowledge about themselves and their teaching (Bailey, 1990; Brookfield, 1995; Burns, 2010; Minott, 2011; Murphy, 2014). Furthermore, by providing valuable insights into educational matters, RT enables teachers to better identify their students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as their preferences and expectations. Teachers, therefore, are better positioned to become responsive to their students' needs. Considering the above benefits, and

several others, it is no surprise that many current teacher education programs advocate reflective teaching and regard it as an integral part of teacher development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several studies have investigated the role of reflection from the perspectives of pre-service teachers in their teacher training (Good & Whang, 2002; Lee, 2005; Minott, 2011; Moran & Dallat, 1995; Ward & McCotter, 2004). However, few studies have examined in-service teachers' views on reflection and its status in real-life classrooms. Thus, it is difficult to gauge whether or not teachers develop a solid understanding of reflection during their teacher training and continue to implement it at a meaningful, dialogic level throughout their careers. While teachers are usually encouraged to endorse the notion of reflection, they may not be adequately taught *what* reflection really is and *how* it is actually practiced. According to Russell (2005), “[t]here seems to be more rhetoric about the value of reflective practice than there is detail about how professional educators can help beginning professionals develop the skills of reflective practice and acquire initial experiences” (p. 199). Hence, there seems to be some literature void on the status of teacher reflection in real-life classrooms: the extent to which teachers understand reflection, and the extent to which they practice it. It follows that; the impact of reflection on in-service teachers also remains vague.

### **Significance of the Research**

Within the UAE context, Yassaei (2011) and Zehra (2012) have investigated teachers' views on reflective teaching, and whether or not teachers reflect on their practices. Similarly to both studies, the present study aims to investigate UAE-based ESL teachers' perspectives on the impact of reflective teaching. Yet, this study goes a step further by implementing a semi-guided, hands-on reflective program on classroom teachers, prior to eliciting their perspectives on RT. Participants in the study are in-service teachers who may have been exposed to the concept of reflection, but have not developed a clear understanding of it and do not incorporate reflective teaching techniques systematically in their teaching practices. The study therefore makes no prior assumptions that in-service teachers have the knowledge or skills to follow a reflective teaching approach. It, rather, clarifies the intended meaning of a reflective practice and its key principles for the participants prior to them implementing a reflective program with their students. The study also suggests guidelines for the application of a range of methods in order to help initiate systematic

and evidence-based reflection. Following the RT program, the study probes the teachers' perspectives on RT, based on their latest experience with it.

The present study aims to contribute to the literature on the impact of reflective teaching by providing empirical data within the UAE educational context. The study also elicits other important data on the factors that support and, conversely, those that hinder teacher reflection. Further observations or conclusions may be made with regards to the views of male versus female teachers, experienced versus novice teachers, and native versus non-native English speaking teachers (NESTs versus NNESTs). Moreover, through the implementation of reflective teaching methods in real classroom contexts, the study aims to promote this insightful teaching approach and encourage teachers to integrate it as part of their teaching identity. The study finally seeks to suggest practical measures that promote teacher reflection and overcome its barriers.

This research therefore aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perspectives of participating teachers on the impact of reflective teaching?
- 2) What, according to the participating teachers, are the factors that hinder reflection?
- 3) What, according to the participating teachers, are the factors that foster reflection?

### **Overview of Thesis Chapters**

Chapter One addresses the purpose of the study and presents the research questions. Chapter Two reviews the literature on reflective teaching. It explores some key conceptualizations of reflection and discusses its attributed benefits, supports, barriers, and limitations. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the research and provides detailed information about the participants and data collection tools employed in the study. Chapter Four presents and then analyses the findings obtained from the screening questionnaires, teachers' questionnaires, and teachers' interviews. Chapter Five concludes by highlighting the main findings, implications, limitations, and a final reflection.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I first explore some key scholarly definitions and conceptualizations of reflection and reflective teaching (RT). I then discuss some main benefits attributed to reflection, pertaining to students, teachers, and the teaching-learning processes. Next, I outline factors that support teacher reflection, followed by those that limit and impede reflection. Finally, some limitations of the RT approach are highlighted.

### Understanding Reflective Teaching

**Background.** Reflective teaching permeated the field of education in the 1980s (Farrell, 2012; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Markham, 1999; Stanley, 1998). It then gained recognition in language education in the following decades, as language teaching shifted towards a constructivist approach that engages learners in shaping the learning process. Some scholars consider that RT emerged as a response to the demise of the method during the post-method era (Akbari, 2007; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011), a time period that demanded a re-examination of pedagogical practices and the theories underlying them.

**Definitions and Implications.** Much of the literature on reflective teaching traces the origin of the concept of reflection to John Dewey (Farrell, 2012; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Markham, 1999; Moon, 1999; Murphy, 2014; Stanley, 1998; Ward & McCotter, 2004; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Dewey defines reflective thinking 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” (1933, p. 9). Dewey (1933) highlights a profound distinction between *reflective thinking*, which is rational and reliable, and *regular thinking*, which is automatic and guided by impulse, routine, or circumstance. He maintains that reflective thinking is the better and more efficient way of thinking, as it “converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action” (Dewey, 1933, p. 17).

An analysis of Dewey's definition of reflection demonstrates his call on teachers to assume an active role, in which they abandon groundless assumptions and reconsider the theories guiding their practices. Further, Dewey prompts teachers to make informed decisions about their actions and beliefs, based on reflection, inquiry, and evidence. Dewey's work constitutes the backbone of the study of reflection (Moon, 1999), on which basis several frameworks of reflection were built, almost half

a century later.

Spinning off Dewey's notion of reflection, Richards and Lockhart (1996) hold that a reflective approach to teaching is "one in which teachers ... collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching" (p. 1). The authors' perception of RT involves teachers in analysing their practices by examining scientifically collected data from their teaching contexts. Richards and Lockhart (1996) maintain that the obtained information constitutes the basis for reflection, self-evaluation, change, and professional growth.

Along similar lines, Farrell (2013) believes that a reflective practice involves the teachers' systematic and ongoing examination of their beliefs about teaching and learning. Like Dewey, Farrell (2012) considers that a reflective practice is one in which teachers assume full responsibility for their instructional actions and engage in active decision making in pedagogical matters that affect their students' learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

Farrell (2013) outlines four principles of a reflective practice. The first principle entails that the reflective practice is evidence-based, requiring systematic data collection and documentation. The second principle indicates that reflective practice involves dialogue with other practitioners, in the form of critical friendships, teacher reflection groups, or peer coaching. Farrell's third principle proclaims that the teacher's beliefs and theories on teaching are linked to practice. Finally, Farrell maintains that the reflective practice transcends the confinements of the classroom to become part of the teacher's identity (2013). Farrell (2012) points out that this form of evidence-based reflection constitutes a strong version of reflection, which seeks an alignment of beliefs with on-ground actions. He highlights that a weak version of reflection consists of informal teachers' reflections, mainly on the descriptive level. Farrell (2012) holds that it is difficult to trace tangible teaching outcomes of the weaker form of reflection, due to the lack of evidence of connection between the teachers' thoughts and their actions on site.

Based on the existing reflection frameworks, Ward and McCotter (2004) identify three common elements of reflection. First, reflection is "situated in practice", that is, teachers reflect on issues that are bound to their specific practices and classrooms (Ward & McCotter, p. 245). This is precisely why RT views the classroom teacher as better positioned than anyone else "to fully understand and appreciate the

conditions of her or his classroom as well as the needs and aspirations of the learners in it” (Murphy, 2014, p. 626). Second, reflective teaching is “cyclic in nature” (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 245), that is, teachers do not carry out the multiple processes involved in reflection in a linear, sequential manner but, rather, they reflect, plan, implement, and revisit as per the demands of the situation in question. Finally, RT involves the use of multiple perspectives, as reflective teachers are encouraged to consider the viewpoints of the different stakeholders in their contexts, including students, fellow teachers, administrators, etc. (Ward & McCotter, 2004).

Furthermore, the importance of social context in teacher reflection was emphasized by several scholars (Barlett, 1990; Brown & Lee, 2015; Mezirow, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Barlett (1990) considers that reflection addresses the in-class teaching of the individual teacher, as well as the institutional structures in which teaching takes place. He holds that reflection has a double meaning, as “[i]t involves the relationship between an individual’s thought and action and the relationship between an individual teacher and his or her membership in a larger collective called society” (Barlett, 1990, pp. 204-205). Similarly, Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue that students live in a world that transcends the classroom walls. The authors caution “a neglect of reflection as collaborative social practice unduly inhibits teachers’ deliberation and their professional growth” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 77).

**Starting Point of Reflection.** The starting point of reflection may be a quest for a solution to a problematic occurrence or an answer to an unsettled state of mind, such as uncertainty, frustration, or skepticism. According to Dewey (1933), it is this “[d]emand for the solution of a perplexity” that serves as “the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection” (p. 14). Additionally, teachers may be inspired to embark on reflection on their teaching without a pressing stimulus, but rather in a proactive attempt to observe, assess, redefine, and refine their beliefs and actions on an ongoing basis (Cunningham, 2001; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Moon, 1999). Moon (1999) concludes that reflection may be a response to certain conditions in the learning environment or “an orientation” to the teachers’ everyday lives (p. 186).

**Phases and Types of Reflection.** Stanley (1998) identifies five phases through which a teacher’s reflection may pass. She recognizes that teachers first start by engaging with reflection, then thinking reflectively, using reflection, sustaining reflection, and finally, practicing reflection (Stanley, 1998). Stanley (1998) maintains

that the phases do not follow a rigid sequence. Rather, teachers move through them depending on their personal and contextual experiences.

Schön (1983, 1987) introduces two types of reflection: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. *Reflection-in-action* occurs instantaneously, right when a situation presents itself. This type of reflection prompts immediate action as a response to the situation in place. *Reflection-on-action* occurs retrospectively, as practitioners analyse a past experience, i.e. after the action is completed. Killion and Todnem (1991) introduce a third type of reflection, *reflection-for-action*, which, according to the authors, is the intended outcome of the two previously introduced types of reflection. By deeply examining our past and present actions, we generate new knowledge that better informs our practices, actions, and tasks in the future.

Furthermore, based on their students' written reflections, Hatton and Smith (1995) distinguish among three types of reflection: *descriptive*, *dialogic*, and *critical*. Descriptive reflection seeks to prove reasons based on the literature or the students' personal judgments. Dialogic reflection involves discourse with one's self, in an attempt to explore reasons and possibilities, and critical reflection involves "reason giving for decisions or events which takes account of the broader historical, social, and/or political contexts" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 41). The authors maintain that the three types of reflection are developmental and sharpened by knowledge and experience, yet each type is intrinsically valuable and useful. Larrivee (2008) holds that critical reflection is the desired goal in every professional's career, although not all teachers reach this stage of reflection.

### **Impact of Reflective Teaching**

Many benefits have been attributed to reflective teaching. Some of these benefits can be classified as teacher-centered and others as student-centered. Yet, the major function of RT lies in ultimately enabling teachers to improve classroom situations and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

**Knowledge About Teaching.** Many scholars argue that valuable insights are obtained from reflection that are significant to the teaching and learning processes. The information yielded from examining teaching practices can lead to "a richer conceptualization of teaching" (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 2) and therefore a deeper understanding of the complexities involved, which might otherwise remain unknown to teachers. Richards and Lockhart (1996) maintain that much can be learned about teaching through inquiry and that experience on its own is not sufficient



to develop the teacher's knowledge. Similarly, Murphy (2014) maintains that by reflecting on their actions, teachers develop an awareness of the "meaning, sources, and impacts" of classroom events (p. 616). This awareness helps teachers to understand, connect, and assess events, rather than encounter them without any meaningful analysis. Building a solid knowledge about their classroom issues and their practices, teachers are in a better position to identify areas for improvement, implement changes in strategies, and instigate positive transformations in their teaching contexts.

**Improvement and/or Change.** Many researchers agree that the result of RT is some form of change or improvement (Bailey, 2012; Brown & Lee, 2015; Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2012; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Moon, 1999; Stanley, 1998). Burns (2010) asserts that "reflection is fundamental to the way you start or improve situations in your classroom" (p. 166). The knowledge obtained through reflection aids teachers to devise and implement solutions to problems and perplexities in their teaching.

According to Brookfield (1995), reflective teachers recognize the unique demands of their classrooms and find that the standardized methods and practices "imported from outside rarely fit snugly into the contours of their classrooms" (p. 19). Reflective teaching enables teachers to carry out self-guided explorations of teaching situations and prompts them to devise effective, context-specific solutions. Gunn (2010) highlights that RT prevents adopting "repetitive 'one size fits all'" teaching solutions and leads teachers towards skilful, productive teaching (p. 208). Further, Dewey (1933) believes that reflection "emancipates" us from the impulse of routine and circumstance to well-directed, purposeful activity with ends-in-view (p. 17). Dewey (1933) concludes that reflective thinking serves to "transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious" (pp. 100-101).

**Student-Centered Pedagogy.** Reflective teaching can lead to a major shift of focus from purely teacher-related issues to a focus on a better understanding of student issues (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002; Lee, 2005; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Several RT techniques, such as student journals, student surveys, and exit tickets, directly involve students and elicit their feedback. Students' reflections provide an opportunity for teachers to delve into the learners' minds and extract important information concerning their learning styles, strategies, expectations, and preferences. The

articulation of the learners' thoughts helps teachers, curriculum developers, and program administrators monitor student progress and identify their academic strengths and weaknesses. By analysing the outcomes, reflective teachers are able to modify their teaching styles, lesson plans, and content materials according to the needs of their students, rather than "the needs of a static syllabus" (Cheruvu, 2014, p. 226).

Just as teachers hold and safeguard their beliefs about teaching and learning, so do learners, who have certain perceptions of what constitutes good teaching and how learning occurs. It is when teachers deepen their knowledge about their students and work on matching the students' views and expectations with the teachers' beliefs that effective learning is likely to take place (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002). As Murphy (2014) maintains, the intended beneficiaries of RT "are the current and future language learners we meet since our aspiration is to provide learners with continually improving learning opportunities" (p. 617).

Besides prioritizing students' needs, RT has also been linked to student empowerment and autonomy (Barlett, 1990; Krishnan & Hoon, 2002; Qing, 2013). Allowing students a platform to share their thoughts and reflections involves them in decision-making about classroom issues and recognizes them as participants in their learning. Krishnan and Hoon (2002) highlight the importance of student journals in fostering learner autonomy by enabling learners to articulate their thoughts, voice their views, and assess their own needs. Moreover, Barlett (1990) argues that becoming reflective teachers requires that we develop in students a sense of self-inquiry, which according to him, challenges the view of students as "receptacles of prepackaged knowledge" and enables them to resist oppression caused by the classroom routine or the surrounding society (p. 214).

**Knowledge of Self and Teaching Beliefs.** One of the main effects of reflective teaching is deepening the teachers' self-knowledge and their awareness of their teaching beliefs. When teachers systematically examine and reflect on their actions, they understand themselves better at a personal level. This "self-discovery" (Murphy, 2014, p. 625) enables teachers to identify their personal strengths and weaknesses (Minott, 2011), as well as their behavioural patterns, preferences, threats, and "comfort zones". The newly found knowledge of the self also helps teachers set / reset their life goals and priorities.

Furthermore, RT enables teachers to uncover the dearly held theories and beliefs that guide their practices. Teachers' beliefs reflect the assumptions that

teachers hold about teaching, learning, teachers, and learners. These beliefs stem from multiple factors, including the teachers' educational experiences as learners, work experiences as teachers, and the knowledge teachers gain from their ongoing professional development and personal encounters (Graves, 2000). More often than not, these theories are deeply seated in the teacher's psyche and internalized without careful questioning. Becoming aware of their internalized beliefs and learning to articulate them is a major step towards the teacher's self-discovery. This journey of determining who they are as teachers and what it is that they value requires deliberate probing and deep reflection. Once teachers are consciously aware of their fundamental assumptions, principles, and values, they are able to make informed choices pertaining to their profession. Larson-Freeman and Anderson (2011) assert "[u]nless you become clear about your beliefs, you will continue to make decisions that are conditioned rather than conscious" (p. 4).

**Linking Theory to Practice.** One of the main functions of RT is that it enables teachers to link theoretical knowledge to their practices (Burns, 2010; Burton, 2009; Farrell, 2012; Minott, 2011; Schön, 1983). The reflective approach emphasizes the connection between theory and practice on the basis that teaching beliefs and rationales underlie the actions teachers take in all aspects of their practices. Reflective teaching requires teachers to take a step following their articulation of beliefs and examine their practices on the grounds of their beliefs. Farrell (2012) maintains that "[a] reflective teacher will try to articulate his or her theories and beliefs about teaching and learning as guiding principles and will also compare these beliefs and espoused theories with actual classroom practices," in order to ensure that "there is a convergence rather than a divergence between the two" (p. 35). Similarly, Cunningham (2001) highlights the importance of integrating the new insights and findings into the teaching practice as teachers continue to reflect on ongoing basis.

**Teacher Empowerment.** By undertaking an inquisitive approach, followed by decision-making in matters related to their own practices, teachers are empowered by reflective teaching. As such, RT prompts teachers to play the multiple roles of investigators and classroom researchers who shape their teaching as per their students' needs and intervene to take action and instil change, whenever necessary. Barlett (1990) maintains that "asking 'what' and 'why' questions gives us a certain power over our teaching" (p. 205). The author finds that by reflecting on these questions, teachers "begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of

transforming [their] everyday classroom life” (p. 205). Similarly, Zeichner and Liston (1996) hold that RT promotes an empowered view of teachers as actively involved in their professions and assuming leadership roles in curriculum development and school reform. Moreover, reflection recognizes that with their theories and ideas, teachers are capable of generating valuable knowledge about teaching, which can contribute to “the betterment of teaching for all teachers” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 5). Zeichner and Liston (1996) affirm that reflection is against the view of teachers “as technicians who narrowly construe the nature of the problems confronting them and merely carry out what others, removed from the classroom, want them to do” (p. 4).

**Teachers’ Cognitive Skills and Life-Long Growth.** RT has also been recognized for its teacher-centered benefits, which include developing the teachers’ analytical, critical thinking, decision-making, and problem solving skills (Farrell, 2012, Good & Whang, 2002; Minott, 2011). By engaging in reflection, teachers learn how to think deeply, evaluate classroom events, explore different perspectives, and relate experiences. Reflective teachers often engage in problematizing situations, collecting and analysing data, and drawing conclusions from research findings. Following their analysis of situations, teachers are called upon to take responsibility and implement changes and modifications in all aspects of their teaching. Teachers are thus encouraged to make their own informed decisions about their practices, rather than import and enact others’ decisions. According to Farrell (2012), reflective teachers develop decision-making skills that enable them to become confident and proactive in their teaching.

Reflection is linked with continued growth and learning throughout the teacher’s professional life (Burton, 2009; Killion & Todnem, 1991; Lee, 2005; Moon, 1999; Moran & Dallat, 1995; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Moran and Dallat (1995) contend that “[t]he emerging picture of the teacher as a reflective professional is a developmental one that begins during undergraduate teacher education and continues to grow and change with professional experiences” (p. 25). Reflective teaching promotes learning by offering teachers ongoing opportunities to develop, construct, and re-construct, their pedagogical knowledge and teaching theories. According to Moon (1999), “[r]eflection could be seen as a tool that facilitates personal learning towards the outcome of personal development - which ultimately leads towards empowerment and emancipation” (p. 88). Furthermore, reflection enables teachers to grow not only individually but collectively. Burns (2010) maintains that sharing

reflections leads to the growth of other teachers and the teaching profession as a whole. Cheruvu (2014) contends that expanding teacher research beyond the immediate spaces of the individual teacher's practice results in developing inquiry teaching communities and culturally responsive practices.

### **Factors that Support Reflection**

Several personal and contextual factors can positively impact teacher reflection. The contextual factors mainly involve the *learning environment*, in which pre-service teachers are trained prior to becoming in-service classroom teachers, as well as the *professional environment*, in which both the novice and experienced teachers practice their profession. Additionally, personal factors are concerned with the teacher's individual characteristics, skills, predispositions, and attitudes, which often continue to evolve throughout the teacher's professional career.

#### **Positive Learning Environment.**

*Explicit instruction and sufficient reflection opportunities.* The learning environment that surrounds student teachers during their training period can be an ideal setting to introduce teachers to RT and cultivate their reflective skills. For the learning environment to be conducive to teacher reflection, it should provide teachers with sufficient opportunities to learn to reflect (Good & Whang, 2014; Moon, 1999; Russell, 2005; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Research reveals that in order to develop the ability to reflect, student teachers need explicit instruction on RT, coupled with onsite field experiences at local schools. Russell (2005) maintains that instruction on reflection and reflective methods should be provided "explicitly, directly, thoughtfully and patiently" (p. 203). An informed training provides teachers with a thorough understanding of the concept of reflection and the use of the reflective tools. Moreover, field visits expose teachers to the dynamics of real-life classrooms with real teaching situations and ultimately bridge the gap between theory and practice (Moran & Dallat, 1995).

*Supportive mentorship.* Within the learning environment, scholars point out the pivotal role played by teacher educators and mentors in supervising and coaching pre-service teachers towards becoming reflective practitioners. Mezirow (1990) considers it the responsibility of educators to "to create reflective dialogic communities in which learners are free to challenge assumptions and premises, thereby breaking through the one-dimensionality of uncritically assimilated learning" (pp. 360-361). Also, scholars highlight the duty of mentors to encourage students not

only to observe teaching, but also to engage in discussions and critical analysis of what constitutes effective teaching and efficient practice (Moran & Dallat, 1995). Moreover, researchers stress the need for mentors to develop a deep knowledge of the student teachers they are mentoring and be able to recognize the teachers' individual personalities, preferred modes of reflection, and different backgrounds and experiences (Lee, 2005; Moon, 1999). Scholars further highlight the importance of mentors to serve as role models who are skilled and proficient in reflecting on their own practices (Moran & Dallat, 1995) and who actually *practice what they preach* (Cheruvu, 2014; Moon, 1999).

In brief, a well-rounded instruction on reflective teaching that provides real-life opportunities for reflection, coupled by a supportive and responsible mentorship, provides an effective learning environment for pre-service teachers to develop into reflective practitioners.

#### **The Professional Environment.**

***Supportive school culture.*** Besides the academic environment, the professional context in which teachers embark on their careers has a significant impact on teacher reflection. School environments supportive of reflection promote inquiry, innovation, creative thinking, and teacher autonomy and empowerment. Such environments, also, have administrative structures that acknowledge and reward the teachers' reflective efforts. Reward may be moral, financial, and/or professional. Murphy (2014) suggests that reward may be accomplished through acknowledging the teachers' work in annual reviews and providing administrative support for in-house group discussions and brown-bag presentations. Schools may also offer teachers opportunities to model and share their reflective teaching experiences in local and professional venues (Murphy, 2014). Additionally, Moon (1999) highlights the importance of social and emotional support that schools can provide. She points out that schools can become socially safe environments that recognize the "emotional concomitants of reflection" and encourage teachers to take risks while feeling supported by their colleagues and administration (Moon, 1999, p. 169).

***Teacher collaboration.*** The professional environment can be highly conducive to reflection if it promotes teacher collaboration and collegiality. Teacher collaboration breaks teacher isolation and provides the professional, moral, and logistic support that encourages teachers to reflect (Burns, 2010; Crookes, 2003). Crookes (2003) highlights the contribution of colleagues in data gathering, devising

solutions, and providing multiple viewpoints through teacher development groups or critical friendships. He adds that teacher development groups contribute to better teaching, more benefit to students, higher teacher motivation, and more teacher empowerment (Crookes, 2003). Similarly, Moon (1999) acknowledges that collaborative work in reflection facilitates learning and broadens the quality of reflection.

**Reflective Teacher Traits.** Besides the external factors, the teacher's ability to reflect is significantly influenced by his/her own characteristics, predispositions, and psychological makeup. Dewey (1933) identifies *open-mindedness*, *wholeheartedness*, and *responsibility*, as key personal traits that facilitate teacher reflection. According to Dewey (1933), *open-mindedness* frees the teachers' minds and makes teachers more receptive to different ideas, perspectives, and possibilities. *Wholeheartedness* entails being genuinely absorbed in the task in question, and *responsibility* refers to the power to sustain one's commitment in a given task, until it is completed (Dewey, 1933). Farrell (2012), too, recognizes the importance of responsibility, as teachers take charge of their instruction both inside and outside the classroom and seek to provide informed, student-centered pedagogy. Zeichner and Liston (1996) find that the three traits of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility make teachers flexible and supportive, rather than judgmental and harsh on themselves when examining their practices.

Furthermore, reflection requires teachers to have not only the knowledge and skills to reflect (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987), but also, the desire to use their knowledge and the will to undergo the inconvenience of searching for information (Dewey, 1933). This desire, Dewey (1933) contends, is a matter of personal disposition. Along similar lines, a sense of curiosity about learning is regarded as essential in driving teachers to pursue ongoing growth and professional development (Brown & Lee, 2015; Farrell, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Stanley, 1998). Moreover, Farrell (2012) highlights that an important characteristic of reflective teacher is having the will to work with constraints and adversities, rather than complain about them. Farrell (2012) argues that reflective teachers constantly seek to improve their teaching situations and provide better learning opportunities for their students.

**RT Strategies.** Scholars acknowledge that teachers reflect differently and that different teachers have different preferences to reflective methods (Farrell, 2012; Lee, 2005; Moon, 1999). For instance, while some teachers prefer oral means of reflection,

other teachers are able to reflect better using written modes. Also, while some teachers are motivated to reflect in groups, others dread revealing themselves to others (Gunn, 2010). Farrell (2012) acknowledges the “real fear” some teachers have from reflecting with others, and he proposes a five-stage plan that gradually prepares teachers to move from individual to group reflection (p. 23). He suggests that teachers first engage in their own self-reflections, through which they examine their assumptions and beliefs. Then, teachers can start reflecting with their students and develop a good understanding of the students’ needs. Next, teachers reflect with their colleagues using methods like peer observations or critical friends. The fourth and fifth stages encourage teachers to reflect with the school administration and with teacher organizations, respectively.

Some scholars classify the reflective methods based on: the type of reflection they yield, the quality of reflection they emphasize, or the source of reflections. Ward and McCotter (2004) distinguish among methods, such as case studies and action research, that emphasize that reflection is situated in practice, and methods, such as journals, that emphasize the cyclic quality of reflection, and methods, such as student surveys and peer observations, which emphasize the consideration of multiple viewpoints. Murphy (2014) divides the tools into those that yield formative feedback from learners, such as minute papers and student surveys, and tools that yield formative feedback from other teachers, such as peer observations, and tools that yield self-generated information, such as teaching journals. Similarly to Murphy, Crookes (2003) differentiates among personal reflection methods, such as teaching journals, interpersonal reflection methods, such as peer observations, and group reflection tools, such as teacher development group discussions.

Several reflection-generating strategies are used to hone the teachers’ reflective skills and provide structure to their reflections. I elaborate below on some of these commonly used techniques.

**Journals.** Brown and Lee (2015) contend that journal-writing has evolved from a simple means of keeping a diary into an integral aspect of learning. According to Burton (2009), writing is considered much more than a documentation strategy, as writing involves composition, which essentially involves reflection. When writing personal journals, teachers represent themselves to themselves, and this enables them to figure out who they are and who they are becoming (Crookes, 2003). As such, journals enable teachers to monitor their practice, assess their progress, and explore



their ever-changing beliefs as teachers. Additionally, Good and Whang (2014) report that journals used by student teachers enhanced their thinking skills and offered opportunities to connect past events with future development. Krishnan and Hoon (2002) highlight the power of student journals as “a channel for the learners to voice their opinions and feelings” (p. 238). As discussed earlier, students’ voices serve as an invaluable source of information that can guide teachers towards an effective, student-centered pedagogy. Moon (1999) identifies other purposes of journals, namely, to deepen the quality of learning, facilitate learning from experience, exhibit ownership in one’s own learning, and enhance problem-solving.

**Peer observations.** Peer observations may serve as a very useful technique that benefits both, the observed and the observing teacher. No matter how attentive teachers may be in their classes, there may be events, reactions, happenings, or certain aspects of teaching that remain unnoticed by the teacher (Farrell, 2012). Scholars highlight that the main aim of peer observations is teacher development (Crookes, 2003; Farrell, 2012). Observations raise the teacher’s awareness of events that take place and help the teacher gather information about the class. At the same time, the observing teacher gets to be exposed to the teaching strategies of peers and may decide to endorse these strategies. Brown and Lee (2015) point out that “[t]eachers are coming to understand that seeing their actions through another’s eyes is an indispensable tool for classroom research as well a potentially enlightening experience” (p. 548).

**Student questionnaires.** Student questionnaires are time-efficient tools that allow teachers to gather a large amount of information “about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences” (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 10). Questionnaires enable teachers to know more about their students’ needs, learning styles, and likes and dislikes, and adjust classroom instruction accordingly. In addition, questionnaires are practical, and relatively easy to administer and analyse.

**Action Research.** Action research (AR) is a reflective approach aimed at improving strategies, practices, and knowledge of teaching contexts (Prescott, 2011, p. 13). Action research typically involves an intervention that may lead to a change or an improvement of a problematic issue. When undertaking action research, teachers play the roles of investigators, as well as participants in their contexts (Burns, 2010). Burns (2010) contends that action research can “raise our awareness to the

complexities of our work and show us what drives our personal approaches to teaching” (p. 7). The author points out several features for action research, which may be summarized as follows (Burns, 2010):

- 1- AR involves teachers in reflecting on their teaching.
- 2- AR is small-scale and contextualized within a specific classroom or situation.
- 3- AR is participatory and seeks the collaboration of the communities concerned with the social situation.
- 4- AR involves systematic data collection and data analysis.
- 5- AR is empowering and is based on democratic principles.

***Minute Papers.*** Minute papers are a simple, easily administered technique used to elicit students’ reflection on the class in no more than a few minutes. The teacher may pose a question or two, pertaining to the lesson or any teaching aspect, and ask the students to respond very briefly. When employed at the end of the class, minute papers can inform the teacher’s planning of the next lesson (Murphy, 2014). Murphy (2014) finds that minute papers provide information to teachers on how their efforts are received by their students. He adds that, if appropriately used, minute papers serve to remind students that their views are valued and seriously considered.

***Critical Friends.*** *Critical friends* is a strategy that involves another person, usually a trusted friend or colleague, in the reflections of a teacher. This method encourages discussing teaching matters openly with the trusted other. Critical friends can be structured to provide a safe environment for questioning, confrontation, and self-revelation (Hatton & Smith, 1995). According to Farrell (2012), “‘critical friends’ can give voice to a teacher’s thinking like looking into a mirror, while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way” (p. 47).

***Video and audio session recordings.*** The previously outlined reflective techniques yield extremely useful information. Yet, session recordings have one advantage over all of the other techniques, as recordings capture events *exactly* how they happen. Burns (2010) asserts that it is impossible to record classroom interactions accurately through notes alone. Unlike the case may be with other techniques, there is no room for subjective reporting using session recordings. As Richards and Lockhart (1996) maintain, “[t]he fullest account of a lesson is obtained from an actual recording of it using an audio cassette or video recorder” (p. 11).

## **Barriers to Reflection**

There are several personal, professional, and contextual factors that can hinder teacher reflection, and, as Markham contends, “if we are to continue to use reflection as a guiding metaphor for teacher education, we must closely examine the major impediments to reflection” (1999, p. 56).

**Insufficient Teacher Training.** The deficiency in reflective teacher education has been widely addressed in the literature on RT (Cheruvu, 2014; Farrell, 2012; Good & Whang, 2014; Jaeger 2013; Russell, 2005; Schön, 1987; Ward & McCotter, 2004). While many teacher training programs recognize the significance of reflection, most of these programs fail to implement effective strategies to teach reflection and cultivate teacher reflective skills. This “gap between the goal of developing critically reflective practitioners and the lack of explicit strategies and support for reaching that goal” (Russell, 2005, p. 203) results in graduating teachers who only have surface knowledge - if at all - about reflection. As a result, Ward and McCotter note that, “[r]eflection, meant to make teaching and learning understandable and open, has itself been an invisible process to many of our preservice teachers” (p. 255).

Teacher education programs are mainly criticized for lacking explicit instruction on reflection and separating theory from practice. Good and Whang (2014) contend that students are introduced to educational theories without getting the opportunity “to transform these theories into practical applications or philosophies through thoughtful reflection” (p. 254). Also, researchers argue that the practicum offers a safe and risk-free classroom experience that does not relate much to the problematic, fast-paced classroom that teachers are likely to encounter in the real world. Training in a context that is significantly different from reality fails to prepare teachers to manage challenging classroom events that require reflection-on-action abilities. As teachers are often not provided with sufficient opportunities to reflect meaningfully during their training or practicum period, studies reveal that many novice teachers lack the basic analytical and cognitive skills needed to interpret, relate, and reflect on events (Jaeger, 2013).

**Score-Oriented Educational Systems and Bureaucratic School Structure.** Limitations in the educational system and school structures may hamper the development of reflective thinking. Ward and McCotter (2004) contend that the product-oriented educational system that is focused on measurable learning outcomes (i.e. test scores) devalues reflection and pressures teachers to meet standards that are

regarded as the sole indicators of quality education. As a result, teachers are forced to abandon meaningful reflective habits that help them improve their performance and assess the teaching methods and materials from moral and ethical perspectives (Ward & McCotter, 2004). Larrivee (2008) also maintains that this pressure to reach the mandated standards drives teachers to prioritize efficiency and expediency at the expense of ongoing reflection on their teaching performance. Along similar lines, Crookes (2003) criticizes the hierarchical, bureaucratic structure of schools “in which independent or professional action, and the reflection which supports it, are less likely to be valued or nurtured” (p. 185).

**Lack of Recognition.** School cultures that do not support reflection or reward the teacher’s reflective efforts discourage and alienate teachers who engage in professional inquiry and seek change. Further, Liston and Zeigler (1996) address the lack of respect and recognition for teacher-generated knowledge about teaching, a knowledge that is perceived as an exclusive property of universities and research centers. Burton (2009) elaborates, “[t]raditionally, research on teaching has been conducted by university researchers, disseminated via pre- and in-service processes by teacher educators, implemented by teachers, and evaluated by researchers, thereby limiting teachers’ potential for broader professional action” (p. 299). The lack of recognition for teacher reflection stems from a conventional view of teaching as a technical practice that involves pragmatic action and that is unrelated to research and reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). This societal view of teaching discourages (and rejects) the role of teachers as researchers and knowledge builders.

**Unfavourable teaching conditions: time constraints and heavy workload.** Teaching conditions that involve long contact hours, heavy workload, and densely packed curricula leave teachers with very little time to reflect (Burns, 2010; Jaeger, 2013; Moon, 1999; Moran & Dallat, 1995; Stanley, 1998). Due to time constraints, teachers tend to focus solely on the pressing demands of teaching and therefore have no opportunity to ponder and deeply reflect on fundamental aspects of their practices. As Stanley (1998) highlights, “[i]f a teacher needs to work many hours a week to barely make a living, there may be little time left for reflective thinking or writing” (p. 586). She adds, “[s]table professional and contextual factors seem to be prerequisites to reflection and, indeed, influence a teacher's capacity to engage with reflection” (Stanley, 1998, p. 586).

**Teacher’s resistance.**

***Nature of reflection.*** When discussing the resistance of teachers to reflection, it is crucial first to acknowledge the nature of reflection as emotionally challenging. Examining one's teaching involves the exposure of feelings and disclosure of teaching philosophies. Scholars recognize that this is a confronting, risky experience that may trigger reactions of pain, guilt, disappointment, uncertainty, self-defence, or self-doubt (Burns, 2010; Cunningham, 2001; Stanley, 1998). Moreover, reflection entails a readiness to uncover and redefine our implicit beliefs and assumptions, which, according to Brookfield (1995), is a process that "we instinctively resist for fear of what we might discover" (p. 18). Considering the emotions involved in reflection, Stanley (1998) holds that "[i]t takes a healthy degree of ego development to put oneself and one's work under the microscope" (p. 586).

***Resistance due to teacher personality and affective makeup.*** Teachers may resist reflecting on their practices, due to their own psychological and affective makeup, which may not be compatible with the demands of reflection. Dewey (1933) identifies three attitudinal forces that "create a withdrawal from new intellectual contacts that are needed for learning" (p. 31). The first force is a state of "mental sluggishness", which closes the teacher's minds to new ideas (Dewey, 1933, p. 30). The second is "self-conceit", which perceives any change in beliefs as a sign of weakness. And the third force is the result of "unconscious fears" that keep teachers at a state of defence against new concepts (Dewey, 1933, p. 30).

Furthermore, Hatton and Smith (1995) maintain that the ego-centeredness of some teachers affects their ability to dissociate themselves and reflect objectively on classroom events. Farrell (2012) questions the readiness of some teachers to reflect and embrace criticism. He advises that teachers must be in a certain mental state that accepts questions and criticisms in order to reflect. Farrell (2012) also acknowledges that reflection is not for all teachers, due to various differences in desire and abilities. Markham (1999) asserts that some teachers' resistance to reflection is very persistent to the extent that even "the most carefully theorized reflective education programs" have recognized their failure to eliminate their resistance (p. 59).

***Culture-related resistance.*** Besides the teacher's personality, Gunn (2010) highlights the role of culture in potentially inhibiting student reflection, if the culture is not accommodating to self-criticism or certain modes of reflection. Reflecting on her experience with Arab student teachers, Gunn (2010) found "a resistance to airing negative thoughts" along with the students' discomfort in sharing personal

information through writing. Gunn (2010) concludes that “the students who are from a culture with more oral than written traditions were not comfortable writing their reflections down, especially ones that could be interpreted as being negative or critical of themselves” (p. 221). Along similar lines, Krishnan and Hoon (2002) highlight the resistance of some cultures to expose conflict and disagreement with higher authority figures, i.e. the teacher or teacher trainer. As a result, students of such cultures refrain from reflecting and providing confrontational feedback.

### **Limitations**

Despite the many benefits attributed to RT, certain limitations to the approach are highlighted in the literature. These limitations mostly focus on the lack of consensus on a clear definition of reflection and what constitutes reflective teaching (Al Riyami, 2015; Burton, 2009; Fat’hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Lee, 2005; Moran & Dallat, 1995; Russell, 2005). Also, some contradictory perceptions of RT are pointed out. For instance, Dewey’s notion of rational reflective thinking is contrasted with Schön’s instinctive reflection (Akbari, 2007). Similarly, Zeichner and Liston (1996) reveal that Schön’s individualistic notion of reflection contradicts with the widely endorsed notion of reflection as collaborative, dialogic, and situated in its social context. The vagueness in defining reflection has sometimes led to confusion in teaching the reflective approach and implementing it (Al Riyami, 2015; Lee, 2004; Russell, 2005).

Further, some scholars shed light on the difficulty of describing and assessing reflection in a tangible manner (Lee, 2005; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Finally, some researches point out the lack of evidence of enhanced teacher performance and student achievement as a result of RT (Akbari, 2007; Cornford, 2002; Jaeger, 2013). Jaeger (2013) contends that longitudinal studies are required to provide such evidence.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, reflective teaching entails much more than automatic or aimless pondering over situations that teachers occasionally encounter in their classrooms. Burns (2010) cautions that “simply talking or thinking about teaching does not mean that we are engaged in reflective teaching,” (pp. 14-15). Rather, RT involves active thinking that is coupled by *responding* to what happens in the classroom (Hatton & Smith, 1995). A reflective practice thus entails a deliberate, rigorous, and systematic investigation of situations or problematic issues in order to enhance the teaching-

learning processes and evoke positive changes in the classroom. These changes do not happen by coincidence, impulse, or routine; they occur upon making informed, evidence-based decisions that are translated into meaningful action. Despite some limitations to the approach, particularly with regards to differences in conceptualizations and difficulty in evaluation, attributed benefits of RT seem to outweigh its limitations. The literature indicates that reflective teaching contributes to a deeper understanding of our students, our teaching, and classroom events. The gained knowledge can be utilized to induce change or improvement in teaching situations. RT is also linked to the professional growth and empowerment of teachers, both individually and collectively. Furthermore, the literature reveals that personal, professional, and contextual factors may either support or hinder reflection. Among these factors are the teacher's training background, work culture, and teacher personality. Considering the gains made by reflection on teachers, students, and the teaching profession, there seems to be a grave need to counter the factors that hamper reflection and promote a reflective approach to teaching. The next chapter, Chapter 3, describes the methodology of the research.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology used in the present research. First, I briefly highlight the context of the study and its intended purpose. I then discuss the main procedures carried out when collecting the data. Next, I provide a detailed description of the participants, the reflective teaching (RT) program implemented in the study, and the three data collection tools, which include the Screening Questionnaire, Teacher Questionnaire, and Teacher Interviews.

#### **Overview of the Study**

Reflective Teaching is being increasingly advocated as a means to enhance teaching and respond to the day-to-day challenges in our practices. While several studies have probed the effects of RT on student teachers during their teacher training periods, few studies gauged the status of RT in actual classrooms and the impact of the approach on in-service teachers. The purpose of this research is to investigate the perspectives of UAE-based ESL teachers on the impact, supports, and barriers of reflective teaching. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the perspectives of participating teachers on the impact of reflective teaching?
- 2) What, according to participating teachers, are the factors that hinder reflection?
- 3) What, according to participating teachers, are the factors that foster reflection?

#### **Procedures**

To recruit candidates for the study, a call for participation was sent out by email to practising ESL teachers at two institutions of higher education: a private university and a government college. For privacy reasons, the institutions will be referred to as University and College in order to distinguish them. The call for participation included an Introductory Letter that briefly introduced reflective teaching and outlined the purpose and main features of the study. Teachers who indicated their willingness to participate were emailed an online Screening Questionnaire (Appendix A) that determined their eligibility for the study. Eligible candidates were instructed to implement in their classrooms a hands-on six-week Reflective Teaching program.

Following the implementation of the RT program, a Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B) was sent out to the participants by email. The Questionnaire elicited the teachers' perspectives on the impact, supports, and barriers of reflective teaching,



based on their latest experience with the approach. Finally, teacher interviews were held with participants who had expressed interest in volunteering for the interviews. The interviews aimed to triangulate the data and elicit further meaningful feedback.

### **The Participants**

**Candidate selection.** Eleven teachers expressed interest in taking part in the study following the call for participation sent out to the ESL teachers. The candidates completed an online pre-study Screening Questionnaire. Following the selection criteria, nine out of eleven candidates were determined as eligible. However, two candidates withdrew from the study prior to implementing the RT program. The withdrawing candidates reported that they had time constraints due to changes in work-related plans and would therefore be unable to commit to the study. The total number of participants became seven.

**Demographic information.** A total of seven teachers, six female and one male, took part in the study. Three teachers (42%) were 40-49 years old, three (42%) were 30-39 years old, and one teacher was below 30. The teachers' teaching experiences varied from 2 to 21 years, with the majority of the teachers (71%) having more than 10 years of experience. The teachers taught ESL at four different educational institutes for adults: three teachers taught at the University, two teachers taught at the College, and the other two teachers taught at private language institutes. Furthermore, five of the teachers (71%) held MA degrees (four teachers held MA in English Language Teaching and one held an MA in English Literature). The two other teachers held non-teaching-related BA degrees and were pursuing their MA in TESOL at the University at the time of the study. Finally, five teachers (71%) were native English speaking teachers, while two (29%) were non-native English speaking teachers. The following table summarizes the teachers' demographics. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain teacher confidentiality.

**Table 1: Participating Teachers' Demographics**

<b>Participating Teacher</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age Range (yrs)</b>	<b>Teaching Experience (yrs)</b>	<b>Degrees</b>	<b>NEST/ NNEST</b>
Ann	Female	40-49	21	MA TESOL	NEST
Robert	Male	40-49	15	MA TESOL	NEST
Carol	Female	40-49	20	MA ELT	NEST
Sally	Female	30-39	11	MA Eng Lit	NEST
Ghada	Female	30-39	15	MA TESOL	NNEST
Alice	Female	under 30	2	BA- MA Candidate	NEST
Sarah	Female	30-39	4	BA -MA Candidate	NNEST

### **The Reflective Teaching Program (RT Program)**

The RT teaching program implemented in this study required teachers to administer reflective teaching tools that included: teacher journals, lesson reports, student journals, student feedback questionnaires, peer observations, minute papers, and audio or video session recordings. The selected approaches were different in nature and elicited different types of reflection. The teaching journals, session recordings, and lesson reports were self-generated information sources (Murphy, 2014) that elicit personal reflections (Crookes, 2003). Further, peer observations gather formative feedback from other teachers, while minute papers, student questionnaires, and student journals gather formative feedback from learners (Murphy, 2014). Each of the journals, recordings, observations, and lesson reports elicit interpersonal reflections, in Crookes' (2003) terms. Considering the teachers' individual differences (Bailey, 1990; Farrell, 2012), teachers were requested to select their own combinations of the reflective tools that they wished to implement, based on their contexts, preferred modes of reflection, and comfort levels with the tools. However, the teachers were encouraged to use the tools as systematically and as repeatedly as possible for maximum effectiveness.

The participants were provided with Information Sheets (Appendix C) that outlined detailed descriptions of the RT program and suggested guidelines for the use of each of the reflective tools. Teachers had the option of using the provided prompts

and samples after adapting them to their own teaching contexts. Additionally, teachers were given the option to discuss the program with the researcher in person, by phone, or by email. All selected candidates completed The Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research Study prior to joining the RT program. The program lasted for six weeks.

### **Data Collection**

Data for the present research was collected using three instruments: the Screening Questionnaire, Teacher Questionnaire, and Teacher Interviews.

**Pre-study screening questionnaire.** The Screening Questionnaire aimed to assess: a) if and to what extent the candidate teachers were familiar with teacher reflection and b) if and to what extent the candidates were actually employing reflective teaching techniques in their practices. The criteria for inclusion involved teachers who did not apply reflective teaching methods on a regular basis.

The Screening Questionnaire, conducted online, consisted of 12 closed-ended questions. The first two questions ascertained whether or not the teachers were familiar with the concept of reflective teaching, as per the definition and principles outlined in the questionnaire. The third question solicited the teachers' views on the impact of reflection on teaching. The fourth question inquired whether teachers reflected on their teaching on a regular basis (without specifying any specific means of reflection). Questions 5-11 investigated the teachers' actual use of six reflective tools, namely the teacher journal, student journals, peer observations, audio and video recordings, and student questionnaires. Questions 1-11 required participants to rank a statement on a 3-point Likert Scale. The available response options were "yes", "no", and "somewhat." The final question, Question 12, checked if the teachers were interested to participate in the study should they be selected as eligible candidates. The responses to the screening questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. Selection of eligible candidates was made accordingly.

**Teacher Questionnaire.** The Teacher Questionnaire was employed after the completion of the RT program. The questionnaire aimed to elicit data that responds to the three research questions outlined in the Overview of the Study. The Teacher Questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended items. The different types of questions yielded factual, behavioral, and attitudinal data (Dornyei, 2003; cited in Burns, 2010). The first question of the questionnaire gathered demographic information about the participants (gender, age range, years of teaching in the UAE,

total years of teaching, degrees held, and nationality). The second question consisted of eight closed-ended statements. The statements were based on the effects of RT as explored in the reviewed literature, with special attention to the findings of the studies conducted by Minott (2011), Good and Whang (2014), Lee (2005), and Krishnan and Hoon (2002). Participants were required to rank their feelings about the statements on a 5-point Likert Scale. The five response options were: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree.”

Besides the closed-ended items, Question Two also provided space for subjective feedback on each of the eight items. The purpose of the open-ended feedback was to allow for the triangulation of the quantitative data and further exploration of the statements. The third question of the questionnaire explored the specific strategies employed by the participants and the number of times each strategy was used during the program. The fourth and fifth questions inquired about the reflective method(s) the participants found the most useful, and the method(s) they found the least useful. The sixth and seventh questions inquired about the supports and barriers of reflection. Question Eight solicited non-guided feedback on the overall reflective teaching experience. The aim of this question was to allow for open feedback, should the respondents wish to reiterate and reconfirm any of their thoughts. The open-ended question also served to provide the respondents with an opportunity to shed light on aspects of their RT experience that were not highlighted in the questionnaire. Finally, the questionnaire checked if the candidates are interested to participate in a teacher interview. Data obtained from the Teacher Questionnaire was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Teacher interviews.** Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three volunteering participants after they completed the Teacher Questionnaire. The aim of the interviews was to triangulate the data obtained from the questionnaires and solicit more in-depth, open-ended responses. The semi-guided structure of the interviews served to allow flexibility and individual diversity among the respondents (Burns, 2010). Each interview comprised of six questions and lasted from 6-16 minutes. As per the participants’ preferences, one of the interviews was conducted via video conferencing (Skype), and the other two interviews were conducted over the phone. The responses were audio recorded following the participants’ consent. The interview responses were analysed qualitatively with an aim to identify emerging and/or recurring themes.

Chapter Four presents and analyses the data collected by the three instruments used in the study, which are the Screening Questionnaire, the post-program Teacher Questionnaire, and the teacher interviews.

## **Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis**

In this chapter, I begin by analysing the pre-study Screening Questionnaire results and discuss the candidate selection criteria. I then examine the data collected from the Teacher Questionnaire and the teacher interviews. Finally, I summarize the findings yielded by the three data collection instruments and discuss these findings in light of the literature on reflective teaching (RT).

### **Pre-Study Screening Questionnaire**

The purpose of the Screening Questionnaire was to determine whether or not candidates were eligible for the present study. More specifically, the Screening Questionnaire aimed to ascertain, first, if the candidate teachers were familiar with teacher reflection and, second, if they actually used reflective teaching techniques regularly in their practices. The questionnaire included 12 closed-ended items, to which teachers were given the option to respond by “yes”, “no”, or “somewhat.” The total number of respondents to the Screening Questionnaire was 11. The results are listed in Appendix D, Table 2.

Question #1 enquired whether or not the teachers were familiar with the concept of reflective teaching, as defined in the questionnaire. Ten out of the eleven respondents (91%) replied that “yes” they were familiar with the concept, while one respondent (9%) was “somewhat” familiar. Question # 2 examined the teachers’ beliefs about reflection. Ten of the participant (91%) said that they believed that reflection improves teaching, while only one participant (9%) believed that reflection “somewhat” improves teaching. Next, Question # 3 required respondents to assess if their own reflection was in line with Farrell’s (2013) principles of RT. Six respondents (55%) agreed that their reflection was “evidence-based, dialogic, links beliefs to practice, and is [their] way of life.” Four participants (36%) replied that they “somewhat” found their reflection to be as described above, while one participant (9%) did not agree.

Following the investigation of the teachers’ beliefs about reflection, Questions # 4-11 examined whether or not the teachers implemented reflective methods in their practices. The methods that the questions addressed were: teacher journals, student journals, peer observations, session recording, and student questionnaires. Question # 4 probed whether or not the participants reflected on their teaching on regular basis, without specifying any particular reflection method. Six participants (55%) affirmed that they did reflect on their teaching regularly. Three teachers (27%) stated that they

“somewhat” did, and two teachers (18%) declared that they did not. When asked about their use of teaching journals on a regular basis (Question # 5), seven participants (64%) stated that they did not keep a teacher journal, while four participants (36%) indicated that they sometimes used a teacher journal. Next, when asked if they incorporated the use of reflective student journals in their classes (Question # 6), one teacher (9%) said “yes”; two teachers (18%) stated “sometimes”, and the remaining eight teachers (73%) indicated that they did not employ student journals in their classrooms.

Questions # 7-8 investigated whether peer observations were part of the teachers’ practices. When asked if teachers were often observed by peers and received peer feedback (Question # 7), three teachers (27%) replied by “yes”, five teachers (45%) selected “sometimes” and three teachers (27%) said “no”. With regards to the teachers observing their peers (Question # 8), one teacher (9%) said “yes”, while four teachers (36%) replied negatively. The remaining six teachers (55%) stated that they “sometimes” did.

With regards to recording their sessions (Questions # 9-10), nine teachers (82%) indicated that they did not audio tape their lessons and reflect on them. One teacher (9%) selected “sometimes” and another teacher (9%) selected “yes”. Furthermore, nine teachers (82%) declared that they did not video tape their lessons, while two teachers (18%) stated that they “sometimes” did. Question # 11 probed whether teachers “administer questionnaires to collect student feedback on the lessons on a regular basis.” Three teachers (27%) indicated that they did. Six teachers (55%) said that they did not employ questionnaires, and two teachers (18%) stated that they “sometimes” did. Finally, Question # 12 checked if candidates would be interested in implementing the Reflective Teaching program, in case they were determined as eligible for the study. All eleven respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating.

**Candidate selection process.** Candidates who did not incorporate the RT tools in their practices on regular basis were considered as eligible for the study. As RT encourages the use of multiple approaches in order to yield different types of reflection and investigate the teaching practices from multiple perspectives, candidates who used only one tool were also considered as eligible for the program. The aim was to introduce the teachers to the many reflective tools that they did not incorporate, and give them the opportunity to explore the impact, or lack thereof, of

these tools. As per the findings discussed above, four teachers did not employ any of the tools in their practices on a regular basis; five teachers used only one tool; and two teachers indicated that they used two tools. Following the above mentioned criteria, all of the questionnaire respondents, except for the two teachers who used two tools, were considered as eligible candidates. Thus, the Screening Questionnaire resulted in selecting nine candidates for the RT program implemented in the study. Due to work-related time constraints, two of the nine selected candidates withdrew before starting the program, resulting in seven participants in total.

### **Teacher Questionnaire**

The Teacher Questionnaire was employed after the completion of the six-week RT program. The questionnaire aimed to probe the teachers' perspectives on the impact of reflective teaching. The questionnaire also gauged the factors that hindered and those that fostered reflection, from the teachers' views. The Teacher Questionnaire included closed-ended and open-ended items, which yielded a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

**Question # 1: Teacher Demographics.** The first question gathered demographic information about the participants (gender, age range, years of teaching in the UAE, total years of teaching, degrees held, and nationality). A summary of the demographic information is outlined in the Participants section in Chapter 3.

**Question # 2: Effects of Reflective Teaching.** The second question consisted of eight closed-ended items that explored the effects of the RT program, based on the participating teachers' perspectives. The eight items also elicited open-ended teachers' feedback on each of the eight statements. The responses to the closed-ended items of Question # 2 are presented in Table 3 below.



**Table 3: Closed-Ended Responses to Teacher Questionnaire**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. RT enhanced your critical thinking and problem solving skills.	1	4	2		
2. RT allowed you to monitor students' progress throughout the course.	3	3	1		
3. RT offered you the opportunity to relate and compare classroom events.	2	3	1	1	
4. RT provided you the opportunity for a deeper self-knowledge.	3		4		
5. RT encouraged you to explore and examine your teaching beliefs.	3	3	1		
6. RT provided valuable insights into teaching.	4	2	1		
7. RT made you feel empowered.	1	3		3	
8. You intend to use reflection in your life outside the teaching context.	3	1	1	1	1

Item #1 enquired whether RT enhanced the participants' critical thinking and problem solving skills. One participant (14%) strongly agreed and four participants (57%) agreed with the statement. The remaining two participants (29%) were neutral about it. A teacher who strongly agreed to the statement explained that RT enabled her to become more critical about her teaching methods, drew her attention to some important aspects of her teaching, and prompted her to revisit and modify her pedagogy. Another teacher believed that RT made her think critically about the teaching materials that she had prepared and investigate to what students respond best. A third teacher mentioned that by reflecting on a particular lesson, he was able to resolve problematic issues that went on in a particular session. Following is his non-edited response:

- In reflecting on the day's lesson, I found that I was able to solve some issues with how the class went that particular day. Once, I tried a new activity (which was a brainstorming session for their research essay topics) and I found that, when I reflected about how this activity worked with the first class I tried it

with, I was able to work out many of the stumbling blocks when I employed the same technique for the later class.

Item #2 of the second question probed whether RT allowed teachers to monitor their students' progress. Three participants (43%) strongly agreed with this statement, and another three participants (43%) agreed, while one participant (14%) was "neutral". The teachers explained that RT made them more aware of the status of individual students in class, the knowledge they have gained after a particular lesson, and the areas that needed to be addressed in subsequent sessions.

Item # 3 investigated whether RT offered teachers the opportunity to relate and compare events. Two participants (29%) strongly agreed and three participants (43%) agreed with the statement. Further, one participant (14%) was neutral about it and another participant (14%) disagreed that RT had this impact. The teachers stated that they found that RT enabled them to see the similarities and differences of how events unfolded in different sessions. One teacher mentioned that RT allowed her to compare the events and outcomes across different sections of the same course she taught. She reported:

- Since I was teaching two different sections of the same course, the reflections allowed me to compare how a specific activity worked with each of the sections. In most cases, the outcomes were very different and in some cases, the outcomes were unexpected. As I wrote in my journal, I often found myself thinking about what I needed to do next. For example, if I felt that a particular student or several students needed more practice on any given aspect of the syllabus, I would make note of this in my journal and incorporate it in future lessons.

Item # 4 gauged whether reflective teaching deepened the teachers' self-knowledge. Three teachers (43%) strongly agreed with this statement, while four teachers (57%) were neutral. The teachers who strongly agreed elaborated that RT helped them identify patterns in their teaching, planning, and classroom management. One teacher explained that RT provided her with a better understanding of who she actually was as a teacher and what she needed to do in order to become a better teacher in the future. Two of the teachers who were neutral about the statement explained that their time and focus were mostly directed "externally," i.e. towards their teaching and their students' reception of it. One of these two teachers stated that taking the time to reflect on her own self may be the next step in her reflections.

Item # 5 enquired whether RT encouraged teachers to examine their teaching beliefs. Three teachers (43%) strongly agreed and another three teachers (43%) agreed to the statement. One teacher (14%) was neutral about it. Some of the teachers explained that they used reflective teaching to investigate whether their teaching beliefs and philosophies were in alignment with their practices. One teacher found that RT confirmed her teaching beliefs, while another teacher discovered some important discrepancy between her beliefs and on-ground actions. She elaborated as follows:

- I did realize that RT provided me with the opportunity of examining or even exploring my beliefs. For instance, I'm a strong believer in having student-centered lessons, yet I discovered that in a few sessions, my lessons were more teacher-centered rather than student-centered. By using RT, I found some differences in my beliefs and my practices, so I'm going to use RT to explore more about my teaching practices to ensure that they are in-line with my teaching beliefs.

Item #6 investigated whether RT offered valuable insights into teaching. Four teachers (57%) strongly agreed and two teachers (29%) agreed that RT offered them valuable insights. One teacher (14%) was neutral about it. The teachers who agreed (or strongly agreed) to the statement found that the insights they obtained from RT reinforced to them the nature of teaching as a dynamic process and as an “inexact science” that requires constant probing and reflection from the side of the teacher and students alike. Other teachers found that the insights ultimately helped them improve their practice. One teacher reported that RT enabled her to make her teaching more student-centered and to deal more effectively with challenging students.

Item # 7 enquired whether teachers felt empowered by RT. One teacher (14%) strongly agreed, three teachers (43%) agreed, while three teachers (43%) disagreed that they felt empowered. The teachers who felt that RT empowered them explained that the approach made them more confident, engaged, and challenged to become better teachers. One of the teachers found the RT empowered her by deepening her knowledge about herself and students. She stated:

- I feel strongly empowered due to reflective teaching, since I have had the opportunity to discover more of myself as a teacher. Moreover, using RT made me realize about my students' issues and their needs, consequently helping me in solving those issues as a teacher.

On the other hand, the teachers who disagreed that RT was empowering mentioned that they already feel empowered with their knowledge as teachers and as decision makers in their practices.

Finally, Item # 8 probed whether teachers intended to use reflection in their lives outside the teaching context. Varied responses were obtained for this item. Three teachers (43%) strongly agreed and one teacher (14%) agreed that they intended to use reflection outside their teaching contexts. However, one teacher (14%) disagreed and another teacher (14%) strongly disagreed to the statement. One teacher (14%) was neutral about it. The teachers who agreed/strongly agreed explained that reflection is essential for personal development and wellbeing just as it is important for professional development. Below is one of the teachers' responses:

- I think the two go hand in hand. People who reflect on their teaching are those who generally question every aspect of their lives and consistently reflect on their decisions so that they can grow as a person. I constantly question myself as a mother, wife, daughter-in-law, daughter, etc.

As for the teachers who disagreed or were neutral about using reflection outside their teaching contexts, their responses addressed the nature of reflection and what is considered to be reflection, as illustrated in the comments below:

- I think reflection happens naturally in many aspects of our lives, but we are not always aware of it.
- If thinking of how my day went before going to bed, then I do reflect every day.

One teacher expressed that he might engage in personal reflection later on:

- I do see value in applying these principles to other areas. Perhaps in later years I will find a way to reflect in my general life the way I do as a teacher.

**Questions # 3-5: Strategies.** Next, the third question investigated the strategies that the participants employed in the study and the number of times each strategy was used. All seven teachers reported that they employed the teacher journal. However, the number of times the teachers used the journals varied between two and eleven times. Besides the teacher journals, four teachers reported that they used the student questionnaire. One teacher used it with the students once, another teacher used it twice, another teacher used it four times, and one teacher used it seven times. Moreover, two teachers used the minute papers. One teacher used it four times and the other teacher used it eight times. With regards to the recordings, one teacher

videotaped her session once, and another teacher audio-recorded her sessions three times. In total, four of the teachers (57%) have used a combination of 2-4 reflective methods, whereas three teachers employed only one method. Table 4 below summarizes the methods used and the number of times each method was used during the RT program.

**Table 4:** *Use of Reflective Teaching Methods*

Teacher	Teacher Journal	Student Journal	Student Survey	Session Report	Minute Papers	Peer Observation	Video Recording	Audio Recording
Ann	11		1					
Robert	4							
Carol	8							
Sally	3		7				1	
Ghada	10							
Alice	2		4		8			
Sarah	11		2		4			3

The fourth and fifth questions enquired about the reflective method(s) the participants found the most useful and the method(s) they found the least useful. As these questions involved a comparison among the methods, they were only applicable to the four teachers who employed a combination of methods during the program. The participants had different views with regards to the most effective methods. Two out of the four teachers (50%) found the teacher journal to be the most effective; one teacher (25%) found the student questionnaire to be the most effective; and one teacher (25%) found the minute papers to be the most effective.

The two teachers preferred using the teaching journals, because according to them, the journals allowed them to express their feelings after a given lesson or situation, keep track of what has happened during the session, monitor the students' progress, and address areas in which the students needed to develop. Further, the teacher who found the student questionnaires to be the most effective tools explained that the questionnaires provided her with constructive student feedback that helped her adjust subsequent sessions and plan her next semester courses accordingly. The teacher added that the questionnaires were also practical and easy to administer. Finally, the teacher who found the minute papers to be the most useful believed that using this method, her students were able to express which aspects of the lesson they

found appealing and which they did not. She said that she could use this information in planning for the next lesson.

Regarding the “least effective” method (Question # 5), two teachers found the teacher journal in its written format to be the least practical due to time constraints. Two teachers stated that the student questionnaires were not effective. One teacher did not find the questionnaires useful, as her students were reluctant to provide detailed feedback. She explained that the students’ reluctance may have been due to their limited English language writing ability. Further, two other teachers commented on the audio recordings. One teacher mentioned that the recordings “could [have been] highly beneficial, but due to time constraints, [the] recordings were not very useful as you have to listen to the class recordings, and later reflect on them.” The other teacher expressed her reservation to using the recordings due to cultural reasons.

**Questions # 6-7: Supporting Factors and Barriers.** The sixth and seventh questions explored the supporting factors and barriers to teacher reflection. Regarding the factors that support reflection, the majority of the teachers pointed out factors related to the teacher’s own attitude, motivation, and predisposition. The respondents particularly highlighted the teacher’s willingness to reflect, desire to advance at the personal and professional levels, commitment to improve their teaching, and openness to explore new ideas and techniques. These ideas are expressed in two of the teachers’ responses below:

- I think it stems from a desire to advance professionally and personally in terms of teaching. I’ve come across many teachers who are not necessarily committed to their students. Without this commitment, I don’t think teachers will go this extra mile.
- First of all, teachers own willingness to reflect is very important in adopting RT techniques. Secondly, having the flexibility of using different RT techniques as part of the teaching process could make it easier for teachers to get involved in reflection, resulting in self-discovery and self-improvement.

Besides the personal factors, two teachers found that contextual factors, namely teacher collaboration and professional reward, can support reflection.

With regards to the barriers that inhibit reflection (Question # 7), the majority of the teachers (six out of seven) found that time was the main restricting factor to teacher reflection. Several teachers expressed their initial intention to try out different

methods which was later compromised due to time constraints. Below are extracts from two teachers' responses to further illustrate these barriers:

- Reflection requires time, something teachers don't usually have a lot of. I would have liked to try out a couple of other strategies, but I couldn't use up valuable class time.
- The most inhibiting factor in my case was time. At times, I wouldn't be able to administer a questionnaire or minute paper because I knew I had to finish a particularly lengthy unit that day and would essentially run out of time.

The next commonly cited factor by the participants was the teacher's own attitude and resistance to change, improvement, and growth. Along similar lines, one teacher mentioned the teacher's fear of discovering certain aspects in their teaching as well as the feeling of being threatened by students' feedback. Below are two teachers' responses to this question.

- The instructors themselves inhibit it. If someone is unwilling to change, refuses to adapt, and is not willing to grow, then s/he will not reflect on anything that is considered best practice in academia.
- What most inhibits teacher reflection is an attitude that one has learned all there is to learn about the profession. Learning is lifelong and ongoing. This applies to one's professional skill set as well.

Finally, the local culture was highlighted by several teachers as restrictive and unaccommodating to the use of reflective tools, particularly the audio and video recordings.

**Question # 8: Open Feedback.** Question # 8 solicited non-guided feedback on the overall reflective teaching experience. Three participants responded to this question. One of the teachers used this space to highlight the role of the students in facilitating or restricting teacher reflection. The teacher mentioned that her ability to reflect was sometimes hindered either by the students' reluctance "to put much thought into their responses" or by their limited language skills to express their thoughts.

The two other teachers who responded to the question reiterated that reflection prompted them to become more critical of their teaching and work towards improving their performance as teachers. One of the teachers shared some of the frustrations she let out on her reflective journal. She wrote:

- When I recently went back to my journal entries, I realized that I may have used the journal to vent and let out some of my frustrations! Below are some quotes from my journal:
  - o “During the 8:00 class, I became very frustrated with [a specific student]!”
  - o “At times, I feel like I’m doing all the work and the students are just waiting for me to give them the answers.”
  - o “Students did well with the vocab task, but when it came to the reading, they were all dead!”

### **Teacher Interviews**

The interviews were conducted with three volunteering participants who completed the questionnaires. The aim of the interviews was to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data obtained in the questionnaires. The interviews also sought to elicit more open-ended feedback and address any issues not highlighted in the questionnaires. The interviews were semi-structured with all three interviewees being asked questions similar to the ones below:

- 1- In your opinion, was there any impact of reflective teaching on you as a teacher and a person? Please explain your answer.
- 2- In your opinion, what factors facilitated your reflection during the study period?
- 3- In your opinion, what factors hindered your reflection during the study period?
- 4- Which of the reflective teaching techniques did you find most useful? Please explain why.
- 5- Do you recommend integrating reflective teaching in our practices? Please explain why or why not.
- 6- Would you wish to continue to use the reflective teaching techniques after the study?

**Sarah’s interview.** When asked whether there was any impact of reflective teaching on the participant, as a teacher and a person, Sarah asserted that there was “definitely a strong impact”. She explained that RT made her more conscious of her actions in the classroom. She stated that she became more aware of the way she delivered her lessons and the way her students responded to her teaching. She also stressed how the approach alerted her to how she actually dealt and communicated with her students, something she was not entirely aware of. She said:

- When I listened to the audio recordings, I realized that when I ask students



questions, my tone was not appropriate. When I was asking students, I felt that I needed to give them more time to answer. I also felt that I didn't have to insist on getting an answer. Also, the way I deal with my students in the classroom... This was something which I wouldn't have realized about myself if it weren't for the recordings.

Likewise, at a personal level, Sarah indicated that she became more aware of the way she dealt and communicated with people. She pointed out that "noticing is very important. When you become conscious of your actions, then you can work on them... consciousness, being aware of what I am doing, is something that has changed me as a teacher and a person".

Furthermore, when asked about the factors that facilitated her reflection, Sarah asserted that it was her own willingness to be part of the study and to know more about herself that was the driving force behind her reflection. Additionally, she found that her students' willingness to get involved and provide feedback greatly helped in her reflection.

As for the factors that hindered her reflection, Sarah indicated that time was the main issue. She explained that she had back-to-back classes, with no breaks in between. Therefore, there was no time to reflect immediately after the lessons, which she thought was the best time to reflect on a particular class. Sarah also highlighted that if reflection were to be made part of a teacher's job, it would have been easier for teachers to commit to reflecting on their practices.

Regarding the most effective reflective tool, Sarah found more than one tool to be quite useful. She thought that the teacher journal enabled her to reflect on how she felt during or after the classes. "It's like writing notes about the lesson you deliver," she described. Sarah also found the exit tickets to be useful, as "you get to know your students' needs better, and you get to set goals for the next lesson". Finally, she mentioned that the audio recordings "can be very, very useful" in providing information about the teacher's actions in class, particularly about "how you talk in class and how much you talk". She recognized however that setting up and analysing the recordings can consume more time than what is available to the teacher.

Furthermore, Sarah indicated that she highly recommends integrating the approach in classroom teaching, in order for teachers to deepen their self-knowledge and simply "to become better teachers". When asked if she wished to continue using the reflective teaching techniques after the study, Sarah confirmed that she still uses

the approach, albeit less regularly than she did during the study. She said that she intends to keep the RT approach as part of her teaching in order to continue to develop professionally. She said,

- So I am using, and I definitely want to continue using RT. I would like to know more about myself and if I am changing and if I am implementing any new techniques to suit my students' needs better. It's a great way of knowing about yourself. I really loved it....  
I think it is a very good way of developing yourself as a professional, as a teacher.

**Sally's interview.** Sally revealed that when she was first asked to engage in RT, the idea did not strike her much, as she thought that she used to reflect on her practice "anyway". She acknowledged however that reflecting on her practice the way she was asked to do in the study made a big difference. With regards to the impact of RT, Sally explained that RT enabled her to find out more about her own actions. One of the areas she noted was the fact that she spoke "really, really quick" when teaching. When she looked more closely into her speech, she thought that even she, herself, had a hard time following her words. Reflecting on the session she recorded, Sally realized that no student would have been able to comprehend all that she said. She mentioned that she only noted this fact upon recording herself and examining the recording.

When asked about the factors that facilitated reflection, Sally mentioned that it was primarily about being open to trying something new and to committing to it. She maintained that "if you don't have that mentality that I'm gonna try something out, I'm gonna be open to this, I'm gonna be adaptive, it'll never happen." Sally asserted that she usually tries to keep herself very open-minded to different ideas and approaches, even if she may not agree 100% with them at first. She added, "if you don't care about improving yourself, you won't do it". Furthermore, Sally found that the flexibility of the RT tools facilitated reflection, given that they can be adapted, simplified, and made more practical.

As for the factors that hindered her reflection, Sally indicated that she felt constrained with time, as she had to plan to reflect, in addition to plan for the lessons she taught. She said however that once you do make the time to reflect, it doesn't have to take more than a few minutes.

Sally found that the student surveys were the most effective tools, as she believed that they were very useful and easy to implement; moreover, they yielded

responses quickly. She also said that the students' responses can be very helpful to the teacher.

When asked if she would recommend integrating reflective teaching, she confirmed that she did. She admitted that she was a little hesitant at first as she thought that she already did reflect, but she found that reflecting the way she did in the study was different. She explained, "just to have something written down and have it recorded, which I can eventually look at it again and ponder on it myself... This is different from having a conversation."

Finally, when asked if she would continue to use RT after the study, Sally said that she definitely would. She noted that reflection has to be ongoing and is essential to address the students' needs. She stated, "You have to reflect to keep up with what the students want, where they are at, and what works for them, versus what you have been doing for the last five to seven years in a row."

**Ann's interview.** When asked if she experienced any impact of RT, Ann confirmed that RT definitely had an impact on her, mostly in terms of building her awareness to her actions in the classroom. She explained that using a reflective journal made her see things that she didn't know she was doing until she went back to her entries. She particularly noted that she was constantly focusing on one or two particular students, who needed some special attention. She realized that it was these students whom she mostly reflected on in her entire journal. Moving forward, she said, "I actually made a mental note to myself... that OK yes these students need attention, but I also need to focus on the others as well. So yes, it did have an impact. It did actually affect me".

Regarding the factors that facilitated her reflection, Ann stated that it was mostly her willingness to try something new and her motivation to do so without feeling forced to do it. When she was first approached to partake in the study, she explained,

- I thought OK this is great, I've never done reflective teaching, in the way you have described it, so I thought OK I'll try something new... it was my own motivation... I think it's because I wanted to do it, I think that helped a lot.

As for the factors that hindered her reflection, Ann mentioned that it was "definitely time". She explained that she had initially pinpointed three or four techniques that she had wanted to try out; however, she never had the chance to

explore that many options as there was a lot happening at work. As a result, she was only able to employ two techniques. Furthermore, she explained that with the teacher journals she employed, she attempted to write her reflections after each session. Yet, she was often constrained with the time she had in between classes. She said, “I didn’t always have the time to do it after class. You know... you need to eat, the meetings... the preparations for the next class... so I think time was the major issue.” Similarly, she explained that time also affected her plan to conduct two questionnaires throughout the term, in order to get the students’ feedback at the start and end of the course. She said that she ended up conducting only the first questionnaire, due to time constraints.

Regarding the most and least useful RT technique, Ann found that the journal was the more useful out of the two techniques she tried, while the questionnaire was the less useful. She believed that the questionnaire may not have worked well due to the limited language skills of her students and their inability to express themselves much in English.

Finally, when asked if she would recommend integrating reflection in teaching, she confirmed that she would recommend using the approach and expressed that she herself would like to try out the other RT techniques that time did not allow her to try. She said:

- I would definitely recommend it. It is something that I would actually love to continue doing, granted that I have the time of course... But yes it was always something that I wanted to try and I can see it is useful and how it would help me in my own teaching. Not only that... probably next time I carry out reflective teaching, I’ll probably try something that I didn’t get the chance to try this time.

## **Summary and Discussion**

**Screening Questionnaire.** The Screening Questionnaire served to select nine out of the total eleven candidates who took the questionnaire. Besides selecting the candidates, the questionnaire revealed some interesting facts. Responses to the first and second questions indicated that most of the teachers had positive perceptions of reflection and its impact on teaching. This finding is in line with Zehra’s (2012) study, which elicited the in-service teachers’ views of reflection. The Screening Questionnaire further demonstrated that although many teachers stated that they were familiar with teacher reflection, the majority of them did not reflect systematically or

employ reflective teaching methods on a regular basis in their practices. Furthermore, the responses to the third question revealed that the notion of teacher reflection and its main principles was vague to many teachers. These findings may reflect the deficiency in pre-service teacher trainings that do not develop in teachers a deep understanding of reflection and do not teach them how to reflect systematically using the variety of reflective teaching tools (Cheruvu, 2014; Farrell, 2012; Good & Whang, 2014; Jaeger 2013; Russell, 2005; Schön 1987; Ward & McCotter, 2004).

**Teacher Questionnaire.** The Teacher Questionnaire responses revealed that the majority of the teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that reflective teaching provided valuable insights into teaching, allowed teachers to monitor students' progress, and enabled teachers to compare and contrast classroom events. Also, the majority of the teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that reflective teaching enhanced their critical thinking and problem solving skills and allowed them to explore and examine their teaching beliefs. These results are in line with the literature on the effects of reflective teaching (Brookfield, 1995; Farrell, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Richards & Lockhart, 1996) and the findings of the studies conducted with student teachers (Good & Whang, 2002; Minott, 2011).

The teachers' responses were divided with regards to three effects of RT cited in the literature. While four of the teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that RT empowered them, three were either neutral or disagreed about those impacts. Similarly, while three participants strongly agreed that RT deepened their self-knowledge, four participants were neutral about it. This disagreement may be due to the fact that self-knowledge and empowerment are long-term effects that could only become apparent after an ongoing, long-term period of reflection and a systematic use of the techniques. A deep self-knowledge may be attained following different phases of reflection, such as those phases outlined by Stanley (1998): engaging with reflection, thinking reflectively, using reflection, sustaining reflection, and finally, practicing reflection. Moreover, teacher empowerment may be experienced when teachers not only discover important issues about their practice, but also take action to address these issues, implement changes, and reap the outcomes of their actions. The six-week period of implementing the RT program may not have allowed all the participants to experience such empowering achievements.

Similarly, four of the teachers agreed that they would use reflection outside the classroom context while the other three teachers were either neutral or disagreed

that they would. These divided results, therefore, are only partially in line with Minott's (2011) study, in which the teachers indicated that they applied reflection outside the classroom. Resistance to commit to an out-of-classroom reflection may be attributed to pragmatic reasons, such as difficulty of implementation of the techniques or lack of time. Also, some of the responses to this question seem to suggest that these teachers may prefer a weaker, more informal form of reflection that does not require systematic data collection and analysis. This preference may be attributed to the teachers' lack of knowledge about and familiarity with the more "formal" evidence-based reflection and the use of its techniques. The RT program may have successfully introduced various RT techniques and enhanced the knowledge and awareness of many participating teachers about reflection. However, the program may not have been sufficient for everyone to develop their understanding of reflection and its processes.

With regards to the strategies the teachers used (Questions 3-5), the teacher journal was the most used strategy by the participants, followed by student questionnaires, minute papers, and session recordings. Further, while two teachers found the teacher questionnaire to be the most effective strategy, other teachers found the same method to be the least effective and the least practical. The same applies to the student questionnaire, which worked well with one teacher and failed with another. These findings confirm the fact that teachers reflect differently and have different preferences of methods and modes of reflection, as highlighted by Farrell (2012), Bailey (1990), Lee (2005), Moon (1999), and others.

Regarding the supports and barriers for reflection, the teachers' responses echoed to a large extent the factors highlighted in the literature. The participants found the teacher's openness to change and commitment for growth and improvement as the strongest initiators of reflection. These personal factors are emphasized in the literature (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2012; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Moreover, teacher collaboration and professional reward were reported by the teachers as positive contributors to teacher reflection. Those two factors were also pointed out by several scholars, such as Murphy (2014) and Crookes (2003).

Conversely, the teachers found that time was the main inhibitor of reflection. They reported that time constraints limited the number of times they reflected as well as the number of reflective methods they were able to combine. Time is a main issue that is often cited in the literature (Burns, 2010; Moran & Dallat, 1995, Murphy,

2014; Stanley, 1998). Moreover, the participants highlighted the teacher's resistance to change and personal growth as a major intrinsic factor that negatively impacts reflection. The teacher's resistance to reflection due to personality and psychological makeup was also addressed by several scholars, such as Akbari (2006), Burns (2010), Farrell (2012), Hatton & Smith (1995), Markham (1999), and Stanley (1998). Finally, several teachers indicated that the local Emirati culture has restricted their implementation of certain reflective methods that may be considered invasive, such as audio and video recordings. This finding echoes the students' resistance to reflection due to culture that Gunn (2010) has encountered.

**Teacher Interviews.** The interviews generated responses with several recurring themes. Moreover, much of the obtained data confirmed the findings of the teacher questionnaires. The three interviewed teachers found that the RT approach increased their awareness of their actions and behaviours in the classroom. One of the teachers discovered that her tone was quite inappropriate; another found that her pace was unrealistically fast; and the third teacher realized that she dedicated most of her attention to a specific couple of students. These outcomes of increased teacher's self-awareness and self-knowledge, reported by the teachers, are in line with the literature on the benefits of reflective teaching as a tool for self-discovery and self-evaluation (Bailey, 1990; Bailey, 2012; Minott, 2011; Murphy, 2014; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Bailey (2012) maintains that "reflective pedagogy refers to the idea that professionals carefully evaluate their own work, seeking to understand their motives and rationales as well as their practice, and then try to improve upon their work" (p. 23).

Furthermore, all three teachers highlighted personal factors, namely the teacher's motivation to improve, openness to different approaches, and willingness to take part in something new, as the driving forces behind their reflection, thus supporting what is found in the literature regarding the impact of the teacher's attitudes and personal predisposition on his/her ability to reflect (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2012; Markham, 1999). Dewey (1933) determines "open-mindedness" as a key personal trait that supports teacher reflection and encourages teachers to accept different ideas and perspectives (Dewey, 1933). One of the teachers also pointed out the students' willingness to reflect and cooperate as a factor that facilitated her reflection. In contrast, all three teachers highlighted that time was the main impediment to their reflection and implementation of multiple reflective tools.

Similarly to the questionnaire responses, the interviews revealed that the teachers had different views and preferences regarding RT tools. One teacher found the student surveys to be the most effective tool, while the other two teachers favoured the teaching journals.

Finally, all three teachers stated that they would recommend implementing reflective teaching in their teaching practices. One teacher maintained that the approach was necessary for the personal and professional development of teachers. Another teacher found that implementing RT is essential in order to better identify and address the students' needs.

### **Further Observations from the Questionnaire and Interview Responses**

The results of the questionnaires and interviews did not lead to clear conclusions with regards to the views of male versus female participants or native versus non-native English speaking teachers. However, further observations may be made with regards to experienced versus novice teachers. It is noteworthy that the teachers with the least teaching experience were those who have employed the highest number of reflective methods. These teachers were also among the most to reflect critically on their practices and report many more effects of RT than some other experienced teachers. The proactivity and readiness to reflect, which the less experienced teachers exhibited in this study, is not exactly in accordance with Jaeger's (2013) view of novice teachers' limited experience as a hindering factor to their reflection. On the contrary, the present study demonstrated that the less experienced teachers may have had a stronger drive to examine and improve their teaching than the more experienced teachers had. This may be due to the fact that experienced teachers may have become more "comfortable" doing things the way they have been doing for quite some time. Stepping out of such routine or questioning long-established behaviours may not have been easy. As Dewey (1933) maintains, "[s]ome are so taken up with routine as to be inaccessible to new facts and problems" (p. 39).

Furthermore, another observation was made when the results were analysed individually. It was quite apparent that most of the negative responses (DA, SD, and N) emerged from the same participant. Upon further examination of the participant's responses, it was noted that the lack of positive outcomes of the teacher's reflection correlated with her limited use of the reflective tools. The participant's responses indicated that the teacher did not engage much in systematic reflection or apply the



processes that cyclic reflection involves, such as reflecting, planning, applying, and revisiting. The responses reveal that reflection was regarded more as an imposed project than a self-directed activity. Below are some of this teacher's responses:

- When asked if reflection offered teachers the opportunity to compare and relate events:
  - o I don't think I need to have a journal for that because I don't have time to go over what I wrote.
- When asked if RT encouraged teachers to explore and examine their teaching beliefs:
  - o Not really it made me feel restricted more, like an additional job that I had to do.
- When asked if RT provided valuable insights:
  - o Not really because I didn't go back to anything I wrote.

The teacher's resistance was also apparent in hanging onto old perceptions and beliefs about reflection, despite the fact that the study provided the definition, qualities, and principles of the teacher reflection that it advocated:

- o If thinking of how my day went before going to bed, then I do reflect every day.

It is difficult to conclude whether this resistance was related to time constraints, the teacher's attitude towards change and innovation, or a combination of factors. It may also simply be that the reflective approach, as outlined in the study, did not work for this participant. This demonstrates that reflection may not really be for everyone. As Markham (1999) holds, "even the most carefully theorized reflective education programs have recognized their failure to eliminate the resistance to reflection in some student-teachers themselves" (p. 59).

Finally, it seemed that a few participants seemed to confuse reflective teaching (in its strong version) with informal, descriptive reflections often made by teachers, usually without engaging in collecting evidence, aligning actions to beliefs, making modifications, reporting changes etc. While personal, informal reflections may help teachers articulate their thoughts, as Farrell (2012) maintains, they may not lead to real changes in teaching. Along similar lines, Killion and Todnem (1991) do not regard reflection as a "passive thought that lolls aimlessly in our minds"; rather to them, reflection is "an effort we must approach with rigor, with some purpose in mind, and in some formal way, so as to reveal the wisdom embedded in our

experience” (p. 14).

The next chapter concludes the present research. It summarizes the main findings of the study, responds to the research questions, and highlights the implications of the results.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications**

This study set out to investigate UAE-based ESL teachers' perspectives on the impact of, supports for, and barriers to reflective teaching (RT). The study employed a six-week Reflective Teaching program during which seven ESL teachers engaged in evidence-based reflection in their classrooms, prior to sharing their views on RT. Several conclusions were made based on the data collected from the participating teachers before and after the implementation of the RT program.

### **Responding to the Research Questions**

To begin with, the candidate selection process highlighted a gap between the teachers' views on reflective teaching and their actual implementation of it. The teachers' responses to the Screening Questionnaire indicated that while many in-service ESL teachers held positive perceptions of reflection and reflective teaching, most of the teachers did not actually engage in systematic, evidence-based reflection in their practices. Also, many of the teachers seemed to lack clarity about what reflection really entails. Furthermore, the study yielded the below responses to three research questions.

#### **1) What are the perspectives of the participating teachers on the impact of reflective teaching?**

Most of the participating teachers highlighted that RT provided them with valuable insights into teaching and allowed them to monitor their students' progress throughout the course. Most of the teachers, also, reported that RT enhanced their critical thinking and problem solving skills and enabled them to relate and compare classroom events. Further, many of the teachers indicated that the reflective teaching program deepened their self-knowledge and provided them with the opportunity to explore and examine their teaching beliefs. Some teachers reported that reflection enabled them to identify certain discrepancies between their teaching beliefs and actions in the classrooms.

#### **2) What, according to the participating teachers, are the factors that hinder teacher reflection?**

The majority of the teachers pointed out the teacher's own personality, desire for growth and improvement, and openness to change as the main factors that initiate and support teacher reflection. Besides the personal factors, professional reward, peer cooperation, and student cooperation were also highlighted as supporting factors to teacher reflection.

### **3) What, according to the participating teachers, are the factors that foster teacher reflection?**

The participants found that teachers' resistance to new approaches and their lack of motivation to change or grow were impeding factors to reflection.

Furthermore, the majority of teachers highlighted time constraints as a major inhibiting factor to reflective teaching. Finally, several teachers pointed out that culture, both their own and that of their students, restricted their reflection and their choice of reflective tools.

Further observations were also made with regards to the differences in practices and perspectives between the experienced and less experienced teachers in the sample. It was noted that the less experienced teachers employed more reflective teaching techniques and reflected more systematically than the more experienced teachers. Also, the less experienced teachers reported more positive effects of reflection than the more experienced teachers did. It was also noted that teachers who reflected less reported fewer effects of the RT program. No observations were made with regards to the views of male versus female teachers or NESTs versus NNESTs.

#### **Implications**

The findings of the study highlight in-service teachers' need for explicit instruction on reflective teaching. Such instruction should ideally be part of the pre-service teacher training, in which student teachers would develop a solid understanding of the concept of reflection and its significance to teaching. Furthermore, a comprehensive training on reflection should provide teachers with opportunities to reflect using reflection-generating techniques that cultivate the teachers' analytical, critical thinking, and problem solving skills. When student teachers are trained to become reflective, reflection is likely to become an inevitable part of their in-class teaching throughout their careers. Dewey (1933) maintains that "while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn *how* to think well, especially *how* to acquire the general *habit* of reflecting" (p. 35).

Besides teacher training, the findings indicate that lack of time constituted a major impediment to teacher reflection. When teachers are constrained with time due to heavy teaching loads and densely packed curricula, their commitment to reflection is greatly compromised. If the quality, not merely the delivery, of teaching is intended, educational institutions need to pay closer attention to the teachers' timetables and reconsider the workload allocated to each teacher. With proper time

management, teachers would be able to integrate reflection as part of their practices and lesson preparations, without perceiving reflection as a foreign, unrelated activity that consumes valuable class time.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that other external factors, such as professional reward and recognition, encourage teachers to reflect. Teachers' efforts may be recognized in several ways. Financial and professional rewards are good incentives for teachers to continue to reflect. Although teachers may benefit from financial compensation, professional recognition is more long-lasting and leaves its mark in the teacher's career. Institutes may also encourage teachers to disseminate their reflective experiences to their peers and motivate them to develop a community of inquirers that values teacher research, reflection, and professional development.

Finally, the findings of the study highlight the influential role personal factors have in teacher reflection. The responses revealed that despite contextual constraints, such as time and culture, several teachers managed to commit to reflecting on their practices. Moreover, these teachers demonstrated an openness to explore concepts and approaches that are new to them, and which they never thought they would be using. This personal disposition stems from the teachers' genuine willingness to grow personally and professionally and to make a difference in their classrooms. On the other end of the spectrum, when teachers exhibit resistance to change and renovation and are firmly grounded in their teaching routines, then no reflective opportunity, reward, or training can make them reflect. It is this intrinsic, self-initiated reflection that, according to Farrell, leads to "the only real, that is, meaningful and lasting, professional development" (2012, pp. 26-28).

### **Limitations**

This study has its limitations. The first limitation has to do with the size of the participant sample. Despite numerous efforts to recruit a greater number of participants, the number of volunteering candidates was not more than 11 teachers. A bigger sample may have made it possible to obtain more generalizable and conclusive results. Also, a bigger sample may have allowed for further observations and conclusions regarding the views of teachers based on their gender, years of experience, and cultural backgrounds.

Second, the duration of the reflective teaching program implemented in the study was quite short. Had it been feasible to extend the period of the program longer than six weeks, the teachers may have been able to explore more RT methods and

reflect more systematically than they did in the present study.

A third limitation has to do with the nature of reflection itself, being difficult to measure, describe, and report. As a result, the data collected for the study, which investigated the teachers' views of reflection, may have been impacted by the nature of reflection. The responses may have also been affected by the ambiguity around the approach that the participants may have had.

Further studies conducted longitudinally over a few terms and with a bigger sample of teachers may remedy the above-mentioned constraints and yield more conclusive results. Also, further studies are needed to explore not only the teachers' *views* on the impact of reflective teaching, but also to assess more tangible / measurable effects of the RT approach, such as learning outcomes, teacher performance, student performance, and student satisfaction.

### **Reflection and Final Thought**

Despite some limitations and constraints, this study attested to the significance of reflective teaching and its positive impact on teachers and their practices, albeit from the teachers' own perspectives. As educators, we owe it to ourselves and to the students with whom we are entrusted to foster in our practices and our classrooms a culture of inquiry, dialogue, and critique. "We teach to change the world" as Brookfield holds (1995, p. 18). If we truly seek positive transformations in the classrooms and the world around us, we must commit to continuous assessment, construction, and reconstruction of our actions and beliefs. We must resist becoming slaves to unexamined theories and practices. We must also resist enslaving our students in the process. Reflective teaching can be that tool that teachers need to transform their everyday classrooms into platforms for ongoing growth, revival, and mental emancipation.

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## Appendix A

### Screening Questionnaire (online)

*Questionnaire: This is a pre-study screening questionnaire that aims to select suitable candidates for my study on the impact of reflective teaching (RT) on English language teachers based in the UAE. The questionnaire assesses if the participants are already aware of the principles of reflective teaching and to what extent they actually use RT techniques in their practices.*

**To better understand the concept of reflective teaching endorsed in this study, please refer to the below definition and principles:**

Reflective teaching (RT) entails the critical examination of teaching practices and beliefs so that practitioners may gain a better understanding of their own teaching and be able to identify and address any problematic issues in their classrooms. Reflective teaching involves instructors “observing themselves, collecting data about their own classrooms... and using that data as a basis for self-evaluation, for change, and hence for professional growth” (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. ix).

**The principles of a reflective practice:** Reflective practice is 1) evidence-based 2) involves dialogue 3) links beliefs and practices, and 4) is a way of life (Farrell, 2013, p.1).

**Please select the answer you find the most accurate.**

1. I am familiar with the concept of reflective teaching as defined above.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
2. I believe that reflection improves teaching.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
3. My reflection on my teaching is always evidence-based, dialogic, links beliefs to practice, and is my way of life.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
4. I reflect on my teaching on a regular basis.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
5. I use a teacher journal on a regular basis.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
6. I ask my students to keep a reflective journal and I read the journals.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
7. I am often observed by my peers in class and provided with feedback on my teaching.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
8. I often observe my peer teachers and provide feedback on their teaching.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
9. I sometimes audio tape my lessons and reflect on them.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
10. I sometimes video tape my lessons and reflect on them.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO
11. I administer questionnaires to collect student feedback on the lessons, on a regular basis.	YES	SOMEWHAT/SOMETIMES	NO

12. If I am an eligible candidate for the reflective teaching study, I would be interested to participate in it.

1. Yes!                      2. No, thanks.

If you answered "Yes!" to the above question, kindly provide your name and email address below.

## Appendix B

### Teacher Questionnaire

**Questionnaire:** Investigating Teachers' Views on the Impact of Reflective Teaching

**Researcher:** Cherine Sinno, MA TESOL, AUS. Email: g00054005@aus.edu

**Purpose of the Study:** This study examines the teachers' views of the impact of reflective teaching (RT), following a six-week period of administering RT techniques. The research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the MATESOL program at the American University of Sharjah. Your participation is voluntary and will be deemed as consent from you to use this information for research purposes only. The questionnaire is anonymous and all collected information will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your participation.

**I- Please complete the background information below.**

1. Gender:
2. Age Range:      a. under 30                      b. 30-39                      c. 40-49                      d. 50 or over
3. Years of teaching:
4. Years of teaching in the UAE:
5. Degrees:
6. Nationality:

**II- Please tick the answer you find most suitable.**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>1.</b> RT enhanced your critical thinking and problem solving skills. Please elaborate.					
<b>2.</b> RT allowed you to monitor students' progress throughout the course. Please elaborate.					
<b>3.</b> RT offered you the opportunity to relate and compare classroom events. Please elaborate.					
<b>4.</b> RT provided you the opportunity for a deeper self-knowledge. Please elaborate.					
<b>5.</b> RT encouraged you to explore and examine your teaching beliefs.					

Please elaborate.					
6.	RT provided valuable insights into teaching.				
Please elaborate.					
7.	RT made you feel empowered.				
Please elaborate.					
8.	You intend to use reflection in your life outside the teaching context.				
Please elaborate.					

**III- Tick below the method(s) you have used and provide the number of times you have used each method during the RT program.**

Method	Tick if used	Number of times used (if used)
Teacher Journal		
Student Journal		
Student Questionnaire		
Session Report		
Minute Papers		
Peer Observations		
Video Recording		
Audio Recording		

**IV- Which of the reflective strategies did you find the most useful? Why?**

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**V- Which of the reflective strategies did you find the least useful? Why?**

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**VI- What factors facilitate or promote teacher reflection, in your opinion?**

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## **Appendix C**

### **Information Sheets**

The Reflective Teaching (RT) program used in this study proposes the use of seven reflective tools: *teacher journals, student journals, lesson reports, minute papers, student questionnaires, peer observations, and session recordings*. The tools/techniques are elaborated on in the next pages, and suggested guidelines for use are provided. Each teacher may use any of the tools/techniques (or a combination of them), depending on the teaching context and the teacher's comfort level. As Farrell (2012) contends, each strategy generates reflection in a particular way, and teachers may prefer certain activities over others. It may be a good idea to try each technique once, if possible, before deciding on your preferred one(s). The more systematic your use of the tool(s) is, the more likely it is to obtain results. The techniques may be employed alone or together with other colleagues.

You are requested to use the reflective technique(s) for a period of six weeks, before taking the post-program Teacher Questionnaire, which elicits your views on the reflective teaching experience. Upon completion of the Reflective Teaching program, kindly contact me and I will forward you the questionnaire. The questionnaire is brief and user-friendly (I promise).

Please be reminded that you have the option to withdraw from the study at any point. Kindly notify me should you wish to do so.

#### **Important Reminders**

As part of the IRB requirements, kindly be sure to complete *The Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research Study* and email it to me, prior to starting with the RT program.

For the reflective tools that directly involve students, such as session recordings and student journals, please be sure to get your ***students' written consent*** before carrying out the activity. If your students are under the age of 18, please be sure you request their parents' consent.

Please be reminded that the data you gather during the RT program will remain yours and I will not use it in my study.

Finally, I wish to sincerely thank you for accepting to take part in my study.

I do hope the reflective teaching experience turns out to be a valuable one to you and your students.

Cherine Sinno

## **1- Teacher Journal**

Farrell (2012) maintains that reflective journals help teachers gain awareness of their thinking and teaching styles, explore their beliefs and practices, and better monitor their practices. Below are some reflection questions to guide your journal entries (adapted from Richards & Lockhart, 1996, pp. 16-17):

### **a) Questions about your teaching**

- What did I aim to teach?
- Was I able to accomplish my goals?
- What teaching materials did I use, and how effective were they?
- What grouping arrangements did I use, and how effective were they?
- Was my lesson teacher-dominated?
- What kind of teacher-student and student-student interaction occurred?
- Did anything amusing, unusual, or problematic occur?
- Did I do anything differently than usual?
- Did I deviate from the lesson plan? If so, why?
- Which parts of the lesson were the most successful? Which were the least successful?
- Would I teach the lesson differently if I were to teach it again?
- Was my teaching philosophy reflected in the lesson?
- Did I discover anything new about my teaching?
- Do I need to make any changes in my current or future teaching?

### **b) Questions about the students**

- Did I distribute your attention on all my students today?
- How did I respond to different students' needs?
- Which part of the lesson did the students find challenging?
- Which part of the lesson they seem to have enjoyed?

### **c) Questions about yourself?**

- What are my strengths as a language teacher? What are my limitations at present?
- How can I improve my language teaching?

## **2- Lesson Report**



A lesson report is a brief, structured list that highlights the main features of the lesson from the teacher's own perspective. The purpose of the report is to help teachers monitor their teaching. Each lesson report form should be prepared by the teacher to match the objectives of the particular lesson or course he/she is teaching. Compared to journal entries, lesson reports are more structured, brief, and focused on the lesson.

Below is a sample report for a grammar lesson (adapted from Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 19):

1. The main focus in today's lesson was:
  - a. Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization etc.)
  - b. Grammar rules (subject-verb agreement, pronoun use etc.)
  - c. Communicative use of grammar
  - d. Other
2. The amount of time spent on grammar work was \_\_\_\_\_ from the class period.
3. I decided on the grammar items to teach based on:
  - a. The textbook
  - b. Course syllabus
  - c. Students' need and previous performance
  - d. Other
4. I taught grammar by:
  - a. Explaining grammar rules
  - b. Using visual aids
  - c. Presenting students' errors
  - d. Using practice exercises from the textbook
  - e. Using practice exercises that I designed
5. When assigning student work on grammar, I had students:
  - a. Study grammar rules
  - b. Practice exercises orally
  - c. Do exercises for homework
  - d. Go over each other's homework or classwork
  - e. Keep a personal record of the errors they make
  - f. Create sentences using specific grammar rules
  - g. Identify and correct errors in writing samples or other students' writing
  - h. Identify and correct errors in their own writing
  - i. Other

### **3- Minute Papers (Exit Tickets)**

Minute papers are simple, easily administered techniques used to get students reflect on the class in no more than a few minutes (3-4 minutes). At the end of class, you ask the students to take out a piece of paper and write down:

- one new thing they have learned in today's class and one thing they are still confused about.

You may focus on other areas, such as:

- The activity they found the most interesting and the activity they found the least interesting
- one thing that was surprising or unexpected they came across in today's class
- the thing they perceive as the main concept of today's class
- their own definition / understanding of ----- (a lesson-related concept) after today's lesson

Minute papers may serve as an ongoing class journal. The responses teachers receive from students help guide teaching and planning for the next lesson. Minute papers also are one way of involving all students to share their thoughts, even those students who do not verbally participate much. Furthermore, this technique may also promote attentiveness in class.

Minute papers can be done every class or on a semi-regular basis. They are also sometimes referred to as "exit tickets". In this case, the students cannot leave the class until they provide some feedback.

#### **4- Student Journal**

Student journals have been recognized as powerful introspective tools in language learning. In addition to providing students with an opportunity for authentic language practice, student journals provide teachers with valuable insights into the students' thoughts, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. Reflective student journals enable teachers to identify patterns in the students' thoughts, monitor student progress, and shape teaching according to the students' needs. Journal entries may be written anytime: on weekly basis, or before / after / during the class.

Teachers need to explain to students that journal entries are different from regular assignments. Entries are not graded and are supposed to be personal, flexible, and informal writing activities. Journals will simply be viewed by the teacher to help him/her provide more student-centered teaching.

You may help your students write reflective and meaningful journals by providing prompt questions and guidelines similar to the below.

(adapted from [www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/ePortfolio/reflective\\_learning\\_journal\\_tips/](http://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/ePortfolio/reflective_learning_journal_tips/))

### **Journal Prompt Questions:**

The aim of the prompt questions is to stimulate your reflective thinking. You are encouraged to record any observations, experiences, thoughts, or feelings that are significant to you as a learner, or even as a person. You may have encountered these feelings during, before, or after a lesson. The below questions are only suggestions to get you started and you do not need to answer all of them.

- What has been discussed today in class? What does it mean to me?
- What do I find difficult in understanding? Why?
- How does what I have learned relate to my other experiences?
- How does what I learned today impact my learning?
- What difficulties have I encountered in applying my knowledge in real world situations?
- How can I overcome the difficulties I have encountered?

### **Tips on what to write in the journal entry:**

- Start off with whatever is on your mind about your learning experience in the course.
- Describe the impact of what you have learned in the course and how it relates to you. Describe your feelings, opinions, and views on both the learning process and the learned material.
- List what you find as your strengths and weaknesses in the course of your learning.
- Make plans for improvements in your learning in the near future.

### **Tips on how to write a journal entry:**

- Write in the first person, as if you are writing a letter to a friend.
- There is no right or wrong way to write a journal entry. Feel free to express yourself in any way.
- Don't hesitate to share your personal experience if that helps to illustrate your point.
- Don't limit yourself to words – diagrams and pictures are ok too.
- Don't be intimidated by grammar rules. It's okay to make mistakes in this activity. Focus more on what to write than how to write.

## **5- Student Feedback Questionnaire**

Student questionnaires are time-efficient tools that allow teachers to gather a large amount of information “about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences” (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p. 10). Questionnaires enable teachers to know more about their students' needs, learning styles, likes, and dislikes, and adjust teaching accordingly. Furthermore, questionnaires are practical, and relatively easy to administer and analyze. They may be conducted several times during the course, as per the need. I recommend using questionnaires for busy teachers who still seek to be reflective and responsive to Ss' needs.

## Student Questionnaire Sample 1

“How Do You Learn Best?”

(adapted from Richards & Lockhart, 1996, pp. 20-21 & p. 75)

- |  |    |          |      |      |
|--|----|----------|------|------|
| 1. In the English class, I like to learn by reading.           | no | a little | good | best |
| 2. In class, I like to learn by conversations.                 | no | a little | good | best |
| 3. In class, I like to learn by making presentations.          | no | a little | good | best |
| 4. In class, I like to listen and use audio materials.         | no | a little | good | best |
| 5. In class, I like to learn by pictures, films, and videos.   | no | a little | good | best |
| 6. I prefer to write everything in my notebook.                | no | a little | good | best |
| 7. I like the teacher to explain everything to us.             | no | a little | good | best |
| 8. I like the teacher to give us problems to analyze.          | no | a little | good | best |
| 9. I like the teacher to correct all our mistakes.             | no | a little | good | best |
| 10. I like the teacher to allow us to find our mistakes.       | no | a little | good | best |
| 11. I learn English better when I study by myself (alone).     | no | a little | good | best |
| 12. I learn English better with a peer (pair work).            | no | a little | good | best |
| 13. I learn English better in small groups.                    | no | a little | good | best |
| 14. I learn English better with the whole class.               | no | a little | good | best |
| 15. I like to study grammar rules.                             | no | a little | good | best |
| 16. I like to learn new words.                                 | no | a little | good | best |
| 17. I like to practice pronunciation of sounds.                | no | a little | good | best |
| 18. When I don't understand a meaning, I ask someone.          | no | a little | good | best |
| 19. When I don't understand a meaning, I check the context.    | no | a little | good | best |
| 20. I am happy to use my English even if I may mistakes.       | no | a little | good | best |
| 21. I think about what I am going to say before I speak.       | no | a little | good | best |
| 22. When I speak in English, I listen to my pronunciation.     | no | a little | good | best |
| 23. I find assignments helpful and they help me learn.         | no | a little | good | best |
| 24. I worry about the difficulties I face in learning English. | no | a little | good | best |
| 25. I believe i will become a fluent English speaker soon.     | no | a little | good | best |

## Student Questionnaire Sample 2

*Directions:* For each of the following statements, circle a number from 0 to 4

- 0 = Strongly Disagree,
- 1 = Disagree
- 2 = Neutral or Undecided
- 3 = Agree
- 4 = Strongly Agree.

Points	Evaluate	Elaborate Please!
The instruction method is engaging and effective.	0 1 2 3 4	
The pace of the lessons is reasonable.	0 1 2 3 4	
The lessons are reasonable in level in difficulty. Most difficult part of the lessons?	0 1 2 3 4	
I use different types of activities.	0 1 2 3 4	
The activities used are useful and relevant.	0 1 2 3 4	
The activity/activities you found most interesting:		
The skills and/or topics you need mostly to focus on:		
I am always prepared for class.	0 1 2 3 4	
My explanation of new concepts is clear.	0 1 2 3 4	
My voice is loud and clear. The tone is non-monotonous.	0 1 2 3 4	
I engage students equally.	0 1 2 3 4	
I am enthusiastic about teaching.	0 1 2 3 4	
I am able to control the class.	0 1 2 3 4	
I provide individual help when asked.	0 1 2 3 4	
Your overall feedback on the course, methodology, teacher, teaching style, and learning experience so far.  <b>PLEASE TURN OVER FOR MORE SPACE</b>		

## 6- Peer Observations

Peer observations may be an extremely useful technique that benefits both the observed and the observing teacher. No matter how attentive teachers may be in their classes, there may be events, reactions, happenings, or certain aspects of teaching that remain unnoticed by the teacher. The main aim of peer observations is for teacher-development. **They should not be conducted to judge or evaluate** (Farrell, 2012). Observations raise awareness to the teacher of events that actually took place and help the teacher gather information about the class. In return, the observing teacher gets to be exposed to the teaching strategies of other peers and may decide on what is best to endorse.

My advice is to try peer observations by inviting a trusted colleague or “critical friend”. You may wish to experience observing the same colleague who would later also observe you. Try to make the experience as flexible and as positive as possible. As a general guideline, observers should remain observers (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). They are not supposed to participate in any way in the class (unless if invited to do so by the class teacher). Another guideline for classroom observations is that they should have a focus. Comments like “I enjoyed your lesson” or “your lesson was great” do not tell the observed teacher much.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) suggest providing feedback on aspects such as the:

- organization of the lesson
- teacher’s time management
- students’ performance on tasks
- time-on-task
- teacher questions and student responses
- students’ performance during pair work
- classroom interaction
- dynamic of group work

Other points of focus may include:

- presentation of new material
- practice of new material
- teacher’s voice
- student talk time (STT) versus teacher’s talk time (TTT)
- students’ understanding of the lesson
- teacher movement during class time
- student movement during class time
- teacher’s control of the class

And the list goes on... Just remember that the main purpose is to receive informative feedback. It is also one way to train ourselves to welcome and value multiple perspectives.

## **7- Audio or Video Lesson Recording**

The previously outlined reflective techniques yield extremely useful information, and most of them are relatively easy to conduct and analyze. Yet, session recordings have one advantage over all of the other techniques, as recordings capture events *exactly* how they happen. There is no room for subjective reporting or analysis in this technique. As Richards and Lockhart (1996) maintain, “the fullest account of a lesson is obtained from an actual recording of it using an audio... or video recorder” (p. 11). Burns (2010) also asserts that it is impossible to record classroom interactions accurately through notes alone. Teachers may decide to video or audio record the entire session or a part of it that he/she would like to observe for a specific purpose.

### **Practicality**

Audio recordings are usually easier to carry out than video recordings. Audio recordings are less noticeable, and therefore may be less distracting to students. However, video recordings have the advantage of capturing gestures, expressions, movements etc. and allowing the teacher to watch the class all over again. Nowadays laptops and mobile phones may decrease the hassle of carrying, setting, or displaying a bulky camera or recorder. So let us make use of technology in order to enhance our teaching!

(Be sure to try out the recording technique beforehand - prior to using it in class).

**Appendix D**  
**Screening Questionnaire Responses**

**Table 2:** *Screening Questionnaire Responses*

Statement	Yes	No	Somewhat Sometimes
1. I am familiar with the concept of reflective teaching as defined above.	10	0	1
2. I believe that reflection improves teaching.	10	0	1
3. My reflection on my teaching is always evidence-based, dialogic, links beliefs to practice, and is my way of life.	6	1	4
4. I reflect on my teaching on a regular basis.	6	2	3
5. I use a teacher journal on a regular basis.		7	4
6. I ask my students to keep reflective journals and I read them.	1	8	2
7. I am often observed by my peers in class and provided with feedback on my teaching.	3	3	5
8. I often observe my peer teachers and provide feedback on their teaching.	1	4	6
9. I sometimes audio tape my lessons and reflect on them.	1	9	1
10. I sometimes video tape my lessons and reflect on them.	0	9	2
11. I administer questionnaires to collect student feedback on the lessons, on a regular basis.	3	6	2
12. If I am an eligible candidate for the reflective teaching study, I would be interested to participate in it.	11	0	



## **Vita**

Cherine Sinno has taught English and Arabic as foreign languages in language institutes for adults for about ten years. Prior to that, she has worked in the field of advertising - copywriting and translation - in advertising agencies in Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. She is currently the manager of a Dubai-based private language institute, in which she combines the roles of management, tutoring, and teacher training.

Cherine holds a BA in Liberal Arts Studies - Women's Studies Option (with Honours) from the University of Waterloo, Canada. She also holds a Teaching English as a Second Language Canada (TESL Canada) certificate. She is in the process of completing her MA TESOL at the American University of Sharjah (December 2016).

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