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EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Reflective Teaching as a Means for Professional Development

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Abstract

This study investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching in the Mekong Delta context. It was a mixed methods study using a descriptive research design with two instruments: a questionnaire and interviews. Eighty-one EFL teachers from different provinces in the Mekong Delta were invited to participate in the study. The findings indicated that EFL teachers' perceptions of the role of reflective teaching were quite high, and there was no significant difference between males and females in their perceptions. The group of senior teachers (with 21 years plus teaching experience) perceived the roles of reflective teaching at the highest level. In contrast, the contrary was seen for the group of less senior teachers. Among the five dimensions of reflective teaching, *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* were the two most commonly practiced, while *critical reflection* was at the lowest level of reflective teaching in practice. Finally, gender and teaching experience were found not to affect the practices of reflectivity among EFL teachers. The study outlined important challenges that EFL teachers generally confronted in reality and suggested relevant strategies to improve reflective teaching practice as a means of professional development in Vietnam and similar contexts worldwide.

Keywords: EFL teachers, perceptions, practices, professional development, reflective teaching, Vietnam context

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Introduction

English has been an integral part of modern education and society in Vietnam and worldwide (Phuong, 2017), and learning English has turned into an inevitable trend if one wishes to be more competitive. Growing schools and English centers have increased the demand for highly qualified Vietnamese EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta. Additionally, Bennell (2014) argues that lacking professional development (PD) can demotivate most teachers. Therefore, to satisfy social and educational requirements, teachers are expected to make professional development their new concern and life-long pursuit (Mesa, 2018).

However, finding practical but effective PD activities in EFL settings has challenged most teachers (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). To achieve this goal, the Applied Science model was first recommended; however, it was rapidly critiqued because it failed to deal with the complexity of educational practice (Schon, 1983; 1987). Therefore, reflective teaching (RT) appeared to be complementary to the applied science model, and there was a growing need for teachers at all levels to reflect on their teaching performance (Pratt, 2002). As a new approach, RT emerged and rapidly captured practitioners' attention. It gained popularity in teacher education for decades because its knowledge primarily stemmed from the voices and insights of the teachers themselves (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). Additionally, its popularity is rooted in its added value to teaching practice and its ability to clarify teachers' thinking (Conford, 2006). RT reflects teachers' teaching performance, aiming to enhance their personal, educational, and career development. In other words, RT is considered a tool for better understanding students' learning process, self-assessing teaching practices, developing responsive curricula, and bridging the gap between teaching and learning (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Schön, 1987).

As mentioned above, RT has been favored for teacher professional practice over the years. However, there is a need for more empirical evidence of RT in practice (Conford, 2006). He argued that studies did not sufficiently provide solid evidence about teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in PD (Conford, 2006). Some researchers claim RT has certain problems, for example, being a somehow redundant practice (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). The superior influence of RT on education has not been proven empirically so the practice is somewhat hindered from being widely disseminated (Conford, 2006). Hence, this study focused on teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in a Vietnamese EFL context, considering the mediating roles of gender and teaching seniority.

Literature Review

Overview of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has received much attention from scholars in second language instruction in recent years (Qing, 2009). Etymologically, reflection was rooted in the Latin *reflectere*, meaning to *bend back* (Valli, 1997). Classroom problems are often reiterated, termed "routine", and they are believed to be predictable and manageable (Hartman, 2010). However, each problem in the classroom is unique and certainly requires suitable actions or responses from teachers. Similarly, Schon (1987) affirmed two distinct roles of teachers in language classrooms: solving problems and comprehending their instructional contexts. Richards and Lockhart (2007) shared a similar view, regarding a teacher as a person who reflects upon institutional factors, teaching approach or method, personal belief in teaching, and cultural values. In short, overgeneralization of classroom problems is no longer accepted in modern educational theories

(Hartman, 2010). RT emerged, and its core tenet is that each classroom shortcoming cannot be treated similarly but needs the teacher's timely intervention (Schon, 1987).

RT practices can be significantly promoted with the help of teaching journals, lesson reports, teaching portfolios, conducting classroom observations, audio and video recording of lessons, forming reflective inquiry groups, and undertaking action research and case studies (Amobi, 2003; Qing, 2009). Richards and Farrell (2005) view these activities as teaching strategies to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, facilitate teachers' self-esteem and self-awareness of their teaching performance, and examine problems that seem neglected in the classroom. These activities eventually highlight what aspects of teaching performance require improvement (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Reflective Teaching as a Means for Teacher PD

RT represents systemic self-assessment of teaching performance through action research and critical reflection on experience (Schon, 1987). It gives teachers great chances to raise their voices, interpret classroom problems under sound theoretical frameworks, and improve their future teaching performance (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). It is teachers' preparation (Cruikshank & Metcalf, 1990) and a conscious attempt to give thoughtful instruction (Richard & Lockhart, 2007). Alternatively, RT as an individual cognitive process includes personal beliefs, subjectivity (Webb, 2000), and emotion (Alison, 2007). Consequently, RT expectedly fosters professional autonomy (Lisbon & Zeichner, 2014) and insights into teaching experience (Hartman, 2010). There is no consensus on the definitions of RT but for the objectives of the current study, RT is viewed as a teacher's conscious considerations, and approach to professional autonomy.

There is extensive literature on different levels of reflection (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018; Larrivee & Cooper, 2006)**.** Reflection can be classified into technical, practical, and critical reflection (Van Manen, 1977), pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection **(**Larrivee, 2008). In common with Van Manen (1977) and Larrivee (2008), Akbari et al. (2010) categorized reflective practices into five subscales, namely practical reflection, cognitive reflection, affective reflection, metacognitive reflection, and critical reflection. The practical dimension concerns the tools teachers apply for their reflective practices. Examples include portfolios, journals, audio and video recordings, and observation. The second dimension centers cognitive aspect of reflective practices, involving reading books or articles on language teaching, participating in workshops and conferences, carrying out research activities, and so on. Affective reflection is devoted to teachers considering students' beliefs, cognitions, personal learning styles, and social living backgrounds, which may affect the teaching method and its outcomes. Metacognitive reflection refers to the philosophy and significance of teaching practices and finding out the strengths and weaknesses of teachers by themselves. In contrast, critical reflection is devoted to discussing social injustice in class, students' surrounding environments, students' fighting against discrimination viewpoints, and the effects of teaching on students' political views.

Viewing RT as a process where educators critically examine their teaching practices to enhance their effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes, Schon (1997) proposed a practical typology. Three main types of RT are reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Reflection-in-action occurs during the teaching process itself, where teachers observe and assess their methods and student responses in real time, making immediate adjustments as needed. Reflection-on-action happens after the teaching session, allowing teachers

to review and analyze their performance, identifying what worked well and what could be improved for future lessons. Lastly, reflection-for-action is a forward-looking approach where teachers use insights gained from past experiences to plan and implement strategies for future teaching, aiming to enhance their overall effectiveness and student engagement. In essence, the three types are not necessarily distinct or separated. However, they can be integral parts of a continuous cycle of reflection that helps educators grow professionally and fosters a more dynamic and responsive learning environment.

Reflection thus has potential benefits for teachers' professionalism (Yassaei, 2011). Initially, RT characterizes an effective teacher as it offers teachers useful insights for performance, setting understanding, and critical thinking (Bean & Stevens, 2002). It significantly supports teachers' PD in formulating rationale for classroom actions, fostering decision-making skills, and facilitating constructive alignment (Alger, 2006). Moreover, RT results in acute skills in observing, analyzing, making decisions, reconstructing, and predicting (Alger, 2006). It also ameliorates the theory-practice link and teachers' self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (Vazir, 2006) and gradually forms objective, critical, and constructive thinking when evaluating teaching performance (Pollard et al., 2008). RT is a tool to examine teachers' beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and values (Larrivee, 2008). As another benefit, RT embraces its ability to face repetitive instructions, and problems regarding discipline knowledge, pedagogical practices, self-confidence, creativity, self-esteem (Núñez & Téllez, 2015), and classroom management (Qing, 2009; Hartman, 2010). Given many potential benefits, RT must be introduced and facilitated in teacher training programs and in-service practices (Nurfaidah, 2016).

Previous Studies

Several studies in various contexts have focused on different aspects of RT. Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018), for example, studied the interaction between teachers' assessment ability and their reflective practice. The study involved 120 Iranian EFL teachers from different institutes in Mashhad. For data, the researchers exploited two distinct questionnaires: an assessment literacy questionnaire (Zolfaghari & Ashraf, 2015) and a reflective teaching questionnaire (Behzadpour, 2007). Findings indicated that teachers' assessment literacy correlated with reflective practice. In other words, teachers' reflective practice could be predicted through their assessment competence. This study suggested the involvement of a wider range of assessment skills and methods in teacher education programs for bettering teachers' reflective teaching and facilitating professional development.

Another study by Gheith and Aljaberi (2018) investigated the variance of teachers' reflective practice and their perspectives regarding gender, number of workshops attended, and teaching experience. One hundred sixty-two male and female teachers working at 10 private schools in Amman, Jordan, were involved in this study. The tool used was a questionnaire centering on the teachers' practice and their attitudes toward RT developed This questionnaire covered a range of RT's functions: (1) creating a student-centered environment; (2) creating a reflective classroom environment; (3) appreciating criticism; (4) self-evaluation; (5) decision making; and (6) openness to professional development. Findings revealed that Jordanian teachers applied reflective teaching at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their gender, the number of workshops they attended, and their teaching experience. However, exceptions could be seen in a low "appreciating criticism". It was inferred that Jordanian teachers were inclined to apply

a learner-centered teaching approach, but they found it difficult to accept feedback from their students and their colleagues.

The study by Gungor (2016) explored the effects of reflective tools on teachers' professional development, self and peer reflection, and their action plans for teaching young learners. Participants are 20 third-year undergraduates (17 females, 3 males, aged between 20-23), who were randomly chosen from the course "Teaching English to Young Learners". The instruments include peer checklist forms for peer evaluation, video-recorded microteaching sessions, reflective diaries, and lesson plans. Findings indicated that reflective practice, nurtured through reflective diaries and video-recorded microteaching sessions, enhances teachers' self-awareness, and willingness to teach young learners. Pre-service teachers showed their need and preference for receiving constructive, detailed feedback on their microteaching performance. Additionally, this study underlined that reflectivity fostered teachers' self-understandings about their strengths and weaknesses in managing the classroom, using target language, instructing, designing materials, and planning lessons. Furthermore, thanks to the reflective process, pre-service teachers' critical thinking, open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and tolerance seemed to be substantially nurtured.

The literature review above suggests that more in-depth, empirical, and contextualized understandings of teachers' reflective practice are needed. Despite being widely accepted in the field of education and teacher development, RT in practice is still in need of further negotiation because of its limitations. Critiques of RT embrace its inability to confront objectivity, rationality (Webb, 2000), cultural, racial, and gender issues (Webb, 2000; Yassaei, 2011), and teachers' lack of open-mindedness and accountability when receiving feedback (Mesa, 2018). It is suggested that RT should be associated with cultural beliefs, cultural values (Webb, 2000; Yassaei, 2011), instructional context, and local characteristics (Halbach, 2002). More importantly, RT should be performed in dialogue among researchers and teachers (Hartman, 2010; Webb, 2000).

Thus, this study aims to identify EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of RT as a means for teacher PD in the context of the Mekong Delta. To achieve these objectives, the researchers attempted to answer the two following questions:

RQ1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of reflective teaching as a means of professional development?

RQ2. How do EFL teachers practice reflective teaching for their professional development?

Research Methodology

Research Design and Participants

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive research following a mixed methods approach. Participants included 81 EFL teachers from different provinces in the Mekong Delta. Their age ranges between 24 and 55. They have been teaching English for one to more than twenty-one years. Their teaching experience helped categorize the participants into five groups for contrastive analyses: from one to five years, from six to ten years, from eleven to fifteen years, from sixteen to twenty years, and from twenty-one years or more. Table 1 below provides demographic summaries of the teacher participants.

Table 1. *Participants' demographies*

	Group	*Number*	*Percentage*
Gender	Male	18	22,22 %
	Female	63	77,78 %
Degree	BA	68	83,95 %
	MA	13	16,05 %
Teaching experience	1-5 years	51	62,96 %
	6-10 years	13	16,05 %
	11-15 years	06	07,41 %
	16-20 years	09	11,11 %
	21 years and over	02	02, 47 %

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Akbari et al. (2010) and Larrivee (2008). The questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale with 44 bilingual statements against which the participants chose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", or "strongly agree" as applicable to them. The questionnaire was piloted with fifteen teachers for content clarity and language accuracy. A minor revision was done to increase the validity and reliability of the final version. The Cronbach's Alpha of the official questionnaire was .849, indicating a high internal consistency.

Part 1 centered on background information with eight items from 1 to 8. Part 2 embraces teachers' perceptions of RT, consisting of 12 statements in four clusters: *RT as a tool for providing information, developing teachers' thinking, developing teachers' skills,* and *addressing classroom problems*. Part 3 encompasses teachers' practices of RT, involving three types of RT (in action, on action, and for action) and five dimensions: practical, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and critical.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were administered to nine target participants, including five males and four females, three with the highest mean scores, three with average mean scores, and three with the lowest mean scores from the questionnaires. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to help participants understand the questions and express their responses clearly. Interview questions were divided into two main parts. The first part was devoted to participants' background information. The second part included seven open-ended questions concerning teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching. Before the interviews, the researchers explained the purpose of the interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes. All of the responses were recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission.

Results

Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Teaching

The results from the descriptive statistics test indicated that the general mean score of teacher perceptions of the roles of RT was fairly high (*M=3.79, SD=.33*). Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the roles of RT seen in the four clusters: information providing, thinking developing, skills developing, and issue addressing.

Table 2. *The roles of reflective teaching*

Clusters	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Reflective teaching as a tool for providing information	81	2.67	5.00	4.10	.42
Reflective teaching as a tool for developing teachers' thinking	81	2.00	5.00	3.97	.61
Reflective teaching as a tool for developing teachers' skills	81	2.67	5.00	4.00	.45
Reflective teaching as a tool for addressing classroom problems	81	2.00	5.00	3.94	.59

Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the general mean score was different from the test value of 4.0. The result was that the general mean score (*M=3.79, SD=.33*) was different from the test value 4 *(t=-5.62, df=80, p=.00).* The finding indicated that the teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT were quite high. This finding was somewhat supported by the results from interviews with nine teachers. It was found that two out of the nine teachers highly perceived the roles of reflective teaching. For example, Teacher 9 said,

"I find them very useful because when we teach in class, we cannot realize whether our teaching is good or not. We must depend on such sources of information and reflective activities; they will help us find good, effective, and weak points in our teaching. Thus, we can change."

Besides, three out of nine interviewed teachers highly appreciated the role of RT in developing teachers' objective and critical thinking. For instance, Teacher 2 said,

"Thanks to my review of my teaching, students' comments, and colleagues' feedback, I have an enhancement in thinking ability, and my critical thinking becomes better."

In addition, three of the nine interviewees claimed that RT helped them find solutions for classroom problems and avoid repeating teaching routines. As an evidence, Teacher 3 explained her points,

"I can solve my problems and I can do my job smoothly. We can have experience teaching other classes in the coming years."

Teacher 9 added,

"We will avoid teaching in the same ways for all courses. I mean we avoid repetition of our teaching practices."

Exceptionally, two teachers mentioned the roles of RT in enhancing students' excitement in learning, teachers' motivation to teach, and teachers' communication with their colleagues. Teacher 3 said,

"For the students, if we can improve, they will feel more excited and learn more effectively, and they will want to learn my subject."

Teacher 4 furthered this point,

"My teaching practice will improve, and I feel inspired to teach. I am motivated to teach, rather than teach and have no chance to improve. I feel I fall into oblivion"

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to verify whether there was a significant difference between males and females in their perception of the roles of reflective teaching. The results (Table 3) indicated that there was no significant difference between males *(M=3.98, SD=.34)* and females *(M=4.01, SD=.45)* in their perception of the roles of RT *(t=-.34, df=35.71, p=.73).* In other words, males and females perceived the roles of RT similarly.

Table 3. *Comparison of perceptions between two genders*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	p
Perceptions	Male	18	3.98	.34	.08051	-.34	35.71	.73
	Female	63	4.01	.45	.05681			

After that, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to see whether there were significant differences among the five groups of various teaching experiences in their perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching. The results of the one-way ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences among the five groups *(F=2.57, df=4, p=.04)*. Specifically, the group of 21 years or more experience perceived the roles of RT with the highest level *(M=4.17, SD=.00)*. The second rank came with the group of 01-05 years *(M=4.06, SD=.41)*, followed closely by the group of 06-10 years *(M=4.03, SD=.47)*. The fourth rank was the group of 16-20 years *(M=3.96, SD=.32)*, leaving the group of 11-15 years with the lowest level *(M=3.50, SD=.47)*. Detailed results are displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics of perceptions in 5 groups*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
G1: 01-05 years	51	4.0572	.40671	.05695	3.9428	4.1716	3.08	4.83
G2: 06-10 years	13	4.0256	.47188	.13087	3.7405	4.3108	3.00	4.75
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.5000	.47140	.19245	3.0053	3.9947	2.83	4.25
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.9630	.31763	.10588	3.7188	4.2071	3.50	4.42
G5: 21+ years	2	4.1667	.00000	.00000	4.1667	4.1667	4.17	4.17
Total	81	4.0031	.42725	.04747	3.9086	4.0976	2.83	4.83

Table 5. *ANOVA of perceptions across experience groups*

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig. (*p*-value)
Between groups	1.742	4	.436	2.574	.044
Within groups	12.861	76	.169		
Total	14.603	80			

Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching

Teachers' Practices of Three Kinds of RT

A descriptive statistics test was conducted to indicate the total mean score, maximum, minimum, and standard derivation of each category perceived by participants. The results of the descriptive test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Teachers' practices of the three kinds of reflective teaching*

Kinds of reflective teaching	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Reflection in action	81	1.00	5.00	3.79	.89
Reflection on action	81	3.00	5.00	4.23	.55
Reflection for action	81	2.00	5.00	4.00	.63

Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the mean scores of the three types of reflection were different from the test value of 4.0. Reflection in action *(M=3.79)* was found to be significantly different from the test value 4.0 *(t=-2.12, df=80, p=.04)*. Therefore, the teachers' practices of reflection in action were quite high. Besides, for reflection on action *(M=4.23)*, it was found to be significantly different from the test value 4.0 *(t=3.81, df=80, p=.00)*. This suggested that the teachers' practices of reflection on action were just over the high level. Strikingly, the mean score of reflection for action *(M=4.00)* was similar to the test value of 4.0. This meant that the teachers' practices of reflection for action were high. In short, analysis of the questionnaire's results revealed that the participants' practices in all three types of reflection ranged from quite high to high levels.

From the interviews, details were revealed regarding their specific practices. For reflection on action, for example, seven out of the nine interviewees admitted that retrospect self-reflecting after a class, a course, or a unit in the textbook became their routine. Teacher 8 said,

"At present, after each unit in the textbook, it is about 6 periods, or at the end of the semester, I reconsider my teaching."

More strikingly, two teachers arranged specific times for reflection. Teacher 2 confessed,

"Once a week, I reflected on my teaching practices. At the weekend, Saturday or Sunday. It is often on Sunday afternoon."

As for reflection for action, two participants said they reflected when problems in class arose and they could not solve them or when they were self-aware of their weak points in teaching, and they thought they could improve in some way. As an example, Teacher 7 said,

"I do it frequently when my teaching practices are not good. I reflect on my teaching performance or when I think I can do something different to help my future teaching better."

Only one teacher, who was working in a university environment and belonged to the group with 06-10 years of experience, reported that he reflected during the lesson to survey learners' opinions about the lesson. He shared,

"During the lesson, for example, I ask students whether an activity is suitable or not, or whether they have any comments for the lesson."

Teachers' Practices of Five Dimensions of RT

Firstly, a descriptive statistics test was conducted to determine the general mean score of the participants' reflective teaching practices. The test provided the minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard derivation of teachers' practices grouped into five dimensions of reflective teaching. Details are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. *Teachers' practices of the five dimensions of RT*

Five dimensions of reflective teaching	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Practical reflection	81	2.17	4.83	3.73	.52
Cognitive reflection	81	2.17	4.67	3.60	.47
Affective reflection	81	2.67	5.00	3.96	.52
Metacognitive reflection	81	2.71	5.00	3.85	.37
Critical reflection	81	1.57	4.43	3.43	.54

The results indicated that the general mean score of the participants' RT practices was 3.72 (M=3.72, SD=.35). Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the mean score of participants' practices was different from the test value of 4.0. The results showed that the general mean differed from the test value 4 (t=-7.33, df=80, p=.00). The findings indicated that the teachers' RT practices were quite high.

Analyzing interview transcriptions led to similar findings. All of the interviewees have reflected on their teaching practices. Two-thirds of them reflected weekly or when they finished a class or a course, whereas a third of them did it daily, after each unit in the textbook or at the end of the semester. One teacher, who came from a university, admitted that he sometimes reflected, but it was not often. Other teachers reported similar reflection practices, for example, Teacher 6 shared,

"I do it weekly because it is an important task in my career, especially for English teachers."

It was found that *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* are the two most common dimensions of teachers' practices. For example, talking about a speaking lesson on *giving and replying to a compliment* (Unit 3, English 12), Teacher 5, who has been teaching English for 20

years at a high school, considered his students' cultural backgrounds as a factor affecting teaching method as well as its outcomes.

"Most students replied to the compliment in a way that they did not accept the compliment. This was probably because of the Vietnamese culture. So, I asked them to freely reply to their friends' compliments. This made the atmosphere more comfortable."

When reflecting as a language teacher, this shared about his strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

"My strength in teaching is my enthusiasm, my weakness is my language knowledge relating to the English I am teaching at high school and the ways I deal with my students. They are young and live in modern society."

Similarly, Teacher 2, who has been teaching at an English center for more than four years, also paid attention to her students' learning styles when she reflected on her lesson about weather. She said,

"My students were happy and willing to engage themselves in the activities. The idea of using PowerPoint slides and videos instead of just pictures has helped me a lot to keep students' attention and interest in the lesson."

Additionally, an independent samples t-test was also conducted to verify whether there was a significant difference between males and females in their practices of reflective teaching. The results (presented in Table 8) indicated that there was no significant difference between males *(M=3.66, SD=.38)* and females *(M=3.73, SD=.34)* in their reflective practices *(t=-.65, df=25.38, p=.52).* In other words, males and females practiced five dimensions of RT similarly.

Table 8. *Comparison of practices between two genders*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	p
Practices	Male	18	3.6649	.38075	.08974	-.650	25.379	.521
	Female	63	3.7297	.34215	.04311			

After that, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the five dimensions of reflective teaching. The results are presented in the Appendix.

Table 9. *ANOVA results of experience groups in 5 reflective dimensions*

Between groups	F	df	p
Practical reflection	.83	4	.51
Cognitive reflection	3.12	4	.02
Affective reflection	1.31	4	.28
Metacognitive reflection	.98	4	.43
Critical reflection	.85	4	.50

The results (displayed in Table 9) showed that there were no significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the four dimensions of reflective teaching. To be specific, there were no significant differences among practical reflection *(F=.83, df=4, p=.51),* affective reflection *(F=1.31, df=4, p=.28),* metacognitive reflection *(F=.98, df=4, p=.43),* and critical reflection *(F=.85, df=4, p=.50).* However, the exceptions can be seen in cognitive reflection *(F=3.12, df=4, p=.02).* More specifically, the group of 21 years or more teaching experience practiced cognitive reflection with the highest level *(M=3.92, SD=.12). In contrast, the* group of 11-15 years experience performed cognitive reflection with the lowest level *(M=3.11, SD=.68).* The second rank came with the group of 16-20 years *(M=3.87, SD=.26),*

followed closely by the group of 06-10 years *(M=3.71, SD=.55)*. The fourth rank regarding cognitive RT went to the group of 01-05 years *(M=3.58, SD=.41)*.
An analysis of the data from the interviews showed similar findings. There were almost no significant differences among the five groups having different teaching experiences in practicing the five dimensions of reflection. However, the 11-15-year-olds frequently practiced affective and metacognitive reflection, whereas the 01-05-year-olds performed cognitive reflection more frequently than other groups.

Challenges and Suggestions

Furthermore, responses from the interviews revealed some difficulties facing the teachers. The challenges were related to external objective sources, such as a shortage of time due to a heavy workload and other responsibilities in life. Some teachers reported a lack of support from the management board when needed.
"… to reflect, the difficulty is the time. Maybe we schedule the time for review, but we have some parties, guests, or other affairs at that time. So, we will lose the time for reviewing and cannot compensate for another time" (Teacher 2).
"Because when we have just graduated from school, we have much time, but when we have a job or when we get married, the time will be limited…" (Teacher 4).
" … when we reflect, I realize some students learn slower than others and we need to meet and talk with the school manager. However, meeting managers is a difficult job…" (Teacher 5).

Perhaps the biggest problems were rooted in the teachers themselves since many of them share their reluctance, low motivation and willingness to reflect, and inability to realize class issues to solve them.
"If I reflect on my own, it will be difficult. Sometimes, I have problems that I do not know how to solve. Of course, at that time, I think of asking other teachers, but the difficulty is that other teachers can rarely realize the problems and the ways to solve them for me" (Teacher 7).
"Sometimes, I am psychologically affected like this. I do not always have a reflecting section after each lesson. I find that the lesson is not perfect, but I feel tired and I do not reflect anymore" (Teacher 3).
"I do not want to spend time learning something new. I am almost fossilized with the ways of teaching and remain unchanged" (Teacher 8).

Other challenges were associated with collaboration and support from peers. While the interviewed teachers recognized the importance of corporative learning through mutual observation, in their realities, this was not carried out effectively due to conservative minds, a lack of constructive and sincere feedback from colleagues, and avoidance due to fears of negative judgment.
"… in observing classes, there are some ideas that I share with my colleagues. But it is difficult because some people are very conservative. When I discuss something new, they do not accept it. They think their actions are the best and never try to change their minds" (Teacher 8).
"Teachers are not willing to be observed. Some teachers give comments for form's sake, but they do not give me sincere feedback. I mean they do not give their true comments" (Teacher 9).
"Normally, teachers think that their peers who observe their classes always take a serious look at their weak points, and they will be very fearful" (Teacher 2).

Together with these obstacles, the teachers recommended some suggestions for bettering the practice of reflective teaching. Firstly, students' comments about the lesson should be taken into consideration. For example, Teacher 5 said,

"My suggestion is that we should create favorable conditions for students to raise their voice, their feedback about contents and activities after each lesson."

Teacher 3 shared similar recommendations,

"We must facilitate students to give their ideas, which we consider valuable. We create a close relationship, and the students will give their opinions. They will reflect on activities and teaching practices in class."

Secondly, RT had to be done more frequently and widely among the English teacher community. To achieve this objective, teachers need support from the school management board and experienced leaders. Collaboration and assistance among fellow teachers are also recommended, specifically through more mutual observing, sharing, and constructive comments regarding their lessons.

"There should be professional meetings among Vietnamese and foreign colleagues, once a month. They should discuss pedagogical issues together" (Teacher 5).

"There should be a person, who is very good at professional knowledge, to organize or lead the groups. If we reflect and we do not have a proficient person to give comments, the group can not develop" (Teacher 8).

In addition, as the effectiveness of RT has mostly resulted from the teachers' efforts to improve their teaching, their endeavors should be encouraged, acknowledged, and rewarded. It was recommended that there should be a specialized department or unit for answering teachers' questions related to RT timely when needed. Lastly, RT should be approached and practiced in an inspiring manner to improve themselves rather than becoming a burden for teachers with worries and pressure.

"I suggest that English teachers apply reflective teaching more thoroughly because it is useful. If the community of English teachers all do reflective teaching, I think the quality of teaching could be enhanced substantially" (Teacher 1).

Discussions and Implications

Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Teaching

In general, teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT as a means of PD were quite high. Participants' understandings of reflective teaching explained these findings. Most of the researched teachers admitted that they knew about RT thanks to their knowledge from university, self-studying, master programs, and in-service training sessions organized by the local education authorities. In other words, most EFL teachers have already possessed a general understanding of RT from several sources. Additionally, most teachers revealed considerable degrees of reflecting practice in their teaching realities. As evident in the study's results, a third of them reflected weekly and when they finished a course, whereas a minority of them did it daily after each unit in textbooks. After practicing RT frequently, teachers somewhat perceived its role in their PD. However, some of them found RT difficult to practice. The challenges were related to time constraints, little support from managers, and low motivation. Other challenges were seen as conservative minds, a lack of realistic comments from peers, and no corporative community practice. These difficulties partly decreased teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching.

In addition, there was not much difference among the teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching. No significant difference was found between males and females regarding their perception of reflective teaching. In other words, males and females perceived the role of RT similarly. The findings of the present study echoed Yassaei (2011), who found that teachers normally perceive a generally similar understanding of RT and its advantages for their teaching performance.

Remarkably, there were significant differences among the five groups of various teaching experiences. Specifically, the group with longer teaching experience perceived the roles of RT at the highest level as opposed to the group of 11-15 years with the lowest level. These differences can be explained by the core of reflective teaching, which centers on teachers' experience of understanding the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching performance (Pollard et al., 2008). Therefore, the more experienced the teacher is, the better the teacher will perceive reflective teaching.

Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching

Teachers' practices of reflection in action were found to be quite high. Their practices of reflection on action were just over the high level, whereas their practices of reflection for action were at the high level. At the core of Schon's (1987) and Van Manen's (2016) explanation, teaching experience is of great importance. The impact of teaching experience on reflection in action is more significant in comparison with the two remaining kinds of reflection (Schon, 1987). In this current study, the number of experienced teachers was somewhat limited, with only 17 teachers having more than 10 years of experience teaching English. Therefore, the level of teachers' practices of reflection in action was lower than those of their reflection on action and for action.

In terms of the five dimensions of reflection, the Vietnamese EFL teachers' practices were generally quite high. This finding was in line with Gheith and Aljaberi's (2018) study which revealed that Jordanian teachers applied RT at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their genders, the number of workshops they attended, and their teaching experience. In detail, it was found that *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* were the two most commonly practiced. Additionally, there were no significant differences between males and females in their reflective teaching practices. In other words, males and females practiced five dimensions of RT similarly. Finally, there were almost no significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the five dimensions of reflective teaching. This meant that teaching experience did not affect reflectivity among EFL teachers. These remarks were a confirmation of Khoshsima et al.'s (2016) study in which the results showed no significant difference among 5 experienced groups of teachers in their commitment to reflective practice in language classrooms. Furthermore, this study agreed with Gheith and Aljaberi's (2018) study, which revealed that Jordanian teachers applied RT at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their gender, training, and teaching experience.

Implications

Implications for Teacher Trainers and School Leaders

Findings from the study showed that EFL teachers' perceptions of the role of RT and practices of RT were just lower than the high level. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the RT practices among the English teacher community. Teachers should be given chances to participate in conferences, workshops, training courses, or professional meetings where they can receive many insights related to the roles of RT and how to apply RT effectively. Moreover, authoritarians

should enhance teachers' awareness and willingness to practice RT through regular meetings where experienced teachers, trainers, and scholars in the RT field share about RT's impact on teaching performance and how to practice RT more effectively. In these meetings, educators should help teachers realize that the more reflective they are, the more effective their teaching outcome will be. If possible, there should be a specialized department for RT to support teachers when needed. Additionally, educators or school managers should facilitate RT practices in a stress-free environment where RT practices should inspire teachers to improve themselves rather than burden teachers with worries and pressure.

Implications for In-service Teachers

As mentioned previously, EFL teachers' practices of RT were only quite high. Therefore, they should reflect on their teaching practices more frequently. Both male and female teachers, regardless of teaching experience, can enhance their frequency of practicing reflective teaching. If possible, RT should be done on action, for action, and in action. Teachers should seek support and guidance to plan in their minds when they will reflect, how they reflect, and which tools they can use to reflect in their instructional settings. Then, these steps should be followed strictly; teachers should consider reflection as their daily task and become more autonomous.

EFL teachers' practices of reflection in action were at a lower level. However, this kind of instant reflection could arguably be essential in the classroom for immediately informed feedback and a finely tuned learning flow. Therefore, the practices of reflection in action should be reinforced with the help of students' insightful and critical feedback about the lesson that they received. It is well-studied that students' comments are a reliable and effective source of information for teachers' reflections. Hence, students' comments, either negative comments or positive comments, should be encouraged and welcomed during every lesson. Thanks to students' comments, teachers can realize the weak points of their teaching practice and adjust timely. Teachers should create a stress-free environment for students to raise their voices in classes and highly appreciate students' ideas for the lesson.

Additionally, critical reflection, which was at the lowest level of RT practices, should receive more attention from both teachers and educators. Furthermore, reflection should be considered an interactive task in which one teacher has to cooperate with their colleagues. Nevertheless, each teacher should be open-minded and accountable for receiving feedback from their peers and willing to give constructive and sincere comments to their peers.

Conclusions

Previous studies on RT required more empirical evidence, especially in the domain of English language education. Following this line of reasoning, the present study was conducted as an attempt to systematically explore EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in their PD. The findings from this current study contribute to more nuanced knowledge of RT practice in the Vietnamese and relevant contexts. Firstly, in terms of EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching, it was found that Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT were quite high. Furthermore, the teachers were aware and well-perceived of the four functions of RT namely as *a tool for informing performance effectiveness, a tool for developing teachers' thinking, a tool for developing teachers' skills,* and *a tool for addressing classroom problems.* In terms of practices, the findings indicated that Vietnamese EFL teachers incorporated reflection into their teaching to a quite high degree. The practices were done across reflection forms and

dimensions. Challenges to the practice tied to the particular teaching context were identified, and the teachers' suggestions were discussed.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the study has reached its aims, it had some unavoidable limitations. First, the younger versus senior teachers ratio was unstable; most were from primary to high school. This may lose sight of the reflective practice of the equally prominent context of Vietnamese higher education. Also, this study relied almost entirely on self-reported data. Thus, it had limitations in providing honest snapshots of the practice in authentic classrooms. Therefore, future studies can overcome these by integrating classroom observations as their research instruments and expanding the scope to include more heterogeneous participants and educational institutions.

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Appendix. *Descriptive statistics of practices in 5 reflective dimensions*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Practical reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.7092	.53629	.07510	3.5583	3.8600	2.17	4.50
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7308	.44378	.12308	3.4626	3.9989	3.00	4.67
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.4722	.59082	.24120	2.8522	4.0923	2.50	4.33
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.9444	.52705	.17568	3.5393	4.3496	3.17	4.83
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9167	.11785	.08333	2.8578	4.9755	3.83	4.00
Total	81	3.7263	.51996	.05777	3. 6114	3.8413	2.17	4.83
Cognitive reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.5784	.41144	.05761	3.4627	3.6942	2.67	4.83
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7051	.54922	.15233	3.3732	4.0370	2.33	4.50
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.1111	.68041	.27778	2.3971	3.8252	2.17	3.67
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8704	.26058	.08686	3.6701	4.0707	3.50	4.17
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9167	.11785	.08333	2.8578	4.9755	3.83	4.00
Total	81	3.6049	.46655	.05184	3.5018	3.7081	2.17	4.67
Affective reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	4.0588	.51943	.07273	3.9127	4.2049	2.67	5.00
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7436	.52974	.14692	3.4235	4.0637	2.67	4.67
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.7778	.58373	.23831	3.1652	4.3904	3.00	4.67
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8519	.50308	.16769	3.4652	4.2386	3.00	4.67
G5: 21+ years	2	4.0000	.00000	.00000	4.0000	4.0000	4.00	4.00
Total	81	3.9630	.52440	.05827	3.8470	4.0789	2.67	5.00
Metacognitive refl.								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.8655	.36635	0.5130	3.7625	3.9686	3.29	5.00
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.9011	.37519	.10406	3.6744	4.1278	2.86	4.29
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.5714	.52683	.21508	3.0186	4.1243	2.71	4.29
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8571	.22588	.07529	3.6835	4.0308	3.57	4.14
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9286	.10102	.07143	3.0210	.48362	3.86	4.00
Total	81	3.8501	.36624	.04069	3.7691	3.9311	2.71	5.00
Critical reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.4398	.48474	.06788	3.3034	3.5761	2.29	4.43
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.3077	.85882	.23819	2.7887	3.8267	1.57	4.43
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.2619	.37706	.15394	2.8662	3.6576	2.71	3.86
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.6032	.38318	.12773	3.3086	3.8977	2.71	4.14
G5: 21+ years	2	3.8571	.20203	.14286	2.0420	5.6723	3.71	4.00
Total	81	3.4339	.54231	.06026	3.3139	3.5538	1.57	4.43