In-Service EFL Teachers' Reflective Practice and Journal Writing Struggles: Action Research at Harar Business and Teachers Education College (HBTEC)

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Abstract	Article Information
The objective of this action research was to investigate the reflective practices and journal writing challenges of in-service EFL teachers at Harar Business and Teachers Education Colleges. This study employed qualitative methods, with a six-week implementation of an action plan aimed at improving teachers' reflective practices. Fourteen in-service EFL teachers were the population of the study and samples were chosen using convenience and availability sampling techniques depending on the types of data gathering tools. The main methods of data gathering tools were interviews, observations, reflective journal writing, and discussions. The baseline data and results from three intervention periods were compared to investigate the improvement. By gathering information using four data gathering sources, the researcher was able to triangulate the study's findings. The results showed that implementing reflective practice improved in-service EFL teachers' professional quality, reflection level, and journal writing skills. Major teachers' difficulties during implementation of reflective practice like lack of knowledge and interest were investigated and addressed during the entire intervention phases.	*Corresponding Author: Eshetu Bekele E-mail: eshebeke22@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a profession is complex and requires highly trained professionals. Teaching is a multifaceted and highly skilled activity that is widely accepted as an occupation (Wallace, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005). English teachers face various challenges in their daily academic activities and are

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expected to continuously improve their awareness and skills. This includes knowledge of the content they teach, their students, the curriculum, self-understanding, and the context in which they teach. Additionally, teachers must be creative, consider techniques that are most effective and align with both their own interests and those of their students.

Nevertheless, the majority of teachers lack an understanding of what should be implemented in the classroom (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). According to these scholars, most teachers do not have the habit of evaluating their daily work by recording it in a diary or journal to find solutions to their own difficulties, as reflective teachers do. Teachers' abilities can be enhanced by connecting them to workshops and training, encouraging them to write journals and portfolios, initiating them to teacher and group support, peer observation, and self-monitoring (Richard & Farrel, 2005).

This study suggests that reflective practice is essential for improving the teaching of in-service EFL teachers. Reflective practice has become a prominent paradigm in the last two decades (Akbari, 2007; Postholm, 2008). Reflective teaching requires EFL teachers to evaluate students' problems and think critically about the teaching process. According to Richards (1990), reflection is a crucial component of teacher growth. He also recognized that teachers can make transition from being guided to directing themselves through self-reflection and critical thinking. Teachers can enhance their capacity for reflection by engaging in reflective practice, which involves self-reflection and critical thinking to assess their daily teaching and learning activities.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) suggest that instructors can engage in reflective practice through techniques such as journal writing, observation, self-assessment, questionnaires, microteaching, action research, lesson reports, and student feedback. By using reflective teaching, teachers can gather data on events that occur both within and outside of their classrooms. By writing journals and analyzing their experiences, they can identify areas for improvement in their teaching processes.

Farrell (2015) explains that reflective practices help individuals examine the complex events and circumstances they encounter in their work by utilizing theoretical perspectives, personal and professional evidence, and considering the ethical and political issues present in their society. Additionally, Baluchzada (2023) demonstrates how reflective teaching is a method that educators can use to monitor and assess their own conduct. Instructors can enhance their knowledge and abilities by learning from their activities, accomplishments, and shortcomings both inside and outside of the classroom.

According to Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001), educators should strive to become lifelong learners who are eager to learn new things, re-learn old concepts, and practice regularly to adapt to changing circumstances. They should also utilize various strategies such as self-observation, journal writing, seeking feedback from students, and drawing from experiences in discussions, among others. However, this way of teaching is not implemented by EFL teachers.

Kebed (2011) discovered that English instructors utilize relatively few reflective tools and that they have very limited experience with journal writing, building teaching portfolios, and doing action research to develop their reflective writing abilities. Teferra et al. (2017), secondary school graduates are not provided enough time or chance to combine their pedagogical training with reflective practice

and advance their careers. The researcher also noticed that teachers had very little experience of writing journals and building teaching portfolios.

According to Moti (2022), the most frequent reasons why EFL teachers refrain from implementing reflective teaching are low pay, instructors' lack of motivation, and supervisors' negligence. These issues are also investigated similarly with in-service EFL teachers at Harar College, where most in-service trainees were not interested in applying reflective practice and reflective journal writing.

Majority of EFL teachers have problem in implementing reflective practice and the skill of journal writing by expressing ideas in detail which would enable them to improve their reflective practice skill. Reflective writing, as to Roux et al. (2012), is a difficult skill, and even experienced teachers require a set of techniques to develop it over a lengthy period. Reflective practice and paragraph writing barriers were found to be obstacles to teachers' and students' successful implementation of reflective teaching-learning and paragraph writing (Fonkamo and Zeru, 2022). However, a continuous journal writing habit can improve the EFL teachers' practice and level of reflection in addition to being helpful in modifying their thinking; explore beliefs into practice (Farrell, 2015).

The researcher planned to carry out this action research to examine how reflective practice is implemented and to assess journal writing difficulties in light of experience with insufficient reflective practice at Harar Business and Teacher's Education College (HBTEC). Therefore, the researcher made the following research questions.

1. What levels of reflection demonstrated by in-service EFL teachers in their reflective practice?
2. What are the impacts of journal writing on professional growth and instructional quality?
3. How strategies are used to improve reflective journal writing practices among EFL teachers?
4. What are the main challenges that EFL teachers encountered in maintaining reflective practice and journal writing?

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivist principles form the basis of this investigation. Williams and Burden (1997) characterize constructivism as a way that supports teachers to develop self-awareness regarding their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. They also highlight the importance of reflection for teachers' professional development and teaching is a multidimensional instructional progression that requires continuous hard work.

Teachers learn primarily from their experiences and backgrounds. According to Schreiber and Valle (2013), Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, developed the social constructivism theory of learning. This theory suggested that individuals actively contribute to the creation of their own knowledge creation, which occurs mainly in social and cultural contexts rather than in isolation of themselves. Implementing social constructivist philosophies is crucial. By doing so; teachers can enhance their profession and level of reflection by utilizing their skills and knowledge from their environment. As educator, it is essential to practice, analyze, comprehend concepts, and assimilate new experiences in order to advance our knowledge of reflective practice and level of reflection.

In their preliminary practices, teachers develop concepts that enable them to understand the things that happen in their daily teaching activity. They bring formal and informal ideas into the classroom, and reflective practice gives them more control and support their profession and level of reflection. Teaching demands an integrated approach. Ahmed et al. (2012) reported that using the same method on each class could become boring for teachers and cause students to lose interest and motivation. When teachers used different methods such as short lectures, case studies, and staging debates, it was noticed that students' role improved.

The hypothetical structure of this study is constructed on social constructivist principles, where the researcher is not always the giver of knowledge, but gave an opportunity for teachers to explore, discover, and compile knowledge. Thus, these reflective teachers' daily activities advance their reflective practice skills and level of reflection. Moreover, through this study, the researcher found that reflective teaching could be the channel through which in-service EFL teachers acquire new knowledge and enhance their reflective practice.

Conceptual Framework

The literature that addresses why many teachers lack reflective practice, and how it can be enhanced were the basis of the study's conceptual framework. Through reviewing the literature, the researcher discovered that teachers who engage little in reflective practice struggle to improve their profession, exposure, motivation, resources, and updating techniques. In response to this issue, the researcher proposed that implementing reflective practice in language classes could support the EFL teachers in their reflective practice. Teachers' level of reflection can be enhanced through various activities such as journal writing. As action research (AR) is a common methodology to support professional growth through reflection, the next step was to investigate the immediate situation that required action research with interventions.

The researcher retrieved the baseline information collected from the in-service EFL teacher's observations, interviews, journaling, and conversations. The researcher was able to organize the first phases of action research with the assistance of this phase's analysis. Planning, acting, observing, and reflecting were the steps in the conceptual framework that the researcher adapted and implemented based on social constructivist principles and Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical action research model. If the outcome remained unclear, the cycle could be repeated. Drawing from constructivist background, the teachers are empowered to create student-cantered learning environments. They are encouraged to take role and be self-motivated in their teaching. In this context, teachers play an essential role in goal setting, providing guidelines, resources, support, and advice for activities.

During this study, the researcher aimed to explore how teachers learn best to use reflective practice and skills like journal writing to enhance their reflective level. The constructivist concept encouraged teachers to incorporate this practice in to their training and interventions allowing them to express their own realities, meaning and knowledge through journaling and discussions. Jonassen and Wilson (1999) affirmed that constructivism differs from traditional teaching methods by emphasizing reality, meaning, learning and knowledge.

Figure 1

Conceptual frame work of the study
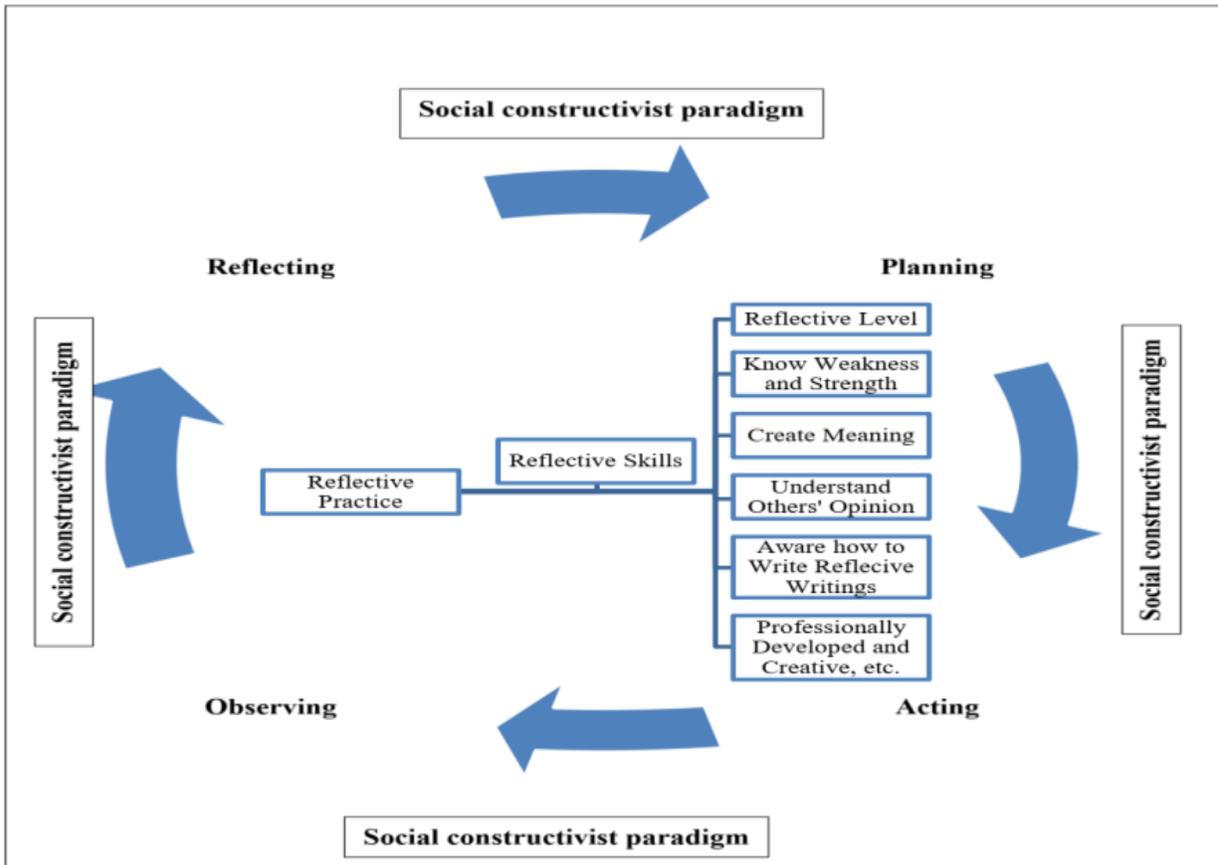
Review of Literature

Reflective Practice

Several terms, such as technical rationality, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, reflection-for-action, and action research, have been used to define reflective practice (Kumaravandivelu, 2003). According to Akbari (2007), the term "reflection" can be interpreted in a variety of ways due to its historical and philosophical influence from various perspectives and ideas. Reflective practice has been described differently by many academics. Therefore, this study aims to provide some descriptions based on its objectives.

According to Liu and Zhang (2014) Reflective Practice provides teachers with a means of considering, analysing, and evaluating their behaviour both inside and outside of the classroom. Based on their involvement in teaching, teachers identify barriers in current practice and then seek out strategies to overcome them through on-going reflection and observation to improve their instruction. Mathew et al. (2017) describes reflective practice is a crucial step that enhances instruction, learning, and comprehension. Thus, Reflection is the practice of critically evaluating experiences in order to gain a better knowledge of one's teaching methods and practices.

Larrivee (2008), the phrases "reflective practice" and "reflection" are used interchangeably in the literature to refer to a

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range of accomplishments, from examining the ethical, social, and political complexities of a particular lesson's design to assessing its various components. Moreover, it is a technique that helps educators think through and comprehend the information, modify their viewpoints, and draw unbiased conclusions. Reflective teaching also entails analysing and appreciating our concepts and activities in order to support private growth and learning. Tosriadi et al. (2018) teachers can evaluate their performance in the classroom by considering their prior achievements. Roux et al. (2012) state that reflection is a method of thinking, analysing information and concepts and experiences in order to derive new insights.

In most cases, reflective practice by itself cannot result in professional development; but, experience and reflection together can successfully lead to instructors' specialized advancement. It takes commitment to apply reflective teaching. Xu (2009) asserts that reflective practice necessitates a commitment, specifically a commitment to accepting and transformation as well as to continuous self-development. Similarly, as it makes deep learning easier, reflection is a crucial learning tool. Both teachers and active learners fully and impartially assimilate new skills. They are capable of identifying a noteworthy experience, putting it into words, applying their thoughts by actively attempting new enactments and transactions in the future stage of activities, and using investigative methods to generate interpretations. This is why the researcher focused on engaging in-service EFL teachers in reflective practice activities like reflective journal writing.

Reflective Skills in Teaching

Always before, during, and after a course is given, reflective teaching entails examining one's core ideas about teaching and learning as well as one's associations with real classroom practice. Reflective educators consider their instruction critically and seek out evidence of successful instruction. According to Di Gursansky et al. (2010), reflection is a learned skill that must be taught as a basis for successful practice, despite the fact that both the skill and the instruction are extremely challenging. Therefore, it needs to constantly advance the common reflective skills over exercise. There are different reflective skills progressed at the time of reflective practice. However, the researcher concentrated on some of the skills that are related to the target of the present study. For example, teachers are expected to practice the reflective skills like: the skill of reflecting content, the skill of reflecting affect or emotions, the skill of reflecting meaning, the skill of paraphrasing, and the skill of summarizing.

Reflecting content is an ability to develop a brief statement that restates content. Reflecting affect or emotion is also a reflective skill used to attach emotions to content from the session. Reflecting meaning is another reflective skill that can be used in a diary to link experience to a deeper meaning system. Since journal writing is a way for digesting experience's raw material to assimilate with existing knowledge and to create new meaning, it is also utilized as a tool to assist with the ascent of the reflective progression (Kerka, 2002). Paraphrasing is ability to a way of reflection used to summarize more session content for reflection purposes. It may include content, affect, and meaning. The last skill is the skill of summary, which repeats more content than paraphrasing. Typically, it is used at transition or ending points. A summary may include content, affect, and meaning. Therefore, the researcher will give time for implementing these skills in every activity during writing their reflective journal.

Strategies Used for Reflective Practice

Teachers need help to develop the reflective teacher personality both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers must employ suitable strategies that might be crucial in carrying out reflective teaching while they are assisting. According to Suphasri and Chinokul (2021), educators have access to a wide range of tools for reflective practice, such as peer observation, lesson recording, reflective diaries, and collaborative learning. These academics contend that a teacher's methods are essential for giving directions, delineating assignments, clarifying the processes students must follow during an activity, and verifying that students have understood. Nevertheless, the researcher thoroughly examined the journals, which promotes self-examination and helps aspiring EFL teachers advance their reflective practice constructed on the aims of the present study.

Journal Writing

Journal is a written response by a teacher or students to instructional methods. Journaling helps teachers discover two things. First of all, it records ideas and events for later analysis. The second is that the act of writing reflectively may inspire ideas for teaching. Writing reflectively serves as a process of discovery in this sense. When one or more co-workers exchange notebooks and regularly get together to discuss them, journaling can be beneficial (Brock et al., 1992). Teachers' reflective level is gradually raised via reflective journal writing, which provides an opportunity to examine a variety of topics linked to classroom involvements, such as personal reactions to happenings that take place in or outside of the classroom.

Watanabe (2016), reflective journal writing maintains the feeling of being extremely personal since it enables writers to express their emotions and deeply held convictions in words and even when a question is posed, it gives them time to think through their options rather than demanding an answer right away. Reflective journals are commonly used to record calls to action, reviews of significant class accomplishments, observations or inquiries regarding subjects that come up in the classroom, and suggestions for more research. Both directly and indirectly, these activities guarantee a positive influence on fostering teachers' reflective practice and reflective journal writing practice.

When you write in your diary, even if you don't have to do it every day, take a few notes to help you recall things later when you have more time to reflect and write. Harris et al. (2010) explain how to start a journal using a double-entry notebook. A double-entry notebook should have two columns: one for observations, or what happened, and another for reactions, or how you feel about what happened, how you might explain it, what questions still need to be answered, etc. Consequently, during intervention the researcher told EFL teachers to employ these strategies.

Levels of Reflection

As per some academics, reflective practice evolves gradually, with the various types of reflection aligning with the various levels of an order (Sonyel, 2013). But according to some academics, the various types of reflection are just distinct settings for reflective practice; rather, they are completely opposed and shouldn't be ranked in any specific order. It is commonly acknowledged that there are several levels of reflection. Van Manen (1977) and Schon (1983) were the first to try to explain the different stages of reflection. For instance, Van Manen (1977) identified three stages at which reflection can be done. These cover the three

categories of reflection: technological, practical, and critical. Similarly, NCERT (2021) specified four levels of reflection. These are descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection.

Akbari (2007) also states that the problem-setting phase also known as the description stage, the instructor chooses which area of the practice or classroom should receive the most reflective attention. With this degree of reflection, teachers can work with the class as a whole, in groups, or one-on-one. They can also give a quick written message or explain it orally. Descriptive in nature, the second degree of reflection travels deeper than the first. Dialogic Reflection, the third stage, shows "stepping back" from the events or actions and proceeding to different levels of reflection, practice, and observation concerning various criteria for judging an incident or action based on other explanations found for the same incidents. Indeed, compared to the first and second levels, this level of reflection is more profound. It occurs when the instructor stands back, considers the actions or incidents that occurred in the classroom, and makes their own decisions about how to approach the problem.

The final step, Critical Reflection, is similarly described by Bartlett (1990) and Wallace (1991). It involves analysing instructional skills as a foundation for assessment and decision-making as well as a source of change. It requires asking why and how things are the way they are, what values they represent, what options are available, and the drawbacks of picking one course of action over another. Another component of this phase is making decisions after a discussion and a careful examination of the situation (Akbari, 2007). This level of reflection shows an understanding of how various viewpoints place and explain events and actions, as well as how

they are influenced by various historical and social conditions. Van Manen (1977) states that discussion of practical action over critical reflection incorporate moral and ethical values.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Action research was utilized in this study to assess the journal writing challenges and reflection practices of in-service EFL teachers. Action research is a method commonly employed in educational research (Clark et al., 2020). This approach is frequently utilized by experts and educators to evaluate and improve the pedagogy and practice of educational institutions. The researcher developed and implemented an action research design to integrating journal writing and reflective practice. The researcher adapted and utilized Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical action research approach included: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Action research designs are rational methods used by people to examine issues they encounter in order to enhance educational practice. Educators reflect on problems, collect and analyze data, and device changes based on their findings (Creswell, 2020).

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted at Harar Business and Teachers' Education College. This specific college was chosen by the researcher due to its proximity and to easily acquire the necessary data as well as the presence of in-service EFL teachers during the study period. Another reason for selecting this college is the insufficient implementation of reflective practice and reflective writing practice in many schools' context. Therefore, since in-service EFL teachers attend this college on weekends and then return to their respective school to teach during the week, the researcher saw this

as a valuable opportunity to collect data from teachers.

The total population consisted of 14 in-service EFL teachers in their second year of the first semester EFL courses at Harar Business and Teachers' Education College during the 2024/2025 academic year. They hold a Diploma in teaching English language and are currently enrolled in the EFL degree program. Creswell (2002) suggests that qualitative research relies on obtaining data from a small number of participants to capture their perspectives accurately.

In order to gather data from various sources, several sampling strategies were utilized. Five samples were selected for observation and interview using a non-probability sampling method known as convenience sampling. These EFL teachers at the college were chosen for the study based on their genuine interest, motivation, and participation during workshops, reflective practices, and reflective writing exercises. Ary et al. (2006) highlighted that an action researcher selects participants based on the study's goal. All of them (14) were also involved in journal writing and discussion using the availability sampling technique. Berg (2004) explains that this type of sampling method focuses on easily accessible or nearby topics.

Data Collection Tools

This study involved qualitative methodology and action research design, so data collection instruments employed were semi-structured interview, observation, reflective journal writing and discussion. The tools mentioned were selected by the researcher based on study's goals and parameters. According to Efron & Ruth (2013), the researcher should choose the data collection techniques that align with the study's purpose, scope, and nature as well as the available funds, time, and desired level of correctness.

Using the above research methods, the researcher used these instruments before and after the intervention to easily compare the change of intervention. Hendricks (2016) says that those who conduct action research can use baseline observations, conduct baseline interviews, or collect baseline surveys prior or post implementing of intervention. In order to determine if there has been progress in the use of reflective practice, including reflective writing, the researcher collected data. Before implementing your intervention, you can also gather baseline data through surveys, interviews, or observations (Hendricks, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were utilized in the study. Most of the interview questions were modified from those in Akbari et al. (2010). The interview was recorded and it was transcribed and summarized for coding and thematic organisation. Also observation, reflective journal writing, and discussions were conducted based on their daily experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. In such a way, the use of different research tools also aided the researcher to triangulate the collected data effortlessly.

Data Analysis

According to Efron and Ruth (2013), data analysis entails several interconnected procedures, such as creating categories, coding raw data to fit these categories, and interpreting of the data afterwards. Consequently, the researcher divided the raw data into a few groupings and coded. Finally, thematic analysis techniques were used. All the data collected were carefully transcribed and analyzed using Kember, et al. (2008) reflective levels and Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. Qualitative data analysis methods involve exploring and understanding non-

numerical data to uncover patterns, themes and insights. These methods helped the researcher to interpret interviews, observations, reflective journal and data from discussion. Hendricks (2016) expresses that the analysis of qualitative data as the process of deriving meaning from sources of data that are open to multiple interpretations. Therefore, to close the interpretation gap during categorization and analysis, the researcher repetitively revised and discussed every data with EFL educators in Dire Dawa University all over again. Moreover, the data from these tools were cross-checked by the researcher for the purpose of triangulation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions: 1. What levels of reflection are demonstrated by in-service EFL teachers through journal writing? 2. What are the impacts of journal writing on professional growth and instructional quality? 3. How are strategies used for improving reflective journal writing practices among EFL teachers? 4. What are the challenges that EFL teachers faced in maintaining reflective practice and journals?

After examining the findings from interviews, observation, journal writing, and discussions, the researcher obtained results that answered the research questions as described in the following section.

1. What levels of reflection are demonstrated by in-service EFL teachers through journal writing?

The researcher asked during interviews and discussion the question, "How do you define reflective practice?" To this question, only two of the in-service EFL teacher interviewees TT1 and TT2, tried to describe reflective practice as a teaching approach aimed at cultivating teaching learning process in the classroom, enhancing their professional skills, and evaluating their instructional efforts. However, most of the participants during interview and discussion expressed that they didn't have any knowledge about reflective practice. Thus, it indicated that most of them have no idea about RP and they were at non-reflective level. Similarly during interview TT3 replies about not having any familiarity of reflective practice like this.

> *'I don't have any knowledge about reflective practice and I didn't learn in teachers college about it. Also I don't know the reason why reflective practice didn't implemented by teachers college.'*

To identify their RP understanding and level the researcher also used the reflective journal writing data as seen in the next table.

Table 1

Finding from reflective journal writing during Pre and While Interventions

Theme	Codes	Frequency						
		Weeks						
		Pr. I.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Non-reflection	- No concept of theory that helps the topic	14	14	13	13	12	12	12
	- Writing without interpreting ideas							
	- Writing without revisions	14	13	13	12	12	10	10
		14	14	13	12	10	10	9
Understanding	- Understanding of a topic	12	12	14	14	14	14	14
	- Journal has limited theory	14	14	13	13	12	10	9
	- Depend upon what was in the textbook	14	14	13	13	12	10	9
	- Theory is not related to experiences, real-life applications	14	14	13	12	12	10	10
Reflection	- Consider and discuss to what has been taught	2	2	6	6	8	8	8
	- Has insights which go beyond book theory	-	-	1	1	2	2	2
	- Theory is applied to practical situations	-	-	1	1	2	2	2
Critical reflection	- Evidence of a change in perspective over a fundamental belief of the understanding of a key concept or phenomenon.	-	-	1	1	1	2	2
	- Critical reflection is occur frequently	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The data from journal writing beginning from pre-intervention and journals written during interventions indicated that some in-service EFL teachers reached to an understanding level, classified as the second level or understanding level. The data also discovered that these teachers offered more significant insights into their reflective processes. Some of the in-service EFL teachers begin to build upon their experiences from earlier cycles which means from pre-intervention phase they tried to understand situations by interpreting ideas but not seeking solutions by relating theories with experience, trying with new strategies, assessing outcomes by considering and discussing to what has been taught, modifying or applying activities, employing assessment-based strategies and begin to describe ideas slightly through their writings.

During interview and discussion the majority concentrated on clarifying a learning task and the difficulties faced, without relating the circumstance to a general concept or theory. One participant, for example, brought up the issue of students arriving late without providing an explanation for their regular

carelessness and failed to analyse the resulting implications in the manner described below:

> *'The students do not always come on time, and this leads to low levels of ability in learning English.'*

During my post-intervention, I observed five EFL teachers in five schools and I got some reflective practice struggles. Especially, at Ras Mekonin and Abdal Primary Schools the in-service EFL teachers (TT2 and TT6) did action research on reasons affecting group work in the classroom, also carried out reading program called 'Reading within a Minute' for students to help each other. They also used reading check list to investigate their transformation though their plan was prepared in Amharic language (local Ethiopian language).

The researcher also observed that the teachers have an exam and assignment question bank, used table of specification, have file for EFL teacher and family communication, have a file that student text book was assessed, have portfolio and Continuous Professional Development plan, and have students result analysis file. These accomplishments might show that there is an attempt to device reflective practice; however, these efforts were at an understanding level because not all the doings were reflected critically through the journal by attaching theories and practices in detail.

Generally, based on the findings of the study, the four-category system developed by Kember et al. (2008) non-reflective, understanding, reflective and critical reflective level; most participants were transferred to the following level, referred to as the understanding level. This indicates that the majority of participants were at the understanding level based on the themes found from their journal and their responses to questions posed during the intervention's. There was no indication of reflective and critical level in any of the participant data.

2. What are the impacts of journal writing on professional growth and instructional quality?

It was noted that engaging in journal writing contributed to sharpening reflective practice and the level of the in-service EFL teachers' professional growth. However, journal writing not only emphasizes their growth of reflection practice and level, but also stresses the necessity of ongoing professional development and educational quality. During interview, the participants expressed an aspiration to enhance their teaching proficiencies. Taggart and Wilson (2005) verify that teachers can realize the concepts, contexts, and theoretical underpinnings of classroom practices by reflecting from an incidental position. Most students told me about advantage of reflective practice. For example one participant (TT2) replied as follows.

> *'Reflective practice would enable teachers to assess both effective and ineffective activities conducted in the classroom.'*

Another participant (TT12) while discussion stated the benefit of journal writing in that it permitted them to describe what they had in mind and in that it was something very good to share and advance their knowledge and experiences. According to Zeichner & Liston (1996), teachers' growth was reduced when they did not have a social gathering to debate their ideas and the concept of reflection as a social practice. Along the way they have been writing journal and discussed in groups, they conveyed the culture of assisting and collaborating with each other. Thus, it helped them to professional growth and to enhance instructional quality.

Most in-service EFL teachers stated that their reflective skills had significantly improved during each of their application phase. One participant (TT13) noted that:

> *'This experience promoted greater self-confidence for me and the acquisition of new skills, particularly in oral and written reflection.'*

Another participant during post interview (TT5) also stressed that:

> *'It enhanced my teaching performance and cultivated my personality both orally and in writing as it was poor. However, reflective practice allowed me to improve my reflections continuously and it enhanced my teaching performance and professional personality.*

Furthermore, one participant mentioned on the value of the experience stating that while he had learned various strategies and approaches in college, nothing he found compared to the practical experience of engaging in oral and written reflection. During the discussion, another participant (TT12) pointed out the progress of his writing skills through writing journal in the following way:

> *'I firmly believe that journal writing helped me to advance my writing skill because I begin to demonstrate what I learned in my everyday journal writing.'*

The in-service EFL teachers also acknowledged a shift towards a more student-centered approach in their teaching practices. They began to prioritize student learning, showing a growing sense of accountability and specialized character as educators.

3. How are strategies used for improving reflective journal writing practices among EFL teachers?

Reflective strategies play a significant role in improving journal writing practices among in-service EFL teachers. However, journal writing alone does not solely emphasize reflective practice growth; different strategies also play important roles in facilitating improvement. For example, during a discussion, one participant (TT3) highlighted the benefits of strategies used during interventions, stating:

> *To enhance my journal writing, the focus given for implementing different strategies during the intervention helped me as a guide to bring change than the pre-intervention phase.*

Another participant (TT1) said in the same way the advantage of strategies in promoting his journal writing practice as follows:

> *'Engaging my-self in reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action as a strategy allowed me to deepen my professional knowledge, to improve my professional quality, to describe what I have in mind, and to identify my weakness and strength; along the way I have been developing my journal writing practices in un expected way.'*

During the discussion, one participant (TT5) also pointed out the value of discussion like this:

> *'Ongoing discussions between colleagues and researcher on revisiting the past journals and feedback with constructive criticism during intervention helped me to get different perspectives and to get areas of improvement in my written reflection.'*

Journal writing practice by itself is used as a strategy to develop the journal writing process. In line with this, one of interviewee (TT2) pointed out the enhancement of his

journal writing practice through constant journal writing in the following way:

> *'Through continuous journal writing, I began to clearly describe the event or experience I am reflecting on, tried to analyze, identify my weakness and strength, and tried to connect theories and concepts.'*

Based on the aforementioned findings about reflective strategies, it can be concluded that the majority of teachers stated that using various reflective journal writing techniques helped them to become more proficient reflective journal writers.

4. What were the key challenges that EFL teachers faced in maintaining reflective practice and journals?

The data investigated in-service EFL teachers' difficulties encountered when writing their reflective journals. One participant *(TT1)* whose paper categorized as 'understanding level', has this to mention:

> *'I could not express all what I wanted to express because my English is not good enough. Writing is hard for me. And I don't have time and interest to write what I did daily.'*

Other participants describe the problem of large class size. For instance, (TT1) stated during post-interview that:

> *'The large class size hindered me from implementing different reflective practice activities.*

Therefore, language deficiencies and large class size can hinder teachers from preparing and writing their journals, as it requires time for thinking and analyzing the entire EFL classroom situation. Reflective journal writing requires different skills, using appropriate pronouns, maintaining a sequence of action, and using tenses correctly. Participants in this study indicated in their journals and discussions that their language competence, writing abilities, and capacity for in-depth analysis of events both within and outside of the classroom were their main areas of difficulty.

Journal writing could help the teachers to analyze day-to-day outcomes, attitudes, and changes needed to take (McDonough, 1994). However, based on finding from interview and discussion some EFL teachers thought that writing a journal wasted their time because it needed its own time to write and to revise. As four of the participants stated in their journal, they understood its value, but they were not willing to write constantly because of time constraint.

For example, one participant (TT1) spoke regarding late-coming students' issues, as they are a hindrance for implementing reflective practice by linking it with lower learning quality and with socio-economic backgrounds. A significant theme that emerged was the students' less learning quality due to latecomers in their school. This participant also told me what they did with school and kebele officials to address this issue. The solution he mentioned includes raising awareness and implementing a school feeding program. Based on the information provided, the researcher concluded that the teacher has some understanding, but not complete grasp of critical reflection, as he was unable to toughly to connect theoretical evidence to these issues.

In addition, the finding shows that EFL teachers were not encouraged by concerned bodies and colleagues to engage in reflective practices, which would help them to be interactive professionals in their school. However, Schön (1987) remarked that significant involvement is depending upon people's level of empowerment and capacity to

freely speak and connect with one another in a positive way.

Generally, the data from interviews, observation, journals, and discussion tell that most teachers offered more significant insights into their reflective processes. They built upon their experiences from earlier cycles by carefully accepting situations, seeking solutions, testing with new strategies, assessing outcomes, modifying activities, and employing strategies that improve their reflective practice and journal writing skills. Furthermore, the in-service EFL teachers demonstrated the ability to reflect on their teaching practices by considering various perspectives, including those of peers, researchers, and educational authorities. Nonetheless, there was limited indication of these teachers utilizing reflective and critical analysis to describe and realize those factors influencing their reflective practices and journal entries.

DISCUSSION

The researcher was motivated to implement this study in order to familiarize in-service EFL teachers with reflective practice and to investigate their struggle with journal writing. In their study, Roux et al. (2012) assert that it is crucial for EFL teacher educators to understand the specific circumstances and settings that either support or impede the level of reflection that helps students gain new insights and understanding. These components were intended to actively engage in-service EFL teachers in the reflective process thereby enhancing their level of reflection.

A thematic analysis conducted throughout each cycle of this action research enabled a focused examination of the intervention's impact, particularly regarding the aspects of reflective practice and how the in-service teachers struggled with reflective journals both in and out of school. According to Wabule

(2017), as teachers' responsibilities extend beyond the classroom to include activities outside of the school, the reflective process for them is on-going, cyclical, and has no end.

At the start of this study, the in-service EFL teachers focused on various aspects of their teaching practice, such as classroom dynamics, students, lesson planning, instructional materials, and activities. This meant that their reflections covered a wide range of topics. The researcher guided them by creating a relaxed environment, providing immediate feedback, and encouraging them to narrow their focus to specific elements, to articulate more detailed insights, indicating growth in their reflective practice skill. According to Wabule (2019), obtaining positive will is related to recognizing the importance of the work, letting them succeed and grow, and giving them feedback that acknowledged their contribution.

During the pre-intervention phase of this action research, the in-service EFL teachers primarily provided general descriptions of their emotional experiences, both positive and negative as well as their interactions with peers. In contrast, as moved from the second to the third cycles, their reflections increasingly centered on feelings of achievement and deeper understanding of their professional identities. The study also examined the challenges of critically reflecting while maintaining a reflective journal. According to Roux et al. (2012), none of the participants attained the level of "critical reflection" in spite of the training they had received.

During the intervention period, only some of the in-service EFL teachers were able to progress from the level of "non-reflection" to the level of "understanding". This finding suggests that significant improvements in reflective practice skills can be achieved in a short period of time. It can be inferred that most

number of participants could benefit from enhanced reflective practice skills through sustained and on-going action research.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study revealed the challenges faced by the in-service EFL teachers at Harar business and teachers Education College in implementing reflective practice, reflective levels struggles with journal writing, and hurdles they encountered. I believe that this experience was beneficial for these teachers to enhance their profession. In order to become reflective and successful educators they require adequate time and professional development training to support their efforts. In-service EFL teachers also need training to understand various reflective practice models to effectively utilize them. The researcher discussed various techniques for implementing reflective practice and addressing journal writing struggles.

According to Kizilcik and Daloglu (2018), effective reflection shows a variety of signs of the thought process and an understanding of the tasks' advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, it connects new information to existing knowledge and experiences and tracks down potential causes of issues and factors that may have led to successful performance. When faced with a challenge, instructors critically examine the reasoning that led them to the solution or opportunity, and they may reframe action plans, perceptions of phenomena, or approaches to problem framing in the process (Schön, 1987). However, most teachers who had taken part in reflective practice didn't fully achieve the desires of reflective practice and have found them to be in supportive environments.

To support EFL teachers during the intervention, the researcher provided resources, enough time, and encouraged them to implement different strategies and facilitated

conditions to have free discussions. As to the advice of Friedman et al. (2014), the discussions promoted a wide learning culture characterized by openness, inquiry, and dialogue.

Based on the above findings, this research examined the various elements of reflective practice that in-service EFL teachers prioritized as well as tracing the shifts in their perspectives that emerged during their reflective processes. According to Jasper (2013), reflective processes allow us to focus on different features of our experiences and view the world in multiple ways. Utilizing various reflective strategies and thoughtful activities assisted teachers to improve their reflective journal writing practice. These tactics, included structuring reflection, involving teachers in various forms of reflection (reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action), dialogue, and continuous journal writing.

The study concluded that reflective practice is essential for the professional development of in-service EFL teachers as it contributes to their academic achievement, growth in reflective abilities and improvement in journal writing. However, the researcher also identified obstacles that individuals encountered. The main obstacles to implementing reflective practice and journal writing were a lack of time, of motivation, and large class size.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Eshetu Bekele: Conceptualization, methodology, Investigation and writing

Adinew Tadesse: Visulization, validation and supervision, review and editing

Abera Admasu: Validation. Supervision, review and editing

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