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Investigating EFL Teachers' Reflective Levels in Reading Comprehension Instruction Through Journal Writing

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Abstract

This study examines the levels of reflection that teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reach when writing about their reading comprehension instruction. Ten EFL teachers working in Jordanian public schools were purposively selected and asked to keep reflective journals. Their entries were analyzed qualitatively using Lane et al.'s (2014) framework, which grades the depth and quality of reflection, and the presence and frequency of descriptive, evaluative, reflective, and imaginative levels in the entries were examined. Descriptive and evaluative reflections predominated, whereas participants engaged only minimally at the reflective and imaginative levels. These results suggest that the participants tended to document instructional routines rather than analyze them critically or propose alternative practices, a pattern that may reflect curriculum constraints and linguistic challenges. The study is original in examining EFL teachers' reflective levels in reading comprehension instruction specifically, whereas previous studies in the Jordanian context have addressed all components of the lesson within a single investigation. The findings point to the need for focused reflective practices that could improve teachers' performance and learners' outcomes in diverse EFL contexts, and in this way they contribute to the development of reflective pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has been marked by profound societal change, driven to a considerable extent by the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) (Rudolph et al., 2023). This shift requires individuals, especially those in developing countries such as Jordan, to keep pace with ongoing innovation. Because English is the predominant language of AI-related research and discourse, raising EFL proficiency has become a priority in these settings. To meet this challenge, EFL teachers need instructional strategies that build, in measurable ways, the linguistic competencies students require to engage with rapidly developing global high-tech industries (Thao et al., 2023). Among the practices available to teachers themselves, reflective writing has emerged as a valuable and sustainable means of professional development (Abednia et al., 2013; Gudeta, 2022; Mohamad et al., 2022). No single instructional model can guarantee universal efficacy, but reflective writing has been shown to work as a versatile, codable framework for teacher growth, with the level of reflection responding to the focus

of the task and the feedback teachers receive (Bain et al., 2002; Fund et al., 2002). By prompting critical self-evaluation and sustained improvement of practice, reflective writing helps educators sharpen their pedagogical decision-making and align their teaching with the changing demands of an AI-driven world.

Teachers' reflection on their own practices and underlying beliefs is central to professional learning (Johannessen, 2024), and it offers a way of prompting teachers to re-evaluate their teaching across all language skills and components. To date, however, limited research has explored the procedures, processes, and ideas that EFL teachers draw on when developing their own reflective writing. Few studies have examined the principles and processes needed for reflective writing to become a critical tool for improving teaching, one that goes beyond merely documenting classroom events (Bain et al., 2002). As Bain et al. (2002) observe, the level of reflection reported in previous research on reflective writing has typically been confined to the description of events.

In this context, the results of numerous studies have been discouraging, with EFL teachers showing limited reflective skills. Some studies examined whether the practice was viable irrespective of its quality (Faghihi & Sarab, 2016). Drawing on recent research, I argue that using reflection and self-assessment interchangeably is problematic, since teachers share little consensus about what the two terms mean. Both are often applied loosely and stretched to cover a range of conceptions and strategies, largely because teachers receive little training in reflection and self-assessment methods (Amhag, 2020; Bain et al., 2002; Namaziandost et al., 2023; Ringmar, 2021).

Even so, a substantial body of recent research presents reflective writing as a key means of prompting teachers to analyze their own classroom practice and to make explicit the reasoning behind their instructional decisions. This work rests on an established cognitive and pedagogical foundation (Kristel et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2022; Nash & Collins, 2024). On this view, developing EFL teachers' reflective writing systematically and in detail allows them to act as autonomous, agentic decision-makers and critical thinkers (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024). Over time, the process can empower teachers and support a culture of pedagogical excellence, leading to richer, more developmental classroom experiences, helping to resolve instructional challenges, and improving overall teaching performance (Habtamu & Belay, 2023).

Reflective writing is also credited with helping teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses, and thus what needs to change if they are to overcome obstacles to their professional development. In his quantitative study, Fatemipour (2013) showed that reflection can help teachers examine, analyze, and recalibrate their practices; in other words, reflection means learning to see and to understand fully what is seen. Through this process, teachers can move beyond conventional approaches toward greater pedagogical flexibility, which in turn supports critical instruction (Effendi & Triastuti, 2022). Against this background, the present study sets out to diagnose the level, quality, and flexibility of EFL teachers' reflective writing from a critical rather than a merely descriptive perspective. These attributes are not easily acquired. Critical reflective writing skills develop only with sustained support from supervisors and exposure to exemplary colleagues (Fatemipour, 2013).

This need is especially pressing because teachers often experience reflective writing as a burdensome, time-consuming addition to lesson planning and implementation. As Fatemipour (2013) notes, reflective practice is not straightforward and carries genuine challenges. One risk is reflecting without turning insight into action: registering the realities of classroom experience and one's emotional responses without ever moving toward pedagogical improvement. A second common pitfall is reducing reflection to simple problem-solving, which undermines its deeper potential. Solving problems may be one part of a teacher's reflective process, but the primary aim of reflection is to uncover the underlying causes of those problems. Yet, as noted above, educators often define the concepts surrounding reflection vaguely and apply them inconsistently, an ambiguity that again traces back to limited training in reflective and self-assessment practices (Amhag, 2020). There is also a gap in our understanding of how reflective teaching approaches can concretely improve teaching outcomes, even though the importance of reflection is widely acknowledged (Abelilla, 2024). The value of studying reflective practice is recognized worldwide, but it takes on added urgency in the Middle East, and particularly in Jordan, where it may offer one response to students' declining academic performance (Al-husban, 2019).

Despite this urgency, little research in the region has used mixed-method approaches to investigate EFL teachers' levels of reflection. Alkhawaldeh's (2008) quantitative study, for instance, offered only a cursory overview of reflective practices, noting merely that teachers tend to prepare sound lesson plans and use effective instructional strategies. Because it drew solely on questionnaire data, its scope and depth were limited. I therefore argue that a thorough qualitative assessment of EFL teachers' reflective writing is needed, since such an analysis can reveal the quality and depth of their reflective practices (Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Wong et al., 1995).

Research on the teaching and development of EFL in the Middle East, and in Jordan in particular, remains scarce. The gap is most pronounced for professional development programs that emphasize reflective writing among novice teachers (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Shamayleh, 2019). Many Western teacher education curricula, by contrast, explicitly stress reflective teaching and build structured reflective activities into their programs as core components (Nurhidayah & Wirza, 2024). Studies in many settings report that teachers reflect to varying degrees, yet they often stop short of gauging how deep that reflection runs or whether it produces meaningful pedagogical reform (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012; Doyran, 2013; Habtamu & Belay, 2023; Moghaddam, 2023; Ryan, 2011; Tabassi et al., 2020). A recurring problem in the literature is the lack of clear guidance on which linguistic or instructional areas teachers should reflect on. The present study therefore narrows its focus to reflective writing on reading comprehension instruction. As Oo and Habók (2020) observe, reflective writing in EFL reading comprehension grows out of the broader tradition of reflective teaching, an idea emphasized ever since Dewey's foundational work on reflective thought. Drawing on recent studies and on my own experience in EFL teacher training, I view reflective practice as a process of recalling, examining, and critically evaluating teaching experience in the service of continuous professional development. I contend that reflective practice matters particularly for EFL teachers, because it equips them to deal with the complex challenges of language instruction, including the cultural, social, and linguistic barriers that learners frequently encounter.

Within this teacher-focused orientation, the use of reflective journals has been associated with measurable gains in the quality of teachers' instructional decision-making and in their capacity to diagnose and refine their own reading comprehension instruction (Bain et al., 2002; Lane et al., 2014). In the present study, reflective journals are therefore treated as a window onto how EFL teachers reason about their reading comprehension instruction (its strengths, weaknesses, and possible alternatives) rather than as an intervention aimed at learner outcomes.

Taken together, prior studies establish three points. First, EFL teachers' reflection has most often been measured with self-report questionnaires (e.g., Alkhawaldeh, 2008; Hung & Thuy, 2021; Quoc Lap et al., 2024), which tend to inflate apparent reflective depth and yield findings that conflict with journal-based evidence (Turhan & Kirkgoz, 2018). Second, studies that analyze journals report predominantly low, descriptive levels of reflection (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024; Oktama et al., 2023), yet they typically asked teachers to reflect on their practice in general, without an instructional focus, and so encouraged breadth rather than depth. Third, almost no such work has been conducted in Jordan or the wider Middle East, where the available evidence is limited to a single questionnaire-based study offering only a cursory account of reflective practice (Alkhawaldeh, 2008). The present study addresses these limitations in three ways: it uses reflective journals rather than self-report instruments; it anchors reflection in a single, well-defined instructional domain, reading comprehension instruction, so that depth rather than breadth is elicited; and it applies a validated four-level depth framework (Lane et al., 2014) in an under-researched Jordanian EFL context.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to apply a validated, depth-oriented reflective framework to EFL teachers' journals that are deliberately confined to reading comprehension instruction. The claim is a bounded one. Prior reading-focused work (Oo & Habók, 2020) developed a reflective teaching model for reading comprehension but did not code teachers' own reflective levels, whereas level-coding studies (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024; Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Oktama et al., 2023) coded reflective depth across unspecified or general instructional content. The present study combines both features, domain-specific prompting and validated depth coding, in a context (Jordan) for which such evidence is currently absent. Theoretically, it extends the depth-oriented reflection tradition (Bain et al., 2002; Dewey, 1933; Lane et al., 2014; Schön, 1983) by testing whether confining the instructional focus of journals to a single language skill elicits deeper reflection than the general prompts used in earlier work. Practically, it offers teacher educators and Ministry of Education program designers in Jordan an empirically grounded basis for designing focused, skill-specific reflective tasks and targeted feedback, in place of the generic journaling requirements that prior research links to shallow, descriptive output.

Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

What levels of reflective writing do EFL teachers demonstrate in their instruction of reading comprehension?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the reflective approach

Because the literature on reflection is conceptually diverse, this section defines the reflective approach before reviewing the empirical findings. Since Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) brought the concept of reflection to the fore in education, a wide range of definitions has been offered (Bain et al., 2002; Faghihi & Sarab, 2016; Postholm, 2008; Widiastari & Fithriani, 2024). Dewey (1933) focused on rational reflective thought, defining it as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (p. 9). Schön (1983), by contrast, emphasized intuitive thinking and held that education and reflective practice are inseparable; he introduced the notion of reflection-on-action, viewing reflection as the cognitive and emotional processes through which teachers critically examine their practices for the sake of professional development.

Within teacher education, Hatton and Smith (1995) operationalized these ideas in one of the first empirically grounded typologies of reflective writing (descriptive, descriptive-reflective, dialogic, and critical reflection), thereby shifting the field from asking whether teachers reflect to asking how deeply they do so. Hickson (2011) broadens this view, contending that authentic critical reflection requires understanding experiences within their wider social contexts and recognizing how such experiences can inform future practice. Mohamad et al. (2022) characterize reflective writing as a cognitive process in which EFL teachers collect data on their pedagogical practices, think rigorously about their efficacy, and make informed decisions about their next steps. It is this conception of the reflective approach (systematic, graded in depth, and oriented toward pedagogical decision-making) that frames the present study.

Theoretical framework: From Dewey and Schön to Lane et al. (2014)

The analytical framework adopted in this study is best understood as the outcome of a cumulative line of theorizing about the depth of teachers' reflection. Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) laid the conceptual foundation by characterizing reflection as disciplined, consequential thinking about practice, yet neither offered an operational means of distinguishing stronger from weaker reflection in teachers' writing. Hatton and Smith (1995) addressed this gap by introducing graded categories of reflective writing, which later researchers refined into assessable rubrics. Fund et al. (2002) proposed a two-dimensional tool separating the content of reflection from its form; Bain et al. (1999, 2002) demonstrated that the level of reflection in journals can be reliably coded and responds to the focus of, and feedback on, the task; and Davis (2006) showed that productive reflection is marked by the integration of ideas about learners, subject matter, and instruction rather than their mere juxtaposition.

Lane et al. (2014) synthesized these antecedents, drawing explicitly on Bain et al. (1999), Davis (2006), and Fund et al. (2002), into a parsimonious four-level scheme that retains the depth orientation of the Dewey–Schön tradition while remaining practicable for coding authentic journal entries. The framework was selected for three reasons. First, unlike breadth-oriented

schemes that classify the topics of reflection, it grades reflection by depth, which is precisely what the present research question asks about. Second, because it was developed and validated on teachers' written reflections, it suits journal data well. Third, its four levels are mutually exclusive and hierarchically ordered, which supports transparent and replicable coding.

Numerous conceptual frameworks have been proposed to define levels of reflection (Amhag, 2020; Effendi & Triastuti, 2022; Mohd Ariff Albakri et al., 2017; Nurhidayah & Wirza, 2024; Wong et al., 1995). Some emphasize breadth, categorizing levels from technical and pragmatic to social dimensions; others focus on depth, moving from surface-level description to reasoning and higher-order cognitive processes (Bain et al., 2002; Jansen & Spitzer, 2009; Rodgers, 2002).

In the present study, the quality of reflective practice is assessed with the framework established by Lane et al. (2014), whose four-level scheme captures qualitative differences in teachers' reflective responses. The first level, Descriptive Responses, covers reflections that only recount classroom events (e.g., "Boys wrote very little and did very little work throughout the lesson"). Evaluative Responses, the second level, go beyond description by adding value judgments about the observed events (e.g., "The teacher was highly effective at questioning; I tend to pose a question and provide the answer immediately"). Reflective Responses involve deeper analysis, concentrating on whether specific teaching practices were effective in terms of their measurable impact on the teacher's practice and on learners' achievement. The highest level, Imaginative Responses, shows the teacher's capacity to consider alternative approaches and propose improvements to classroom instruction. Lane et al. (2014) applied this framework to teachers' written reflections, coding the output at four levels:

D1: Purely descriptive responses.
D2: Descriptive responses containing an evaluative element.
R1: Low-level reflective responses (makes a judgment and justifies it).
R2: High-level reflective responses (explains possible underlying causes and/or imagines future actions).

Conceptually, the four levels serve the present analysis as an ascending ladder of cognitive engagement. Coding each teacher's entries against D1, D2, R1, and R2 allows the depth of reflection on reading comprehension instruction to be characterized systematically and compared across participants, rather than merely recording whether reflection occurred.

Empirical studies on EFL teachers' reflective practice

Although reflective teaching is officially part of the strategic framework of educational systems, including that of the Jordanian Ministry of Education, its implementation and impact in EFL contexts remain under-researched. Few studies have offered substantial evidence of its contribution to improving English language teaching in Jordan (Alkhawaldeh, 2008). Gheith and Aljaberi (2018) noted growing interest in reflective practice among EFL teachers, reporting a satisfactory level of engagement on the basis of questionnaire data. The same

study, however, revealed that these teachers rarely engaged in critical reflection. Many did not keep journals to document or reflect deeply on their instructional performance, an omission often attributed to excessive workload. Most also appeared to interpret reflective practice superficially, equating it with describing classroom activities rather than with a structured, analytical process informed by reflective levels and critical reflection.

Similar findings have emerged in international contexts. Thao et al. (2023) found that most EFL teachers operated at a contextual level of reflection, with only a minority reaching the dialectical level. Although their study stressed the importance of identifying reflective teaching levels in order to design targeted professional development, its reliance on a survey questionnaire limited the depth of the findings. These results contrast with those of Hung and Thuy (2021) and Quoc Lap et al. (2024), who also used questionnaires to evaluate EFL teachers' reflective levels but found that most teachers reflected at high and even critical levels, a contradiction that illustrates the risk of relying solely on self-reported data.

A later mixed-methods study by Tora et al. (2024) brought this disconnect into sharper relief. Although the participating teachers recognized the value of reflective language teaching for professional development, they did not consistently implement it in their classrooms, and their reflective engagement remained low. Taking a qualitative approach, Tabassi et al. (2020) examined teachers' reflective diaries and journals and found that teachers used reflection both to tackle challenges and to relieve negative emotions such as stress and anxiety. The study identified three main types of reflection, namely reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action, with the last being the most frequent.

Oktama et al. (2023) investigated levels of reflective practice among EFL teachers through content analysis of their reflective journals. The teachers' reflections were mostly at low levels (D1 and D2): participants recounted classroom experiences and described instructional practices without engaging in reflective or imaginative reflection. The study offers useful guidance for designing research instruments and teacher-training programs aimed at developing teachers' reflective competencies.

Nurfaidah et al. (2017), in contrast, reported higher levels of reflection. Their content analysis of reflective teaching journals showed that pre-service teachers engaged in dialogic reflection at Levels 3 and 4, describing, analyzing, and evaluating their instructional practices. None, however, reached critical reflection, a limitation the authors attributed to participants' lack of prior experience with critical reflection.

Gläser-Zikuda et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative content analysis of reflective journal entries and found that the 198 reflections produced by pre-service teachers were mainly descriptive, indicating a low level of reflection. On this evidence, structured reflection training is needed to improve both the quality and the impact of reflective journals.

Inconsistent findings across studies using similar methods point to the need for further, systematic investigation of EFL teachers' reflective practice. Abednia et al. (2013) examined teachers' perceptions of reflective journal writing and found that participants believed the

practice had increased their self-awareness, their understanding of ELT issues, their reasoning skills, and their dialogue with teacher educators. Participants also identified challenges, including the need to engage in depth with course materials and to take an active part in discussions in order to produce high-quality entries. These findings support the use of journal writing as a sound qualitative tool for assessing levels of reflective practice, rather than relying solely on survey instruments.

Gudeta (2022) lends further support to this implication. Using a mixed-methods design, the study analyzed qualitative data to identify indicators of reflective practice and then integrated them with quantitative findings to generate four themes: pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. The approach shows the value of combining qualitative and quantitative data to reach a fuller understanding of reflective teaching.

Quantitative findings suggest that in-service EFL teachers often see themselves as using a wide array of reflective skills, a perception that may stem from guessing at the ideal survey response. Qualitative data, by contrast, frequently reveal minimal engagement in reflective practice, with many teachers displaying attitudes characteristic of a pre-reflective stage.

Turhan and Kirkgoz (2018) used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the reflective practices and perceptions of English language teachers and found a marked discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative data: teachers seldom showed critical reflection in their narratives, although the quantitative data suggested that they strongly believed in the importance of reflection. This divergence shows how difficult it is to assess reflective practice accurately and why more than one research approach is needed.

Related studies indicate that participating EFL teachers are generally at an early stage of adopting effective pedagogical practices and that considerable effort is needed to move away from deeply ingrained traditional methods. Most prior research indicates that teachers have not yet reached the level of critical reflection. Dewey (1933) regarded critical reflection as an essential attribute of educators, one that strongly influences the quality of instruction; EFL teachers therefore need to develop a deeper awareness of it.

A closer look at prior studies reveals a common limitation beyond the low levels of reflection: participants were often asked to write reflective journals without specific guidance on which instructional areas to address. Because EFL teachers engage in numerous activities across the four core language skills, general, nonspecific prompts may encourage breadth rather than depth, leading teachers to touch on many aspects of their practice superficially instead of reflecting critically on specific areas. A reflection framework that targets a clearly bounded dimension of EFL instruction is therefore needed. Accordingly, the present study confines teachers' reflection to reading comprehension instruction in order to elicit more focused and meaningful reflective writing (Fatemipour, 2013).

METHOD

This exploratory study uses a predominantly qualitative methodology, complemented by simple descriptive statistics, to conduct a preliminary investigation of EFL teachers' levels of reflection as defined in the framework proposed by Lane et al. (2014).

Participants in the study

The study used purposive sampling to select ten novice female EFL teachers from public schools. The participants were aged between 27 and 32 years, and each had less than two years of teaching experience. Purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) means that participants are selected for shared characteristics relevant to the research topic, in this case novice EFL teachers (less than two years of experience and aged 27–32 years) teaching English in Jordanian public schools. The sample was deliberately homogeneous because the research focuses on levels of reflection rather than on differences associated with demographic characteristics. Selecting participants of the same gender, a similar age, and the same teaching stage reduces possible confounders and makes the journal entries more comparable across participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Gender was therefore not treated as a variable, and comparing male and female teachers lay outside the scope of the research. All participants were female, reflecting the actual gender composition of the target population. The instructions emphasized that journal entries could vary in nature, from purely descriptive accounts to evaluations and reasoned, justified judgments, and finally to reflections proposing future solutions or improvements to practices the participants considered unsuccessful. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of their right to withdraw at any time. To preserve anonymity, participants were allowed to submit their journal entries without identifying information, and they were informed that their data would be used solely for research purposes.

Research tool

The reflective journal was the study's primary instrument. The author explained Lane et al.'s (2014) four reflective levels to the teachers and asked them to write one entry after each reading comprehension lesson per week. Teachers were instructed to keep their reflections on their teaching of reading comprehension (the texts and tasks used, the comprehension strategies taught [e.g., predicting, inferring, identifying main ideas, deriving vocabulary from context], the difficulties learners encountered, and their own instructional decisions) rather than on other language skills or general classroom matters. For each entry, teachers were encouraged to describe what happened, evaluate how effective it was, give reasons for those judgments, and suggest how they might improve the practice in future lessons. This sequence mirrored the D1–D2–R1–R2 progression without requiring teachers to label the levels themselves. Entries were written in English, the language of instruction, both for consistency with the medium of teaching and so that the reflections could be content-analyzed directly. To reduce writing anxiety, teachers were assured that entries would not be graded for language accuracy and that no minimum length was required.

Feedback procedure

After each weekly submission, the author gave oral feedback on every participant's entry before the next entry was due, so that the feedback could inform the following cycle of reflection. Consistent with Bain et al. (2002), the feedback addressed the level and focus of reflection rather than the quality of the teaching itself. It did not judge whether a lesson was "good" or "bad"; instead, it invited the teacher to move beyond description and evaluation toward reasoned analysis and the consideration of alternatives, for example by asking them to explain why a strategy had or had not worked, to relate the event to their learners' reading comprehension, and to propose what they might do differently in a later lesson. To avoid steering participants toward predetermined responses, the prompts were open and nonevaluative, and no model answers were supplied. Feedback thus served as a developmental scaffold for deeper reflection (Bain et al., 2002), and its weekly timing, between entries, gave later entries the opportunity to reach higher reflective levels than earlier ones.

Analysis procedures

The primary objective of this research was to assess the levels of reflection demonstrated by EFL teachers in Jordanian public schools in their reading comprehension classes. A content analysis approach was used, based on Lane et al.'s (2014) framework, which categorizes reflection into four levels: purely descriptive, descriptive and evaluative, low-level reflection, and high-level reflection, coded D1, D2, R1, and R2, respectively. Participants received general guidelines on writing reflective entries and were given an entire semester, the first semester of the 2024–2025 academic year, to document their reflections freely. These reflections covered their actions, feelings, thoughts, and future intentions following each class. The guidelines were designed to ease any anxiety associated with the writing process. By directing teachers to concentrate on their reading comprehension instruction, the study also kept their reflection on a single area, with the aim of promoting deeper and more concentrated reflection. This approach differs from previous studies in which teachers frequently moved between activities without reaching a clear or sustained level of reflection.

Numerous studies indicate that EFL teachers often reflect superficially on various technical aspects of their teaching, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and grammar instruction. This lack of in-depth focus on specific instructional areas may account for the absence of critical reflection among EFL teachers reported in previous research. To address this issue, participants in the current study were asked to keep weekly reflective journals on their reading comprehension classes. They were required to submit four entries each month during the first semester (September to December 2024), giving a total of 16 entries per teacher over the study period.

The data were analyzed deductively through qualitative analysis. Before coding, each journal was segmented into annotations, the unit of analysis. Following Campbell et al. (2013), who stress that reliable coding of textual data depends on first standardizing the unit on which coders work, an annotation was defined operationally as a coherent stretch of text

(one or more consecutive sentences) expressing a single, complete idea about the teacher's reading comprehension practice that could be assigned a reflective level. Unit boundaries were drawn where the idea changed (e.g., a shift from recounting an event to judging it, or from judging it to proposing an alternative). The analysis followed the three-step procedure outlined by Cohen et al. (2018): (1) familiarization with the data by reading the sentences in light of Lane et al.'s (2014) reflection framework; (2) coding the data by assigning levels of reflection consistent with the framework; and (3) reviewing the coded data in collaboration with a research assistant. Each annotation was assigned one of the four levels (D1, D2, R1, R2). Where an annotation showed evidence relevant to more than one level, the higher-level code was applied.

The author and a second coder were trained before coding independently. Training focused on understanding the four levels of Lane et al.'s (2014) framework. The coders first calibrated their judgments on a common subset of entries, compared their decisions, and refined their shared understanding of the boundaries between levels until coding was stable, as recommended by Campbell et al. (2013) and O'Connor and Joffe (2020). Examples used in training included the following:

D1 (purely descriptive): *"During the class, I asked students to read the passage silently and then answer the comprehension questions."* (description of practice only)
D2 (descriptive and evaluative): *"The students read the reading task silently; most students were engaged and needed between three to five minutes to answer the questions."* (a value judgment added without justification)
R1 (low-level reflective): *"The task worked because the text matched students' level; when the text is too difficult, they give up before finishing."* (judgment plus justification)
R2 (high-level reflective): *"Their difficulty with inference questions may stem from my focus on literal questions; next time I will model inferencing through a think-aloud before independent practice."* (explains a possible cause and proposes future action)

The author and the second coder independently coded all 1,107 annotations. Interrater agreement reached a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high reliability (Cohen et al., 2018). The coefficient was not, however, treated as a substitute for a procedure for resolving disagreements. Every disagreement was discussed: the coders returned to the codebook definitions and anchor examples until they reached consensus on the appropriate level (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Where consensus could not be reached, the entry was re-examined against the framework. Most discrepancies arose from annotations that lacked sufficient evidence to be assigned to any reflection level, for instance general statements about the importance of reading comprehension rather than specific reflections on the practices used to teach reading. Such annotations were excluded from the final analysis. It was this consensus procedure, rather than the coefficient alone, that established the trustworthiness of the coding (Campbell et al., 2013; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

RESULTS

Participants' journal submissions varied considerably. Although 16 entries were expected from each of the ten participants (160 in total), 105 were actually submitted. Table 1 presents the number of entries submitted by each participant.

Table 1

Number of entries submitted by each participant

Participants	Number of entries	Percentage
Par1	9	5.6%
Par2	11	6.9%
Par3	13	8.1%
Par4	11	6.8%
Par5	10	6.25%
Par6	9	5.6%
Par7	10	6.25%
Par8	12	7.5%
Par9	11	6.8%
Par10	9	5.6%
Total	105	65.6%

As Table 1 shows, most participants submitted between 9 and 13 journal entries, and approximately 34.4% of the expected entries were not submitted. In September, 12 of the expected 40 entries were received; submission rates then rose, with 24 entries received by September and all 40 expected entries submitted in December.

The number of entries is a general indicator of participants' engagement; a finer-grained measure is the number of annotations within each entry. Table 2 presents the number of annotations in each participant's journal entries.

Table 2

Number of annotations in each diary per participant

Written reflective diary	The number of annotations in each diary per month									
	Par1	Par2	Par3	Par4	Par5	Par6	Par7	Par8	Par9	Par10
Diary 1	8	6	6	4	3	4	-	-	-	-
Diary 2	-	8	7	6	-	5	-	6	4	-
Diary 3	9	-	9	-	-	7	7	8	-	-
Diary 4	10	8	12	7	-	8	7	8	6	-
Diary 5	-	8	14	8	5	-	8	9	7	4
Diary 6	-	9	16	9	4	-	-	11	8	7
Diary 7	11	9	17	9	6	8	8	12	9	9
Diary 8	-	-	18	9	6	8	9	14	11	9
Diary 9	13	9	16	-	8	-	12	16	13	10
Diary 10	14	11	17	11	7	8	13	17	15	9
Diary 11	12	13	18	14	9	7	12	16	14	8
Diary 12	14	15	19	16	11	8	14	18	17	9

Written reflective diary	The number of annotations in each diary per month									
	Par1	**Par2**	**Par3**	**Par4**	**Par5**	**Par6**	**Par7**	**Par8**	**Par9**	**Par10**
Diary 13	16	16	20	17	12	-	15	20	17	9
Annotations per participant	107	112	189	110	71	63	105	155	121	74
Total	1107 annotations									

As Table 2 shows, participants recorded 1,107 annotations in total. The number of annotations per entry ranged from three to 20. Participants 3 and 8 recorded the highest totals (189 and 155, respectively), whereas Participants 5 and 6 contributed the fewest (71 and 63, respectively). Some diaries were missing for certain participants in certain weeks, and the number of annotations increased over time.

Table 3 presents the levels of reflection in the participants' annotations, coded according to the four levels proposed by Lane et al. (2014).

Table 3

Levels of reflection in participants' annotations based on Lane et al. (2014)

Levels of reflection	Par1	Par2	Par3	Par4	Par5	Par6	Par7	Par8	Par9	Par10	Total
Descriptive (D1)	70 (65.4%)	75 (67%)	89 (47%)	50 (45%)	35 (49%)	40 (63%)	48 (46%)	78 (50%)	40 (33%)	45 (61%)	570 (51%)
Evaluative (D2)	33 (30.8%)	33 (29.4%)	60 (32%)	55 (50%)	34 (48%)	20 (32%)	49 (47%)	40 (26%)	49 (40%)	26 (35%)	399 (36%)
Reflective (R1)	3 (2.8%)	4 (3.6%)	30 (16%)	4 (4%)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	7 (6%)	29 (19%)	27 (22%)	3 (4%)	112 (10.1%)
Imaginative (R2)	1 (0.93%)	0 (0%)	11 (5.8%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	8 (5%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)	26 (2.3%)
Total	107	112	189	110	71	63	105	155	121	74	1107

Across the ten participants, descriptive reflections (D1) were the most frequent, accounting for 570 of the 1,107 annotations (51%). Evaluative reflections (D2) accounted for 399 annotations (36%). Higher-order reflections were less common: there were 112 reflective (R1) annotations (10.1%) and 26 imaginative (R2) annotations (2.3%). Individual participants varied, Participant 9 recorded the highest proportion of reflective (R1) annotations (22%), Participant 4 the highest proportion of evaluative (D2) annotations (50%), and Participants 2, 5, 6, and 10 recorded no imaginative (R2) annotations. Total annotations ranged from 63 (Participant 6) to 189 (Participant 3).

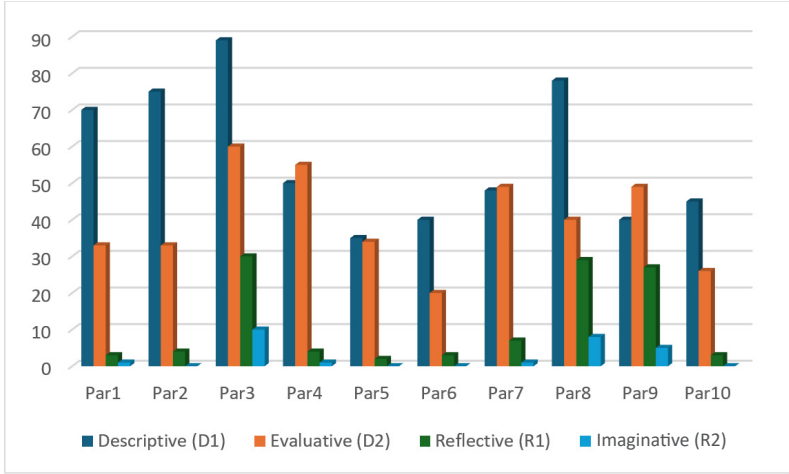


Figure 1 Distribution of participants' reflective writing levels

As Figure 1 shows, descriptive (D1) annotations were the most frequent (570), followed by evaluative (D2; 399), reflective (R1; 112), and imaginative (R2; 26) annotations. Across the four-month period, only three participants (3, 8, and 9) recorded sizable numbers of reflective (R1) annotations (30, 29, and 27, respectively), and imaginative (R2) annotations remained at 2% of the total.

Representative examples by level

The following scripts of annotations illustrate each coded level:

Descriptive (D1). Example: "I read the title of the story, explained some new words, then students worked in pairs to answer the comprehension questions. By the end of the class, I asked students to read the story aloud to develop their reading-aloud skills." A second participant wrote: "I revised the main key words, then I asked students to read in turn, then I asked some questions. Students answered all questions. At the end, I asked students to do the activity-book exercise individually."

Evaluative (D2). Example: "I felt that some students could not use the context to infer the meaning of new vocabulary and preferred using the glossary." Another wrote: "I used realia and explanations to communicate the meanings of new vocabulary items. I felt students were engaged and motivated."

Reflective (R1). Example: "I found that the pre-reading stage was effective and engaging as I asked students to discuss the quotes together and predict what the reading text will be about."

Imaginative (R2). Example: "I should have asked questions ranging from factual to critical-thinking questions." Another wrote: "I could have developed prediction skills in the pre-reading stage through discussions, brainstorming, and introducing key vocabulary items."

A third stated: "I would have used visual aids like concept maps and flowcharts to help students understand the text structure and the relationship between ideas."

DISCUSSION

Overall level of reflection and comparison with prior studies

The predominance of descriptive (D1) annotations shown in Table 3 suggests that participants mainly recounted events or observations, often without substantial analysis or interpretation, while the moderate proportion of evaluative (D2) annotations indicates that they frequently moved beyond description to judge their experiences. The relative scarcity of reflective (R1) and imaginative (R2) annotations points to limited engagement in deep analysis and in the exploration of alternative approaches. These findings are consistent with several studies (Belaggoun & Djouima, 2024; Gheith & Aljaberi, 2018; Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024; Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Oktama et al., 2023; Thao et al., 2023; Turhan & Kirkgoz, 2018) that likewise found teachers engaging in surface-level reflection, describing classroom events and offering simple evaluations but rarely moving to deeper, theory-informed analysis. A few studies, by contrast, reported higher levels of reflective practice (Hung & Thuy, 2021; Quoc Lap et al., 2024; Tabassi et al., 2020). The discrepancy may be partly methodological: those studies relied on surveys or questionnaires, which tend to elicit more generalized or idealized responses than the written journals analyzed in the current study.

The results also allow a closer look at why a minority of participants reflected more deeply. The three participants with the most reflective (R1) and imaginative (R2) annotations were Participants 3, 8, and 9. Their entries also developed most consistently, moving from description toward annotations that justified their instructional practices in teaching reading comprehension and referred to resources that could develop these practices, such as jigsaw activities or projects. These participants, in other words, went beyond entries that merely recorded classroom events. The pattern is consistent with Bain et al. (2002), who found that feedback directed at the level of reflection, especially when combined with questions that challenge participants to consider alternative perspectives, deepened journal writing more effectively than feedback directed at teaching issues alone.

It is also consistent with Pieper et al. (2021), whose field experiment showed that feedback on an initial reflective entry significantly improved the quality of reflection in a subsequent entry. In the present study, the rise in higher-level annotations across the semester (Table 2; Figure 1) coincided with the introduction of explicit, level-focused feedback after the low-submission first month. This suggests that what mattered in the feedback was its focus on the process of reflection (prompting teachers to explain causes and imagine alternatives) rather than on evaluating the lessons themselves. Sustaining this trend is nonetheless difficult given teachers' current attitudes toward journal writing. Moving toward evaluation and proposing more effective options demands more effort, as well as participation in workshops and conferences through which teachers can learn which aspects of evaluation and development to include in their journals.

All participants taught reading comprehension lessons drawn from the prescribed national English curriculum for their grade level in Jordanian public schools. The lessons followed a broadly common sequence, pre-reading vocabulary work and prediction; guided reading (predicting, understanding the main idea, finding specific information, dealing with new words, or making inferences); and post-reading comprehension questions. Teachers reflected on these shared lesson types after each class.

A thematic reading of the annotations shows that, irrespective of level, participants reflected on a recurring set of content areas: vocabulary instruction (e.g., glossary use versus inferring meaning from context), comprehension questioning, note-taking, and pre-reading prediction. Descriptive (D1) annotations clustered around the procedural, routinized parts of the lesson (reading aloud, turn-taking, and the mechanics of answering questions), where teachers recounted the sequence of activities. Higher-level annotations, by contrast, clustered around vocabulary strategies and pre-reading prediction, where teachers more often supplied reasons (R1) or imagined alternatives (R2). The depth of reflection thus appears to be tied to the type of instructional content: routine procedural content tended to elicit description, whereas strategy-laden content (inferring vocabulary, prediction) more readily prompted reasoning. Read against Lane et al.'s (2014) descriptors, this helps explain why D1 predominated. Much of the shared lesson content was procedural, and procedural recounting maps onto the descriptive level by definition. The same pattern reinforces the value of a single-skill focus for surfacing strategy-level reasoning (Oo & Habók, 2020).

Following Lane et al. (2014), evaluative (D2) reflection was defined broadly in this study to include any value judgment about the lesson, whether about the instructional materials and tasks, the teacher's own performance, or students' learning and responses. Annotations such as "I felt students were engaged and motivated" (a judgment about students' learning) and "I felt that some students could not use the context to infer the meaning of new vocabulary" (a judgment about students' performance and, implicitly, the teacher's strategy) were therefore coded as evaluative even when they proposed no change to the curriculum. Such reflections represent progress beyond simple description, yet most remained surface-level judgments that did not engage analytically with the underlying causes of observed outcomes. What distinguishes these D2 annotations from the higher levels, then, is not their object but the absence of a supporting reason (R1) or an imagined alternative (R2).

That descriptive reflection predominated is unsurprising in itself and converges with the literature reviewed above. The contribution of the present study lies less in this distribution than in what it implies for these novice teachers' professional development. Körkkö et al. (2016) found that primary student teachers' reflections gradually broadened and deepened over a program yet remained primarily descriptive, and that reflection combined with feedback advanced their professional learning. The trajectory observed here, with rising annotation counts and a small but real emergence of R1 and R2 entries after level-focused feedback was introduced, mirrors that developmental pattern in an in-service EFL context. Seen this way, the journals are less a record of shortcomings than a formative tool for professional development: they revealed how the teachers think and where that thinking lacked strong theoretical foundations and explicit instructional strategies, thereby setting concrete goals for

in-service training. This developmental view aligns with arguments that structured, feedback-supported reflection is a tool for teacher professional growth (Gudeta, 2022; Habtamu & Belay, 2023; Johannessen, 2024; Quoc Lap et al., 2024). It also turns an otherwise predictable finding into an actionable agenda: pairing skill-focused journals with sustained, level-focused feedback and explicit training in how to teach reading comprehension.

The single-skill focus and factors limiting deeper reflection

A distinctive feature of the present study is its focus on a single language skill, reading comprehension, which was intended to give participants the opportunity to reflect in a more targeted and meaningful way on the instructional strategies they use. Previous research supports this approach (Oo & Habók, 2020), indicating that focused reflective practice centered on a single domain raises teachers' awareness of their instructional strengths and weaknesses, whereas reflecting on all four skills at once, particularly early in a career, can overwhelm teachers and dilute the quality of their reflection.

The sample had been expected to reach more advanced levels of reflection, particularly because the researcher provided formative feedback during the early stages of journal writing and the task focused on a single skill. Most annotations nevertheless remained descriptive or evaluative, and only a few participants reached higher levels. Several factors may account for this limited development. First, many participants appeared unfamiliar with the principles of reflective writing, probably because they had received no formal training in reflective pedagogy. Second, as non-native speakers of English, some participants may have been constrained by limited proficiency when trying to articulate their reflections in depth. Third, contextual pressures (heavy teaching workloads, large classes, and curriculum constraints) may have limited teachers' capacity for deep, critical reflection and for designing pedagogical interventions, thereby reinforcing traditional teaching approaches. A recurring pattern, in which teachers told students to "answer the questions" or "summarize the main ideas" without modeling the underlying cognitive strategies, suggests that many participants assessed comprehension outcomes rather than explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies, a concern also raised by Al-Husban (2019).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the reflective practices of a sample of EFL teachers in reading comprehension instruction, using Lane et al.'s (2014) framework to analyze the depth and quality of their reflective annotations. Over the course of the study, the participating teachers engaged mainly in descriptive (D1) and evaluative (D2) reflection, with limited progress toward the higher-order analytical (R1) and imaginative (R2) levels. This pattern may be attributable to systemic barriers, including restricted access to professional development, heavy workloads, and, in some cases, teachers' own linguistic limitations in English. Together, these factors appear to constrain teachers' capacity for critical reflection, which is in line with prior research documenting the difficulty of developing reflective practice in resource-constrained EFL contexts (Oktama et al., 2023).

The prevalence of surface-level reflection points to a significant gap in EFL teacher education and professional support systems. To address it, teacher education programs need to incorporate structured reflective training designed to cultivate higher-order reflective skills, such as critical analysis of pedagogical decisions and creative problem-solving tailored to learners' diverse needs. School leaders can further support this development by setting aside time for collaborative reflective inquiry and by establishing communities of practice that model and reward deeper reflection. I argue that such measures are essential if teachers are to move beyond routine description and evaluation toward a reflective stance that improves their instructional effectiveness and their students' reading comprehension. Over time, this may also raise students' overall academic performance, including their informed and competent use of AI.

The findings contribute to theoretical discussion of reflective practice by drawing attention to the interaction between individual teacher agency and institutional capacity in shaping the depth of teachers' reflection. Practically, they are particularly relevant to EFL contexts in which reading comprehension continues to pose significant instructional challenges. By developing reflective habits that correspond to the analytical and imaginative levels of Lane et al.'s (2014) framework, teachers may be better equipped to handle the complexities of language instruction and, over time, to reshape their professional identities and classroom practices. Writing reflective journals can, however, be particularly demanding for EFL teachers who are required to write their entries in English, and this may affect the depth and clarity of their reflections.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The sample was small and demographically homogeneous, and reflective journals were the sole data source; they were not triangulated with interviews or focus group discussions. These factors may restrict the generalizability of the findings and indicate the need for broader and more varied methodological approaches in future research.

The framework used in the present study opens several avenues for future research. Comparative studies could examine reflective writing produced in teachers' first language rather than in the target language. Longitudinal research on the impact of reflective training programs on teachers' reflective practices and on student learning outcomes would also be valuable. Mixed-methods designs that link qualitative analyses of reflective writing with quantitative measures of teaching quality and student achievement, in appropriate and contextualized ways, could clarify the mechanisms through which reflection informs pedagogical improvement. Finally, comparative studies across diverse EFL settings could show how specific contextual factors support or inhibit the alignment between theoretical perspectives and teachers' personal experiences.

Declaration of the use of AI technologies

During the preparation of this paper, the author used the Consensus tool to review related studies and identify references to cite. The author also used Claude (Opus 4.7) to revise wording, improve coherence, and check APA formatting. After using these tools, the author

reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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