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Reflective Practices on Teaching English as a Foreign Language in The Algerian Secondary School: Perspectives and Challenges

Sara Bouakaz[i,*], Dr. Ahmad Bachar[2]

[1] PhD Student of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English, Mohamed Khider University-Biskra (Algeria),

sarabouakaz5@gmail.com

[2] Assistant Teacher A, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English, Mohamed Khider University- Biskra (Algeria),

ahmadbashar2012@hotmail.fr

[*] **Sara Bouakaz**

Abstract :

The ongoing journey of ELT in Algeria have become crucial; academicians have encouraged teachers to adopt critical methods such as those applied in the "Reflective Teaching Approach". Reflection implies an internal investigation that boosts teachers to be self-aware by tuning into their competences, feelings and behaviors through the adoption of particular metacognitive practices. This study aims at tackling the challenges of reflective practices on ELT in the Algerian Secondary School in the city of Tebessa through, first, utilizing both the "humanistic" and "sociocultural" approaches and, second, adopting a descriptive method via conducting a qualitative structured questionnaire submitted to the teachers.

Keywords: EFL Teaching; Humanistic Approach, Reflective Practices, Self-Awareness, Sociocultural Approach.

ملخص

إن مسيرة تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر أصبحت في غاية الأهمية حيث أن خبراء التعليم الأكاديمي شجعوا الأساتذة لتبني مناهج نقدية كتلك المطبقة فيما يسمى بالمقاربة بالتعليم الانعكاسي. التدريس الانعكاسي يتضمن نوعا من التحقيق الداخلي الذي يدفع الأساتذة لإدراك ذاتهم وطلك عن طريق الرجوع والبحث في كفاءاتهم ومشاعرهم وسلوكياتهم من خلال انتهاج ممارسات ما وراء الادراك. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معالجة التحديات المواجهة لممارسة هذه السلوكيات الانعكاسية اثناء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في ثانويات ولاية تبسة في الجزائر أولا عن طريق استعمال المقاربات الإنسانية والاجتماعية الثقافية وثانيا اتبني منهج وصفي استعمل في خلاله تقنية الاستبيان المنظم الموزع على الأساتذة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، المقاربة الإنسانية، الممارسات الانعكاسية، الوعي الذاتي، المقاربة الاجتماعية الثقافية

1. INTRODUCTION

Sinking in the realm of pedagogy; seeking for the best ways to teach English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/ EFL), professionals have dealt with a long past but definitely a short history of a finite number of approaches and methods. In the late of the 20th century, the current exigent international position of English in the world emanates that pedagogues have evinced the quest for new teaching practices that dove beyond the notion of teaching methods to reach a cardinal landmark of a thorough investigation concerning every pertinent element in the teaching process of the language to ensure better learning outcomes. Henceforth, stepping into a post method era, ESL/ EFL teachers have been required to adopt innovative profiles representing new practical options of professionalism via thinking critically and tuning into their own competences, feelings and behaviors through the adoption of particular metacognitive actions. Such internal examination of all the cognitive, psychological, and professional components of the teachers' identity is termed 'reflection'. The ongoing journey of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Algeria have become crucial; academicians have encouraged teachers to adopt innovative and critical methods such as those applied in the "Reflective Teaching Approach" in order to elevate the quality of EFL teaching. However, none can deny the fact that integrating such a demanding approach seems to be as elusive as ever in our Algerian academic setting due to various challenges that may encounter ELT.

2. Reflection in English Language Teaching:

Reflection in the process of teaching is a crucial act demonstrates high teachers' self-awareness through the deployment of an exceeding critical thinking concerning the treatment of particular problems in particular situational contexts occurring pre, while, or post the teaching dynamic operation inside or outside the classes and, as a result, the implementation of appropriate solutions accordingly. This purposeful introspection is considered as a focal element in the development of the teacher. It entails a deep evaluation and analysis of past or present teaching experiences in order to make necessary decisions about specific academic problems. [1]Richard claimed that reflection can "help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking".

Reflection, indeed, as a conceptual idea is not recent but it is traced back to the past half century in the enquiry of some educational theorists. Many researches refer the notion of reflective teaching to the works of

[2]John Dewey who explored the concept of reflection in claiming that one's progress can be gained through a 'reconstruction' of experience so by reflecting upon one's acquaintance, self-educational perspectives can be reshaped, altered, constructed and thereby developed. Dewey's general premise concerning reflection has been lately integrated in the realm of education in the 1970s. Then, many scholars commenced effectively shedding light on the significance

of reflective teaching practices in the 1990s; Richert argued that [3]"As the time in the teaching process when teachers stop to think about their work and make sense of it, reflection influences how one grows as a professional by influencing how successfully one is able to learn from one's experience". Hence, reflection in teaching is related in general to the ability and willingness of teachers to dissect critically their own teaching beliefs and taking more responsibility for their own professional actions. From that time, reflection as a theoretical backbone has been intervened mainly in teaching under the term of "Reflective Teaching Approach".

3. The Reflective Teaching Approach:

Teaching is not merely a cognitive process but rather a complex dynamic system in which particular inner cognitive and psychological components of teachers are interrelated accordingly with external social factors that might either scaffold or even hinder the teaching process since it [4]"is recognized as both individually practiced and socially shaped phenomenon with lots of constraints imposed by the society" (Tutunis & Hacifazlioglu). Dissecting the social and cultural interventions that takes a significant part in the progress of the teaching practice was mainly the focal concern of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which contends that social interactions play an important role in the construction and the development of the teacher's cognition. Vygotsky argues that learning, to become an effective teacher in this case, [5]"forms a superstructure over development" which is in fact "viewed as a mastery of conditioned reflexes" (Vygotsky). Such a premise believes that developing the efficacy of being a reflective teacher is "conceived of as the elaboration and substitution of innate responses" (ibid).

The notion of reflection and ELT has been interestingly and theoretically intertwined only in the late of 1970s and the 1990s have marked the real commencement of applying the reflective thinking in the teaching/ learning process in which the reflective teaching approach has witnessed its apex. [6]Richards and Lockhart argued that the reflective teaching approach is a representation of a deliberate process moves from "external" or "top-down" perceptions of teaching toward an "internal" or "bottom-up" teaching methods that investigate teachers' practices in order to gain appropriate educational suggestions for different professional issues. [7]Pennington, by her side, developed a reflective orientation and defined it as "a means for (1) improving classroom processes and outcomes, and (2) developing confidences, self-motivated teachers and learners.". Moreover, [8]Mathew as well stated that reflective teaching is not just "thinking about one's teaching", but it is "a process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analyze how something was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes".

3.1 From Theory to Practice:

It seems very difficult for ELT teachers to bridge the gap between the notion of reflection as a theoretical framework and its practice as a real implementation

in the classroom. For this, so many scholars attempted to search the best ways to intertwine the theory and the practice of reflection; [9]Dahlin claimed that "we need to demonstrate our research base by conducting our own classrooms research (reflective practice) and by reading, using, and citing professional journals. We have to show that we understand the 'hows' and 'whys' of our theory and practice". For being a critically reflective practitioner, a series of reflective practices have been identified as a trial for uncovering those hows and whys by teachers:

- Questioning what, why and how one does things and asking what, why, and how others do things.
- Keeping an open mind.
- Comparing and contrasting.
- Seeking the framework, theoretical basis, and/or underlying rationale.
- Viewing from various perspectives.
- Asking for others' ideas and viewpoints.
- Using prescriptive models only when adapted to the situation.
- Considering consequences.
- Hypothesizing.
- Synthesizing and testing.
- Seeking, identifying and resolving problems. [10](Imel,)

Based on such ways of reflecting, so many researchers have developed methods, models, and procedures for reflective practices. [11]Bringle and Hatcher proposed a set of reflective techniques through which teachers collect descriptive data of what happened in the classrooms in order to be analyzed later on for instigating a positive professional change:

- *E-Mail Discussion Groups:* Electronic mailing list servers which allow participants to form a discussion groups to discuss their experiences;
- *Portfolios:* Student-generated files including administrative documents, evidence of class outcomes, and the students' evaluation of the learning experience that enable students to demonstrate the knowledge and abilities they have acquired;
- *Presentations:* PowerPoint presentations where by students are required to reflect on different aspects of the class action; and
- *Photo Reflections:* Pictorial accounts of class activities for which students may be asked to write reflective captions.

Another very useful technique for determining the best ways for teaching ESL/EFL within the classrooms is the *questionnaires*. Questionnaires submitted to learners may enable the teachers to know what kind of tasks the formers prefer to do, what sequence of grammatical elements they prefer to deal with, how they prefer to be tested, what ways they prefer their mistakes to be corrected and whether the teachers are flexible in delivering the lessons for them

or not. Questionnaires may help teachers as well to ask their peers about how the teaching objectives can best be achieved, what is the best way to prepare for a lesson plan, how to face what hinders the teaching process and what is the best way to achieve best learning outcomes; teaching what to think or teaching how to think.

A fulsome assemblage of researches, inspired by the works of Dewey, have been enquired regarding the teaching reflective practice. [12]Schon re-conceptualized the notion of reflection and introduces the term *'Reflective Practice'* to include the emotions and feelings of teachers that must be taken into consideration when retuning on their previous experiences to improve their teaching skills. He emphasized the challenges that meet the teaching process can be dealt with through professional practices. Schon claimed that teachers who aim at improving their teaching skills must integrate themselves in a complete circle of reflective development in which all the components of the teaching process are chained; henceforth, he categorized such reflective practices as follows: 'Self-Reflection', 'Peer Reflection', 'Group Reflection', 'School wide Reflection'. Schon viewed reflection in two forms: *a) - reflection in action*, and *b) - reflection on action*. A third category of reflection has been appeared later in the related literature: *c) - reflection for action*; whereby teachers decide what to do accordingly so as to cope with all the future problems that may encounter the teaching/learning process in general.

Shape. 1. Categories and subcategories under each type of reflection
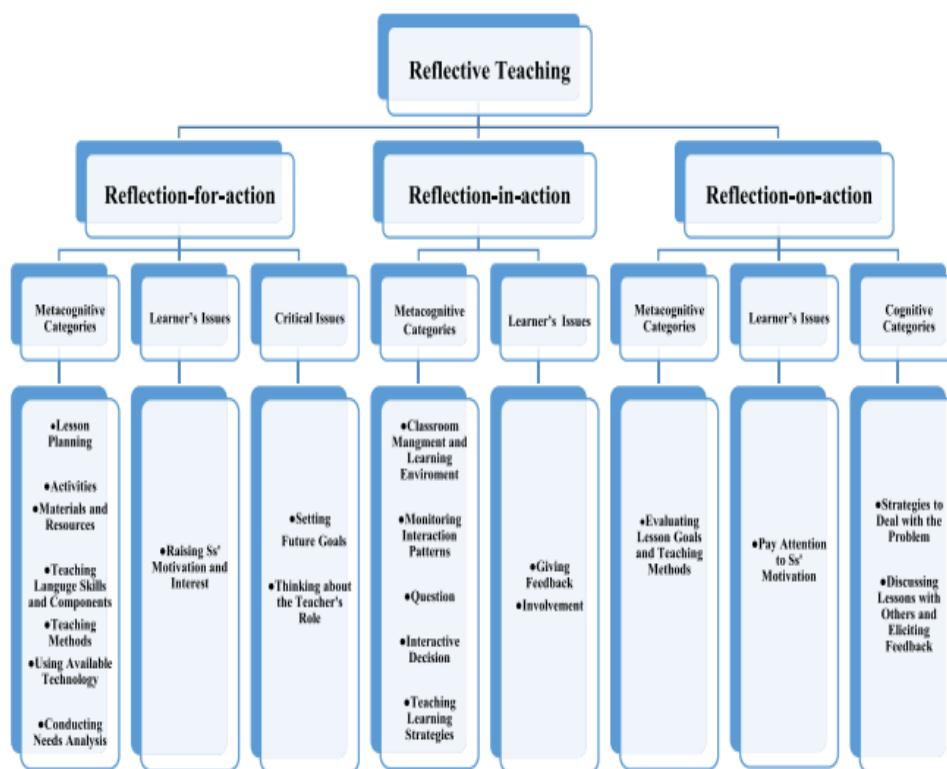
[13]**Source:** « (Reflective Teaching through Journal Writing: a Study on EFL Teachers' Reflection-for-Action, Reflection-in-Action, and Reflection-on-Action s.d.)" retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/

By reflection in action, he argued that it relates thinking and doing; i.e., teachers reflect on the task at hand which they are dealing with as well as the prior covert understanding behaviors regarding the same task. Then, they are required to conduct new experiments which, from the one side, enable them to produce a new better alternative perception of the task; from the other side, direct to a new change in the contextual situation of the task. Reflection in action is [14]"an internal conversation of the practitioner where he/she takes hold of the process/ or experience that has occurred, reframes it, and tries to experience it from a different perspective" (Pacheco). By contrast, *reflection on action* occurs after the performance of the task through which teachers reflect on what they did and why within the task.

4. The Study:

The present study is a descriptive study of the reflective practices in high school EFL classes in the city of Tebessa/ Algeria. It is carried out in order to highlight the perspective challenges that hinder EFL teachers in Algeria from applying the Reflective Teaching Approach. Moreover, it attempts to suggest a set of practical insights that may help the teachers to develop their professional profiles as skillful EFL teachers for uplifting the quality of the EFL teaching process.

4.1. Methodology:

The researcher adopts a descriptive method. Data, first, have been collected through conducting a qualitative structured questionnaire submitted to the chosen population of teachers and, second, they have been analyzed using the humanistic and the social constructivist approach. The Likert Scale has been used as a research categorical instrument for the analysis of the collective data. This measurement technique is adopted to demonstrate the professional relational attitudes of the selected participants towards exposition of their reflective identity in their EFL classes through five levels (1/Very Often, 2/ Often 3/ Sometimes, 4/ rarely, and 5/ Never). A sample of 129 teachers who teach in the secondary educational level have been selected from the city of Tebessa due to the factor of availability through the Random- Sampling design. The Sampling elements are divided into gender groups: 120 female teachers and 9 male teachers aged between 25 to 51 years old. All of them have EFL teaching experiences from approximately 2 months to 30 years. Only (44.6%) of them teach near their residences; however, the rest have to move daily or weekly to and fro their works from 15 to 130 kilometers.

4.2. Findings

The first section of the questionnaire deals with the professional bio data of the sampling items considering their gender, age, academic qualifications, expertise in the field of EFL teaching. The second section of the questionnaire involves questions that inquire the teachers' professional practices in their classes. The main question that signify this section *"Do you ask yourself questions about the efficiency of your professional teaching practices?"*

Table 1. Participant's EFL professional teaching practices

Professional Teaching Questions	Very Often Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
1 Do I design successful activities?	96	8	25	0	0 129
2 Do I design activities that motivate my students to activate their critical thinking to solve the problems?	70	29	12	0	0 129
3 Am I really coping with all my students learning styles?	36	29	21	43	0 129
4 Which students benefit from which activities?	35	15	14	60	5 129
5 Am I designing activities that encourage my students to be engaged in real life sociolinguistic contexts?	32	27	53	17	0 129
6 How can I create a positive climate for my students to develop their critical skills?	41	24	50	11	3 129
7 Do the assessments I design in my classes reflect my students' acquisition levels?	47	19	55	8	0 129
8 What are the short and long-term objectives of the teaching process in my classes?	97	10	22	0	0 129
9 Could the problems I have in my classes be solved by pre-teaching plans?	77	22	16	13	0 129
10 Am I utilizing new up-to-date ICTs tools in my classes?	19	33	52	25	0 129
Average total (N)	550	216	320	177	8 1290
Percentage (%)	42.6	16.7	23.2	13.7	0.6 100

The findings of this section show that a great number of teachers answered that they *very often* (42.6%) reflect upon their teaching practices by asking themselves questions about *the efficiency of your professional teaching practices* while only few of them said that they have never (0.6%) done so.

Shape.2. Frequency of the participant's EFL professional teaching practices
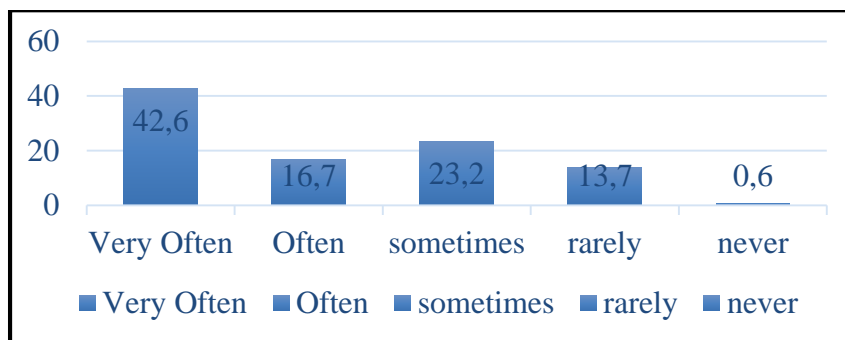
The answers frequency of the questions raised by the teachers to reflect upon their professional teaching practices are: very often (42.6%), often (16.7%), sometimes (23.2%), rarely (13.7%), and never (0.6%).

The third section of the questionnaire reveals the humanistic hallmarks of the teachers: i. e. to what extent have the teachers intertwined their professional identity with their feelings and emotions while teaching. They were asked to answer a set of interrogative statements under the following leading question: *Do you ask yourself questions about whether you imply indispensably your feelings and emotions in your teaching practices?*

Table 2. Participant's EFL humanistic teaching features

Professional Teaching Questions	Very Often Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
1 Am I excited to teach today?	29 9	25	42	24	129
2 How was my mood last session with my students?	15 19	20	55	20	129
3 Am I churlish when dealing with my students?	9 12	40	68	0	129
4 Am I temperamental?	15 35	15	60	4	129
5 Am I friendly with my students and my colleagues?	4 16	20	35	54	129
6 Do I love teaching my students?	23 19	10	70	7	129
7 Do my students like me?	34 3	38	13	41	129
8 Am I able to separate my personal social problems from my profession?	7 12	24	29	56	129
9 Do I have an approachable personality?	29 30	0	23	47	129
10 Am I trying to understand my student' behaviors in a sympathetic or dismissive way?	32 23	24	38	12	129
Average total (N)	200 178	216	433	265	1290
Percentage (%)	15.5 22.9	16.7	33.5	20.5	100

Table 2 demonstrates that the majority of teachers responded that they rarely

(33.5%) ask themselves questions that reflect their integrations of their feelings and emotions in the TEFL process.

**Shape.3**. Frequency of the participant's EFL humanistic teaching features
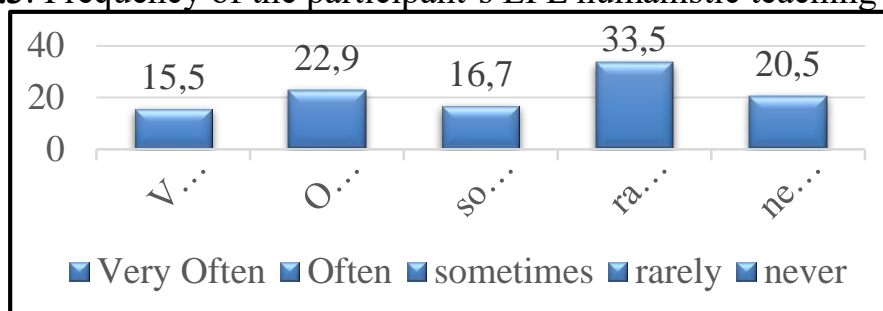
The frequency of the teachers' answers apropos their implementation of their feelings and emotions in the TEFL process are: Very often (15.5%), often (22.9%), sometimes (16.7%), rarely (35.5%), and never (20.5%). Talking about the fourth section of the questionnaire, it deals with the social attitude of the teachers in and out of their classes. The significant question that underlies this section, which inquires the extent to which EFL teachers reflect upon their profession through investigating the impact of their social relations in the improvement of the teaching/learning outcomes, is *Do you ask yourself questions about your social relationships with your students and everyone who actuate in the whole teaching/ learning operation?*

Table 3. Participant's EFL social relations in the teaching practices

Professional Teaching Questions	Very Often Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
1 Is my relationship with my students helping or hindering their learning acquisition abilities?	33	14	31	32	19 129
2 Are the relationships with my students' parents improving my teaching practices?	13	6	17	60	33 129
3 In what ways I coordinate with my colleagues to enhance my teaching skills?	24	12	47	27	19 129
4 Am I helping my colleagues in their teaching practices? ,	18	22	29	60	0 129
5 Am I friendly with my students and my colleagues?	0	17	19	29	64 129
6 To what extent am I engaging with my colleagues in Collaborative tasks in and/or out of classrooms?	11	21	3	55	39 129
7 Are my relationships with the staff of the school facilitating my work?	04	16	18	29	62 129
Average total (N)	103	108	164	292	236 903
Percentage (%)	9.3	9.7	18.1	32.3	26.1 100

According to the findings of the table above, it is noticeable that the frequency of the reflective teachers habits of asking about the influence of their social interactions with their surroundings in the teaching setting is very low: very often (9.3%) and rarely (32.3%).

Shape 4. The frequency of Participant's EFL social relations in the teaching practices
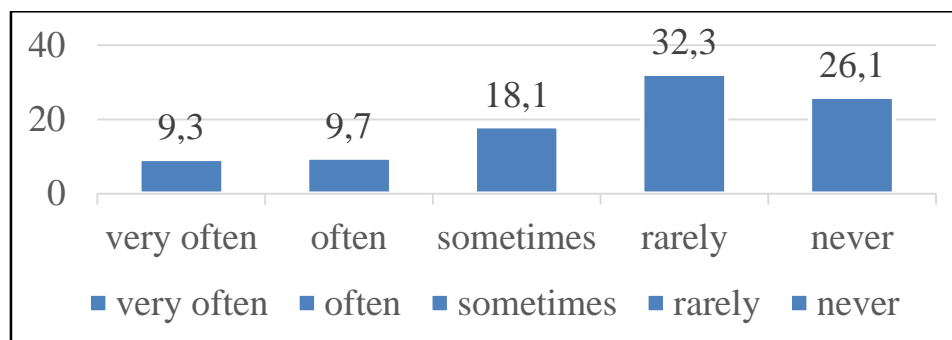
The results of this section expose that the frequency reflective answers concerning the reflective questions asked by teachers to monitor the role of their social interactions played for the betterment of their teaching skills are various: very often(9.3%), often (9.7%), sometimes (18.1%), rarely (32.3%), and never (26.1%).

Finally, the last section of the questionnaire which includes two main secondary questions investigates the extent to which the teachers apply the reflective practice in their classes while teaching in addition to their perceptions regarding the pros and cons of such a demanding approach.

Table 4. Participant's EFL reflective practices

Professional Teaching Questions	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
1 Did I talked too much in the lesson?	31	14	15	42	27	129
2 What was the best moment in my class today?	21	24	13	11	60	129
3 What would I do to live more beautiful moments in the future?	20	19	30	41	19	129
4 How much personal time have I spent out of my job?	29	32	30	21	17	129
5 How much time have I enjoyed lately with my family?	14	13	24	44	34	129
7 How much time have I spent lately with my friends?	7	15	28	42	37	129
7 What I have done lately to release stress?	23	11	21	30	44	129
8 What must be done to maintain my wellbeing ensure I remain an effective teacher?	24	24	19	33	29	129
9 Have I travelled in the last month?	30	14	15	30	40	129

10 Have I practiced sports lately?	26	20	22	28	33	129
Average total (N)	225	186	217	340	380	1290
Percentage (%)	17.4	14.4	16.8	26.3	29.4	100

The results of the above statistics contend the answers of the first main question *Do you ask yourself reflective questions that aim at improving your teaching process*? Therefore, the 'very often' answers frequency of the reflective practice performed by the sample is very low (17.4%) while the 'never' answer frequency reaches 30%.

Shape. 5. The Frequency of participant's EFL reflective practices
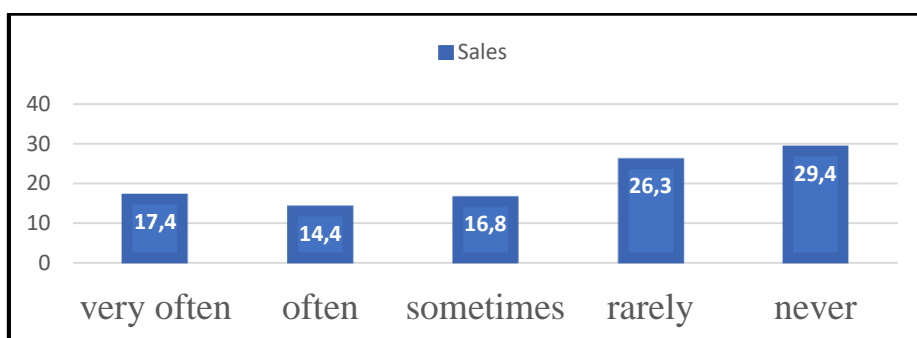
The results of the answers frequency about the first question of this section are: very often (17.4%), often (14.4%), sometimes (16.8%), rarely (26.3%), and never (29.4%). Regarding the second main question of this section, it tackles the challenges that prevent the sample from applying the reflective approach when teaching EFL. The researcher in this part has asked the participants *"Do you consider yourself a reflective EFL teaching practitioner?"*

Table 5. Participants' perceptions of being reflective EFL teachers

Responses	Yes	No	Total
Number	23	106	129
Percentage	17.8	82.1	100%

Although the majority of teachers admitted the significant benefits of the reflective approach, only very few of them (17.8%) said they adopt it in their teaching practices. In this respect, they mentioned various challenges as main causes of such a pedagogical negligence.

Table 6. Participants' perceptions of the Challenges of Reflective Practices

Professional Challenges	Social Challenges	Other
1. Lack of adequate knowledge about the reflective thinking. 2. Lack of procedural knowledge about the use of the reflective strategies and techniques. 3. Refusal of adopting innovative critical ideas. 4. Clinging to traditional teaching methods. 5. Lack of technological competences of using ICTs.	1. The nature of the Algerian social environment entails from women to bear special social responsibilities such as household activities and upbringing children so they do not find enough time to engage in such an exacting approach to EFL teaching 2.The high cost of life and the low teachers' monthly salaries compel them to search for new sources of financial incomes; working in part- time jobs such as teaching in private schools so they do not find enough time to adopt such a critical thinking task. 3. Lack of social entertainment in the wilaya of Tebessa prevents the teachers to release their stress caused by the heavy psychological load of the teaching act. 4. Fear of building social relations with the students or their parents in order not to lose their professional aura.	1. Age which plays an important role since young teachers are likely more eager to engage in such a reflective approach compared to their elderly counterparts. 2. Lack of professional motivation. 3. Lack of time due to the burden of academic and administrative charges. 4. Lack of necessary pedagogical aids provided by some educational institutions.

4.3. Discussion of Findings:

The Reflective Approach to language teaching is an ongoing critical process

that requires an integration of cognitive, metacognitive, physical, social and psychological competences. Such reflective skills though create long-life reflective practitioners and action researchers; it demands a deep critical teaching thinking to decide what to do next in the ELT. The findings of this study demonstrate that in spite the fact that approximately most of the selective EFL teachers (66.4%) agreed on the efficacy of the Reflective Approach, they (82.1%) did not consider themselves as reflective practitioners in the field due to a variety of reasons. This study highlights that EFL teachers are encountered with particular challenges that hinder their willingness to promote their teaching practice via applying the reflective thinking process. It shows that the frequency of using the reflective practice among Algerian EFL teachers, alike with their peers in the Arab world, is considerably low. This gospel is due to the pedagogical gap between the conceptualized theory of the reflective approach and its practical implementation in the EFL classrooms. In addition to that, the teachers demur such creative practice since elderly teachers are still influenced with the ad hoc fashion of EFL language teachers; i.e. adopting old teaching methods based on teaching decontextualized grammatical and semantic structures; however, the reflective teaching practice is a new theoretical Moreover, the results state that this statistical demonstration is caused due to the factor of teachers' gender. A great array of teachers as well highlighted a list of disadvantages concerning the implementation of the reflective thinking in the EFL teaching process; they said that:

- ✓ It is a highly- demanded cognitive and metacognitive process.
- ✓ It needs an assiduous effort in and out of the classrooms.
- ✓ It is a time-consuming task.
- ✓ It entails special professional training.
- ✓ It requires a simultaneous master of many professional skills.
- ✓ It is difficult to be applied in the pedagogical setting because of many professional, social and cultural constraints.
- ✓ It is not interesting.
- ✓ It involves high critical examination of past teaching experiences.
- ✓ It requires deliberate self and/or peer evaluation and then correction which is considered by some teachers a psychological challenge.
- ✓

5. CONCLUSION

This study probes into the application of reflective practices on teaching English as a foreign language in the Algerian secondary school in the city of Tebessa, first, in order to scrutinize the extent to which EFL teachers employ the reflective approach in their classes ,second, to pinpoint the possible challenges that may hinder the ELT process. The importance of this study lies in shedding light on the significance of implementing the reflective approach in ELT classes which boosts EFL teachers to think critically and creatively about their teaching practices. It pinpoints the worth of reflective practices in order to improve, from the one hand, the teaching skills; from the other hand, the betterment of the

learning outcomes as far as the use of English in real life contexts. Moreover, it highlights the challenges that may encounter the application of such an approach. Therefore, it endeavors to find some future solutions which are going to help the Algerian linguistic policy, regarding the position of the English language, to cope with the international economic, political, and cultural growth.

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