Reflection and agency: the experiences of English Language Teachers in Türkiye

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Reflection and agency: The experiences of English Language Teachers in Türkiye

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This study explores English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers` experiences of reflective practice in Türkiye. It looks at the role agency plays in reflection in relation to teacher growth. Thirteen ELT teachers were interviewed through narrative interviews and critical incidents. All teachers were engaged in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action; however, they differed in the criticality of their reflection and what they reflected on. Their ability to engage in critical reflection, and therefore their growth, was shaped by their agency. Those with a future-oriented agency could focus on their aspirations, detach themselves from present constraints and engage in critical reflection. However, those with present-oriented agency tended to view external factors as disablers and struggled to reflect critically. As critical reflection can lead to teacher development, developing agency to support reflective opportunities throughout pre-service and in-service years seems essential.

Keywords: Reflective practice; teacher agency; English language teachers

Introduction

This paper explores English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers` experiences of reflective practice in Türkiye, particularly, the role agency plays in enabling the reflective practice of ELT teachers in their efforts to improve their teaching and for professional growth. This matters because teachers and teaching quality are seen as the key to improved educational outcomes (Jones & Charteris, 2017). Reflection is seen as crucial within this process of improvement (Akbari, 2007), enabling teachers to "theorize from their practice and practise what they theorize" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.173), thereby providing them with new insights into their practice (Farrell, 2016). However, reflection does not automatically result in teacher development (Akbari, 2007, Godínez Martínez, 2018), as the relationship between

reflection and teacher growth is mediated by various factors such as when, how and on what teachers reflect, and teachers` perception of what they can change.

This paper continues with an overview of reflective practice, before exploring the literature on agency and reflection. It then outlines the study that was conducted, and examines how reflective practice and agency appear to be linked.

Reflective practice

Schön (1987) distinguished between reflection-in and reflection-on action. Reflection-in-action refers to "a period of time, …, during which we can still make a difference to the situation at hand – our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it" (Schön, 1987, p.26), whilst reflection-on-action involves "thinking back what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action contributed to an unexpected outcome" (Schön, 1987, p.26). Reflection-in-action is more limited in terms of its scope and depth (Schön, 1987), as it deals with immediate issues and is mostly concerned with drawing on one`s teaching repertoire to re-examine the situation (Griffiths, 2000). In contrast, reflection-on-action allows teachers to distance themselves from their practice and bring concrete experiences to the state of abstract conceptualisation (Moon, 2005). Reflection-on-action has the greater potential to support teacher development but its impact is shaped by whether this reflection is critical (Godinez Martinez, 2018).

The distinction between different forms of reflection can be seen in the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986), who draw on Habermas`s (1972) knowledge types, i.e. technical, practical and emancipatory, and link the form of reflection to different types of change. At the technical level, teachers focus on what works in their classes, applying instrumental knowledge (in the forms of methods and strategies), without reflecting on values, beliefs and assumptions (Larrivee, 2008). At the practical level, teachers go beyond technical rationality

and try to understand and interpret the conditions for better judgement (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Technical and practical reflection, then, are concerned with classroom teaching. However, through emancipatory (i.e. critical) reflection, teachers can see how their classes are linked to wider social, political and educational realities, thereby reflecting on the broader context where education takes place (Larrivee, 2008). This can support teachers as they strive for more rational, just and fulfilling forms of education (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This involves examining personal and professional beliefs (Larrivee, 2008) and surpassing the surrounding limitations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Through critical reflection, teachers can formulate alternative ways of teaching and approaching a problem (Akbari, 2007).

Also, what teachers reflect on can inform their reflection. Teachers` judgement of why a particular incident happens in their classes, how they interpret situations and their allocation of responsibility can influence their reflection. Weiner (2019) defines this as the locus of dimensions of causality, which can be internal and external. This shapes whether teachers believe they can control a situation, and what actions they believe they can take. As teachers become more reflective, they tend to take more responsibility for the outcomes, become more open-minded to alternative solutions (Dewey, 1933), and become more autonomous by gaining personal authority over their teaching (Akbari, 2007).

Reflection and agency

Another mediating factor linked to reflection is the role of agency, but this tends to be implicitly covered in the literature. Agency is increasingly defined as individuals` "ability or potential to act" and is seen as an achievement rather that something someone possesses (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015, p.22).

The achievement of agency, according to the ecological model of agency, is impacted by three temporal dimensions; iterational (impacts of the past), practical-evaluative

(engagement with the present) and projective (aspirations for the future) dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015). These dimensions are shaped by internal personal capacities, such as ideas, values, professional backgrounds, beliefs, aspirations, and contextual factors, like workplace relationships, resources, workplace discourses, and physical environments (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers achieve agency as a result of the interplay between these various dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015).

Critical reflection can strengthen teacher agency (Leijen, Pedaste, & Lepp, 2020), and agentic teachers are internally driven to reflect as they are willing to develop (Polatcan, 2021). Leijen et al. (2020) have theorised that different types of reflection, i.e. reflection-in-action, practical reflection and critical reflection, can reinforce agency in a complementary way; critical reflection in particular can empower teachers to transform themselves by liberating them from their typical ways of thinking and acting (Leijen, et al., 2020).

Yet the research into the relationship between agency and reflection, particularly regarding the development of ELT teachers, is limited. For example, Kharlay, Wei and Philips (2022) examined the type of reflective practice deployed by ELT teachers; although they focused on obstacles to reflective practice, they cited issues around a lack of professional development experience and heavy workloads, implying issues linked to agency. Godínez Martínez's (2018) study of ELT teachers focused on collaborative reflective practice, and hints at the importance of collaboration in allowing teachers a sense of agency. The few studies that have looked at reflection together with agency have mostly investigated the impact of collaborative reflection in promoting collective agency to transform teachers` situation from a cultural-historical perspective with a focus on the community, rather than individual teachers (e.g., Kramer, 2018), or examined how reflection helps to exert agency at a purely theoretical, rather than practical, level (e.g., Leijen et al., 2020). This study aims to

fill this gap by explicitly looking at the role of agency in relation to reflection and teacher development.

Moreover, it contributes to the Turkish situation, by looking at Turkish in-service ELT teachers` experiences of reflection and its impact on their development and how this can be conceptualised. Studying reflection is relatively new in Türkiye (Korucu-Kis & Demir, 2019), so this study can highlight ways to improve reflective practice in the Turkish context.

To gain insights into the reflective practices of Turkish ELT teachers, and the role of their agency in enabling reflection in their development, the research questions were:

- When, how and on what do Turkish ELT teachers reflect?
- How does reflection help these teachers develop?
- How does these teachers` sense of agency affect their ability to reflect?

Context

Türkiye has sought membership of the EU since 1987. An expectation for membership is that countries have strong quality assurance processes for school development, including strengthening the quality of teaching (European Commission, 2020). Despite various educational reforms, the examination results of Turkish students appear disappointing. In both PISA rankings (OECD, 2019b) and quality of education (UNICEF, 2017), Türkiye is ranked below average. In terms of English language competency, Turkish students are generally amongst the lowest performers in European countries (ETS, 2019). Promoting better reflective practice may be a way to enhance the quality of the teaching force in Türkiye.

However, pre-service training in Türkiye, including ELT programmes, does little to foster reflective practitioners (Tezgiden Cakcak, 2015). There is little expectation that teacher candidates learn how to reflect critically on their teaching, identify issues and adapt their

practice (Tezgiden Cakcak, 2015). In-service training also has weaknesses. Training offered by the Ministry of Education typically uses top-down approaches, ignoring teachers' needs and contexts (Polatcan, 2021). Expectations around teacher competencies are not well-established, so there is little incentive to acquire reflective skills (Ozturk & Aydin, 2019). Consequently, teachers may adopt ineffective practices. OECD (2019a) data also shows that Turkish teachers` participation in self-directed professional development activities, such as reflective practice, is lower than average.

Given the prevalent use of English as a *lingua franca,* students today need to be proficient in English to gain better educational and employment opportunities. Yet ELT teachers in Türkiye often adopt traditional grammar translation methodologies rather than integrating form (grammar) and meaning (communication) (Haznedar, 2010). Developing reflective practice so that ELT teachers in Türkiye can become self-reliant, autonomous learners would be an important element in enhancing practice and student outcomes (Kayaoğlu, Erbay, & Sağlamel, 2016).

Research design

As the study investigated the individual experiences of ELT teachers' reflective practice, a qualitative approach was adopted. Probing teachers` lived experiences of reflective practice helped to provide a deeper better understanding of those experiences. Grounded in the ecological model of agency, the study also looked at ELT teachers` backgrounds, their current experiences and future goals, to understand how their agency shaped their reflection in relation to their professional development. The sampling strategy was largely purposive, and 13 ELT teachers with different backgrounds (i.e. length of teaching experience, educational background, school settings) were recruited. Table 1 demonstrates details of the participants` demographics.

[Table 1 near here]

Two separate interview sessions were conducted with each teacher, making 26 interviews in total. All interviews were face-to-face, lasted around 45 minutes, conducted in Turkish then translated into English. Narrative interviews looked at teachers' professional lives, providing an overview of their reflection and development, and how their agency varied over time and interacted with their reflective skills. Critical incident interviews captured specific recent instances of teachers` reflective experiences, using "what", "when", "where", "why", and "how" questions. We started the critical incidents by asking participants to reflect on recent classes, to see what they reflect on and how. Employing these two interview types allowed us to understand the link between reflection, agency and their development.

Data were coded in two ways. Initial coding was employed to get familiar with the data, where every semantically meaningful sentence or phrase was considered and coded (Saldaña 2016). Axial coding followed this, which identified themes and subthemes (Saldaña 2016), by often using the ideas from the literature such as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and also reflecting on the data to determine, for example, what teachers reflected on, and how they reflected. A constant comparative method was applied to all data sets, which helped to create codes that would explain all teachers. This study followed the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) (2018) ethical guidelines (The University of Reading, approval number 1303181). Pseudonyms are used throughout, and all data has been made non-attributable to preserve teachers` confidentiality.

Results

The findings will be presented around the research questions to examine the range of reflective experiences of the participants. In particular, there will be a focus on the type of reflection, and how this is affected by teachers' sense of agency.

When, how and on what Turkish ELT teachers reflect

The teachers differed regarding what they reflected on. Table 2, created based on the interview data, summarises this.

[Table 2 near here]

All teachers engaged in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Most teachers reflected on classroom management issues, students` attention span and motivation, pedagogical approaches and teaching materials. Reflection-in-action was used to find quick solutions to immediate issues. For example, Sedef, working in a challenging neighbourhood, perceived students lacked parental support and educational aspirations, leading to classroom management problems, so used rewards to address behavioural issues:

> Today, …, I know they (a challenging group) have a phase, I felt that was approaching. … So, I said to them, …, if they behave well this class, I will let them watch a movie in the next one. Problem solved.

Sedef`s reflection-in-action was largely designed to `survive` the day, having limited longer term educational merit. On rare occasions, reflection-in-action was more educative, focusing on the quality of learning outcomes. For example, Hande's reflection on an ineffective pedagogical approach led to other ideas to reinforce vocabulary learning:

> There is a topic, … you need to teach them around 50 adjectives. … So, I wrote the vocabularies on the board, but they did not seem to understand. … So, I said "Stand up", it just came to my mind at that moment really. … I made them raise their hands for tall and lower for short, bend their body for old, etc. They were giggling, they loved it.

Occasionally, reflection-in-action led to reflection-on-action. Lale, for example, noted students` low self-efficacy in reading in English, and advised them to read stage books (story books designed according to readers` levels):

> So, in one of my classes, I told them … they can start (reading) from the first stage and … they will certainly understand what they read. Then I thought to myself; "If I make a reading corner and place it downstairs, …, maybe students could see they can actually read in English".

Achieving this involved gaining managerial approval, purchasing stage books and making bookshelves, requiring more time and effort than simple reflection-in-action. Some teachers utilised a cyclical approach to reflection-on-action by considering multiple solutions for the problem and completing the reflective cycle (Kolb, 1984), yet others failed to complete the reflective cycle, only defining a problem but failing to identify solutions, or only considering one solution.

Teachers differed in how they reflected. Five engaged mainly at the technical level, six moved between technical and practical levels, whilst only two used emancipatory reflection. Figure 1 shows the teachers` engagement in the forms of reflection.

[Figure 1 near here]

How reflection helps Turkish ELT teachers develop

The criticality of reflection informed whether teachers` reflection helped their development. Those engaged in technical reflection, tended to choose simple options or used prescribed techniques to address issues. Dilek, who worked in a medical vocational high school, reported low levels of motivation among students towards learning English. She stressed the importance of English to students, using medical-life-related reading comprehension worksheets, to show students how English terminology was used in the field, an idea she gained from a colleague previously. However, she confessed the idea did not work and did not mention any other alternatives. Similarly, Yeliz, observing a similar problem among her students, tried to overcome the situation by giving pep-talks about the importance of learning

English, and creating a non-threatening learning environment. This idea seemed to derive from her own experiences of learning English.

> I always try to comfort the students about learning English, that is because I was a shy student as well, students should not feel intimidated, they should be able to say what they do not understand. … Comforting the students is important, once you do that, then they start to have positive attitudes towards English.

However, although these ideas might better the situation temporarily, she mentioned it was an ongoing problem, and yet had no other ideas to address the issue. This highlights the limitations of technical reflection.

Practical reflection required teachers to make carefully considered plans and stay committed to achieving their goals. Teachers engaged in practical reflection tended to complete the reflective cycle, seeing multiple solutions for a problem. Hande, for example, mentioned seeing improvements in students` speaking skills after adopting different pedagogical approaches, having noticed how students struggled with basic common statements in English:

> One day, …, I said "thank you", they could not say "you are welcome", …, they did not know how to say "enjoy your meal", so it started like that. … I said to myself "I will make a corner of that (daily phrases)".

By integrating these into her class, utilising role play and drama activities more frequently, she showed students that speaking in English could be fun and felt students participated more enthusiastically in her classes. Similarly, Okan observed that his students, coming from nearby villages, had limited access to electronic devices, therefore started benefitting from visuals, online interactive portals and PowerPoints, which helped to increase students` motivation towards learning English. And, Kerim, upon noticing that using only the course textbook would not help him achieve his goal, adopted various activities to enrich his class:

> What is the purpose? You see that students get bored, the same textbook, the same topics for several times. You say to yourself "The students have been learning these topics for years now, they must be bored". So, you do it (integrating several activities in his classes), …, so that they would feel more motivated in classes, that is the ultimate aim, to increase their participation in classes, to make classes fun.

Although practical reflection often resulted in improved learning outcomes and increased levels of motivation towards learning English, the impact on teacher growth appears limited.

Engaging in emancipatory reflection encouraged teachers to take greater control of their teaching and the context. For example, Gaye felt she needed more time to teach but realised this would not happen:

> How could I increase two hours (class hours), I cannot just make it three, …, it is above all of us. Then we have to be solution-oriented, there is no point in complaining.

Gaye therefore adopted multiple solutions. She decorated classes with flash cards, which later extended to the whole school building. This required managerial approval, gaining support from her colleagues, fundraising, and the preparation of the flash cards, which took time and energy beyond her working hours. She then organised an end-of-the-year show with students, positively impacting students` attitudes towards English; as she reported `English has become something they could show others and be proud of.`

Gaye also changed the school principal and parents` attitudes towards her and English classes. After seeing her efforts and the positive impact on students, she felt:

> The parents` respect towards me has changed a lot. …They could see my efforts and only then they felt like I was doing something.

Pinar, likewise, found ways to create the type of educational experience she thought her students needed, through transforming the school culture, from a teacher- to learner-centred

approach). Engaging in emancipatory reflection made these teachers analyse what they wanted to achieve, why and how, resulting in teacher growth.

How Turkish ELT teachers` sense of agency affects their ability to reflect

The iterational component of teachers` agency was shaped by internal factors such as beliefs (which might be constructed by previous experiences and pre-service training) and their sense of self-efficacy. The practical-evaluative dimension affecting teachers` agency was dominated by external factors such as workload, time, school structure (management, colleagues, parents), available resources, exam requirements and students` profile. The projective dimension was linked to internal factors such as teachers` motivation and aspirations.

Teachers differed regarding how they responded to present external factors. Gaye and Pinar were able to ignore practical-evaluative constraints and were driven more by the projective dimension, meaning they were future-oriented and proactive. Whilst studying ELT, Gaye found little support in developing her ability to reflect, however, she had an ideal image of herself as a primary school ELT teacher, who provided students with a positive experience learning English. This aspiration fuelled her reflection. Pinar`s prior experiences during pre-service training and in a private school, shaped her aspirations. Her firmly established beliefs about learning English provided the basis for her reflections. Also, in her case, she was driven by a sense of inadequacy, stating:

> I, for example, never see myself enough. Since I do not find myself enough, I want to do more, all the time, to search for things.

Both Gaye and Pinar had clear projective aspirations - Gaye, by trying to become her ‘ideal self,’ and Pinar, by trying to overcome her feelings of inadequacy. This agency helped them to engage in emancipatory reflection to realise their ambitions.

Some teachers were more reactive to present situations. The practical-evaluative dimension of agency could hinder or foster their reflection. Esma, for example, having a non-ELT background and negative previous experiences as a substitute teacher, felt empowered by the existence of a supportive school structure.

> This is my school. The management is a big motivator, …, Cinar teacher (the head teacher) supports us a lot. … With their support, we improve.

This sense of belonging improved her motivation to become more reflective, leading her to use more English instruction and integrating speaking activities in her classes, rather than mainly following the coursebook using Turkish, as she did previously.

Similarly, Hande`s previous experiences in a private school where she had several reflective and development opportunities to expand her teaching repertoire and to build strong beliefs about teaching enabled her to implement various ideas in her current classes. The resulting positive feedback from her students increased her motivation to engage in further reflection:

> These things (positive feedback) make me feel like, …, you know when you become more and more motivated as you do, something like that.

Coming from a non-ELT background like Esma, and lacking effective practicum, Ilker appeared to benefit from working with Hande in the same school and felt encouraged to try new ideas. He mentioned they often talked about classroom activities, and even started collaborating on an end-of-the year project. He did not experience such kind of collegial support previously in a small village school where he was the only English teacher, and followed more traditional approaches.

In some cases, teachers viewed external factors as disablers. Ilker, Kerim and Okan, for example, felt restricted by examination requirements, and were unable to go beyond exam-focused teaching with those groups:

> You need to go beyond classical (traditional) methods. But, as I said before, you cannot do it in exam groups, that is because you prepare them for the exam. … For them, you cannot do listening or speaking activities, you purely focus on grammar and tips on how to do well on tests. (Kerim)

> In our country, knowing English is assessed based on grammatical knowledge. … And, what the school management and parents expect from you is that students make minimum mistakes on the exam. (Ilker)

Naz, having experienced a repressive management previously and feeling compelled to move school, appeared to be burnt out, and questioned whether teaching should be her lifelong profession.

> About teaching, when you start teaching for the first time, you expect that you would be respected and all. But I have learnt that it is not happening. … I feel like "is this (teaching) going to be it (my life)?" I need to do something about it, something to change it.

She seemed inactive when it came to improving her practice, which limited her reflection accordingly. Dilek, who came from a non-ELT background and lacked practical teaching experience (like Esma), relied on `tips` from colleagues. Instead of improving her ELT knowledgebase, she merely repeated these techniques, so had a narrow teaching repertoire. Additionally, her students` aspirations were low and her workload was heavy, so she saw little incentive to improve her teaching:

> I teach 30 hours a week, plus weekend courses[1], plus my home life and my child. … In that school (a previous school where she was teaching only in the mornings), I could prepare for my classes, … Now, it is not like that anymore.

Teachers like Dilek felt little, if any, power, in themselves to improve their practice, which limited them to technical reflection only. In some cases, they failed to act even after reflection. Mine was aware that her students struggled to speak English, yet said:

> To be honest, I do not really look for what else I can do because the resources we have are very limited. So, I do not look for other ways. Generally, I use Grammar Translation Method (GTM), it is what is commonly used in Türkiye anyway. What else are we supposed to do, …, speaking?

Lacking opportunities for learning or practising more up-to-date ELT methodologies, and feeling no need to critique her teaching afterwards, Mine simply adopted a traditional approach from which she had benefitted as a student.

Discussion

The findings suggest a close link between higher sense of agency and the criticality of teachers` reflection in their growth. In this study, it appears that the criticality of teachers` reflection was influenced by different components of the ecological model of agency.

Examining how teachers utilised agency, we could categorise this as:

- future-oriented agency – a combination of iterational and projective dimensions
- present-oriented agency (which could be seen as constraining or supportive) – a combination of iterational and practical-evaluative dimensions. (see Figure 2)

[1] Weekend courses were to help students prepare for the upcoming national exams. In most cases, teachers were obliged to offer them.

Iterational aspects, such as beliefs, appeared to mediate in both categories, and when teachers were able to examine their beliefs critically through reflection, they were to act more agentically and flexibly (Priestley et al., 2015).

[Figure 2 near here]

Future-oriented agency

The projective dimension (i.e. future aspirations) looked more prominent in Gaye and Pinar`s agency, and it was powered by their belief systems, giving them a stronger sense of agency, which may have unlocked critical reflection. Teachers, driven by their goals, may be more open to a wide range of ideas and influences (Larrivee, 2000). Being internally motivated, these teachers ascribed failure to internal sources, they also adopted a solution-oriented approach to problems, engaging in critical reflection. Having higher aspiration levels and therefore higher achievement expectancy helped these teachers persist in the face of difficulties (Weiner, 1985). The combination of a future-orientation and a solution-focused approach led to critical reflection, helping them to exert more agency in return.

Critical reflection empowered Gaye and Pinar to take responsibility for improving both learning outcomes and overcoming external barriers (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This included changing colleagues` and parents` attitudes towards English classes and transforming the mindset about teaching and learning aproaches. These teachers could recognise that they had to think beyond their classrooms, free themselves from external constraints and make more autonomous and independent judgements (Carr & Kemmis 1986). Achieving this might require them to experience conflicts within themselves, shift their way of thinking from a victimised position towards feeling empowered, and see new strategies to respond to problems, which eventually brought change on and beyond students (Larrivee,

2000). Experiencing success and positive outcomes might result in higher sense of self-esteem (Weiner, 1985).

Regarding the role of reflection in increasing Pinar`s self-efficacy, this study aligns with Kurosh, Yousefi and Kashef (2020), who found reflection enhanced ELT teachers` efficacy. However, Pinar`s low self-efficacy actually supported her in achieving agency, which contradicts Bandura`s (2006) view that links high self-efficacy with agency. In Pinar`s case, low self-efficacy was channelled into continuous effort to achieve higher self-efficacy. The contradiction may perhaps be explained by the importance of cultural context and differences in educational values and settings.

By reflecting on their aspirations, these teachers were more agentic regardless of their prior experience or current work environment. For example, lacking reflective opportunities at the pre-service training and teaching practicum did not stop Gaye from engaging in critical reflection later. Ellis (2010), does stress the value of reflection during pre-service teacher preparation, but despite the absence of reflective practice being an explicit component of her pre-service training, Gaye could still develop reflective skills by focusing on her goals and aspirations, suggesting reflective practice may be linked to individual aspirations, not necessarily the stage of training..

Present-oriented agency

The practical-evaluative dimension was significant in shaping other teachers` agency, as teachers felt either enabled or constrained by different contextual factors. Whether the school structure fostered agency seemed to be important in this study, as most of the teachers were able to engage in more effective forms of reflection when they felt supported, which in turn, triggered an internal drive to exert more agency.

A positive present-oriented degree of agency could be observed when there was a combination of a supportive practical-evaluative environment and teachers who adopted a solution-oriented form of reflection. The teachers in these situations, such as Hande and Esma were able to engage in practical reflection. These teachers were solution-oriented (see Figure 2), believed that effort on their part could change the situation they wished to influence (Weiner, 1972). This gave them a sense of responsibility and control over the situation, which could lead to high achievement motivation (Weiner, 1972), and triggering an internal drive to exert more agency. Focusing on solutions, these teachers more closely followed a reflective cycle, continuously evaluating the results of their actions, and considering alternative ideas for actions, although their level of critical reflection was limited.

Engaging in practical reflection enabled teachers to interpret their experiences, consider alternative ideas and give themselves space to restructure their teaching (Larrivee, 2008). The act of visiting their beliefs might help them learn more about themselves and their reasons for the actions they were specifically taking (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Carr and Kemmis (1986) view this as an interpersonal dialogic process, helping individuals to articulate their own concerns, monitor problems and impact of their approach, and evaluate the value and consequences of change achieved eventually. Engaging in such a process might enable teachers to critique their own teaching constructively, take responsibility for students` failure in speaking English. Both Hande and Esma, for example, were able to acknowledge the gap between the current and ideal speaking outcomes for their students, and could identify ways to achieve more desirable learning outcomes (Larrivee, 2008). Eventually, rather than repeating their old patterns or following imposed ideas, these teachers could move towards self-challenge and better self-knowledge (Shabeeb & Akkary, 2014).

Other teachers, however, like Naz, felt disabled by the practical-evaluative environment. When faced with particular issues, regarded as beyond their personal control,

these teachers viewed change as impossible (Weiner, 1972), and engaged in technical reflection-in-action only. Lacking aspiration for the future, these teachers felt powerless, experienced learned helplessness and failed to recognise that their efforts and learning outcomes covaried (Weiner, 1972). As Mine's example showed, these teachers` technical reflection might only consist of identifying a problem, but not knowing what to do about it (Shabeeb & Akkary, 2014).

Lacking long-term goals in their agency, these teachers were concerned with evaluating the results of their actions based on their usefulness and effectiveness to achieve immediate goals, therefore their reflection tended to be superficial (Larrivee, 2008). This is because the ideas they were testing did not emerge from their reflection about their beliefs, therefore their experiences of technical reflection lacked authenticity, meaning and depth (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Leijen et al. (2020) suggest that reflection-in-action can reinforce agency by helping teachers to specify effective strategies, rules or principals for their practice. In this study, although reflection-in-action helped teachers to generate known outcomes and facilitate their control over a situation, such as Sedef`s approach towards behaviour management, it generally did not lead to further analysis of practices, interpretations and situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). However, the few examples of reflection-in-action, when followed by more critical forms of reflection afterwards, like Lale`s efforts for creating a reading corner as a result of reflecting while teaching, seemed to foster a degree of teacher agency.

When teachers had present-oriented agency and lacked a supportive school structure, their educational backgrounds affected their ability to reflect. This finding aligns with Ellis (2010), in the sense that teachers who received PFP, hence lacking effective teaching practicum and ELT-specific knowledge base, did seem to struggle with not knowing how else they could teach. For example Mine, Dilek and Naz felt unable to improve their practice.

Therefore, for teachers who lack strong beliefs and future aspirations, having a deliberate focus on reflective practice at the pre-service stage could help them exert more agency to engage in effective forms of reflection.

Conclusion

This study investigated ELT teachers` experiences of reflective practice in Türkiye, and the role of their agency in their ability to reflect in their growth. The teachers reflected on several areas (students, other people, pedagogical approaches, PL activities, individual dispositions and resources), they experienced both reflection-in- and on-action. While most of the teachers were engaged in technical and practical reflection, only two teachers experienced emancipatory reflection. This was linked to the components of their agency. It seems that those with a future-oriented agency could distance themselves from constraints, and when combined with a solution-oriented approach towards problems, were able to engage in critical reflection. Those with a present-oriented focus on the practical-evaluative dimensions of their context, could feel enabled or disabled. Some were able to engage in practical reflection, when their agency had a stronger iterational dimension or supportive school contexts. Others were limited to technical reflection.

This study builds on Leijen et al. (2020) by examining the link between agency and reflection. It appears that teachers are able to engage in critical reflection, when they have strong projective aspirations, which allows them to surpass the existing constraints and restructure their beliefs, leading to professional growth. Additionally, this study develops the ecological model of agency as proposed by Priestley et al. (2015) by suggesting a connection between future-oriented and present-oriented modes of agency and linking these to types of reflection. Additionally, this study offers insights for teacher development in Türkiye, by emphasising the importance of critical reflection in improving in-service teachers` practice.

Clearly, this study is limited by its scale and focus on a particular group of teachers, but it does suggest a link between teachers` growth and reflection. It would seem helpful for authorities and schools to consider how they foster reflection, but also how the quality of this is impacted by the ecological model of agency. In particular, this study suggests that a greater focus on the prospective dimension of agency can help teachers` professional growth.

Declaration of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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