



## A Mixed-methods Study of Teacher Diary as a Reflective Instrument for the English Language Teacher Development

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### Abstract

From the very outset, postmethod pedagogy has shaken the long-held concept of language teaching and has recognized the importance of contextualized language teaching in the field of Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL). As such, contemporary language teacher education programs have tried to furnish postmethod language teachers with the much-needed development to have their own contextualized praxis to respond to existing English language teaching requirements. By the same token, the current study aimed to find out whether involving language teachers in writing diaries of self-practice and peer practice and then discussing their findings with circle members in regular gatherings would nurture the required self-growth and self-development in language teachers and help them with (the underlying components of) reflective teaching. To do so, the present research employed a mixed-methods design whose quantitative part enjoyed a pre-experimental design consisting of three phases--a pretest, an educational treatment phase, and a posttest – and for its qualitative part the current researchers asked the participating language teachers to keep diaries of both self-practice and peer practice. The results of the study gained through both quantitative and qualitative analyses bore witness to the significant changes in the reflectiveness of language teachers who took part in these collaborative language teachers' diary circles.

**Keywords:** Freirean Pedagogy, Postmethod Pedagogy, Reflective Teaching, Teacher Diary, Teacher Education

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## 1. Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology moved into “beyond methods” more than two decades ago (Richards, 1990). Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (1994) first talked about the “post-method condition,” and, afterward, he introduced and expatiated upon the concept of postmethod pedagogy in a number of books and papers (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a, 2006b). This, in turn, has led to fresh rounds of discussions in academic circles in the field of English as a foreign language/English as a second language (EFL/ESL) teaching profession.

"Postmethod pedagogy," as Kumaravadivelu (2006a) argues, "recognizes teachers' prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks" (p. 178). What this pedagogy strives for is the recognition of contextualized solutions to educational problems. This position, as Blair (2012) maintains, is also in line with the Freirean critical pedagogy discourse which has quite recently emerged from the general educational field into ELT.

Informed by Freirean critical pedagogy, postmethod pedagogy struggles to move towards social transformation in the field of ELT (Akbari, 2008a, 2008b); however, it tries to dump all responsibilities on the classroom teachers' shoulders. Postmethod pedagogy, in fact, expects ELT teachers to be informed enough to be able to gear their teaching towards the varying requirements of different classroom settings (Borzabadi Farahani & Ahmadian, 2007). In order to live up to postmethod ideals, language teachers, as postmethod pedagogs argue, should know both their learners and their classroom contexts in order to develop their own methodology based on the particular qualities of their classroom contexts.

But one question arises as how postmethod pedagogs can help language practitioners make context-specific decisions to actualize postmethod dreams. To do this, as Kumaravadivelu (2003a) argues in the parameter of the practicality of postmethod pedagogy, language teachers need to “theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize” (p. 37). To translate this into classroom terms, postmethod language teachers need to make context-specific decisions based on their classroom research and analyses. They should observe their teaching, evaluate the results, locate problems, explore solutions, and finally try new techniques (Can, 2012).

The parameter of practicality is, in fact, in line with one Freirean (1970, 1998) principle, called praxis, in which theory and practice join forces to create an action that leads to social and political change. To do this, postmethod language teachers need to be able to achieve a proper sense of harmony among knowledge, skills, and experience needed for context-

specific praxis. In other words, they need to be autonomous, critical, and above all, reflective practitioners.

The present authors believe educating autonomous, critical, and reflective language teachers who are able to practice their own context-specific praxis could be accomplished by doing away with the idealistic, top-down teacher training programs and moving towards more pragmatic bottom-up forms of language teacher education programs. One way to expedite such trends and enhance professional and reflective practice might be through language teacher diaries. In fact, the current study aimed to suggest a language teacher diary as a practical and practicable way to nurture critical language teacher development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Language Teacher Education: Training and Development**

The words teacher training, teacher development, and teacher education have often been used interchangeably. However, to begin with, a brief remark on terminology needs to be in order. Conceiving language teacher education as the general process, language teacher educators need to make a valid operational distinction between two trends, i.e., teacher training and teacher development. In fact, as Freeman (1989) argues, the term education should be preserved as a more general, neutral, and inclusive term, i.e., a hypernym, whereas the terms training and development are used to depict the strategies through which teachers are educated.

Language teacher training, as Richards (1989) argues, is based on the view that the essential qualities of effective teaching are recognized and can be characterized in distinct skills or competencies. Moreover, as he asserts, teaching is no longer regarded as predominantly individual or intuitive but, quite on the contrary, as something which could be summarized to general rules and principles emanating from already existing body of knowledge. Often these qualities are associated with a certain established method of language teaching. The approach, as Richards maintains, is prescriptive in nature.

Language teacher training programs are, therefore, characterized by objectives that are motivated by a deficit (Atay, 2004) which are essentially theory-driven and top-down. Richards (1989) goes on to say that the content of the language teacher training programs, i.e., goals and topics, is generally determined well in advance by the teacher educator. In such contexts, the role of the language teacher is reduced to that of a technician who would be concerned mainly with the successful accomplishment of goals decided by external stakeholders (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). In other words, the effective

teacher is regarded as a proficient stage person reciting a number of lines written by an external scriptwriter.

On the other hand, and more recently, there exist teacher education programs that, as Johnston (2003) maintains, move towards teacher development as a process that is guided and undertaken by teachers themselves and not something that is "usually conducted by a teacher educator" and "presented to teachers" (Mann, 2005, p. 104). Moreover, he believes that this view of teacher development places personal growth and self-development at the center of its definition of language teacher development. This perspective also regards language teacher development as a process which is both led and undertaken by language teachers themselves. In other words, language teachers themselves introduce and follow the process of teacher development, while other people, including teacher educators, can only help and guide teachers, but they cannot tell teachers what they need or what they should do. As such, this new view maintains that language teachers must always be in charge of their own development (Johnston, 2003). The present study enjoyed this view of teacher development.

## **2.2. Language Teacher Development in Postmethod Pedagogy**

Informed by the principle of praxis of critical pedagogy, postmethod pedagogy insists that language teachers need to both provide the theoretical bases for their classroom practices and make their own contextual decisions. In other words, it demands that language practitioners become not only classroom teachers but also theorists of their teaching practicum.

However, the technicist language teachers rendered by teacher training programs are denied the altitude to translate their pre-determined teacher training programs content to the realities of the classroom. This is because, as Kumaravadivelu (2006a) argues, teacher training programs are based on idealized concepts which are geared up for idealized contexts. In other words, such programs are of the view that they can previously predict all contextual variables in a top-down fashion. Therefore, they see the process of language teacher education as finite and leave almost no room for prospective language teachers' contextual maneuverability. However, every practicing language teacher knows that each language teaching context is unique in that she needs to deal with various language learning and teaching needs and necessities, teacher and teaching factors, learner factors, and institutional factors. This means that no language teacher training program can envision all the variables in advance to make practically appropriate context-specific proposals.

To make contextualized decisions, language teachers should take the opposite direction dictated by teacher training programs. In other words,

language teachers should be given the necessary authority, as Kumaravadivelu (2003a) maintains, "to tackle the challenges they confront every day in their professional lives" (p. 28) in a more bottom-up fashion. This is exactly sought by the principle of praxis favored by Freirean critical pedagogy and is also advocated by the new view of teacher development programs favored by this research study.

To accomplish praxis, i.e., to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints, language teacher education in postmethod pedagogy needs to move towards "critical language teacher education" (Hawkins & Norton, 2009, p. 32). It is believed that such teacher education programs can prepare language teachers to make required decisions for the unfolding multifarious particulars of the classroom arenas.

Additionally, it is hoped that language teachers who are educated through critical teacher education programs will be able to act as transformative intellectuals who are able to address educational inequality (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). To do this, as Giroux and McLaren (cited in Bercaw & Stooksberry, 2004) argue, language teachers must first adopt a "critical" stance in the sense the concept was used in Paolo Freire's (1970, 1998) philosophical beliefs, and then make existing norms problematic; i.e., they need to firstly learn and also teach how to pose problems, and secondly try to make contextualized decisions to solve them. In other words, they need to learn to "problematize" (Freire, 1998, p. 13).

### **2.3. Reflective Action and Language Teacher development**

To help language teachers to learn to problematize, as Benade (2009) maintains, critical language teacher education programs need to place emphasis on the co-operative knowledge construction along with the democratic dialogue. This, in turn, helps language teachers feel the need to develop a critical awareness that they are neither the mere passive recipients of professional knowledge (Zeichner, 1983) nor sheer transferors of knowledge within a banking system of education. In other words, as Dewey (cited in Farrell, 1998) contends, critical language teacher education programs need to push language teachers towards reconstructing their own educational attitudes through reflecting on their own experiences: to become "reflective" practitioners.

Delving into the literature on reflective action, one would get perplexed as there exists a lack of a unanimous consensus as to what reflective practice actually involves. However, having exhausted the existing literature on the construct of reflective practice, Akbari et al. (2010) attempted to operationalize the construct of reflective action and consequently developed an instrument on the basis of their own provisional model of teacher reflection along with its five components as follows:

1. Practical component: This component is concerned with the tools and the actual practice of reflective action. "Different tools/procedures for the reflective practice include journal writing, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, teaching portfolios, group discussions, analyzing critical incidents (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214).
2. Cognitive component: This constituent deals with teachers' efforts at professional development. "Conducting small-scale classroom research projects (action research), attending conferences and workshops related to one's field of study, and reading the professional literature are among the behaviors included in this domain"(Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214).
3. Learner (affective) component: This element is concerned with "a teacher's reflecting on her students, how they are learning and how learners respond or behave emotionally in their classes" (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214). According to Zeichner and Liston (cited in Akbari et al., 2010), "this tendency emphasizes reflection about students, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thinking and understandings, their interests, and their developmental readiness for particular tasks (p. 214). Additionally, this component includes "teachers' reflecting on their students' emotional responses in their classes (p. 214).
4. Meta-cognitive component: As Akbari (2007) points out, "teachers' personality, and more specifically their affective make-up, can influence their tendency to get involved in reflection and will affect their reaction to their own image resulting from reflection" (p. 214). As such, this meta-cognitive component is concerned with "teachers and their reflections on their own beliefs and personality, the way they define their practice" (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214).
5. Critical component: This constituent entails the social, cultural, and political aspects of pedagogy and reflections upon them. In other words, this component is concerned with "teachers' reflecting on the political significance of their practice and introducing topics related to race, gender, and social class, exploring ways for student empowerment" (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214). The critical component relates reflective action to Freirean critical pedagogy.

#### **2.4. Language Teacher Diaries**

"A teacher's diary" as Richards and Farrell (2005) argue, "is in fact a form of teaching journal which is an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching ... which serves as a source of discussion, reflection, or evaluation" (p. 68). In addition, as Richards and

Farrell contend, a diary may also be a living report of a certain classroom that the teacher would like to review later, or it may be a source of information to be shared with others. Employed as an effective channel of communication, as Howell-Richardson and Parkinson (1988) argue, language teacher diaries (also known as journals) can serve pedagogical purposes, among other purposes, in which practitioners are provided an opportunity to critically analyze their concerns and/or problems encountered during their teaching practices and seek potential solutions (Ohata, 2007). In other words, as Gabryś-Barker (2014) maintains, diary writing, if recorded and interpreted systematically and contextually within the teacher's working environment, could be considered as a reflection process and one of the best tools for both instilling and developing reflective thinking which in turn could contribute to constructing professional knowledge among language teachers.

## **2.5. Related Studies**

In an early study carried out in Hong Kong, Ho and Richards (1993) instructed journal writing at the beginning of the course to ten EFL teachers who registered for an in-service teacher education program. The researchers tried to explore the type of journal writing teachers had, i.e., if their writing could be considered as critically reflective, and if the journal writing experience helped teachers with their critical reflectivity over time. The results of the study indicated that, firstly, what the teachers were mainly concerned about were the problems they would run into in their everyday teaching, and secondly, there was little change in the participating teachers' critical reflectivity over time.

Furthermore, Insuasty and Zambrano Castillo (2010) conducted a study in which they examined whether student teachers could get more reflective teachers through two tools of journal keeping and blog group discussions. There were six student-teachers who developed their practicum over six months. The researchers collected their required data through journals, blogs, metaphors, conferences, and a questionnaire. The journal keeping was approached as an informed process in which student-teachers could go beyond the sheer descriptive documentation of what happened in their classrooms. The findings suggested that student teachers enriched their perceptions about what reflective teaching sought, i.e., evaluating teaching, diagnosing and solving problems.

In another study, Abednia et al. (2013) investigated teacher trainees' own understanding of the effectiveness of journal writing in an EFL teacher education program. To do this, they chose an experimental group of six in-service EFL teachers who took part in the discussions of the upsides and downsides of the journal writing task. Thematic analysis of the discussion suggested that the participating EFL teachers considered their writing

journals had resulted in higher self-awareness, deeper understanding of language teaching issues, improved reasoning skills, and more constructive dialogs with the teacher educator.

In a more recent study, Göker (2016) investigated the impact of reflective journal keeping of 16 student teachers on their reflective practicum. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed to carry out this study, i.e., "open-ended questioning techniques (surveys and interviews) and written reflections under reflective categories" (p. 63) were employed to show how the participants reflected on their teaching experience as anecdotal data. The findings of this study also suggested that student teachers were empowered as reflective practitioners at the end of the course of the study.

Finally, and the most recent study, Khanjani et al. (2018) carried out a study to fill the gap between the EFL teachers' perceptions of reflective practice and the actual application of reflective practice in EFL teaching practice. They employed a questionnaire, which included both closed- and open-ended items, and an observation checklist to collect the data. The data gained from the checklist and closed-ended items of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively, and a qualitative content analysis was utilized for the open-ended items of the questionnaire. The findings showed that "journal writing had a significant effect on promoting the reflective practice in teacher trainees" (p. 57).

## **2.6. Research Questions**

Given the reflectivity-criticality trend in language teacher education sought by postmethod pedagogy, the current research does its best to develop a critical language teacher education path through which in-service language teacher education programs could hopefully lead to further reflectivity and criticality of participating language teachers. To this end, the following research question was formulated as the primary purpose of the current study:

1. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance language teachers' reflective action?

The secondary purpose of the current research is to determine whether participation in collaborative teacher diary circles enhances the components of reflective action, i.e., practical, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and critical components. As such, the following research sub-questions were formulated:

1. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance the practical component of language teachers' reflective action?

2. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance the cognitive component of language teachers' reflective action?
3. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance the learner (affective) component of language teachers' reflective action?
4. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance the metacognitive component of language teachers' reflective action?
5. Does language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments enhance the critical component of language teachers' reflective action?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

A total number of 30 language teachers (18 male and 22 female language teachers), aged 24-34, teaching at five language institutes located in the northern city of Sari, Iran, took part in the study. All participating language teachers had language teaching experience ranging from 3 to 10 years at various levels of EFL conversation classrooms. Seventeen of them had their B.A. degrees in English-related disciplines, i.e., translation, teaching, and literature; the remaining 23 were working towards or had already earned a Master's degree in TEFL. The participants came from the same Persian L1 background. Attempts (through running the reflective teaching questionnaire as the pretest) were made to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their level of reflective practice at the beginning of the study.

#### **3.2. Instruments**

##### ***3.2.1. The Reflective Teaching Questionnaire***

Given the nature of the current research, the researchers made use of *The Reflective Teaching Questionnaire* which was created, tested, and validated by Akbari et al. (2010), and used it here in its original form. Akbari et al. created the categories and the questionnaire in its entirety through a narrowing and defining of topics, and interviews with experts, both teachers and administrators in the area. The 29 items of the questionnaire consist of a test of the five categories of reflection on a Likert scale where participants can choose to answer on a varied scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). The reliability of the instrument was calculated to be .85 based on the result of Cronbach's alpha analysis (N= 300) (Akbari et al., 2010).

### **3.2.2. Diaries**

Teachers' diaries of peers' practices in which each circle member kept a non-evaluative written record of classroom events and observations of other colleagues' classes she had carried out. In fact, "without such a record, the teacher often has no substantial recollection of what has happened during a lesson and cannot use the experience of successful (and sometimes unsuccessful) teaching as a source for further learning" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 69). Moreover, *the* teacher's diaries of self-appraisal in which the teacher wrote on regular occasions how observations of other classes and participating in practical and theoretical discussion circles had changed her attitudes and teaching practicum to the direction of critical and reflective practices.

### **3.3. Research Treatment**

It is commonly believed that the process of writing about one's teaching practices and then going through it collaboratively along with democratic dialogs (Benade, 2009) to analyze events critically leads to new insights about those events and ones' own teaching practices. As such, and to achieve the purpose of the study, participants underwent a 12-week-long scenario as follows. To begin with and prior to the treatment phase of the study, the participating language teachers were asked to fill out the Reflective Teaching Questionnaire. This was an attempt to describe the language teachers' initial reflective practice.

Motivated and informed by Ahmadian and Maftoon's (2016) study on how to enhance critical language teacher development by means of providing reflective opportunities for the treatment phase of the present study, the current researchers asked the participating language teachers to keep diaries of both self-practice and peer practice (and hand them to the researcher every ten days after the gathering). Then, the participating language teachers, along with the researcher, convened regular meetings every ten days in one of the language institutes. They created collaborative discussion circles in which they reflected and commented on the content of each other's diaries. The purpose of such discussions was to create opportunities for group members to have open-ended exchanges of opinions in a mutually respectful environment. It was hoped that such discussions finally give way to the circle members' tolerance, openness to the dialog, reflectivity, and, ultimately, criticality.

Finally, for the posttest phase of the study, the language teachers were asked to fill out the same questionnaire they had filled in for the pretest phase. The purpose was to see how far the participating teachers' attitudes, viewpoint, and practices have changed as a result of their participation in the treatment period, i.e., have they become more reflective practitioners?

### 3.4. Research Design

As the present study was exploratory in nature, it involved a concurrent (Ary et al., 2014), otherwise known as convergent (Creswell, 2015), qualitative-quantitative research design during the separate quantitative-qualitative data collection phase of the study. The quantitative part of the current study employed a quasi-experimental design that consisted of three phases of a pretest, an educational treatment phase, and a posttest.

The main reason why the current research involved the mixing of both qualitative and quantitative data within the framework of a mixed research method was to increase the strengths and decrease the weaknesses of the study through gathering both numerical and non-numerical information in order to arrive at a clearer picture of the problem. This is because the present study employed "triangulation as an effective research strategy to ensure research validity" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. Quantitative Results

To begin with, both the pretest and the posttest data gained from the Reflective Teaching Questionnaire were analyzed to determine if they showed a normal distribution or not. As the sample size was less than 50, the researchers used the Shapiro-Wilk statistical test to explore the normality of the data (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The results are provided in Tables 1 and 2 below:

**Table 1**

*Normality Tests for Questionnaire Pre-Test Total Data*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher Diaries	.896	40	.116

**Table 2**

*Normality Tests for Questionnaire Post-Test Total Data*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher Diaries	.937	40	.424

As both Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, the values of P for Shapiro-Wilk test of normality for the total results of the pre-test and post-test data were found to be larger than .05. In other words, the data showed normal distribution, and, therefore, one of the conditions to employ parametric tests to analyze the total results of the questionnaire was established.

Furthermore, the results for the five components of reflective action, i.e., Practical, Cognitive, Affective, Metacognitive, and Critical components, for each set of pre-test and post-test data are shown in Tables 3 and 4. The values of P for Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality for each of the components will be referred to in the proper section of the Results.

**Table 3***Normality Tests for Questionnaire Pre-test Data*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Practical	.915	40	.213
Cognitive	.874	40	.060
Affective	.890	40	.097
Metacognitive	.650	40	.000
Critical	.877	40	.064

**Table 4***Normality Tests for Questionnaire Post-test Data*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Practical	.852	40	.030
Cognitive	.804	40	.008
Affective	.803	40	.007
Metacognitive	.884	40	.080
Critical	.885	40	.083

To find out if language teachers' keeping diaries of self-practice complemented by peers' comments (known simply as teachers' diaries circle) culminated in any significant difference in the total reflective action of participating language teachers, the parametric Paired Samples t-test was run on the questionnaire-provided data, the results of which are provided in the following Table 5.

According to the results of the above table, there was a significant difference in the total reflective action of language teachers who participated in teachers' diaries circle ( $t(39) = 2.392, p < .05$ ).

To explore the possible effects of teachers' diaries on the practical component of reflective action, and taking the non-normality of the data for the practical component of teachers' diaries into account (see Table 3 and 4), the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was administered, the results of which are illustrated in the Tables 6 and 7 below.

**Table 5***Paired Samples t-test Results for Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig.
Pair 1	posttest – pretest	5.076	7.653	2.122	.451	9.70	2.39	39	.034

**Table 6***Ranks for Practical Component of Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
pretest – posttest	Negative Ranks	38	6.50	78.00
	Positive Ranks	2	13.00	13.00
	Ties	0		
	Total	40		

**Table 7***Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Practical Component*

		pretest - posttest
	Z	-2.290 <sup>a</sup>
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.022

a. Based on positive ranks.

The findings of Table 7 suggest that there is a significant difference in the practical component of reflective action of language teachers who took part in teachers' diaries circles ( $Z = -2.290$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

Furthermore, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was administered on the non-normal data (see Tables 3 and 4) to come up with the answer to the possible effects of teachers' diaries on the cognitive component of reflective action. Tables 8 and 9 below bear the results.

**Table 8***Ranks for Cognitive Component of Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
pretest-posttest	Negative Ranks	36	7.00	77.00
	Positive Ranks	4	7.00	14.00
	Ties	0		
	Total	40		

As shown in Table 9, there is a significant difference in the cognitive component of reflective action of language teachers who participated in teachers' diaries circles ( $Z = -2.211$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 9***Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Cognitive Component*

	pretest-posttest
Z	-2.211 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.027

a. Based on positive ranks.

In addition, to understand whether there was any significant difference in the learner (affective) component of reflective action of language teachers who took part in collaborative professional and critical discussion circles, the relevant pretest-posttest data gained through the Reflective Teaching Questionnaire were put to tests of normality whose results rejected normal distribution (see Tables 3 and 4). Afterward, to explore the possible effects of teachers' diaries on the affective component of reflective action, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted, which are shown in the following Tables 10 and 11.

**Table 10***Ranks for Affective Component of Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
pretest - posttest	Negative Ranks	34	6.25	62.50
	Positive Ranks	2	3.50	3.50
	Ties	4		
	Total	40		

The findings in Table 11 indicate that there is a significant difference in the affective component of reflective action of language teachers who participated in teachers' diaries circles ( $Z = -2.676$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 11***Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Affective Component*

	pretest-posttest
Z	-2.676 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.007

a. Based on positive ranks.

In order to address the possible effects of keeping diaries of self-practice on the metacognitive component of language teachers' reflective action, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, given the non-normality of the data (see Tables 3 and 4) was run to discover the possible effects of teachers' diaries on the metacognitive component of reflective action of language teachers in this group. The results are reported in Tables 12 and 13 below.

**Table 12***Ranks for Metacognitive Component of Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
pretest-posttest	Negative Ranks	30	6.25
	Positive Ranks	4	2.50
	Ties	6	
	Total	40	50.00

**Table 13***Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Metacognitive Component*

	pretest-posttest
Z	-2.325 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.020

a. Based on positive ranks.

On the basis of the findings in Table 13, there is a significant difference in the metacognitive component of reflective action of language teachers who attended teachers' diaries circles ( $Z = -2.325$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

Finally, to understand whether there was any significant difference in the critical component of reflective action of language teachers who took part in teachers' diaries circles, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, considering the non-normality of the data (see Tables 3 and 4), was conducted to find out the likely influence of teachers' diaries on the critical component of reflective action of language teachers in this circle (Tables 14 and 15).

**Table 14***Ranks for Critical Component of Teachers' Diaries Circle*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
pretest-posttest	Negative Ranks	32	6.25	62.50
	Positive Ranks	4	3.50	3.50
	Ties	4		
	Total	40		

As the results of Table 15 suggest, there is a significant difference in the critical component of reflective action of language teachers who participated in teachers' diaries circles ( $Z = -2.643$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 15***Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Critical Component*

	pretest-posttest
Z	-2.643 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008

a. Based on positive ranks.

#### **4.1.2. Qualitative Results**

To analyze the obtained diary data qualitatively, the participating language teachers' accounts were sifted through employing qualitative content analysis regarding the five components of reflection tapped by the reflective teaching questionnaire developed by Akbari et al. (2010).

##### **4.1.2.1. Practical Component**

The first thing about reflective teachers that crosses one's mind is that such teachers should not only care about the quality of their teaching practicum but also do their best using whatever possible means available to them to enhance their everyday practice. The potential means of practical elements of reflection, as Farrell (2003) and Richards and Farrell (2005) argue, include group discussions, journal writing, observation, action research, and teaching portfolio. In this regard, and according to the analysis of the content of the diaries of the participants, an overwhelming majority (95%) of them wrote that they talked about their classroom experiences with colleagues and sought their takes and tips on them. Here are two examples from their diaries:

**Example 1:** *I really enjoy talking to other experienced teachers every day when I attend this language institute. I feel I am much more experienced now.*

**Example 2:** *In our break time, we talk about different issues such as classroom management, different materials, and how to teach vocabulary.*

Furthermore, almost 70% of them mentioned that in addition to talking about their everyday classroom practices, they exchange views regarding the theoretical and practical issues of ELT with other co-workers. Furthermore, as this study provided the participants with the opportunity to observe each other's classes and write their own report on what changes their observation of other classes sparked in their own teaching practices, nearly all teachers (98%) declared that classroom visits furnished them with the best opportunity to learn about efficient practices and reshape some of their own practices. Here are two examples:

**Example 1:** *After visiting my friends' classes and seeing how they run their classes, I have made some changes to my classroom procedure.*

**Example 2:** *Seeing another person teaching, I had a lot to think about: how to give feedback, how to motivate students.*

The results suggest that when language teachers discuss practical and theoretical issues and everyday teaching experiences with their colleagues, they reflect on their own actions and take responsibility for their own development, whose benefits will undeniably be extended to language learners.

#### 4.1.2.2. Cognitive Component

Following Akbari et al. (2010), the current researchers went through the writings of the participants to see if they made any attempts to develop professionally. More than half of the teachers (59%) mentioned that in order to raise students' attention and motivation, they did their best to have creativity alongside routines in their teaching practicum:

**Example 1:** *For each of my classes, I created a Telegram group so that I can share English-related stuff with them.*

**Example 2:** *I ask my students to call or text each other in English, and also leave messages for each other in messaging applications in English.*

Also, the majority of teachers (85%) asserted that they are willing to not only read articles and books related to effective teaching but also participate in workshops and/or conferences on learning/teaching issues so as to both improve their own classroom performances and enhance students' learning. Two examples follow:

**Example 1:** *I always look for conferences and workshops on language teaching so that I can attend and improve my knowledge.*

**Example 2:** *I am an MA student in TEFL, and I read books and papers related to language teaching/learning.*

#### 4.1.2.3. Affective Component

Following Zeichner and Liston (1996), who believe that reflective teachers consider students, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their interests, and openness to learning, Akbari et al. (2010) argue that reflective teachers should take into account how learners learn, respond or behave emotionally in classroom settings.

A great number of participants in this study (90%) mentioned in their later diaries that they do their best to give a general picture of how human beings learn through explaining various learning styles and affective factors

to their learners. This helps students, as teachers argued in their writings, to be more tolerant of themselves and others during the process of learning, especially when they have problems understanding a certain point or making a mistake. Also, it helps students to attain some degrees of self-awareness which is necessary for their own autonomy. Furthermore, it helps teachers to know their students better which is much needed in the process of giving various types of (corrective) feedback. Here are two examples from their diaries:

**Example 1:** *I always ask my students to tell me after the class time what they liked and they didn't like of my way of teaching. This way I can learn a lot about my own teaching performance.*

**Example 2:** *My students are important to me and I do care about them. I try not to do anything that hurts their feelings.*

#### 4.1.2.4. Metacognitive Component

To follow Akbari et al.'s (2010) model of reflection, metacognitive component deals with "teachers' knowledge of their personality, their definition of learning and teaching, and their view of their profession" (p. 215). The current researchers combed through the participating EFL teachers' diaries to see not only if they thought about their teaching philosophy and how it affected their classroom practices, but also whether they thought about their own strengths and weaknesses as EFL teachers.

The majority of the participants (92%) were of the idea that periodical discussions with other teachers furnished them with the wisdom of hindsight so that they could unravel their own teaching philosophies and realize not only if they had previously set any goals for their teaching practicum, but also how far they have accomplished them:

**Example 1:** *Now, whenever I go to my classes, I think about that session's instructional objectives.*

**Example 2:** *I try to change my teaching procedure in order to teach better than before.*

Also, most teachers (80%) reported that as they went through the process of writing, observing, writing, and discussing their takes with other circle members, they became more and more cognizant of their own strong and weak points as EFL teachers and planned for remedial work:

**Example 1:** *In every session, I learn more on how to teach some parts such as grammar better.*

**Example 2:** *I always try to find solutions when I find my teaching does not fit certain students.*

All these reports have one theme in common: the desire to learn and be a better teacher. The reports were indicative of the fact that the circle members were willing to look at their own teaching in retrospect both individually and collectively so that they could locate problematic areas, mistakes, and wrong conceptions, and look for avenues for the future betterment of their subsequent teaching practices. The theme is, in fact, in line with EFL teachers' "tendency to get involved in reflection" in the hope that it "will affect their reflection to their own image resulting from reflection" (Akbari et al., 2010, p. 214).

#### 4.1.2.5. Critical Component

The last component of reflection in Akbari et al.'s (2010) model refers to the socio-politico-cultural aspects of pedagogy and reflection upon those elements. The critical component, in effect, deals with EFL teachers' thinking about the socio-cultural significance of their teaching practicum, raising topics such as social injustice, poverty, HIV AIDS, gender bias, social class, and tolerance, and finally helping students with empowerment and voice.

According to the obtained results, more than half of the participants (52%) mentioned that they work with their students on socio-cultural topics. Some of them even reported that they try to enable their language learners to change their stereotypical social lives by making them aware and fight against discrimination and gender bias:

**Example:** *In my speaking classes, I try to raise topics such as why women should be allowed to have socially equal status with men?*

Moreover, only a few teachers referred to the fact that in order to make students more tolerant of diversities, which is a necessary factor in learning a foreign/second language, they play devil's advocate with their students while discussing socio-cultural issues in some of their classes:

**Example:** *In my free discussion classes, I often disagree with many of the students on social topics so we can have a hot debate.*

It can be concluded that EFL teachers with critical reflection reflect upon their own identities as teachers and look for potential ways to help their students to move toward empowerment, become more tolerant of diversities, and finally gain their own voice in society.

## 4.2. Discussion

The findings of the current research vividly demonstrated that partaking in collaborative language teacher diary circles led to significant changes in the reflectiveness of the member language teachers. The results of this study were quite in line with those of Insuasty and Zambrano Castillo (2010), Abednia et al. (2013), Göker (2016), and Khanjani et al. (2018), in

which there was a significant difference between the participants' reflective practice before and after journal-writing treatment.

Furthermore, the results, in teacher education terms, showed that the collaborative meetings along with due non-judgmental discussions furnished language teachers with considerable latitude to practically exercise "teacher support group" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 51) in which "critical friendship" (Farrell, 2001, p. 368) was fully functional.

The very process of writing diaries along with subsequent dialogic discussions provided the circle members with ample opportunities to individually take a critical look at their own teaching contexts through posing problems and then collectively come up with appropriate solutions through making the right decisions. This dialogic process gave language teachers a voice helping them to distance themselves from mere passive recipients of knowledge transferred from a superordinate body of knowledge, i.e., teacher trainer, in their teaching training programs. Conversely, language teachers realized that they needed to both personally and concertedly look critically at their teaching practicum to pose problems, challenge each other to generate information, make decisions to solve those problems, and finally create knowledge dialogically.

Moreover, the findings of the study can be looked at from three points of view. First of all, the outcome of the current research can be justified by the Vygotskian (1978, 1986) sociocultural position. As sociocultural perspective considers cognitive development as a socially mediated process, collaborative discussions of the content of the diaries in group's regular gatherings played the same role in helping language teachers with their cognitive development through a transformative and constructive process of consciousness development.

Secondly, the results of the study bear witness to the tenets of Activity Theory. According to the theory, cognitive development (reflectiveness in this case) is taken on by human agents (language teachers) who were motivated toward a purpose (reflective teaching) mediated by tools (language) in collaboration with others (group members) (Daniels, 2001).

Finally, it should also be noted that language teachers in this study were given an opportunity in which they could systematically reflect on their own act of teaching, learn how to listen to each other, and participate in non-judgmental collective learning activities. The whole process, in fact, helped language teachers to "forge on the development of their autonomy" (Freire, 1998, p. 78) and make decisions that are "aware and conscientious" (p. 79), and eventually, grow stronger self-directed learning attitudes to restructure their routinized teaching practicum. Language teachers, in practical terms, came to match between their pedagogical practice and their personal

pedagogical theory: to link theory to practice, or "praxis," as Freire (1970, p. 51) calls it.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

The present research aimed to help language teachers with their reflective development through what Freire (1998) calls "education as intervention" (p. 70). This has been accomplished by asking language teachers to firstly keep diaries of both self-practice and peer-practice and then professionally and critically discussing their experiences and opinions in their regular dispassionate gatherings. In other words, the main objective of the current study was to see how the proposed path for critical language teacher education, i.e., language teachers' diaries along with due concerted discussions, would promote language teachers' reflective teaching and their subsequent teaching practicum.

The reason behind such a motion is that language teachers in 21<sup>st</sup> century TESOL must be autonomous and self-governed professionals who are able to articulate and implement their individualized beliefs, in particular, ELT educational contexts. To reach such a state, language teachers need to do away with the limited and limiting view of transmission-based teacher training programs and move towards the teacher development side of teacher education programs.

As such, this study has, in fact, done its best to furnish a group of language practitioners with ample opportunities to democratically and critically (re)construct their knowledge of language teaching by exploring many avenues through reflecting, discussing, and sharing their experiences and ideas towards the betterment of their own practices. The final results of the study bear witness to the fact that the ideals of teacher development, i.e., self-growth and personal development, were well in working order.

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