

Research Article

Cite this article: Aassif, A., Lotfi, F. Z., Laajan, Y., El Jari, K., & Nachit, B. (2026). Contribution of Reflective Practices to Strengthening the Pedagogical Autonomy of French Teachers in Secondary Education. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 21, e2026031. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2026.21.31>

Received August 24, 2025


Accepted January 1, 2026

Keywords: Reflective practices, pedagogical autonomy, French language teachers, secondary education, professional development.

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Contribution of Reflective Practices to Strengthening the Pedagogical Autonomy of French Teachers in Secondary Education

Abdelhamid Aassif , Fatima Zahra Lotfi , Youssef Laajan , Khadija El Jari , Brahim Nachit 

Abstract

Background/purpose. This study explores the role of reflective practices in enhancing the pedagogical autonomy of French language teachers in Moroccan secondary education. It begins with the observation that, although reflective thinking is essential for professional development, its effectiveness is often limited by obstacles such as lack of time, inadequate training, and insufficient institutional support. The main objective is to examine the relationship between the frequency of reflective practices and various dimensions of teacher autonomy, and to identify the most commonly used forms of reflection and the main challenges teachers face.

Materials/methods. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. An online questionnaire was administered to a sample of 210 teachers, including closed-ended questions to assess reflective practices and autonomy, as well as open-ended questions to capture teachers' perceptions of difficulties. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subsample to gain deeper insights into the institutional and pedagogical context. Data analysis involved statistical techniques (ANOVA, MANOVA) and thematic content analysis.

Results. Findings show that most teachers engage in some form of reflective practice and that there is a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of such practices and levels of autonomy, particularly regarding method selection, content adaptation, and activity design. However, teachers also reported several barriers, such as time constraints, lack of specialized training, and weak institutional support.

Conclusion. This study advocates several measures to institutionalize reflexivity: incorporating dedicated modules on reflective practices into professional development programs for teachers; allocating specific time slots for individual and collective reflection; promoting professional learning communities (PLCs) to facilitate peer collaboration; and strengthening pedagogical support, particularly for novice teachers. These actions aim to establish a sustainable culture of reflection and facilitate the gradual development of pedagogical and professional autonomy.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global educational landscape, characterized by multidimensional challenges, teachers' capacity to examine their pedagogical practices critically has become essential to address the evolving needs of their learners and societies. Professional autonomy is understood as the teacher's competence to make informed pedagogical decisions and to fully assume responsibility for their consequences, which are identified as a critical determinant of teaching quality. Within this framework, reflective practices—defined as systematic processes for critically analyzing professional actions, cognitions, and affects to optimize them—play a central role in developing such autonomy (Schön, 1983; Perrenoud, 2001).

Reflective practices are pivotal in enabling educators to critically evaluate their methodologies and student interactions, thereby fostering continuous refinement of pedagogical skills and teaching approaches. They also constitute a key mechanism for enhancing teachers' resilience amid complex professional challenges. In the context of teaching French in Morocco's upper secondary cycle, where educators navigate diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-contextual demands, such reflexivity holds particular significance. It empowers them to adapt to learners' specific needs while effectively reconciling institutional expectations with classroom realities, ultimately strengthening pedagogical and professional autonomy.

Recent international research continues to demonstrate the concrete mechanisms through which reflective practices foster teacher autonomy. A qualitative case study by Latifa et al. (2025) in Indonesia demonstrated how reflective journaling served as a pathway to autonomy for EFL secondary teachers. Their analysis of journal entries revealed that elements like testing hypotheses and reasoning were directly linked to autonomous classroom actions, including syllabus adaptation and material development to meet student needs. Similarly, in the context of early childhood education, Tang and Hwang (2025) implemented a Systemic Practical Situated Reflection (SPSR) mechanism in Taiwanese kindergartens. Their 18-month action research found that structured reflection within a collaborative community empowered teachers to overcome challenges and make more informed pedagogical decisions, thereby strengthening their professional autonomy. While these studies from diverse Asian contexts provide valuable insights into the autonomy-enhancing potential of specific reflective frameworks, a significant gap remains in understanding how similar processes operate within the unique socio-educational context of Moroccan secondary education, particularly for French language teachers. The specific challenges these teachers face—navigating among Arabic, French, and local cultural imperatives within a rapidly evolving educational landscape—create a distinct environment in which the relationship between reflective practice and pedagogical autonomy demands focused investigation.

The present research, therefore, seeks to systematically investigate the contribution of reflective practices to strengthening the pedagogical autonomy of French teachers in Moroccan secondary education. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do reflective practices influence the pedagogical autonomy of French teachers in Moroccan secondary schools?
2. What types of reflective practices are most frequently employed by these teachers, and how are they implemented?
3. What are the perceived facilitating and constraining factors that affect the adoption of reflective practices in this context?

This article investigates the influence of reflective practices on the pedagogical autonomy of French language teachers, drawing on empirical insights from Morocco and international settings. It examines how critical reflection on teaching practices simultaneously enhances professional

expertise, cultivates autonomy, and fortifies teachers' agency over their professional environments. Through this lens, we analyze facilitating and constraining factors for reflective practice and propose contextually adaptable strategies—particularly for upper secondary education—to institutionalize reflection as a catalyst for professional autonomy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Reflexive Practices and Professional Autonomy

Reflective practices, as defined by Schön (1992), constitute a process whereby teachers critically analyze professional experiences to enhance instructional effectiveness. Killion and Todnem (1991) subsequently expanded this conceptualization by distinguishing between reflection-in-action (during pedagogical interventions) and reflection-on-action (post-intervention), underscoring the importance of teachers engaging in this iterative process at multiple stages of the teaching-learning continuum.

Professional autonomy, according to Pearson and Moomaw (2005), denotes educators' capacity to make informed, independent, and accountable pedagogical decisions. Within the Moroccan context, however, such autonomy frequently encounters systemic constraints—including ministerial directives, resource limitations, and students' linguistic and cultural diversity (Kharroubi & El Mediouni, 2024).

Recent empirical investigations (e.g., Agnihotri et al., 2024) demonstrate that a habit of critical analysis can strengthen teachers' professional autonomy by enabling contextually responsive pedagogical adaptations aligned with their core values. Thus, while conceptually distinct, these constructs are interdependent: this capacity for introspection deepens understanding of instructional decision-making and enhances educators' ability to exercise agency amid institutional demands arising from educational reforms.

2.2. Reflective Practices as a Lever for Professional Development

Critical reflection serves as a fundamental catalyst for teacher professional development. Dewey's (1933) foundational work established that reflective thinking enables educators to address complex pedagogical challenges through systematic examination of teaching practices. Contemporary research by Farrell (2022) empirically demonstrates that structured frameworks—including portfolio systems, collaborative learning communities, and reflective journals—effectively scaffold continuous enhancement of professional competencies.

Warfa and Machyo's (2023) empirical investigation confirms that sustained engagement in reflective processes not only strengthens pedagogical skills but also facilitates instructional adaptation during educational transitions, particularly within reform contexts. This approach proves especially salient in Morocco's educational environment. Mohammed et al. (2022) document that French-language instructors who adopt reflexive stances demonstrate greater capacity to align methodologies with learners' needs despite institutional pressures and multilingual complexities.

Three predominant implementation modalities emerge:

1. Individual reflection (via pedagogical diaries),
2. Collaborative reflection (within professional learning communities),
3. Guided reflection (through mentoring or professional development).

These strategic approaches collectively transform teaching into a critically adaptive practice—simultaneously centering learners as pedagogical focal points while enhancing practitioners' professional agency.

2.3. Reflexive Practices and Their Effects on Professional Autonomy

The various Reflective practices in education manifest through three complementary modalities, each enhancing teachers' pedagogical and professional autonomy:

1. Individual Scaffolding: Utilizing instruments such as reflective journals (Loughran, 2002), this approach enables educators to systematically analyze instructional practices, identify professional strengths and limitations, and design developmental pathways. Such introspective processes cultivate pedagogical self-reliance by fostering critical metacognition, thereby reducing dependence on external feedback.

2. Collaborative Engagement: Within professional learning communities or communities of practice (CoPs) (Farrell, 2017), educators co-construct pedagogical solutions through shared experiences and perspective exchange. In Morocco's educational context, this modality empowers French teachers to innovate amid classroom heterogeneity (Mohammed et al., 2022). Yang's (2024) research confirms its dual impact: adoption of novel instructional strategies and heightened confidence in pedagogical decision-making.

3. Guided Development: Mentorship and professional development programs provide structured support for practice analysis, particularly benefiting novice teachers navigating complex environments (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). As Mokoena and van Tonder (2024) demonstrate, such scaffolding strategically builds pedagogical autonomy through essential early-career support systems.

Collectively, these modalities reconfigure teaching praxis: they illuminate classroom dynamics, promote proactive resolution of instructional challenges, and consolidate confidence for evidence-informed educational decisions. This convergence of individual, collective, and supported reflection constitutes a catalyst for professional empowerment.

2.4. The Impact of Reflective Practices on Professional Autonomy

International research consistently demonstrates a correlation between reflective practice and teacher autonomy. Foundational studies by Ryan and Deci (2000) and Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) establish that educators who systematically analyze their instructional methods develop heightened professional confidence and enhanced decision-making agency. Loughran's (2002) seminal work further reveals that professional learning communities simultaneously strengthen pedagogical autonomy and foster professional belonging amid evolving educational landscapes. These findings align with contemporary research by Rauteda (2024), which documents reflexivity's capacity to help practitioners navigate tensions between institutional mandates and pedagogical convictions—echoing Morin's humanistic conception of autonomy as "acting with conscious awareness of personal and societal implications" (as cited in Lotfi, 2020).

Within Morocco's educational context, this relationship manifests with particular significance. Ouladhadda and Azhar's (2024) empirical investigation observes that upper secondary French teachers engaged in collaborative reflection develop demonstrable capacity to overcome challenges posed by educational reforms. These professionals report greater efficacy in reconciling ministerial expectations with learner-specific needs, thereby transforming implementation pressures into catalysts for pedagogical innovation.

2.5. The Challenges and Limits of Reflexive Practices in the Moroccan Context

Despite established benefits, the implementation of reflective practices faces significant constraints stemming from systemic barriers. Empirical evidence identifies three primary impediments: excessive workload demands, inadequate professional development structures, and institutional performance pressures—factors that have been documented as substantially limiting

reflective engagement across educational contexts (Farrell, 2017). Within Morocco's distinctive environment, these challenges intensify due to disparities in resource allocation. Atmani and Madrane's (2023) fieldwork reveals that rural educators encounter compounded obstacles, including insufficient institutional support and contextually irrelevant training programs, which collectively diminish reflexive capacity.

A further critical limitation emerges from hierarchical supervisory cultures. Mohammed et al. (2022) observe that accountability fears inhibit authentic critical self-assessment among practitioners, creating organizational climates that may discourage the professional vulnerability essential for growth. This dynamic demonstrably reduces both the depth and frequency of reflective practice implementation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This research analyzes the reflective practices and pedagogical autonomy of French teachers in Morocco, focusing on the impact of professional experience and teaching context on these practices. The target population consisted of all French teachers working in public and private secondary schools throughout Morocco during the 2024–2025 academic year. From this population, a representative sample of 210 teachers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure balanced representation across regions (urban and rural), school types (public and private), and gender. Participation was voluntary, and only teachers with at least two years of teaching experience were included, while those on administrative leave were excluded.

The participants are divided into different age groups: 36.2% are under 30, 39.5% between 30 and 40, 16.7% between 41 and 50, and 7.6% over 50. This diversity of ages enables us to examine variations in teaching practices as a function of experience. In terms of professional seniority, 30% of teachers have less than 5 years' experience, 29.5% between 5 and 10 years, 24.8% between 11 and 20 years, and 15.7% more than 20 years. These differences illustrate the diversity of career paths and their influence on teachers' pedagogical autonomy.

For the qualitative phase, a purposive subsample of 20 teachers was selected from the quantitative respondents. Inclusion criteria required participants to (a) be actively teaching French at the secondary level, (b) have at least three years of teaching experience, and (c) be willing to participate in an interview. Teachers in administrative roles or with less than one year of experience were excluded. This ensured data relevance and homogeneity in professional status.

3.2. Study Instruments

Data collection employed a mixed-methods explanatory design, integrating digital surveys administered via Google Forms with semi-structured interviews. This design allowed quantitative results to be complemented and explained by qualitative findings.

The survey instrument underwent rigorous validation by educational science specialists, and psychometric reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients (initial $\alpha = 0.824$; standardized $\alpha = 0.862$). This validated tool systematically measured reflective practices, pedagogical autonomy, and contextual constraints reported by participating educators.

A pilot test involving 25 teachers was conducted to assess clarity and cultural appropriateness. Feedback from participants was incorporated to refine wording and ensure the questionnaire's reliability and validity.

A purposively selected subgroup of survey respondents subsequently participated in semi-structured interviews. These qualitative engagements yielded rich contextual narratives that complemented quantitative findings, providing granular insights into profession-specific dynamics. This methodological triangulation transformed statistical data into meaningful professional discourse, significantly enhancing comprehension of the interplay between pedagogical autonomy and reflective practice.

3.3. Data Analysis Process

The Data collection employed a digitally administered survey distributed via Google Forms to examine the relationship between reflective practices and pedagogical autonomy among upper secondary French instructors in Morocco. Following comprehensive pilot testing, the instrument was disseminated through professional networks and direct contacts over six weeks, ensuring voluntary, anonymous participation in accordance with established ethical protocols.

A mixed analytical approach is integrated:

- Quantitative methods (descriptive statistics identifying core trends; Pearson correlations examining autonomy variable relationships; MANOVA assessing reflective practice impact by experience level and implementation frequency)
- Qualitative methods (thematic analysis of open-response items and semi-structured interviews)

Thematic coding of open-ended responses and interview transcripts identified recurrent constructs and explored instructors' perceptions of reflexivity's influence on professional agency. This methodological triangulation elucidated contextual challenges, motivational drivers, and concrete strategies through which systematic reflective practice enhances instructional freedom—effectively transforming statistical outputs into lived professional narratives.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of educational research. Participants were informed in advance about the study's objectives and procedures, and their free and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality of responses were guaranteed, in compliance with ethical and regulatory standards.

4. Results

Our questionnaire findings yield substantial empirical insights regarding participating instructors' reflective practices and pedagogical autonomy. To ensure conceptual cohesion in analyzing these results, we present outcomes through three principal analytical dimensions that reveal dominant trends while maintaining methodological coherence. These dimensions comprise:

4.1. Reflective Practices

This initial analytical dimension examines how educators embed reflective practices within their professional routines, demonstrating observable transformations in instructional decision-making and pedagogical approaches throughout student interactions. Indeed, reflexivity, as a process of awareness and critical analysis of one's own professional practices, plays a key role in the evolution of teaching. This exploration aims to understand the extent to which teachers, through a continuous process of reflection, adapt and improve their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of learners. This will enable us to analyze the impact of this reflexivity on the quality of teaching and learning, highlighting any changes in pedagogical strategies, student engagement, and academic outcomes. In this way, we can lay the foundations for a deeper understanding of the link

between professional reflection and the improvement of pedagogical practices, a central element in ensuring quality education.

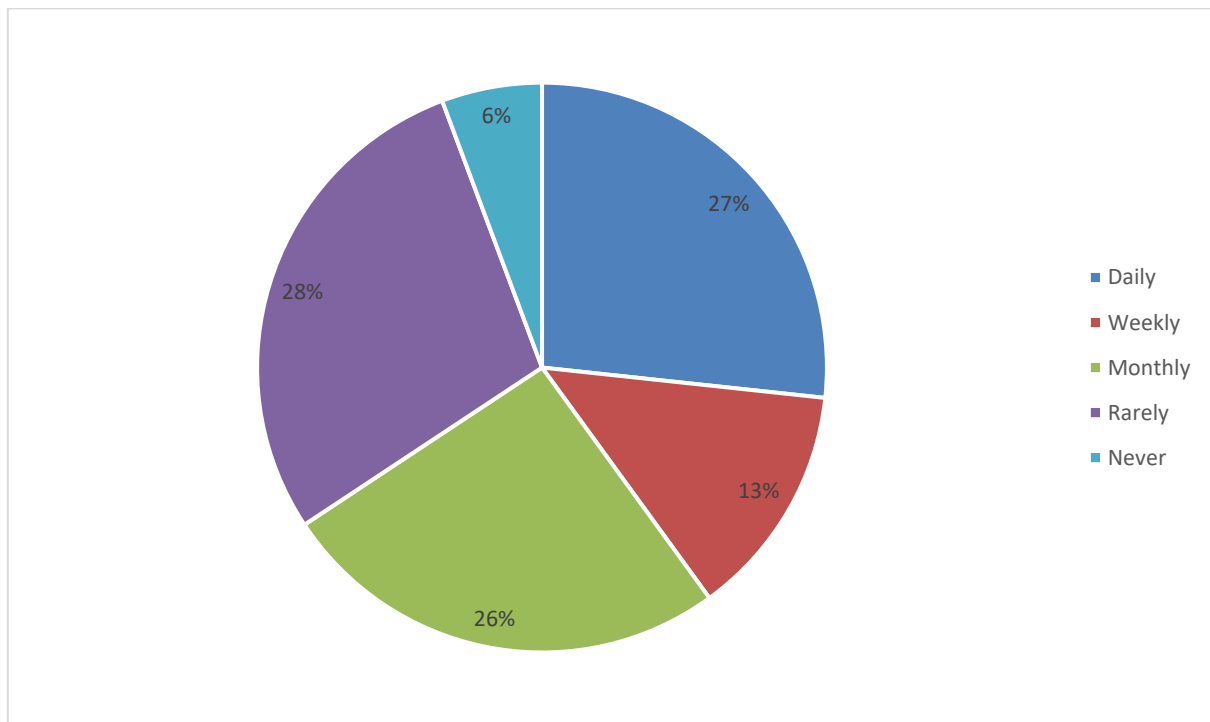


Figure 1. The Frequency of Reflective Practices in Teaching Practices

With this in mind, and to gain a better understanding of teachers' use of reflective practices, we analyzed the frequency with which they integrated them into teaching. The results in Figure 1, based on 210 responses, reveal significant discrepancies. Some 26.7% of teachers claim to use them daily, 13.3% weekly, and 25.7% monthly. Conversely, 28.6% use them rarely and 5.7% never. Thus, 65.7% of teachers use them at least once a month, versus 34.3% who rarely, if at all, incorporate them. These results highlight the need for greater awareness and appropriate training to encourage more systematic integration of reflective practices, which are essential to the continuous improvement of teaching practices in particular, and of teaching in general.

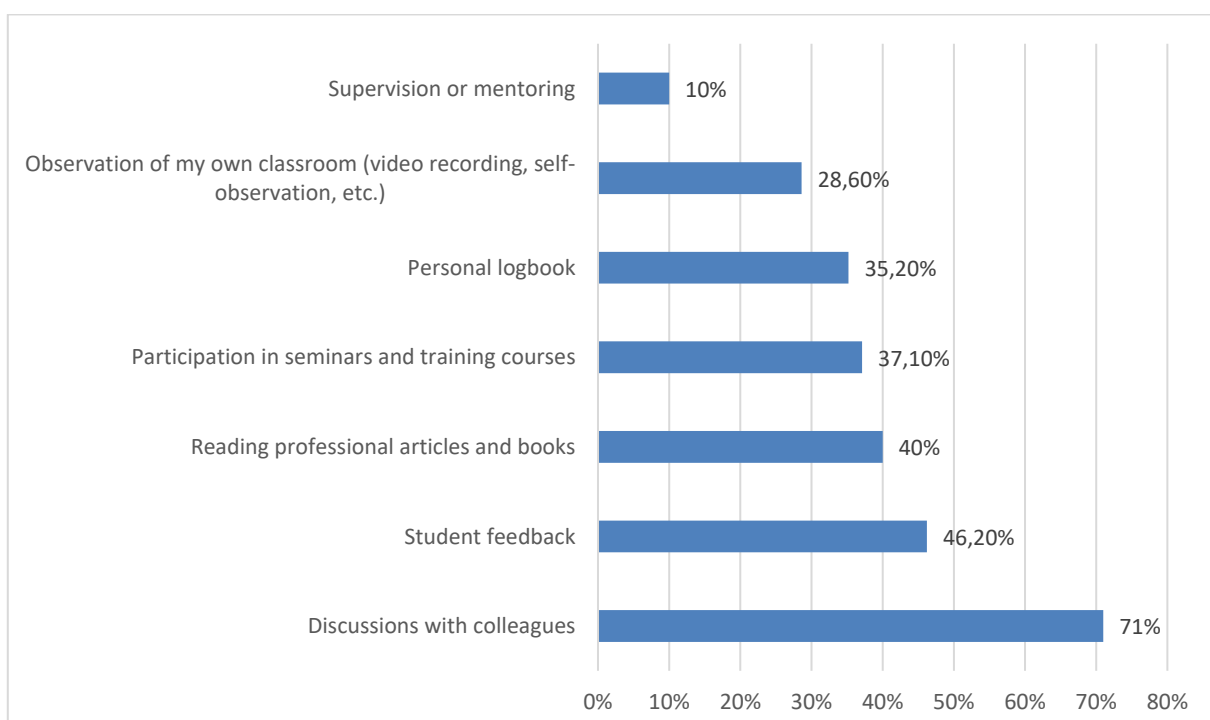


Figure 2. Methods and Forms of Reflective Practice Used by Teachers

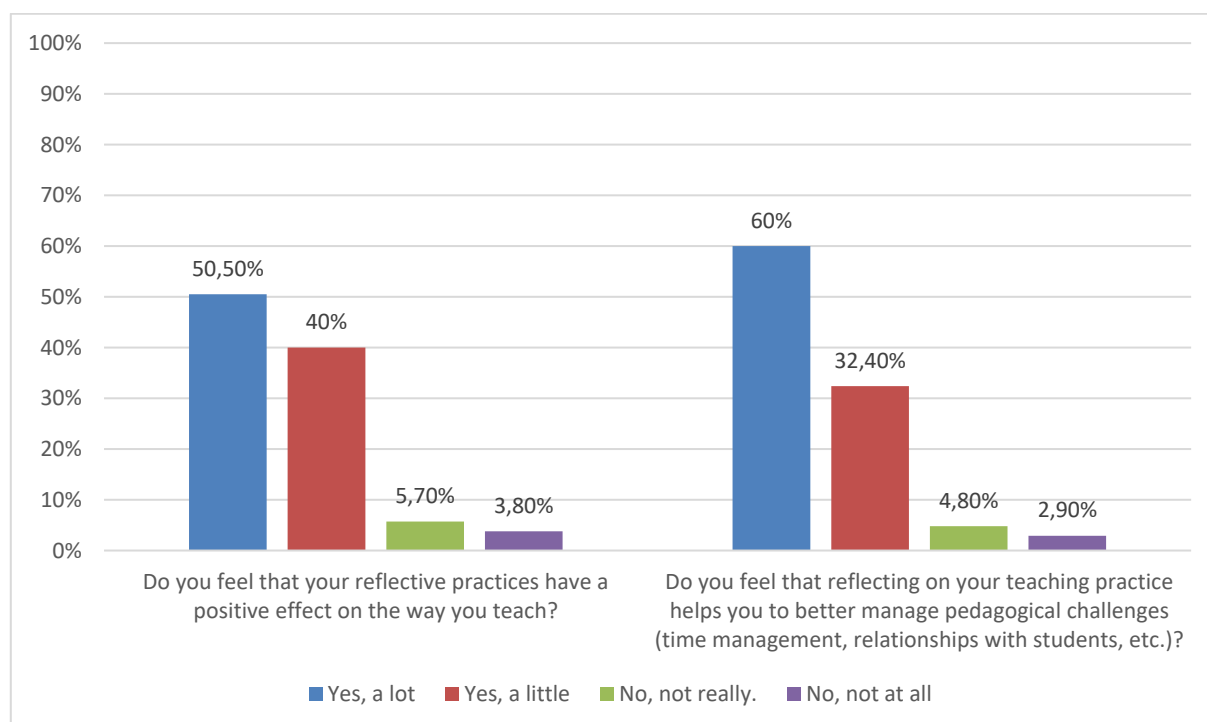
The results in Figure 2 show the different methods teachers use to reflect on their teaching practice. Although responses varied, there was a clear preference for certain practices. The majority of participants (71%) indicated that discussions with colleagues were the most frequently used method, underscoring the importance of exchange and collaboration in professional reflection.

In addition, 46.2% of teachers favor student feedback as a means of reflection, demonstrating an interest in learner feedback to improve their teaching. Reading articles or professional books (40%) is also commonly used, offering teachers an independent avenue for theoretical reflection. Next come seminars or training courses, followed by 37.1% of teachers, who seek to improve their skills through more structured means.

However, more introspective methods, such as using a personal logbook (35.2%) and observing one's own classroom (28.6%), are less common. Finally, supervision or mentoring is practiced by only 10% of teachers, suggesting limited recourse to these practices.

These results show a predominance of peer exchanges, feedback, and student feedback as the preferred methods for reflecting on teaching practices.

It is worth noting that when asked to record their reflective practices, only 19.5% of teachers report recording their reflections regularly, while the majority (57.6%) do so irregularly. Conversely, 22.9% never record their reflections. These results show that the practice of written reflection is recognized as important, but remains mainly irregular and unsystematic.

**Figure 3.** The Impact of Reflective Practices on Teaching Methods and the Management of Pedagogical Challenges

Our interest in these reflective practices led us to ask teachers about their impact on the way they teach and manage pedagogical challenges. Figure 3 shows the responses of 210 participants concerning the impact of reflective practices on their way of teaching and managing pedagogical challenges. An absolute majority of 50.5% of respondents felt that these practices had a very positive effect on their teaching style, while 40% considered them to have a moderate impact. Only a small proportion (9.5%) felt they had no significant effect.

Furthermore, when it comes to managing pedagogical challenges, 60% of participants say that reflection helps them a lot, particularly in managing time and relationships with students, and 32.4% feel that it helps them a little, for a total of 92.4% positive responses. These data reflect an overall favorable perception of reflective practices as an essential lever for improving both teaching methods and the management of pedagogical challenges. It therefore seems appropriate to encourage their more systematic integration into teacher training and support.

Moreover, in the same vein, the teachers taking part in this survey demonstrated the aspects of their teaching practices that had benefited most from their reflective practices, which we will summarize from the aspect most influenced by these practices, namely, lesson preparation, to the aspect least influenced by these practices, namely, managing relationships with students. (Figure 4)

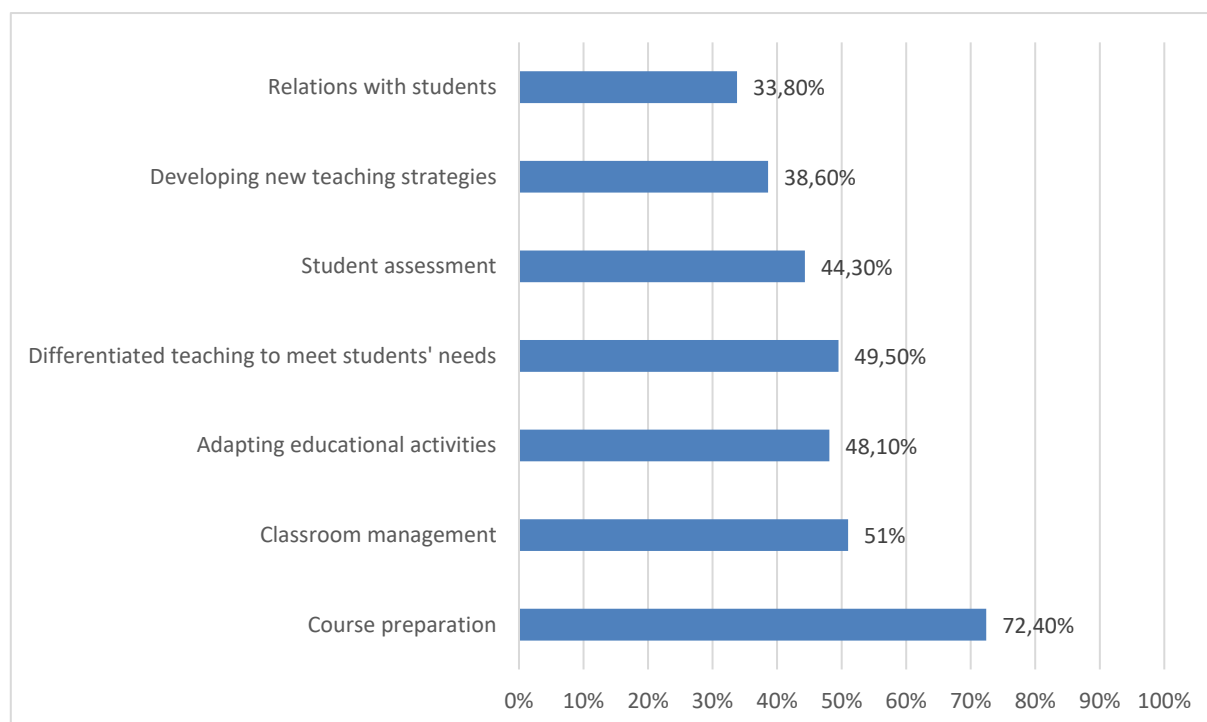


Figure 4. The Impact of Reflective Practices on Different Aspects of Teaching

The results in Figure 4 show that lesson preparation is the aspect most influenced by reflective practices, with 72.4% of teachers reporting that they have benefited from them. Classroom management (51%), pedagogical differentiation (49.5%), and the adaptation of teaching activities (48.1%) are also areas where reflection plays a key role. Furthermore, 44.3% of respondents emphasized its impact on student assessment, while 38.6% felt that it contributed to the development of new teaching strategies. Relationships with students, although less frequently cited (33.8%), remain an aspect of concern. These results confirm that reflexivity has a significant influence on several dimensions of teaching, is perceived above all as a lever for optimizing individual teaching practices, and could be further encouraged in collaborative and relational dimensions to promote greater professionalization of the teaching profession.

4.2. Pedagogical Autonomy

Assessing teachers' pedagogical autonomy is a key factor in understanding their teaching practices and how they evolve. Autonomy, defined here as the ability to choose and decide in various pedagogical areas, is an essential indicator of teachers' ability to adapt and personalize their educational approach. To analyze this dimension, we used the Teachers Autonomy Scale (TAS), which assesses, on a satisfaction scale, the degree of freedom and control teachers have in different aspects of their practice. The questions analyzed in this framework cover crucial areas,

including the choice of teaching methods, the adaptation of content to students' needs, the adjustment of teaching activities, and the freedom to experiment with innovative activities. Each question classifies responses according to the degree of teaching autonomy acquired, ranging from "low autonomy" (less than 25%), "moderate autonomy" (between 25% and 50%), "high autonomy" (between 50% and 75%), to "high autonomy" (over 75%). Analysis of the results of these questions sheds valuable light on the factors influencing teacher autonomy, and on areas where improvements could be made to foster greater pedagogical autonomy.

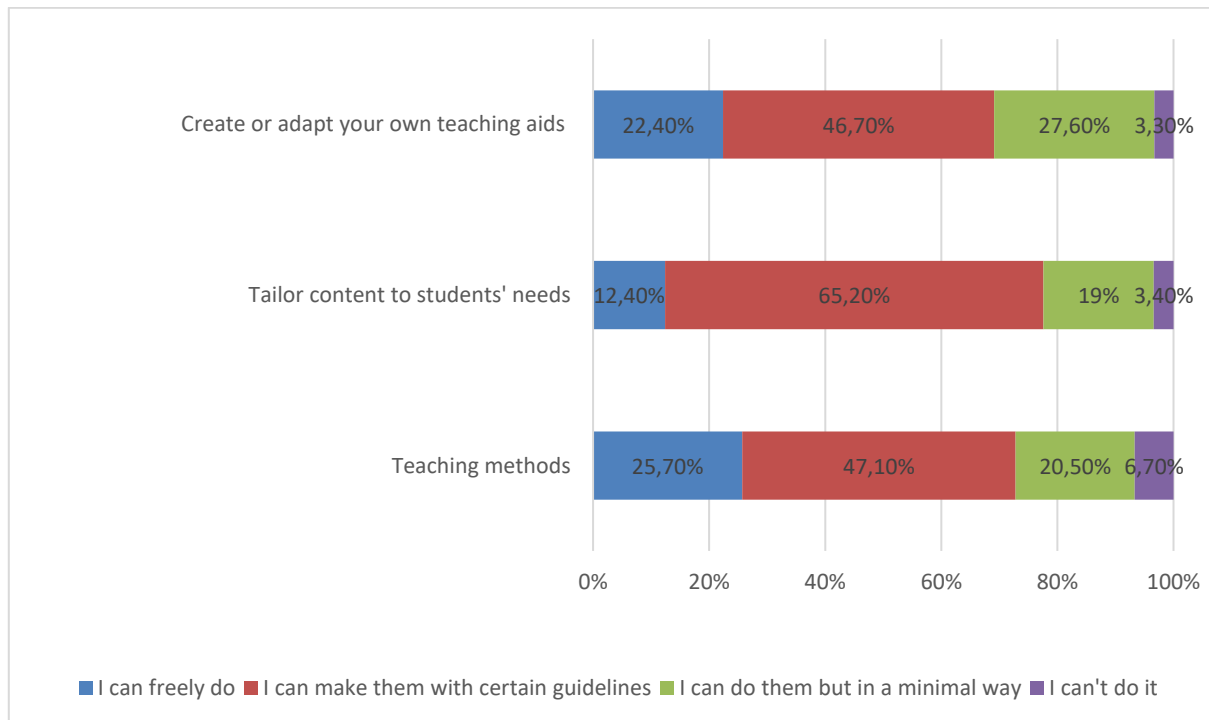


Figure 5. Pedagogical Autonomy and Reflexivity in Choosing Methods, Adapting Content, and Creating Materials.

To better explore the interaction between reflexive practices and the pedagogical autonomy of French language teachers in the qualifying secondary cycle, we focused on the crucial aspects of this autonomy that interact perpetually with reflexivity when implementing different teaching practices. Thus, the analysis of the responses in Figure 4 above concerning the ability to choose teaching methods, adapt content, and create or adapt teaching aids reveals teachers' overall pedagogical autonomy, framed by official guidelines. Regarding teaching methods, a significant proportion (47.1%) felt they could choose their own methods, though within certain guidelines, suggesting partial autonomy. Some 25.7% of respondents claim total freedom of choice, while 20.5% indicate restricted ability, and 6.7% report that methods are entirely imposed.

In terms of content adaptability, 65.2% of teachers say they can adapt content. However, only within the framework of the program: 19% consider adaptation minimal, and 12.4% have greater capacity for adaptation. A small proportion (3.4%) considers the content to be completely fixed.

Finally, with regard to teaching aids, 46.7% of teachers can create their aids within a defined framework, 27.6% exclusively use standard aids provided, 22.4% can freely create and adapt their aids, and 3.3% can neither create nor adapt aids. These results highlight pedagogical autonomy influenced by normative frameworks, with varying degrees of teachers' ability.

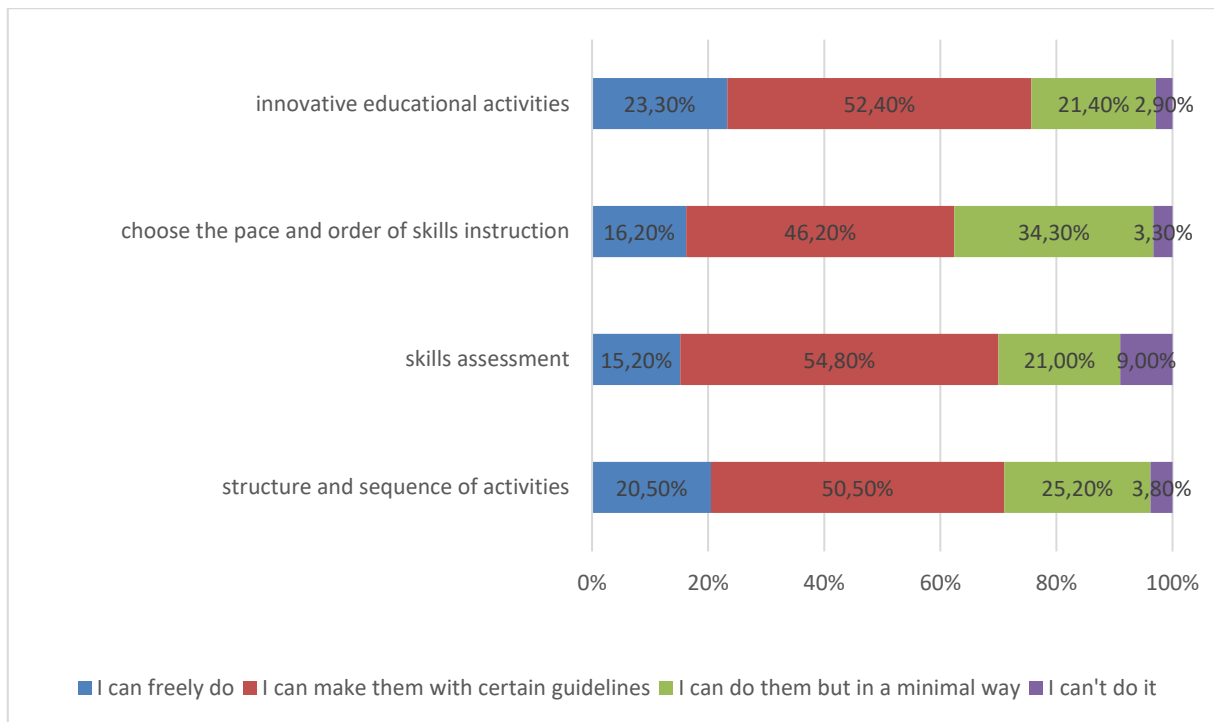


Figure 6. Pedagogical Autonomy and Reflexivity in Managing Activities, Pace, Skills, and Assessment.

Analysis of the results in Figure 6 reveals significant variations in teachers' pedagogical autonomy. When it comes to adjusting the structure and flow of activities in response to students' reactions, a majority (50.5%) can make these adjustments within a defined framework. In comparison, only 20.5% have full capacity. Conversely, 25.2% of teachers can adjust these parameters only minimally, and 3.8% say they cannot change them at all. These figures suggest that while some teachers do have the ability and scope for manoeuvre, it is often constrained by rigid institutional guidelines.

When it comes to choosing assessment criteria and methods, the data show limited autonomy. Only 15.2% of teachers report being able to freely choose assessment criteria, while 54.8% must comply with specific guidelines. What is more, 21% have only a limited choice, and 9% have no decision-making capacity or leeway at all. These results highlight a strict framework for assessment practices, reducing the possibility for teachers to adapt these criteria to the specificities and needs of their students, especially in certificate classes.

Teachers' autonomy in selecting the pace and order of teaching the skills targeted by French language instruction also seems moderate. Indeed, 46.2% of teachers claim they can adjust these elements, but only within a predefined framework. Only 16.2% have total capacity, while 34.3% must conform to an imposed rhythm and order, with very little room for manoeuvre. Finally, 3.3% indicate that they cannot modify these parameters at all. These results reveal a high degree of institutional control, which can limit teachers' ability to adapt their teaching to the specific needs of their classes.

Finally, experimentation with innovative teaching activities appears to be one area where teachers enjoy relative pedagogical autonomy. Thus, 23.3% of respondents say they can freely implement innovative approaches, and 52.4% can experiment, but within a defined framework. Conversely, 21.4% have only limited autonomy in this area, and 2.9% say they are completely unable to innovate. These results indicate that, despite certain constraints, teachers retain certain latitude to introduce new pedagogical practices, notably by integrating educational technologies and collaborative projects.

4.3. Links between Teaching Autonomy and the Reflective Practices of French Teachers

To better explore the links among the dimensions of French teachers' pedagogical autonomy, the following table presents the correlation coefficients from the statistical analysis.

Table 1. Correlations between Different Dimensions of French Teachers' Pedagogical Autonomy

	Teaching methods	Content adaptation	Adjusting activities	Evaluation criteria	Teaching aids	Pace and order of teaching	Innovative educational activities
Teaching methods	1	+0,425**	+0,479**	+0,425**	+0,463**	+0,404**	+0,474**
Content adaptation		1	+0,552**	+0,599**	+0,532**	+0,594**	+0,465**
Adjusting activities			1	+0,513**	+0,580**	+0,444**	+0,553**
Evaluation criteria				1	+0,504**	+0,542**	+0,359**
Teaching aids					1	+0,493**	+0,510**
Pace and order of teaching						1	+0,444**
Innovative educational activities							1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The correlation table reveals positive, statistically significant relationships among the dimensions of French teachers' pedagogical autonomy. The results indicate that teachers who can adapt lesson content to meet students' needs also enjoy greater freedom in choosing assessment criteria, structuring activities, and creating teaching aids. The strongest correlations appear between content adaptation and choice of assessment criteria, while the weakest relationship concerns freedom of pedagogical innovation and assessment criteria, which may reflect certain institutional constraints. Overall, the comprehensive analysis indicates that pedagogical autonomy operates as an integrated construct, with professional competencies exhibiting synergistic reinforcement. These findings align with MANOVA results, confirming the significant influence of professional experience: veteran educators demonstrate enhanced capability in adapting instructional content, establishing personalized assessment criteria, and modifying pedagogical approaches to address learner-specific needs.

This progression underscores how autonomy consolidates through accumulated experience and mastery of reflective practice. Consequently, targeted professional development—particularly for novice teachers—emerges as fundamental for cultivating this critical professional capacity.

Table 2 summarizes the data on teaching autonomy as a function of professional experience.

Table 2. Effect of Professional Experience on Dimensions of French Teachers' Pedagogical Autonomy

	F (3, 206)	p-value	Effect size (η^2)
Choice of teaching methods	3.714	0.012	0.051
Content adaptation	3.174	0.025	0.044
Adjusting the business structure	2.750	0.044	0.039
Choice of evaluation criteria and methods	4.060	0.008	0.056
Creation of teaching aids	4.446	0.005	0.061
Choice of rhythm and order of skills	2.915	0.035	0.041
Freedom of initiative	1.929	0.126	0.027

The results of the statistical analysis reveal significant differences between categories of professional experience concerning several dimensions of the pedagogical autonomy of French teachers in qualifying secondary education. In particular, professional experience influences the choice of teaching methods ($p = 0.012$), the adaptation of content ($p = 0.025$), the adjustment of the structure of activities ($p = 0.044$), the choice of assessment criteria ($\eta^2 = 0.056$), the creation of teaching aids ($\eta^2 = 0.061$) and the management of the pace and sequence of skills ($p = 0.035$). Teachers with more than 20 years' experience showed a higher level of autonomy than the other groups. However, the effect of experience was limited on the dimension of freedom of initiative ($p = 0.126$), with no significant difference, suggesting that other factors may be at play. Although the effect sizes were moderate to small, these results underline the importance of in-service training to reinforce pedagogical autonomy and enable teachers to optimize their educational practices.

Examination of the averages shows a tendency for autonomy to increase with professional experience. For example, in the "creation of teaching materials" dimension, teachers with over 20 years' experience ($M = 1.5152$) exhibit higher levels of autonomy than those with 11 to 20 years' experience ($M = 0.9423$). This trend is also evident in other dimensions, albeit to varying degrees, suggesting that greater experience promotes greater freedom in pedagogical choices and enhances teachers' ability to adapt their practices to educational needs.

To complete this analysis, it is also important to consider the results on the evolution of the teaching autonomy dimensions as a function of teachers' frequency of reflective practice. This passage highlights the impact of the frequency with which teachers integrate reflective practices into their teaching, offering an additional perspective that complements observations drawn from professional experience.

Table 3. Impact of the Frequency of Reflective Practices on the Dimensions of French Teachers' Pedagogical Autonomy

	F-value	p-value	Effect size (η^2)
Choice of teaching methods	2,29	0,061	0,043
Content adaptation	2,20	0,071	0,041
Adjusting the business structure	5,23	< 0,001	0,093
Selection of evaluation criteria/methods	5,46	< 0,001	0,096
Creation/adaptation of teaching aids	8,46	< 0,001	0,142
Management of learning pace and sequence	3,94	0,004	0,071
Freedom to innovate by proposing educational activities	4,81	0,001	0,086

In the same context, the results of the general linear model indicate that the frequency of reflective practices is a significant predictor of different dimensions of teachers' pedagogical autonomy. Teachers who engage more frequently in reflective practices tend to demonstrate greater autonomy in key aspects, such as choosing teaching methods, adapting content, structuring activities, determining assessment criteria, creating or adapting teaching aids, managing the pace and sequence of learning, and the freedom to innovate pedagogically. For example, the ability to create or adapt teaching materials was strongly influenced by the frequency of reflection ($F = 8.46$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.142$), suggesting a notable association between reflective practice and pedagogical innovation. Similarly, significant effects were observed on the adjustment of classroom activity structure ($F = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.093$) and on the choice of assessment modalities ($F = 5.46$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.096$).

However, the effects on choice of teaching methods ($F = 2.29$, $p = 0.061$, $\eta^2 = 0.043$) and content adaptation ($F = 2.20$, $p = 0.071$, $\eta^2 = 0.041$) remain at the limit of statistical significance. These results nevertheless reveal a trend towards greater autonomy with more frequent reflection.

Overall, these results underscore the importance of reflective practices as a lever to help teachers strengthen their pedagogical autonomy and improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

Following this meticulous observation, study, and processing of statistical data, and to better explore the effects of these different reflective practices on teachers' pedagogical autonomy, we opted for an open-ended question to give free rein to teachers' responses regarding the usefulness of these practices. This was a way of gathering all the valuable information that might shed light on the benefits and positive effects of this reflexivity.

In fact, participant testimony consistently indicates that reflective practices substantially enhance pedagogical autonomy by cultivating critical analysis capabilities. This process enables educators to deconstruct the theoretical underpinnings of their instructional choices, identify their professional strengths and limitations, and dynamically adapt methodologies to learners' specific requirements. Furthermore, it develops adaptive responsiveness to pedagogical contingencies while refining evidence-informed decision-making across classroom management, resource selection, and learning sequence design. Educators particularly emphasize how reflexivity diversifies teaching methods and fosters signature pedagogical approaches, thereby improving student guidance and didactic innovation. Notwithstanding occasional constraints from institutional rigidities (prescriptive curricula, limited professional development), personal reflection remains pivotal for navigating educational challenges, consolidating professional self-efficacy, and

optimizing classroom governance. Collectively, these practices constitute foundational strategies for nurturing professional agency, refining pedagogical artistry, and responsively addressing evolving learner needs.

4.4. Challenges and Suggestions

Embedding reflective practices into the professional routines of upper secondary French teachers represents a pivotal catalyst for enhancing pedagogical expertise and cultivating instructional autonomy. Acknowledging implementation challenges, we engaged practitioners in participatory design sessions to co-develop sustainable integration strategies for critical reflection within daily teaching praxis, while documenting their experiential narratives. These collaborative dialogues reveal both encountered barriers and emergent adaptive solutions, delineating actionable pathways toward embodied professional reflexivity that fruitfully transforms signature teaching approaches.

4.4.1. Obstacles and Challenges

Participant narratives reveal recurrent barriers to sustained implementation of reflective praxis. Temporal scarcity emerges as the predominant constraint, cited by a majority of educators overwhelmed by professional obligations. As one participant articulated, chronic deficiency in dedicated pedagogical reading time impedes practical practice analysis due to severed theory-practice integration. Another acknowledged conducting ad hoc reflection during instructional delivery, given insufficient structured opportunities. Furthermore, specialized training deficits constitute a significant secondary impediment, with multiple respondents requesting scaffolded frameworks to systematize reflective processes, exemplified by demands for "targeted professional development to organize reflective thinking methodically." Institutional support gaps were frequently lamented, with educators noting the impracticality of securing resources without administrative scaffolding. Additional challenges include cognitive formalization difficulties and variable personal engagement, indicating divergent levels of metacognitive awareness regarding instructional behaviors. These multidimensional challenges necessitate integrated implementation strategies that combine tailored professional development, protected reflection time, and reinforced institutional scaffolding to embed reflexivity within the teaching culture.

4.4.2. Suggestions and Solutions

Teacher testimony proposes concrete implementation pathways for embedding reflexivity in response to identified barriers. Participants advocate enhanced institutional backing, emphasizing: "Administrative allocation of dedicated time and resources is essential" for integrating reflective practice into professional routines. Continuous professional development is deemed critical, with one respondent asserting: "Specialized training would provide frameworks to systematize reflective processes." Collaborative engagement among peers and inspectors is valorized, a participant describing "structured professional exchanges to share practices" as catalysts for mutual growth. Student involvement emerges as equally vital: "Incorporating learner feedback refines instructional methods," enabling responsive adaptation to evolving needs. Finally, respondents request protected reflection periods, as expressed: "Instituting regular weekly/monthly sessions—not ad hoc arrangements"—to establish sustainable routines countering temporal constraints exacerbated by professional demands.

These proposals reflect a collective commitment to systematizing reflective praxis through supported frameworks. They underscore the interdependence of professional development, educator collaboration, learner engagement, and institutional support for successful integration of critical reflection into teaching practice.

In conclusion, teachers' suggestions for improving reflective practices in the qualifying secondary cycle highlight the need to integrate collaborative tools, such as regular meetings among colleagues and student feedback, to enrich their pedagogical reflection. Ongoing training, the use of digital tools, and self-assessment also appear to be essential levers for structuring and enriching this approach. However, obstacles such as a lack of pedagogical freedom and difficulties related to the pupils' level remain, requiring management adapted to encourage teachers' commitment. Thus, stronger institutional support and the introduction of moments dedicated to reflection seem crucial to anchoring these practices in everyday professional life.

5. Discussion

The results of this study, which examined the links between the pedagogical autonomy of French teachers in the qualifying secondary cycle and their reflective practices, converge with a large body of recent research that emphasizes the importance of reflection in improving pedagogical practices and in professional development, particularly in terms of the acquisition of pedagogical autonomy. Our data indicate that the frequency and intensity of teachers' engagement in reflective practice are positively correlated with their ability to adapt teaching methods, optimize lesson preparation, differentiate the pedagogical approach, and design appropriate materials.

This finding is powerfully illustrated by the qualitative case study of Latifa et al. (2025), in which the very act of keeping reflective journals led EFL teachers to exercise autonomy through concrete actions, such as adapting syllabi, resequencing topics, and supplementing or replacing textbook materials. This demonstrates that reflective practice is not merely introspective but is intrinsically linked to self-initiated pedagogical decision-making. Studies by Kagoire et al. (2024) have shown that pedagogical autonomy is strengthened when teachers are given latitude to personalize their practices, enabling them to match the specific needs of their learners better. This finding aligns with the work of Rostikawati et al. (2024), who assert that professional experience is an essential determinant of the consolidation of pedagogical autonomy, as it enables teachers to negotiate institutional constraints more skillfully and increases their capacity for innovation and creativity.

In this sense, our research highlights the influence of reflective practices on pedagogical autonomy. This is supported by several recent studies that stress the importance of self-evaluation and co-analysis in the construction of an autonomous professional posture. In this regard, one study points out that "teachers, by refining their metacognitive skills, become adept at navigating the complexities of the classroom, responding thoughtfully to students' diverse needs and innovating pedagogical strategies adapted to individual contexts" (Agnihotri et al., 2024). In addition, Aryal (2024) reports that systematic recording of pedagogical reflections contributes to better calibration of classroom interventions. The research by Latifa et al. (2025) adds a crucial nuance here, revealing that the reflective elements employed by teachers (such as reasoning, testing hypotheses) do not follow a rigid sequence but form a dynamic, problem-solving cognitive process directly aimed at enhancing student engagement. These findings also corroborate the self-determination theory of Serdiuk et al. (2018), which postulates that intrinsic autonomy fosters not only engagement but also pedagogical creativity. Thus, an environment that supports self-evaluation and reflection encourages teachers to develop innovative strategies to meet learners' evolving needs.

In addition, our statistical analysis, using the TAS (Teachers Autonomy Scale), shows that more experienced teachers have greater autonomy, particularly in terms of creating materials and adapting content. These findings are part of a dynamic in which reflexivity serves as a driving force for pedagogical innovation, enabling the adoption of differentiated practices despite a sometimes restrictive institutional framework. However, certain aspects still show limitations: despite unanimous recognition of the benefits of reflexivity, only a minority regularly record their

reflections, revealing practical obstacles such as a lack of time, specific training, or institutional support. This challenge is precisely what the study by Tang & Hwang (2025) addresses. Their action research demonstrates that moving beyond isolated reflection to a structured, collective model is key to overcoming these barriers. They show that implementing a Systemic Practical Situated Reflection (SPSR) mechanism within a collaborative learning community, supported by experts and sustained over time (18 months), effectively institutionalizes reflective practice and empowers teachers to overcome challenges. Studies by Dwyer (2023) emphasize these obstacles, citing administrative overload and rigidly organized timetables as impediments to in-depth reflection.

The suggestions made by the teachers in our survey also align with recent research recommendations. (Vidyarthi, 2024) Recommend creating collaborative focus groups that incorporate teachers' and students' perspectives to enrich the feedback process and improve teaching quality. This aligns perfectly with the model proposed by Tang & Hwang (2025), where the learning community and the involvement of experts provided diverse perspectives that were crucial for enhancing teacher autonomy. In addition, Gorbunova et al. (2021) highlight the importance of stronger institutional support, making specific time available for in-service training focused on pedagogical reflection. Both the study by Latifa et al. (2025), which explicitly recommends greater institutional support for diverse reflective practices, and that of Tang & Hwang (2025), which provides a successful blueprint for such support, converge on this critical point.

Such Contemporary research converges in identifying reflective praxis as a critical catalyst for pedagogical autonomy. Kalıpçı (2018) demonstrates that pedagogical reforms and mentorship programs create collaborative spaces conducive to continuous improvement. This perspective is reinforced by Elaiche (2024), who observes that "reflective practice transforms daily experience into a perpetual source of professional refinement," thereby actualizing Schön's (1992) foundational models regarding the evolution toward autonomous reflective teaching. Lazar's (2022) recent research complements this view by revealing how collegial reflection and digital self-assessment tools consolidate ownership of instructional agency.

In synthesis, the integrated findings from Latifa et al. (2025) and Tang & Hwang (2025) with our own data present a compelling dual pathway to autonomy: one through the individual, diagnostic practice of journaling that fosters self-initiated action, and another through the systemic, situated practice within a supported community that fosters collective empowerment and professional growth. These two models are not mutually exclusive but are rather complementary dimensions of a comprehensive approach to teacher development.

Despite acknowledging institutional constraints, these studies collectively establish that systematic reflection—when supported by experience and collaborative frameworks—stimulates pedagogical innovation and self-development. Consequently, they advocate for educational policies instituting protected reflection time, targeted professional development, and adapted institutional scaffolding. Such measures would transform reflexivity into a core professional competency capable of addressing contemporary education's evolving challenges.

6. Conclusion

In response to our first research question, which sought to understand the nature of the relationship between reflective practice and pedagogical autonomy, this study's findings substantiate that reflective practices structurally scaffold autonomy among upper secondary French teachers. The analysis indicates a significant correlation between the intensity and frequency of reflective practices and the degree of autonomy acquired. Specifically, those who adopt a systematic reflective approach demonstrate greater confidence and ability to innovate, experiment with new strategies, and proactively adapt their teaching. This dynamic confirms that regular critical

examination of one's practice is a powerful driver of autonomous, context-responsive decision-making.

Regarding our second question, which explored how this autonomy manifests in teaching practices, the findings reveal that reflexivity enables nuanced adaptation to learner-specific contexts. The implementation of frameworks such as individual reflective dashboards and peer exchange circles consolidates this developmental trajectory, progressively transforming educators into practitioner-researchers. This synthesis of institutional expertise and professional discretion empowers them to transcend prescriptive mandates, forge context-responsive pedagogical solutions, and ultimately cultivate pedagogically grounded innovations.

Concerning the conditions that foster this development, the study highlights the indispensable role of professional experience and a supportive institutional environment. This research confirms that the pedagogical autonomy of French teachers cannot be thought of in isolation from their commitment to critical reflection, which implies the need to integrate these mechanisms more fully into initial and in-service training. These empirical insights collectively warrant the institutionalization of dedicated support structures and targeted professional development to sustain reflective praxis, thereby enhancing both professionalization and instructional quality.

Despite these robust findings, this study has limitations that restrict the generalizability of its results. The use of self-reported data may introduce biases, and restricting the sample to French teachers in the qualifying secondary cycle limits its applicability to other disciplines and educational levels. Nevertheless, the diversity of responses offers a rich and solid database on how reflective practices are perceived and integrated.

To build upon this work, future research should adopt a multidimensional approach. It is essential to examine the effects of reflective practices on teacher commitment and student performance, and to extend the study to other disciplines and levels using mixed methods. This would deepen the analysis of the specific mechanisms by which reflection influences autonomy and explore the effects of innovative support systems across various educational contexts.

Declarations

Author Contributions. All authors contributed to the original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding. This research received no external funding.

Ethical Approval. Ethical approval and consent to participate were not required.

Data Availability Statement. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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