

Research Article

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Exploring the Relationship Between ESP Teachers' Reflective Practices and Their Impact on Their Course-Related Instructional Decisions

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This research examines the relationship between the reflective practices teachers adopt while engaging in their ESP teaching experiences and their impact on their course-related actions and decisions.

Materials/methods. A single case study approach was adopted in the current study, in which the reflections of one ESP teacher were thoroughly analysed to explore whether and how teachers' documentation of their thoughts, feelings, reactions and attitudes towards different aspects of the course can contribute to raising their awareness of these cognitive and emotional aspects and whether these factors have an impact on the course trajectory. The teacher participant wrote daily reflective journal posts to provide qualitative reflections before and after each lesson. A thorough document analysis was also conducted, alongside a follow-up interview to elaborate on some critical issues arising from the information documented in the journal.

Results. The research uncovers some substantial implications related to the value of reflective practices in broadening teachers' cognitive and practical horizons by enabling them to be aware of their beliefs, interrogate them, and challenge them to find practical solutions for potential obstacles.

Conclusion. The research also highlights the importance of recognising reflective practices as a core aspect in preservice and in-service teaching education programs, especially in the domain of ESP, where language and disciplinary knowledge intersect.

1. Introduction

Without a doubt, the fast-paced nature of modern life provides a valid justification for the shift from learning a language for a general scope or recreational purposes to the growing need for understanding specific genres to meet the needs of specific educational/academic future communities. A critical implication of such a scenario is the need for teachers to be consciously aware of their perceptions and actions at each step of this unique instructional experience, in order to cater more effectively to the changing needs of their learners. This awareness can be achieved through the employment of self-reflective practices. Although research in the field of language education has been pinpointing cognitive and emotional aspects as fundamentally influencing factors in the teaching and learning experience (Alexander, 2012; Cheung et al., 2023; Csizer & Kontra, 2012; Farrell & Yang, 2019) individuals in charge of educational policies sadly fail to notice such elements when planning and implementing academic policies (Dang et al., 2024; Ding & Bruce, 2017).

Reflective practice involves scrutinising one's thoughts and actions to view them from a critical perspective. It is the act of careful self-reflection on one's beliefs, depictions, judgments, actions, emotions, and attitudes while engaging in the experience of preparing and teaching a course, which can be conducive to instructional reform in the field. As can be inferred from Wallace (1991), unlike previous models of teacher education which essentialize external channels as primary sources of knowledge attainment and professional development such as experienced educators and outcomes of scientific research, i.e. the 'craft model' and the 'applied science model', the reflective model highlights the *personal* experience of teaching and the ensuing feelings, attitudes, and remarks it yields. However, it is certainly not the intention of Wallace (nor ours) to conceptualise reflective practices as a random process of looking into one's instructional experience and placing judgments that lack theoretical or experiential underpinnings. Instead, as described by Akbari (2007) and Wallace (1991), both *scientific* and *experiential* knowledge should be considered when engaging in the act of self-reflection. In this case, teacher reflection becomes an attempt to critically appraise the impact of the self, others, and the context surrounding the instructional experience. This personal scrutiny can be achieved through a detailed description and evaluation of one's experiences and their surrounding elements, both while preparing and teaching, as well as describing one's feelings and attitudes after delivering content in their courses. It also involves critically assessing their teaching techniques against the course outcomes and their knowledge of the domain, to identify points of strength and weakness, consolidating the former and rectifying the latter.

This research highlights the importance of investigating the reflective practices of ESP educators, an area that remains under-examined despite the growing recognition of reflection as a vital aspect of teachers' professional development. In contexts where language instruction is linked with disciplinary knowledge, ESP instructors encounter unique challenges in balancing the linguistic, academic, and professional demands of their learners. This study aims to analyse the impact of reflective practices on teachers' instructional decisions, demonstrating how reflection promotes self-awareness, improves decision-making, and ultimately enhances learner outcomes. The objective is to generate empirical insights into the influence of systematic reflection on teachers' choices, including material selection, classroom management strategies, and learner engagement.

The rationale is based on the need to more effectively incorporate reflective methodologies into both pre-service and in-service teacher education, thereby equipping educators to critically evaluate their beliefs and practices in response to the evolving academic needs of learners. Consequently, this research not only aids in advancing the literature on teacher cognition and reflection but also highlights practical implications for teacher development initiatives, institutional policies, and the broader field of ESP instruction.

2. Literature Review

Teachers' reflective practice embraces the idea of 'developing awareness before seeking to act with intentionality, they [teachers] engage in intentional practice before assessing the impact of one's actions, and then they determine impact before enacting interventions' (Hall & Simeral, 2015, pp. 38-39). Such understanding of reflection indicates that teachers adopting this practice are usually self-motivated to appraise their thoughts before and after their instructional experience, urging them to make changes according to how they perceive it as beneficial for the success of the educational experience. Ultimately, this intentional act of embarking on a self-reflective practice can be associated with generating a sense of ownership and a more substantial commitment among teachers. Engaging in this thought process leads teachers to carefully consider their theoretical knowledge when applied in practice, ultimately prompting them to critically challenge their existing beliefs and practices. This helps them refine the quality of their decisions to better suit the context of their teaching, its actors, and desired outcomes. Teachers then begin to witness personal and professional growth. On the contrary, teachers who are negligent or ignorant about the value of reflection often become enslaved by their routine daily work as well as historical practical repertoires that may or may not suit their instructional contexts (Borg, 2015; Farrell & Yang, 2019; Oteng et al., 2023). These teachers often adopt a robotic approach to their teaching, in which content, pedagogy, and class rhythm seldom change throughout the semesters, and in which the sense of targeted attainment of specific goals is lost. This is particularly risky in the modern era of rapidly evolving knowledge and diverse learners. Reflective practice thus becomes the compass by which teachers navigate the changes that could improve the instructional experience in a more thoughtful and cognizant manner.

Teacher reflection is a fundamental channel for effective PD (Professional Development) (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Reflective practices can serve as a springboard for change in educational settings, considering that teachers are a pivotal agent in transforming educational experiences. As indicated by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017, p. 14), 'Professional development models associated with gains in student learning frequently provide built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection'. And indeed, as indicated by Hall & Simeral (2015, p. 14), 'Growth, improvement, progress, and development...typically don't happen accidentally. They're a result of intentionally planning, conscious effort, and thought'. Teachers' self-reflection is crucial in understanding nuances in several aspects of their educational experiences, including the curriculum, objectives, learners, instructional strategies, and materials. Such thorough consideration can help young teachers adopt the habit of mentally calculating the implications of their beliefs and actions once they are put into action in the classroom. Thus, teachers adopting reflective practices can make more organised instructional choices that are strategically directed towards an enhanced educational experience and meet the needs of their learners. This, as proposed by Brookfield (2017) and Farrell (2018), can be achieved through several individual or collective channels, such as the utilisation of teaching journals, critical counterparts, discussion focus groups, practical observations, and engaging in action research.

In ESP courses, the situation is further exacerbated by several factors that can compromise the effectiveness of instruction. As highlighted by Kırkgöz (2019), ESP teachers are faced with the frequent and complex duties entailed in their specific domain of teaching, including identifying the particular needs of learners from different angles, as well as planning, designing, evaluating, and improving the courses and materials required for ESP instruction. Amongst these factors are teacher's knowledge, the benefit of pondering on the teachers' role, positionality and identity in the ESP course and the amount of knowledge they are expected to possess to achieve their target missions (Hafner & Miller, 2018; Ferguson, 1997; Tao & Gao, 2018), the genres, discourses, and cultural sensitivities

teachers should acknowledge while teaching specific materials (Hüttner et al., 2009; Hüttner et al., 2019; Léon-Henri, 2019; Zareva, 2019), ESP's 'rhetorical complexities of disciplinary cultures' (Bao et al., 2024, p. 1), as well as the decisions, sometimes spontaneous and complex, taken in the classroom as a reaction to specificity-related moments (Kaivanpanah et al., 2021; Wu & Badger, 2009). Although the three main corners of ESP courses have always been the teachers, learners, and textbooks/materials, as pinpointed by Basturkmen (2017), Belcher (2006) and Kaivanpanah et al. (2021), teachers are always placed at the end of the formula with heavier roles and responsibilities, undertaking the complex missions of preparing themselves, their learners and materials for the course, evaluating the performance of all stakeholders and constantly looking for new ways of improvement. Bearing in mind all these complexities, it is necessary to raise teachers' awareness of such critical matters and how they can impact the success of their instruction. This, in turn, naturally lends itself to the importance of reflecting on one's thoughts and practices to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

As indicated above, the nature of ESP teachers' roles and duties suggests a more urgent need for the adoption of reflective practices. Reflective ESP teachers are aware of their learners, their linguistic capabilities, needs, and wants, and continually reflect on their course realities to tailor their lessons more effectively accordingly. In this sense, teachers' choices and classroom decisions are usually more strategically directed towards meeting specific targets that are informed by these reflections. All these factors require teachers to step back and critically analyse their presence in the classroom to evaluate the consequential impact on their learners and the efficacy of their instruction. It can be contended, though, that the more challenges teachers face in their instructional situations, the greater the need is for them to engage in self-reflection to deconstruct their experiences and better understand them, thereby reacting to improve.

For example, Tao & Gao's (2018) research reveals that teachers' annual interactions and critical discussions with different cohorts of students have led them to engage in a self-appraisal of their teaching, leading them to approach their courses differently in terms of deciding on the nature of disciplinary knowledge to be assigned for their students based on their wants and needs. Additionally in the study of Bao et al. (2024), it was the participant's thorough reflection on her practices, previous academic experiences, and daily contextual intricacies that led her to modify her teaching and use new techniques through the 'conversions among [her] different selves': the 'past', 'imaginary' self as well as her reflection on her realistic role of being an EAP teacher. The high percentages of self-reflective practices reported in the study of Kaivanpanah et al. (2021) have also shown better levels of teachers' awareness of the positive and negative aspects of their teaching, as well as the challenges they face while teaching specific content, including those related to learners, materials, needs, content knowledge and other institutional challenges.

The elaborated case study of Hafner & Miller (2018) similarly provides an excellent review of the benefits of reflective practices in the domain of ESP. According to Hafner & Miller (2018), the ESP course is far from being a neatly organised course that can simply involve selecting a suitable textbook to teach. Through the constant cycles of needs analysis, collaborations with teachers from the scientific departments, consulting ESP literature, and engaging students in the course design process by exploring their views before and after instructional experiences, Hafner & Miller (2018) report the more informed decisions they take to further improve the quality of the course. For instance, the decision to substitute traditional oral presentations in their speaking course to incorporate a project-based documentary production came as a result of reflecting on the modern-day needs of students, their language competency, and technological literacy, as well as the students' attitudes towards the experience.

In the same realm, Chen's (2000) action research asserts the value of self-reflective practices in enhancing ESP-related 'situational decisions', which in turn greatly aids in the improvement of

teachers' self-training attempts. As further suggested by Bao et al. (2024, p. 9) and Chen (2000), the need for self-reflective practices is even more pressing for teachers who are freshly transitioning from GE to ESP instruction, where they are freshly dealing with the new hurdles of a different domain of instruction through 'conversations...with present, past, and imagined selves' (Bao et al., 2024, p. 9) to learn to 'close the gap between theory and practice and also in providing the chance to cultivate the confidence to theorize from practice' (Chen, 2000, p. 399).

Reflective practice has been acknowledged as a significant element of teacher education for a considerable period (Wallace, 1991; Akbari, 2007). However, in the domain of ESP, scholarly focus has predominantly been directed towards curriculum development, materials design, and addressing learner needs (Hyland, 2018; Bhatia et al., 2011). Consequently, less emphasis has been placed on the processes by which teachers reflect and the influence of these processes on pedagogical decision-making. Although recent research underscores the role of teachers' beliefs and the interplay of cognitive and emotional factors in shaping classroom practices (Alexander, 2012; Cheung et al., 2023; Farrell & Yang, 2019), there remains a paucity of empirical investigations that explicitly connect reflective practices of ESP educators with their instructional choices. Moreover, existing studies tend to adopt generalised perspectives on teacher cognition, often overlooking reflection as a situated and systematic practice within specific ESP contexts. This gap underscores the need for nuanced, contextually grounded research that aims to understand how reflective practices inform teachers' decisions regarding material selection, classroom management strategies, and student engagement, thereby integrating theoretical insights with the practical realities of ESP teaching.

It can be inferred from the above discussion that teachers' reflection becomes a powerful tool, allowing them to go beyond an exclusive focus on content, with a disregard for the strategies through which the content is delivered. It also allows teachers to better link theory to practice (Bates & Morgan, 2018), address any pitfalls that arise in their instructional experiences (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski, 2024), and more confidently venture into creative methods of introducing target knowledge to learners (Kim & Lu, 2024; Lee & Swales, 2006). The ESP literature also highlights the importance of reflective practices for teachers to critically evaluate their thoughts and actions, identifying ways to enhance their existing perceptions of ESP instruction. By embracing new perspectives, teachers can tailor their instruction to the required level of specificity and introduce reform to their teaching methods. If such aspects are achieved, ESP teachers can be agents of positive change in their contexts, boosting their sense of agency and ownership of their instructional experience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following question:

How does ESP teacher reflection influence decision-making regarding ESP materials and classroom decisions?

3.2. Participants and Context

The study was conducted in the English Language Unit (ELU) at the College of Technological Studies (CTS) in Kuwait. CTS is part of the large institution of the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET). It is a diploma-awarding vocational institution that fosters several scientific disciplines from a technological angle.

The participant, Noura (pseudonym), has been serving at PAAET since 2010 and has been teaching at the CTS for five years. Both her higher academic qualifications (master's and PhD) are in the area of ESP.

The participant (also a researcher in this article) was not purposefully selected to participate in the current study. When the two researchers in this study engaged in a conversation about current teaching practices and professional development in their context, the concept of teacher reflection emerged strongly; to be more precise, the lack of teacher reflective practices in their context was a key issue that instigated the rationale for conducting the study. The participant was recruited based on her involvement in teaching at the target college, her enthusiasm for the research topic, and her interest in experimenting with various methods to enhance her teaching styles and strategies. This initially provoked concerns about the risk pinpointed in Flyvbjerg (2011) regarding asserting ‘a tendency to confirm the researchers’ preconceived notions’. However, the decision to recruit the current participant was confirmed based on the following measures to ensure the quality of the generated data:

- a. The constant discussions between the two researchers during the data collection and analysis phases helped in shaping the content of the research.
- b. Applying triangulation of methods, i.e., daily journaling, follow-up interviews, and document analysis (Flick, 2018).

This research employed a single case sampling approach, selecting a participant whose dual expertise in ESP instruction and research rendered her particularly well-qualified to offer contextually rich insights. Although the sample consisted of a single educator, this aligns with the objective of the case study to achieve a comprehensive depth of understanding rather than generalizability (Yin, 2003). The intention here was not to derive universally applicable conclusions, but to construct a detailed, contextualised account that may inform subsequent studies within similar ESP settings. Additionally, researchers such as Flyvbjerg (2011, p. 310) argue that the goal behind implementing case studies is not to verify or test inferences or data. On such a basis, the implementation of the single case study methodology in the current research can be seen as a window from which the researched units can be explored to understand the ‘detail, richness, completeness, and variance — that is, depth— for the unit of study’ (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). The decision to implement a single case study did not seek to provide generalizable data that can essentially apply to other contexts, but instead aims to build a contextualised depiction as a springboard to delivering insightful ‘theoretical propositions’ to explore in different contexts (Yin, 2003).

3.3. Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Analysis

The primary methods employed for data collection included a reflective journal, semi-structured stimulated recall interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of course documents. Such methodological triangulation allows for producing rich data from multiple channels, which can not only address the complexity of the researched topic but also minimise the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity (Yin, 2003). The reflective journals were completed without prompts, thereby enabling the participant to document her thoughts, feelings, and instructional decisions spontaneously both prior to and following each lesson. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, striking a balance between consistency across sessions and the flexibility to explore emerging issues. Classroom observations were recorded through detailed field notes to capture pedagogical interactions and the dynamics of the classroom. Additionally, institutional documents, such as course outlines, instructional materials, and online platforms, were examined to provide contextual understanding of the reflections.

The study was conducted throughout one academic semester (around 4 months). Noura began writing daily digital reflections from the start of the semester, documenting her experience while preparing for the ESP course she was assigned to teach (Eng. 171: English for Technical Communication), averaging one to two pages per entry. The course was not taught using a commercial textbook; instead, in-house materials were used. Although the main course outline was

assigned to the teachers and some materials compiled and organised by the course coordinators, each teacher was allowed to provide their own materials based on their suitability to the given objectives. Noura wrote daily entries while preparing for her lessons, as well as after delivering them.

Two comprehensive interviews were conducted during the semester, during which the second researcher attempted to elaborate on the data provided by Noura in her daily documentation. Two interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. This was accompanied by an analysis of the documents she used in her course, i.e., the course outline, syllabus, materials, and Teams channels, to further understand Noura's responses. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the semester, with annotations recorded immediately subsequent to each session. Document analysis included the syllabus, instructional materials, and content from the digital learning management system (Teams channels). These sources were triangulated to enhance comprehensiveness and minimise potential biases.

The generated data were analysed using the reflective Thematic Analysis (TA) framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2021). For the current research, TA allowed for 'ensuring rigorous and systematic engagement with data, to develop a robust and defensible analysis' (Terry et al., 2017). The data were initially coded inductively, beginning with a line-by-line analysis of the reflective journals and interview transcripts. Subsequently, codes were aggregated into categories, which were further refined into salient themes. The analytical process was iterative in nature, involving frequent revisits to the data to enhance consistency and depth. Therefore, following the procedural steps provided in Braun & Clarke (2006) allowed for capturing the complexity of the researched context by eliciting the main themes concerning how the participant felt while applying reflection in her teaching and how these feelings, attitudes, and perceptions impacted her classroom practices.

Given that one of the researchers also participated as a subject, reflexivity was fundamentally embedded in the research process. The second researcher engaged in continuous discussions and served as a critical peer to scrutinise assumptions and interpretations. This collaborative approach was instrumental in reducing potential biases by ensuring that the participant's reflections were critically evaluated and contextualised within a comprehensive analytical framework.

4. Results & Discussion

The data collection for this study was conducted during the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. Noura wrote entries in a shared diary on an electronic platform that both researchers had access to, documenting aspects of her experience. Entries were written before each lesson and during her involvement in the process of materials selection and design. Additionally, Noura recorded entries immediately following each lesson, where she articulated her thoughts and emotional responses concerning various aspects, such as the appropriateness and relevance of the materials to the targeted learning objectives, as well as student reactions. The journal served as a form of interactive engagement with the instructional experience, providing insights into its pros and cons, points of strength and weakness, and ways to help learners deal with any potential complications they might face. In alignment with Dewey's educational philosophy (1916, p. 46), which posits that 'Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process,' this reflective practice corroborates existing literature, demonstrating that teacher reflection influences pedagogical decision-making, including material selection and classroom strategies. As contended by Hall and Simeral (2015), it is through the intentional reflection on one's self thoughts and actions, rather than random ones, that growth and progress occur. This was seen clearly in Nour's systematic journaling. Likewise, Farrell (2018) also highlights that journaling enables educators to reconsider and reassess their experiences in light of their contextual circumstances, a

benefit reflected in how Noura critically evaluated her lessons throughout the semester. The current inquiry aims to address the following research question:

How does ESP teacher reflection influence decision-making regarding ESP materials and classroom decisions?

4.1. Teacher Reflection as a Form of Self-Appraisal

The findings of this study support the implementation of reflective practices among teachers as a systematic method for appraising their instructional experiences. Such practices facilitate teachers' interactive engagement with their instructional conceptualizations and may provide opportunities for instructional reform. During the data collection period, Noura successfully maintained a record of her classroom experience and documented events in which she critically reflected on her feelings towards her instructional decisions, interrogating her choices and justifying her reasons. Noura expressed a range of feelings towards the course materials. Across the diary entries, the sentiments expressed by Noura towards the materials included feelings of hesitancy, worry, uncertainty, overwhelmingness, intimidation, confusion, loss, frustration, helplessness, and disappointment. When she perceived the materials to be inappropriate, she made a clear statement, such as *"I didn't like the materials."* However, when the materials were successful in achieving the objectives she had for her students, her expressions of satisfaction were well and clear: *"...the lesson went quite well [...] I was quite satisfied with their performance", "I monitored their work and was quite satisfied with the questions that they've asked; it showed me that they are actually thinking about how to form their questions", and "I was satisfied with the responses and overall reactions of the students towards the given materials"*.

A notable example in this theme concerned Noura's reflection on one of the lessons in Unit 2. During her preparation for this lesson, Noura planned to introduce the topic of Technical Specifications and Benefits. She planned for the lesson to start with the listening excerpt to get her learners thinking about what different specifications are and how to discuss them in the form of a question-and-answer session. Then, students would read a machine's specification list and start asking each other about its details, moving on to the discussion of the benefits of that machine. Due to her perception of the student's low proficiency and lack of allocated time, Noura decided to focus only on the technical specifications, overlooking the part where she had to introduce them to the benefits. Noura then recorded: *"Was I thinking about myself and how overwhelmed I was with the materials at the time of this decision, or was I thinking about the students? I'm not sure, to be honest, but I felt that I lost too much time at the beginning, going on a slow pace"*.

As illustrated in the words of Rocha-Antonin (2020, p. 13), 'it is crucial that teachers take time to reflect upon their daily teaching practice and find ways to constantly improve it or tweak it when needed, adjusting it to new methodologies that yield results. The only way to do this is by maintaining a record of classroom experiences and eventually, reflecting upon their results. Farrell (2018, p. 3) also states that 'When teachers write regularly in a teaching journal, they can accumulate information that, on later review, interpretation, and reflection, can assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their work'. Based on this, it can be inferred that if teacher reflection is effectively implemented, teachers can constantly revisit their instructional experiences to question their nuances. By communicating these reflections, teachers are able to understand their feelings towards their instructional experiences, which allows them to subsequently guide or change these sentiments for the benefit of the course.

4.2. Teacher Reflection Identifies Obstacles and Promotes Problem-Solving

Through her journaling, Noura recorded that her frustration lies in her continuous efforts to collaborate with her colleagues: *"I constantly highlighted the need for a needs analysis to be*

conducted... I kept on highlighting that instead of looking for a book, we should work on the materials themselves and provide them in an organised way". When she found no cooperation from her colleagues, she decided to rely on herself to organize the content of her units and consequently built a repertoire of materials that she could refer to whenever she needed.

These difficulties were consistently reflected in Noura's thoughts and feelings throughout the materials development process. As such, Noura's practical approach to material selection and implementation was a reaction to her evaluation of her contextual surroundings and as an attempt to overcome this obstacle. In the absence of an updated needs analysis to inform her materials' selection decisions, Noura stepped back and thought critically of her context. Here, she referred to the times when she utilised her research skills to inform her materials development: *"I then went back to my saved resources and found a few articles which were discussing the need of students in fields such as science and linguistics in different parts of the world. I felt that this was the logical thing to do since there wasn't any local NA which I could get my hands on. No serious work was done to 171 since then"*. This aligns with the findings of Kirkgöz (2019), who emphasizes the considerable responsibilities shouldered by ESP educators in customizing materials and decision-making processes to meet contextual requirements in the absence of institutional support. Likewise, Hafner & Miller (2018) contend that iterative cycles of needs analysis and material adaptation are fundamental to effective ESP practice, a process exemplified by Noura's independent efforts when colleagues displayed a lack of responsiveness.

Additionally, self-reflection proved to be an effective tool for Noura to identify the issues with her current experience and devise solutions for them in the future. In this realm, Noura expressed regret for excluding the discussion of benefits and only focusing on teaching learners about specifications in Unit 2. When she needed to find materials for the listening assessment, Noura found that in technical reviews, these two concepts are usually discussed together. Noura then wrote:

"I started preparing for the listening assessment... I then turned to YouTube to find a suitable product review clip... I was confronted with another issue that made me regret my decision to focus solely on specs and omit benefits from my teaching: almost all product reviews discuss both specs and benefits. I started questioning my decisions in this chapter... what's done is done. I will definitely consider this for next semester".

According to Sanchez & Borg (2014, p. 236), 'teacher education models which promote conscious critical reflection and teacher agency, and provide space for trainees to engage constructively both with their peers and with students are likely to generate innovative ideas for teaching'. Upon examining the previous excerpt, the act of self-reflection similarly enabled Noura to become more conscious of her teaching mishaps, allowing her to rectify them in future scenarios. This type of critical reflection was also demonstrated in Chan's (2018) study. To address the importance of reflection in the educational process, Chan (2018) chose to structure her syllabus around a triangulation of three fundamental tenets, one of which is 'repeated reflection' on the content of the targeted genres to identify potential pitfalls and develop more effective solutions. Considering such pivotal role of teacher reflection, teachers who continue their teaching without the ability to notice and consider the moments of pride, frustration, achievements or failures, might fall into the trap of robotic instruction, where they only focus on serving the aims which they think are achievable in their contexts, without attempting to solve any problems or implement any improvement in their current contexts.

4.3. Teacher Reflection as a Tool for Understanding the Role of Content Knowledge in ESP Instruction

Bearing in mind that cognitions and practices are sensitive to the context in which they occur (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), the current research demonstrates how the teacher's perceptions and

practices were dynamically shaped and reshaped throughout this journey. During the lectures, Noura has experienced a few trial-and-error incidents, where she has reconsidered or eliminated materials based on factors such as her own perceptions of the nature of ESP classrooms, student engagement and proficiency levels, as well as other contextual factors, including time and the availability of suitable materials. For example, while teaching Unit 1, she explained that although the course outline required attention to both the learners' ability to question and report a workplace incident, she made an informed decision to focus only on the skills needed for reporting an incident. This was based on her perception that her students' future role in their future workplace in such scenarios is to report an incident they have witnessed rather than investigate it. Here, Noura explained, *"I didn't feel that it was useful, so I immediately decided not to use it in my other sections."* Based on this belief, Noura relied on a number of YouTube clips that demonstrated incidents such as explosions or workers' entrapment in utility holes as part of the materials she adopted, followed by a role-play where students acted as witnesses and began reporting the main details they had seen.

Another hindrance faced by Noura, in common with that experienced by the participants of Bayram et al. (2022), is the difficulty of promoting learner engagement and critical thinking skills in some of her groups. This could be attributed to the issue of content or disciplinary knowledge, as well as the teacher's role in dealing with this type of knowledge in the ESP classroom. Noura herself acknowledged this in one of the interviews: *"I always tell them...I know you have more knowledge than me on such topics"*. Noura believed that the higher the specificity in the ESP lesson, the more learners would engage with the lesson content, as they are expected to be knowledgeable about their specialisations. Noura also believed that learning is a mutual process between the ESP teacher and learner; however, and as indicated in her interview *"...[the learners] come with the belief that the teacher is the source of the knowledge"*, and in a sign that they lacked logical reasoning, she explained that they *"are not used to questioning themselves or others"*. As such, Noura expressed positive feelings in one of her teaching moments, where she started engaging with her learners who challenged or corrected her in detail related to their specialisation: *"They challenged me [...] I was very happy then. They are intellectually confident about what they know."*

Therefore, it can be argued that a successful ESP experience naturally entails that teachers should not only be reflective on their language teaching beliefs and practices, but also on how they can explore their targeted domains, what they can learn before teaching that domain, and how this knowledge could lead to the enhancement of the teaching experience. In the ESP realm where linguistic rules intersect with specific knowledge, it is essential for teachers to continually scrutinise key aspects of their perceptions about ESP instruction, including the roles of ESP teachers and learners in the instructional process and the authority of teachers in the ESP classroom. If ESP teachers are educated on the tenets of their domain, they will be able to transcend the exclusive focus on textual elements of language (Chen, 2000; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hafner & Miller, 2018). Constantly reflecting on their teaching moments allows teachers to be aware of such focus and enables them to look for ways of incorporating wider disciplinary aspects in their teaching (Hüttner et al., 2009; Hüttner et al., 2019) in a more progressive, inclusive, and perhaps confident manner (Benesch, 2009; Wu & Badger, 2009). Whether in individual or collective practice, such reflection would enable teachers to question the feasibility of their current perceptions and practices and find ways to improve.

Another profound implication that arises from the discussion of this theme is related to teacher education and professional development. Teachers and teacher educators need to acknowledge that notion that teaching cannot be simplistically viewed from the angle of an individual's compilation of knowledge and perceptions based on their experiential journeys, simply because not all journeys are deemed successful. Instead, the experience of teaching is also highly contextualised and prone to being malleable in response to time, surrounding realities, and the presence of other competing

forces. One contributing factor to a better conceptualisation of teaching can be achieved by engaging in self-reflective practices, in which teachers continually revisit their thoughts about teaching in general and in their changing contexts specifically. To better understand the role of self-reflection in improving teaching, it is essential to note that the success of teaching does not necessarily depend on an innate nature or natural readiness to acquire the skill (Hüttner et al., 2011; Hüttner et al., 2009). Instead, success in the craftsmanship of teaching resides in our capacity to engage in deep, continuous, rigorous thought about that skill (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p. 15). Thus, teacher reflection is, and must be, a seminal part of teacher professional development events, allowing for such critical practices to thrive in teachers' communities of practice and offering an enhanced teaching experience by which teachers can feel more confident about their instructional decisions.

5. Conclusion

The current research examines the role of teacher reflection in shaping and influencing ESP teachers' conceptualisations of their teaching and subsequent practices. As evident in the findings, it can be argued that reflective practices proved to have a substantial impact on the way teachers make decisions related to their ESP material selection process.

The findings underscore the significant implications of reflective practices in expanding teachers' cognitive and practical perspectives. Specifically, such practices enable self-awareness of beliefs, promote rigorous examination of these beliefs, and encourage the development of practical strategies to confront potential challenges. The study emphasises the importance of incorporating reflective practices as an essential element within preservice and in-service teacher education programs, especially in the domain of ESP, where linguistic competence intersects with disciplinary knowledge. The study also asserts the institutional role in encouraging and facilitating self-reflective practices among its members to achieve instructional enhancement. This is because by adopting the act of self-reflection, teachers would begin to problematise their teaching methods, consider their re-visited views, and reassess the dynamics of the teacher-learner relationship in alignment with how they view the balance of power in the ESP classroom. In such a scenario, the learner is not only a passive receiver of knowledge but also an active contributor to the learning process.

Additionally, all major themes in this study lead to a significant avenue of discussion: the role of teacher education and institutional professional development programs in encouraging the act of teacher reflection among their participants. Engaging teachers, whether pre- or in-service, in practical moments of reflecting on their previous and current teaching experiences and training them to utilise such reflections for informing their course decisions is a powerful tool that can help teachers understand their fields of instruction. This, in turn, creates an instructional environment in which teachers are no longer entrapped in their traditional instructional experiences. Specifically in ESP, such a scenario can contribute to avoiding the potential cognitive void between the conceptualization of ESP as 'a Portal to Systemic Literacy' (Bhatia et al., 2011), which aims at familiarizing learners with their target disciplinary genres and equipping them with 'lifelong learning' skills and competencies (Hyland, 2018), and the perception of ESP as an 'unworkable' approach (Bhatia et al., 2011) due to contextual circumstances. Therefore, this necessitates the implementation of the concept of teacher reflection in pre- and in-service educational opportunities to enable teachers to be more aware of these possible pitfalls and how to overcome them in their actual instructional experiences. Additionally, promoting a reflective community of practice in which teachers collectively reflect on their ideas and actions within their ESP instructional experience is an essential form of professional growth for these teachers, as it allows them to reflect on their cognitive and practical experiences, reinforcing the positive ones and excluding the negative.

It is essential at this point to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. While the research highlights the importance of implementing reflective practices through a single case, alternative

methodological frameworks could be employed to further enrich the findings. For instance, a mixed methods approach could facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the researched context by incorporating insights from a broader sample and employing different analytical perspectives.

6. Recommendations

Future studies could focus on understanding the institutional aspects that facilitate or hinder the implementation of teacher reflection in a community. An interventionist examination could be conducted to measure the impact of practically implementing the concept of teacher reflection among preservice and novice teachers. This could also be complemented with a comparative study between novice and experienced teachers to better understand the nature of reflection each group of teachers generates and how these reflections help us understand the role of instructional experience in shaping teachers' instructional beliefs and practices.

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