

## Investigating English language teachers' reflective practices in secondary schools

Bogale Abera Woldegiyorgis<sup>1</sup>

*Hawassa College of Teacher Education*

Alamirew Gebremariam Tesema<sup>2</sup>

*Addis Ababa University*

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### Abstract

Although reflective practice is a key to quality teaching, teachers often focus on teaching itself and do not reflect on their practice. Therefore, this study investigated reflective practices of English language teachers in Hawassa Secondary schools. The study used a qualitative case study design with 7 purposefully selected teachers using in-depth interviews, classroom observation and focus group discussion and analyzed the data thematically. The study showed that teachers taught through information-giving and students learned through information-receiving. They could not reflect well before and during teaching and superficially reflected after teaching and their reflections were limited to pre-reflection and technical levels and could not reflect at practical and critical levels. They made a little reflection individually and could not make meaningful group reflections. Teachers' reflections focused only on classroom teaching, paying no attention to other areas. The study implied modifications to current reflection theories to be cyclical, career long and practiced individually and with others. It showed how reflective teaching could be adopted into teachers' regular practice to improve teaching quality and student outcomes. It implied that the teacher development policy guideline to be re-evaluated to consider teacher development through reflection. The study raised some important questions that warrant further investigation.

**Keywords:** Focus of reflection, reflection, teaching and learning, reflective practice, reflection tools, types of reflection

### 1. Introduction

This part introduces the concept of reflective teaching and reviews the literature pertinent to the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> Bogale Abera Woldegiyorgis is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Addis Ababa University and a Lecturer of TEFL at Hawassa College of Teacher Education, Ethiopia. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Literature (English) from Addis Ababa University and Master's Degree in TEFL from Hawassa University. He has also earned another Master's Degree in Social Work from Addis Ababa University. He has published his work in reputable journals and published many books for his college and NGOs. Corresponding author: [bogale.article@gmail.com](mailto:bogale.article@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Alamirew Gebremariam is an Assistant Professor of TEFL at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He received a Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Literature, as well as an MA and PhD in TEFL from Addis Ababa University. He has published a number of books for secondary schools, colleges and universities.

### 1.1. Reflective teaching

Reflection is self-examination. Dewey (1933) defined reflection as the deliberate, ongoing and thoughtful self-examination. It is important to study the status of teachers' self-examination as practice alone cannot improve teachers' competence. Teaching experience alone is not enough for effective teaching and effective teaching requires both teaching and taking time to reflect on the teaching (Farnell, 2018). In Dewey's terms, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (Dewey, 1933, 78.). Therefore, it is important to investigate the status of Reflective Teaching (RT) among English Language Teachers (ELT teachers) in the study area.

The professional behaviors of ELT teachers in Ethiopia deviate from research findings. Studies consistently inform us that RP is a major approach to developing English language teachers' professional competence as it helps teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses and adjust lessons to students' needs (Mesa, 2018). The studies in Ethiopia are in contrast to these findings. Degife (2022), for example, found that ELT teachers in Secondary Schools in Addis Ababa had very low levels of reflectivity. Similarly, Berhan (2019) found that ELT teachers in Hawassa have low levels of reflectivity. Although RT is a buzz word in the Ethiopian education system, it is little implemented in secondary schools.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how ELT teachers in Hawassa Secondary Schools practice reflection. This fills the knowledge gap in the study context.

This study contributes to the development of Reflective Practice (RP) in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Although RT is a widely recognized tool to improve teaching, it is still new to the study context and the teachers taught without reflection. Teacher development documents in Ethiopia paid no attention to professional development through reflection on one's practice and the current study contributes to the re-evaluation of teacher development guidelines in the Ethiopian context. The guideline could be used in material development, evaluation and teacher development. The results influence the routine actions of ELT teachers and encourage them to consider reflective actions in their teaching. To change teachers' routine actions, this study revised Wallace's (1991) reflective practice model which viewed RP only as individual practice and this study revised the model to show how teachers should reflect individually and with others to improve their teaching competence. Other studies showed teachers' reflection on fragmented components and this study introduced comprehensive teacher reflection that included teaching and learning, reflection on a particular skill, reflections of different kinds, the use of reflection tools and the focus of teacher reflection in a comprehensive manner. To fill the gaps in previous studies, this study aimed to answer the following specific questions:

1. How do ELT teachers approach teaching and learning in general?
2. What are the types of reflections practiced by secondary school ELT teachers?
3. What reflection tools do ELT teachers use to reflect on their teaching?
4. What are the focus areas for ELT teachers' reflections?

### *1.2. Literature review*

The teaching and learning approach that teachers follow directly affects students' learning. The two major approaches are the constructivist approach and the transmission approach. Farrell (2018) explained that direct transmission implies that teachers directly provide information to students. They communicate knowledge to students in a clear and structured way, which is knowledge transmission to learners. Constructivist teaching emphasizes students' active participation in the learning process and teachers act as facilitators of students' inquiry.

Effective teaching requires both teaching and reflecting on the process of teaching. As Farrell (2018), experience alone is not enough for effective teaching as effective teaching requires reflections on teaching. Teachers' reflection before, during and after teaching improves their competence in teaching. Dewey (1933) observed teachers' focus on teaching and disregard of reflection and proposed that teachers should reflect after teaching. Schon (1983) noted that teachers also have to examine the effectiveness of their lessons while teaching to solve problems on the spot based on their previous experience. Killion and Todnem (1991) expanded Schon's concept of reflection and proposed reflection-for-action, which is reflection before teaching. Reflection before teaching relates to how teachers prepare for their teaching, and it involves thinking about future actions to improve practice. Therefore, teachers have to reflect before, during and after teaching. However, Firehiwot and Demekash (2024) found that teachers were generally not engaged in reflective practice in Ethiopia.

Teachers' reflection at all levels improves their teaching effectiveness. Manen (1977) organized reflection into technical, practical, and critical levels. The first level is technical reflection, which is concerned with the means teachers use to achieve lesson objectives. The second level is practical reflection, which involves justifying classroom activities with theory and teaching techniques. The third level is critical reflection, which considers moral, ethical, and social issues that impact teaching. Larrivee (2008) added pre-reflection (non-reflection) level as some teachers could not reflect at all. This relates to whether the teachers react to students and the classroom situation impulsively or make conscious consideration of alternative responses. Farahiani and Rajabi (2022) said teachers' levels of reflection have not received due research attention.

Teachers' reflection on various aspects of their teaching makes teachers effective in their instruction. Kim (2018) thought teachers' reflection has to focus on-their-teaching, focus on self, focus on professional issues and focus on students/class. Likewise, Brookfield (2017) recommended that teachers examine their teaching concerning students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory and research and personal experiences

Teachers have to reflect on their teaching both individually and with others. Thompson (2022) indicated that teachers can learn through individual reflection on their practice. Solitary reflection enhances awareness of one's strengths and areas of development. She added that individual reflections may offer one perspective on the issue and teachers have to reflect with others to better identify their strengths and areas of improvement. Ur (1991) indicated that personal reflections enable teachers to draw on their experience only, but

they can also learn from other teachers' things they could not learn on their own

Previous models of reflection have focused on fragmented components of reflection and lacked comprehensiveness. Woldegiyorgis and Tesema (2025) have provided a summary of the common reflective practice models. In the earliest RT model, Dewey (1933) emphasized that teachers should consider their knowledge and beliefs in light of the grounds that support them. Gibbs (1988) proposed an RP model that focused on learning by doing which included phases designed to encourage more in-depth reflections on experiences as well as the concept of reflecting on emotions. Experiential learning models suggested by Kolb and Kolb (2005) emphasized that the best way to learn is to actually have the experience. Moon (2004) wrote the importance of written reflections over oral reflection. Farrell's (2022) RT model invites teachers to reflect on their teaching philosophy (their self-knowledge of the teacher as a person), principles (their assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning), theory (theories they consult), practice (what they do in class) and beyond practice (critical reflections). Farrell's (2022) RT model could be better covered under types of reflection rather than a model of reflection.

Wallace's RP model for professional development is a more comprehensive reflection model compared to other models and still stands out. It captures the essence in all other models to map reflection dimensions and to show the interplay among them. The conceptual framework used in this study is one proposed by Wallace (1991), which states that teachers improve their competence when they reflect on their practice. This model still needed a little modification as it viewed reflection as an individual practice alone. Shah (2022) indicated that reflection should not be viewed as a solitary practice alone and should also be considered as a social practice. Therefore, the researcher added the component that RP could be done individually as well as in groups as individual reflection provides only one sided perspective on practice.

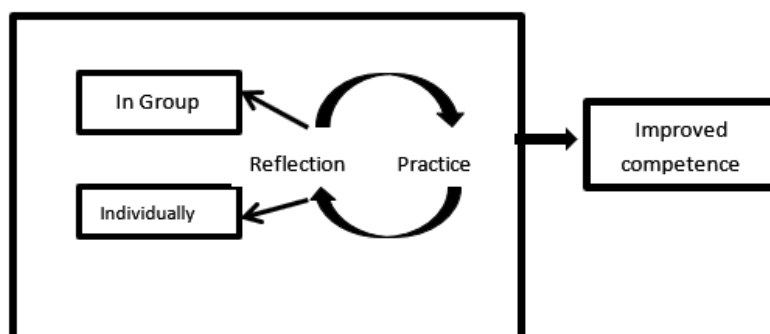


Figure 1. Link between individual and group reflections to improve teachers' teaching competence (Source: Adapted from Wallace, 1991, p.49)

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. The study design

The study site was Hawassa City Administration, the capital city of Sidama Regional State in Ethiopia. The researcher selected two secondary schools (Tabor and Misrak Chora) where information about RT is strongly

evident. The researcher sampled the schools and ELT teachers based on their ability to provide rich information to the study.

### *2.3. Sampling technique and sample size*

Qualitative data for case study was collected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting information-rich samples from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009).

### *2.4. Instruments for data collection*

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and class observation based on interview protocol and observation protocol suggested by Creswell (2012). The instruments were based on research objectives and they were pilot tested.

### *2.5. Data Collection Procedures*

The researcher followed the data collection procedure suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). First he determined if the case study is appropriate to study the problem. Second, he identified cases. Third, he developed a procedure for intensive data collection. Fourth, he developed a data analysis approach. Finally, he reported the interpreted meanings.

### *2.6. Methods of data analysis*

Qualitative case study data were analyzed using thematic analysis with the support of NVivo 10. The steps used to analyze data were according to the suggestions given by Creswell and Creswell (2023). First, the researcher organized and prepared data. Second, he read through all the data. Third, he coded the data. Fourth, he combined codes into themes. Finally, he interconnected them into a story line.

### *2.7. Validity and reliability*

The researcher ensured the validity and the reliability of the qualitative data as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2023). He ensured the validity of the data through triangulating data sources, by using member checking and by making thick descriptions and he also ensured reliability of the qualitative data by checking the transcripts, by making sure there is no change in meaning of codes and cross-checking codes with another researcher. He observed the ethical standards suggested (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

## **3. Findings**

The study involved four male and three female ELT teachers, seven in total, teaching in two secondary schools. They were given codes for anonymity (TT, GG, DM, FA, MM AH and GB). Three of the teachers had an MA and four had a first-degree qualification in English language teaching. All teachers have served for more than 14 years and were teaching in grades 9-12. The themes that emerged were teachers' approach to teaching and learning in general, kinds of reflections practiced, reflection tools used and teachers' focus of reflection.

### *3.1. Teaching and learning in general*

#### *3.1.1. Teaching in general*

Interview participants were asked how they taught their students in general. Four participants (TT, FA, AH and GB) taught both by providing information and facilitating students' independent learning and three (GG, DM and MM) taught by providing information. TT taught both ways. *"I provide information and also facilitate their independent learning."* (TT). FAI taught both ways depending on the situation. GG, DM and MM provided information. *"I actually teach by providing information. Then based on the information, they practice it"* (GG). MM provided information as students cannot learn on their own. *"Students cannot dig out things by themselves. They can't do that. Therefore, I mostly teach by providing information. That is the existing condition"* (MM). Most Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants (DM, FA, MM and AH) have taught by providing information, two (TT and GB) both by providing information and facilitating their independent learning and one (GG) by facilitating things for students. DM provided information. *"I first give them some information and then they participate and learn from that"* (DM). TT and GB taught both ways. *"First I give them information and then facilitate things for them"* (TT). GG facilitated students' independent learning. *"You facilitate things and in the context created, they learn by solving problems"* (GG). The observation showed that most of the teachers provided information and gave practice activities. The data showed that participants have taught mostly by providing information.

### 3.1.2. Learning in general

All participants believe that students generally learn by receiving information. TT's students expected an explanation from him. *"Students expect explanations from the teacher. They want to learn by receiving information"* (TT). GG's students received information and implemented it. *"They learn by receiving information from me. Based on the information they do activities"* (GG). DM said, *"They learn by receiving information from me"*. GB's students preferred to learn by receiving information. *"They receive information first. The students are passive and expect to receive information"* (GB). Focus group participants gave varied responses. Two (TT and DM) indicated that students learned both by receiving information and solving problems on their own. DM said students learn both ways. *"Students learn the language both through receiving information and solving problems on their own. If the teacher could not give them some things, they could not learn on their own"* (DM). Three teachers (GG, FA, and GB) said their students learned by solving problems. *"They encounter problems and find solutions"* (GG). Class observation showed that in most of the teachers' classes, students learned by receiving information, not by solving problems on their own. The data showed that students learned by receiving information, but they were not solving problems on their own.

## 3.2. Types of reflection practiced

### 3.2.1. Timing of reflection

*Reflection before teaching (reflection-for-action):* Participants' preparation before getting into the classroom was limited. All of them gave brief responses. TT had no clear idea. *"Before class begins, students clean the board or I myself clean it"* (TT). GG said, *"Before teaching, I prepare"*. DM looked at the contents

and prepared notes. “I look at the content for the day’s lesson first. If it requires notes, activities, I organize these, I check if students will be able to learn things in the way I planned for them. I organize the content” (DM). FA mentally figured things out. MM prepared exercises and added more. “I look at exercises and add some if required. I bring additional exercises (MM). AH and GB gave a brief response. Focus group participants also provided brief answers. TT thought of the materials to be used and made arrangements. GG goes to class with prepared notes. DM made all kinds of preparations. “I make all kinds of preparations including psychological and academic preparation. I read well on the topic and get prepared” (DM). FGD participants could not clearly articulate their in-advance preparation. The data clearly showed that the participants lacked the required prior preparations before classes.

### *3.2.2. Reflection during teaching (reflection-in-action)*

No participants could reflect while teaching. They could not stop and reflect on their lessons during teaching. TT rarely reflected while teaching. GG did not reflect while teaching. “During teaching, I don’t reflect. I work to finish my lesson. I only focus on my teaching” (GG). The DM implemented the prepared lesson. “I implement those ideas in class” (DM). FA also rushed to finish the prepared lesson. “I implement what I planned to teach during instruction” (FA). MM presented the lesson and answered questions. In the FGD, only DM said he reflects while teaching. All others just pushed to finish the lesson. GG did not make changes to his lesson. “I make students follow my lesson attentively. They don’t usually show unwanted behaviors” (GG). GB said, “I implement my plan in class”. DM stopped in the middle of teaching and made changes when needed. “I present the lesson and observe students. There will be classroom interaction with the students. There could be elements of the lesson that I could change based on observation. I could take immediate corrective measures” (DM). Class observation showed that most of the teachers did not reflect while teaching. They pressed on to finish their lessons and could not improvise the lesson. Only TT and MM attempted to reflect while teaching. When TT found that students had gotten stuck, he changed the activity. MM was focusing on providing information, but noted that she has to make the lesson communicative, so she changed her approach. Classroom observation showed that participants could not reflect during teaching and rushed to finish their prepared lessons.

### *3.2.3. Reflection after teaching (reflection-on-action)*

Except for GB, all interview participants reflected after teaching. “I evaluate myself at the end. The way I taught in the previous section may force me to change my method in the other section” (TT). GG’s reflection is after the lesson. “I see myself after teaching. I examine how much students understood the lesson. After class, I think about the students. I even check my notes” (GG). DM reflected on how his lesson went. MM examined what went well and what went badly after the lesson. “I think about what went well and what went wrong in my lesson” (MM). GB did not reflect; she taught lessons, and things ended there. “After the lesson, I leave the class” (GB). All FGD participants reflected after teaching. TT avoided his gaps in the next lesson. “After the lesson, I will teach better in the next class. I avoid the gaps I had in the

previous class" (TT). GG examined his strengths and weaknesses after lessons. DM asked himself and improved his next lesson. "I ask myself about the gaps in the lesson and the contents I missed and how I could correct them in the next lesson" (DM). FA checked her weaknesses. MM checked the problems she faced and solved them in the next class. GB checked if students have achieved objectives. Post-observation discussion with participants showed that all participants reflected after teaching though the reflection is not critical. They all believed their lessons went well and their preparation helped them succeed, and they blamed students for being weak. They could not see their own gaps after the lesson. The data showed that ELT teachers mostly reflected after teaching, but their reflections were not critical.

### 3.2.4. Levels of reflection

#### 3.2.4.1. Pre-reflection/non-reflections

Most interview participants (DM, FA, MM, and GB) responded both consciously and impulsively to things and three (TT, GG and AH) responded consciously. DM's responses were both considered and emotional. "If the event is outside of teaching and learning, I don't respond emotionally. For events related to teaching and learning, I respond immediately" (DM). FA and MM responded automatically or with consideration. "I respond automatically or with conscious consideration" (FA). GB sometimes regrets impulsively reacting. "Sometimes, I take action automatically and then regret doing that" (GB). AH delayed responses when not sure. "If I am not sure what to do, I delay responses" (AH). Almost all FGD participants (except AH), responded both consciously and impulsively. GG's reaction depends on the situation. "My response to students and classroom situations depends on situations. I don't usually respond impulsively, but there are some situations. The reaction depends on situations". FA's responses were also condition dependent. "My response to students and classroom situations could be impulsive or one well-considered. If things are unexpected, I react impulsively. When students disturb me, I sometimes change their sitting arrangements" (FA). AH responded with consideration. Classroom observation showed that teachers' responses were mostly impulsive and were not consciously considered. For example, GG aggressively responded to students' needs and classroom situations.

#### 3.2.4.2. Technical reflection

Participants mentioned the means they used to achieve lesson objectives. The means TT used to achieve objectives were "I see my lesson. Second, I make good preparations. I organize examples that help me explain. I tell them the lesson objectives. I check if they have achieved objectives" (TT). GG gave them exercises and checked them. DM said, "I present lessons in a manner students can understand. I prepare notes and activities for the level of students. I check the achievement of lesson objectives". GB organizes things to achieve objectives. "I try to use local instructional aides to teach. I organize these things to achieve objectives" (GB). Some FGD participants have mentioned the means they used, and others could not articulate the means they use to achieve objectives. TT communicated objectives and involved students in activities. GG used different materials, presented and facilitated things for

students. DM managed the class and presented the lesson. FA said, “My activities and students’ activities are mobilized to achieve objectives”. MM considered students’ level and involved learners. GB has no clear means to achieve the objectives. Class observation showed that most of the means teachers used have helped them achieve lesson objectives. The data generally indicated that some participants could not tell how to combine all means to achieve lesson objectives. Generally speaking, teachers used different means to achieve lesson objectives.

#### *3.2.4.3. Practical reflection*

Most participants (TT, GG, FA and MM) did not consider justifying their actions with theories and techniques. TT did not consider them. “I don’t remember theories. I haven’t even thought of them” (TT). GG did not do that. “I don’t look for theoretical justification for my teaching. I go with the accustomed way. We don’t have the experience of finding theoretical justification for our work” (GG). FA and MM did not remember the theories. “I don’t remember theories” (FA). DM, AH and GB reported to have made attempts to justify actions. DM said “When teachers provide information, it is behaviorist theory and when students construct knowledge it is constructivist theory behind” (DM). GB attempted to justify the lessons. “I attempt to justify my lesson. I don’t teach traditionally. I think of the teaching techniques” (GB). All FGD participants indicated that they did not consider theories in their teaching. GG did not consider them. “I don’t relate classroom activities to theories” (GG). DM hasn’t ever used theories. “I haven’t ever thought this theory reflects this lesson. I did not relate the theories to the contents” (DM). Classroom observation revealed that no teacher could justify their actions with theories and teaching techniques. The data clearly showed that teachers taught without considering theories or teaching techniques justifications.

#### *3.2.4.4. Critical reflection*

All interview participants considered the impact of moral, ethical and social issues on classroom teaching. TT considered students’ diversity. “They have different behaviors and cultures. I tolerate some of the misbehaviors. I teach through tolerance” (TT). GG has an attachment to students and understands problems. “Students could be affected by the economy, politics and other things. We have an attachment to students in many aspects. We know their background and their family condition. We know their academic status and economic condition” (GG). DM said, “Teachers should respond wisely lest they should hurt students’ feelings” (DM). FA made misbehaving students bring their parents and sometimes advised them. MM considered moral, ethical and social issues related to her teaching. “There could be students who feel tired, not engaged in activities, or have no exercise books. I approach them and ask why? I understand students’ problems”. All FGD participants considered these things in their school. TT sometimes considered them and sometimes made mistakes. GG responded to these diversities. DM tried to handle these things. “Students come to class with different behavior, culture, social issues or even personal behaviors. I try to handle these things by setting down myself. I am not emotional in class and I tell them to calm things down” (DM). Class observation showed that teachers are not

considering moral, ethical and social issues in their lessons. They have the knowledge, but they are not practicing it. Except for TT, all others could not consider moral, ethical and social issues. TT attempted to involve female students because it was only males answering. The data showed that participants could not implement what they knew about moral, ethical and social issues.

### *3.3. Individual and shared reflection tools*

#### *3.3.1. Individual reflection tools*

Most participants used some kind of individual reflection tools to reflect on their practice individually. They used few reflection tools and MM has not used any of the tools. TT collected students' feedback and recorded lessons. I collect students' feedback about lessons. The other is lesson recording. I recorded a listening lesson" (TT). GG used the portfolio and student feedback. "I collect student feedback. I collect comments at the end of first semester on things that should be improved or changed. Portfolio is a must at school level. I do two things. I organize a portfolio and collect students' feedback" (GG). DM used a portfolio, lesson recording and student feedback. FA did not ask for feedback for fear of negative comments. She used a portfolio. MM has not used any of the individual reflection tools. "I don't use reflection tools. I feel I should have used them. Up to now, I did not use reflection tools to examine myself" (MM). AH used a portfolio. GB used a lesson report. In the focus group, they still used a few tools for individual reflection. TT used student feedback and lesson recording. GG used a portfolio. "We organize portfolios. We haven't done action research up to now. I think I will do it in the future" (GG). DM did action research many years ago, but not now. FA, MM, AH, and GB all used the portfolio alone. GB said, she used the portfolio and no other tools. During classroom observation, the researcher could not see any individual reflection tool being used by teachers. No teacher used individual reflection tools, including student feedback.

#### *3.3.2. Shared reflection tools*

Participants indicated that they reflected with others, but the reflections were done orally and not recorded. TT used peer discussion on portions to cover and CPD activities, both of which are oral. GG could not use shared reflection tools due to a lack of knowledge. "I haven't used many of them due to lack of knowledge. We conduct peer observation. There is school supervision. There is a group portfolio "(GG). DM did not use any of the tools due to lack of knowledge and a lack of time. FA got feedback from department supervision and participated in CPD. MM had an oral discussion with peers. "We usually ask each other about how we conducted lessons. Our shared reflection is also done just mentally. We don't make written reflections. We just raise the idea and discuss. There is no writing" (MM). AH organized a group portfolio, discussed with peers, and had a teacher study group. GB had a department observation and conducted peer observations. Focus group participants indicated that there are few written group reflections. TT orally discussed the pages covered. "We only check which page we are on" (TT). GG conducted peer observation and is yet to conduct group action research. "I conduct peer observation. We have planned to do group action research"

(GG). DM had only department supervision. FA is currently not reflecting with others. MM conducted a discussion with peers. AH discussed with peers and was involved in group CPD. GB discussed in CPD. “We discuss in the teacher development group” (GB). Classroom observation showed that teachers were not using group reflection tools. The researcher couldn’t see shared reflections in the school compound during the study period.

#### *3.4. Focus of reflection*

Participants’ reflections focused on different areas. TT reflected on his experience, students’ feedback and colleagues’ comments. “I see myself in terms of experience. I evaluate myself in terms of my teaching experience. The other is in terms of students. We always reflect with peer teachers” (TT). GG reflected on his profession and student feedback. “I examine myself in terms of profession and with respect to students” (GG). DM reflected in terms of theory, students’ feedback and peer comments. FA reflected in terms of technology use. MM reflected in terms of student feedback and experience. AH reflected in terms of students, colleagues’ feedback, profession and his background. GB reflected with respect to the subject area, life experience, and peers. FGD participants reflected on similar focus areas. TT reflected on the subject matter and colleagues’ comments. GG reflected on ethics, teaching and student feedback. “I check myself in relation to ethics, in relation to teaching and in relation to students’ level of understanding” (GG). DM said, “I see myself in relation to my peers, in relation to students’ feedback and from experience” (DM). FA reflected in terms of teaching and student feedback. MM reflected in terms of materials to use. AH reflected in terms of peers, students and preparation. GB said, “I see myself in terms of peers and collecting students’ feedback” (GB). The data indicated that participants are not reflecting on different aspects of their class; they focused on one or two focus areas.

### **4. Discussion**

This study investigated ELT teachers’ reflective practices in secondary schools in Hawassa. In this section, the researcher presents what the findings mean and compares them to existing literature.

#### *4.1. Teaching and learning in general*

##### *4.1.1. Teaching in general*

Most participants taught by providing information. This is in line with widespread transmission teaching which is against the constructivist approach to teaching currently promoted in the education sector. Adnew (2016) found that most teachers in Ethiopia taught students by providing information which is against students’ knowledge construction. He said students are passively listening to teachers’ lectures for much of class time. Similarly, Asrat (2017) found that teachers could not implement a constructivist approach to teaching and still wanted to continue teacher-fronted teaching. He said teachers could not facilitate students’ learning and they repeated the transmission teaching they were used to when they were high school students. Teachers taught students the way they were taught and

duplicated bad teaching practices (Jemadi et al., 2023). This means teachers are not creating opportunities for students' independent learning.

#### 4.1.2. *Learning in general*

Students generally learned by receiving information from teachers and this was also found during class observation. This is in conflict with the constructivist approach to students' learning. In the constructivist approach to teaching, students are involved as active participants in the process of constructing knowledge. Farrell (2018) explained that teachers are viewed as active participants in the process of constructing knowledge. The approach stressed more on students' thinking and reasoning processes more than the acquisition of specific knowledge. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) added that in this approach students are encouraged to find solutions to practical problems themselves (OECD, 2009). The constructivist approach encouraged students' active learning, problem solving, and cooperative learning (Adnew, 2016). Adnew (2016) said this was not the case in secondary schools in Ethiopia. According to him, although a constructive approach requires students' active role in constructing their knowledge, teachers in Ethiopia have limited students' learning and become an obstacle instead of facilitating students' own learning.

Teachers can combine knowledge transmission and knowledge construction approaches in teaching. Al-Shehri and Alaudan (2024) advised teachers to combine knowledge transmission and knowledge construction approaches in their lessons to address the diverse needs and preferences of students.

### 4.2. *Types of reflection*

#### 4.2.1. *Timing of reflection*

##### 4.2.1.1. *Reflection before teaching (reflection-for-action)*

Most participants could not make adequate in-advance preparation for teaching. Although they made some preparations, they could not predict what might happen in class and how to respond to it. Teachers' reflection before class is not to the extent required. This is in conflict with the idea of reflection-for-action. Riyanti (2020) indicated that reflection before teaching relates to how teachers prepare and plan future actions with the intention of improving practice. Fakazli, (2021) said reflection before teaching helps teachers to think critically about the lesson they plan by focusing on lesson aims, learning outcomes, teaching approaches and methods, materials, activities and classroom management. In Cirocki and Widodo's (2019) class, teachers envisage and structure the lesson, anticipate challenges, and consider students' needs and how to integrate them into the teaching-learning process. However, most teachers miss this important aspect of in-advance preparation. For example, Firehiwot and Demekash (2024) found that most of the teachers in their study did not reflect on the suitability of their lessons before teaching and failed to evaluate whether their lessons would be appropriate for their students' needs. The data showed that participants lacked the required preparation for lessons.

#### *4.2.1.2. Reflection during teaching (reflection-in-action)*

No participants reflected while teaching to check how the lesson was going during teaching. They pressed on to finish their lessons and could not improvise the lesson. This is in line with other studies that documented the difficulties of reflecting while teaching. Manen (1995) argued that reflection during the event is perhaps the most challenging activity to be done. Few participants could reflect during their teaching activities, which is evident in this current study. Riyanti (2020) found that few teachers reflected while teaching by making needed changes in their lessons and improvising their teaching although they were not aware they were reflecting. The teachers shifted their plans or made instant decisions to address unexpected situations. Firehiwot and Demekesh (2024) found that teachers could not make real-time adjustments during the lesson based on student responses and engagement. The majority of the teachers did not check whether they were delivering the lesson as planned, and did not amend their teaching approach during the lesson. The data showed that teachers could not improvise and change their lessons when classroom situations demanded it during teaching.

#### *4.2.1.3. Reflection after teaching (reflection-on-action)*

Teachers' reflections after class were not critical, mostly revealed self-appreciation bias and failed to see areas for improvement. This is consistent with other studies. Riyanti 's (2021) study found that teachers mostly reflected after conducting their teaching by checking how their lesson went, which is not the case in the current study. Cirocki and Widodo (2019) stated that reflection after teaching enables teachers to clarify what they would do differently when they deliver that lesson again. Firehiwot and Demekash (2024) also found that the majority of teachers in their study did not evaluate their lessons after teaching, and could not examine the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons after the lesson. The teachers missed the opportunity to learn from their experiences and enhance their future teaching strategies. The data showed that teachers still needed to make meaningful reflections after lessons.

### *4.3. Levels of reflection*

#### *4.3.1. Pre-reflection/ non-reflection*

Pre-reflection is whether teachers' responses were automatic or done with conscious considerations. All participants responded both consciously and impulsively to students' actions which shows the existence of elements of non-reflectivity. This is in line with other studies that indicated non-reflectivity among teachers. Wallace (1991), indicated that some teachers react to situations and students impulsively and lack a reflective mindset. Larrivee (2008) said pre-reflection or non-reflection is the lowest level of reflection. She said that if teachers reacted automatically without conscious consideration, it shows that the teacher is at a pre-reflection level. She said such teachers' responses are not supported by evidence from experience, theory or research. Machost and Stains (2023) indicated some teachers exhibit this level of reflection. They said such teachers are not engaged in meaningful reflection and act in survival mode reacting automatically to situations without considering the impact of their reaction on students. They failed to respond to

the needs of learners. Participants in this study exhibited such a level of non-reflectivity.

#### 4.3.2. *Technical reflection*

Participants mentioned some means they used to achieve lesson objectives. Class observation showed that most of the means teachers used have helped them achieve lesson objectives. These findings agree with other studies. For example, Riyanti (2021) found that most of the in-service teachers in her study reflected at technical level, which is the lowest level of reflection. Rico et al., (2012) also found that all five participants in their qualitative study reflected at a technical level on the methods and strategies they used to reach the objective. Teachers' main concerns are how to develop their lessons and reach the goals set (Manen, 1977; Rico et al., 2012). As the Ministry of Education (MoE) (2013), teachers' reflections focus on strategies and methods used to reach predetermined goals. The data showed that teachers have used some means that helped them achieve their objectives.

#### 4.3.3. *Practical reflection*

Participants were asked what efforts they made to justify their actions with theories and teaching techniques. Most interview participants and all FGD participants did not consider justifying their actions with theories and techniques. Classroom observation revealed that no teacher could justify their actions with theories and teaching techniques. This agrees with other studies that depicted teachers' inability to justify their lessons. In practical reflection, teachers are concerned with how their actions were supported by their theoretical views on language learning and teaching (Manen, 1977; Rico et al., 2012). Riyanti (2021) found that teachers in her study couldn't justify their practice using theories or teaching techniques. Rico et al., (2012) found that out of five participants in their study, only two of them reached practice level justifying their classroom actions with their theoretical assumptions. This showed that teachers lacked theoretical justification and teaching techniques for their actions.

#### 4.3.4. *Critical reflection*

Study participants were asked if they considered moral, ethical and social issues in their teaching. All interview and FGD participants considered the impact of moral, ethical and social issues on classroom teaching. Class observation showed that although teachers seemed to have the knowledge of critical reflection, they did not practically consider moral, ethical and social issues in their lessons; they did not practice them. Teachers' inability to reflect at a critical level is consistent with studies that reported on this level. At this level, teachers consider moral, social and ethical factors that might have an impact on students' learning experience. (Manen, 1977; Rico et al., 2012). In Rico et al., (2012) study, only two out of five teachers reached critical reflection levels by considering the impact of moral, social and ethical factors on students' learning. Saliha (2016) indicated that critical reflection is rarely achieved since it represents the ability to relate their actions to social, ethical, and moral contributions. The data showed that participants were unable to consider moral, social and ethical issues during teaching.

#### 4.4. *Individual and shared reflection tools*

##### 4.4.1. *Individual reflection tools*

Few interviews and FGD participants reflected on their teaching, but most of them did not use reflection tools. During classroom observation, the researcher could not see any individual reflection tool being used by teachers. No teacher used individual reflection tools, including student feedback. This finding disagrees with most of the studies on the use of individual reflection tools. Cholifah et al., (2020) found that all participants in their study used students' feedback and half of them used journal writing and audio/video recordings to reflect on their teaching. As Jemadi et al., "Peer sharing and observations are generally preferred by teachers over journaling because they viewed other tools as time-consuming and disruptive to a busy schedule" (Jemadi et al., 2023). Upton and Hirano (2022) found that the majority of their participants reported they have improved their practice through individual reflection and planned to continue using self-reflection tools even after the research period. Individual reflection enhances teachers' awareness of their strengths and areas for development. (Thompson, 2022). These findings suggest that teachers in this study are far behind in using reflection tools. It could be due to a lack of knowledge or the perception that they are time-consuming.

##### 4.4.1.1. *Shared reflection tools*

Interview and FGD participants used a few shared reflections done orally. Classroom observation showed that teachers were not using group reflection tools. The researcher couldn't see shared reflection in the school compound during the study period. These findings are in conflict with studies on the importance of shared reflection. Thompson (2022) for example, explained that individual reflection gives teachers only one perspective on their work and teachers have to practice reflecting with others as well. The tools she recommended for shared reflection include peer observation, reading group, support group and writing group. Avery et al., (2008) added that reflections with other staff members can help develop more effective strategies, with the added benefit of working as a team. Tosriadi, Asib, Marmanto and Azizah. (2018) found that peer observation helped teachers solve the problems they encountered in teaching and helped them learn new teaching strategies from other colleagues. Han (2017) found that teachers who shared reflections were able to solve their immediate classroom problems. The data clearly showed that participants lacked a systematic approach to reflect with others and their common-sense reflections were oral, not done in writing.

#### 4.5. *Focus of reflection*

Interview and FGD participants reflected on a few focus areas available for reflection. They reflected on focus areas such as reflection on their experience, student feedback, peer comments, profession, theory and technology use. The data indicated that participants are not reflecting on different aspects of their class; they focused on one or two focus areas. This finding is in contrast with Kim and Brookfield's many suggestions for the focus of reflection. Kim (2018) thought teachers have to reflect in the areas of their teaching, focus on self, focus on professional issues and focus on

students/class. Likewise, Brookfield (2017) recommended that teachers have to examine their teaching with respect to students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory and research and personal experiences. Riyanti(2020) found that participants in her study had reflected on several aspects such as on their teaching methodology, teaching techniques, teaching materials, lesson planning and more. Study participants reflected on limited areas. Riyanti (2021) found that most in-service teachers do not document their reflection in written form. Orakci (2021) found that participants in his study reflected on teaching methods and techniques, activities and materials, student motivation, classroom atmosphere, ensuring participation in the lesson, the efficiency of measurement tools and the need to prepare measurement tools with regard to the learning objectives. The data showed that participants did not reflect on various aspects of their teaching and needed to view their instruction from different angles.

## 5. Conclusions

This section concludes the study by summarizing the key findings in relation to the research aim and research questions and discusses the value of the study. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose recommendations of further research.

### 5.1. Summary of the findings

The study aimed to investigate how ELT teachers in Hawassa secondary schools practice reflection. This was to see how teachers approach teaching and learning in general, the types of reflection practiced, the tools they use to practice reflection and the focus of their reflection. The study indicated that the teaching and learning was conducted through information giving and taking exhibiting a widespread transmission approach to teaching. ELT teachers could not make meaningful reflections before, during and after teaching. Teachers' responses to students and classroom situations were mostly impulsive and lacked conscious consideration of alternatives. Although they mentioned some of the means they used to achieve lesson objectives, they could not justify their activities with theories and techniques and couldn't practically consider the impact of moral, ethical and social issues on their lessons. They could not use individual and group reflection tools to make meaningful reflection. They failed to reflect on different aspects of their lessons.

### 5.2. Implications of the Study

This study has implications for theory, practice, policy and future research. Most RP theories proposed a linear model viewing reflection only as an individual practice and disregarded group reflections and how they feed each other. This study suggested modifications to the current RP theories to include cyclical, career long practice and to be done individually and with others. The study outcome highlighted the potential benefits of adopting RP in teaching. Mere teaching does not improve teachers' practices, so teachers should consider adopting RP in their teaching. It revealed how teachers can conduct RP in their teaching to enhance their effectiveness. The study has policy implications for the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. The current

teacher development policy is entirely focused on teacher training through university-based courses. Teacher development guidelines need to be re-evaluated to consider professional development through RP besides going to universities. Teachers should count on their own personal experiences as a source of learning and continuous growth. Otherwise, they will remain as teachers of yesterday, not of today.

### 5.3. *Limitations of the study*

This case study involved a few participants and one city, hence the findings are less generalizable to a broader population. Future studies could expand the participant-base and conduct comparative studies across multiple regions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. However, it is believed that much could still be learned from a particular. The researcher believed that the study has great value to improve the practice of RT despite these limitations.

### 5.4. *Suggestions for future research*

There is limited research on the topic of reflection in Ethiopia and more research is needed into the problem of teachers' RP. Poor RP in schools in Ethiopia raised some important questions for future research. The first question is "Do ELT teachers have the required RT knowledge to conduct reflection?" The second question is "What sort of teaching and learning beliefs do teachers have that influence teachers' RP?" The third one is "What are other setbacks that hindered teachers' uptake of RP?" These questions need further investigation.

## **Declaration of Interest**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## **Data availability statement**

Data supporting the results of this study can be accessed upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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