

USING REFLECTIVE JOURNALS AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL: VOICES FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract: This paper reports a qualitative case study on the use of reflective journal writing (RJW) as a professional development (PD) tool by three Vietnamese primary school English language teachers (VPETs). The study aims to explore their attitudes towards RJW through the data collection tool of interviews conducted with the teachers before and after they spent eight weeks writing reflective journals on their English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching at primary schools. The interview results indicated that the teachers shifted their attitudes toward the use of RJW as a PD tool, from being hesitant and doubtful of its advantages to being enthusiastic and welcoming to RJW. Regarding the influences of RJW on their teaching performance, the issues of time and insufficient training experience were reported as the barriers in journal teaching writing. However, RJW was acknowledged to help improve the teachers' teaching performance and personal development. The findings suggested that RJW could be used as a valuable PD tool to enhance both teaching effectiveness and professional growth among EFL teachers.

Keywords: Reflective journals, reflective teaching, teacher professional development, EFL teachers, primary school

1. Introduction

Professional development (PD) has been regarded as a crucial process in teacher teaching profession, in which teachers keep themselves updated with the latest teaching methodologies and strategies to improve their students' learning (Avalos, 2011). Thus, PD plays an essential part in improving education quality. Aimed at enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills in language teachers, various forms of PD have been conducted at school-based or individual-based levels (Brown & Lee, 2015; Díaz-Maggioli, 2003; Richard & Farell, 2005, 2011). While the former group of PD activities such as training courses, workshops, and conferences are considered formal and direct forms of teaching, individual-based PD activities such as reflective teaching journals or self-monitoring engage teachers as active, self-directed, and reflective agents in their learning process. Thus, the latter group of PD activities would allow for more reflection, self-assessment, and critical thinking in their teaching thinking, and thus promote more teacher development (Richard & Farell, 2005; Avalos, 2011; Kwakman, 2003; Tran et al., 2020). It is suggested that reflection helps them gather information on their instruction and student achievement to evaluate their practice and enable teachers to be more conscious of their beliefs and make informed decisions by contrasting them with their classroom practices (Cirocki & Farrell, 2016; Farrell, 2014).

Previous studies have explored the use of reflective teaching journals in various contexts (Belvis et al., 2013; Kinsella, 2001), but few have deeply examined in-service teachers' perceptions and practices of writing teaching journals in the Vietnamese context. A scarcity of

research on the use of reflective journals among in-service primary school EFL teachers makes it more crucial to conduct a study on how Vietnamese primary EFL teachers (VPETs) perceive reflective journals as a PD tool to improve their teaching. In alignment with the aim, a qualitative case study was conducted to seek the answers to the research question "What are the attitudes of in-service Vietnamese primary EFL teachers towards reflective journal writing?"

2. Literature review

2.1 Key concepts

Professional development

The concept of professional development (PD) has been extensively discussed in the literature on teacher development and education (Farrell, 2013). Bell and Gilbert (1994) define PD as developing teachers' beliefs in classroom practice and attending to teachers' feelings associated with change. In line with this, Day (1999) notes that PD is a complicated, continuous, and long-term process that aims at both intelligent and emotional change on the part of the teachers to keep or grow the quality of education in the classroom. Put more emphasis on the active role of the teacher and the context-embedded nature of teacher learning, Diaz-Maggioli (2003) defines teacher development as "an evolving process of self-disclosure, reflection, and growth that yields the best results" (p. 3). Teacher learning is not a one-off event, but a long-term process, continuously developing teachers' knowledge of their "self, students, subject matter, curricula and setting" (Johnson, 2006, p. 9). To be more specific about the focus of the teacher learning process, Avalos (2011) regards PD as an instructor's learning process, learning how to learn, and putting their knowledge into practice for their students' progress. Drawing on the aforementioned features of teacher professional development, PD in this study is defined as an ongoing reflective process in which teachers make inquiries about their self, students, subject matter, teaching experiences, and social, cultural, and political features of their teaching context with its outcomes of positive impacts on students' learning.

Reflective teaching

In education, the concept of reflective teaching (RT) was initiated by John Dewey (1933), and then by other linguists and educational researchers over the last century. According to Dewey (1933), teachers do not learn from experience, but from reflecting on experience or reflective teaching. It is a systematic process of problem-solving that involves teachers intentionally reflecting on a particular event, occurrence, or circumstance. Since a teacher alone does not suffice for learning if he or she does not reflect on his or her experience, he or she should actively consider what he or she has done for adventure. To improve teachers' practice, Dewey advises teachers to combine practical teaching experiences with sincere, systematic reflections. In a similar vein, Simmons and Schuette (1988) define a truly reflective teacher as the one who makes instructional decisions intentionally and tentatively, thoughtfully weighs all relevant contextual and pedagogical factors, actively seeks evidence regarding the outcomes, and continues to adjust these decisions as the circumstances require. Lysons (1998) also equates RT with how teachers interrogate their teaching practice, asking questions about the effectiveness of their teaching practice and how they might be refined to meet the needs of students. In addition, Lysons (1998) compares RT to teachers' methods of questioning their methods of instruction, seeking to improve them to meet the needs of students. In more detail, Farrell and Mom (2015) describe RT as a cognitive process followed by a set of attitudes in which instructors routinely get information

about their practice while conversing with others and use that information to guide their practice both within and outside the classroom. Based on the definitions suggested in the literature, RT in this study is defined as a process by which teachers think critically before, during, and after teaching practice and quest for evidence of effective teaching.

Reflective journal writing

As far as reflective teaching is concerned, a variety of PD tools have been adopted by teachers to reflect on their teaching, namely narrative, classroom observation, peer sharing, action research, and reflective journal writing (RJW). Among these, RJW has widely been used in the field of education (Stevens & Cooper, 2020). RJW, according to Dymont and O'Connell (2003), is the recording of daily events, personal reflections, questions about the environment, and reactions to experiences. Bolton (2010) claims that journals are one of the fundamental pillars of RT, and they could be seen as a person's journey. They can be kept as a diary, written to and for each other in pairs or groups, or carried in the form of a diary. Cirocki and Farrell (2017) note that logs and diaries are frequently used interchangeably with journals. Lesson planning, attendance, and the description and interpretation of classroom events are common examples of the objective data kept in teaching journals. Teachers can then check for any disparities by comparing their stated views with their noted classroom activities (Farrell, 2007). In this way, second language teachers can use teaching journals to legitimize and solve problems while reflecting on new teaching ideas.

About what has been suggested in the literature about RJW, this study adopts RJW as a process of writing about teaching experiences, including what happened before, during, and after teaching practice that helps teachers strengthen their personal and professional development.

2.2 Benefits of reflective journal writing

Reflective journal writing used as a PD tool has been proven to benefit teachers in various aspects of the teaching profession. The triple-faced merits of RJW include fostering teachers' self-awareness, enhancing their critical thinking, and promoting problem-solving skills.

Fostering self-awareness

It has been found in extensive previous studies that fostering teachers' self-awareness is the prominent advantage of RT through RJW (Casanave, 2013; Genc, 2010; Good & Whang, 2002). The results of Genc's (2010) study show that keeping a reflective journal helps in-service EFL teachers in Turkey realize their own opinions and background information regarding teaching and studying foreign languages. In a similar vein, Good and Whang (2002) note that writing reflective journals provides preservice teachers with more opportunities to link their past personal experiences with future development. Donyaie and Afshar (2019) also found similar benefits of RJW in enhancing the cognitive awareness of EFL teachers in Sanandaj by allowing them to learn from their own teaching experiences.

Enhancing critical thinking

RJW has been proven to improve critical thinking in teachers by assisting them in revisiting their understanding of their inner teachers through a process of active and skillful reflection (Farrell, 2004; Lee, 2007). Apart from helping teachers understand themselves, RJW is a tool for teachers to clearly define the particular features of their classes (Richard & Lockhart,

1994). Conducting a study with in-service teachers in Hong Kong, Richard and Lockhart (1996) found that recording events that occur around the classroom by writing could provide teachers with basic critical reflections on how to develop their lessons more effectively. In the same vein, Farrell (2004) emphasizes journal writing can allow in-service teachers later review and assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their work. Moreover, through critical reflection, teachers can clarify their beliefs on teaching and their students' learning; thereby, they can meet the needs of the students and promote student outcomes. Similarly, the findings of Lee's (2007) study support that journal writing enables pre-service teachers in Hong Kong to engage in reflective thinking in their teaching practices.

Promoting problem-solving skills

Previous studies highlighted that RT facilitates teachers in dealing with unexpected teaching situations (Farrell, 2014; Greiman & Covington, 2007; Wallace, 1998). Wallace (1998) asserts that journals are the ultimate instruments for teacher reflection because they allow teachers to analyze classroom critical incidents and discuss possible solutions in their diaries. Therefore, they could properly handle unexpected situations in the classroom. Likewise, Farrell (2014) explains that RJW guides teachers' learning to an analysis of various issues in their work, by addressing and resolving problems that arise inside and outside the classroom. RJW, in other words, is a means to create a link between theoretical and practical issues (Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998), between the course content and their real-life experience, which might construct their understanding of matters that occur in the class (Abednia et al., 2013). Likewise, Greiman and Covington (2007) emphasize teachers identified pedagogical problem-solving as the second most frequent benefit of journaling, lending support for the development of critical thinking skills through the writing process. As a result, RJW is the way for teachers to create better problem-solving strategies and come up with new ideas for teaching practice.

2.3 Challenges of reflective journal writing

In contrast to the aforementioned multiple benefits, two major challenges of RJW, including teachers' time deficiency and insufficient training experience have been extensively discussed in the literature.

Time deficiency

The issue of time deficiency has been reported in a large body of previous studies in different settings (Abednia et al., 2013; Farrell, 2014; Greiman & Covington, 2007; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). From Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman's (2018) findings, time constraint was reported as a hindrance to in-service English teachers in the United States in their process of performing reflective thought. Likewise, Farrell (2014) states that the time for writing and reading journals could be a considerable problem in the process of RT to a novice male English as a second language teacher at a language university in Canada. In a similar vein, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in Iran spend limited time reflecting on their teaching after long working days because they are overloaded with duties and responsibilities they have to fulfill (Abednia et al. 2013). As a result, most of the teachers fail to write journals regularly, which may affect the quality of their reflection entries.

Insufficient training experience

Insufficient training experience is another issue that has been reported in the literature. Russel (2005) argues that although extensive attention has been drawn to reflective practice, few teacher trainers equip their teacher trainees with fundamental insight and specific skills for performing reflective teaching. Empirical evidence from previous works reveals a similar situation. Lai and Calandra (2007) report that limited knowledge of RJW and a lack of RJW principles and guidance are the major factors in the failure of performing online reflections of a group of pre-service teachers in the United States. In a similar vein, the findings from Greiman and Covington’s (2007) study revealed that pre-service teachers in the United States feel confused because they have insufficient knowledge of what and how to perform their RT and, thus, find it struggling to identify what to write in their journals, which might have decelerated their professional development.

The merits and drawbacks of RJW have been acknowledged in various contexts of teacher training and development; however, a dearth of empirical evidence on the use of RJW by Vietnamese EFL teachers, significantly in primary school settings. Therefore, the current research was conducted to explore the implementation of RJW as a PD activity specifically in the context of primary schools in Vietnam with its social, cultural, and political features.

3. Methodology

To investigate in-service primary teachers’ attitudes towards the use of reflective journal writing, this study adopted a qualitative case study as a research framework guiding its process of designing and implementing the research (Cresswell, 2014; Holliday, 2015; Yin, 2018) to obtain in-depth and detailed understanding about the teachers’ authentic experience in RJW in their specific teaching context.

3.1 Participants

This case study carefully selected participants based on relevance and availability, ensuring voluntary participation and a good population sample for the research implementation process (Higgins et al., 2019; Manohar et al., 2018). For the first criterion of relevance, the participants selected in this study were based on their age range, years of experience, and school setting. The three teachers are currently working as in-service teachers in three primary schools in a city in central Vietnam and have over 10 years of teaching English as a foreign language to primary pupils. Regarding the issue of availability, within the researcher’s network of acquaintances, three VPETs, who used to be her teachers. The teacher participants were well informed of the research’s aims and data collection plan and voluntarily participated in the study by writing weekly reflective journal entries for eight weeks and attending pre- and post-interviews. For their confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the teachers’ names and schools’. Their qualification, teaching experience, and other demographic information are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of teacher participants

Profile	Nam (pseudonym)	Hoa (pseudonym)	Cuc (pseudonym)
Gender	Male	Female	Female
Age	46	47	43
Qualifications	Bachelor’s degree in	Bachelor’s degree in	Bachelor’s degree in

	English Language Teaching	English Language Teaching	English Language Teaching
School setting	Sao Mai Primary School	Sao Kim Primary School	Sao Hoa Primary School
Grade of teaching	Grades 2, 4, 5	Grades 2, 3, 4	Grades 3, 4, 5
Class period per week	24	22	20
Years of EFL teaching	21	19	11

Engaging in the current study, the three teachers were suggested to write reflective teaching journals weekly on their teachings of EFL to their different classes at their school for the whole week. Via a Google document shared by the researcher, each of the three teachers was asked to reflect on their teaching based on guiding questions for eight successive weeks (see Appendix 1). The guiding questions focus on their preparation for the lesson and teaching performance.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the major data collection tools to investigate teachers' attitudes toward reflective journal writing (RJW). The semi-structured interviews were guided by predetermined questions, allowing for further discussion. With their consent, each of the teachers was invited for two interviews, namely a pre-interview before their writing reflective journals and a post-interview after their eight weeks' writing journals.

Before starting writing reflective journals, the three participant teachers were interviewed to explore their attitudes toward the use of reflective journal writing as a PD tool. The interview included 10 open-ended questions, which were divided into two main parts. The first part aimed to collect data about the teachers' attitudes toward the use of RT as a PD activity (Questions 1-5) and the second aimed to explore their attitudes toward the use of RJW (Questions 6-10). (See Appendix 2)

After completing reflective teaching journals, the three teachers were invited for the second interview, which aimed to find out their attitudes towards their experience in RJW and explore the influences of RJW on their development and teaching performance. The interview included 5 questions, which were divided into three main parts. The first part aimed to collect data on any transformations that the teacher made in his or her observed lesson and their possible reasons (Questions 1-2). The second part sought to find out the teachers' attitudes about RJW after experience writing six reflective journals over a six-week period (Question 3). The third part explored the influences of RJW on teacher development and teaching (Questions 4-5). (See Appendix 3)

Each interview lasted about 30 minutes, conducted in face-to-face mode at the teachers' schools for their convenience and in Vietnamese language for the clarity and accuracy of the data collected. The transcripts were coded and analyzed to ensure the data was reliable and consistently identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded by the researcher and her supervisor under three overarching themes related to the teachers' attitudes toward using reflective journal writing as a professional development tool, namely PD experience, benefits of RJW, and challenges of RJW. The themes were evaluated before giving them names and started writing the report once the themes were decided upon by her supervisor.

4. Findings

4.1 Teachers' attitudes towards reflective journal writing

This section presents and analyzes the collected data based on pre-interview responses to clarify the three teachers' attitudes prior to their experience in writing reflective journals. Then, the section continues to present and analyze data from the post-interviews to explore their attitudes after conducting RJW for eight successive weeks. Noticeable differences in the teachers' attitudes before and after RTW implementation will be discussed.

4.1.1 Teachers' attitudes before conducting reflective journal writing

In the first stage of the study, the three teachers were interviewed about their PD experience and their prior knowledge and experience in RJW.

When being asked about professional development (PD) experience, all three participant teachers reported that they had prior experience with such various PD tools as group discussion, and classroom or peer observation. However, none of the teachers recalled their experience in doing reflection journal writing (RJW). Being specifically asked about RJW, the three teachers shared similar stories that RJW was not popular in their teaching practice as it was merely briefly introduced in teacher training programs, but had not put it into practice. Mr. Nam admitted that "group discussions and observations are two tools I use a lot. Talking about RJW, I have learned about it in some training programs, but not ever used it." (Pre-interview 1). Teaching in another primary school, Ms. Hoa reported a similar PD experience "I join a group discussion each week, and 4 peer observations each school year. I have no experience with RJW, I just heard somewhere, maybe teacher training workshops." (Pre-interview 2). In a similar vein, Ms. Cuc said: "I often take a group discussion weekly and am proactive in observing my colleagues. I know RJW, just a little because it is not familiar to me, and I never use it." (Pre-interview 3).

These interview quotes indicate that although the teachers have previous experience with PD, RJW has not been as familiar to these teachers as other PD tools, specifically group discussions or classroom or peer observations. Their lack of real experience in exercising RJW in practice could account for the fact that they were reluctant to use RJW in teaching practice and showed skeptical and unsure about RJW's benefits, which is illustrated in the following extracts from pre-interviews data.

Being asked about RJW's benefits, Mr. Nam admitted: "I am not sure but I think this tool will help teachers prepare for lessons." (Pre-interview 1)

Similarly, Ms. Hoa stated: "This tool may support teachers in changing their teaching methods and plan lessons, but I'm not sure." (Pre-interview 2)

And Ms. Cuc responded: "I think it may help teachers improve their teaching skills and methods to suit their students, but I have not used it before, I don't know." (Pre-interview 3)

It is clear from the pre-interview findings that VPETs' little experience in RJW would lead to their reluctance to or skepticism about the possibility and benefits of using RJW as an effective PD tool in their setting, which has been proven effective in an extensive body of previous works in various contexts (e.g., Good & Whang, 2002; Farrell, 2014; Greiman & Covington, 2007).

4.1.2 Teachers' attitudes after conducting reflective journal writing

The data collected from the post-interviews indicated that all three teachers realized the merits of RJW in their professional development after spending eight successive weeks writing reflective journals on their EFL teachings at their primary school. The teachers expressed their interest in reflecting on their teaching as Mr. Nam and Ms. Cuc admitted: "It was really interesting to write about what I taught, and my teaching improved after each entry." (Mr. Nam, Post-interview 1) or "This tool made me know my true ability more than others, it attracted me to write all things in class." (Ms. Cuc, Post-interview 2). They also shared that they started to be more familiar with the reflection experience and felt "getting better day by day." (Ms. Hoa, Post-interview 3).

Regarding the reported attitudes of the participants before and after their RJW experience, it could be noticed that after the RJW was implemented for two months, the participant teachers seemed to be more positive towards the possibility of implementing RJW and its possible benefits in their teaching practice.

The study's findings found that initially, all three teachers were skeptical about the benefits of RJW in teaching development. However, upon further investigation, it was found that their skepticism was due to their limited understanding and experience with RJW. Being involved in the implementation of writing journals, each of the participant teachers changed their attitudes towards RJW and expressed positive views about its advantages in teaching development. This outcome of this study is supported by Lee's (2007) argument that teachers' attitudes towards RJW change as they gain experience with it. They changed their views on the use of RJW in their professional development from being hesitant and doubtful of its advantages to being enthusiastic and welcoming to RJW. This shift in their attitudes towards using RJW as a means of professional development can ultimately lead to enhanced teaching practices and improved student outcomes.

4.2 Benefit of reflective journal writing

Being asked about RJW's benefits, all three participant teachers reported that RJW was a useful tool for teaching performance, particularly improvement in heightening self-awareness, and promoting critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

4.2.1 Heightening self-awareness

The three participant teachers reported that they had a chance to think about their feelings and behaviors while writing teaching journals. As Mr. Nam stated: "I evaluate myself when writing journals. I recognize that teaching delivery is good or not. What I need to improve, what I should avoid, and then straighten up my knowledge, and skills to be the best version." (Pre-interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Hoa claimed that RJW helped teachers assess themselves by "seeing what they are not good at, what they should learn more, and what skills they lack." (Pre-interview 2). And Ms. Cuc reported that: "I realized that I need to learn a lot, not only specialized knowledge but also technological skills, or communication skills. I should develop myself to create interesting lessons that attract the students' engagement and motivation." (Pre-interview 3). RJW has had a positive impact on teachers by providing them with valuable self-assessment opportunities. This self-reflection process allows teachers to identify their strengths and areas for growth, enabling them to make informed decisions about their instructional practices. By gaining

a deeper understanding of themselves and their teaching methods, the teachers could enhance their effectiveness in the classroom and ultimately improve their students' learning outcomes.

4.2.2 Promoting critical thinking

The post-interview findings indicate that RJW would provide the participant teachers with opportunities to critically reflect on how to develop their lessons more effectively. The following extracts from their interviews illustrated how RJW influences their adoption of teaching methods in their EFL classrooms.

Mr. Nam replied: “This tool helps me think about how to prepare lessons effectively.” (Post-interview 1)

Similarly, Ms. Hoa stated: “Writing journals helps teachers make a decision in changing their teaching methods and plan lessons.” (Post-interview 3)

And Ms. Cuc responded: “When writing journals, I evaluate my teaching performance, then I improve my teaching skills, and methods on how to suit my students.” (Post-interview 2)

The findings reveal that RWJ helps the participant teachers critically reflect on their adoption of teaching methods and activities and selection of the teaching and learning materials used in their English language as reported in other works (e.g., Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2017). By incorporating a range of activities, teachers could create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that promotes active participation among students.

4.2.3 Problem-solving skills

In the post-interviews, the three participants admitted that avoiding unexpected problems when teaching was impossible, so preparing ahead would help them easily address them. They all shared that when writing about these problems in their reflective journals, they could contemplate all possible solutions and select the best one to solve if a similar problem occurs. The development of their problem-solving skills is illustrated in the teachers' sharing. Mr. Nam said: "Thinking about and preparing for incredible situations helps teachers come up with solutions without being time-consuming." (Post-interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Cuc admitted: “Teachers will teach based on a clear plan for next week that helps them prepare carefully about the content and create activities flexibly.” (Post-interview 2). She expected what would happen in the lesson, and if some of them occurred, she easily addressed it without hesitation. Similar to what Ms. Cuc shared, Ms. Hoa claimed “When planning lessons, I select activities within proper time allotment and plan to carry them out in an appropriate process, and students in each class can follow the lesson easily.” (Post-interview 3). These findings from their post-interviews are supported by Farrell's (2014) claims that RJW focuses on teachers' learning about different issues in their work, including addressing and resolving problems that arise inside and outside the classroom. In brief, writing for planning lessons helped the teachers make proper decisions to solve possible problems in their lessons and their teaching delivered effectively.

4.3 Challenges of reflective journal writing

In contrast to the findings on the upsides of RJW, the data collected from post-interviews reveal two main groups of constraints, namely the issue of time deficiency and lack of knowledge and skills of performing RJW among the three teachers.

4.3.1 Time deficiency

As discussed earlier about the teachers' prior experience with RJW, before writing their journals, all three teachers expressed their concern about their limited time availability for journal teaching writing. After spending eight successive weeks writing their weekly reflective journals, the teachers confirmed that time was a significant barrier as they struggled to allocate sufficient time to reflect, revise their entries, and improve their writing skills. Mr. Nam reported that "because of a lot of work at school, it is difficult to keep writing." He continued that the workload at school has been overwhelming, leaving little time for writing. Despite his willingness to write journals, the demanding nature of his job has hindered him from being inspired and energetic to continue with RJW. Being female teachers, Hoa and Cuc blamed their school and household responsibilities for their reluctance to "maintain the habit of writing journals." They expressed that fulfilling both their teaching duties and domestic responsibilities has left them feeling mentally and physically drained, making it difficult to prioritize writing reflective journals.

In short, the issue of time constraints was the prominent challenge for the participant teachers to persist and continue writing reflective journals. The teachers in this study expressed that their tight schedules and heavy workloads were major hindrances to their reflective journal writing. This finding is in line with the challenges faced by teachers in various teaching practices (Abednia et al., 2013; Farrell, 2014; Greiman & Covington, 2007; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). Their time challenge was, however, exacerbated by the fact that journal teaching requires careful planning and feedback, which can be time-consuming (Abednia et al., 2013).

4.3.2 Insufficient training experience

The post-interview data showed that besides the issue of time, the three teachers were prevented from writing journals regularly and in a confident mode because of their insufficient knowledge and skills of RJW. Their deficiency in RJW's fundamental knowledge and specific skills is illustrated by the following quotes from their post-interviews.

Mr. Nam: "If there was not a guided question, I did not know where to begin, what, and how to write teaching journals." (Post-interview 1).

Ms. Hoa: "It is difficult for me to write reflective journals by myself because I do not know how to write." (Post-interview 3).

Ms. Cuc: "If more teachers at my school had used journals and showed how to use this tool and share their journals, it would be better, wouldn't it?" (Post-interview 2).

These findings reveal that the lack of knowledge and skills of RJW were the major challenges that the three teachers faced in writing journals reflecting on their own teaching experiences. This finding is supported by Lai and Calandra (2007), who report that limited knowledge of RJW and a lack of RJW principles and guidance are the major factors in the failure of performing online reflections of a group of pre-service teachers in the United States. In a similar vein, Smith and Johnson (2018) found that teachers often cited time constraints and a lack of clear guidelines as barriers to consistent journaling. Therefore, it could be claimed that limited training of RJW could be the major cause of teachers' reluctance to write reflective journals.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of the current study indicate that adopting RJW as a PD tool for in-service teachers teaching English as a foreign language to primary school students in central Vietnam was positively appreciated by the teachers. The results reveal that while the participant teachers had no prior PD experience in RJW and were reluctant to its possibility and benefits before engaging in RJW activities, they showed their positive attitudes towards the adoption of RJW as a PD tool in their process of learning to teach EFL to their primary school students after extensively producing reflective journals for eight successive weeks. It was acknowledged that RJW enables the teachers to grow both personally and professionally as EFL teachers teaching in their particular context. The issues of time constraints and limited insight and skills of RJW could result in their reluctance to reflect on their teachings. However, as the benefits and challenges were reported by only a small group of teachers teaching EFL in three primary schools in central Vietnam, further research with a larger sample size in various settings could provide more comprehensive insight into the adoption of RJW as a professional development tool for teachers doing their teachings and reflections within their particular social, cultural, and political contexts.

About the current study's findings, it is suggested that in-service primary school teachers in Vietnam and other similar contexts could be introduced with RJW as a PD tool for its merits in developing teachers' professional and personal knowledge. Teachers would be trained with fundamental knowledge and specific skills to perform RJW more confidently and skillfully as Russel (2005) recommended. School leaders would develop PD plans and for teachers to stimulate their critical reflections on their teachings, which thereby improves students' learning.

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SỬ DỤNG NHẬT KÝ CHIÊM NGHIỆM NHƯ MỘT CÔNG CỤ PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN: QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TIỂU HỌC

Tóm tắt: Bài viết này báo cáo một nghiên cứu định tính tình huống về việc sử dụng viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm như một công cụ phát triển chuyên môn của ba giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh tiểu học ở Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích khám phá thái độ của họ đối với việc viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm thông qua công cụ thu thập dữ liệu từ các cuộc phỏng vấn được thực hiện với các giáo viên trước và sau khi họ dành 8 tuần để viết về việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh tại các trường Tiểu học. Kết quả phỏng vấn chỉ ra rằng các giáo viên đã thay đổi thái độ đối với việc viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm như một công cụ phát triển chuyên môn, từ do dự và nghi ngờ về lợi ích của nó sang nhiệt tình và chào đón nó. Về những ảnh hưởng của việc sử dụng viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm đối với hiệu quả giảng dạy của họ, các vấn đề về thời gian và kinh nghiệm đào tạo không đủ được cho là những rào cản trong việc viết nhật ký. Tuy nhiên, việc viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm được thừa nhận là giúp cải thiện hiệu suất giảng dạy và phát triển cá nhân của giáo viên. Các kết quả cho thấy việc sử dụng viết nhật ký chiêm nghiệm có thể được sử dụng như một công cụ phát triển chuyên môn có giá trị để nâng cao cả hiệu quả giảng dạy và phát triển chuyên môn của các giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Nhật ký chiêm nghiệm, chiêm nghiệm trong dạy học, phát triển chuyên môn giáo viên, giáo viên tiếng Anh, trường Tiểu học

Appendix

Appendix 1: Guiding questions for reflective writing journals

Part 1	How many hours /classes did you teach for this week?	Question 1
	What lessons did you teach this week?	Question 2
Part 2	What challenges did you have upon delivering the lessons?	Question 3
	What lesson/activity/situation did you like most?	Question 4
	How did your pupils learn?	Question 5
	What aspects of your teaching do you think you would have done better?	Question 6
	What changes would you like to make in your teaching next week?	Question 7
	What challenges did you have upon preparing for the lessons?	Question 8

Appendix 2: Pre-interview’s focuses

Part 1	Their prior knowledge of PD tools	Questions 1-4
	Their perception of PD's benefits	Question 5
Part 2	Their prior experience with RJW	Questions 6-7
	Their willingness to use RJW	Question 8
	Their expectations about RWJ benefits	Question 9
	Their expectations about RWJ challenges	Question 10

Appendix 3: Post-interview’s focuses

Part 1	The changes in the lesson observed	Question 1
	The possible reasons for changing	Question 2
Part 2	Their attitudes about RJW	Question 3
Part 3	The benefits of RJW	Question 4
	The challenges of RJW	Question 5