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Reviews

From Knowledge Sharing
to Reflective Thinking:
Using Focus Group to Promote
EFL Teachers' Reflectivity

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DALLA CONDIVISIONE DELLA CONOSCENZA AL PENSIERO
RIFLESSIVO: UTILIZZO DEL FOCUS GROUP
PER PROMUOVERE LA RIFLESSIVITÀ DEGLI INSEGNANTI
DI INGLESE COME LINGUA STRANIERA (EFL)

Abstract

Educational research literature has underscored the key role of collaboration and interaction among teachers. As such, the present study, as its main objective, sought whether knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group improved English as a foreign language (EFL) student teachers' reflective practice. In addition, it explored the benefits and challenges to knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group. To this end, a survey of reflective practice, and a semi-structured interview were employed to investigate research questions. Eleven Iranian Master of Arts (MA) students who were, at the same time, EFL teachers in languages schools served as the participants of the study. The results indicated that the focus group platform could enable EFL teachers to improve their reflective practice through interaction with colleagues. Among other factors, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing the possible relationship between theory and practice were the benefits of knowledge sharing through reflective practice. Regarding the barriers to using

reflective focus group, various inhibitors were reported by the participants that can be classified into personal, institutional, and educational factors. The implications of the study are also presented.

Keywords: EFL teachers; Knowledge sharing; Reflective focus group; Reflective practice; Semi-structured interview.

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1. Introduction

Teachers' characteristics and their role in education are of paramount importance. In this regard, reflective thinking plays a particularly important part in teachers' daily practice. The recent literature on reflective practice has demonstrated the beneficial effect of teachers' engagement in reflective teaching (Farrell, 2015; Widodo, 2018; Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018). Empowered by reflectivity, teachers do not assume a passive role in their daily teaching process and engage in monitoring their activities in the classroom (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019) and make more informed decisions about their practice (Farrell & Jacobs, 2016).

Additionally, knowledge management is gaining acceptance in education as teaching and research environments are being considered as the cradles of knowledge production and dissemination. Universities, schools, and language institutes like many other organizations, are in a competitive environment and it is essential to ensure that knowledge is created, transmitted, and shared among teachers. Teachers' exchange of views, «can inspire each other … may evoke discussions about pedagogy and may as such result in new insights» (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016, p. 2). What is more, it is through sharing knowledge that teachers begin to understand the thinking behind their practices and theories underlying their pedagogy since through knowledge sharing their perspectives become so overt that teachers can reflect upon them (Van Woerkom, 2004). In addition, if teachers have access to the ideas of others, they may draw on the understanding of more experienced teachers and, thus, may gain more awareness regarding their practice (McIntyre, 1993) and, thus, analyze and evaluate their practices and reflect upon them (Parsons & Stephensons, 2005)

Promoting teachers' reflectivity has received much attention and various platforms have been suggested to cultivate teachers' reflection namely, writing reflective journals/diaries, lesson study, video recordings, peer observation of teaching, blogs or online discussion groups, action

research, and focus groups (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). However, research conducted on the role of knowledge sharing in enhancing teachers' reflective practice has yielded contradictory results. Therefore, the present study, as its main objective, seeks to investigate if knowledge sharing in a focus group improves EFL teachers' reflective practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Development in any educational system highly depends on teachers' qualities and one of the much-needed teachers' qualities is their reflection. Teacher reflection is important for teachers since it encourages teachers to «stop, look, and discover where they are at that moment and then decide where they want to go in the future» (Farrell, 2012, p. 7). It paves the way for applying theory to practice and at the same time contributes to more effective classroom practice. Teachers who engage in reflective teaching learn from their classroom experiences which in turn results in their professional growth and performance (Fendler, 2003; Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Zahid & Khanam, 2019). Teachers' reflection on their classroom-based experiences can have a positive relationship with students' achievement (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018); it can improve teacher self-efficacy (Hosseini *et al.*, 2018) and produce more skilled and capable teachers (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

There is no unanimous agreement over the definition of reflection. As the pioneer in reflective studies, Dewey (1933, p. 9) defines reflection as «the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it». Reflective practice requires teachers to constantly make inquiries about their own classroom-related practice and then collaborate with others regarding questions that arise during reflection (Pickett, 2020). Accordingly, teacher training should go beyond equipping teachers with skills (Bartlett, 1990) and enable teachers to acquire the ability to analyze their daily practice and adjust themselves based on the pieces of evidences they collect.

Various classifications of levels of reflection have been put forward by different scholars (Van Manen, 1977; Schön, 1983; Bartlett, 1990) however, in a recent attempt to develop a tool to assess teachers' level of reflective practice, Larrivee (2008) introduced four levels of reflection namely, pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. At pre-reflection, teachers automatically respond to various events in their classrooms. At the second level, as Larrivee further explains, teachers' focus on strategies and methods which are used to reach predetermined

goals. At the third level, teachers reflect on the theories behind their practice and make a connection between theories and practical experiences. Finally, at the critical reflection level, teachers focus on both their classroom practice and social conditions, and at the same time, engage in deep examination of values, personal and professional beliefs.

A less cultivated issue in education, which is also the focus of the present study, is knowledge sharing. It is «capturing, organizing, reusing, and transferring experience-based knowledge that resides within the organization and making that knowledge available to others in the business» (Lin, 2006, p. 27). Teachers and practitioners should engage in knowledge sharing to transmit knowledge and skills to students, colleagues, and the community (Adamseged & Hong, 2018). It is through knowledge sharing that experience-based knowledge is transferred and made available to others (Lin, 2006). In addition, knowledge-sharing intention positively influences teachers' collaborative behaviour (Chedid *et al.*, 2019). Above all, effective knowledge sharing increases the survival chance of an organization (Argote *et al.*, 2000).

Schwaer *et al.* (2012) suggest that some formal and informal tools help with knowledge sharing in organizations. As they explain, examples of formal tools are attending teacher training courses, and sharing documents. Informal tools include joining discussions with other teachers, informal knowledge sharing with colleagues, and joining work-related internet forums to make inquiries about questions related to their classroom practices. However, for such tools to be effective, the determining impact of factors including climate, reward system, organizational structure, and culture (Bousari & Hassanzadeh, 2012) should be taken into consideration.

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of various contexts, various factors may posit serious barriers to the flow of knowledge in organizations and academic settings. In this regard, different classifications have been proposed for knowledge sharing barriers (e.g., Filieri, 2010; Zhou & Nunes, 2012); however, Riege's (2005) has been extensively discussed by researchers. He classifies barriers to individual, organizational, and technological. His classification of knowledge sharing barriers is based both on the related literature and experts' opinions from both educational contexts and industry. As Reige explains, at an individual or employee level, knowledge-sharing barriers correlate with factors such as lack of time and trust, lack of proper communication skills, national culture differences, overemphasis of position status. Organizational barriers are related to economic challenges, lack of sufficient resources, and a suitable physical environment. At a technology level, barriers are linked to factors such as individuals' unwillingness to use applications in the workplace, and difficulties the personnel may have in managing technology integration in their organization. In a similar

comprehensive classification of knowledge sharing barriers, Anwar *et al.* (2019) categorizes them into individual, organizational, technological, cultural, and geographical. Cultural barriers, as the authors conclude, include language differences and cultural norm differences among the members of an organization. Geographical barriers comprise of geographical distance and time zone differences.

Apart from the aforementioned barriers, it has been argued that the use of higher-order thinking in general and reflective thinking, in particular, is not a realistic aim in non-Western countries since the construct is socially constructed, a property of Western culture (Mathews & Lowe, 2011), and rooted in Western ideology (e.g., McGuire, 2007). Such an idea has been contested by other researchers on the ground that the «fundamental problem underlying the 'cultural-specificity model' of critical thinking lies in its uncritical, monolithic, and static view of the culture of the other» (Yoneyama, 2012, p. 234). Accordingly, the difference between the higher-order thinking of Western and non-Western societies, among other factors, has been attributed to either linguistic (Lun *et al.*, 2010) or pedagogical (Wang, 2010) issues. If the second possibility is accepted, it can be assumed that through proper education in non-Western countries like Iran individuals can learn to engage in higher-order thinking. Thus, in light of the argument, it seems necessary to involve teachers in some type of exercises to engage them in reflective thinking. Accordingly, various platforms have been proposed to train teachers to grow into reflective practitioners including writing reflective journals/diaries, lesson study, video recordings, peer observation of teaching, blogs or online discussion groups, action research, and focus groups (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). In this regard, various studies have been carried out to develop EFL teachers' reflective practice. The effect of EFL teachers' reflective journal writing (e.g., Khanjani *et al.*, 2018; Donyaie & Soodmand Afshar, 2019), the effect of blogs in promoting reflective practice (e.g., Tajeddin & Aghababazadeh, 2018) and portfolios (e.g., Lo, 2010). Studies have also investigated the role of video recording (e.g., Orlova, 2009; Lakshmi, 2012) in this regard.

A number of studies were conducted on the overall impact of collaborative reflective group for teacher development (Borko, 2004; Avalos, 2011; Harlow & Cobb, 2014). Moreover, some studies have reported that a good strategy to help student teachers learn to reflect is through collaborative reflection (Harford & MacRuaric, 2008; McCullagh, 2012; Daniel *et al.*, 2013). However, there are studies that have come up with contradictory results about the effectiveness of knowledge sharing in promoting reflectivity. While some authors argue that teacher collaboration improves deeper reflection (Attard, 2012; Clarà *et al.*, 2019), others have reported relatively

low-level reflection (Killeavy & Moloney, 2010; Wopereis *et al.*, 2010; Loh *et al.*, 2017) and some concluded that they did not find any conclusive evidence with respect to the influence of teachers' collaboration on their practice (e.g., Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). To meet this knowledge gap, the present study aimed at investigating the effect of using knowledge sharing in a focus group on EFL student teachers' reflective practice. Having such an aim in mind, we posed the following research questions:

1. Does knowledge sharing in a focus group improve EFL student teachers' reflective practice?
2. How does knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group benefit student teachers' reflective practice?
3. What are the potential challenges of using knowledge sharing to promote reflective practice?

3. Method

3.1. *Participants*

An important feature of focus group is a small number of participants. It has been recommended that the group size should be between 5 and 12 participants (Cameron, 2000). As such, there were 11 teachers (9 females and 2 males) in the focus group who were at the same time students of a methodology course of a MA program. The first researcher was the instructor of the course. The participants were either high school teachers who worked either as part-time or full time teachers in language institutes. The participants' experience of teaching EFL ranged from 2 to 11 years. As a basic ethical obligation, they were informed about issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

3.2. *Instruments*

3.2.1. Focus group forum

It has been suggested that focus groups can be used as both a qualitative research methodology and a reflection tool (Schmiede, 1995). Accordingly, in the present study, the rationale behind using a focus group platform was twofold. First, it was aimed to encourage the EFL teachers to reflect criti-

cally on their experiences. In other words, the researchers intended to draw on the participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions towards their own experiences. Second, it was used as a tool to help teachers engage in knowledge sharing during the treatment.

3.2.2. A survey of reflective practice

A survey of reflective practice developed by Larrivee (2008) measures levels of reflection engaged in by teachers. There are 53 items in the scale with four levels, namely pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection in the scale. Each participant rated each item as frequently, sometimes, or infrequently. The completion of the scale took about 15 minutes.

3.2.3. Semi-structured interviews

To investigate the benefits and potential challenges of using a reflective focus group, a semi-structured interview was carried out after the treatment. Two questions inquired about the interviewees' opinions regarding the benefits and challenges. The interviews were in Persian and each interview lasted for about 30 minutes.

The first researcher conducted the interviews in Persian, the mother tongue of the interviewees, to ascertain that they felt comfortable in reporting their experiences and opinions. The audio-recorded sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure the credibility of the results, after transcribing the audio-recorded interviews, member checking technique (Dörnyei, 2007) was employed. A constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) was employed to identify the emerging themes. As the next step, the codes were categorized to determine the relevant sub-categories. As for trustworthiness, we asked another researcher to code the data. The obtained inter-rater reliability was about 0.82, indicating an acceptable level of consistency.

3.3. *Procedure*

Since it is recommended that focus groups take place in a familiar meeting area (Winlow *et al.*, 2013), the participants were invited to take part in the focus group forum which was held in their university every Thursday evening.

The first cycle:
1. Important recent theories in TEFL on post-method pedagogy and reflective practice were extracted from two books and each week some questions were assigned to the participants.
2. The participants were required to answer the questions and send the answers to the first researcher via email.
3. At the beginning of each focus group session, the participants were asked to discuss the questions and express their opinion. Their claims had to be supported by the theories they had already studied.
4. The researcher asked the teachers to pass their judgments on their colleagues' views.

The second cycle:
1. The teachers were required to describe a specific event or a problem which draws their attention or causes a problem and describe it in the joint group. (Mapping)
2. The teacher who described the problem was asked about her purpose of the practice. (Informing)
3. Other teachers were free to ask their questions or comment on the experience.
4. The teachers were asked to analyze the experience and identify any possible problems. (Contesting)
5. The teacher/teachers was/were asked about any alternative strategies she could adopt and if she could behave differently. (Appraisal)
6. The teacher/teachers was/were asked to talk about how s/he could act differently the next time. (Acting)

Figure 1. – Knowledge sharing in the reflective practice group.

Following Farahian and Parhamnia (2021), the forum included two cycles (*Fig. 1*). In the first cycle, which included four stages, the participants were expected to gain basic familiarity with recent theories on post method pedagogy and reflective practice. To do so, the participants were assigned to read two leading books (Appendix A). Each week some questions (e.g., Appendix B) based on what they had already studied were assigned to the participants and they were required to answer the questions. They were required to send the answers to the first researcher via email. At the beginning of each focus group session, the participants were asked to discuss the questions and at the same time, the other participants were required to express their judgments on their views.

In contrast to a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer has the role of investigator, in a focus group discussion platform, the researcher adopts the role of a mediator (Cohen & Garrett, 1999). Accordingly, in the present study, the first researcher was given a peripheral, not a central role. His role was to ensure that all topics were covered in the first cycle, to guide the discussions, and to ensure that all participants took part in the discussion.

Following each session of the focus group, the survey of reflective practice was given to the participants and was collected in person. From this, we hoped to determine whether the forums had enabled EFL teachers to move beyond low levels of reflection and whether the discussions had any effect on their reflection.

A week after the treatment, the teachers took part in an interview. The aim of the study was explained to them and appointments for one to one interviews were arranged separately. The interviews were conducted in teacher' lounge. The respondents' consent was obtained for recording their interviews. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were held in Person, the respondents' first language, to enable the participants to express their thoughts and views easily.

4. Results

As to the first research question that inquired if knowledge sharing in a focus group improves EFL student teachers' reflective practice the survey of reflective practice was given to the participants.

As illustrated in *Table 1*, as the treatment continued, the respondents' pre-reflection, and surface reflection increased but they declined over time. This can be seen in the pre-reflection at session one (1.39) compared to the session 8 (1.18). On the contrary, their critical reflection had a steady, slow increase. It is 1.25 at the first session while it is 1.16 at the final session. It is noticeable that, based on the results, as the sessions of knowledge sharing continued, the pedagogical reflection had a noticeable rise. As demonstrated in the table, at session one, pedagogical reflection is 3.79 but at session 8 it has increased to 4.33. Overall, the participants' pedagogical reflection gained a higher increase than the other three levels. In addition, the result of Wilcoxon test showed that according to results obtained for the levels pre-reflection ($Z = -2.810$, Sig. = .005), surface reflection ($Z = -2.936$, Sig. = .003), pedagogical reflection ($Z = -2.938$, Sig. = .003) and, critical reflection ($Z = -2.807$, Sig. = .005), there are significant differences between the means of the first session and the eighth session. *Figure 2* shows the performance of the participants during the treatment.

The third research question inquired benefits of being engaged in a reflective focus group. A semi-structured interview was the tool to delve into the question. Although, as the interviewee acknowledged, there were some impediments to knowledge sharing, they reported that they could benefit from it in various ways.

Table 1. – The participants' levels of reflection.

Session	Pre-reflection (mean)	Standard Deviation	Surface reflection (mean)	Standard Deviation	Pedagogical reflection (mean)	Standard Deviation	Critical reflection (mean)	Stdandard Deviation
Session 1	1.39	.086	2.40	.209	3.79	.120	1.25	.173
Session 2	1.48	.164	2.44	.216	3.86	.119	1.28	.156
Session 3	1.54	.165	2.48	.143	3.90	.089	1.33	.140
Session 4	1.58	.173	2.30	.097	4.02	.148	1.39	.073
Session 5	1.58	.169	2.40	.114	4.11	.165	1.44	.106
Session 6	1.58	.194	1.33	.051	4.17	.181	1.50	.095
Session 7	1.32	.077	1.44	.325	4.24	.164	1.54	.105
Session 8	1.18	.116	1.40	.134	4.33	.177	1.61	.054
	$Z = -2.810$, Sig. = .005		$Z = -2.936$, Sig. = .003		$Z = -2.938$, Sig. = .003		$Z = -2.807$, Sig. = .005	

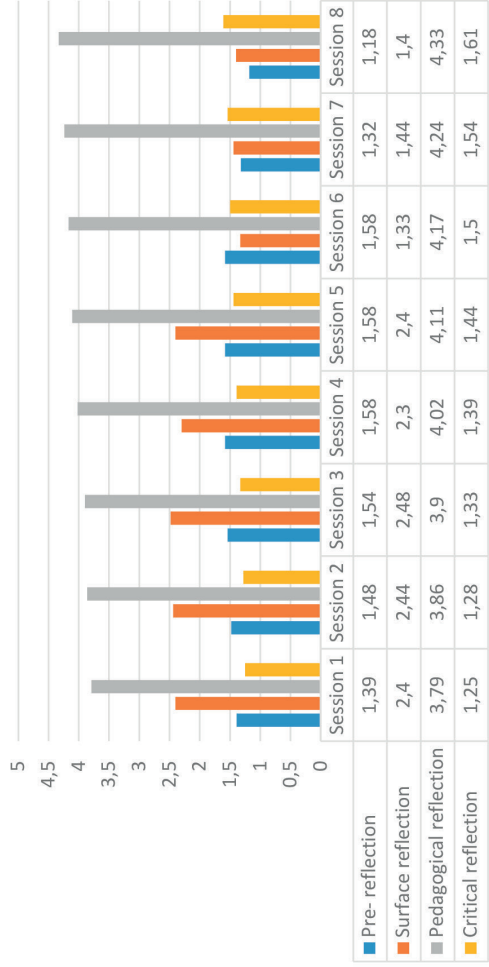|	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8
Pre- reflection	1,39	1,48	1,54	1,58	1,58	1,58	1,32	1,18
Surface reflection	2,4	2,44	2,48	2,3	2,4	1,33	1,44	1,4
Pedagogical reflection	3,79	3,86	3,9	4,02	4,11	4,17	4,24	4,33
Critical reflection	1,25	1,28	1,33	1,39	1,44	1,5	1,54	1,61

Figure 2. – The performance of the participants during the treatment.

As one of the students expressed,

> Knowledge sharing helps me examine my thoughts and contemplate my teaching. After we discussed over different issues, I gained a deeper understanding about my teaching practice, and compared my practice and its possible effectiveness with those of others.

Another student believed that:

> The collaborative reflections enabled me to make sense of my core beliefs as a teacher. Thus, this I think I will reform my ways of engaging with students in future.

Some teachers referred to the potential the knowledge sharing has in linking theory and practice. An interviewee commented:

> I'm not experienced enough in teaching; however, sharing ideas with more experienced teachers and discussing related theories could show me how to connect theories to my one's personal experiences. It also helps me challenge my already held assumptions about how effective teaching.

Eight interviewees thought that sometimes things do not go the way they are expected to so, the interaction with other teachers interrupts and they should seek out the reason.

As *Table 2* shows, knowledge sharing in a focus group is beneficial for EFL teachers in various ways.

Table 2. – Benefits of using knowledge sharing in a focus group forum.

Benefits	F	P
1. It helps me seek out opportunities to share my experiences with other colleagues and focus group helps me to draw on them for support.	11	100
2. It facilitates constructive feedback from other EFL teachers.	10	90.9
3. It helps me recognize the possible relationship between theory and practice.	9	81.8
4. It helps me understand If something does not go well in class, I will ask for reasons.	8	72.7
5. It helps me challenge my already held assumptions about teaching and learning.	6	54.5
6. It helps me assess the effectiveness of my teaching practice.	5	45.5
7. It helps me think about the theories I have studied and try to find their relevance to my teaching context.	4	36.4
8. It encourages me to reflect on my daily practices.	3	27.3
9. It helps me develop an intimate relationship with other teachers.	3	27.3

In this regard, items 1 to 3 refer to opportunities to share experiences, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing the possible relationship between theory and practice. However, what is noticeable is that based on items 4 to 9, the focus group with their reflective practice in different ways.

The fourth research question explored the potential challenges of using a reflective focus group. Various impediments to knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group were reported by the interviewees. The following extracts from different teachers' responses clarifies some of the responses.

> (1) Some teachers are not aware of the role of knowledge sharing in enhancing their reflectivity, (2) a lot of teachers are preoccupied with conventional teaching methods though big differences could be found between language institutes and schools, (3) lack of sufficient familiarity with the EFL teaching theories may impede them to gain enough advantage from teacher to teacher interactions.

As *Table 3* illustrates, the potential challenges to using a reflective focus group can be categorized into three classes of «personal», «educational», and «institutional».

Table 3. – Challenges to using knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group.

RESPONSE	F	P
1. EFL Teachers are not familiar with the importance of group discussion forums. (P)	11	100
2. Conventional methods of teaching which are prevalent in the educational system do not necessitate sharing ideas. (E)	11	100
3. EFL teachers' do not have sufficient TEFL theoretical knowledge to rely on in the focus group. (P)	10	90.9
4. There is not enough support from the side of educational institutions to encourage teachers to do group work. (I)	9	81.8
5. There is a lack of incentive for teachers to share their knowledge. (P)	9	81.8
6. EFL teachers underestimate the knowledge they receive from other teachers. (P)	8	72.7
7. EFL teachers' workload is an inhibitor to their collaborative work. (P)	6	54.5
8. EFL teachers have not received enough training regarding group discussion forums. (E)	5	45.5
9. There is a competitive behavior in institutions.(C).	4	36.3

Note: P (personal), I (institutional), E (educational), C (Culture).

Personal issues were *teachers' lack of familiarity with the importance of group discussion, teachers' lack of theoretical knowledge, teachers' lack of motivation,*

teachers' underestimating colleagues' knowledge, and *teachers' workload*. The institutional issue was *lack of support from the side of educational institutions to encourage teachers to do group work*. Regarding the educational issues, *the prevalent conventional teaching method* and *lack of training as to teamwork* were the most important barriers. Finally, the cultural issue as the barrier was the *competitive behavior in the institutions*.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to explore whether knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group improve EFL student teachers' reflective practice. In addition, the study sought the benefits and challenges to knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group.

As the results indicated, at the outset of the study, the participants' did not get involved in the high level of reflection. This is in tandem with the related literature in the Iranian context (Rashidi & Javidanmehr, 2012; Faghihi & Anabi Sarab, 2016; Marzban & Ashraafi, 2016) which consider Iranian EFL teachers' reflection as being low. Based on the results, as the treatment continued, the pedagogical and critical levels of reflection had a steady growth. The positive effect of knowledge sharing in a focus group on EFL teachers' reflectivity after the treatment can be explained in light of the argument that teachers' regular meetings may help them reflect on their teaching practices and those of their colleagues and this result in their exchange of ideas with each other (Hargreaves, 2013). This claim is indirectly supported by the studies (e.g., Grossman *et al.*, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) that state that teacher learning communities promote instruction. The findings are also congruent with Daniel *et al.* (2013), Harford and MacRuaric (2008), and McCullagh (2012) who found that student teachers' reflectivity was promoted by collaborative reflection. The only study carried out in the Iranian context was that of Donyaie and Soodmand Afshar (2019) who investigated the effectiveness of teachers' workshops. In tandem with the findings of the present study, they reported that consciousness-raising interactive workshop improves EFL teachers' reflectivity and enhances their teaching quality.

Second, regarding the ways knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group benefit student teachers' reflective practice, among other advantages, opportunities to share experiences, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing, possible relationships between theory and practice, and developing intimate relationships were reported by the participants. The

findings are in line with that of Shadravan *et al.* (2010) who stated that among other benefits, knowledge sharing enhances learning opportunities. In addition, knowledge sharing, as the results indicated, helped teachers think about the theories they had studied and enabled them to find their relevance to their teaching context. This may facilitate knowledge creation (Akhavan *et al.*, 2012).

Third, regarding the challenges to using knowledge sharing, various inhibitors were stated by the teachers including personal, institutional, and educational. The finding corroborates with Ipe's (2003, p. 352) argument that a number of factors including the nature of knowledge, motivation to share, opportunities to share, and the culture of work environment influence knowledge sharing. Also, in this regard, research studies (e.g. Convery, 2010; Javaid *et al.*, 2020) have acknowledged the impact of organizational trust on knowledge-sharing. Jabbary and Madhoshi (2014) also highlighted the issue and concluded that knowledge sharing happens if there are right people in the right place at the right time and added that the production of science takes place in a secure and stable environment.

Another factor found in the present study acting as an inhibitor to knowledge sharing in a focus group was culture. As O'Dell and Grayson (1998) state, the effect of the organization's culture is much stronger than the commitment of the organization to knowledge sharing. As such, the finding suggests that organizational climate can promote a higher degree of knowledge sharing due to the mediating effects of social interaction. This is echoed by Sveiby and Simons (2002) who argue that organizational climate has a key role in shaping behaviors of an organizations members and has a significant effect on their perception of knowledge sharing.

The next barrier to knowledge sharing in a focus group found in the study was the teachers' workload. This is not surprising because based on the researchers' experience working in language schools for more than 10 years, due to the existing economic problems, most of EFL teachers' in Iran have too busy schedules to have enough time for informal gatherings with coworkers. Some EFL teachers who teach in language schools do not even have time for tea between classes. In addition, the breaks are too short to provide an opportunity for an effective formal or informal interaction. These findings are in accord with those from a variety of previous studies (Ipe, 2004; Gururajan & Fink, 2010; Makambe, 2014) which reveal that cost of sharing including time and effort is a barrier to sharing knowledge.

Also, in the present study, teachers' competition resulted in knowledge hoarding. A possible explanation, as Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) argue, is that that if members of an organization believe that power comes from the knowledge, they may resist sharing it with other members. The

finding suggests that competitive behavior is likely to be related to the culture prevailing in language schools which may motivate or bar collaboration. The claim is supported by Jong *et al.* (2019, p. 1) who explain that teachers' collaboration is contingent upon the collaborative culture in institutions and the collaboration among teachers helps them to reflect on teaching practice.

6. Conclusion

While teacher learning communities is a promising approach to improve teachers' instruction and students' learning (Akiba *et al.*, 2018), at the outset of the present study, Iranian EFL teachers preferred to work autonomously. They did not receive instructional support for developing knowledge sharing groups from their institutions either. It was through the focus group forum that teachers' degree of reflectivity improved and they began realizing the benefits of knowledge sharing. The results showed that teachers became acquainted with knowledge sharing though there were some perceived challenges to it.

Like any other study, the present study is subject to some limitations. First, the treatment lasted for 8 sessions. In fact, more sessions are needed to improve EFL teachers' reflective practice. This is consistent with Helyer's (2015) view who notes that it takes time to be reflective and the process is considerably more difficult than what one expects. Further research could replicate the study to examines the long-term effects of such treatment. The second limitation is the limited number of male participants of the study because of all participants, only 2 were males. It seems that in future studies more male participants could be recruited. Further research can use more than one method to collect data on EFL teachers' degree of reflective practice. For example, EFL teachers could be asked to write journals on the process of their reflection. The data gleaned from the journals could help the researcher to have a more vivid picture of teachers' reflectivity since there is the possibility that some respondents did not provide did not provide genuine responses to questions, and thus, not reporting their genuine reflective practice process. Finally, the focus group forum took place every Thursday evening when the participants felt tired having all week long studying for their MA course. It seems that to obtain more reliable findings, such meetings could be held at times which are more convenient to participants.

Despite the limitations, a number of recommendations could be made. First, educational institutes should be aware of the importance of

social interaction in knowledge management, and hence should create more opportunities for teachers to collaborate. Since interpersonal contact among teachers are crucial for knowledge sharing it is imperative for educational institutes to cultivate, the social interaction among teachers. It seems that much attempt is needed to change EFL teachers' negative attitude to knowledge sharing. Perhaps, it is essential to raise teachers' attention towards both «knowing» that, and «knowing how».

Furthermore, designation of a reward system to motivate knowledge sharing in the organization is of a great importance since the relationship between knowledge sharing and incentives is supported by the literature (e.g., Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). As another recommendation, educational institutes need to motivate either formal or informal teacher learning communities in an appropriate context. This may result in teachers' positive attitude towards the organizational climate and ultimately contribute to teachers' sharing knowledge. The role of informal knowledge sharing should not be underestimated since it may lead to a more social interaction (Chen & Huang, 2007) thought no firm conclusion could be drawn regarding a causal relationship between EFL teachers' informal gathering and knowledge sharing. We suggest that once in a while directors of language schools encourage their teachers to attend informal gatherings or workshops in their workplace to share ideas regarding the recent theories, their perspectives, and daily teaching practice. In addition, we recommend that EFL teachers not be too much concerned about problems in their interaction with collogues and make attempt to build positive relationship with other EFL teachers.

Acknowledgment

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APPENDIX A

Assigned books for the focus group

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to post-method*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Richards, J. C., & Lochkart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language class-room*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX B

Focus group questions

1. Based on what you studied, what did you find most helpful?
2. What new ideas you have learned that may influence your teaching practice?
3. How do you think reflective practice can improve teaching?
4. How can you relate what you have learned to your daily practice?
5. In your opinion, do you think the process of reflective practice can feasibly be carried out in your classes?
6. What were the Challenges to using knowledge sharing in the reflective focus group

Riassunto

La letteratura sulla ricerca educativa ha sottolineato il ruolo chiave della collaborazione e dell'interazione tra gli insegnanti. Il presente studio, come obiettivo principale, ha inteso verificare se la condivisione delle conoscenze attraverso il focus group riflessivo migliorasse la pratica riflessiva degli studenti di lingua inglese come lingua straniera (EFL). Inoltre, si è voluto esplorare quali sono i vantaggi e le sfide che comporta la condivisione delle conoscenze nell'ambito di un focus group riflessivo. A tal fine, un'indagine sulla pratica riflessiva e un'intervista semi-strutturata sono state impiegate per indagare sulle suddette questioni di ricerca. Undici studenti iraniani del Master of Arts (MA) che erano, allo stesso tempo, insegnanti EFL nelle scuole di lingue hanno partecipato allo studio. I risultati hanno indicato che la piattaforma del focus group potrebbe consentire agli insegnanti EFL di migliorare la loro pratica riflessiva attraverso l'interazione con i colleghi. Tra gli altri fattori, ricevere un feedback costruttivo e riconoscere la possibile relazione tra teoria e pratica sono stati i vantaggi della condivisione della conoscenza attraverso la pratica riflessiva. Per quanto riguarda le barriere all'uso del focus group riflessivo, i partecipanti hanno segnalato vari inibitori che possono essere classificati in

fattori personali, istituzionali ed educativi. Vengono anche presentate le implicazioni dello studio.

Parole chiave: Condivisione della conoscenza; Focus group riflessivo; Insegnanti EFL; Intervista semi-strutturata; Pratica riflessiva.