Reflective Journal Writing: EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions during Practicum

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Abstract

Reflective journal writing is recognized as a valuable tool for pre-service teachers to analyze their teaching experiences and foster professional growth. However, its effectiveness in EFL teacher education in Kuwait remains understudied. This study investigates how systematic reflective journal writing affects pre-service EFL teachers' practicum experiences in Kuwait. The study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences with reflective journal writing during their practicum. Data was collected through interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis. Preliminary findings suggest that reflective journal writing enhances pre-service teachers' self-awareness, critical thinking, and professional growth. However, challenges related to time constraints and classroom management also emerge. This study highlights the potential of reflective journal writing as a powerful tool for professional development among pre-service English language teachers in Kuwait. By exploring the impact of the weekly frequency of reflective journaling on participants' experiences to enhance teacher education programs.

Keywords: *Reflection, Journal Writing, Pre-Service Teachers, EFL Teachers, Professional Development*

Introduction

Reflective journal writing has emerged as a powerful tool for pre-service teachers to analyze their experiences and foster professional growth. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education in Kuwait, runs into challenges instructors face to navigate the complexities

of language teaching during their practicum (Al-Adwani & Al-Shammari, 2022; Al-Hashim, 2019; Cenoz et al., 2010). The effectiveness of pre-service teacher preparation promotes self-awareness, critical thinking, and continuous professional growth among pre-service teachers. Practicum placements provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world classroom settings, and reflective journal writing allows them to document their experiences, analyze their teaching practices, and explore their personal and professional growth (Qadri et al., 2022).

Kuwait's approach to teacher training research reflects its relatively young education system, established in the 1960s, and its rapid modernization efforts. The research landscape is characterized by pragmatic, application-focused studies that often utilize case studies, action research, and mixed-methods approaches. Kuwait's centralized education system influences its research to focus on national-level policies and implementation. The country frequently collaborates with international institutions to accelerate its educational development, with an eye towards innovation in areas such as technology integration, and sustainable development (Al-Adwani & Al-Shammari, 2022).

Kuwait's teacher training landscape offers a compelling research subject due to its recent establishment and rapid evolution. The country's transition from reliance on expatriate educators to developing local teaching capacity, initiated in the 1980s with the founding of Kuwait University's College of Education and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, continues to shape its educational policies and research priorities (Gün, 2018; Tryzna & Al Sharoufi, 2017).

In Luxembourg, teaching practicums spans one academic year, while the United States, assigns a one-semester (15-weeks) program (Ries, 2016). On the other hand, it is shorter in Spain (around 100 hours of field experience). In the Middle East, the duration and requirements for teaching practicums also vary (Taghizadeh & Amirkhani, 2022; Yada et al., 2018). For instance, in Saudi Arabia, pre-service teachers undergo a 60-hour practicum over 15 weeks. In the Middle Eastern context, integrating an instructional coaching framework for pre-service teachers' reflection could be highly beneficial. Coaches modeling reflective practices and providing specific feedback tailored to teachers' needs, while being familiar with the cultural context and students, would enhance the effectiveness of the process (Karlström & Hamza, 2023; Smith & Morris, 2023). Encouraging habitual reflection, promoting a deeper understanding of teaching methods, and fostering critical reflection align well with Middle Eastern educational values of continuous improvement and thoughtful consideration. Reflecting on past experiences, skill development, and beliefs, along with utilizing tools like vlogs, diaries, and structured reflection models with appropriate guidance, would offer valuable support for Middle Eastern teachers undergoing professional development (Pakpahan, 2023).

Regardless of the specific duration, pre-service teachers observe and document specific teaching situations, student interactions, or classroom dynamics they encounter during their practicum. They should analyze their teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and the alignment between their actions and the intended learning outcomes and reflect on the effectiveness of their approach for improvement. Recent educational reforms and initiatives, such as those aligned with the New Kuwait 2035 vision, provide rich ground for research. The centralized education system allows for nationwide implementation of policies, offering valuable opportunities to study systemic changes in teacher education. Additionally, the

accelerated integration of technology in education, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, opens new avenues for research into preparing teachers for digital and blended learning environments.

Based on reflection, pre-service teachers develop an action plan, evaluate the effectiveness of their modified approach, and document their observations, continuing the cycle of reflection and improvement. The current case study is designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of pre-service English language teachers on their reflective journal writing experience in Kuwait?

RQ2: In what ways did weekly journal writing benefit/or pose challenges for pre-service English language teachers' practicum experiences in Kuwait?

Literature Review
Teacher Education Context in Kuwait

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Kuwait follows a centralized national curriculum in public schools, which are referred to as government schools. To be qualified to teach in these public schools, teachers need to have graduated from one of these four universities in Kuwait that offer teacher education programs: 1. Kuwait University (KU), 2. Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), 3. Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), and 4. American International University (AIU). KU and PAAET are government-run educational organizations with education majors in English, math, Arabic, science, and Islamic education. While GUST and AIU are the only private institutions offering degrees in English secondary education, and math, English elementary and secondary education, respectively. These teacher education programs have been working closely with the MOE to produce competent teachers prepared for the workforce.

Teaching practicums, also known as student teaching, teaching internships, or fieldwork, are the most impactful culminating experience for pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education programs. It is usually completed in their senior year and lasts anywhere from 15 weeks to months to one year in some countries around the world. For instance, in Luxembourg, the duration of teaching practicums is one year, while in Spain student teachers are required to complete 100 hours In Saudi Arabia, the teaching practicum is 60 hours and lasts for about 15 weeks (Al-Seghayer, 2015). The purpose of teaching practicums is for students (i.e., pre-service teachers) to take everything they have learned thus far from their coursework and practically employ it in a real-life classroom setting. Upon the successful completion of their practicum, pre-service teachers graduate and are ready for the path of becoming in-service teachers.

In Kuwait, the duration of the teaching practicum is also 15 weeks accounting for 75 hours of teaching. As part of the teaching practicum in Kuwait, pre-service teachers are subject to five supervisory visits by the head of the department at their respective school and three visits from the professor in charge from the university to assess and supervise pre-service teachers according to a ministry-approved evaluation report.

Language Research on Pre-service Teachers

Research in Language Teaching Research has investigated the relationships between Self-Directed Learning (SDL), Teacher Cognition (TC), and digital Connectivism (DC). This exploration has revealed a web of interactions that shape the development of language teachers (Khaksar et al., 2023; Park & Yi, 2023; Richards et al., 2023). Nevertheless, mapping these variables is not always one-to-one. The relationships between these concepts vary depending on the specific context of language teaching (Tajeddin & Norouzi, 2024; Tóth & Abdelzaher 2023; Zahran, 2019). Factors such as cultural background, institutional setting, learner characteristics, and available technologies can all influence how SDL, TC, and DC intersect. The focus on SDL in relation to second language teacher education has uncovered significant implications for pre-service teachers and provides a concrete example of how SDL principles can be effectively integrated into teacher education programs, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Main Covariates Influencing Pre-service Teachers in the Literature
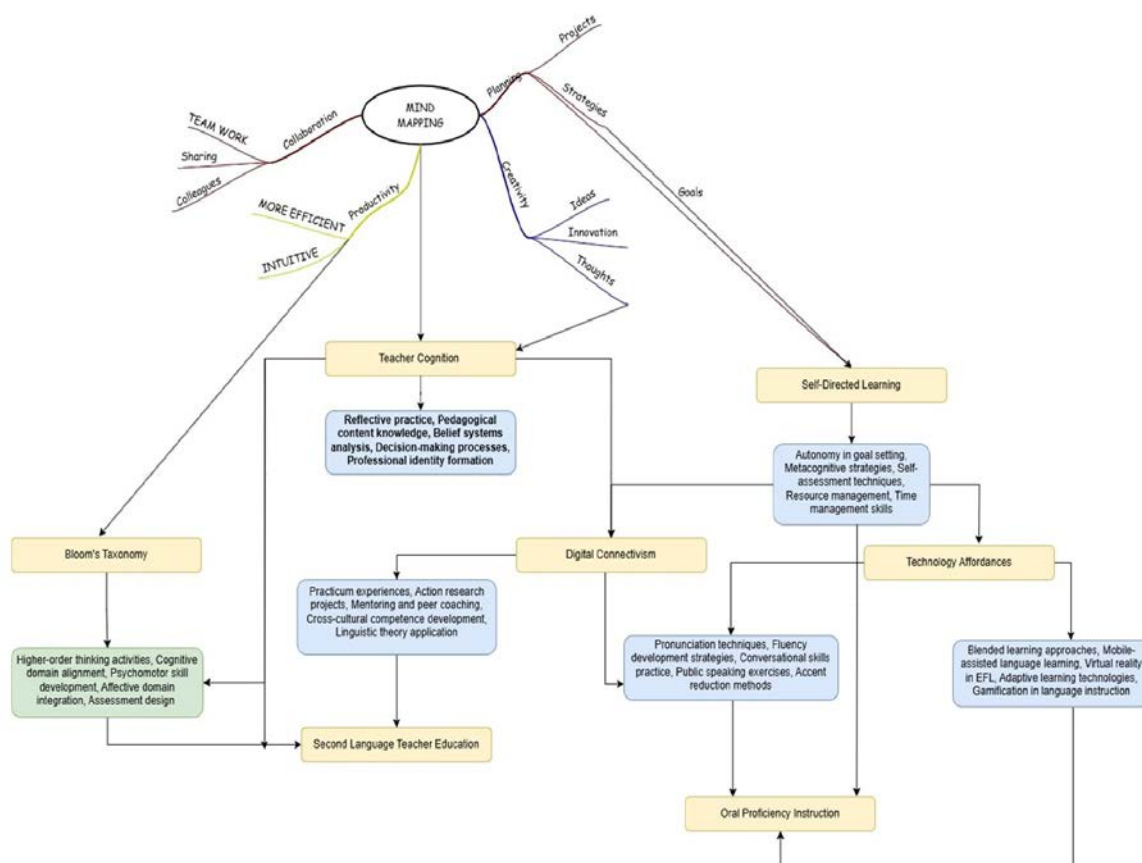
The enhancement of oral proficiency through SDL is particularly noteworthy. The comparative studies between experimental groups and control groups offer quantitative evidence of this improvement. As teachers take ownership of their learning, they become more attuned to language use, leading to improved fluency and accuracy in their oral production. Metacognitive strategies in SDL, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning, are crucial in the development of effective teaching practices. A few research integrated

Bloom's Taxonomy (BT) with Digitial Connectivism (DC) in teacher education programs representing an innovative approach to fostering higher-order thinking skills (Al-Maawali, 2023; Holovatenko, 2023). However, the influence of Teacher Cognition on the implementation of BT within digital environments is a crucial area of study. TC shapes how teachers interpret and apply BT in their lesson planning and execution. Technology affordance in second language teacher education has unveiled innovative strategies for teacher training, particularly in EFL contexts. The incorporation of blended learning and mobile-assisted language learning represents a shift in how teacher education is delivered. These approaches leverage the ubiquity of digital devices to create flexible, personalized learning experiences for pre-service teachers (Al-Maawali, 2022).

Such an integration involves designing curricula that blend face-to-face instruction with online modules, allowing teachers to engage with content at their own pace. The emphasis on digital literacy and gamification in teacher training programs reflects a recognition of the changing landscape of education (Al-Maawali, 2023). By incorporating game-based learning elements, these programs increase engagement and motivation among pre-service teachers (Park & Yi, 2023; Richards et al., 2023)

Reflective Practice among Pre-service Teachers
Reflective practice has gained significant attention in teacher education, with numerous studies exploring its impact on pre-service teachers' professional development. Several studies have investigated the benefits and challenges of reflective journaling for EFL pre-service teachers across various contexts (Carrington et al., 2015; DeJarnette & Sudeck, 2015; Gokalp & Can, 2022; Makalela, 2015). In South Korea, Kim (2018) found that pre-service teachers primarily focused on teaching demonstrations and self-reflection in their journals. This finding highlights the tendency for novice teachers to concentrate on immediate classroom experiences rather than broader educational issues.

Dumlao and Pinatacan (2019) conducted a study in Thailand, revealing that reflective journaling enhanced pre-service EFL teachers' critical thinking abilities, teaching philosophy, and self-efficacy (Dumlao & Pinatacan, 2019). Similarly, in Turkey, Tavyl (2014) reported that pre-service EFL teachers experienced increased awareness of their teaching progress and improved confidence through journal writing. These studies suggest that reflective journaling can contribute to both cognitive and affective aspects of teacher development.

Altalhab et al. (2021) examined Saudi Arabian EFL pre-service teachers' attitudes towards reflective journaling. Their findings indicated generally positive perceptions, with participants advocating for the inclusion of reflective journals as a mandatory component of teaching practicum. This research provides valuable insights into the potential receptiveness of pre-service teachers in Gulf countries to reflective practices. However, not all studies have reported uniformly positive outcomes (Altalhab et al., 2021). Riyanti (2020) observed that EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesia tended to use reflective journals at a surface level, failing to engage in deep, critical reflection (Rahmani & Riyanti, 2022). Similarly, Makina (2019) and Altalhab et al. (2021) reported that pre-service teachers often demonstrated a shallow understanding of reflection, with journal entries remaining largely descriptive rather than analytical. These findings point to a common issue in pre-service teacher education: the difficulty of fostering genuine reflective practice amidst the demands of coursework and

practicum experiences (Goktepe & Kunt, 2021). It was noted that the heavy workload of pre-service teachers often hinders their engagement with meaningful reflection, a challenge that appears to persist in contemporary teacher education programs (Holmes & Peña Dix, 2022).

Pre-service teachers are encouraged to reflect, however, some teacher education programs do not show them how. In this study, we introduce the act of reflection by engaging pre-service teachers in professional writing. Reflective journal writing during practicum in the pre-service EFL context is yet to be explored in the research concerning teacher education. Although previous studies encourage reflection as an integral part of the development of EFL pre-service professional development (Maulidina et al., 2022).

The study addressed significant gaps regarding preservice teacher education, with a specific focus on the use of effective reflective journaling for pre-service EFL teachers in Kuwait. These gaps included the scarcity of research on reflective journaling in Kuwait's EFL context, which is crucial due to the unique educational policies, cultural factors, and teaching practices in the region. Additionally, the study explored the under-research affective dimension of reflective practices and investigated the impact of technology on reflective journaling, particularly how digital platforms and AI-assisted feedback could enhance reflective practices in Kuwait. This provides empirical evidence of the connection between reflective practice and professional development during the critical practicum period. By addressing these gaps, the study sought to contribute to improving teacher education programs and adapting reflective journaling practices to the specific needs of pre-service EFL teachers in Kuwait.

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design (Edwards-Jones, 2014) to explore pre-service teachers' reflective journal writing experiences during their teaching practicum. Four undergraduate students enrolled in the secondary English education program at a private university in Kuwait participated in the study. These pre-service English language teachers, all female and ranging in age from 19 to 22 years old (with a mean age of 20.75 years), completed their required 15-week teaching practicum in local Kuwaiti schools from January to May 2023 (Table 1).

Table 1
Participants' Profile

Code	Gender	Age	School Type
Participant 1	Female	21	Public School
Participant 2	Female	22	Public School
Participant 3	Female	19	Private School
Participant 4	Female	21	Private School

The participants were selected using convenience sampling from the pool of senior students enrolled in the teaching practicum course. During the practicum, they taught one English class daily in their assigned schools, accumulating approximately 75 hours of teaching experience. Two participants were placed in public schools, while the other two taught in private schools. Data collection methods included weekly written reflection journals (250-500 words each) and end-of-practicum semi-structured interviews. Participants received a brief 15-20 minute

orientation on writing high-quality reflections and were provided with prompts, guiding questions, and a sample of a good-quality reflection journal. The interviews, conducted in the final two weeks of the practicum, were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for analysis. The interviews focused on participants' experiences with reflective writing, challenges faced during the practicum, and perceived impact on their professional development.

The study employed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze the qualitative data. This process involved open coding of all data sources, grouping codes into themes and sub-themes, and refining these themes to ensure they accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions. The analysis interrogated patterns in participants' reflective practices, common challenges in their teaching experiences, and insights into their professional growth throughout the practicum. Two peer researchers independently coded a subset of the data to establish inter-coder reliability.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. This ethical consideration helped establish trust with the participants and encouraged honest reflection in their journals and interviews.

Results

The purpose of this study was to find out how the addition of systematic reflective journal writing impacts EFL pre-service teachers' practicum (teaching internship) experiences. To achieve this purpose, four pre-service teachers who had been participating in weekly reflective journaling exercises during their teaching internship at public schools in Kuwait were interviewed after completing their practicum. This report presents the themes constructed from the analysis of these interviews, focusing on the experiences of four undergraduates regarding reflective journaling during their teaching internship.

The results indicate that the participants' overall perceptions of engaging in weekly reflective journal writing were positive, enjoyable, and they viewed it as critical to becoming effective teachers.

General Perceptions of Reflective Journaling

The participants reported diverse experiences with reflective journaling during their teaching practicum. Participant 1, a 21-year-old placed in a public school, emphasized the broader benefits of reflection beyond the teaching profession. She stated, "*Reflecting is good practice not just for teachers. When you're reflecting, you're developing metacognitive awareness and the potential for reflective practices to become habitual practice heralding forward, as I'm constantly fine-tuning my approach based on previous reflections.*"

Participant 2, the youngest participant at 19 and teaching in a private school, found the journaling process particularly enlightening. She remarked, "*I was teaching my students during the internship and the reflective process facilitated a deeper, more critical understanding of the pedagogical approaches. For instance, I realized that interactive group activities resulted in higher participation rates compared to traditional lecture-style teaching. This insight*

prompted me to redesign my lessons to incorporate more collaborative learning opportunities."

Participant 3 highlighted the emotional intelligence aspect of reflective writing. She explained, "*Reflective journaling helped me understand what I was developing in terms of emotional resilience and self-awareness as a pre-service teacher. After a particularly challenging lesson where students were unresponsive, I initially felt discouraged. However, through reflection, I was able to identify the specific factors that contributed to the lesson's ineffectiveness and brainstorm alternative approaches.*"

In contrast, Participant 4, 22, teaching in a public school, heightened the importance of providing modeling and constructive feedback to enhance the reflective process and prevent it from becoming a perfunctory exercise. She elaborated: "*While I see the potential benefits of reflection, I often felt unsure if I was doing it 'correctly'. Further, having guided reflection sessions where experienced teachers model their thought processes could provide valuable insights into how to critically analyze teaching experiences and translate those reflections into actionable improvements.*"

Three of the participants were of the opinion that reflective writing is an important aspect of being a teacher. Participant 1 stated "*I've been meticulously documenting the impact of varied phonemic awareness exercises on my ELL students' reading fluency. After six weeks, I've noticed an increase in correct phoneme identification among students who engaged in daily tongue-twisters, compared to those using traditional flashcard methods. This granular data is reshaping my approach to early literacy instruction.*" Participant 2 also expressed that reflecting on oneself helps improve teaching and avoid teaching incorrectly. "*It will help me. After that, I will help the students. If I don't take my reflection about myself, I can't give the students, so I'll teach them wrong.*"

Participant 4 also believed that reflecting is an important skill for teachers as it helps in exercising other critical skills.

> "*Yes, I think it's a very important skill, which helps you exercise other skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. It all goes hand in hand. So, if you're more reflective, and you're more self-aware of your skills and your values, it will only benefit you and will only help you succeed in different areas and develop other skills. The first step would be to be reflective. So, I think it's a very important component, regardless of your career, or your position.*"

Three of the participants believed that writing reflective journals was an enjoyable experience. According to Participant 2, writing self-reflections on teaching was fun.

> "*I've implemented a morning check-in ritual where students use a mood meter to indicate their emotional state. For students showing signs of insecure attachment, I've been using specific language patterns and non-verbal cues to foster a sense of security. Over time, I've observed a reduction in disruptive behaviors among these students.*"

Participant 3 expressed that she enjoyed writing journals and found them healthy and enjoyable.

"Yes. I did enjoy writing the journals. It was a nice routine to have, like every week you know, going every week taking time out of my week to reflect on myself, that it's healthy. I don't think that there's anything that I wanted to change. Uh, I was really happy writing it and I thought it was really helpful, so I wouldn't change anything."

Another participant, participant 4 believed that analyzing feelings is enjoyable, she also stated she didn't expect to enjoy writing reflective journals as much as she did.

"I've always enjoyed understanding and analyzing what I feel, why I feel. I try to push myself to be more self-aware and observe how learners identify linguistic choices that reveal bias and discern subtle propaganda techniques."

Therefore, pre-service English language teachers in Kuwait generally find reflective journal writing to be a beneficial and enjoyable process in their learning-to-teach

Professional Development and Improvement

Three of the participants believed that reflective journaling helps achieve mental and emotional well-being. Participant 1 stated that it helped her to organize her thoughts. "*Sometimes, when you write reflections, you organize your thoughts.*" Participant 4 expressed that reflective journaling helps process thoughts and experiences, clearing the head and addressing feelings.

Participants reported that reflective journaling significantly contributes to their mental and emotional well-being, citing improvements across various domains: Participant 1 highlighted enhanced cognitive functioning and self-awareness: "*Reflective journaling has sharpened my decision-making abilities. When faced with a challenging class, I used my journal to break down issues systematically. This process improved my concentration and problem-solving skills. I've noticed an increase in my ability to make quick, effective decisions in the classroom.*"

Participant 2 focused on emotional regulation and mood stability: "*Through journaling, I've learned to identify and manage my emotions more effectively. After a particularly frustrating day, I wrote: 'Feeling angry about student behavior. Need to separate my emotions from the situation.' This practice has led to more consistent positive affect. I estimate a reduction in mood swings and a greater ability to maintain composure in stressful situations.*" Participant 3 emphasized improvements in social connections and adaptability: "*Reflective writing has improved my relationships with colleagues. I've started sharing certain reflections in our team meetings, which has fostered a sense of belonging. Last month, when curriculum changes were announced, my journal entries helped me process the change positively. I wrote: 'Change is challenging, but it's an opportunity for growth.' This mindset has made me more adaptable, improving my relationships with both students and fellow teachers.*"

Participant 4 noted benefits in terms of purpose, meaning, and life satisfaction: "*Journaling has clarified my sense of purpose as an educator. I regularly reflect on how my work contributes to students' lives. Last week, I wrote: 'Helped Sara overcome her fear of public speaking. This is why I teach.' These reflections have increased my overall life satisfaction. I'd rate my job fulfillment 8/10 now, compared to 5/10 before I started journaling.*"

Three of the participants revealed that reflective journaling helps identify actions and changes needed for improvement. Participant 1 stated that writing reflections helps identify areas for improvement and take action in teaching practices. It becomes concrete and visual, helping internalize ideas and remember them. This helps in applying lessons learned in the future.

> *"By writing down your reflections quickly, you can identify areas where you can improve and take action the next time you teach. Yes, I feel that writing reflections has affected my teaching practices inside the classroom. Sometimes, when you write reflections, you organize your thoughts and identify areas for improvement."*

Another participant spoke about how writing reflexive journals helped identify a strategy to balance student-centered and teacher-centered strategies.

> *"At first my classes were more teacher-centered, I started to realize that, I mean during writing my reflections and after re-read them, so I said to incorporate more student-centered strategies even if we don't have so much time in classes. I started to think of ways to apply strategies to manage time and students."*

Participants expressed that they faced challenges in terms of the content in the weekly reflective journal. Participant 3 expressed that they had a lot to write while journaling and struggled to fit all week's events in one journal entry, feeling limited.

> *"I don't know if it's because I like to write a lot. I felt how could I fit everything that happened this week in one journal. I felt I was a bit limited, uh, but it was useful, so I didn't, it didn't bother me that much. I try to, like, highlight the most important parts."*

Participant 4 shared that she faced challenges having nothing new to write in the reflective journal each week. She explained that the challenge was to write about new and different topics in the reflective journal, avoiding repetition or repeating the same points. This led to struggling to explore new ideas and explore different topics during boring teaching weeks.

> *"An internal challenge I faced was the desire to write about new and different things in each reflective journal entry. When I had weeks where not much changed, I struggled to find fresh perspectives. Teaching can sometimes be routine, and on 'boring' weeks, it was difficult to dig deep and find new topics to process and analyze. This push for constant novelty in reflection became a significant challenge."*

Therefore, pre-service English language teachers in Kuwait perceive reflective journaling as a valuable tool for enhancing mental and emotional well-being and professional development.

Challenges in Reflective Journaling

Participant 1 stated "*Reflective writing has boosted my confidence in making independent decisions. Recently, I chose to overhaul my grading system based on patterns I noticed in my journal. I'm more aware of the present moment in class, able to observe student behavior without getting overwhelmed. This mindfulness has made me a more effective teacher.*" Participant 1 also confessed that laziness could be one of the reasons for not wanting to write the journal; "*Perhaps I'm a bit too lazy.*" Similarly, participant 3 expressed that writing the reflective journaling distracted her from other teaching tasks. "*My journal is a record of challenges overcome, which fuels my optimism. After a failed lesson, I wrote: 'This didn't work, but it's a learning opportunity.' I've become more resilient, bouncing back from setbacks more quickly. I see more opportunities in challenges now, which has made me a more innovative teacher.*"

Participant 2 also stated that she perceived that reflective writing could be time-consuming for pre-service teachers, yet they recommended reflective journaling to others. "*Absolutely. I would ask her to write a reflection about herself and so on. Even if I say it was time-consuming.*" Participant 4 also believed that reflective journal writings can be a useful tool for teachers, but they can be time-consuming as they require analysis.

> *"The efficacy of reflective journaling for teachers is often compromised by time constraints. Meaningful reflection demands thorough analysis and thoughtful articulation, which conflicts with the profession's demanding schedule. Rushed entries yield diminished returns, undermining the practice's potential for professional growth. The tension between ideal reflective practice and pragmatic time management highlights a key challenge in implementing this professional development tool effectively."*

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how the addition of systematic reflective journal writing impacts EFL pre-service teachers' practicum (teaching internship) experiences using qualitative case study methods. The first research question explored EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of their weekly reflective journal writing experience as they taught in their internships for the first time. To investigate this, students engaged in weekly reflective journal writing, and then post-teaching internship interviews were conducted with the participants.

Socio-constructivist approaches, sociocultural perspective, and narrative dimensions govern the attitude of reflective teaching, whose efficacy among pre-service teachers may shape their professional metamorphosis. The implementation of a cohort model during a residential practicum engenders a milieu for pedagogic content knowledge through collaborative reflections, interactions surrounding subject specialization, and individualized introspection (Mukeredzi, 2014). This socio-constructivist approach to practicum fosters a symbiotic relationship between prior beliefs and reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, facilitating the reframing of initial pedagogical conceptions into authentic classroom praxis (Bannink & Dam, 2007). The narrative dimension of reflective journaling aids in crystallizing meaningful practicum experiences. These narratives, when analyzed through a sociocultural lens, illuminate the contextual factors that shape the awareness and professional growth of pre-

service teachers, offering valuable insights for refining practicum content and reflective methodologies (Eksi & Güngör, 2018).

Reflective journaling among pre-service teachers is influenced by various factors that shape their professional development and pedagogical practices. The sociocultural context orients individual, cultural, and social elements that impact competencies and qualifications during their teaching practicum (Tavil & Güngör, 2017). The reflections of pre-service teachers evolve throughout different phases of preparation, transitioning from initial observations to the gradual entry into the profession and the subsequent practice. This longitudinal progression reveals a shift from outer-level reflections focused on environment, behavior, and competence to more inner-level reflections centered on mission and purpose (Yalcin Arslan, 2019). The implementation of structured reflected models, such as the five-step cognition practice observation reflection action (CoPORA) framework, has demonstrated efficacy in elevating pre-service teachers' reflective capacities. Nonetheless, challenges persist in rationalizing the issues that have been encountered and formulating apposite solutions, which underscore the need for exemplars of critical reflection and the potential exploration of dialogic or collaborative approaches to further refine reflective practices (Ong et al., 2021).

Technology integration in reflective journaling included the implementation of digital observation tools, video-mediated feedback, and AI applications (Tóth, 2015). The use of digital observation and video tagging tools in video-mediated post-observation meetings facilitates the topicalization of both the pedagogical and technological aspects of online practicum teaching, offering novel insights into EFL learning, teaching, and teacher education in fully online settings (Kanat Mutluoğlu & Balaman, 2023). This, however, could be culture-specific.

The provision of feedback emerges as a potent yet challenging professional undertaking in initial teacher education. In Confucian-influenced cultures, such as Vietnam, where pre-service teachers maybe habituated to a 'listener' role, monological feedback can boost dialogical, reflective feedback, which is widely advocated in Western schools (Nguyen, 2023). In addition, the practicum experience in rural settings presents unique challenges that may significantly influence the reflective journaling of pre-service teachers. While collaborative reflection sessions and classroom practice are mostly positive in nature, negative interactions with school-based mentors and contextual challenges are plausible (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). The dichotomy underscores the need for a holistic approach to practicum design that addresses both the pedagogical and contextual dimensions of the experience. In Kuwait, reflective journaling emerges as a potent tool for fostering resilience, adaptability, self-efficacy, and professional identity among pre-service teachers, particularly in developing metacognitive strategies and self-assessment techniques. This is consistent with self-directed learning (SDL) principles previously investigated in the literature (Figure 1).

The challenges involved in journaling classroom management and its subsequent adaptations exemplify the intersection of teacher cognition in high-order thinking activities (e.g., encouraging critical analysis, promoting problem-solving skills, facilitating student-led discussions, and using inquiry-based learning approaches) and corresponding reflective practice (e.g., better questioning strategies, task effectiveness, classroom interaction, conducting independent research integrating language development, and metacognitive instruction). The reported reduction in work-related anxiety and improvement in stress

management through journaling demonstrates affective domain integration. However, the difficulties encountered in content selection (e.g., juggling lesson planning, teaching, grading, and personal study) and time management for journaling highlight the need for enhanced resource management and time management skills within the SDL framework. The tendency towards descriptive rather than analytical reflection points to a need for more robust analyses of pedagogical content knowledge and belief systems as well as the key components of technology affordance, such as digital platforms, for more efficient and collaborative reflection. This outcome can be attributed to the structured opportunity for self-assessment and growth that journaling provides, allowing for a deeper processing of experiences and connecting theory with practice. The socio-constructivist approach underpinning this study aligns well with these results, as the participants built their understanding of teaching through ongoing reflection (Abdelzaher, 2022).

The limitations of this study include potential self-reporting bias and cultural specificity, which may affect the broader applicability of the findings. Longitudinal studies may track the long-term impact of reflective journaling, explore cross-cultural comparisons of reflective practices, and investigate the integration of technology in enhancing reflection. Additionally, incorporating quantitative measures to assess specific teaching competencies (e.g., students engagement rate, lesson plan accuracy, feedback response time, error correction frequency, use of target language, translanguaging, assessment pass rates, and pacing accuracy) and comparing the effectiveness of different reflective models could provide more comprehensive insights (Bowden et al., 2024).

Practical Implications

Pedagogical implications heighten the need for implementing structured reflection models such as the CoPORA framework, to guide preservice teachers in developing higher-level reflective capacities. Integrating collaborative reflection sessions and technology-enhanced feedback can enrich the reflective process and provide concrete visual references for analysis. An early introduction of reflective journaling in teacher education programs, coupled with mentor training and diverse practicum experience (e.g., tutoring digitally/virtually, implementing technology-enhanced lessons, teaching in rural or under-resources settings, and observing special needs language classrooms), can foster a habit of reflection and broaden the perspectives of pre-service teachers. Furthermore, using reflective journaling for emotional regulation and stress management addresses the psychological challenges of teaching.

Consolidating reciprocal peer mentoring within practicum experiences improves reflective practices and the perceived inadequacies in practicum structures. This advocated for the earliest onset of teaching engagements and periodic rotations in mentor-mentee pairings to maximize experiential learning (Çapan & Bedir, 2019). To this end, peer-feedback mechanisms serve as a conduit for deepening the metacognitive awareness of learning processes, although a tendency towards inflated peer evaluations necessitates careful consideration in implementation (Yüksel & Başaran, 2020). Embodying a reflective practice in pre-service language teacher education serves as a critical tool for evaluating the nexus between theory and practice and for exploring the beliefs and practices of pre-service English teachers during teaching practicum programs. Strategies such as recollection, reflection-in-action, and mentoring facilitate the development of personalized teaching theories, the establishment of

theory-practice links, and the enhancement of higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Nuraeni & Heryatun, 2021). The integration of action research methods in pre-service teacher education fosters collective experiences, joint negotiations, and co-constructed solutions. This facilitates a deeper understanding of unvoiced challenges in teaching practicum, including pedagogy, classroom management, diversity, and workload management.

Instilling the significance of reflective practice in pre-service teachers beyond the confines of the teaching practicum holds significant potential for fostering professional development. Adopting the practice of remote school visits increased opportunities for fostering pre-service teachers' autonomy and reflective capabilities while simultaneously recalibrating within the training triad [preservice teacher, the mentor teacher (or cooperating teacher), and the supervisor]. However, this transformation raises pertinent questions regarding equity in the training and assessment process and its possible global expansion (Murtagh, 2022).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of pre-service English language teachers regarding their reflective journal writing practice during their practicum in Kuwait. The findings reveal a predominantly positive view of reflective journaling, with participants perceiving it as a valuable tool for professional development and personal growth. Participants consistently reported that journaling served as an effective means to improve their cognitive functioning and self-awareness. The act of writing allowed them to systematically analyze classroom challenges, leading to more structured problem-solving approaches and improved decision-making abilities.

Moreover, reflective journaling was perceived as a powerful method for emotional regulation and stress management. Participants found that the practice regulated complex emotions often experienced during their practicum. This emotional regulation aspect was particularly valued in the high-stress environment of teaching, with participants reporting significant reductions in work-related anxiety and improved work-life balance. The pre-service teachers also viewed journaling as a practice that fostered resilience and adaptability. Through consistent reflection, participants felt better equipped to navigate challenges and adapt their teaching strategies in the classroom. This perception of increased resilience was closely tied to their growing sense of self-efficacy and professional identity.

The benefits of weekly journal writing were numerous and significant. Participants reported improved problem-solving skills and decision-making abilities, which they attributed to the regular practice of breaking down complex classroom issues through writing. Enhanced self-awareness and a deeper understanding of their teaching practice were also noted as key benefits. Emotional regulation and stress management emerged as significant advantages of the journaling practice. Participants found that weekly reflection helped them process their experiences more effectively, leading to reduced anxiety and better overall mental well-being. This improved emotional state contributed to increased resilience and adaptability in facing classroom challenges.

However, the current discussion lacks information on the challenges posed by weekly journal writing. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pre-service teachers' experiences, future research should explore any difficulties or obstacles encountered in

maintaining a regular journaling practice. Furthermore, to fully address the research questions, future discussions should include more explicit statements about overall perceptions of reflective journaling, including any negative or neutral views that may have been expressed. Additionally, exploring the impact of the weekly frequency of journaling on participants' experiences would provide valuable insights for teacher education programs considering implementing similar practices.

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