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Task Planning Competence: A Reflection-Based Model to Describe EFL Teachers' Professional Competence for Planning Heterogeneity-Sensitive Learning Opportunities

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Abstract
Professional competence is more than knowledge and more than behavior. Responding to the need to conceptualize competences beyond such dichotomous notions, this paper proposes a reflection-based model for describing EFL teachers' competence in planning learning opportunities for heterogeneous EFL classrooms. Utilizing situational prospective reflection processes as a mediator between dispositions and performance, the model accesses task planning competence via reflectivity. Four indicators of reflectivity were derived theoretically and subsequently refined and specified empirically through a deductive–inductive qualitative content analysis of vignette-based task planning reflections of 57 (German) pre- and in-service EFL teachers. The resulting model provides a theoretically and empirically grounded framework in which reflectivity alongside the indicators "reflective depth", "references to knowledge", "references to self", and "references to others involved" offer insights into task planning competence. Targeting teacher education specifically, the model may foster increased conceptual clarity and tangible starting points for feedback. Ultimately, it may contribute to a teacher education that equips teachers to engage with task planning in a way that responds to learner heterogeneity.

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Introduction

The question of how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching can effectively address heterogeneous learners is as old as foreign language teaching itself (e.g., Liu & Nelson, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Over the past decades, a considerable body of research has emerged on this concern, including theoretical, empirical and practical perspectives. These findings echo in educational policy frameworks and curricular guidelines, oftentimes framing heterogeneity-sensitive teaching[1] as a (normative) standard (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 11). Simultaneously, teacher education programs have picked up on the topic, aiming to prepare pre-service teachers to meet this requirement (e.g., Wernicke et al., 2021).

At first glance, this may leave the impression that the field is well equipped to deal with the challenges heterogeneous learner groups present. Yet, a closer look reveals a significant gap: Despite an abundance of recommendations from research and policy, little is known about teachers' actual competence to translate these recommendations into practice. Trautmann (2010) expresses concern that there might be a "great discrepancy between the recommendations of foreign language teaching theory and the practice of EFL teaching" (p. 10, translated by author). In particular, EFL teachers' competence to plan heterogeneity-sensitive learning opportunities is largely unexplored. This points to two related but distinct research desiderata. First, a lack of empirical evidence on how competently EFL teachers engage in such planning (competence assessment desideratum). Investigating this desideratum presupposes conceptual clarity how this competence manifests and how it can be made empirically accessible - in other words, a model that provides a structured and necessarily simplified representation of the competence's underlying components and interrelations (Stachowiak, 1973). With existing (general) competence models tending to draw on one-sided, overly simplistic or generalistic conceptualizations that do not account for the subjective and situational nature of professional competence sufficiently, this leaves a second, logically prior gap: the need for a task planning competence model (competence modelling desideratum). Although both desiderata are intertwined, they cannot be addressed simultaneously: a reliable and appropriately nuanced assessment of task planning competence requires an adequate model in the first place. The present study therefore addresses the competence modelling desideratum only, guided by the question: How can task planning competence in the context of heterogeneity-sensitive EFL teaching be modelled? With the focus on competence modelling, empirical data collected within this study

[1] In this article, the term "heterogeneity-sensitive" is used to capture a comprehensive view of diversity. Unlike the more common term "inclusive", it is less closely linked to special needs education, but emphasizes responsiveness to the full spectrum of learner differences, ranging from biological, cognitive and linguistic variation to affective and socio-cultural dimensions (Prengel, 2020, p. 14).

exclusively served to develop the model rather than being assessed in terms of underlying competence. Competence assessment on the basis of the developed model lies beyond the scope of the present study. Its viability as an instrument for competence assessment and development is currently being examined in subsequent pilot studies.

To address the competence modelling desideratum, chapter 2 briefly contextualizes the task planning situation as a means towards the overarching aim of heterogeneity-sensitive EFL teaching. Chapter 3 turns to the question how competence can be conceptualized and assessed generally, identifying shortcomings of existing models and sketching a framework that uses teachers' reflective processes within a situation as access to their competence. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological steps undertaken to adjust this framework to the task planning situation. Finally, chapter 5 presents the resulting model, followed by a discussion on potential fields of use in research and teacher education.

Heterogeneity-Sensitive EFL Teaching

To address heterogeneous EFL classrooms, Trautmann (2010) identifies two major strategies that should not be regarded as competing or mutually exclusive, but as complementary and mutually enriching, as their respective strengths may compensate for one another's limitations.

On the one hand, heterogeneity-sensitive practice can be realized through top-down differentiation (Trautmann, 2010, p. 57), a concept also discussed as differentiated (Tomlinson, 2014), adaptive (Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Smit et al., 2022) or teacher-directed practice (Westwood, 2024). This perspective assigns teachers responsibility for anticipating and responding to learners' diverse abilities and needs by creating graded versions of instruction and material. Such adaptivity comprises consideration of various biological, cognitive, affective, emotional, and sociocultural factors (Dewaele, 2013; Dörnyei, 2005; Kersten & Winsler, 2022) in order to account for each individual learner's needs. However, given the complexity, interdependence and dynamics of individual differences (e.g., Kersten & Winsler, 2022), the short-term realization and long-term sustainability of (fully) adaptive teaching are considered challenging at least. Furthermore, concerns have been raised that adaptive teaching may make learner differences even more visible, thereby reinforcing them and potentially contributing to stigmatization ("doing differences", Trautmann, 2010; West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

On the other hand, Trautmann (2010) outlines task-orientation (among others: Ellis, 2003; van den Branden et al., 2007; Willis, 1996) as a second option, in line with what

Westwood (2024) refers to as student-centered approaches. Despite a recent strong endorsement in (German) educational policy and continuous refinement of the concept, a number of "real issues" still seem to limit its practical implementation (Ellis et al., 2020): Particularly, the considerable time and effort required for task design and the persisting lack of conceptual clarity among teachers may hinder task-oriented classroom practice (p. 326).

Given the limitations of both strategies and following the "postmethod perspective" (Akbari, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2006), it may be argued that both adaptivity and task-orientation represent valuable entry points that, when applied and combined reflectively, can contribute to more heterogeneity-sensitive EFL teaching (see also Reckermann & Heim, 2019). However, this shifts responsibility to the individual teacher, who must be capable and willing to apply adaptive and task-oriented strategies. In this regard, particular significance may be ascribed to planning situations. Taking place before actual teaching, they put less immediate situational pressure on teachers than in-class situations, providing suitable circumstances for rational, informed decision-making. Hence, some assume planning may be the missing link between theoretical knowledge and its application within classroom practice (Pang, 2016; Stender et al., 2017).

Among various types of planning situations teachers encounter, the planning of heterogeneity-sensitive learning arrangements for EFL through the use of adaptive and task-oriented principles (see above) represents a distinct subset, in this study referred to as task planning. Task planning includes selecting a task source (e.g., textbook, online materials, colleagues' or self-developed tasks) as well as selecting, adapting, designing and preparing a concrete task for usage in a lesson or unit (Schocker-von Ditfurth & Müller-Hartmann, 2011, pp. 92–104). In this process, EFL teachers find themselves navigating diverse task sources, each offering particular advantages and disadvantages, as well as a broad range of activities within them. They are responsible for selecting and interpreting tasks in light of their learners' heterogeneity, anticipating how design features may interact with diverse learner needs and adapting them accordingly (Baumann, 2023, p. 13). This responsibility asks for knowledge-based and reflective choices, in other words for competence within the task planning situation.

A Reflection-based General Competence Model

Until recent years, empirical research on professional competences was very much divided into two dominant schools of thought, both emerging from the fundamental challenge that competence as a latent construct cannot be assessed directly but only

inferred through either its resulting performance or underlying dispositions (e.g., Blömeke et al., 2015; Li & Zou, 2017; Pittich, 2014).

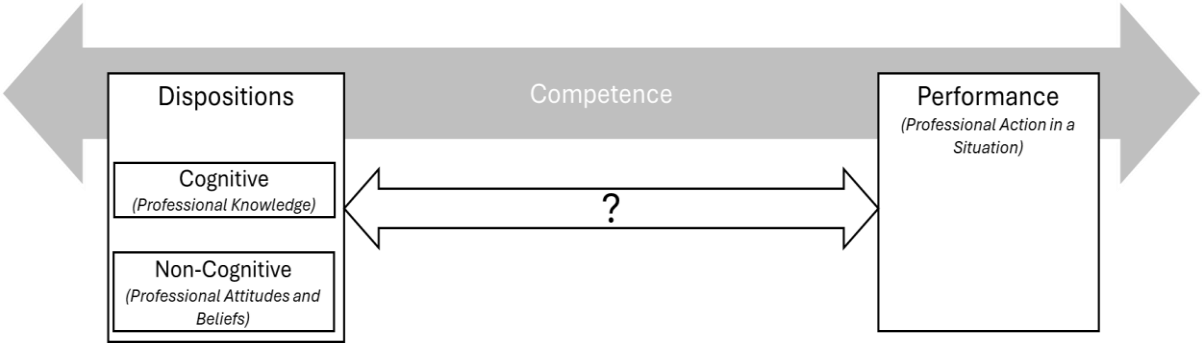
The performance-oriented approach assumes that competence manifests as successful response to a situation in question (Ericsson, 2018; Ericsson & Towne, 2010). Hence, performance-oriented research examines observable behavior and draws conclusions about competence based on how successfully a person's actions contributed to resolving it. However, the assumption that behavior directly reflects competence may be questioned, since external observation does not reveal the extent to which behavior is grounded in full understanding of the situation and conscious decisions. Actions appearing professional from the outside may also result from coincidence, contextual factors or social desirability rather than from competence (Pittich, 2014).

In contrast, disposition-oriented approaches infer competence from the possession of specific cognitive (e.g., Chi, 2006; Tan, 1997) and non-cognitive dispositions (e.g., Lau & Roeser, 2002; Wessels et al., 2018), such as knowledge, beliefs, or motivational orientations, assuming that these will lead to competence. Criticism of this perspective concerns a focus on cognitive dispositions, that, when not explicitly communicated otherwise, virtually equates knowledge with competence (e.g., Wessels et al., 2018). Moreover, the mechanisms assumed to translate dispositions into practical action frequently remain unclear, thus ignoring phenomena like inert knowledge (Renkl et al., 1996, p. 1).

Recent research has strived to overcome this dichotomous thinking towards a multidimensional understanding of competence, framed as a continuum spanning from underlying dispositions to observable performance (Blömeke et al., 2015).

Figure 1

Competence as a Continuum (Based on Blömeke et al., 2015)

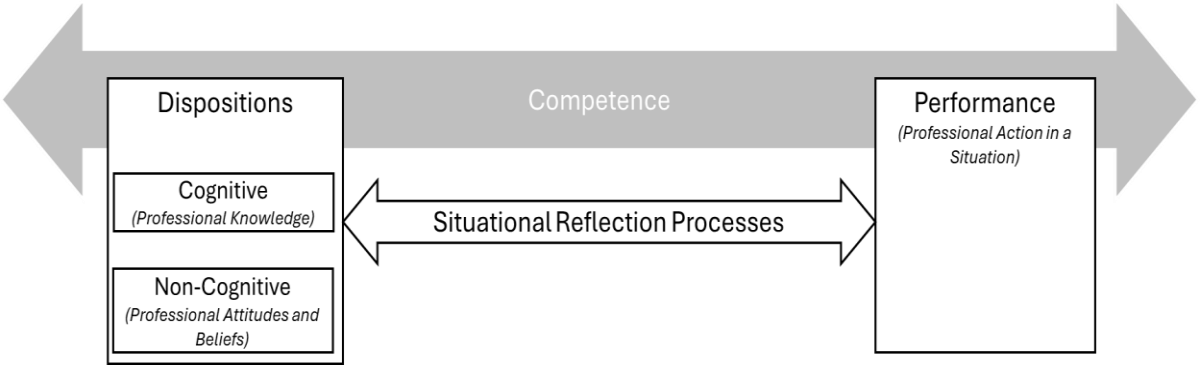


Nevertheless, this integrative understanding does not yet explain how dispositions and performance are connected, but only makes the conceptual gap more visible. As Blömeke et al. (2015, p. 7) admit, the question remains, "which processes connect cognition and volition-affect-motivation on the one hand and performance on the other hand?". To address this gap, they introduce the concept of situation-specific skills as a mediator. These skills comprise a three-step process of perceiving, interpreting, and decision-making in a given situation, conceptually aligning largely with the concept of teacher noticing (van Es & Sherin, 2002, 2021). Both concepts have since been applied to and empirically tested across various situations teachers face (e.g., Choy et al., 2017; Kosko et al., 2021; Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021; Thomas et al., 2017; Zucker, 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights into teachers' decision-making processes, they appear to rely on the (implicit) assumption that these processes can be evaluated against a universally valid standard of "correct" perception and reasoning, oftentimes operationalized through expert judgments that serve as reference points. However, in light of the complexity and uniqueness of pedagogical situations, the notion of universal correctness appears questionable. What may ultimately matter is less *what* and more *how* teachers perceive, interpret, and decide. This idea resonates with the concept of reflection, a construct less normatively framed, yet showing considerable overlaps with situation-specific skills on a process level (e.g., Bechtel & Rudolph, 2022; Zucker, 2019). Even though reflection has received little attention within competence-based frameworks thus far (Wyss, 2013, p. 62), it is widely acknowledged as a core component of teacher professionalism and has been proposed as a potential link between knowledge and action for years (e.g., Farrell, 2021, 2022; Marcos et al., 2011; van Manen, 1977). Within situational reflection processes, teachers may activate (theoretically acquired) professional knowledge, weigh and connect different knowledge elements, and apply them to an individual case (Friederich & Schelle, 2017, p. 385). Simultaneously, reflection may operate in the opposite direction by exposing limitations in and reorganizing existing knowledge (Davis, 2003, p. 93) and transforming experience into dynamic professional knowledge (Korthagen, 2002, p. 59-60). Consequently, reflection can be hypothesized to operate as a bidirectional mechanism between competence components.

Reflection may be less understood as a competing mediator to situation-specific skills (Blömeke et al., 2015), but rather as an extension or complementary perspective. While the process logic remains, it shifts attention from what is perceived, interpreted, and decided towards how reflectively these processes unfold. Therefore, it potentially opens up new ways to evaluate decision-making processes beyond dichotomous notions of right and wrong.

Figure 2

Reflection as a Mediator (Based on Haase, 2026)

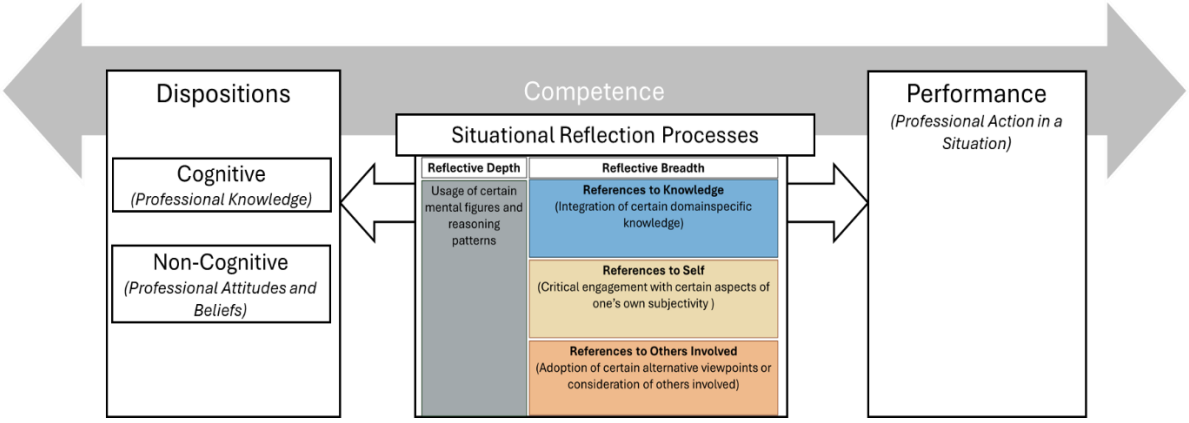


However, it must be expected that it takes more than "fleeting thoughts before, during, or after a lesson" (Farrell, 2020, p. 9) to unfold reflection's assumed bridging function. Instead, reflection processes have to meet qualitative criteria.

Early works (e.g., Dewey, 1933; van Manen, 1977) already hint at criteria for what constitutes quality resp. reflectivity. These have been continuously refined, systematized and differentiated over past decades. Lately, two-dimensional conceptualizations of reflectivity (e.g., Klempin & Rehfeldt, 2020; Leonhard & Rihm, 2011) have been on the rise: One dimension, reflective depth, refers to the cognitive complexity evident within reflection processes, operationalized through specific mental figures that indicate deeper engagement with the object of reflection (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1995). The second dimension, reflective breadth, concerns the diversity of perspectives and content incorporated. It can be further divided into three subcomponents: (1) integration of (domain-specific) knowledge (e.g., Davis, 2006; Klempin & Rehfeldt, 2020), (2) critical engagement with one's own subjectivity (e.g., Korthagen, 2014), and (3) adoption of external viewpoints of others involved with the object of reflection (e.g., Davis, 2006). Rather than operating independently, the two dimensions may mutually reinforce one another, as greater reflective breadth may stimulate deeper engagement and vice versa (e.g., Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Stender et al., 2021, p. 247). Ultimately, both dimensions can thus be assumed to contribute to the proposed mediating function of reflection, enabling correspondence between a person's dispositions and performance. An analysis of (externalized) situational reflection processes with regards to both dimensions may provide insight into this interplay and therefore may be used as an indicator of a person's competence in the respective situation.

Figure 3

General Reflection-Based Competence Model (Based on Haase, 2026)



It is important to note, however, reflectivity cannot be conceived in form of a universal target dimension. What constitutes sufficient depth and breadth can only be specified against the background of the situation in question, as different situations require and allow for different degrees of reflectivity, depending on their complexity, emotional intensity, and temporal constraints (Häcker, 2019; Perkins & Salomon, 1989).
Acknowledging this, the following chapter elaborates how this general framework of a reflection-based competence model can be specified for the task planning situation.

Methodological Steps towards the Task Planning Competence Model

Following Schaper (2009), competence modelling takes an integrative interplay of theoretical, deductive and empirical, inductive modelling processes to ensure theoretical anchoring and empirical applicability equally. Consequently, the customization of the general reflection-based competence model towards a reflection-based task planning competence model was split into two phases.

Theoretical Modelling

First, a theoretical modelling phase was carried out in which the model's framing components, dispositions and performance, were specified literature-based. This process was informed primarily by empirical research on planning-related dispositions (e.g., Kirchhoff, 2017; Li & Zou, 2017; Stender et al., 2017; Tagle et al., 2020) and performance (e.g., Borko & Livingston, 1989, p. 9; Li & Zou, 2017; Weingarten, 2019). In order to specify the mediating component of reflection, the processes of perception, interpretation and decision-making within task planning situations were analyzed in greater detail. Task sources and tasks were identified as (potential) objects of reflection: Due to their antinomic structure and resulting inner tension, they hold potential to cause irritation, raise "a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt" and thus to initiate "an act of search or investigation" (Dewey, 1910, p. 9). In

other words, they may trigger reflection processes. The reflection mode can be characterized as predominantly prospective (*reflection for action*, Killion & Todnem, 1991), as they are directed towards future teaching practice. The reflection goal can be defined as primarily external, aiming to improve (future) teaching quality and heterogeneity-sensitivity (Farrell, 2002; Weingarten, 2019, p. 544). Subordinately, an internal goal presents, as reflective engagement within (task) planning is repeatedly associated with a side effect of individual professionalization (e.g., Pang, 2016). Based on this definition of the situational reflection acts, preliminary assumptions could be derived regarding plausible manifestations of the reflectivity indicators introduced in chapter 3. Assumptions were cross-checked against empirical findings from comparable reflection processes (e.g., Baumann, 2023) as well as examined and extended in the empirical modelling phase (see below).

Empirical Modelling

The empirical modelling processes required a methodological approach to artificially initiate and externalize the identified situational reflection acts under controlled, yet authentic conditions. To address this need, vignettes were employed. Vignettes feature "descriptive episodes of specific situations that simulate real events or problems" (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020, p. 544) and have previously proven effective in eliciting situation-specific skills (e.g., Nagele, 2021), noticing (e.g., Kuntze et al., 2025) and reflection (e.g., Bernabeo et al., 2013).

Two vignettes were developed following the seven-step framework proposed by Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014): To provoke task source reflection, the first vignette (V1) depicted a (written) scenario set in a staffroom, in which two teachers debate the appropriateness of different task sources for heterogeneity-sensitive EFL teaching. This was followed by a structured reflection prompt, inviting participants to articulate their spontaneous thoughts on the situation as comprehensively as possible. To elicit task reflection, the second vignette (V2) featured an authentic activity from a German elementary school EFL textbook ("Storytime", Duncan-Hauff et al., 2015, pp. 52–53), contextualized within a short narrative, in which a colleague voices doubt about using it in a heterogeneous EFL classroom. The depicted activity deliberately only meets adaptive and task-based principles to a limited extent to enhance the vignette's potential to provoke irritation and, consequently, reflective engagement. Below, the same structured reflection prompt as mentioned above followed. The initial vignette drafts underwent several rounds of expert consultation, during which they were reviewed with regard to comprehensibility, openness, plausibility, and authenticity and iteratively revised. Subsequently, they were piloted with 29 pre-service teachers, who produced task source and task reflections based on the vignettes and provided

feedback on their suitability as prompts for reflection. Insights from the pilot study informed further adaptations.

The final vignettes were embedded in an online survey tool compliant with data protection regulations and presented to 57 participants. The sample was actively recruited and comprised both (German) pre- and in-service EFL teachers. In line with the focus on competence modelling rather than competence assessment (see introduction), this sampling strategy was not directed towards group comparisons, but to base the model on a sufficiently diverse data set. Including participants at different stages of professional development was intended to ensure that the model is capable of grasping manifestations of task planning competence ranging from limited forms – as might be expected within the pre-service teacher subsample - to highly developed forms – as might be expected among in-service teachers.

All participants were asked to reflect on the vignettes individually and to capture their thoughts through reflective writing. While reflection at its core is understood as a mental process (e.g., Lenske & Lohse-Bossenz, 2023), using it for purposes of competence modelling, assessment or development necessarily requires some form of spoken or written externalization to make it (empirically) accessible. Any externalization, however, is associated with limitations: Thoughts need to be translated into a linear, communicable form and can therefore never fully represent the underlying, rapid and complex mental processes. For the present study, written externalization was chosen for several reasons. Beyond its natural proximity to planning (e.g., Borko & Livingston, 1989; Weingarten, 2019) and its instant anonymity (Berndt et al., 2017), written externalization is said to go hand in hand with a natural deceleration and distancing of thoughts that may open up cognitive resources for more in-depth reflection ("built-in reflective mechanism", Farrell, 2024, p. 21). However, written externalization involves a paradox: While the process of writing may stimulate the underlying mental reflection, at the same time, the demands of verbalizing and documenting thoughts simultaneously make it impossible to capture their full reflectivity. Consequently, written externalization cannot be regarded as a direct, exhaustive representation, but only an approximation of the underlying mental reflection process and may further be under the influence of factors such as writing proficiency, motivation or time available for articulation (e.g., Leonhard & Rihm, 2011, p. 262). Yet, as mental reflection is not directly accessible, externalization remains inevitable. Externalization conditions must therefore be carefully designed and communicated and limitations that persist must be accounted for when interpreting findings based on externalized reflection.

The resulting written reflections were analyzed alongside qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). This methodological approach was chosen mainly for its openness towards a combination of theory-driven and data-driven category formation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), aligning with the requirements of competence modeling (Schaper, 2009). In the present study, deductive main categories in form of the four indicators of reflectivity (reflective depth; references to knowledge, references to self, references to others involved) formed the baseline. Their situation-specific manifestations were modelled through different combinations of deductive and inductive category formation. Subcategories of reflective depth could largely be derived from established models (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1995; for an overview: Haase et al., 2025). Subcategories of references to knowledge were partly informed by previous research (Baumann, 2023) and further differentiated inductively. Overall, the deductively derived subcategories provided a largely suitable structure for the empirical material, although some required inductive differentiation or extension. No deductively derived category had to be discarded due to a lack of corresponding manifestations in the data. Subcategories specifying references to self and references to others involved emerged entirely from the empirical material before being related back to existing literature. Each category's origin is specified in the coding frame provided in the appendix.

The resulting coding frame was repeatedly refined through consensual coding and subjected to intra-coder reliability analyses once the coding frame had been sufficiently stabilized ($\kappa n = 0.78$). Subsequent to the analysis of the full data material through the main coder and author of this article, intercoder reliability analyses on segment-level were conducted to ensure the model could be applied consistently by researchers other than the author. Intercoder reliability analyses resulted in κn values between 0.47 and 0.80 across categories ($M = 0.58$). Finally, the structure of the coding frame was transferred into the final task planning competence model.

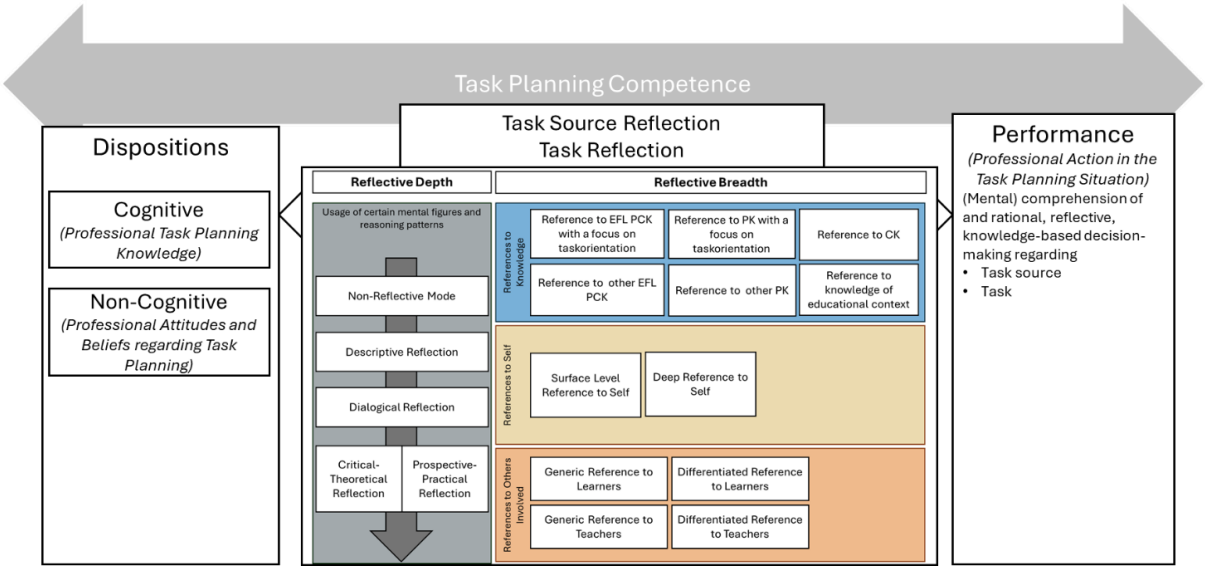
The Task Planning Competence Model

The following model represents a condensed synthesis of the results emerging from the deductive–inductive modelling process outlined above, offering a theoretically substantiated and empirically grounded framework of task planning competence through the lens of teachers' situational reflection processes. It may allow differentiated analysis of reflectivity alongside four main categories (reflective depth, references to knowledge, references to self and references to others involved) and their respective sub-facets, with observed patterns of reflectivity indicating how functionally dispositions and performance are interconnected within the task planning situation. Importantly, however, neither the presence nor, particularly, the absence of a (sub-)category should be interpreted as conclusive evidence for the

presence or absence of a (functional) connection between competence components, as what becomes observable in the written reflection is also shaped by factors such as the demands of externalization and participants' ability to articulate their thoughts. In other words, mental figures or references may, in some cases, have occurred mentally, but have not overcome the externalization barrier.

Figure 4

Reflection-Based Task Planning Competence Model (Based on Haase, 2026)



In the following, the four main categories (reflective depth, references to knowledge, references to self and references to others involved) will be presented to illustrate how they may manifest in form of (selected) subcategories within (externalized) task source or task reflections and how these may point to a (functional) interplay between dispositions and performance.

Reflective Depth

The model incorporates a situation-independent multi-stage model of reflective depth consisting of four levels (Haase et al., 2025; Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 9; Poldner et al., 2014). Each level is characterized by a distinct combination of mental figures, with higher levels building upon previous ones cumulatively by asking for the addition of one more mental figure respectively (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Poldner et al., 2014).

Professional engagement with inherently antinomic objects like task sources and tasks requires at least episodic instances of the subcategory dialogical reflection (e.g., Farrell, 2020, p. 9), a level defined by justifying and questioning as core mental figures (e.g., Haase et al., 2025). The empirical modelling processes revealed that this level is

possible to reach within task planning reflection processes, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

> *At this point, a standard solution in elementary school is to have fast learners draw a picture. I sometimes do this, too, to maintain an appropriate learning atmosphere, but with a bad conscience because it's completely useless in terms of cognitive activity. I know it's not great, and it's not really my ideal of good teaching." (LP09_V2[2])*

In this excerpt, the reflecting teacher describes what they perceive as a common classroom strategy to occupy fast learners. They initially legitimize its use by referring to the need for a calm learning atmosphere, making use of the mental figure of justifying. Subsequently, they distance themself and critically re-evaluate the described practice, acknowledging its limited value in terms of learners' cognitive activity. Hence, although justified legitimately, the reflecting teacher resists following their initial interpretation blindly, but demonstrates capacity and willingness to engage with counterarguments, even if they call their practice into question. This back and forth marks an inner dialogue, as contrasting interpretations are held in (potentially) productive tension by "weighing competing […] viewpoints, and then exploring alternative solutions" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 45).

In the data set, there were also instances going beyond dialogical depth, additionally incorporating the mental figure of deciding, thereby reaching prospective-practical depth, or the mental figure of relating, reaching critical-theoretical depth (Haase et al., 2025).

Reflective Breadth

This dimension captures the diversity of contents and viewpoints within a reflection. It cuts across segments of varying depth and can therefore be coded overlappingly.

References to knowledge

Within this indicator, reflection's role as a mediator between knowledge and action becomes most obvious. Whenever knowledge elements are consciously activated and integrated into reflection processes, they are applied to a concrete case, representing a step towards transforming theoretical knowledge into practice, a mechanism already outlined by pioneers of reflection research such as van Manen (1977). Such knowledge application fulfils the external goal of improving (future) teaching practice (see theoretical modelling), simultaneously, the conscious engagement with knowledge

[2] All following data excepts were originally written in German and translated for this article.

may also contribute to the internal goal of refining and expanding professional knowledge (e.g., Davis, 2006; Killion & Todnem, 1991).

Findings from the empirical modelling processes indicate that it is possible to activate different domains of professional knowledge when reflecting in a task planning situation. This resulted in six subcategories, as for example EFL specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK, Shulman, 1987):

> *According to the principle "listening before speaking before reading before writing," which governs elementary EFL teaching, students should first LISTEN to a language pattern and try to reproduce it orally before working with it in written form. (LA04_V2)*

Situated within a segment of descriptive depth, this reference demonstrates the application of pedagogical content knowledge, as the teacher grounds planning decisions in two core principles of (early) foreign language learning pedagogy: reception before production and orality before literacy. Hence, it illustrates how a general understanding of foreign language learning's theoretical foundations becomes applicable to a concrete case through reflection, indicating a left to right transformation of a cognitive disposition into practical action may have happened or is about to happen.

As task planning aims for heterogeneity-sensitivity, partially achieved through an implementation of task-oriented principles, references to knowledge of tasks and task-orientation are regarded vital for the assignment of task planning competence. To reflect this, the model integrates situation-specific knowledge categories such as EFL pedagogical content knowledge with a focus on task-orientation:

> *Many of the activities [displayed in textbooks] are in fact often exercises (thus focusing on form rather than meaning). (MA09_V1)*

In this statement, the reflecting teacher activates knowledge on task characteristics and proceeds to derive implications on their handling of the textbook as a task source, likewise illustrating a left to right transformation of a knowledge element into (future) action.

In addition to PCK references with and without a focus on task-orientation, elements of general pedagogical knowledge (PK) with and without a focus on task-orientation, content knowledge (CK), and knowledge of the educational context also became

evident in the data set and were incorporated into the model in form of corresponding categories.

References to self

References to self capture instances in which reflecting teachers become aware of and consciously engage with their own subjective involvement. On a surface level, this may concern aspects of the self located in the outer layers of personality, such as experiences and memories conserving one's engagement with an external environment (Korthagen, 2004):

> *During my internship, I observed that long periods of individual written work can quickly lead to disruption (MA08_V2).*

In this reference, the reflecting teacher draws on a classroom experience from an internship to substantiate their judgement of the reflected task's design. Such conscious engagement with prior experience may have potential to operate in both directions of the competence framework: It may contribute to consolidating the experience as practical, experience-based knowledge (Korthagen, 2002), while simultaneously applying this knowledge to practical action.

Beyond surface-level, engagement with deeper levels of the self were observed in reflections within task planning as well, mirroring non-cognitive dispositions such as beliefs or motivational orientations being made available for reflected decision-making. To varying degrees, both forms of references to self indicate a teacher's awareness of and readiness to critically examine the subjective component within task planning, with potential effects on both their (future) practical action and dispositions (e.g., Korthagen, 2014). It must be acknowledged, though, that the task planning situation might not provide ideal conditions for deepened self-referencing due to its predominantly external goal.

References to Others Involved

In the context of task planning, references to others primarily concern teachers and learners. Both party's interests, abilities and needs must be taken into account, yet there is an undeniable "priority of student interests" (Häcker & Rihm, 2005, p. 374, translated by author).

To reduce the complexity any (task) planning situation holds (e.g., Küth & Scholl, 2024), teachers may at times adopt a generic perspective on learners, (implicitly) equating their interests, abilities, and needs to some extent rather than acknowledging individual variation.

> *The students will enjoy this lesson because they are given the opportunity to perform the role play in front of the class in the end. This will motivate them to practice it well. (BA03_V2)*

In this excerpt, the reflecting teacher attempts to align a task design feature with learners' preferences. In doing so, they attribute a universally motivating effect, assuming that *all* learners will enjoy performing in front of the class. Although this may hold true for some, it neglects learners whose affective dispositions make public performance challenging, thereby inhibiting any consideration of potential adaptations or scaffolds to accommodate their needs. However, when accompanied by adequate reflective depth[3], generic learner references may also indicate an appropriate interplay between dispositions and performance, as teachers may (consciously or unconsciously) balance their cognitive and non-cognitive dispositions regarding the priority of learner interests against an awareness of their own limited resources available for planning and translate this balance into a manageable level of planning complexity.

The data set also contained more differentiated stances, indicating teachers' capacity to - at least occasionally - adopt a nuanced perspective and consider interests, abilities, and needs deviating from the norm. In doing so, they establish a foundation for the application of adaptive principles, thereby contributing to heterogeneity-sensitivity as outlined above.

> *Nevertheless, it must be considered that not all learners feel confident to present something in a foreign language, as they may not enjoy standing in the spotlight even when presenting something in their L1. (MA06_V2)*

Contrasting with the preceding reference, this example demonstrates awareness that not all learners enjoy public speaking, particularly in a foreign language. Anticipating challenges particular learners may face due to the task design enables the teacher to address these proactively, for instance by making modifications, preparing alternative formats or individual support. Therefore, differentiated learner references may be cautiously interpreted as an indication that practical action is planned in (conscious or unconscious) consideration of cognitive and non-cognitive dispositions concerning learner heterogeneity.

[3] In the example excerpt, the generic learner reference is accompanied by rather superficial reflective depth and therefore offers little observable evidence of a deliberate balancing. Still, corresponding considerations may have occurred mentally without being externalized. Follow-up dialogue with the reflecting teacher could provide additional insight.

In addition to learner references, the instructing teacher's perspective was frequently adopted, too, negotiating professional capacities, abilities and needs through generic and differentiated lenses likewise. Consequently, references to teachers were incorporated into the model as subcategories.

Discussion

Starting from the question of how EFL teachers' competence for planning heterogeneity-sensitive learning opportunities can be described beyond dichotomous notions (e.g., Blömeke et al., 2015), this article outlined conceptual and empirical steps undertaken to establish a corresponding model. The proposed reflection-based model adopts a multidimensional approach, seeking for access through situational reflection processes assumed to mediate between dispositions and practical action. The oftentimes vague concept of reflectivity is transferred into concrete theory-based and empirically underpinned criteria, according to which reflective engagement with task sources and tasks characterized by (1) at least occasional reach of dialogic reflective depth, (2) integration of domain-specific knowledge relevant to heterogeneity-sensitive EFL teaching, (3) conscious awareness of subjective patterns underlying perception and interpretation, (4) and deliberate consideration of learners' (diverse) interests, abilities, and needs, may serve as an indicator allowing cautious inferences about individuals' task planning competence. The proposed model therefore moves beyond a binary competent/non-competent classification, but provides fine-grained subcategories to capture a variety of competence profiles.

Apart from research on EFL teachers' task planning competence (competence assessment desideratum, see introduction), the model's practical value unfolds most clearly in teacher education, with potential fields of use alongside all stages of lifelong professional development. During theory-intensive university-based phases of teacher education, it may help to construct practice-oriented knowledge (Baumann, 2023; Renkl et al., 1996). During practical teacher training, it may guide emerging professional routines. In in-service upskilling, it could provide a framework for critically revisiting established practices and foster continuous professionalization. Across different phases of teacher education, the model may potentially serve both prescriptive and descriptive purposes. Prescriptively, it may provide pre- and in-service teachers as well as teacher educators with orientation regarding relevant dimensions of reflectivity in task planning. Descriptively, its criteria may provide a basis for exploring manifestations of this reflectivity in one's own or others' reflections, potentially helping to identify strengths, weaknesses and unrealized potential. It may contribute to teachers' understanding of reflection not as an isolated ideal, but as something naturally inherent in their everyday practice. This aligns with Farrell's (2022) observation that "one of the main reasons […] practitioners have

problems with 'doing' reflective practice is a lack of understanding of what reflective practice is and how it can be operationalized" (p. 5). Responding to this call for operationalization, the model offers tangible criteria that may be used as shared professional vocabulary for discussing and evaluating (situational) reflection processes, thereby encouraging shared reflective practice and constructive feedback. At present, however, these potential applications remain hypothetical. To explore the viability of the model across different phases of teacher education, initial pilot implementations are currently underway. First data collected in the context of university-based teacher education appear promising, while also suggesting that the model does not constitute a quick fix but requires conscious and time-consuming introduction as well as sustained practice before its potential can be realized. Accordingly, whether and under which conditions the model can effectively support reflective practice and professional development remains subject to further empirical investigation, including larger-scale studies with sufficient sample sizes to allow for robust conclusions regarding effectiveness.

Apart from the need to design suitable seminar formats around the model, inherent conceptual limitations must be acknowledged. This includes unresolved questions concerning single indicators, like treatment of knowledge misconceptions within "references to knowledge" or the issue of "doing differences" (e.g., West & Fenstermaker, 1995) within "references to others involved". The most fundamental limitation, however, lies in the confinement to externalized reflection products (see empirical modelling). Firstly, (written) externalization, regardless of the effort put into, inevitably provides only limited access to underlying mental processes and cannot be expected to capture their full reflectivity. Moreover, the degree of reflectivity observable in written products may also be shaped by factors unrelated to task planning competence itself, including writing proficiency, motivation, and resources available for articulation. Consequently, the model only allows for highly tentative, context-dependent conclusions about minimum task planning competence, whereas the mentally available, potentially further developed level of competence may remain partially undetectable. Nonetheless, as Leonhard et al. (2011) argue, any reflection that is articulated must have occurred mentally, making conscious inferences from reflective writing to reflective thinking legitimate and without alternative. Thus, while reflection may constitute a theoretically plausible mediator between competence components, operationalizing it as an empirical indicator of competence entails substantial limitations that must be considered in any application of the model within both research and teacher education.

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Prior to participation, all participants were educated about the purpose of the data collection and gave their informed consent. Participation was entirely voluntary and an effort was made to maintain participants' full anonymity as well as confidentiality of their data. Participants were repeatedly reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Throughout the research process, the time and effort required from participants were limited to what was considered appropriate and necessary in relation to the research objectives.

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The data on which this study is based can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

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