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Pre-service Teachers' Perspective on Written and Oral Reflective Practice: A Case Study

La perspectiva de maestros en pre-servicio sobre la práctica reflexiva escrita y oral: estudio de caso

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Abstract:

Reflective practice (RP) supports preservice teachers' (PSTs) professional development by fostering self-awareness and connecting pedagogical knowledge with classroom experience. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Mind, this qualitative case study examines how collaborative oral and individual written reflection function as mediational tools in the development of PSTs in an English Language major. Data were collected through group oral reflection sessions and individual reflection journals and analyzed qualitatively. Findings indicate that participants reflected on similar dimensions of their teaching across both modalities, particularly emotions, materials and activities, teaching performance, and professional identity. However, collaborative oral reflection enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences, exchange perspectives, and gain insights from peers. Although participants expressed different preferences for oral or written reflection, both modalities provided opportunities to articulate concerns, experiences, and professional insights. The findings highlight collaborative reflection as a valuable socially mediated practice for supporting PSTs' professional learning and development.

Keywords:

Reflective practice, written reflection, collaborative reflection

Resumen:

La práctica reflexiva (PR) favorece el desarrollo profesional al promover la autoconciencia y vincular los conocimientos pedagógicos con las experiencias en el aula. Fundamentado en la Teoría Sociocultural de la Mente de Vygotsky, este estudio de caso cualitativo examina cómo la reflexión oral colaborativa y la reflexión escrita individual funcionan como herramientas de mediación en docentes en formación de una Licenciatura en Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa. Los datos se recopilaron mediante sesiones grupales de reflexión oral y diarios, y se analizaron cualitativamente. Los resultados indican que los participantes reflexionaron sobre aspectos similares de su práctica, particularmente sus emociones, materiales y actividades, desempeño docente e identidad profesional. La reflexión oral colaborativa permitió profundizar en sus experiencias, intercambiar perspectivas y aprender de pares. Aunque expresaron preferencias, ambas modalidades ofrecieron oportunidades para expresar experiencias y preocupaciones. Los hallazgos destacan la reflexión colaborativa como práctica mediada que favorece el aprendizaje.

Palabras Clave:

Práctica reflexiva, reflexión escrita, reflexión colaborativa

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Introduction

Teacher education continues to evolve in response to the need to provide pre-service teachers (PSTs) with effective approaches, strategies, and practices for developing their professional competencies. Teachers must often respond to students' learning challenges while navigating the institutional conditions in which teaching takes place. While these issues are important, equal attention should be given to teachers' professional growth—their classroom performance, organization, rapport with students, and ability to manage diverse situations (Muñoz, 2011). One strategy that fosters such awareness is engagement in reflective practice (RP) (Tarrant, 2013). RP promotes adaptability, as Sabgini and Khoiriyah (2020) argue, by enabling PSTs to adjust strategies based on classroom experiences. When PSTs reflect on what is effective or ineffective, they can refine their approaches to better meet both students' needs and their own pedagogical goals.

From a Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory of Mind perspective, collaboration, social interaction, and dialogic thinking are central to reflective practice. In this framework, reflection can be understood as both an individual and socially mediated process which involves questioning and dialogue through which teachers examine and make sense of their practice (Jay & Johnson, 2002). It must be intentional, systematic, and methodical (Moreno & Cal y Mayor, 2016) to shape teachers' attitudes and values according to classroom demands (Farrell, 2015). Reflective practice (RP) can be implemented through various tools, such as journals, video recordings, surveys, observations, and group discussions (Maarof, 2007; Mann, 2008; Orlova, 2009).

This study focuses on two specific methods: written reflections (journals) and collaborative oral reflections (group sessions). Written reflections are widely used and foster self-analysis, but they frequently lack external perspectives (Kime, 2014). To address this limitation, oral group reflections can be incorporated, allowing practitioners to share experiences and gain alternative viewpoints. Each mode of reflection, written and oral, prompts distinct ways of thinking (Hickey, 2016), with collaborative reflection offering the added benefit of peers identifying aspects of teaching that self-reflection may overlook.

During the practicum, PSTs gain firsthand exposure to the realities of teaching. Many face frustrations as novice teachers (Farrell, 2009) when encountering challenges, they had not anticipated. They may also struggle to identify areas of their practice that require improvement. Parsons (2005, cited in Coffey, 2014, p. 87) warns that "students who fail a school practicum experience are those who are unable to identify areas of their practice that require improvement, continually repeating their mistakes, irrespective of advice from their supervising teachers." This underscores the importance of RP, which enables PSTs to learn from both their own experiences and, in collaborative settings, from those of their peers (Digumarti, 2003).

At this university in southeastern Mexico, the English Language major prepares students to become foreign language teachers by equipping them with linguistic proficiency and pedagogical competencies. In their final year, students enroll in *Práctica de la enseñanza* (Teaching Practice), where they teach in real classroom contexts for the first time. This practicum serves as their initial immersion into the teaching profession, with one of its key objectives being the enhancement of reflection. Although RP is not widely promoted among practitioners and PSTs, it is considered a central component of teacher training at this institution. Reflection is fostered through written journals and collaborative oral sessions, where students share practicum experiences, support one another, and encourage mutual improvement.

Rationale

Although both individual and collaborative forms of reflection have been promoted in teacher education programs in recent years, there is limited empirical evidence comparing their effectiveness from trainees' perspectives. Existing studies tend to emphasize the benefits of reflective practice in general. Yet, they rarely investigate which form of reflection is perceived as more valuable by novice teachers or which approach aligns better with their preferences. This lack of attention to the trainee perspective creates a gap in understanding how reflective practices can be tailored to support those at the beginning of their professional development. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that reflective practice not only fosters deeper learning but also resonates with the interests and needs of future educators.

The relevance of this study lies in recognizing that language teachers' identity and competence should not be viewed solely as outcomes or products demonstrated through lesson delivery and classroom performance. For this reason, it is vital to trace the micro-genesis of how pre-service language teachers construct their pedagogical identities and evolve through different stages prior to their first formal encounter within a real school context. Moreover, to our knowledge, little empirical research has been carried out on this topic in southeastern Mexico. This study seeks to address this gap by examining reflective practice within the specific context of the present study.

The purpose of this research was to analyze how PSTs in the English Language major engaged in collaborative oral reflection and individual written reflection, as pedagogical

tools for reflective practice. This study addressed the main themes that emerged in their RP, as well as their stated preferences regarding the tools used. Accordingly, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the themes that emerged in PSTs' written and oral reflections?
- Which tools do participants claim to prefer for engaging in reflective practice?

Theoretical lens and literature review

This section introduces Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of mind (SCT) as a theoretical lens that guides this study. Then, we introduce the central concepts discussed in this study: reflection and reflective practice. The final section addresses the reflection tools that practitioners can use to develop critical thinking in their teaching practice, focusing on the two tools used in the current study.

Sociocultural Theory: The central idea

Within the broader theoretical landscape, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamic processes involved in teaching, learning and language teacher development. This notion is based on the principle of social interaction as the prime element for learning and development proposed by SCT. For this to take place, mediation is key, and language is the ultimate and most powerful of all human means of interaction. This perspective foregrounds collaborative dialogue and dialogic thinking as central processes in reflection and critical reflection

A pre-service second-language teacher is not simply learning how to teach a language; rather, they are developing professional identity and competence through participation in communities involving teacher educators, peers, mentors, schools, and learners. From a SCT perspective, preservice teacher development can be represented as:

Social interaction → mediation (reflective practice) → participation → (written individual reflections) internalization → developing professional competence

For example:

Teacher educator
↓
models / questions / provides feedback
↓
Preservice teacher + peers
↓
collaborate, discuss, teach, critically reflect
↓
Develop Teaching practice
↓
Gain experience + conduct reflection + get feedback
↓
ULTIMATELY
↓
Developing teacher identity and competence

Reflection and Reflective Practice

Earlier studies (Lee & Loughran, 2000) found that pre-service teachers (PSTs) in an Australian school-based program often focus on immediate concerns such as pedagogy, classroom management, and student behavior. Contemporary research extends this by emphasizing the importance of emotions and identity in reflection (Merry, 2024; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017).

Reflective teachers, like reflective learners, should go beyond and reflect on what worked or failed. They should also consider why outcomes occurred, how personal experiences shaped behavior, and what impact their decisions had on students and the broader context. More recent research has emphasized the role of emotions in reflection. For instance, MacManus (2011, p. 6) observes that emotions can "act as a catalyst for reflection, be a source of reflection or a by-product," underscoring their significance in shaping reflective processes.

Within the literature on reflection, Reflective practice (RP), is widely recognized as a systematic process of critical inquiry through which teachers analyze their own actions to improve professional performance (Houde, 2018; Ramos, 2015; Ryan, 2015) by recalling or revisiting classroom events that they deem significant, using these insights to improve subsequent lessons (Farrell, 2013), and remaining attentive to the educational context, theory, and methodology (Ramos, 2015). It involves questioning teaching strategies, materials, and classroom interactions to foster growth and adaptability (Matthew et al., 2017; Taibi, 2015). More recent perspectives highlight the role of emotions as catalysts for reflection, shaping both cognitive and affective dimensions of teach learning (Farrell, 2024; MacManus, 2011).

Scholars emphasize that RP is not only about evaluating what worked or failed, but also about interrogating why outcomes occurred and how decisions impacted learners (Moreno & Cal y Mayor, 2016; Ryan, 2015). Furthermore, RP provides opportunities to anticipate possible problems, address uncertainties, and resolve doubts by analyzing one's own teaching performance (Tut Balam & Dzay Chulim, 2020).

As Dzay Chulim et al. (2019) note, reflection has been defined in multiple ways, but most descriptions emphasize critical inquiry into knowledge, beliefs, actions, and the theories underpinning teaching. Some definitions also highlight the importance of analyzing broader context: economic, social, political, ethical, and moral —so that reflection leads to learning, growth, and development through deliberate action.

Beyond this, RP helps teachers capture and interpret learning experiences, reconcile discrepancies between thought and practice, and strengthen effective teaching (Fade, 2013; Zalipour, 2015). Farrell (2024) emphasizes that reflection fosters a culture of self-assessment and continuous examination of teaching practice, thereby promoting lifelong learning and openness to change. The overarching goal of RP is to improve teaching practice and support professional development. Importantly, RP must be systematic, as Moreno and Cal y Mayor (2016) and Larrivee (2008) argue, requiring intentional and methodical engagement.

As suggested in previous paragraphs, a common theme in the literature is the emphasis on RP as a tool for lifelong learning and adaptability, with authors highlighting its role in reconciling discrepancies between theory and practice and promoting openness to change (Farrell, 2024; Larrivee, 2008; Moreno & Cal y Mayor, 2016; Ramos, 2015; Zalipour, 2015). However, points of divergence emerge in the depth of reflection: while some definitions focus narrowly on technical evaluation and immediate classroom concerns (Farrell, 2013; Ryan, 2015), others argue for a more expansive approach that incorporates emotions, identity, and contextual analysis (Dzay Chulim et al., 2019; MacManus, 2011; Ramos, 2015). Earlier studies (e.g., Lee & Loughran, 2000) paid little attention to emotions, whereas more recent work (Farrell, 2024; MacManus, 2011) positions emotions as central to reflective practice. This reflects an evolution in the conceptualization of RP—from a predominantly cognitive and technical exercise to a more holistic practice that integrates affective and contextual dimensions. This study adopts the more recent conceptualization of RP as a holistic practice that incorporates cognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions.

Reflection Tools

As many scholars have noted, RP can be fostered through diverse methods and instruments (e.g., Maarof, 2007; Orlova, 2009; Ward & McCotter, 2004; Xu, 2009). Examples include journals, checklists, rubrics, portfolios, recordings, peer observations, and self-observation. Another valuable approach is collaborative reflection, which typically involves small groups of practitioners sharing experiences and engaging in dialogue to construct reflection collectively (Mann & Walsh, 2013; Schechter, 2020).

For this study, two specific tools were selected to encourage PSTs to engage in RP: written reflections and collaborative oral reflections. The aim was to provide participants with two modes of reflection and examine their preferences and perceptions of each modality

Written reflections, often in the form of journals, encourage systematic documentation and self-analysis (Farrell, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, empirical studies show that written reflections tend to remain descriptive and summative, with limited depth unless guided by structured prompts (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024). Richards and Farrell (2005) highlight that maintaining a journal enables teachers to consciously analyze classroom events. Farrell (2008, p. 3) further explains that “Writing regularly in a teaching journal can help teachers clarify their own thinking, explore their own beliefs and practices, become more aware of their teaching styles, and be better able to monitor their own practices.” Written reflections typically involve describing the key features of a lesson, analyzing whether its objectives were met, whether it was effective, and what aspects may have been lacking (Brunker, 2025). In sum, journal writing helps PSTs generate new ideas, deepen learning, and become more aware of their own development.

The second tool promoted in this research was collaborative group reflection, or collective oral reflection, which provides mutual support among practitioners. These sessions function as communities where teachers share experiences, strategies, and insights, offering constructive feedback to improve practice (Farrell, 2013). Dzay Chulim and Mann (2017) emphasize that dialogue, discussion, and debate enable practitioners to construct understanding. Engaging with peers in reflective discussions provides PSTs with feedback that highlights strengths and areas for improvement (Elhussain & Khojah, 2020). Walsh (2013) similarly observes that “through talk, new realizations and greater insight come about” and that professional dialogue can spark “light bulb moments” (p. 122).

Collaborative oral reflections, thus, create spaces where PSTs exchange knowledge and support one another. Their value lies in fostering a sense of community, consistent with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, which posits that human cognition is shaped differently in social contexts than in isolation. Social interaction influences thought processes, and reflection benefits from these collective practices (Lantolf, 2014). Di Sabato et al. (2024) further highlight that collaborative reflection strengthens community bonds, offering emotional and professional support that reduces feelings of isolation, particularly among novice teachers.

Comparative studies reveal important distinctions between reflection tools. Written reflections often emphasize performance evaluation and technical aspects of teaching, while oral reflections highlight emotions, confidence, and identity formation (Lambert, Sorenson, & Elliot, 2014). Recent research confirms that portfolios and written records strengthen metacognitive awareness and employability competences (Scoupe et al., 2024), but oral reflections provide richer elaboration and collaborative meaning-making (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2024; Walch,

2013). This duality suggests that hybrid approaches may optimize reflective practice by combining the depth of written analysis with the dialogic richness of oral reflection.

Although research on reflection is relatively recent, interest in RP has grown among practitioners in Latin America, especially in Mexico. Studies by Dzay Chulim et al. (2019), García (2015), Godínez (2018), Houde (2018), Núñez Pardo Moreno (2015), Pellerin (2015), Roux, Mora, and Tamez (2012), and Tut Balam and Dzay Chulim (2020) demonstrate this trend. This interest reflects recognition of the need to promote RP so that teachers become familiar with tools and strategies that enhance their reflective capacity and teaching practice. RP thus emerges as a valuable approach to achieving more effective teaching outcomes.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine participants' experiences and perspectives regarding reflective practice. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the aim is to understand participants' experiences and perspectives through their own accounts. Unlike the statistical analysis that quantitative research has, qualitative research consists of collecting data and analyzing it in a nonlinear way by interpreting it (Heigham & Crocker, 2009). Creswell (2007) states that "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices" (p.40), which is the main purpose of the research: to comprehend the experiences, to hear the subjects expressing their ideas and thoughts regarding reflection. As Creswell (2013, p.48) states, this "can only be established by talking directly with people and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature."

As this research is a case study, it is important to understand the implications of this concept. Creswell (2007) states that,

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. For example, several programs (a multi-site study) or a single program (a within-site study) may be selected for study (Creswell, 2007: 73).

As explained in more detail within the following section, the cases in this study were bound by the following:

- Participants were all enrolled within the same context (a public university located in southeastern Mexico);
- Participants were all enrolled in the English Language major offered at the main University campus;
- Participants were all enrolled in the course "Práctica de la Enseñanza" I, in their seventh semester of the educational program.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2012). The sample consisted of 30 pre-service teachers (PSTs), with an average age of 22 years old, from two groups enrolled in the English Language major at a university in southeastern Mexico. All were taking the course *Práctica de la Enseñanza I* during their seventh semester.

By the time they enrolled in this course, the students had already completed most of the required subjects and English proficiency levels within the major, including courses related to the pedagogy of English as a foreign language. The purpose of *Práctica de la Enseñanza I* is to prepare PSTs for their initial teaching practices in diverse educational contexts. As part of the course requirements, PSTs completed six weeks of teaching practice in a school of their choice—kindergarten, elementary, high school, or university. Typically, the teaching practice was carried out in pairs. The PSTs were given the option to select either public or private schools in the city according to their individual interests and circumstances. However, this distinction was not considered in the analysis, as the reflections were examined solely in terms of the themes that emerged, both oral and written, without reference to the specific institutional context. None of the PSTs had any prior teaching experience.

All students agreed to participate in the oral collaborative reflection sessions; however, only seven provided consents for their written reflections to be included in the study. The limited number of written reflections corresponds to those students who completed the required practicum weeks and produced the full set of journal entries. In contrast, most of the group either reported insufficient time to engage in reflective writing or submitted only minimal entries, which did not meet the criteria for inclusion.

Data collection

One of the methods used was the recorded collaborative oral reflections that were guided with the use of a pedagogical strategy known as *questioning,* or what Wright and Bolitho (2007) identify as *Thinking questions.* This strategy is designed to trigger PSTs' reflection on

their teaching practice and help students to share their experiences and feelings. This approach enabled us to explore more about participants' ideas or methods (Fusco, 2012). During the semester, there were two sessions per group, that is a total of 4 recorded sessions. The questions that guided the oral reflection sessions were general open-ended questions, adapted from a previous study conducted by one of the researchers as part of her doctoral thesis research. The following initial questions were addressed: Is there anything you'd like to talk about? How have you been feeling? What did you do that was new or different after your first class? Why? What worked and what didn't? What made you realize that was the case? Many of the follow-up questions depended on what the trainees said, leading to more questions. For instance, could you elaborate on what you just mentioned? Or what do you think caused that? These questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

The second method consisted of written reflections or journals. For each journal entry, PSTs expressed themselves without a rigidly guided structure. Instead, they were asked to reflect on anything they wanted regarding their classes. They were allowed to choose the topic or aspect of their teaching they needed to focus on.

During their practicum experience, participants wrote 6 entries each, one per week of teaching. An additional final written reflection consisted of 2 open-ended questions about the tool for reflection they preferred using and the reason behind that preference. A summary of the methods and procedures followed can be found in Table 1. The methods employed in this study were adapted from a previous investigation conducted by one of the researchers and co-authors of this article. Its validity was established during that initial study through expert review, which included professors of the teaching practicum course, two researchers specializing in reflective practice in Mexico, and the author's thesis advisor.

Table 1. Summary of data collection methods and procedures

Tools used for Reflective Practice (RP)	**Method used for data collection**	**Number of participants**	**Number of times the method was used**	**Total data**
Collaborative oral reflections	Questioning	30 pre-service teachers (PSTs)	2 sessions per group	4 sessions
Written reflections	Journals	7 pre-service teachers (PSTs)	6 entries per participant	42 entries
			1 final reflection	7 entries

Source: Compiled by the authors

Procedure

Data collection began by approaching the practicum groups and inviting them to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was explained as an exploration of the focus of their reflections and their preferences for engaging in written and oral modes of reflective practice. Participation was structured over a six-week practicum period, during which students were asked to contribute both oral collaborative reflection sessions and individual written reflections. Consent was obtained before participation, and students were informed that their contributions would be analyzed thematically, with attention given to the patterns and themes emerging from their reflections rather than to institutional or contextual differences.

The oral sessions were conducted during the regular teaching practice class schedule in a supportive environment designed to encourage spontaneous participation. Initially, PSTs were asked broad, open-ended questions (e.g., *"Tell me about anything you would like to share regarding your teaching experience during the first three weeks of practicum. Something you learned, something you found challenging, etc. Who would like to start?"*). Follow-up questions were then posed to prompt deeper reflection on specific aspects of their classes. Participation in these sessions was voluntary, allowing PSTs to share their reflections freely. In the final session, participants were asked to provide feedback on the usefulness of the reflections.

For written reflections, students were encouraged to write about any concern, critical incident, or issue they wished to express. The number of written reflections corresponded to the number of teaching practicums. Since students were required to teach six classes during the semester, they produced one written reflection for each class.

The research was carried out over the entire seventh semester. Once all data were collected and transcribed, it was analyzed to examine the students' reflective processes in both modalities and to identify the themes and topics they addressed, as explained further in the following section.

The researchers' role was limited to facilitating the reflective process. During the oral sessions, they posed general and follow-up questions to guide discussion, while for the written reflections they provided only minimal instructions, asking participants to document any issues, experiences, or topics they considered relevant, in

addition to the two open-ended questions posed in the final written reflection.

Data analysis

As summarized in Table 1, four group reflection sessions were conducted and recorded, and participants wrote their reflections following 6 of the classes they taught during one semester. The group sessions were transcribed for analysis, as well as the written reflections, and were uploaded to MAXQDA software.

A data-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used for data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method that "organizes and describes a data set in rich detail" while offering a theoretically flexible and accessible approach to qualitative analysis (p. 79). Following their framework, we adopted the six phases they outline (p. 87): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading and initial note-taking; (2) systematic coding of salient features across the dataset; (3) collating codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes in relation to coded extracts and the dataset as a whole, producing a thematic map; (5) defining and naming themes to capture the analytic narrative; and (6) producing the final report, which involves selecting illustrative extracts, conducting the final analysis, and situating findings within the research questions and relevant literature.

At the end of the semester, participants were asked to write down their opinion regarding the usefulness and preference of the two reflective options provided to them during the semester.

MAXQDA was used to organize, code, and compare the data from the written and oral reflections. The names of the participants did not appear in the transcription. Each participant was assigned an identifier prior to uploading the transcripts and written reflections into MAXQDA, so the researchers would not be biased. All this information was analyzed to identify the focus of reflection. The data sets obtained from each of the types of reflection were examined separately followed by a comparative analysis. Thus, an iterative data analysis was used to allow for the codes to emerge from each data set.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, the study employed several methodological strategies, including the following: triangulation across written and oral reflections, systematic coding with MAXQDA to maintain consistency, peer debriefing to validate interpretations and minimize researcher bias, and the use of thick description through verbatim excerpts to ground findings in participants' voices. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously protected by assigning codes (e.g., P1 WR1, ORS1 Turn 11) in place of names, removing identifying details, and storing data securely with restricted access limited to the research team. Reporting emphasized collective themes rather than individual identifiers.

Ethical considerations were central throughout the research process: participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time; informed consent was obtained; and special care was taken to respect emotional well-being, particularly during oral reflections where sensitive experiences were shared. By adhering to these principles, the study upheld professional standards, safeguarded participants' dignity and privacy, and ensured that the findings were both credible and ethically sound.

Findings

Based on the emerging data, the findings in this study will be presented by focusing on the research questions stated earlier in this manuscript.

- What are the themes that emerge in PSTs' written and oral reflections?
- Which tools do participants claim to prefer for engaging in reflective practice?

Emerging themes

There are numerous aspects of teaching practice that pre-service teachers (PSTs) may address in their reflections. Some of these relate to classroom management, discipline, and classroom disorder. A study conducted by Lee and Loughran (2000) with PSTs in a school-based teaching program in Australia revealed that reflections often centered on specific concerns arising during practice. These concerns varied throughout the study but were primarily classified into the following themes: teachers, students, content, context, pedagogy, classroom management, and assessment.

More recent research in education and English Language Teaching (Dzay-Chulim et al., 2021; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Gkonou & Miller, 2023; Marathe & Sen, 2021; McManus, 2011; Méndez López, 2020; Mercer & Gkonou, 2017; Merry, 2024) has placed particular emphasis on the role of emotions, recognizing them as a crucial component of both teaching practice and the reflective process.

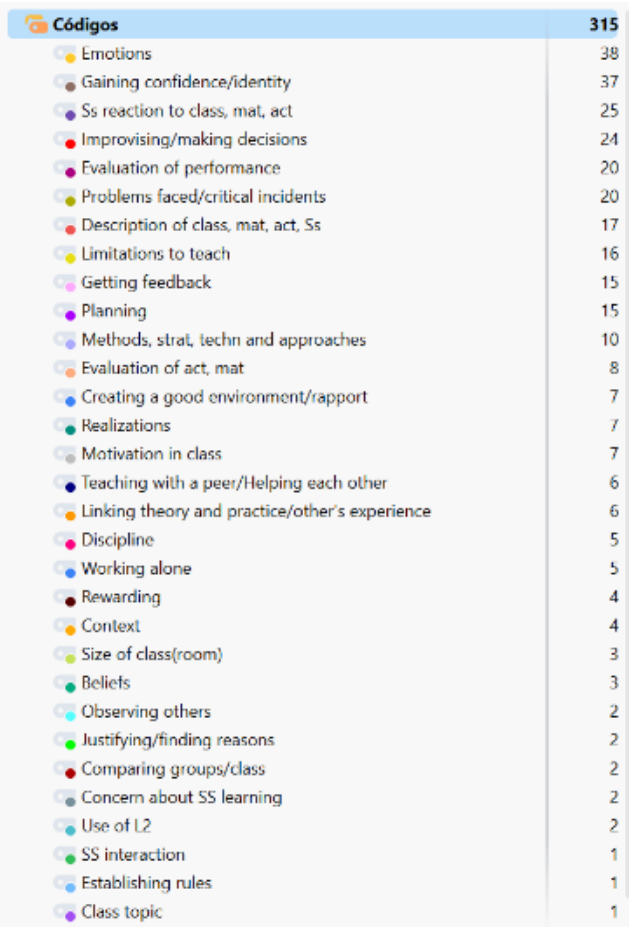
In line with this literature, the codes that emerged from data analysis in PSTs reflections – both oral and written - include a wide variety of topics that include the following: evaluation, emotions, building rapport, lesson planning, motivation, beliefs, among others, as illustrated in the images below:

Fig. 1. Summary of codes (26) emerged from the written reflections (MAXQDA).



Source: Compiled by the authors

Fig. 2. Summary of codes (31) emerged from the Oral or collaborative reflections (MAXQDA).



Source: Compiled by the authors

Under a thematic analysis, it is also important to understand how some themes may be more predominant than others. A frequency count of the codes that emerged from the data allows for this. Table 2 offers a comparison of the top ten codes identified in each type of reflection tool used in the study.

Table 2: Comparison of themes emerged in written and oral reflection.

	Written reflection		**Oral reflection**
1	Evaluation of performance **(101)**		Emotions **(38)**
2	Evaluation of activities materials and the class **(76)**		Gaining confidence/identity **(37)**
3	Improvising and making decisions **(71)**		Students' reactions to class, activities and materials **(25)**
4	Realizations **(62)**		Improvising and making decisions **(24)**
5	Students' reactions to class, activities and materials **(61)**		Evaluation of performance **(20)**
6	Emotions **(61)**		Problems faced/critical incidents **(20)**
7	Description of class, materials, activities, students **(35)**		Description of class, materials, activities, students **(17)**
8	Problems faced/critical incidents **(33)**		Limitations to teach **(16)**
9	Planning **(26)**		Getting feedback **(15)**
10	Justifying/finding reasons **(22)**		Planning **(15)**

Source: Compiled by the authors

From Table 2, we can conclude that, although there were similarities in the topics addressed across both modalities of reflection, the written reflections revealed a stronger emphasis on evaluating personal performance, classroom activities, materials, and overall lesson effectiveness. Participants also highlighted the need to improvise during lessons and paid close attention to how students responded to the activities, materials, and classes.

In contrast, participants in the oral sessions seem to discuss a broader range of topics (see Fig. 1 and Table 2

above), elaborating more fully on their experiences and concerns. This suggests that while written reflections encouraged repeated focus on a set of issues, oral sessions seem to have fostered the opportunity for richer and more detailed explorations of diverse aspects of teaching practice (see Table 1 above). These differences should be interpreted cautiously given the characteristics of the datasets and the differences in the initial prompts.

Emerging themes in written reflections

The following verbatim excerpts highlight how PSTs approached the three most frequent codes found in their written reflections, regarding evaluation of their performance, evaluation of activities, materials, and classes, and improving or making decisions.

Evaluation of performance:

"Also, I have difficulties being clear in my explanations, and sometimes my explanations could be difficult to understand and follow. Especially now that we are treating children and we have to be clearer and more direct as possible." (P1 WR1 L45-47)

"I think that our performance this time was better; we improved the aspects we had told each other that we were not doing so well, and we identified some needs of the students." (P2 WR4 L10-11)

"Our experience this time was really good. I think we have worked well with our students because we feel that there is a good rapport in the class, and I think that has also helped us to have a better performance in our classes because students feel comfortable doing the activities, and we do as well." (P3 WR4 L3-6)

"I remember that at the beginning I was really scared because of my lack of experience, but the practicum helped me to improve my skills as an English language teacher." (P7 WR6 L35-37)

The evaluation of performance illustrates how reflective practice enables teachers to integrate constructive self-criticism with recognition of professional growth. This process encompasses both cognitive dimensions—such as clarity of explanations and identification of student needs—and affective dimensions, including confidence and rapport with learners. Reflection thus extends beyond the identification of weaknesses to include acknowledgment of progress and relational achievements, positioning it as a comprehensive tool for professional development. Nevertheless, while participants reported improvements, their reflections tended to remain descriptive. Greater analytical depth, particularly through connections to pedagogical theories and frameworks, would enhance the reflective process and yield more actionable insights.

Evaluation of activities, materials, and the class:

"At the beginning of the practices, I could see that it was difficult for the students to participate in the activities." (P5 WR3 L5-6)

"The didactic materials were great tools because they were very useful for students to understand the topic, and the activities were more fun. The first material of the class was the lottery, an activity that really had a lot of acceptance by pupils. The second material was two posters with information and examples about the topic that we were learning. These materials made the explanation easier… The only negative factor was that students needed more time to finish the activities correctly, and we had to change the way of checking the answers." (P5 WR3 L19-27)

"About the material, I really prepared it, and it took me days to do it. I consider the material was good not only because of the size, the colors, or the way it was made, but also for its use in the class. It was very useful, and the students could catch the information easily. Some of them said that the material was cool, and it is something good because I realized the students in this group enjoy working with materials, and they love dynamic classes." (P6 WR1 L22-27)

These examples indicate that participants engaged in critical evaluation not only of their teaching performance but also of the activities and materials employed in the classroom. They acknowledged the contribution of instructional resources to student comprehension, engagement, and enjoyment, while simultaneously recognizing practical constraints such as limited time. Reflective practice in this domain enhances teachers' awareness of how materials and activities influence classroom dynamics, prompting them to balance creativity, clarity, and feasibility. As in previous quotes, the reflections tend to remain descriptive.

Improvising and making decisions:

"…This happened because I didn't take into account that they probably have not learnt how to write and read, so I had to change this activity a little by indicating the color orally for each figure in the sheet." (P1 WR1 L25-29)

"This, of course, made us change since the beginning of our first activity. We were going to ask students to make a horseshoe so that we could see everybody well, but we had to ask students to get closer to the front so that we could work better with them, which was good because we could see and listen to them perfectly." (P3 WR1 L11-15)

"In the 'while activity', where we explained the grammar, we had a little problem, because the students were a little bit confused, but we solved it by giving more examples to the students to make them understand the grammar rules of the past simple." (P7 WR3 L19-22)

These reflections highlight improvisation as an essential teaching skill, enabling educators to respond effectively to unforeseen student needs, logistical constraints, and instructional challenges. They underscore the inherently dynamic nature of classroom practice, where adaptability and flexibility often determine the success of learning experiences. Through reflective practice, teachers become more aware of their decision-making processes, gaining insight not only into the adjustments they implemented but also into the rationale behind those choices. This awareness contributes to the development

of professional resilience and adaptability. Nonetheless, the reflections largely emphasize immediate problem-solving rather than deeper pedagogical analysis.

In their written reflections, PSTs concentrated primarily on evaluating and describing their teaching and assessment practices, often questioning whether their actions were appropriate, effective, or showed improvement. They consistently weighed their classroom decisions against students' reactions to lessons, materials, and activities. Notably, many PSTs also described how they managed critical incidents and classroom challenges.

Ur (1999) observes that student teachers frequently focus their reflections on everyday classroom elements, which are fundamental to their professional growth. Other studies suggest that novice teachers often adopt a teacher-centered perspective at the beginning of their practice (Farrell, 2008; Graves, 2009). In this study, the top three themes in written reflections were: Evaluation of own performance, Evaluation of activities, materials, and class, and improvising and decision-making.

Emerging themes in oral reflections

The following verbatim excerpts highlight how PSTs approached the three most frequent codes found in their oral reflections, regarding Emotions, Gaining confidence and building identity, Students' reactions to class, activities, and materials. Interestingly, while student reactions in oral reflections also functioned as a form of evaluation, they were expressed through shared dialogue, allowing PSTs to exchange perspectives and insights rather than relying solely on individual analysis.

Emotions:

"We did feel a little frustrated with ourselves for not finishing the activity. In fact, the regular English teacher was late again. … It felt really nice this time that, as soon as we arrived, some kids said, "The teachers are here!" One of them even asked us, "Teachers, are you going to stay for a long, long time?" And I asked him, "Why? Do you not like me?" And he said, "No, on the contrary, I really like your class; I do want you to keep coming." It really feels so nice when they make comments like that." (ORS1 Turn 11)

"The night before, I remember talking to my mom and telling her, "Mom, I'm really nervous. What if I forget all my English or how to speak? I said, 'Oh no, I'm not going to be able to do this.' The thing is, even so, before going into the class, I was really nervous—I was nervous like, "What's going to happen? Will they even pay attention to us?" This and that, and I was really nervous, but as soon as I stepped into the room, I didn't even have time to be nervous. With them there, I didn't even remember why I was nervous… Oh my gosh, I loved it!" (ORS1 Turn 63)

"The students don't want to talk, they don't want to give it all… it's frustrating! There are two or three who… In fact, one day they made me angry and sad when we told them we'd only be coming on Fridays; one kid said, "Oh, so I won't come on Fridays." Yeah, it made me angry and sad… But, well, everyone else keeps coming to class; in fact, we're already seeing that when we arrive, they ask, "Teacher, what are we doing today?" and I tell them, "Oh, it's going to be easy". (ORS2 Turn 38)

These reflections reveal that teaching is deeply emotional, with frustration, nervousness, joy, and relief all shaping the reflective process. They show how student responses—both positive and negative—directly influence teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness. Reflective practice may also provide a structured way for teachers to process emotions, transform anxiety into confidence, and use student feedback as a source of motivation. The reflections, in these instances, remain focused on personal feelings and immediate classroom experiences.

Gaining confidence and building identity:

"The truth is, I never thought I'd actually enjoy working with them, but when you get there and see how excited they are, it means they liked the activities you planned." (ORS1 Turn 9)

"My colleague and I were talking about what had happened in our class, and we were surprised by our ability to observe things, despite all the difficult circumstances we faced. And we started saying, "But the students who sat on this side are the ones who are at a lower level, while the ones over here are the ones who clearly enjoy participating." And in fact, we started talking about things we never thought we could achieve, like, 'I think we need to do more dynamic activities, because they like them; we have to do this,' so there came a moment when we said, 'No way, we're adults now,' like that moment when we realized, 'We've matured!'." (ORS1 Turn 21)

"It's really great when our peers or classmates also recognize how we're making progress and improving." (ORS2 Turn 71)

These reflections demonstrate that confidence and professional identity are shaped through the interplay of student feedback, self-awareness, and peer recognition. The reflections provided evidence that participants were beginning to recognize their development and perceive themselves as emerging professionals. Confidence-building is not solely an internal process but is reinforced by external validation, which helps novice teachers integrate these experiences into their evolving sense of identity. The theme Gaining Confidence and Building Identity illustrates how reflective practice enables novice teachers to recognize their progress, derive satisfaction from their teaching role, and consolidate professional maturity through both self-reflection and external affirmation.

Students' reactions to class, materials and activities:

"I shared a story that I think really freaked the students out, but since the stories I tell are from my old job as a hotel receptionist and are kind of terrifying, I saw about three students whose eyes went wide like, "What just happened?!"." (ORS1 Turn 3)

> *"We started the class, and oh, we just love the kids—we really do! The kids already love the classic song—I mean, the original song is "Mother Owl," but we changed it to "Mother Fish" because it's easier to pronounce, and they love it. They're already doing the hand motions too, and they know the whole thing by heart…"* (ORS2 Turn 8)

> *"We had to do several activities to teach a class. I mean, our main goal was to teach two lessons in two hours. We thought there would be 18 students, but there ended up being 15 or fewer, and since they're from different majors, some don't know English, so everyone speaks to you in Spanish. Even the people who speak English stand on the right side; those who don't know any stand in the left corner, and it's like, I don't know, that classroom is really divided—it's like nobody gets along with anyone else, and instead of supporting each other, they separate. So we needed to adapt our activities…"* (ORS1 Turn 82)

These reflections illustrate how students' reactions serve as immediate feedback on the effectiveness of teaching strategies, materials, and classroom organization. Positive responses (enthusiasm, memorization, enjoyment) validated PSTs' efforts, while negative or challenging reactions (division, disengagement) highlighted areas requiring adaptation. Emotional and behavioral responses are central to reflective practice, offering teachers both validation of effective strategies and cues for improvement in addressing classroom diversity and cohesion.

Notably, emotions emerged as the predominant theme during the oral or collaborative reflections. Previous research suggests this may be attributed to PSTs feeling more comfortable sharing and, in a sense, venting or releasing emotions in the supportive environment fostered during the sessions (Bassot, 2013; Edge, 2002). Because prompts in the written reflections were not targeted towards emotions, rather were freely addressed, this study cannot assess how written or collaborative reflections may have hindered or provided more opportunity for students to engage in these themes. However, it is evident that the theme emerged in collaborative reflections, suggesting these discussions can be used as an outlet for students to reflect on both positive and negative emotional experiences. Such emotional expression is common among novice teachers, who often report ongoing frustrations, anxieties, and emotional challenges related to classroom development (Gkonou & Miller, 2023; Cano-Vara et al., 2013; Hayes, 2008; Numrich, 1996).

The second major theme in collaborative reflection was gaining confidence and building identity. Over time, as PSTs recognized their progress, received positive feedback, and observed favorable student reactions, they began to see themselves less as student teachers and more as teachers. Akbari (2007, p. 198) notes that "research shows that reflective practice can result in an increase in teacher job satisfaction and an improvement in interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students; it can also improve teachers' sense of self-efficacy." Similarly, Burns and Richards (2009, p. 5) argue that PSTs "negotiate their identity through the unfolding social interaction of a particular situated community, in relation to its specific activities and relationships." Teacher identity, as Fottland (2004) emphasizes, is a continuous process, while Furness (2008, p. 151) adds that it "develops gradually over time as teachers' own education and later teaching experiences begin to accumulate."

With these insights in mind, the next section explores the PSTs' perspectives regarding their preferred reflective tool and the reasons behind their choices. This responds to the second research question.

Preferred tools for reflection

To address the second research question, participants completed a final written reflection concerning their preferred reflective tool. Participants expressed different preferences, with some favoring written reflections and others preferring oral collaborative reflections.

> **Written reflection**
>
> *"I think I preferred the written reflection because I didn't have to share my experience with the rest of my classmates; I didn't feel like doing that, since I felt they were doing their internships much better than I was."*
>
> *"My favorite reflection was the written one, and the reason is that, unlike the oral one, in the written reflection you can include more information and reflect more deeply on all those important aspects related to the class."*
>
> *"Personally, I prefer writing down my thoughts because it gives me more time to think and helps me realize just how much I've accomplished. Plus, I tend to be a bit awkward when it comes to expressing my feelings."*
>
> **Oral reflection**
>
> *"I think group/oral discussions are helpful because they allow me to learn about my classmates' experiences, the situations they encountered, and how they resolved them. I prefer group discussions because that way I can hear what others have to say."*
>
> *"The reflection I enjoyed the most was the group one, because I realized that I wasn't the only one who struggled when it came to teaching a class."*
>
> *"The advantage of oral reflection is that your classmates give you feedback on how to improve certain things."*
>
> *"I prefer group work because it gives me more freedom to express myself."*
>
> *"I prefer group sessions because they're much more dynamic."*
>
> *"I think group reflections are better because you can express yourself a little more fully and really convey the emotions you felt while teaching; however, I feel that participants might forget to mention certain things because they might run out of time. With written reflections, I feel you can thoroughly describe everything that happened during your classes since you have enough time to think;*

however, I think you might not be able to emphasize the points your reflections require. I prefer group reflections."

The preference for one reflective approach over another may depend on a number of factors. Some of the reasons why students prefer written reflection tools over collaborative oral ones – according to their voices – are related to a sense of not having the same success or being as good at their practicum as their peers, having more time to reflect on and process with more depth their thoughts, serve as a reminder of progress, among others. On the other hand, preferences for oral collaborative reflections include social interaction experiences, sense of not being alone or facing a problem in isolation, receiving feedback for improvement from other peers' experiences, and more dynamism.

Under the lens of SCT, which frames this study, these findings have important implications. First, while some individuals claim to learn better through social interactions, others seem to feel more confident and benefit more through a more individual stance to reflective practices. Second, whether reflective practice is individual and written or collaborative and oral, all participants claimed that engaging in RP helped them process, understand, and learn from their teaching practicum. Thus, reflections are important mediational tools that enable pre-service language teachers' pedagogical practice to evolve and improve.

Conclusions

This qualitative case study on pre-service teachers' (PSTs) perspectives regarding written and oral reflective practice reveals distinct patterns in both reflection focus and tool preference during their teaching practicum. Answering the research questions, the analysis demonstrates how different reflective modalities shape what novice educators prioritize, offering valuable insights into professional development in English language teaching. The comparative analysis highlights differences in how participants processed their experiences and the topics they addressed across the two reflective modalities.

In written reflections, the participants tended to address their topics of interest and concern in a repetitive and concise manner, without elaborating on them in great detail. This pattern suggests that instead of engaging in extended analysis or connecting their experiences to broader pedagogical frameworks, they focused on documenting immediate observations and outcomes, which limited the depth of their reflective practice. PSTs demonstrated a dominant focus on evaluating their own teaching performance and classroom effectiveness, often scrutinizing the clarity of their explanations and their ability to meet student needs. This teacher-centered lens emphasized self-assessment and improvement over broader contextual analysis. Alongside performance, participants critically evaluated the materials and activities used in class, acknowledging how instructional resources shaped student engagement and comprehension while balancing creativity with practical constraints like time management. Adaptability also emerged as a recurring theme, with PSTs describing how they improvised and modified lessons in response to unforeseen challenges, reflecting the dynamic nature of classroom practice. While emotions were present in the writings, they were less central than in oral reflections; written accounts tended to frame student reactions as evaluative feedback rather than deeply emotional experiences. Collectively, these themes reveal that written reflections primarily fostered structured self-evaluation, critical analysis of teaching tools, and documentation of adaptive decision-making, with emotions playing a secondary role.

By contrast, oral reflections encouraged spontaneous articulation, enabling freer exploration and analysis of ideas (Godínez, 2018; Houde, 2018; Tut Balam & Dzay Chulim, 2020). Moreover, collaborative oral reflections fostered a sense of community characterized by non-judgmental peer support, which empowered participants and enhanced their motivation to refine teaching practices (Houde, 2018; Tut Balam & Dzay Chulim, 2020). In the oral reflections, emotions emerged as the predominant theme, with PSTs openly expressing frustration, nervousness, joy, and relief in a safe, collaborative environment. This emotional sharing was central to meaning-making. Beyond emotions, oral reflections also played a crucial role in building confidence and shaping professional identity, enabling PSTs to recognize their growth and maturity, often reinforced by peer validation and student feedback. Additionally, student reactions were framed as dialogic evaluation, allowing participants to collectively interpret classroom dynamics and adapt strategies.

Taken together, oral reflections broadened the scope of themes compared to written accounts, emphasizing emotions, identity, and shared experiences. While both modalities addressed practical concerns such as improvisation and student feedback, they diverged in emphasis. This is understandable given the nature of each type of reflection. A final written reflection regarding PSTs' preference for written or oral reflection suggests that their choice of one reflective approach over another may depend on a number of factors. Some of the reasons why students prefer written reflection tools over collaborative oral ones – according to their voices – are related to a sense of not having the same success or being as good at their practicum as their peers, having more time to reflect on and process their thoughts with more depth, serve as a reminder of progress, among others. On the other hand, preferences for oral collaborative reflections include social interaction experiences, sense of not being alone or facing

a problem in isolation, receiving feedback for improvement from other peers' experiences, and more dynamism.

Taken together, these results suggest that a hybrid approach, integrating both written and oral reflections, is important in teaching practicums to consider PSTs' diverse needs and preferences, as well as take advantage of the mutual benefits each reflection tool can provide.

Contribution and Implications for Teacher Education

This study contributes to the existing literature by directly addressing a critical gap in research on reflective practice among pre-service teachers in southeastern Mexico. While prior studies have emphasized the general benefits of reflection, few have empirically compared individual (written) and collaborative (oral) modalities from the perspective of trainees themselves. By analyzing both forms of reflection side by side, this study extends current knowledge by revealing the main themes that emerged from PSTs' reflective practices—written reflections centering on performance, materials, and decision-making, and oral reflections highlighting emotions, confidence, and identity-building. Importantly, the findings clarify that while some prefer written and others prefer oral reflections, RP is a central component for teacher preparation programs, as it allows PSTs to engage in individual reflection while learning from others' experiences. In doing so, this study contributes to understanding how reflective practices may be tailored to the interests and needs of future educators, ensuring that reflection is not only a tool for deeper learning but also a practice that meaningfully supports teachers during their professional development. Limitations of this study include the small sample size and its focus on reflective processes rather than direct impacts on teaching practice. Future research could explore longitudinal effects, digital hybrid approaches or the integration of reflective tools across diverse contexts.

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