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# **Pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' levels of reflection**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to identify the levels of reflection achieved by Chilean pre-service and in-service teachers of English based on their classroom performance. This research was qualitative and employed a case study design. The participants were 121 pre-service teachers and 54 novice in-service teachers from Chile. In order to collect data, a reflection form was completed by them. The results indicate that the participants only show a descriptive level of reflection, which is the most basic. It is suggested that English language teacher education programs promote reflection, at higher levels, in undergraduate courses of didactics and practicum.

**Keywords:** Reflection; EFL; Language teaching; Teacher education.

## Niveles de reflexión de profesores de inglés en formación y en ejercicio profesional

### Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es identificar los niveles de reflexión alcanzados por futuros profesores de inglés y docentes en ejercicio de esta lengua considerando su actuar docente. Esta investigación fue cualitativa y consistió en un estudio de caso. Los participantes fueron 121 estudiantes de pedagogía y 54 docentes noveles en ejercicio chilenos. Para recolectar información, un formulario de reflexión fue completado por ellos. Los resultados indican que los participantes logran sólo un nivel descriptivo de reflexión, el cual es el más básico. Se sugiere que los programas de pedagogía en inglés promuevan la reflexión, basada en altos niveles, en cursos de didáctica y práctica.

**Palabras clave:** Reflexión; Inglés como Lengua Extranjera; Enseñanza de idiomas; Formación de profesores.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is related to pedagogical practices when teachers question the decisions they make (Concha, Hernández, Del Río, Romo & Andrade, 2013). This allows them to improve their pedagogical performance. In relation to this, Guerra (2009) states that reflection allows individuals to perceive teaching as a complex, analytical and investigative process. In this regard, reflection has become one of the greatest goals for pre-service teachers since they need to be prepared to act in a professional area that experiences continuous changes (Sööt &

Viskus, 2014). The fact of providing pedagogy students with a program specially focused on reflection could change the way they face their first classroom experiences (Cote, 2012). Additionally, reflection can make them more responsible and critical about their professional and personal growth.

Encouraging pre-service teachers of English to reflect about their pedagogical experiences provides them with possibilities to articulate both their theoretical and practical knowledge when questioning their classroom performance (Armutcu & Yaman, 2010; Mattheoudakis, 2007). This can help them transform the traditional representations they have about teaching. Along this line, it has been reported that, at the level of English language teachers' university preparation, there are certain aspects that block processes associated with reflection about teaching. In this context, it is stated that EFL pre-service teachers' university training is sometimes incoherent with real-life experiences (Erten, 2015). This fact would prevent them from reflecting about the various challenges presented by educational contexts. Additionally, according to a study conducted by Genç (2016), pre-service teachers of English, when questioning their pedagogical practices, recognize that their weaknesses are associated with classroom management, feedback, time management, and teaching strategies, and emphasize they need more support from their mentor teachers in terms of the analysis and reflection about these constructs.

On the other hand, considering the situation of in-service teachers of English, it has been suggested that reflective practice helps them promote effective pedagogical actions, as well as autonomy and independence in their decision-making processes associated with their pedagogical actions (Noormohammadi, 2014). In this respect, there are studies which have focused on the levels of reflection achieved by in-service teachers of English. Within this framework, it has been reported that those professionals who present higher levels of this competence are able to implement pedagogical practices that promote foreign language learning (Fatemi, Shirvan, Rezvani, 2011; Rahimi & Chabok, 2013). However, it has been revealed that teachers also present low levels of reflection (Khoshsima, Shirnejad, Farokhipour & Rezaei, 2016; Roux, Mora, & Tamez, 2012). This is because they are not familiar with the benefits of reflection or they present weaknesses with respect to deductive reasoning. Similarly, according to the results of a study carried out by Genç (2016), in-service teachers lacked theoretical knowledge regarding how teaching and learning were developed, which may hinder their reflective practices.

In the Chilean context, the Teacher Professional Development System, framed within the Law No. 20,903 (2016), was recently established. From this perspective, it is compulsory for professionals who work in national elementary and secondary schools to take part in teachers' appraisal procedures. Within this framework, teachers must elaborate a portfolio consisting of evidence associated with their reflection on lesson planning processes and class interventions. Based on this, a study conducted by Rodríguez et al. (2016), which analyzed

portfolios prepared by Chilean teachers of all subjects, showed a limited reflection level.

Chilean pre-service teachers of English also demonstrate low levels of reflective practices. This was evidenced by the results of a national diagnostic examination for 4<sup>th</sup>-year students of pedagogy programs (CPEIP, 2018). They achieved low levels regarding the test dimension 'the teaching profession and the Chilean educational system', which focuses on reflecting about both their teaching practices and insertion in the educational system. The limitations that pre-service and in-service teachers of English have in terms of reflection may block their decision-making processes when teaching, resulting in ineffective English language teaching practices.

This investigation aimed at answering two research questions:

- 1) What are the levels of reflection achieved by pre-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson?
- 2) What are the levels of reflection achieved by in-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson?

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Wallace (2002), pre-service teachers manage to develop professional competence by reflecting about 'received

knowledge' (knowledge about facts, theories, among others, which are associated with the study of a certain profession) and 'experiential knowledge' (knowledge derived from the teaching experience) in the light of practice. In this respect, Dewey (1933, as cited by Grant & Zeichner, 1984) argues that reflection is a careful consideration of any belief or knowledge considering the bases that support it and its possible conclusions. Additionally, Dewey (1933, as cited by Grant & Zeichner, 1984) makes an important distinction between actions that are reflective and those that are a routine. From this view, routine action is a behavior guided by impulse, tradition, and authority. On the other hand, reflective action involves reflecting actively, persistently and carefully about each belief or practice by facing and solving problems.

Schön (1983) distinguishes two types of reflection: reflection in action and reflection on action. Regarding reflection in action, individuals stop their performance to think about the actions they have implemented and how their own knowledge may have contributed to an unexpected result. Acosta (2010), based on Schön's work, refers to reflection in action as thinking about what is done while acting, which is used by professionals in situations of uncertainty and conflict. Reflection in action can also be a response to a surprise element, in which one can reflect without interrupting the action.

The second type of reflection mentioned by Schön (1983), reflection on action, is performed after the action, analyzing the characteristics and processes of the action made. This type of



reflection is an essential component for professionals' lifelong learning process. In reflection on action, knowledge is used to analyze and evaluate what has been done. In this sense, individuals reflect about what has been done to discover how knowledge could have contributed to an unexpected result. From this perspective, human beings start reflecting about the action once it is finished or they stop their performance to analyze the situation (Acosta, 2010).

In the context of reflection, Farrell (2015) identifies three levels of reflection: descriptive, conceptual or comparative, and critical. The descriptive level is related to describing a situation, problem or an interesting phenomenon that an individual is experiencing. The problem can be explicit; for example, when the teacher knows that the curriculum is not working with the students and needs to make a change, or it can be implicit when the teacher feels that something is not working, but he/she does not know why (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Once the problem has been defined or established, the teacher begins to reflect on it, making a transition from the descriptive level to the conceptual level.

The conceptual or comparative level of reflection involves thinking about the problem from different perspectives and referring to values and beliefs (Farrell, 2015). In this level, the teacher asks why he/she made certain decisions (Farrell, 2004). Then, to answer this question, the teacher must compare his/her actions with those of others. In the school context, the perspectives of other teachers, students, the principal, among others, can be considered. Richards and

Lockhart (2007) emphasize that analyzing a situation from different perspectives allows exploring the limitations regarding teachers' own paradigms.

In terms of the critical level of reflection suggested by Farrell (2015), the teacher, after reflecting and considering all perspectives, must judge, decide or simply incorporate the different views discovered in a new and better understanding of the problem (Jay & Johnson, 2002). With regard to this, Farrell (2015) argues that a situation should be examined from a perspective beyond school, reflecting on social, political, ethical and moral aspects involved in it. By considering and reflecting on all perspectives, the teacher can perceive him/herself as an agent of change who is not only capable of understanding the reason of a situation, but also of working to improve it (Jay & Johnson, 2002).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative. The type of research involves a case study of descriptive nature, which seeks to identify the levels of reflection, associated with the implementation of a lesson, evidenced by a group of 5<sup>th</sup>-year Chilean pre-service teachers enrolled in English language teacher training programs and a group of Chilean novice in-service teachers of English who taught this subject in high schools.

### **3.1. Participants**

Two groups of subjects were invited to participate voluntarily in this investigation. First, 121 5<sup>th</sup>-year pre-service teachers of English enrolled in English language pedagogy programs from three Chilean universities: one located in the southern zone, one from the central zone and one from the northern zone. They were carrying out their final pedagogical practicum in different high schools located in southern, central, and northern Chile. Their ages fluctuated between 22 and 25 years.

The second group of participants included 54 novice in-service teachers of English language. They had graduated from three Chilean universities: one located in the southern zone, one in the central zone, and another in the northern zone of the country. All of them had around two or three years of experience working as teachers in different schools located in southern, central, and northern Chile. Their ages fluctuated between 25 and 30 years.

Considering the characteristics of the three institutions of higher education to which the study subjects were associated, these were traditional universities part of the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities. The three institutions have offered the English language teacher training program for around fifty years. In this regard, the duration of this program is five years in all the universities.

In the case of the three English language teacher training programs, their curriculum includes, from the first to the ninth semester, subjects focused on the development of the communicative competence in English so that pre-service teachers achieve, progressively, an advanced level of this language. Likewise, the pre-service EFL teachers carry out activities of early and progressive pedagogical practicum from the second year of preparation. From the third year, they must design and implement lessons plans to teach receptive and productive language skills in English (reading, listening, writing, and speaking). Regarding the practicum courses offered in the three higher education institutions, the pre-service teachers are encouraged to reflect about their professional performance.

### **3.2. Data collection techniques**

As the instrument to collect data, a reflection form was used (see Appendix 1) and was completed by all the participants. The purpose of this instrument was to collect information about a pedagogical problem identified by the pre-service and the novice in-service teachers regarding the implementation of a lesson plan to teach English. This was designed by the researchers and validated by two professors with expertise in EFL pre-service teacher education. This data collection technique is coherent with documentary analysis since it involves the examination of previously written documents which cover a variety of characteristics (Bisquerra, 2009).

The research subjects completed the reflection form in their mother tongue (Spanish) in order to facilitate the participants' provision of meaningful information concerning the reflection about their classroom implemented actions. Afterward, due to publication purposes, the subjects' answers were translated into English.

### **3.3. Data analysis technique**

To analyze the instruments completed by the participants, content analysis was used by means of the ATLAS.ti software. By using this computer program, the data was coded in order to identify textual segments which were linked to the research objectives. The process of coding was based on the taxonomy of reflection levels suggested by Farrell (2015). This includes the following levels: descriptive, conceptual or comparative, and critical.

Consequently, the codes were categorized by considering two units of analysis: 1) Levels of reflection achieved by pre-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson, and 2) Levels of reflection achieved by in-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson. Afterward, conceptual networks were created to illustrate the qualitative findings of each category. This was carried out by establishing meaning relationships, based on the participants' oral discourse, among the recognized codes.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Level of reflection achieved by pre-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson

The category *level of reflection achieved by pre-service EFL teachers* when teaching an English language lesson (see Figure 1) is associated with the subcategory of *descriptive level*, which is related to constructs of *teaching* and *behavior*.

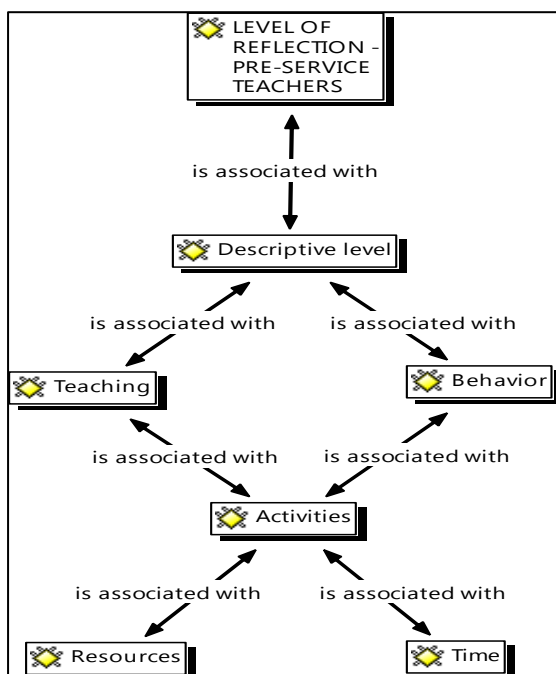


Figure 1. Level of reflection achieved by pre-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson

In the case of the pre-service teachers of English carrying out their professional practicum, they evidenced a *descriptive level of reflection* in their written discourse. In this sense, they identify and describe problems associated with their performance in the school context. These problems are related to some elements of *teaching* and the *behavior* of students in classes. Regarding the elements of *teaching*, the participants focus, first, on the implementation of the *activities* formulated in their lesson plans. In this respect, most of them declare having difficulties when implementing tasks which do not follow, rigidly, the structure of their plans. This view is illustrated in the following segment of written discourse: 'My lesson did not have a structure and I forgot to implement an activity in which the students had to use their notebooks. In my future implementations, I must follow an order or specific steps to carry out all the activities of my lesson plan' (PST69 [24:24]). Similarly, another participant made the following comment: 'The activities that I considered did not have a defined order, so it was difficult for me to carry them out. It is necessary to bear in mind that lessons must integrate a clear beginning, development and closing' (PST08 [54:54]).

One of the elements that hinders the implementation of the *activities* included in pre-service teachers' lesson plans is the effective use of *resources*. This perspective is pointed out by one of the research subjects in the following extract: 'I had problems when showing a video at the beginning of the lesson since the multimedia projector did not work. The students got a little bit distracted. This also prevented me from implementing the starting activity correctly' (PST17 [18:18]).

Additionally, another pre-service teacher indicated: ‘It was complex to implement the activity to present keywords that was included in the lesson plan. I had to paste some images on the board, but these fell to the floor constantly. Students could have gotten confused’ (PST92 [33:33]).

On the other hand, and according to the participants, the implementation of the *activities* is also affected by *time* management. Within this framework, the pre-service teachers of English refer to problems experienced in their teaching performance which relate to the activities’ length they estimated in their lesson plans. An example of this is stated in the next quotation: ‘In some activities, the students took a little more time than I had estimated in the lesson plan. I must improve the control of the allocated time for each activity. I could use a clock’ (PST04 [39:39]). In the same way, another participant expresses the following problem: ‘When I was implementing the lesson, I realized that we would not be able to carry out the final activity integrated into the lesson plan. That is why I should have modified it, allocating less time for each task’ (PST 18 [19:19]).

As previously indicated, pre-service teachers’ reflection, at a *descriptive level*, also refers to the *behavior* of students in the school system. According to the written discourse of the research subjects, it was identified that learners’ *behavior* is a relevant aspect in their classroom interventions. From this view, pre-service teachers state that students misbehave as a result of problems they experience when implementing some *activities*. This is illustrated the following excerpt: ‘I lost the control of the class in some moments. The students got out of control easily because they finished the activities quickly’ (PST20 [21:21]). Besides,



another participant states that: ‘The students presented discipline problems and those related to concentration. They did not carry out the activities in an appropriate way. This was evidenced in their results’ (PST70 [29:29]).

#### 4.2. Level of reflection achieved by in-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson

The category *level of reflection achieved by in-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson* is associated with the subcategory of *descriptive level* (see Figure 2).

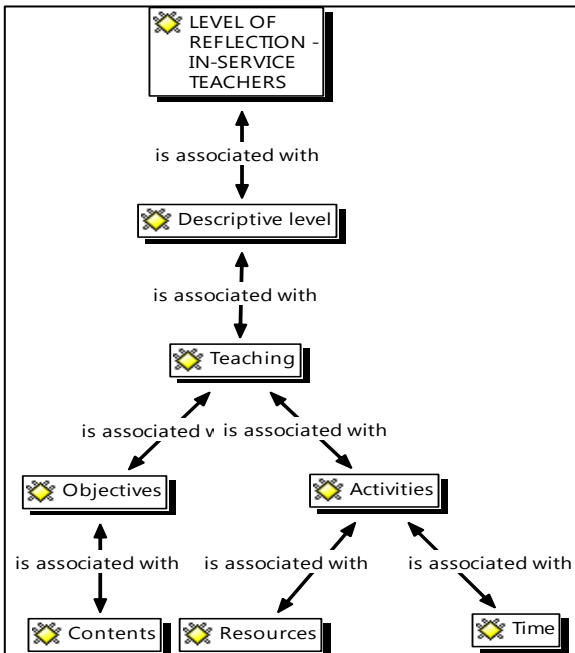


Figure 2. Level of reflection achieved by in-service EFL teachers when teaching an English language lesson

When requesting in-service teachers of English to focus on a problem of one classroom implementation, most of them demonstrate a *descriptive level of reflection*. This is connected, essentially, to *teaching*. In this context, they indicate having experienced problems considering the class *objectives*. With regard to this, the participants claim to have had difficulties in getting the students to meet the learning goals associated with the session, which corresponded, essentially, to *linguistic contents*, such as *grammar* and *vocabulary* of the English language. This is evidenced in the following segment of written discourse: ‘During the class, the students presented weaknesses related to the objective of the class that was to learn the rules of reported speech. I expected them to fulfill this goal in the end, but they were unable to understand’ (IST08 [50:50]). In the same way, another research subject reported having reflected about a similar problem: ‘One of the difficulties I had in the class was that the students could not learn all the vocabulary in English that was related to the learning objective. This could have been resolved by teaching these words beforehand’ (IST11 [55:55]).

On the other hand, the *descriptive level* of reflection achieved by the in-service teachers of English is also focused on the *contents* of the lesson. In this context, similar to the aforementioned considering *objectives*, the participants usually referred to the teaching of *linguistic contents*, which are related to the grammar and vocabulary of the English language. Regarding this, one of the research subjects points out the following: ‘The greatest difficulty when planning was related to the content I had to teach. As the lesson was focused on grammar,

the students found the class unattractive and repetitive. They had studied that content before' (IST06 [36:36]). Similarly, another participant states: 'The students had complications when understanding the content of the lesson that was the simple past tense and the continuous past tense. I could have provided more examples or asked them to reproduce more examples' (IST54 [31:31]).

The in-service teachers of English also show problems associated with *activities*. Along this line, the reflective process of these participants focuses on difficulties related to the way in which the planned tasks are implemented. Regarding this point, one of the in-service teachers declared: 'I did not give feedback to the students when performing my lesson. Because of this, I only told them the correct answers for some activities. Feedback must be considered in the structure of the lesson plan' (IST60 [39:39]). From a similar point of view, another research subject refers to the characteristics of the implemented activities: 'The scarce variety of activities was an inconvenience. Students may have become bored' (IST17 [31:31]).

Regarding *activities*, the in-service teachers achieved a *descriptive level* when they reflected on *resources* used when carrying out different tasks. In this sense, these participants reported critical incidents associated with the effective use of teaching materials when implementing their lesson plans. This is declared by one of the in-service teachers in the following excerpt: 'The overhead projector did not work properly. Someone helped me fix it while the students carried out other activities which did not require the use of this. I should have

checked if all technology materials were correctly working beforehand' (IST13 [44:44]). Similarly, another in-service teacher commented: 'I had problems with the coursebook since it was not attractive for the students. It was not coherent with the curriculum objectives, either. I will have to look for a more effective material to teach' (IST46 [19:19]).

The in-service teachers of English also reflected on the use of *time* when following the organization of *activities* included in the designed plan. This vision is illustrated as follows: 'I did not consider enough time to implement all the activities with its corresponding feedback. This caused that only some activities were reviewed with the students' (IST01 [39:39]). A similar perspective is pointed out by another research subject: 'Time is my problem. Some students take longer to carry out the activities. It is difficult for me to implement the following ones because I do not want them to fall behind, so I cannot close the lesson' (IST17 [32:32]).

## **5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The findings of this study show that both EFL pre-service and in-service teachers achieve a descriptive level of reflection. This is evidenced when the participants report the incidents experienced in their classroom interventions. As it is suggested by Farrell (2015), the previous is the first and most basic level of reflection. From this

perspective, a descriptive reflection is carried out by teachers in order to answer the questions “what do I do?” and “how do I do it” when analyzing their teaching practices. Farrell (2015) also declares that critical reflection, which is the third level, is considered the ideal reflective performance for a teacher. In this, professionals of education examine the context outside their actions by “reflecting on the social, political, ethical, and moral aspects of practice” (Farrell, 2015, p. 10).

Regarding the situation of pre-service teachers of English in this study, their descriptive level of reflection is mainly centered on teaching (associated with activities, resources and time) and students' behavior. In this sense, it can be noticed that their reflective practices are not focused on how a foreign language is learned, which is an alarming fact. These results are coherent with the findings of other studies in which trainee teachers also reach basic levels of this competence (Cote, 2012; Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati & Sukyadi, 2017). The authors of these studies agree on the point that the participating pre-service teachers need more academic scaffolding during their professional preparation in terms of reflective practices.

On the other hand, the descriptive level of reflection demonstrated by English language in-service teachers is based on objectives, contents, activities, resources and time. It has been stated that those professionals of education, whose reflective practices are limited, may not be conscious about how powerful reflection can be in order to perform any pedagogical activity (Alberca La Torre & Frisancho, 2011). In this sense, teachers' professional motivation and

fear of facing risks may block their competence of reflection (Zeichner & Wray, 2001).

In spite of the low level of reflection achieved by in-service teachers, results show that they tend to reflect more on language learning than the pre-service teachers participating in this study. Within this framework, it is relevant to indicate that the in-service teachers' process of reflection is focused on learning objectives and contents which are mainly associated with grammar and vocabulary. This may be due to the traditional beliefs on language teaching these participants have. Some authors state that pedagogical beliefs are subjective representations about teaching and learning which guide teachers' actions (Borg, 2006; Richards & Lockhart, 2007). This fact is related to the findings of some studies on English language teaching (Mattheoudakis, 2007; Özmen, 2012; Tagle et al., 2017). These studies report that the research subjects' traditional beliefs, which are linked with form-focused approaches or methods to language teaching, directly translate into equivalent pedagogical actions. As their main aim is language accuracy rather than fluency, this type of classroom performance hinders communicative language teaching practices. For this reason, in order to replace their traditional beliefs with communicative-oriented ones, individuals should develop critical reflection centered on the development of receptive and productive language skills (see; for example, Ho, 2009; Yang, 2009).

Pre-service teacher education programs should include reflective practices in those courses associated with language teaching

didactics and practicum. In these, pre-service teachers should learn how to examine the impact of their teaching practices on students' English language learning based on comparative and critical types of reflection. To achieve this, individuals should be encouraged to reflect on their critical incidents by considering different perspectives, such as theoretical, socio-political, moral, and ethical views (Farrell, 2015). The aim of this training would be to help pre-service teachers become reflective professionals after they graduate, being able to implement this competence in their lifelong career.

In order to promote reflective practices in teacher education programs, some formative models can be considered. In this context, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) propose an ALACT model of reflection. The acronym corresponds to five phases associated with some words in English (Action, Looking back on action, Awareness of essentials aspects, Creating alternative method of actions and Trial). In the model's phase 1, a problematic situation is identified; in phase 2, pre-service teachers consciously reflect on the tensions related to their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, and actions, and their students' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, and actions. In phase 3, pre-service teachers become aware of the necessary qualities to achieve a desired situation and to overcome the weaknesses they refer to. In phase 4, pre-service teachers focus on how to mobilize these necessary qualities at the performance level and, in phase 5, they act. Along the same line, Korthagen (2010) suggests that teachers can reflect on their performance context (question 'what am I facing?'), behavior (question 'what do I do?'), competence (question 'what am I

competent at?'), beliefs (question 'what do I believe in?'), identity (question 'who am I?'), and mission (question 'what inspires me?').

Some studies report the implementation of the ALACT model of reflection to support the preparation of pre-service teachers. With regard to this, the findings of an investigation conducted by Shooshtari, Razavipur and Takrimi (2017) indicate that, by means of this model, pre-service teachers have the possibility to examine their beliefs in formative activities, such as individual and collective reflection on their practicums, roundtable sessions or re-planning lessons. In this sense, research subjects declare that these tasks are helpful for them to cope with stress in their professional preparation. Moreover, Salomão (2011) expresses that implementing an intervention based on this model of reflection reinforces mentor teachers' scaffolding in practicum experiences. According to Salomão (2011, p. 154), the formative intervention reported in her study "provided scaffold for learning by means of resolving procedural, technical, pedagogical and organizational problems that arose from an authentic teaching situation, without being directive or having a pre-established syllabus in mind" (Salomão, p. 154).

Farell (2015) also presents a descriptive framework of five levels (which are articulated with each other) for the development of foreign language teachers' reflective practice. The first level corresponds to the 'philosophy', which is associated with professional identity ('who I am?', it is related to how to teach). The second level refers to 'principles' and is articulated with the assumptions, beliefs,



and conceptions that the professional has about teaching and learning. The third level refers to the 'theory' (theoretical and experiential knowledge) that a teacher can assume for future courses of action. The fourth level refers to 'practice', which involves the performance and the reflection in action or on action. The fifth level, 'beyond practice', refers to the process of understanding the moral, political and social effects of the practice.

Implementing successful reflective models in teacher education programs may depend on the consideration of certain components. In this context, Korthagen (2010) suggests that is necessary to carry out specific formative actions, such as offering pre-service teachers possibilities to reflect on their own classroom performances and based on their own concerns; integrating irrational origins of behavior; considering a systematic and explicit structure; introducing the structure progressively; stimulating meta-reflection, and encouraging reflective learning among peers.

The basis of EFL pre-service and in-service teachers' reflective practices should be the theoretical and practical antecedents related to communicative language teaching. In this sense, action research is also considered as way of reflecting on language teaching and learning (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2015). This type of study is conducted by professionals of education in order to improve their pedagogical actions or certain weaknesses they experience in their own classrooms (Burns, 2010). From this view, action research is carried out by following an iterative cycle consisting of planning, action,

observation, and reflection. In this sense, teacher researchers enhance their pedagogical actions considering evidences and the theory which informs their teaching practices (Latorre, 2005).

Some studies conducted by teacher researchers in the area of EFL have helped them reflect on the development of receptive and productive language skills (see, for example, Arias, 2017; Briesmaster & Etchegaray, 2017). By doing this, these teachers have had the possibility to critically examine their language teaching practices. Consequently, the analysis of their findings has allowed these professionals to think of alternative ways to teach language skills in English from a functional and communicative perspective.

There is evidence that university courses based on action research have been considered for the preparation of pre-service teachers of English (Marlina, Ramdani & Sri, 2016; Martin, 2016). From this view, the findings of a study state that pre-service EFL teachers declare that “research engagement in the practicum helped them to look at classroom events objectively, become more reflective and self-confident and realize that teaching is a continuous process of questioning and analyzing for the good of students and self-improvement” (Akyel, 2015, p. 11). Having said this, action research could be included in those courses related to didactics of English language teaching and practicum. Within this framework, the focus of the pre-service EFL teachers’ reflection should prioritize the way they teach receptive and productive language skills. Therefore, by means of action research, university professors and mentors should teach them

how to examine their weaknesses on language teaching and reflect, to solve those incidents, by considering higher levels of reflection, such as the conceptual and critical suggested by Farrell (2015).

Regarding the situation of in-service teachers, the Law No. 20,903 (2016), which is related to the Teacher Professional Development System, creates the orientation and mentoring system. Its purpose is to support those teachers who start their professional career in Chilean public and subsidized schools which are part of the Teacher Professional Development System. In order to make this program effective for language teachers, there should be mentors who facilitate the professionals' reflection on their practices regarding communicative language teaching (Smith & Lewis, 2015). This could also be done by means of action research including the iterative cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The answers provided by both pre-service and novice teachers of English participating in this study demonstrate that they just achieve a descriptive level of reflection. Consequently, they are unable to interpret classroom critical incidents from perspectives beyond their teaching practice. As the research subjects present a reflective performance at a low level, they may experience limitations when

making the most appropriate decisions associated with their lesson planning and classroom intervention actions.

The findings of this research also show that the in-service EFL teachers reflect more on language learning than the pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, their reflective practices are focused on traditional beliefs on foreign language learning and teaching which may impede the implementation of communicative practices. For this reason, it is suggested that English language pedagogy programs empower pre-service teachers to question the effectiveness of their pedagogical performance based on the principles of communicative language teaching and learning. This should consider higher levels of reflection, such as those conceptual and comparative suggested in this paper.

As mentioned earlier in this article, in order to encourage pre-service EFL teachers to be reflective practitioners, opportunities of reflection should be included in the English language teacher education programs' curriculum in those courses related to didactics and practicum. In these, pre-service teachers should receive training and scaffolding in terms of effective reflection practices which enhance their professional development and communicative language teaching practices. This could be implemented by considering some models of reflection (for example, Farrell, 2015 or Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005) or action research.

Training pre-service teachers to become reflective practitioners will be beneficial for their lifelong career after they graduate from university. In this sense, by constantly helping them develop conceptual and critical reflection, they will get used to questioning the impact of their teaching practices by considering theoretical and practical perspectives beyond their performance. Within this framework, pre-service teachers' reflection should be focused on English language teaching and learning so that they can be able to look for ways to improve their performance when they experience limitations or critical incidents.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

Dear participant,

This activity requires that you remember and report a problem related to the implementation of a lesson plan. We expect that you share this with us in a detailed and sincere way. To do this, please answer the following questions.

### **Presentation of the case:**

What were the learning objectives and contents of the lesson plan?

What were the lesson plan activities, ways of assessment, and resources?

### **Problems:**

What difficulties did you experience when planning and implementing this lesson? How did you solve them?

Could these difficulties have been resolved differently? How?

### **Personal learning:**

What did you learn from this lesson plan and its classroom implementation? Why?



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## **opción**

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