APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

An investigation into EFL learners’ reflection in writing and the inhibitors to their reflection

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Abstract: The present study explored Iranian EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners’ reflective writing and the inhibitors which are a deterrent to write reflectively. The participants consisted of both students and teachers. A researcher-made questionnaire probed the EFL learners’ reflection in writing. The essays produced by the learners were also evaluated to consolidate the findings of the survey. In the second phase of the study, we examined both students’ and teachers’ perceptions about the inhibitors of reflection in EFL writing. To do so, a semi-structured interview was conducted for the students and the themes extracted from the essays were categorized. Afterward, the teachers were given a researcher-made survey of the inhibitors to EFL students’ reflective writing questionnaire (IRWQ). The findings revealed that Iranian EFL writers have noticeable weaknesses in implementing higher-order thinking while writing and they are mostly involved in lower levels of reflection such as habitual actions and understanding. Regarding the reasons, as the results of the interview revealed, students believed that, among other factors, low proficiency is the most important inhibitor while their teachers considered teachers’ lack of training, students’ lack of adequate foreign language (FL) proficiency, and lack of support from the side of teachers as the most influential factors that limit students to write reflectively.

Subjects: Educational Psychology; Writing; Language & Education

Keywords: EFL learners; inhibitors; reflection; reflective learning; writing

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

To write an articulate and coherent piece of writing, people need to reflect upon different aspects of their texts. For foreign language (FL) learners, in particular, writing is a much more demanding skill to master and thus more attention should be paid to reflective practice in language classrooms. To do so, researchers and teachers should first find out the extent to which FL students write reflectively. The next step, which has received scant attention so far, should be a thorough investigation into the inhibitors to reflective writing from both students’ and teachers’ viewpoints. Having this in mind, the researchers made an attempt to delve into the aforementioned issue and found that, among other factors, low language proficiency and insufficient teacher training are the most prominent factors in this regard.
1. Introduction

The concept of reflection has drawn considerable attention to itself in the last decade. The idea was pioneered by Dewey (1933) when he defined reflective thinking as “an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it and the conclusion to which it tends” (p. 9). In fact, Dewey (1933) believed that reflective thinking is a particular kind of problem-solving that involves a careful linking and ordering of ideas (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Built upon Dewey’s experiential learning, Kolb (see Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001) holds that reflection is necessary since it transmits the learned material from concrete experience to a conceptual framework. Likewise, reflective learning had a pivotal role in Mezirow’s (2009) transformative learning theory. For Mezirow, apart from gaining new knowledge, having a new perspective was important in the process of reflection. That is why he introduced the term transformative learning. He defined transformative learning as the “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (p.58) For Mezirow (1995), critical reflection is of a great importance in transformative learning theory and the only type of reflection is critical reflection. He made a distinction between reflective and non-reflective action. For him, non-reflection action is “all human action that is habitual or thoughtful without reflection” (Lundgren & Poell, 2016, p.4). All other action is reflective which “is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 104). He distinguished two types of reflection; namely, straightforward reflection and critical reflection. While straightforward reflection is the act of “intentional assessment” (p. 44) of one’s actions, critical reflection refers to both the examination of the nature and consequence of one’s actions and at the same time the circumstances which resulted in the action.

Among various theoretical frameworks proposed for the concept of reflection in the literature (e.g. Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983), the present study draws on Kember’s et al. exposition of reflection. Drawing mainly on Mezirow’s influential work, Kember et al. (2000) developed a four-layer framework of reflection (Habitual action/non-reflection, Understanding, Reflection, Critical Reflection). As they hold, habitual action/non-reflection refers to the state at which reflection or understanding does not take place. In the second stage which is understanding, attention to meaning starts. This level features limited thinking and experience. Reflection is a stage where personal knowledge comes into play. At this level, the new experience is connected to one’s personal experiences. As the highest level which is critical reflection, one’s beliefs or the concepts she holds is reconstructed.

The paradigm shift toward progressive education which was the cradle of reflective thinking gave shape to the idea of problem-solving and process-oriented writing. In fact, the writing skill was no longer seen as a linear task and the importance of strategy training received more attention. Furthermore, the process of creating meaning became much more important. The shift in composition theory considered writing as a recursive and non-linear process rather than a linear one. At the same time, under the influence of cognitive psychology, it was conceived that the more one is equipped with higher-order processing skill, the more he will be capable of acting successfully in problem-solving situations. This led to alternative models of writing, particularly process-based ones. Process-oriented theories of writing consider writing as a problem-solving activity and added new terms to writing research such as sharing, planning, monitoring, evaluating and revising. From the new perspective, FL teachers were required to be responsible to develop “writers’ intramental processes, particularly cognitive and higher-order thinking which in turn results in creating, revising, and correcting their texts independently” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 6). In such a context, high levels of consciousness and reflection were required from the side of the writers to get involved in the problem-solving act.

1.1. Reflection and FL writing in the Iranian context

There are experts (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2003) who argue that higher-order thinking in general and critical thinking, in particular, are not culture-bound and can be found in all cultures. In this regard, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) holds, critical thinking can be found among all people to some degree. On the other side of the argument, there is a claim that the idea of reflection is culture-specific and is, in fact, the property of Western culture (e.g., McGuire, 2007). In Asian countries, in
contrast, it is believed that the traditional view regarding teaching and learning is prevalent (Park, Kim, Chiang, & Ju, 2010). In addition, Sangani and Stelma (2012, p.116) numbered five features that shape reflective teacher development in developing countries. In a top-down system of education, the absence of questioning, challenging work conditions, lack of pedagogical knowledge, and the degree of support in favor of the reflective practice are abundant. In such a context, as Chittooran (2015, p.79) puts it, “knowledge is perceived as simple and certain rather than complex and uncertain”. Therefore, expecting schools and universities to cultivate higher-order thinking and critical thinking seems pretty far-fetched (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Davies, 2013).

It has been argued that overwhelmed with rote learning, Asian students do not take part in conversations, seldom question the authority, and have less inclination to engage in problem-solving activities (Rear, 2017). Likewise, in Iran, it seems that the ‘sociopolitical norms’ and ‘social conformity’ have acted as barriers to the cultivation of higher-order thinking (Enayat, Davoudi, & Dabbagh, 2015). Moreover, prevalent prescribed methods and approaches in Iran have caused EFL learners’ target needs and interests to be overlooked (Atai & Mazlum, 2013) and there is a tendency toward teacher-oriented approaches to learning. What deteriorates the situation is that teachers are knowingly or unknowingly reluctant to give up their authority (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2012). There are challenges, as Enayat et al. (2015) state, which bar EFL teachers from applying reflective practice and "Iranian English-as-a-foreign-language … writing teachers' reflective practice is shaped both by influences that apply more generally across contexts and by influences that may be more particular to their Iranian context" (p.113–114).

In Iranian ELT curriculum, language knowledge has been limited to “knowing the vocabularies, the ability to read and translate the texts, and the knowledge of grammatical rules and structures” (Safari & Rashidi, 2015, p.16). Of all skills, reading has been poetized by the curriculum in the Iranian public schools leaving writing skill unprivileged (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). Even private language institutes that may use interactive activities have less emphasis on the skill. This instructional system is rooted in the traditional approach of product-oriented writing. Moreover, many teachers in the existing system think that grammar and vocabulary training would be enough for writing instruction and thus the prominent role of processes in writing has been overlooked in EFL courses. This has led to a lack or little awareness of the cognitive complexities in the processes of constructing a text, particularly in the FL contexts. Accordingly, writing is not considered as a problem-solving task and students suffice to a mere description of people and events just to pass the course. In such a context, reflectivity may come to aid.

1.2. Research purposes and questions
In recent decades, research on reflective practice has proliferated. However, little is known about Iranian students’ reflection on writing. Furthermore, few studies have endeavored to explore the inhibitors (from both students' and teachers' perspectives) which deter EFL students from reflecting on their writing. The best example of conducted research in Iran in this domain is that of Soodmand and Farahani (2017). The significance of such studies lies in the importance of reflection for a successful language classroom for both learners and teachers, particularly in contexts like Iran where teachers lack high reflectivity in their profession (Marzban & Ashraafi, 2016). What distinguishes our study from the previous ones is that we recruited both language learners and teachers to find out the perceptions of both groups about the inhibitors. In addition, in order to study students’ reflective practice, we employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Accordingly, the following research questions were suggested.

1. To what extent do Iranian EFL learners engage in writing reflectively?
2. What are the inhibitors of writing reflectively from EFL students’ viewpoints?
3. What are the major inhibitors of writing reflectively from EFL teachers’ viewpoints?
2. Method

2.1. Participants
Two groups of participants were recruited in the study. First, 106 (42 males, and 64 females) available students of different proficiency levels studying English in various language schools across Kermanshah (a city in the west of Iran) were selected. Based on the level of the students, as defined roughly by the language schools, their proficiency level ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

Furthermore, we surveyed 34 available EFL teachers from various language schools across the province. Of the sample, 3 were Ph.D. holders, 7 had M.A and 24 had BA in TEFL. They had experience of teaching both at public and private schools. The teachers had over 4 years of teaching experience at the language school and/or school level.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Reflection on writing questionnaire (RWQ)
To prepare the researcher-made questionnaire, the relevant literature (Chittooran, 2015; Kember et al., 2000; Marzano, 1993) on reflection was studied and the most important issues were extracted. The items of the RWQ aimed to find out whether the students critically evaluate and make connections between the given experiences and their own and if they can put forward their personal thoughts about their experiences, analyze and evaluate the given topics. We prepared the first draft of the questionnaire based on the operationalized definition of reflection. In the initial step, the first 26 items were piloted on 15 students from the pool and their views were used to modify the first draft of the statements. Four experts in the field were required to pass their judgments on the items which resulted in removing 3 items. The results were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. The first results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) 0.64 was not satisfactory. After eliminating 4 items that suffered low levels of factor loading (below 0.50) and rerunning factor analysis, the KMO increased to 0.76. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was also statistically significant ($\chi^2 (422) = 5664.23, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation showed all items had acceptable loadings. There remained 19 ones which created the final draft of the scale. A 5-point Likert scale was employed where 1 indicated “not at all”, 2 “to a small scale”, 3 “to some extent”, 4 “to a moderate extent, and 5 “to a great extent”. We should mention that because we assumed that the participants’ limited language proficiency in English (particularly pre-intermediate learners) may negatively affect the responses, the scale was then translated by a professional translator into Persian. Finally, in order to make sure whether the items elicited consistent responses, the reliability was estimated based on Cronbach $\alpha$ and finally found to be adequate (.88).

2.2.2. Inhibitors to reflective writing questionnaire (IRWQ)
In a separate study with 245 EFL teachers (Farahian & Avarzamani, 2019), with the same characteristics of the participants of the present study, a process of validation was run. Accordingly, in line with Lietz (2010), a five-point Likert-scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” was employed. After the preliminary 34 items were prepared, five experts passed their judgments on the statements. After that, in a pilot study, 5 participants took the questionnaire and identified 2 confusing items in a face to face encounter with the researchers. They were also asked to leave comments on the first draft of the questionnaire. To do so, a principal component analysis was employed. The results of the correlation matrix revealed that 4 items of 32 ones had to be dropped. After the subsequent factor analysis, the KMO level was 0.81 showing the suitability of the data. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity reached a statistically significant value ($\chi^2 (375) = 4959.61, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The final draft consisted of 28 items. The estimated Cronbach $\alpha$ for this scale is .71 which seems to be fair.
2.2.3. Writing task
To give the EFL students the opportunity to relate their self-report to a specific task, we needed to provide them with an appropriate context. The task was also used for the analysis of the texts by the researchers to classify the reflection level of each sentence. Accordingly, a short essay was given to the students on “Do you think that the world without Telegram (an instant messaging application which is widely used in Iran) would be much more productive? Why (not)?” The topic was chosen since it was felt that it would provoke learners’ reflective thinking.

2.2.4. Interview
Fifteen of the students were interviewed in the present study. The semi-structured interview (see the Appendix) consisted of three questions. Since delving into reflection was not an easy task, and because there was the fear that the students were not familiar with the concept of reflection some examples were used during the interview to give them enough hint regarding the term reflection. While asking the third question again the interviewer presented some examples to clarify the question.

2.3. Procedure and data analysis
After the preliminary steps and the pilot studies, the questionnaires were finalized and distributed among the participants. The questionnaires were distributed among the teachers during the tea break. Then, the purpose of the research was explained briefly. No time limit was set for the teachers to give back the questionnaires. Likewise, participation was voluntary for the students. First, the EFL students were asked to write a short essay and hand it to the teacher and then they were asked to fill out the questionnaire honestly. Finally, the students were interviewed about their views on the inhibitors of reflective writing.

We analyzed the obtained quantitative data using the Friedman test and descriptive analysis. As for the learners’ essays, we employed Kember et al.’s (2000) framework to analyze their text. The qualitative data related to the students’ interviews were analyzed by searching for patterns and themes.

3. Results

3.1. The results of the RWQ
According to Table 1, there are significant differences between the mean ranks of the RWQ items, meaning that an overall difference exists between the responses given to each item and there are some items that significantly scored either higher or lower among the respondents. The following table indicates the ranks of the levels of reflection in EFL writing.

Table 2 indicates that students, according to their self-reports, were mostly involved in lower levels of reflection (i.e. H & U) such as using borrowed sentences and thinking in Farsi or translating while writing in English.

As Table 2 shows, students were considerably less involved with making arguments and providing relevant reasons and rationale since the items related to R and CR are ranked lower (10 to 20) in comparison to H and U (1 to 10). Among the items related to higher orders of reflection (R & CR), the two (R) with the mean ranks of 11.81 and 8.66 (10th and 11th ranked items) are more frequent.

| Table 1. The descriptive statistics of the Friedman test for the RWQ |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Statistic             | Statistic value      |
| n                     | 106                  |
| chi-square            | 1036.000             |
| df                    | 19                   |
| Sig                   | .000                 |
| Effect Size (Kendall’s W) | .514                |
among learners. CR was the least frequently used level of reflection as their mean ranks ranged from 6.18 to 4.69.

In addition to students’ self-reports, we also examined their essays as a non-self-report measure in order to obtain more precise results. To do so, the texts produced by the participants were analyzed to find reflection level in each sentence based on Kember et al. (2000). Based on Table 3, students’ texts revealed that they do not involve in high levels of reflectivity (Reflection and critical reflection) in FL writing. Such a finding was the impetus for the researchers to find the reasons. Accordingly, in the second phase of the study, we examined both teachers’ (survey) and students’ (interview) ideas about the inhibitors to low reflectivity in FL writing. To do so, first, we examined students’ ideas in this regard using a semi-structured interview. A summary of the findings is presented in the following table. Afterward, we surveyed teachers’ viewpoints concerning the factors that negatively impact students’ L2 writing the results of which are provided in Table 5.

| Elements                                                                 | Mean Rank | Rank |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|
| When writing it is likely that I use a lot of fixed sets of sentences borrowed from somebody or somewhere. H | 15.11     | 1    |
| I probably write an essay without getting deeply involved with the meaning. H | 14.73     | 2    |
| I know how to begin, how to write, and how to revise. U                 | 14.45     | 3    |
| My writing is often limited to state what/when/where something happened. U | 14.33     | 4    |
| My writing is limited to translating Persian words into English. U       | 14.12     | 5    |
| I write my ideas without questioning them or considering them in depth. U | 13.13     | 6    |
| I often start writing without planning for it. H                         | 13.10     | 7    |
| When I write in English, I do it without thinking. H                    | 12.82     | 8    |
| My writing is often limited to conveying meaning to readers. U          | 12.44     | 9    |
| When I get stuck, I look for ways to solve the problem. R               | 11.81     | 10   |
| I often think about my weaknesses and strengths while writing. R         | 8.66      | 11   |
| I often predict how a specific reader will interpret and value that text. R | 7.98      | 12   |
| I can compare/contrast an event to other similar events or experiences. R | 6.89      | 13   |
| While writing I often think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it. R | 6.87      | 14   |
| I can write for and against certain positions and ideas. CR             | 6.18      | 15   |
| While writing, I can explain the meaning/significance/value of things. R | 6.11      | 16   |
| When I write, I analyze the topic from different perspectives. CR        | 5.41      | 17   |
| I state my preferences and provide a rationale for them. CR             | 5.38      | 18   |
| I provide reasons and justifications for events. CR                      | 4.69      | 19   |

H (habitual action), U (understanding), R (Reflection), CR (Critical Reflection).

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| Levels of Reflection | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Habitual             | 1235      | 45.68       |
| Understanding        | 983       | 36.36       |
| Reflection           | 302       | 11.17       |
| Critical Reflection  | 183       | 6.77        |
| Total                | 2703      | 100         |
3.2. The results of the interview
The first themes that emerged from the data were language proficiency and poor writing skills, indicating that the participants regarded language proficiency as being essential for reflection in EFL writing. The following comments can be taken up as representative examples:

“When we do not know enough vocabularies, how one expects us to write for or against an idea.

Lack of familiarity with paragraph/essay writing skills was also recognized as an impediment to reflective thinking”.

“When one comes to think of it, a lack of familiarity with the layout of a paragraph is a big obstacle to reflection. If I do not know how a paragraph begins and how it ends how I can write about my personal experiences or argue against a position”.

Interestingly, not being allowed to choose topics was determined to bar reflection while writing. In this regard, a student said:

“You can explain different points of view and relate events to your own experiences if you can choose the topic. As far as I know, in writing courses, teachers choose the topic and students are asked to write”.

Of 15 interviewed participants, 4 were advanced EFL learners. Three out of four advanced EFL learners recognized text type as being important in reflection. As one of these students reported:

“Being familiar with text type is necessary. You cannot write for and against a particular point of view unless you are taught different text types”.

Lack of motivation to write was also deemed as a factor that may impede reflective thinking while writing. As an instance, a student said:

“In some courses writing has turned to be very tedious. We only sufficed to narrate or describe events. Even in some cases, I remember copying the ideas I had borrowed from others or the internet. There was no deep thinking and no reflection on the experience”.

3.3. The results of the IRWQ
Based on Table 5, no one answered “Not at all” which shows teachers found all the items to be related (at least to a small extent) to the students’ weakness in reflecting while writing in FL. With regard to the most frequent answers concerning inhibitors to reflection, teachers reported that teachers’ unfamiliarity with the concept of reflection (statement 12), teachers’ inability to promote reflection in classroom (statement 9), students’ purposeless assignment writing (statement 14), and also non-collaborative environment in the classroom (statement 22) are among the most important inhibitors to EFL students’ reflective writing since above 70 percent of teachers declared that the abovementioned factors “to a great extent” inhibit students’ reflection in FL writing (the related parts are shaded orange in Table 4). Besides, above 50 percent of the teachers responded “to a great extent” to the items 3, 6, 8, 17, 26, and 27 (the related parts are shaded blue in Table 4). On the other hand, teachers found the items 4, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 23 were unlikely to affect EFL learners’ reflection while writing.

4. Discussion and conclusion
Reflection is regarded as an important part of any curriculum. To improve EFL skills in general and writing, in particular, some degrees of reflection is necessary. The first research question sought whether Iranian EFL learners engage in writing reflectively. As the results revealed, the degree of students’ involvement in reflective writing was not high enough, indicating that Iranian EFL writers might not involve in high levels of reflection while writing in English. According to the students’ self-reports, they were less involved in reflective writing. More precisely, the learners’ main problem was mainly in the
domain of critical reflection. This issue has also been found by other scholars in Asian contexts in general and in the Iranian context in particular. For example, as an endowment of Western culture, as Safari and Rashidi (2015) argue, critical thinking is not welcomed by the Iranian educational system. However, the problem of Iranian EFL writers should not be merely attributed to contextual factors like culture and nationality. There are other variables that may exacerbate the problem. One of the most important factors is training methods. As Çapar (2014) argued, “with appropriate training, it is possible to achieve autonomy in a writing course through enhancing reflection on the learning process” (p. 470).

The findings regarding students' low involvement in higher-order thinking led us to investigate the possible inhibitors to reflective FL writing in the second phase of our study. Accordingly, we decided to conduct interview sessions to find out what students thought about the inhibitors to answer the second question of this study. Interestingly, except for motivation, and training all other themes extracted from the interview were related to language proficiency and writing skill. Students strongly believed that lack of proficiency was the main cause of the problem. Previous studies (e.g. Mirador, 2011; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011) also showed that students often pay attention to technical aspects of writing rather than abstract skills like reflection and reflective writing. Such a problem in EFL settings may be due to EFL learners’ poor language proficiency.

As regards teachers’ viewpoints, in particular, we employed a researcher-made survey to find out teachers' views on the inhibitors to EFL students' reflective writing. As the answers to the third research question show, we found that teachers were mostly concerned about their own lack of necessary knowledge and skill concerning reflection and reflective teaching. In this regard, Coyle (2002) believes that teachers are responsible for conducting reflective teaching since their knowledge and skills are the main contributing factors to the actualization of reflective teaching. Teachers also reported that they lack enough motivation to attempt to teach reflectively. The role of affective factors like motivation in reflective thinking has been acknowledged in other studies as well (Sh. & Shirazizadeh, 2017; Soodmand & Farahani, 2017). This is particularly important in Iranian and similar contexts where teachers face “financial pressures and occupational concerns” (Soodmand & Farahani, 2017, p.14). The findings are also in agreement with Safari and Pourhashemi (2012) who argue that EFL teachers in Iran do not feel compelled to teach students critically or help them think critically. As they note, EFL teachers believe that, in the Iranian educational setting, thinking critically is out of place due to various reasons. Safari and Rashidi (2015) also hold that critical thinking has not received attention in Iran and “teaching is still based on the banking model of education in which students are silent and passive and are accustomed to listening meekly to their teachers through the process of schooling”(Safari, 2017, p.40). In the same vein, Birjandi, Bagheri, and Maftoon (2018) argue that the majority of Iranian graduates in all levels of education do not possess critical thinking skills and have experienced teacher-oriented education in which memorization is given high importance.

Deficiency in the curriculum and the system of education were other prominent factors that teachers reported. This was reflected in their responses to statements 7, 8, 14, 21, 22, and 27 (see Table 4). We should note that “reflection needs to be instructed to both teachers and learners so
Table 5. EFL teachers’ responses regarding inhibitors to EFL students’ reflective writing (%)

| No. | Statements                                                                 | Not at all | To a small extent | To some extent | To a moderate extent | To a great extent |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 1   | Students have not been trained to be reflective.                            | –         | –                 | –             | 73.5                 | 26.5             |
| 2   | Students lack adequate foreign language proficiency.                        | –         | –                 | 11.8          | 88.2                 | –                |
| 3   | Reflective practice is not supported by teachers.                           | –         | 2.9               | –             | 32.4                 | 64.7             |
| 4   | Students lack adequate motivation to write.                                 | –         | 32.4              | 8.8           | 55.9                 | 2.9              |
| 5   | Teachers lack the motivation to practice reflection.                         | –         | 8.8               | 5.9           | 61.8                 | –                |
| 6   | Teachers’ working conditions (financial, time, etc.) negatively affect their teaching. | –         | –                 | –             | 38.2                 | 61.8             |
| 7   | The educational system is hierarchical.                                      | –         | –                 | –             | 44.1                 | 55.9             |
| 8   | Type of assessments does not lead to reflection.                            | –         | –                 | 8.8           | 32.4                 | 58.8             |
| 9   | Teachers cannot develop reflective thinking among students                  | –         | –                 | –             | 29.4                 | 70.6             |
| 10  | Students cannot freely express their ideas in the papers.                   | –         | –                 | –             | 67.6                 | 32.4             |
| 11  | There is no positive feedback from the teacher to encourage reflective thinking. | –         | 5.9               | 44.1          | 8.8                  | 41.2             |
| 12  | Teachers are not familiar with the concept of reflection.                    | –         | 8.8               | 5.9           | 8.8                  | 76.5             |
| 13  | Personal views are not valued by teachers or classmates.                    | –         | 35.3              | –             | 38.2                 | 26.5             |
| 14  | Students often write just to fulfill an assignment since they seldom have a real purpose in mind. | –         | –                 | –             | 26.5                 | 73.5             |
| 15  | Students’ personal accounts of events are not interesting for teachers or classmates. | –         | 67.6              | 2.9           | 20.6                 | 8.8              |
| 16  | The topics chosen are not relevant to daily life.                           | –         | 26.5              | 2.9           | 70.6                 | –                |
| 17  | Creativity in writing is not encouraged in writing courses.                 | –         | 23.5              | –             | 11.8                 | 64.7             |
| 18  | The content of students’ writings is not valued.                            | –         | 44.1              | 2.9           | 38.2                 | 14.7             |
| 19  | Students seldom receive feedback on the content.                            | –         | 29.4              | –             | 55.9                 | 14.7             |
| 20  | Students do not write for a real audience.                                  | –         | 14.7              | 14.7          | 23.5                 | 47.1             |
| 21  | Customary writing courses focus on the product of writing rather than the process. | –         | 2.9               | 14.7          | 32.4                 | 50               |

(Continued)
| No. | Statements                                                                 | Not at all | To a small extent | To some extent | To a moderate extent | To a great extent |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 22  | Classroom practice does not involve collaborative works with teachers or classmates. | 8.8        | 20.6              | 70.6           |                      |                  |
| 23  | Before writing, teachers do not pose challenging questions to promote curiosity. | 32.4       | 5.9               | 50             | 11.8                 |                  |
| 24  | There is no discussion in the class to consider alternative relevant ideas. | 17.6       | 41.2              | 41.2           |                      |                  |
| 25  | Poor language proficiency inhibits reflective writing.                     | 2.9        | 23.5              | 50             | 23.5                 |                  |
| 26  | Teachers do not encourage students to monitor or evaluate their writings.  | 5.9        | 5.9               | 23.5           | 64.7                 |                  |
| 27  | The writing course does not provide an opportunity for students to think about what they have learned from the previous session. | -          | -                 | 41.2           | 58.8                 |                  |
| 28  | EFL Students lack enough interest in the chosen topics.                    | 2.9        | 29.4              | 44.1           | 23.5                 |                  |

Cells shaded in orange represent the items that above 70 percent of teachers indicated as being important inhibitors. Cells shaded in blue represent the items that above 50 percent of teachers indicated as being important inhibitors.
that they can get acquainted with the concept itself and how to apply it in actual teaching/learning contexts in practice" (Soodmand & Farahani, 2017, p. 12). Regarding language proficiency, we believe that the similarity between teachers’ and students’ viewpoints is illuminating since it can be concluded that unless EFL students gain an acceptable level of language proficiency, they may not involve in deeper levels of reflection. Such findings assist us to broaden our knowledge about any possible relationship between language proficiency and reflective learning.

As long as the authoritarian nature of the educational system prevails, it seems that a move towards critical pedagogy is essential. Such approaches can bring much more enjoyment into teaching and can also draw our attention to “what the students really need to talk about, letting them discuss their issues of interest, helping students to move forward critically and consequently enabling students to change the structure of their society” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011, p.83). Moreover, reflective teaching and critical pedagogy go hand in hand (Minott, 2011). Without reflective thinking talking about critical pedagogy is meaningless. By engaging students in reflective practice, they can get involved in asking questions, solving problems, thinking critically, criticizing assumptions, participating in discussions, and valuing beliefs. On the other hand, critical pedagogy prepares the context for reflection to take place as teachers and students know that their voices are heard and make sure that their views about the world can make a difference. In effect, they get more and more involved in reflection on their actions.

There is a key limitation of the present study which can be addressed in future studies. Although we interviewed some of the students to have more in-depth data in terms of their perspectives, the sample was small and thus, no generalizable conclusion can be drawn from the findings. The reason was that many of the students were either unavailable or reluctant to participate in further investigations in the second phase of our study. As such, the next step in further studies would be using larger samples for furthering our understanding of the problems related to reflection and FL writing.

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The authors have no conflict of interest.

Correction
This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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Appendix
1. While writing in English, what deters you from having reflection?

2. While writing in English, what are the factors that hinder you doing the following? Explain your answers.
   - describing the events, characters, etc. or you moving beyond surface meaning and expressing your personal ideas
   - connecting (both similarities and differences) between the events and personal experiences
   - explaining different points of view and being able to support an argument?
   - thinking about how you should improve your writing the next time you write.
   - writing for or against an idea

3. How much you, your teachers, or contextual factors hinder your reflection while writing?