EFL Teachers’ Development of Reflective Practice Through Knowledge Sharing in a Reflective Focus Group

Majid Farahian (farahian@iauksh.ac.ir)  
Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah Branch  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5367-5138

Farshad Parhamnia  
Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah Branch

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Abstract

Development in any educational system highly depends on teachers’ qualities. Among other qualities, one of the much-needed teachers’ qualities is reflection. As such, the present study examined EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers’ perceptions towards knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group and the improvement of their reflective practice through knowledge sharing in a focus group. In addition, the study sought the benefits and challenges to knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group. The results indicated that the participants did not have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing. Furthermore, it was also revealed that the focus group platform could enable teachers to improve their reflective practice. Among other factors, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing the possible relationship between theory and practice were benefits of reflective practice through knowledge sharing. Regarding the barriers to using reflective focus group, various inhibitors were reported by the teachers, including personal, institutional, and educational. The implications of the study are also presented.

Introduction

Development in any educational system highly depends on teachers’ qualities. Among other qualities one of the much-needed teachers’ qualities is reflection. Teacher reflection is important for teachers since it encourages teachers to “stop, look, and discover where they are at that moment and then decide where they want to go in the future” (Farrell, 2012, p. 7). It paves the way for applying theory to practice and at the same time contributes to more effective classroom practice. Teachers who engage in such reflective teaching learn from their classroom experiences which in turn results in their professional growth and performance (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Fendler, 2003; Zahid & Khanam, 2019; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Teachers’ reflection on their classroom-based experiences can have a positive relationship with students’ achievement (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018); it can improve teacher self-efficacy (Hosseini, et.al., 2018) and produce more skilled and capable teachers (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

There is no unanimous agreement over the definition of reflection. As the pioneer in reflective studies, Dewey (1933) defines reflection as “the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it” (p. 9). Reflective practice requires teachers to constantly make inquiries about their own classroom-related practice and then collaborate with others regarding questions that arise during reflection (Pickett, 2020). Glazer, Abbott and Harris (2004) report that “reflection often acts as a catalyst for professional growth” (p. 35). For Bartlett (1990), teacher training should go beyond equipping teachers with skills. In other words, teachers should acquire the ability to analyze their daily practice and adjust themselves based on the evidence they collect.

The first classification of levels of reflection was put forward by Van Manen (1977) and Schön (1983). As Van Manen suggests, there are three levels to reflection including technical, practical, and critical reflection. Schön distinguishes between reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection in action occurs at the same time one is practicing teaching while reflection on action happens after teaching when one reflects back on her experience. Another category was suggested by Bartlett (1990). He
proposed a reflective cycle with five steps including mapping, informing, contesting, appraising, and acting. At the first stage, the teacher gathers classroom-related evidence of her teaching. In the second stage, the teacher searches for the meaning behind the pieces of evidence she has collected. At this step, she can get help from her colleagues. In the third stage, the teacher looks for the rationale behind the behavior. Contesting, as the fourth stage involves teachers’ finding any possible mismatch between her thinking and the real event in the classroom. This helps the practitioner to search for the best ways of teaching which are compatible with her understanding. By doing so, she also recognizes the mismatch between her beliefs and practice. Finally, at the last stage, the teacher asks herself what and how she shall teach now and acts based on what she has achieved at the previous stage. In an attempt to develop a tool to assess teachers’ level of reflective practice, Larrivee (2008) introduced four levels of reflection namely, pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. At pre-reflection, teachers automatically respond to various events in the classroom. At the second level, as Larrivee further explains, “teachers’ reflections focus on strategies and methods used to reach predetermined goals” (p. 342). At the third level, “teachers reflect on educational goals, the theories underlying approaches, and the connections between theoretical principles and practice” (p. 343). At the critical reflection level, teachers focus on both their classroom practice and social conditions.

A less cultivated issue in education, which is also the focus of the present study, is knowledge management. Knowledge management is defined as “the process of gathering, managing, and sharing… knowledge…throughout the organization” (Bhojaraju, 2005, p. 37). It helps members of an organization “to collectively and systematically create, share and apply knowledge to achieve their strategic and operational objectives” (North & Babakhanlou, 2016, p. 211). Knowledge management is often considered from two perspectives: the technological aspect which contributes to knowledge dissemination and social context in which knowledge sharing happens (Biasutti & El-Deghaidy, 2012). As an important unit of knowledge management, “knowledge sharing is capturing, organizing, reusing, and transferring experience-based knowledge that resides within the organization and making that knowledge available to others in the business” (Lin, 2006, p. 27). Teachers and practitioners “must share knowledge among themselves to be better prepared for onward transmission to students, community, and the world as a whole” (Adamseged & Hong, 2018, P2). It is through knowledge sharing that experience-based knowledge is transferred and made available to others (Lin, 2006). Effective knowledge sharing increases the survival chance of an organization (Argote et.al., 2000), and to share knowledge, various platforms such as blogs, email, online discussion groups, and discussion forums are available. No matter what type of platform is chosen, teacher-to-teacher interaction seems to be central to the platform chosen.

Although EFL teachers attend different teacher education courses at schools and language schools, less attention has been paid to teacher-to-teacher interaction (Mawhinney, 2010). In this regard, effective communication with other teachers results in teachers’ receiving different perspectives (Glazer, et.al., 2004; Ng & Tan, 2009), employing more innovative approaches, and improving job satisfaction and self-efficacy (European Commission, 2013). In general, collaboration with other teachers may result “in a change in cognition and/or behavior at the individual and/or group level” (Doppenberg, Bakx, & Brok, 2012, pp. 548–549). If teachers work collaboratively they are more likely to share knowledge. This may
contribute to developing reflectivity (Kelchtermans, 2006; Vangrieken, et al., 2015; Van Gyn, 1996), and making changes in their daily practice (Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000).

To be an effective teacher, the dedication of time and effort is essential (Gelter, 2003). However, there are some barriers which prevent teachers from being reflective. The related literature shows that the study of barriers to reflective practice is missing. To the researchers’ knowledge, only one study has dealt with the issue. Soodmand Afshar and Farahani (2018) investigated the inhibitors to reflective practice. As they report, three types of inhibitors to EFL learners’ reflective thinking included ‘affective-emotional’, ‘cognitive’ and ‘learning situation’ barriers.

Apart from the aforementioned barriers, it has been argued that the application of higher-order thinking in general and critical thinking in particular in non-western countries is not a realistic aim since such a construct is socially constructed, a property of western culture (Weinstock, Assor & Broide, 2009; Mathews & Lowe, 2011) and rooted in western ideology (e.g., McGuire, 2007). Such an idea has been contested by various researchers on the ground that the “fundamental problem underlying the ‘cultural-specificity model’ of critical thinking lies in its uncritical, monolithic, and static view of the culture of ‘the other” (Yoneyama, 2012, p. 234). The difference between the critical thinking of western and non-western societies, among other factors, has been caused by either linguistic (Lun, Fischer & Ward, 2010) or pedagogical (Wang, 2010) issues. If the second possibility is accepted, it can be assumed that through proper education individuals in non-western countries like Iran may learn to think critically. Thus, it seems necessary to involve teachers in some type of exercise to engage them in reflective thinking in order to improve their reflective practice. Accordingly, various platforms have been proposed to train teachers to grow into reflective practitioners including writing reflective journals/diaries, lesson study, video recordings, peer observation of teaching, blogs or online discussion groups, action research, and focus groups (see Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Rieger, Radcliffe, & Doepker, 2013). In this regard, various studies have been carried out to develop EFL teachers’ reflective practice. The effect of EFL teachers’ reflective journal writing (e.g., Donyaie & Soodmand Afshar, 2019; Khanjani, Vahdany & Jafarigohar, 2018; Uzum, Petrón & Berg, 2014), the effect of blogs in promoting reflective practice (e.g., Dos & Demir, 2013; Tajeddin & Aghababazadeh, 2018) and portfolios (e.g., Lo, 2010). Studies have also investigated the role of video recording (e.g., Lakshmi, 2012; Orlova, 2009) in this regard.

To date, the power of knowledge sharing is underestimated (Jong, Meirink & Admiraal, 2019). In addition, among the proposed practices, research on focus group as a platform to develop reflective practice is scare. To meet this knowledge gap, the present study aimed at investigating the effect of using knowledge sharing in a focus group on EFL teachers’ reflective practice. Having such an aim in mind, we posed the following research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers’ perceptions toward knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group?
2. Does knowledge sharing in a focus group improve EFL teachers’ reflective practice?
3. What are the benefits of being engaged in knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group?

4. What are the potential challenges of using knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group?

**Materials And Methods**

**Participants**

An important feature of focus group is a small number of participants. It has been recommended that the group size should be between 5 and 12 participants (Cameron, 2000). As such, there were 11 teachers (9 females and 2 males) in the focus group who were students of a methodology course of a MA program. The first researcher was the instructor of the course. The participants were either high school teachers who worked as part-time teachers in language schools or were full-time language school teachers who were teaching in language schools. The participants’ experience of teaching EFL ranged from 2 to 11 years. As a basic ethical obligation, they were informed about issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

| Participants | Sex     | age | Years of teaching experience |
|--------------|---------|-----|------------------------------|
| 1            | Male    | 24  | 2                            |
| 2            | Male    | 43  | 11                           |
| 3            | Female  | 38  | 8                            |
| 4            | Female  | 26  | 8                            |
| 5            | Female  | 25  | 3                            |
| 6            | Female  | 25  | 5                            |
| 7            | Female  | 27  | 7                            |
| 8            | Female  | 25  | 6                            |
| 9            | Female  | 29  | 9                            |
| 10           | Female  | 26  | 5                            |
| 11           | Female  | 27  | 4                            |

**Instruments**

Focus group forum
It has been suggested that focus groups can be used as both a qualitative research methodology and a reflection tool (Schmiede, 1995). Accordingly, in the present study, the rationale behind using a focus group platform was twofold. First, it was aimed to encourage the EFL teachers to reflect critically on their experiences. In other words, the researcher intended to draw on the participants’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions towards their own experiences. Second, it was used as a tool to help teachers engage in knowledge sharing during the treatment.

EFL teachers’ perceptions toward knowledge sharing questionnaire

The purpose of using the researcher-made questionnaire was to find out what were the participants’ perceptions towards knowledge sharing in the focus group. To prepare the questionnaire (authors, unpublished manuscript), the first 20 items were piloted on 15 M.A students studying in the same university. The students were either teachers of schools or language schools. The scale was also given to five experts to pass their judgments on the statements. It should be stated that due to the small sample of the participants, we did not intend to generalize the findings we identified through the scale in the present study, and the report of our study was primarily descriptive.

There were 15 items in the questionnaire. Each item was followed by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. As for Cronbach's Alpha, the value was .765 for the scale.

A Survey of reflective practice

A survey of reflective practice developed by Larrivee (2008) measures how teachers are progressing as reflective practitioners. There are four levels, namely pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection in the scale. Each participant rated each item as frequently, sometimes, or infrequently. The completion of the scale took about 15 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews

To investigate the benefits and potential challenges of using a reflective focus group a semi-structured interview was carried out after the treatment. Two questions inquired the interviewees’ opinions regarding the benefits and challenges. The interviews were in Persian and each interview lasted for about 30 minutes.

Procedure

To find out what were the participants' perceptions towards knowledge sharing in a focus group, the perceptions toward knowledge sharing questionnaires in the form of hard copies were distributed among them. Since it is recommended that focus groups take place in a familiar meeting area (Winlow, et al., 2013), the participants were invited to take part in the focus group forum which was held in their university every Thursday evening.
The forum included two cycles. In the first cycle, which included four stages, the participants were expected to gain basic familiarity with recent theories on postmethod pedagogy and reflective practice. To do so, the participants were assigned to read two leading books (see Appendix A). Each week some questions were assigned to the participants. The participants were required to answer the questions on what they had already studied and sent the answers to the first researcher via email. At the beginning of each focus group session, the participants were required to discuss the questions (e.g., Appendix B). At the same time, the other participants were required to express their judgments on the views. To prepare the questions, the assigned books and the related literature was consulted (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2019). During the second cycle, which included five stages based on Bartlett's (1990, p. 209), the participants' experiential knowledge was addressed.

In contrast to interview in which the interviewer has the role of investigator, in a focus group discussion platform, the researcher adopts the role of a mediator (Cohen & Garrett, 1999). Accordingly, in the present study, the first researcher was given a peripheral, not a central role. His role was to ensure that all topics were covered in the first cycle, to guide the discussions, and to ensure that all participants took part in the discussion. With the contest of the participants, all conversations were fully recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then read through several times and key themes within and between groups were identified (Cameron, 2000).

Following each session of the focus group, the survey of reflective practice was given to the participants and was collected in person. From this, we hoped to determine whether the forums had enabled EFL teachers to move beyond low levels of reflection and whether the discussions had improved their reflection.

A week after the treatment, the teachers took part in an interview. The audio-recorded sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) was employed to identify emerging themes. As the next step, the codes were categorized to determine relevant sub-categories. As for trustworthiness, we asked another researcher to code the data. The obtained inter-rater reliability was about 0.82, indicating an acceptable level of consistency.

**Results**

As to the first research question which inquired EFL teachers’ perceptions toward knowledge sharing in a focus group, Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics in terms of frequency and percentage for the questionnaire. As shown, about 73 percent of the teachers disagreed with the statement which states that *it is important to share knowledge with other academics for the benefit of all*. A similar pattern can be found for the second and the third item. About 81.8 percent stated that knowledge sharing is time-consuming while 9 percent disagreed. All participants disagreed that *knowledge sharing helps teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching*. But a more surprising finding regarding item 4 was that 72.7 percent admitted that *knowledge sharing is time-consuming*. About 63.7 percent disagreed that
knowledge sharing helps one change his view about the effectiveness of her teaching. Also, 72.8 disagreed with item 6. Concerning item 7; just 9.1 percent agreed with the statement. It was interesting that 45.5 stated that they lack trust in other staff to share knowledge with while 54.5 neither agreed nor disagreed. But a more interesting finding was that 81.8 percent disagreed that knowledge sharing helps teachers theorize what they practice. A similar pattern can be found for item 10 since 72.8 percent disagreed with the statement. None of the respondents agreed that knowledge sharing helps one look for solutions to problems that arise in the classroom. On the other hand, 72.7 percent disagreed with it. In response to item 12, only 9.1 percent agreed that knowledge sharing helps teachers develop critical thinking in daily practice. Similarly, only 9.1 percent agreed that Knowledge sharing helps one considers new strategies and ideas and reflect upon their own learning processes. Regarding item 14, 72.8 percent believed that it is difficult to share to knowledge for which one has worked hard to earn. while 27.3 percent disagreed. Finally, about 45 percent considered knowledge sharing as a burden for teachers.
| Items                                                                 | strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. I feel that it is important to share knowledge with other teachers for the benefit of all. | 1 (9.1%)          | 7 (63.6%)| 1 (9.1%)                  | 2 (18.2%)| -              |
| 2. Knowledge sharing provides an opportunity to discuss the problems we face in daily practice. | 2 (18.2%)         | 7 (63.6%)| 1 (9.1%)                  | 1 (9.1%)| -              |
| 3. Knowledge sharing helps teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. | 7 (63.6%)         | 4 (36.4%)| -                         | -     | -              |
| 4. Knowledge sharing is time-consuming. | -                 | -        | 4 (36.4%)                 | 5 (54.5%)| 2 (18.2%)       |
| 5. Knowledge sharing helps one change his views about the effectiveness of her teaching. | 3 (27.3%)         | 4 (36.4%)| 4 (36.4%)                 | -     | -              |
| 6. Knowledge sharing helps one engage in constructive criticism of one's own teaching. | 3 (27.3%)         | 5 (45.5%)| 2 (18.2%)                 | 1 (9.1%)| -              |
| Items                                                                 | strongly disagree | Disagree    | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------|
| 7. Knowledge sharing helps teachers review related theories.        | 1 (9.1%)          | 9 (81.8%)   | 1 (9.1%)                    | -     | -             |
| 8. I lack trust in other teachers to share knowledge with.          | -                 | -           | 6 (54.5%)                   | 2 (18.2%) | 3 (27.3%)   |
| 9. Knowledge sharing helps teachers theorize what they practice.   | 2 (18.2%)         | 7 (63.6%)   | 2 (18.2%)                   | -     | -             |
| 10. Knowledge sharing helps one recall and evaluate teaching experiences in order to improve her future practice. | 3 (27.3%)         | 6 (45.5%)   | 1 (9.1%)                    | 1 (9.1%) | -             |
| 11. Knowledge sharing helps one look for solutions to problems that arise in the classroom. | 2 (18.2%)         | 6 (54.5%)   | 3 (27.3%)                   | -     | -             |
| 12. Knowledge sharing helps teachers develop critical thinking in their daily practice. | -                 | 7 (63.6%)   | 3 (27.3%)                   | -     | 1 (9.1%)     |
| Items                                                                 | strongly disagree | Disagree   | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 13. Knowledge sharing helps one consider new strategies and ideas and reflect upon his own learning processes. | 5 (45.5%)         | 3 (27.3%)  | 2 (18.2%)                 | 1 (9.1%) | -              |
| 14. It is difficult to share knowledge for which I have worked hard to earn. | 3 (27.3%)         | -          | 4 (36.4%)                 | 4 (36.4%) |                |
| 15. Knowledge sharing seems to be an extra burden for teachers.      | 2 (18.2%)         | -          | 4 (36.4%)                 | -      | 5 (45.5%)      |

As to the second research question, after each session, the survey of reflective practice was given to the participants.
As illustrated in Table 2, the participants' pedagogical reflection was higher than the other three stages in all sessions. As the treatment continued, the respondents' pre-reflection decreased; on the contrary, their critical reflection had a steady increase. Overall, based on the results, as the focus group knowledge sharing continued, both pre-reflection and surface reflection declined over time. In contrast, pedagogical and critical reflection witnessed a steady rise.

The third research question inquired benefits of being engaged in reflective focus group. As Table 4 shows, knowledge sharing in a focus group is beneficial for EFL teachers in various ways.
Table 4
Benefits of using knowledge sharing in a focus group forum

| Benefits                                                                 | F  | P   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| 1. It helps me to seek out opportunities to share my experiences with other colleagues and focus group helps me to draw on them for support. | 11 | 100 |
| 2. It facilitates constructive feedback from other EFL teachers.         | 10 | 90.9|
| 3. It helps me recognize the possible relationship between theory and practice. | 9  | 81.8|
| 4. It helps me to understand if something does not go well in class, I will ask for reasons. | 8  | 72.7|
| 5. It helps me to challenge my already held assumptions about teaching and learning. | 6  | 54.5|
| 6. It helps me to assess the effectiveness of my teaching practice.      | 5  | 45.5|
| 7. It helps me to think about the theories I have studied and try to find their relevance to my teaching context. | 4  | 36.4|
| 8. It encourages me to reflect on my daily practices.                    | 3  | 27.3|
| 9. It helps one develop an intimate relationship with other teachers.    | 3  | 27.3|

In this regard, items 1 to 3 refer to opportunities to share experiences, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing the possible relationship between theory and practice. However, what is noticeable is that based on items 4 to 9, focus group helps teachers in different aspects with their reflective practice.

The fourth research question explored the potential challenges of using a reflective focus group. As Table 5 illustrates, the potential challenges to using a reflective focus group can be categorized into three classes of ‘personal’, ‘educational’, and ‘institutional’.
Table 5
challenges to using knowledge sharing in a reflective focus group

| Response                                                                 | F  | P     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| 1. EFL Teachers are not familiar with the importance of group discussion forums. (P) | 11 | 100   |
| 2. Conventional methods of teaching which are prevalent in the educational system do not necessitate sharing ideas. (E) | 11 | 100   |
| 3. EFL teachers’ do not have sufficient TEFL theoretical knowledge to rely on in the focus group. (P) | 10 | 90.9  |
| 4. There is not enough support from the side of educational institutions to encourage teachers to do group work. (I) | 9  | 81.8  |
| 5. There is a lack of incentive for teachers to share their knowledge. (P) | 9  | 81.8  |
| 6. EFL teachers underestimate the knowledge they receive from other teachers. (P) | 8  | 72.7  |
| 7. EFL teachers’ workload is an inhibitor to their collaborative work. (P) | 6  | 54.5  |
| 8. EFL teachers have not received enough training regarding group discussion forums. (E) | 5  | 45.5  |
| 9. There is a competitive behavior in institutions. (C) | 4  | 36.3  |

**Note:** P (personal), I (institutional), E (educational), C (Culture)

Personal issues were teachers’ lack of familiarity with the importance of group discussion, teachers’ lack of theoretical knowledge, teachers’ lack of motivation, teachers’ underestimating colleagues’ knowledge, and teachers’ workload. The institutional issue was lack of support from the side of educational institutions to encourage teachers to do group work. Regarding the educational issues, the prevalent conventional teaching method and lack of training as to teamwork were the most important barriers. Finally, the cultural issue as the barrier was the competitive behavior in the institutions.

**Discussion**
The findings demonstrated that the EFL teachers did not have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and did not consider it to be effective. As the treatment began, there was a steady increase in the level of reflectivity of the participants. This is in compliance with the related literature (e.g., Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) which states that teacher learning communities promote instruction.

Second, it was also revealed that the focus group platform could enable teachers to improve their reflective practice. To the researchers’ knowledge, no study has explored the impact of teachers’ group work on reflective practice. The only study carried out in the Iranian context was that of Donyaie and Soodmand Afshar (2019) who investigated the effectiveness of teachers’ workshops. In tandem with the findings of the present study, they reported that consciousness-raising interactive workshop improves EFL teachers’ reflectivity and enhances their teaching quality.

Third, regarding the benefits of a focus group platform among other advantages, opportunities to share experiences, receiving constructive feedback, and recognizing, possible relationships between theory and practice, and developing intimate relationships were regarded by the participants as the benefits of knowledge sharing. Similarly, Ipe (2004) found that a motivator of knowledge sharing is the creation of informal relationships with team members. The findings are also in line with that of Shadravan et. al. (2010) who stated that among other benefits knowledge sharing enhances learning opportunities. Knowledge sharing, as the results indicated, helps teachers think about the theories they have studied and find their relevance to their teaching context. This may facilitate knowledge creation (Akhavan, Ghojavand & Abdali, 2012)

Fourth, regarding the barriers to using a reflective focus group, various inhibitors were stated by the teachers including personal, institutional, and educational. The finding corroborates with the idea of Ipe (2003, p. 352) who argues that a number of factors including the nature of knowledge, motivation to share, opportunities to share, and the culture of work environment influence knowledge sharing. Also, in this regard, research studies (e.g. Convery, 2011) have acknowledged the impact of organizational trust on knowledge-sharing. Jabbary and Madhoshi (2014) concluded that knowledge sharing happens if there are right people in the right place at the right time and added that the production of science takes place in a secure and stable environment. Another factor found in the present study acting as an inhibitor in knowledge sharing was culture. As O’Dell and Grayson (1998) state, the effect of the organization’s culture is much stronger than the commitment of the organization to knowledge sharing (O’Dell& Grayson, 1998). In tandem with the present study which found teachers’ workload as playing a role as a barrier to knowledge sharing, Ipe (2004) stated that cost of sharing including time and effort was a barrier to sharing knowledge. Also, in the present study, teachers’ competition resulted in knowledge hoarding. This is in line with Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) who argued that if members of an organization believe that power comes from the knowledge, they may resist sharing it with other members. Competitive behavior is likely to be related to the culture prevailing in language schools which may motivate or bar collaboration. In this regard, Jong (2019, p. 1) argues that “short-term teacher collaboration initiatives depend on the prior existence of collaborative cultures collaboration served as a
tool to reflect on teaching practice in all groups”. As to how to tackle the barriers, Ipe (2004) recommends that the designation of a reward system to motivate knowledge sharing is important. The relationship between knowledge sharing and incentives is also suggested by other studies (e.g., Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

**Conclusion**

While teacher learning communities is “a promising approach to systemwide improvement of instruction and student learning during the last two decades” (Akiba et. al., 2018), at the outset of the present study, Iranian EFL teachers preferred to work autonomously. They did not receive instructional support for developing knowledge sharing groups from their institutions either. It was through the focus group forum that teachers’ degree of reflectivity improved and they began realizing the benefits of knowledge sharing. The results showed that teachers became acquainted with knowledge sharing though there were some perceived challenges to it.

Like any other study, the present study is subject to limitations. First, the treatment lasted for 8 sessions. More sessions are needed to improve EFL teachers’ reflective practice. The second limitation is the characteristics of the sample of the study. Of all participants, were 9 females and 2 males. It seems that more male participants are needed to take part in the study. The third limitation was that the focus group forum took place every Thursday evening when the participants felt tired having all week long studying for their MA course. Finally, the present study investigated the participants’ perceptions towards knowledge sharing through a questionnaire. Further research could investigate the possible reasons for Iranian EFL teachers’ negative attitudes towards knowledge sharing through an interview.

Despite the limitations, a number of recommendations could be made. First, educational institutes should create more opportunities for teachers to collaborate. Second, it is recommended that policymakers and program designers investigate the obstacles that hinder teachers’ collaboration and design pre- and in-service teacher training courses to raise teachers’ awareness in this regard. The school/ language school administrations can also have a role in creating an atmosphere where teachers are encouraged to take part in teacher learning communities.

**Declarations**

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**Availability of data and material**

Please contact the authors for data requests.

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**Competing interests**

Not applicable

**Authors contributions**

The first author conducted the procedure, gathered the data, wrote the first draft, and reviewed the final draft. The second author performed the statistical analyses. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Figures

**The first cycle:**

1. Important recent theories in TEFL on post-method pedagogy and reflective practice were extracted from two books. Each week some questions were assigned to the participants.
2. The participants were required to answer the questions on what they had already studied and sent the answers to the first researcher via email.
3. At the beginning of each focus group session, the participants were asked to discuss the questions and express their opinion. Their claims had to be supported by the theories they had already studied.
4. The researcher asked the teachers to pass their judgments on their colleagues’ views.

**The second cycle:**

1. The teachers were required to describe a specific event or a problem which draws their attention or causes a problem and describe it in the joint group. *(Mapping)*
2. The teacher who described the problem was asked about her purpose of the practice. *(Informing)*
3. Other teachers were free to ask their questions or comment on the experience.
4. The teachers were asked to analyze the experience and identify any possible problems. *(Contesting)*
5. The teacher/teachers were asked about any alternative strategies she could adopt and if she could behave differently. *(Appraisal)*
6. The teacher/teachers were asked to talk about how she could act differently the next time. *(Acting)*

**Figure 1**

Figure 1. The framework for knowledge sharing in the reflective practice group.