



Reflective Practice

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A bibliometric analysis of research on language teacher reflection, 1991–2024

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ABSTRACT

Although research on second language (L2) teacher reflection has grown substantially in recent decades, little is known about its geographical distribution, leading scholars and institutions, key publication venues, and overall research impact. Questions also remain regarding emerging trends and underexplored areas that could shape future inquiry. Addressing these gaps, this bibliometric review analyses 688 documents published between 1991 and 2024, retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. The findings reveal a significant increase in publications on reflective practice in L2 teacher education, highlighting its growing prominence. The review identifies the most cited authors, influential works, productive countries, and dominant research themes. It highlights the transformative potential of reflection in enhancing teaching practices and classroom dynamics. However, the study also notes a need for more research situated in contexts of bi/multilingualism, English-medium instruction, and global Englishes. The review concludes with pedagogical and research implications for fostering reflection in language teacher education.

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Language teacher reflection; reflective practice; L2 teacher education; language teaching; bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction

A substantial body of scholarly work confirms the important role of reflective practice in the professional growth of language teachers (Farrell, 2015, 2016a, 2018, 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Engaging in systematic reflection not only helps early-career teachers narrow the gap between their theoretical understanding of pedagogy and the realities of classroom practice but also facilitates the uncovering of tacit knowledge embedded in their daily teaching experiences (Kim et al., 2009). For example, reflective practice enables teachers to identify persistent challenges (e.g. student engagement, classroom management) and adapt their approaches accordingly, fostering more responsive and effective instruction. This reflective process is particularly critical during the early years of teaching, as educators navigate the complexities of translating pedagogical ideals into practice (Farrell, 2016b). Richards and Farrell (2011) highlight that teacher development is not a linear or prescriptive journey but rather a long-term process requiring continuous adaptation and self-examination. They emphasise that reflection is inherently personal and individualised, encouraging teachers to critically engage with emerging trends, innovations, and theoretical advancements in education. Yet, involving in meaningful reflection can be challenging for early-career teachers, who often face time constraints, limited support, and difficulty in critically evaluating their own practices (Farrell, 2018). Recognising these obstacles is essential to support effective reflective teaching. Through reflective engagement with current trends and research, teachers can better refine their practice, integrate new insights with existing knowledge, and ultimately enhance the quality of their instruction (Richards & Farrell, 2011). Freeman (2016, p. 207) further advances this discussion by articulating two foundational premises for reflective language teaching. First, he asserts that meaningful improvement in teaching occurs when educators shift from relying on habitual, automatic responses to adopting a more deliberate and thoughtful approach to instructional decisions. Second, this transition from automaticity to conscious reflection aligns with a more professionalised and scholarly conception of teaching as an intellectual and ethical endeavour—one that demands ongoing critical engagement and ethical responsibility.

Together, these perspectives affirm that reflective practice extends beyond serving as a tool for immediate problem-solving; it represents a sustained, long-term investment in professional growth and the development of pedagogical expertise (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Farrell, 2022). Through ongoing reflection, teachers engage in continuous learning, gradually building deeper, context-sensitive knowledge that is attuned to the complexities of their unique teaching environments (Farrell, 2018; Richards, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2011). This cumulative process cultivates educators who are not only responsive and adaptive but also critically informed and reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987). Consequently, reflective practice is essential for fostering lifelong learning and a commitment to excellence in teaching, ensuring that educators remain both professionally agile and ethically responsible throughout their careers (Farrell, 2015, 2018; Mann & Walsh, 2017).

Although reflective practice is widely recognised as a vital element in developing professional competence – both in preservice and inservice teacher education contexts – it has been approached and interpreted through a variety of theoretical perspectives over time (e.g. Clarà, 2015; Farrell, 2018, 2022; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Walsh & Mann, 2015). One of the earliest and most influential definitions comes from Dewey (1933, p. 9), who described reflection as the ‘active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads’. This foundational understanding has shaped various subsequent models and discussions of reflective practice (Farrell, 2015; Hatton & Smith, 1995). Building on this, Schön (1983, 1987) emphasised the integral connection between reflection and professional action, introducing the concepts of *reflection-on-action* (occurring after the teaching event) and *reflection-in-action* (occurring during the act of teaching). These concepts later gave rise to the idea of *reflection-for-action*, a proactive form of reflection that guides planning and future instructional decisions (Killion & Todnem, 1991). Despite its widespread use, the concept of reflection remains somewhat ambiguous. Hatton and Smith (1995, p. 33) observed that it is often ‘ill-defined’ and broadly applied to a wide range of educational ideas and techniques. Adding a critical dimension, Zeichner and Liston (1996) contended that research on teacher reflection should expand beyond purely cognitive domains to engage with the broader social, political, and ethical aspects of teaching practice.

Early studies by researchers such as Wallace (1991) and Richards and Lockhart (1994) viewed teacher learning primarily as a reflective process, emphasising the importance of teaching experiences in shaping professional growth. In this context, reflection was defined as ‘the process of critical examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one’s teaching practices and routines’ (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 7). Due to the complex and sometimes ambiguous nature of the term ‘reflection’ (Clarà, 2015), scholars have sought to classify the different phases or levels involved in teachers’ reflective practices. For instance, Stanley (1998, p. 585) outlined a five-stage framework for TESOL teachers’ reflective teaching, which includes: engaging with reflection, thinking reflectively, using reflection, sustaining reflection, and practicing reflection. From another perspective, Jay and Johnson (2002, p. 79) proposed a typology for preservice teachers’ reflection consisting of three levels: descriptive reflection, which involves identifying problems; comparative reflection, which explores issues from multiple viewpoints; and critical reflection, which takes into account broader sociocultural factors.

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of reflective practice in language teacher professional development, concerns have been raised regarding its conceptualisation, implementation, and future direction (e.g. Mann & Walsh, 2013, 2017; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Nearly a decade ago, Walsh and Mann (2015) highlighted a significant gap: the absence of a data-driven foundation to support teachers in applying reflective practice and exploring its potential in an effective manner. They argued that research on reflective practice often lacks sufficient empirical grounding, places too much emphasis on individual reflection while neglecting collaborative approaches, relies predominantly on written forms, and provides limited clarity on the purposes and nature of reflective tools (Walsh & Mann, 2015, p. 352). Recently, Farrell (2022) has noted that many existing frameworks tend to confine reflection to intellectual and cognitive domains and treat teacher reflection as a remedial response to perceived deficiencies in teaching. Additionally, the discrepancy between reflection and situated, contextualised action continues to persist in the research literature on reflective practice (Clarà, 2015).

Although research on reflective practice has grown substantially in recent years, comprehensive reviews of the field remain limited. In his analysis of studies published between 2009 and 2014, Farrell (2016) found that teachers employ a wide range of reflective activities to support their professional development. However, he also identified some tensions between teachers’ stated beliefs, principles, theories, and their actual classroom practices, both within and beyond language teaching contexts. Many of the studies

reviewed were conducted in university settings, where the theoretical orientations of teacher educators often shaped the research. Farrell warned that this academic framing may disconnect reflective practice from the lived experiences of teachers, potentially leading to standardised, one-size-fits-all models of reflection. Another notable observation was the geographical shift in research, with nearly half of the studies conducted in Asian countries, indicating a move away from the traditional dominance of North American and European contexts. Additionally, approximately half of the studies focused on in-service teacher education, suggesting that reflection is increasingly integrated into the practical realities of teachers' workplaces.

In a more recent review, Tajeddin et al. (2022) examined literature spanning 2001 to 2020 and emphasised the role of collaborative forms of reflection. Their findings reveal that the focus, modalities, and participatory structures of reflective practice have evolved to encompass both internal and external variables, including online platforms and collective reflection processes. They also highlight the emerging emphasis on teacher identity formation as a central concern in reflective practice – an area that remains underexplored and warrants further investigation.

While both reviews affirm the potential of reflective practice to enhance teaching performance, they also acknowledge a lack of direct empirical evidence supporting this claim. Much of the current understanding is based on inference rather than measurable outcomes (Farrell & Farrell, 2025). Therefore, future research should aim to more explicitly link reflection with practice, generating concrete evidence of its impact on teaching effectiveness. In line with previous systematic reviews, the present authors' scoping review (Anani Sarab & Mardian, 2023) shows a continued trend toward studying reflective practice in in-service teacher education, primarily through qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. It also reveals that most studies still emphasise reflection-on-action, suggesting a tendency to adopt a retrospective or 'post-mortem' approach to reflective inquiry (see Farrell & Farrell 2025).

Building on the results of previous reviews, the present bibliometric review intends to provide a birds-eye view of the research landscape in this burgeoning field bringing into limelight the key players in terms of individuals, institutions and geographic regions, and research outlets, the research themes and trends, and finally the gaps that set the scene for future research.

2. Bibliometric analysis and research questions

Using bibliometric analysis, researchers can analyse a variety of interrelated parameters in a given field, such as key papers, leading authors, widely-used keywords, top journals, important institutions, and researched countries (Zhang, 2020). Scholars have used bibliometric analyses to examine research in several areas, including language learning strategies (Hajar & Karakus, 2025), vocabulary acquisition (Meara, 2012) and theses and dissertations (Barrot et al., 2020). To the best of our knowledge, no bibliometric research has been conducted so far in the field of L2 teacher reflection. To fill this gap, the present review focuses on two research questions:

- (1) Which publications, researchers, and geographic regions have been most influential in the field of L2 teacher reflection?
- (2) What are the key themes and emerging trends in L2 teacher reflection research?

3. Method

3.1. *Martials and methods*

To gather the required data, several databases within the Web of Science Core Collection were examined, including the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Book Citation Index, and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). All retrieved records were carefully screened and verified manually. The Web of Science was selected for this study because it is recognised globally for indexing high-quality research and is widely trusted by researchers for citation analysis (Zhang, 2020).

During the online database searching, we tried to conduct a comprehensive search process using the search bar 'All Field', which includes titles, abstracts, author keywords, and keywords plus. The search strategy and a sample of search words are presented in Table 1 (The full list of keywords can be seen in Appendix A).

Table 1. Search strategies and search terms.

Feature	Explanations
Time frame	1991 to 2024
Database surveyed	Web of Science SCII (Science Social Citation Index) and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI)
Search terms	Teacher/instructor* AND language AND "reflect*"
Search terms used for strategies of reflective practice	reflect* is used with strategies such as "observation", "action research", "technology", "critical friend", "critical incident", "blog*", "mentor*", "coaching"
L2 specific search terms	EFL OR ESL OR TESOL OR TESL OR L2 OR TESL OR ELT OR second OR foreign teacher* AND "reflect*"

Other types of publications such as book reviews, meeting abstracts, notes, news items, conference proceedings, forums, and comments were excluded since they did not carry information germane to the research questions. After excluding the irrelevant items, 688 documents were obtained (see Figure 1). Editorial materials were also included in this review because some of them were highly cited in the corpus. It is important to note that we only included documents published in English because we could not examine and assess the relevance of the articles published in other languages. This issue is addressed at the end of the paper.

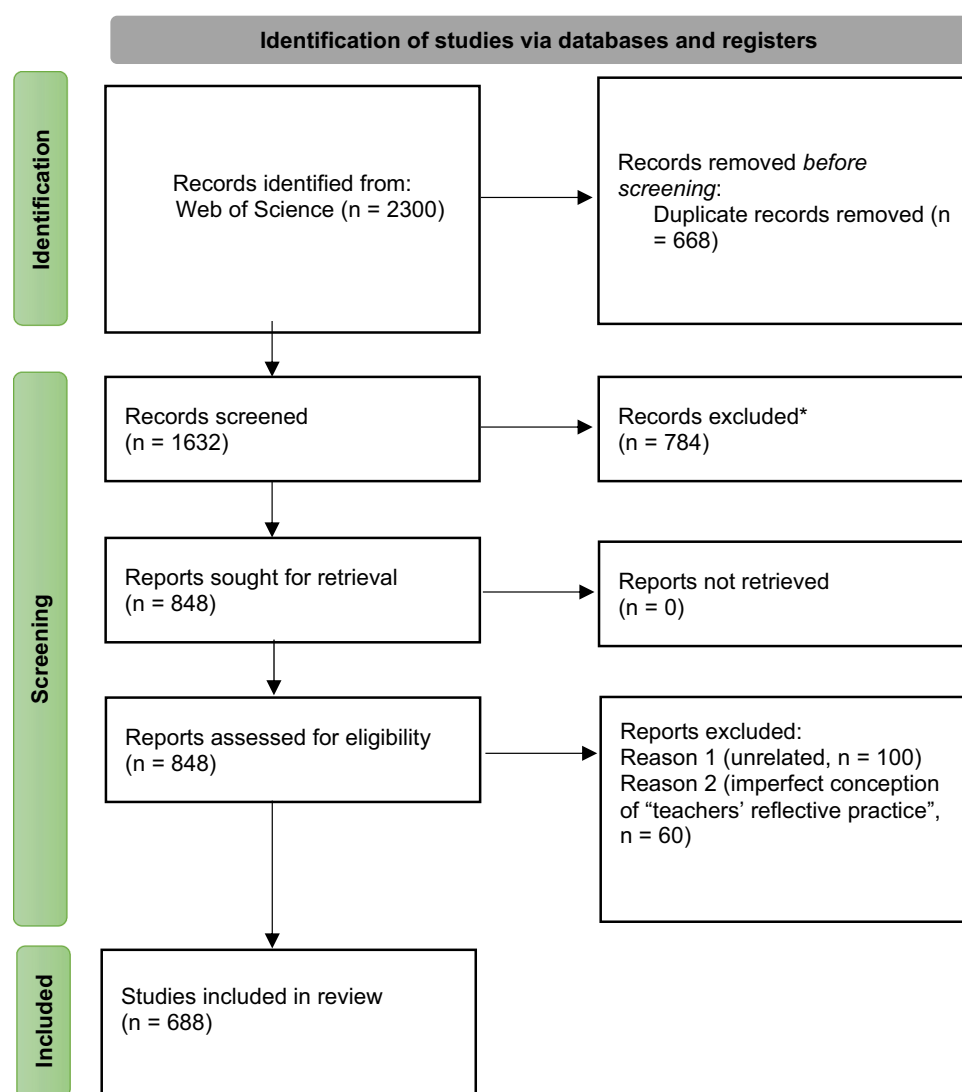


Figure 1. Flow diagram for the literature review process. *Note.* Flow diagram adapted from PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021).

3.2. Data analysis

This study used Biblioshiny to map the literature on L2 teachers' reflective practice. The software is built in the programming language R; it is user-friendly and enjoys flexibility (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). It enables the researcher to map a certain area in terms of citation analysis, cocitation analysis, keywords analysis, and bibliographic coupling. For the *citation analysis of impact*, citation information (e.g. author affiliation, publication year, number of citations) were extracted from the data. For the *cocitation analysis*, citation information was calculated based on the references in the examined data. For the *keyword analysis*, both author-supplied keywords and keywords extracted from abstracts were used. To detect the *research themes*, author-supplied keywords were analysed along with taking into account of the co-occurrence frequencies of keywords in the documents. Specifically, two indices were computed to outline each theme – Callon's Centrality and Density. Callon's centrality indicates the relevance of a theme across the full set of publications, whereas Callon's density shows the theme's development.

4. Results

This section presents the results for each research questions of the study. Before reporting the results, it is important to draw attention to the trajectory of research on L2 teacher reflection within the last three decades. Figure 2 shows the annual scientific production of research on L2 teacher reflection.

As can be seen, the field of L2 teacher reflection has witnessed a rapid growth over the years, with an increasing number of publications particularly since 2015. While the field is developing its overall scientific bases, it has been the subject of varied fluctuation over the years. For instance, from 1991 to 2001 a roughly stable line of theorisation can be seen. From 2001, research has gradually started to develop in terms of growth and size. From 2007 to 2015, research has continued to expand larger than previous years. Recent calls for adopting analytical frameworks (e.g. Farrell, 2015) and consistent warning into the need for conducting evidence-based research into teachers' reflective practices (e.g. Mann & Walsh, 2017) seem to have potentially contributed to the research growth during the last ten years. In short, reflective practice research has managed to enjoy increasing popularity and acceptance within the community, despite other leading topics and trends in the wider field of applied linguistics.

4.1. RQ1: influential journals, authors, publications, and countries

The analysis of data shows that the most relevant journals publishing reflective practice studies are the following: *System* has the highest number of citation counts (1159) and H-index (18). *Teaching and Teacher Education* has the second-highest citation count (569) with a relatively smaller number of publications (14).

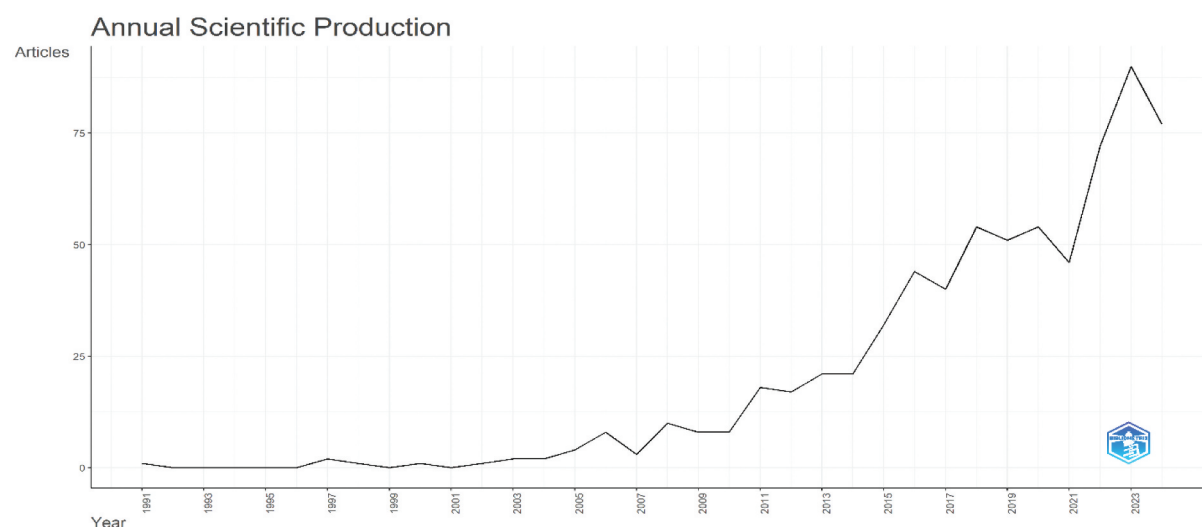


Figure 2. Annual scientific production (1991–2024).

Reflective Practice has the highest number of publications (51) with an H-Index (12). The top journals are listed in Table 2, along with the number of citations, publications, and H-Indexes.

In terms of the most prominent authors, the results (Table 3), as predicted, showed that Thomas S. C. Farrell is regarded as the most cited researcher who has produced impactful research into teachers' reflective practice with the highest number of citations (1421), publication (48), and H-Index (22). Rui (Eric) Yuan wins the second position (474, 28, 14). Other most highly cited authors are listed below, with regard to their citation counts, publications, and H-Index. It should be noted that the most leading authors were chosen on the basis of their number of publications, which was set at the threshold level 5 documents.

Empirical research into reflective practice is on the rise, and during the last three decades a great number of scholars have published influential works in this regard. The results identified the ten most highly cited documents presented in Figure 3.

The findings in Figure 3 are in line with previous sections that Farrell takes the leadership in framing our understanding of the dynamics of reflective practice. As can be seen, six of his documents are among the most highly cited documents and this reflects the significant impact and contributions of his works. Both Steve Mann and Steve Walsh have played a key position in this growing domain, highlighting the need to embrace data-led, evidence-based types of reflection (Mann & Walsh, 2013; Walsh & Mann, 2015). More information about the most highly cited documents is shown in Table 4.

The review also examined the most productive countries and highly cited contexts across the globe. The results indicate that USA occupies the leading research context ($n = 285$), followed by China ($n = 230$), Iran ($n = 199$), UK ($n = 142$), Canada ($n = 120$), Turkey ($n = 104$), Australia ($n = 81$), Japan ($n = 57$), Malaysia ($n = 45$), and Spain ($n = 45$). In our analysis of countries' scientific production over time, we noticed that USA is the central country in research on reflective practice from 1997 to 2024. This reflects diversity and distribution of geographical settings in the literature. In terms of the most cited countries, data analysis indicates that Canada is the most highly cited region in the world ($n = 137$), and China and USA come as the second and third-highest cited regions respectively ($n = 1308$; $n = 1165$). The total citation counts are calculated based on average article citations. Other highly cited countries include UK ($n = 969$), Iran ($n = 663$), Turkey ($n = 533$), Spain ($n = 247$), Malaysia ($n = 213$), Singapore ($n = 189$), and Australia ($n = 185$). The shift of focus from North America to Asian countries may reflect the view that English language education is rapidly growing in such regions and there is a need to embed contextually relevant teaching approaches and policies (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). In fact, Asian classrooms have

Table 2. The most highly impactful journals, along with citations, publications, and H-indexes.

Journals	Total citations	Number of publications	H-Index
<i>System</i>	1159	36	18
<i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>	569	14	12
<i>ELT Journal</i>	547	42	11
<i>TESOL Quarterly</i>	464	19	10
<i>RELC Journal</i>	454	30	12
<i>Reflective Practice</i>	408	51	12
<i>Language Teaching Research</i>	367	21	11
<i>ReCALL</i>	223	11	7
<i>Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research</i>	214	19	8
<i>The Modern Language Journal</i>	214	8	7
<i>Language Learning and Technology</i>	153	8	7
<i>Australian Journal of Teacher Education</i>	142	10	7
<i>Applied Linguistics Review</i>	142	6	4
<i>Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching</i>	140	20	7
<i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	123	13	7

Table 3. The most highly cited authors, along with citations, publications, and H-indexes.

Authors	Total citations	Number of publications	H-Index
Thomas S. C. Farrell	1421	48	22
Rui (Eric) Yuan	474	28	14
Mostafa Nazari	127	12	8
Kenan Dikilitaş	107	12	6
Dario Luis Banegas	84	11	5
Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan	171	10	6
Steve Walsh	262	10	4
Icy Lee	303	8	7
Steve Mann	195	7	4

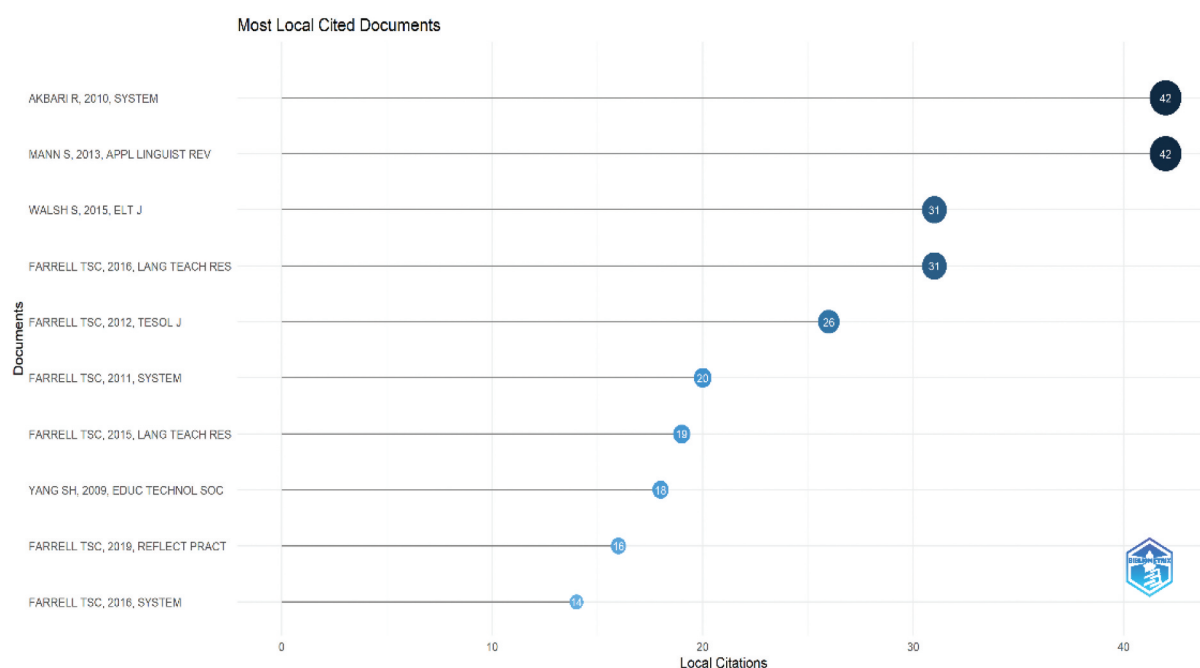


Figure 3. The most frequently-cited documents.

Table 4. The most highly-cited reflective practice documents.

Rank	Title	Authors/Year	Journal	No. of Citation (WoS)
1	Using blogs to enhance critical reflection and community of practice	Yang (2009)	<i>Educational Technology & Society</i>	297
2	Exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices through reflective practice: A case study	Farrell (2015)	<i>Language Teaching Research</i>	127
3	Exploring the professional role identities of experienced ESL teachers through reflective practice	Farrell (2011)	<i>System</i>	117
4	Development of English language teaching reflection inventory	Akbari et al. (2010)	<i>System</i>	108
5	RP or 'RIP': A critical perspective on reflective practice	Mann and Walsh (2013)	<i>Applied Linguistics Review</i>	108
6	Doing reflective practice: A data-led way forward	Walsh and Mann (2015)	<i>ELT Journal</i>	94
7	Reflecting on reflective practice: (Re)visiting Dewey and Schön	Farrell (2012)	<i>TESOL Journal</i>	87
8	Anniversary article: The practices of encouraging TESOL teachers to engage in reflective practice: An appraisal of recent research contributions	Farrell (2016a)	<i>Language Teaching Research</i>	81
9	Surviving the transition shock in the first year of teaching through reflective practice	Farrell (2016b)	<i>System</i>	56
10	Reflective practice framework for TESOL teachers: One teacher's reflective journey	Farrell and Kennedy (2019)	<i>Reflective Practice</i>	33

their own linguistic and cultural complexities that encourage reflective teaching to address classroom challenges (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019).

A cocitation analysis was also run to identify the intellectual structure of the research field, and to analyse the knowledge foundation relating to teacher reflection (Figure 4). The cocitation network below shows the semantic relationship among the documents.

Based on the data analysis, three clusters were identified. The middle blue cluster, which demonstrates strong inter-relationships, impact and performance in the research field includes a number of influential works such as Akbari (2007, 2010), Farrell (2016a), Hatton and Smith (1995), Wallace (1991), Johnson (2009), and Richards and Lockhart (1994). These works have contributed to the conceptualisation of reflective practice with a focus on its core dimensions and its links to teacher education in general. This cluster can be considered the core one feeding the other two clusters. The second

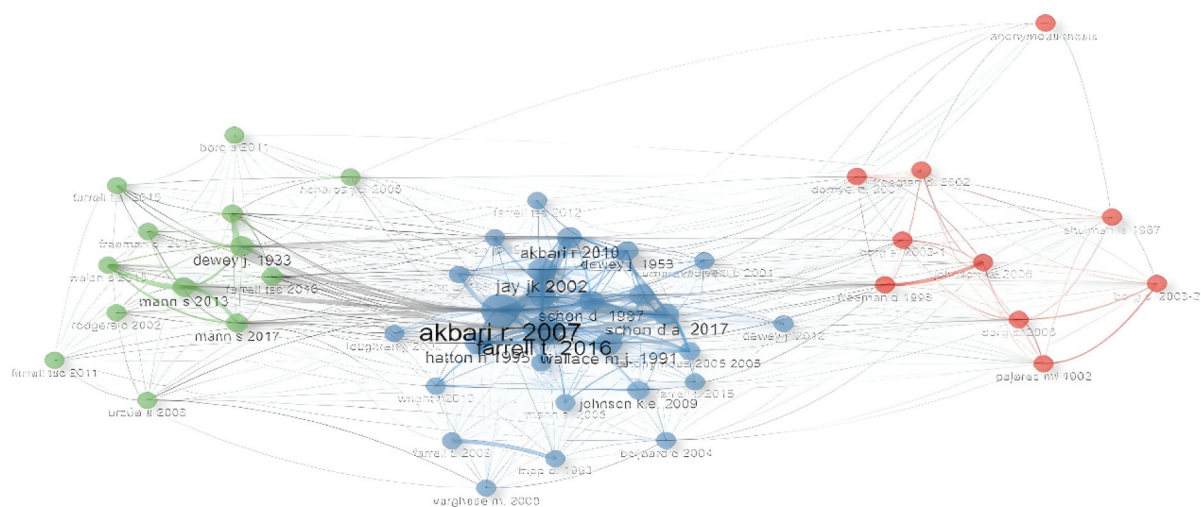


Figure 4. The cocitation network of papers.

green-highlighted cluster includes co-cited work by Farrell (2011, 2015, 2016a) Walsh and Mann (2015), Mann and Walsh (2013, 2017). These works are mainly concerned with the ways through which reflection can be operationalised in educational settings. The final red cluster includes works such as Borg (2006), Shulman (1987), Freeman (2002), Freeman and Johnson (1998), and Pajares (1992). The third cluster links reflection and reflective practice to the knowledge-base of language teaching and teaching practice with a special emphasis on teacher cognition.

4.2. RQ2: research themes and trends

Using the author keywords, we were interested in examining the most frequently researched topics in the field of L2 teacher reflective practice.

The trend topics, presented in Figure 5, once again emphasises the growth of research into teacher reflection as well as the diversified nature of L2 teacher reflection. It can be seen that since 2015 a wide variety of trend topics are being addressed in the studies of L2 teacher reflection. While trend topics, such as, 'writing' and 'teacher beliefs' have been investigated in research between 2009 and 2020, emerging and new trends seem to appear after the year 2015. For example, topics such as 'self-efficacy', 'computer-mediated communication', 'reflective teaching', 'telecollaboration', 'preservice teachers', 'action research', 'agency', 'language teacher identity', and 'teacher professional development' are gaining scholarly interest in the field. This variety indicates that research in reflective practice continues to function as a viable means for language teachers to apply their theories, reflect on their teaching practices, develop their identity, build agency, and increase their evolving knowledge base in the classroom (Richards & Farrell, 2011). The following Figure visualises the co-occurrence network, which shows the relationship among the nodes.

As Figure 6 shows, the nodes 'reflective practice', 'teacher reflection', 'reflection', and professional development' are at the heart of the network, demonstrating a powerful relationship with other concepts such as teacher identity, teacher beliefs, and microteaching. In addition to the analysis of the trend topics, we used the thematic map facility to structure the accumulated knowledge into research domains as a basis for identifying the most frequently addressed topics in research on reflective practice. A thematic map is provided below using the authors' keywords field.

The thematic map (Figure 7) plots the themes on two axes of centrality and density. Centrality examines the degree of relation that a keyword network creates with other keyword networks. Density assesses the internal strength of a network, entailing how closely these words interact with each other. As it is clear, the themes are classified into four groups: Motor themes, which refer to the well-developed, relevant, and highly frequent topics, include 'language teachers' professional development', 'challenges', and teaching practice". Niche themes, which describe peripheral and specialised



Figure 5. Trend topics based on the authors' keywords.



Figure 6. Co-occurrence network.

themes, are 'computer-mediated communication', 'blogs', 'preservice teachers', 'task-based language learning', 'innovation', 'narrative', and emotional dynamics" (e.g. vulnerability). Emerging or declining themes, themes with low density and low centrality, indicate weakly developed areas (e.g. collaborative reflection, community of practice, materials development, critical reflection). Basic themes, which include important and general ones, encompass areas such as action research, dialogue, corpus linguistics, reflective teaching, identity, dialogic reflection, and so forth. A network is also provided to visualise the authors' keywords.

As can be seen in [Figure 8](#), the conceptual structure of L2 teacher reflective practice is characterised by different clusters representing the interaction among the concepts. The central cluster 'reflective practice' enjoys strong links with 'professional development', 'teacher education', 'teacher', and 'reflection', confirming the thematic map. The nodes then have multiple close relations with

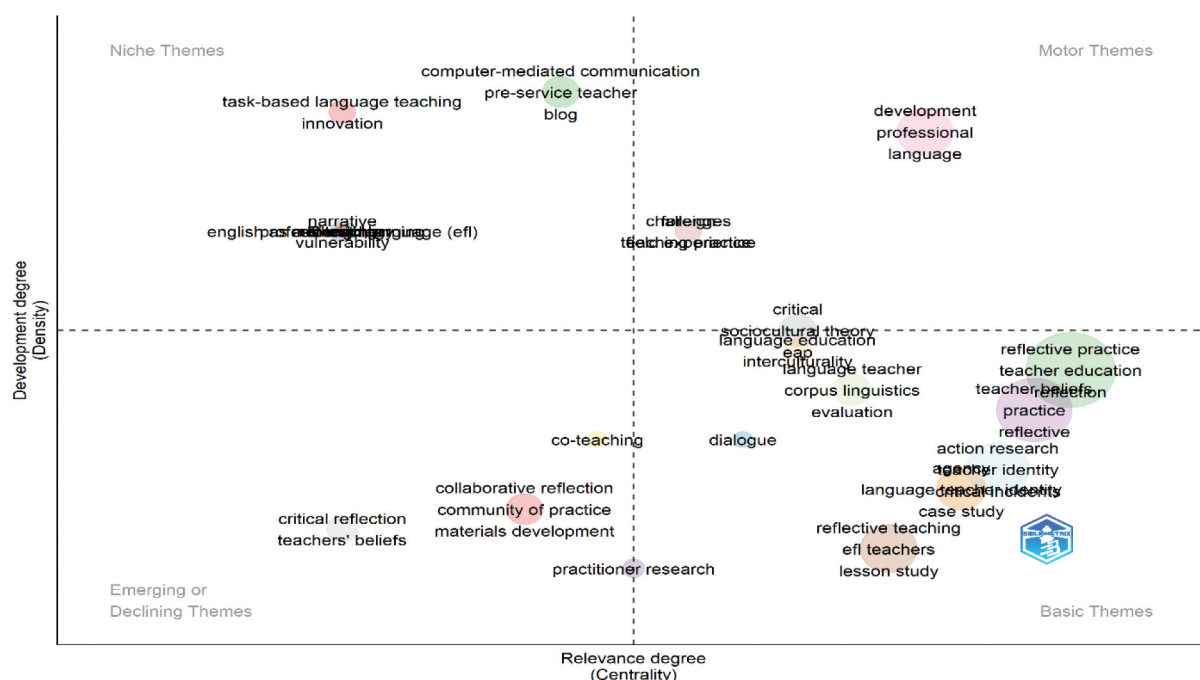


Figure 7. Thematic map.

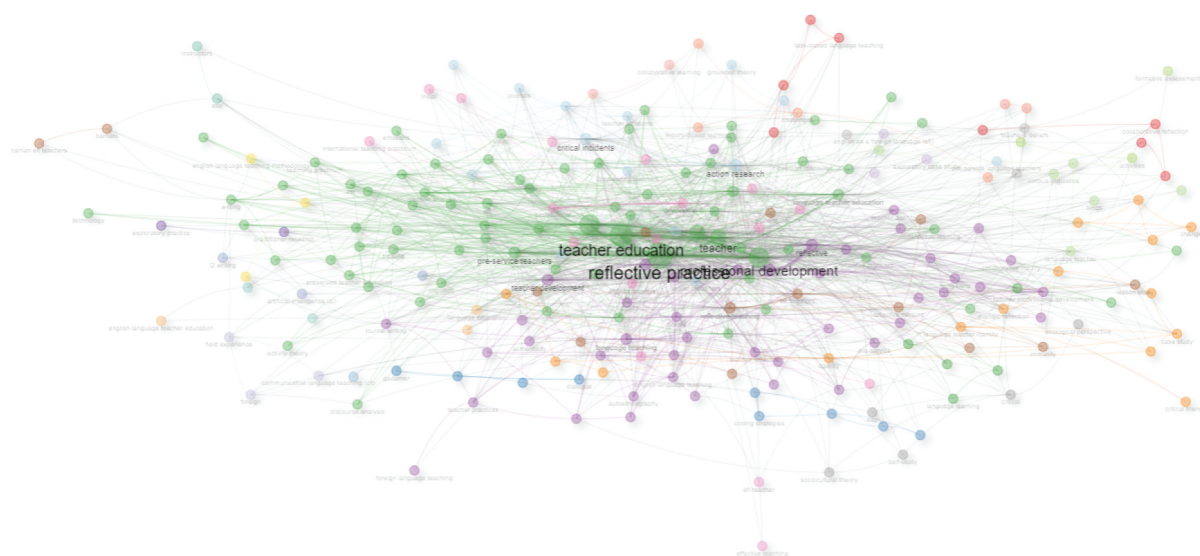


Figure 8. The network map based on the authors' keywords.

other concepts in the map, such as 'early-career teachers', 'preservice teachers', 'action research', 'teacher beliefs', 'community of practice', and 'professional identity', among others.

5. Discussion

The present bibliometric review shows that reflective practice remains a vibrant and rapidly expanding area of activity in the field of L2 teacher education, capturing increasing academic attention both locally and internationally (Farrell, 2013, 2018). The sustained interest in reflective practice can largely be attributed to its central role in teaching, particularly in language education. As Farrell (2015) notes, reflective practice fosters self-knowledge, self-awareness, and the development of professional identity – core elements that underpin teachers' ongoing growth and adaptability in increasingly complex educational contexts. This perspective resonates with Schön's

(1983) notion of the reflective practitioner, who is supposed to engage in continuous self-examination and experiential learning to effectively navigate the uncertainties and dynamic nature of classroom environments.

The identification of professional development of language teachers as a motor theme (characterised by high centrality and high density) indicates that reflection is not merely an add-on but an embedded, vital component of teacher learning processes. Research has confirmed that through reflection, teachers develop nuanced understandings of the multifaceted nature of language teaching, including its cognitive, affective, and sociocultural dimensions (Farrell, 2015; Freeman, 2016; Yuan & Mak, 2018). This supports Zeichner and Liston's (1996) argument that reflective practice bridges the gap between theory and practice by encouraging teachers to interrogate their beliefs, assumptions, and classroom decisions meaningfully. Consistent with this theme, the rapid growth of empirical research on language teachers' professional development, as evidenced by the identified trend topics, suggests an increasing realisation that reflection is an integral part of professional development as it plays a central role in shaping teacher identity, agency, self-efficacy, and belief systems. Techniques such as action research, video-based observation, and digital tools are gaining traction as powerful facilitators of reflective inquiry (see Figure 7). This trend is in line with Loughran's (2002) emphasis on the iterative nature of reflection, where teachers continually refine and develop their practices through evidence-based scrutiny and collaborative dialogue.

Among the niche themes identified in the present study, the main one is technology-supported reflection. Niche themes are themes with high density but low centrality (Ying et al., 2022). In other words, these themes are highly developed but scattered. The implication is that they are relevant and important to the field and have the potential to become motor themes; therefore, they demand more emphasis in future research. The studies in this category reveal how e-portfolios, blogs, video-enhanced dialogues, and online forums serve as platforms for teachers to engage in self-assessment, peer feedback, and emotional engagement (Farr & Riordan, 2015; Farrell, 2019; Yuan et al., 2022). This finding highlights the growing pedagogical movement towards integrating digital literacy and multimodal reflection into teacher education (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Yuan et al., 2022), underscoring technology's potential to transform reflective practice from isolated introspection to dialogic, collaborative professional learning.

The review also confirms that the conceptualisation and operationalisation of teacher reflection have been significantly shaped by influential scholars, particularly Thomas S. C. Farrell. His extensive scholarship over three decades highlights the layered, multifaceted nature of reflection, integrating dimensions such as personal beliefs, classroom management, lesson planning, and professional development. Farrell's (2015) framework offers valuable practical guidance for teacher educators and researchers aiming to explore and support reflective processes in L2 teaching contexts. This contribution advances the field beyond generic definitions towards contextualised, actionable understandings of reflection. Equally important is the emphasis by Mann and Walsh (2013, 2015) on adopting data-led, evidence-based approaches to reflective practice research. Their call for rigorous, empirical methodologies challenges traditional, often anecdotal, treatments of reflection, encouraging a more systematic investigation of how reflective processes influence teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (Walsh & Mann, 2015).

The field's dynamism is further reflected in its engagement with a wide array of academic journals, notably *System*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *ELT Journal*, and *TESOL Quarterly*, *Applied Linguistics Review*, and *Language Teaching Research*, which have played important roles in conceptualising and operationalising teacher reflection (e.g. Akbari, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Korthagen, 1993). The multidisciplinary journal *Reflective Practice* emerges as a particularly prolific platform, reinforcing the transdisciplinary appeal and practical relevance of reflective practice research. These outlets collectively facilitate critical discourse that bridges the oft-cited theory-practice divide in teacher education, thereby enriching both scholarly understanding and classroom realities (Farrell, 2016a). The geographic variety found in the research – while dominated by the USA – represents a global recognition of reflective practice's importance, with substantive contributions from China, Iran, the UK, and other countries. This diversification enriches the field by introducing varied cultural, institutional, and linguistic perspectives on how reflection is conceptualised and enacted, challenging the field to develop more culturally responsive and context-sensitive models of reflective teacher education (Atkinson, 2011).

The thematic mapping of research reveals a dynamic landscape, with basic themes focusing on core elements like teacher beliefs, action research, and identity formation. These foundational areas remain essential, providing the conceptual scaffolding for understanding reflective practice. However, niche themes such as computer-mediated communication and blogging are gaining traction but require deeper, focused inquiry to fully realise their potential in supporting reflective engagement. Emerging and declining themes such as collaborative

reflection, communities of practice, materials development, and critical reflection currently exhibit low centrality and density, indicating the diversification of techniques used for fostering reflective practice. The instrumental use of these new techniques highlights critical opportunities for advancing the field by moving beyond individualistic, descriptive reflections toward more dialogic, critical, and collaborative reflective models (Mann & Walsh, 2013, 2017). This reflects Vygotskian sociocultural theory's emphasis on social interaction and mediation in learning, reinforcing that reflection is not only personal but also fundamentally social and contextual. Engaging with these areas is crucial for responding to contemporary challenges in teacher education, including issues of power, identity, and equity, and for fostering reflective practitioners who are socially and politically conscious agents of change (Zeichner, 2010).

6. Pedagogical implications

The pedagogical implications of this bibliometric review highlight the necessity of embedding reflective practice as a valuable element in L2 teacher education programs to foster continuous professional growth, adaptability, and identity development among language teachers (Farrell, 2015; Schön, 1983). Considering the fact that reflection supports critical self-awareness, teachers need to be encouraged to engage systematically in reflective inquiry to better understand their beliefs, instructional decisions, and classroom dynamics, enabling them to respond effectively to diverse learner needs and complex teaching contexts (Yuan & Mak, 2018; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Teacher educators should prioritise creating opportunities for reflection, such as guided journaling, peer collaboration, action research projects, and video-based observations, all of which facilitate deeper analysis of teaching practices and enhance metacognitive skills (Farrell, 2018). Furthermore, integrating technology-supported reflective tools such as e-portfolios, blogs, and online discussion forums can extend reflection beyond the classroom, promoting dialogic and multimodal reflection that supports emotional engagement and peer feedback, thereby fostering a community of practice among language educators (Farr & Riordan, 2015; Farrell, 2019; Yuan et al., 2022). Reflective activities, for example, should be closely linked with new pedagogies such task-based language teaching and technology-enhanced learning. Through critical reflection on their use of these approaches, teachers can better tailor their instruction to meet learners' needs and improve outcomes (Bryfonski, 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Pedagogical frameworks should also emphasise the iterative and evidence-based nature of reflection, encouraging teachers to use data-driven insights to continually refine their teaching strategies (Mann & Walsh, 2013, 2015; Walsh & Mann, 2015). This approach is in line with sociocultural theories highlighting the social and contextual dimensions of learning, suggesting that reflection should not be an isolated, individual activity but one embedded in collaborative, critical, and culturally responsive practices that address issues of identity, equity, and power in education (Johnson, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, teacher education curricula need to accommodate diverse cultural and institutional contexts to ensure reflective practices are meaningful and relevant across different settings (Atkinson 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In short, cultivating reflective practitioners capable of critical self-examination and adaptation enhances teacher efficacy, improves student outcomes, and advances the professionalisation of language teaching in an evolving global educational landscape (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Farrell, 2015; Walsh & Mann, 2015).

7. Conclusion

This bibliometric review has shown that reflective practice is not only central to L2 teacher education but also a driving force behind meaningful and sustained professional development (Farrell, 2022). Reflection is no longer considered supplementary; it is now recognised as essential for cultivating teacher identity, self-efficacy, and pedagogical adaptability in increasingly complex educational environments (Akbari, 2007; Farrell, 2015, 2018; Schön, 1983). The prominence of professional development confirms reflection's critical role in linking theory to classroom realities (Yuan & Mak, 2018; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The integration of technology – through e-portfolios, video dialogues, and online platforms – signals a transformative shift towards multimodal, dialogic reflection that enhances peer interaction and emotional engagement (Farr & Riordan, 2015; Yuan et al., 2022). Scholars such as Farrell (2015, 2019) and Mann and Walsh (2013, 2015) have significantly advanced the field by offering practical, data-driven frameworks that challenge superficial reflection and advocate for systematic, evidence-informed inquiry. As reflective practice continues gain attention across the globe, future research should

focus on culturally responsive, socially grounded, and critically engaged models (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2022). Embedding such reflective practices in teacher education is essential for fostering competent, adaptive, and socially conscious language teachers.

There are some opportunities for further research, especially in less explored areas such as collaborative and critical reflection, along with the impact of new digital technologies. Investigating these topics will shed light on the intricate connections between individual thinking, social interactions, and technology in the context of teacher reflection. Moreover, Farrell (2020) stresses the importance of examining teacher reflection within specific settings such as English-medium instruction (EMI), multilingualism, and global Englishes, which remain largely understudied. Research in these areas is essential for developing professional development programs that prepare teachers to effectively navigate linguistic diversity and the unique challenges present in EMI environments. Finally, nurturing reflective teachers with strong theoretical frameworks, technological resources, and a collaborative approach offers great potential to enhance language teacher education and support ongoing professional growth.

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Ethical considerations

There were no human participants in this study and neither informed consent nor ethical review were required.

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Appendix A

Keyword search terms used during data collection.

Key concepts/terms			
Reflect	EFL	Professional	Reflective strategy
Reflection	ESL	development	Technology
Reflective practice	TESOL	Beliefs	Blog
Reflexivity	Applied linguistics	Identity	Diary
Critical reflection	ESOL	Cognition	Observation
Critical reflective practice	ELT	Emotions	Supervision
Collaborative reflection	TESL	Collaboration	Case analysis
Collaborative reflective	TEFL	Classroom practice	Analysing cases
practice	L2 teacher education	Teaching practice	Online learning community
Self-reflection	Second/foreign language teacher	Expertise	Online collaboration
Dialogic reflection	education	Classroom management	Action research
Reflective enquiry		Practicum	Critical incidents
Reflective inquiry		Teacher talk	Critical friend
			Tutoring
			Forum
			Portfolio
			Telecollaboration
			Podcast
			Self-study
			Lesson study
			Teacher development/study/discussion
			group
			Lesson plan
			Journal writing
			Narrative
			Monitoring
			Dialog
			Critical incidents
			Journal writing
			Mentoring
			Coaching
			Co-teaching
			Team teaching
			Peer coaching
			Service learning
			Metaphor