

**EXPLORING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AMONG UNIVERSITY  
ENGLISH TEACHERS IN YEMEN: A CASE STUDY**

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## Abstrak

Refleksi merupakan satu alat pengajaran yang penting bagi guru dalam pendidikan tinggi. Dengan membuat refleksi terhadap prestasi pengajaran, guru boleh memahami refleksi untuk pembangunan profesional serta pembelajaran dan pengajaran yang bermakna. Oleh kerana kepercayaan dan amalan adalah komponen yang penting dalam amalan reflektif, pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang cara guru melibatkan diri dalam amalan refleksi perlu diterokai. Kajian terdahulu memberi tumpuan utama kepada kepercayaan guru terhadap refleksi. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak banyak yang diketahui tentang cara refleksi yang diamalkan dalam kalangan guru Bahasa Inggeris di universiti di Yaman pada masa kini. Kajian ini meneroka cara refleksi diamalkan di sebuah universiti swasta di Yaman dengan menggunakan kaedah kajian kes kualitatif untuk mendapatkan gambaran tentang fenomena ini. Data telah dikumpul melalui pendekatan penyelidikan pelbagai cabang termasuk temu bual separa berstruktur, pemerhatian separa berstruktur, catatan jurnal, dan perbincangan kumpulan berfokus. Lima orang guru yang mempunyai sepuluh tahun pengalaman mengajar dipilih sebagai informan utama. Enam hingga sepuluh orang pelajar yang diajar oleh setiap informan telah mengambil bahagian dalam perbincangan kumpulan berfokus. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan satu skim pengekodan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru terlibat dalam pelbagai peringkat, jenis, dan corak refleksi. Elemen refleksi yang pelbagai memperlihatkan bahawa refleksi guru disebabkan oleh dua jenis faktor, iaitu faktor yang membolehkan dan faktor yang mengekang. Kajian ini memperlihatkan bahawa guru perlu sentiasa melibatkan diri dalam refleksi secara formal, berkala, serta perlu berkolaborasi dengan pelajar, rakan sekerja, dan pentadbir untuk tujuan pembangunan profesional. Kajian ini mempunyai beberapa implikasi. Secara teorinya, kajian ini memberikan kesedaran yang kritis pada peringkat refleksi yang berbeza. Secara praktiknya, kajian ini memberi maklumat yang mendalam tentang amalan reflektif yang berkesan kepada guru, pentadbir, dan pembuat keputusan, khususnya berhubung proses dan kesesuaian amalan ini dengan pendidikan guru. Dari segi metodologi, kajian lain boleh mengupayakan pendekatan yang sama untuk memahami fenomena yang kompleks berkaitan pembelajaran dan pengajaran. Kajian penyelidikan selanjutnya diperlukan untuk meneroka peranan pentadbir universiti dan penggubal dasar untuk menggalakkan refleksi yang berkesan.

**Kata kunci:** Amalan reflektif, Proses refleksi, Kepercayaan guru, Guru universiti, Yaman

## Abstract

Reflection is an important teaching tool for teachers in higher education. By reflecting on the teaching performance, teachers can make sense of reflection for professional development and meaningful teaching and learning. Given that beliefs and practices are important components of reflective practice, more in-depth understanding of how teachers engage in reflection needs to be explored. Previous studies mainly focused on teacher's beliefs about reflection. However, little is known about how reflection is currently practiced among the university English teachers in Yemen. This study explores how reflection is practiced at one private university in Yemen by employing a qualitative case study method to gain insights into the phenomenon. Data were collected through a multipronged research approach including semi-structured interviews, semi-structured classroom observations, journal entry and focus group discussions. Five teachers with ten-years of teaching experience were purposively selected as the key informants. Six to ten students taught by every informant took part in the focus group discussions. Data were analyzed using a coding scheme. The findings indicate that the teachers engaged in various levels, types and patterns of reflection. The multifaceted elements of reflection revealed that teachers' reflection was caused by two types of factors namely enabling and constraining factors. The study demonstrates that teachers need to constantly engage in formal, regular and collaborative reflection with students, colleagues, and administrators for professional development. The study provides several implications. Theoretically, the study leads to a critical awareness of the different layers of reflection. Practically, it gives teachers, administrators and decision-makers in-depth information about effective reflective practice, in particular, its process and relevance to teacher education. Methodologically, other studies can employ a similar approach to understand any complex phenomena related to teaching and learning. Further research studies are required to explore the roles of university administrators and policy makers in promoting effective reflection.

**Keywords:** Reflective practice, Reflection process, Teacher's beliefs, University teachers, Yemen

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**UST** University of Science and Technology

**SU** Sana'a University

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The concept of reflective practice is not new. Rather, it dates back to Dewey (1910) who was inspired by Plato. Today, this concept has become very common not only in education but also in some other fields like nursing, the police force, counseling, social service and clinical pharmacy, and appears in almost every professional training mission statement or policy document as an espoused objective of professional training (Barry, 1996). Stemming from this view, teachers' lifelong professional development can be achieved through reflective practice (Biggs, 2003) and the ability of teachers to professionally develop can be enhanced by constantly constructing knowledge through reflection (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; McAlpine & Weston, 2000).

The use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the beliefs that teachers can enhance their own teaching professional development by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching practice (Farrell, 2007, 2008; Gimenez, 1999). Reflective practice can ensure that teachers' work is going smoothly (Bailey, 1997) and provide teachers with an opportunity to develop awareness of the beliefs and assumptions underlying their practices (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Previous research on teacher reflection (Fensom, 2007; Lyons, 2006; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2009; Munoz, 2007; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006) reveals that the teacher can better understand his/her

professional action through reflective practice and that reflection on teaching problems can lead to new insights for practice.

The focus of professional development on teaching is improved practice (Osterman, 1991) and meaning making (Ramsey, 2003). As such, reflective practice is seen as constructing and reconstructing practitioners' beliefs and practices to create awareness that leads to professional development and improved practice (Fook & Gardner, 2007). This can be done by investigating the underlying premises on which practitioners draw their work (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005). However, the relationship between teachers' beliefs (espoused theories) and their practices (theories-in-use) is vague which might be caused by certain implicit factors (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002). Such factors may affect the awareness of teachers pertaining to their theories-in-use (Kane *et al.*, 2002).

In addition, researchers stressed the need for the investigation of these implicit factors that stand in the way of reflective practice and cause ineffective reflection of university teachers (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006). Furthermore, researchers view reflective practice as an important teaching aspect in higher education (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brookfield, 1995; Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2004) and have encouraged more research studies among university teachers of English pertaining to reflective practice (Akbari, 2007; Akbari, Behzadpoor, & Dadvand, 2010; Fensom, 2007; Munoz, 2007). Based on the argument above, the main purpose of this study was to explore reflective practice among teachers of English at one particular university in Yemen.

The reason for this focus is that by engaging teachers in the reflection process, they can develop awareness about their theories-in-use (practices) which practitioners may not be aware of (Barry, 1996). These theories-in-use, which are influential as they guide teachers' practices (Argyris & Schon, 1974), are deeply rooted and cannot be changed easily by just providing new information (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Rather, theories-in-use are likely to change through teachers' engagement in observation and reflection to develop awareness of their beliefs and practices (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Furthermore, theories-in-use which are difficult to articulate or identify (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Hartnell-Young, 2003) also need to be made explicit for teachers so that they can develop and improve their own teaching practices (Moon, 1999).

To illustrate the point presented above, reflective practice focuses on both espoused theories (beliefs) and theories-in-use (practices). Espoused theories are theories that teachers articulate and claim to follow in their practices and theories-in-use are those that teachers demonstrate by their behaviors (Argyris & Schon, 1974). However, more emphasis is given to theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Schon, 1983, 1987) which can only be observed by others. This entails the essential role of others in the reflective practice and its objective of increasing practitioner's awareness of the role of theories-in-use in the design of action (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Barry, 1996; Schon, 1983, 1987).

Overall, reflective practice is viewed as important to develop teacher's expertise at all levels (Kane *et al.*, 2002). Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaughlin (1990) argued that professional development cannot occur without systematic reflection. Rando and Menges asserted that "every [university] teacher has a professional



obligation to formulate and articulate a rationale for his or her instructional world” (Rando & Menges, 1991, p. 13). This shows that reflective practice can be used as an effective instrument to make teachers’ theories-in-use explicit. It can be used to narrow the gap between teachers’ espoused theories and their theories-in-use. Kane *et al.* (2002) asserted that examining the consistency of espoused theories and theories-in-use of any particular tertiary teacher and exploring the factors that affect the agreement between them can help to create a holistic picture about teaching at the tertiary level. Hence, in this study, reflective practice was used to narrow the gap between espoused theories and theories-in-use and raise teachers’ awareness about reflection and its practice.

Reflection is not a mere description of what we do, but it involves thinking about why we do things and whether they have gone as intended, why we think they may have worked well, and how we might do them differently next time (Brookfield, 1995). According to Brookfield (1995), teachers can understand their teaching world better by reflecting on their teaching practices through four perspectives: autobiographies as teachers and learners, colleagues’ perceptions and experiences, students’ eyes, and the related literature. These lenses can reflect (back to us as to) who we are and what we do.

In light of the above discussion, the personal constructs theory (Kelly, 1955), critical social theory (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007) and theories of personal action i.e., espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974) can help to explain teachers’ engagement in the reflective practice in the social community of practice. They show how new knowledge and understanding can be constructed and

developed through engaging teachers in collaborative discussions of their teaching and students' learning problems. Much more detail review of this is presented in the second chapter.

Research studies in higher education indicated that reflective practice might be affected by certain factors such as reflective framework guidance, teacher's personality, experience, ability, teaching environment, training and formal learning (Akbari, 2007; Amobi, 2005; Killen, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Munoz, 2007; Ramsey, 2003). However, very little was known about these factors in the literature and as such, I felt the need to explore reflective practice and what affects it more fully. Several instruments were used to understand reflection process among teachers which include teacher's individual interviews (Amobi, 2005; Lyons, 2006; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, & Montie, 2006), classroom observations (Argyris, Putnam, & McLain Smith, 1985; Hsiu-ting, 2008; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), journal writing (Fang, 1996; Farrell, 2008; Hartnell-Young, 2003; Smith, 2009) and students' comments on the teaching and learning issues (Brookfield, 1995).

Given that reflection is important for continuous and instant improvement of learning from experience (Butler, 1996; Dewey, 1933), some researchers view it as a catalyst for continuous learning and for change (Ghaye, 2005; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). As such, it helps teachers to increase their learning and improve their practices (Barry, 1996). York-Barr *et al.* argued that "ten years of teaching can be 10 years of learning from experience with continuous improvement, or it can be 1 year with no learning repeated 10 times" (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006, p. 27).

Experience may be insufficient as a basis for teacher development because we often "... teach as we have been taught" (Bailey *et al.*, 1996, p. 11); yet reflective practice can play a key role in changing this experience into new understanding, new knowledge that may inform teachers' theories and practices. This is because reflecting critically on our own practices can bring us to the level of awareness about what we do and why we do it (Bailey, 1997). Nunan and Lamb (1996) stated that reflective practice is a fundamental component in the professional development of teachers' knowledge and their theories of teaching, and reflective teachers have the capacity of monitoring, critiquing and defending their practices in planning, implementing and assessing language programs. Moreover, reflective practice is viewed as an influential norm which is required for constant improvement of teaching and learning practices that result in high levels of student achievement (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Research studies called upon the development of university teachers through reflection (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Munoz, 2007). Kane *et al.* (2002) suggested that the development of university teachers can be achieved through understanding teachers' espoused theories and their theories-in-use that may provide a clear picture and how they develop as teachers. As a result of the limited research in examining espoused theories and theories-in-use of how they develop professionally, Kane *et al.* stressed the need for research that can assist academics to make their theories-in-use explicit and to question them in light of their own espoused theories and intentions. Questioning the teacher's actions is reflection at the critical level (Van Manen, 1977).

Munoz (2007) also asserted that reflective practice among the teachers of English needs to be explored further in order to enhance teachers' professional development.

Types of reflective practice have been identified in literature based on the time of their occurrence. Reflection-for-action takes place before the educational activities (Killion & Todnem, 1991). Reflection-in-action occurs during the teaching and reflection-on-action happens when the teaching is done (Schon, 1983, 1987). It is worthwhile to illuminate that Schon also used reflection-on-action to refer to reflection that precedes action. Reflection can be done either individually or collaboratively with others.

Teachers often engage in reflection-in-action while many designers of teacher professional development programs focus on reflection-on-action as they see it as the most systematic and deliberate thinking back over one's actions (Hartnell-Young, 2003). This study focused on all the three types of reflection as they are important for treating teaching and learning problems. The systematic and deliberate reflection elevates our awareness that all university teachers should articulate the rationale for their teaching strategies (Rando & Menges, 1991). Therefore, teachers can reflect on the teaching and learning practices before teaching, during teaching and after teaching is done. For instance, before teaching, they can reflect on the teaching and learning activities they plan to use in class. During teaching, they can reflect on the teaching and learning problems which occur in the classroom, and they can also reflect back on the teaching and learning process when the teaching is done.

By and large, reflective practice has no unique definition in literature. Some researchers (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009) defined it as a meta cognitive process with a cyclical nature that involves initial beliefs about a particular problem, plans of action to improve practice in relation to that problem, taking an action to solve that problem and evaluating the solutions or looking back on what has been done. Therefore, diagnosing the teaching and learning problem, showing responsibility to solve the problem, and evaluating the solution to the problem (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989) are the main dimensions of reflective practice that the present study adopted to understand reflection process.

Specifically, reflective practice is viewed as an intentional problem-solving process that involves two interrelated components: thought and action (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009). In line with the components of reflection: thought and action (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009), and the three main dimensions of reflection i.e., diagnosing the teaching and learning problem, testing and evaluating the solutions to the problem and believing in the personal causation (showing commitment and responsibility to solve problems) (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989), this study attempted to focus on both the teachers' thoughts and practices.

Dewey (1933) argued that reflective practice is a process and a product; it is a careful way of thinking (process) that results in meaning making and understanding (product). However, the existing studies on teacher reflective practice focus on the product of reflection rather than the process (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009). This incomplete cycle of reflection has caused ineffective product of reflection (teachers' implicit theories-in-use) (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009). Specifically, whether reflective

practice is an intentional problem-solving process in which a teacher is involved in a process of re-analyzing his/her practices based on inquiry process or it is seen as a meta cognitive process of thinking (planning, reviewing and evaluating) in relation to action (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009), researchers argued that it has not been studied thoroughly (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Mena Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011). Rather, only some fragments of reflective process have been studied regarding what teachers claim they do, but not what they actually do about reflective practice. This is only part of the story (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009) or what Kane *et al.* (2002) referred to as telling half the story. The present study intended to focus on the two parts of the story. That is, what teachers claim they do (their thoughts or espoused theories) and what they actually do (their actions or theories-in-use).

I argued that what the teachers claim they do can be studied through teachers' interviews and what they do in practice can be investigated through classroom observations, teachers' journal entries and students' comments on the teaching and learning issues. That is, we can understand what teachers claim they do from their perspectives about their actions (Merriam, 1998) by listening to their views about the teaching and learning issues. In a series of interviews, I intended to see the teachers' lives from different angles (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), illuminated through the teachers' own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Minah Harun (2007) argued that we can make sense of what people do by stimulating them to talk about their lives. Furthermore, in classroom observations, the investigator can observe what people do without relying on what they claim they do (Dornyei, 2007). We can understand why things happen the way they do in the classroom (Allwright, 1983). The investigator can get authentic data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) about the teacher's behavior as it

is happening (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the journal entry has a reflective nature (Smith, 2008). It can help us elicit teachers' interpretations of events and behaviors (Dornyei, 2007). Through the journal entry, we can learn about the three dimensions of reflection i.e., diagnosis, testing and belief in personal. Also, the students' comments on the teaching and learning issues provided more details about the teaching and learning process. Much more detail review of the research instruments is presented in the third chapter.

In the present study, reflective practice represents the whole process of reflection including the implicit factors which affect the thought and action of practitioners. It is considered a process of careful thinking involving planning, reviewing and evaluating beliefs and practices, and a product resulting in meaning making and understanding (Ramsey, 2003).

Given that teachers can develop themselves professionally by reflecting on the day to day experiences (Brookfield, 1995; Fensom, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Munoz, 2007; Richards, 2002), reflective practice is viewed as a meaning-making process (Rodgers, 2002). Such a process shifts a learner from one experience to another with more profound understanding of its relations with other experiences and ideas that occurs in community in collaboration with others (Rodgers, 2002). This is based on the view that "knowledge is actively constructed and not passively received. A constructive view of teaching involves teachers in making their own sense of their own classrooms and taking on the role of a reflective practitioner" (Richards, 2002, p. 27). As a faculty teacher in English, Fensom (2007) emphasized the fundamental role of reflection in developing university teachers' knowledge and

their professional teaching, an idea which I also concur. In this study, the teachers as reflective practitioners can generate knowledge from experience through their discussions with me as a researcher. This can help them develop their own theories of practice. Yet, to be effective reflective practitioners, teachers need to develop certain attitudes towards reflection (Dewey, 1933).

These attitudes as posited by Dewey (1933) include open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness (Farrell, 2008). According to Dewey (1933), open-mindedness is to have a desire to listen to others' ideas and pay attention to alternative views; responsibility is concerned with the careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads; and wholeheartedness indicates that teachers can overcome fears and uncertainties to critically evaluate their practices and be prepared to deal with uncertainties in order to make meaningful change.

Meanwhile, Dewey (1933) stressed the significance of reflective practice and its components for the reflective practitioners. Dewey's (1933) three attitudes i.e., open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness seemed to be in congruence with Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) three dimensions of teachers' reflective practice i.e., diagnosis of teaching and learning problem, testing and evaluating solutions to the problem and belief in personal causation. In other words, for diagnosis of teaching and learning problem, testing and evaluating solutions to the problem and belief in personal causation, the three attitudes presented by Dewey are required.

To illustrate the point above, open-mindedness requires teacher's willingness to diagnose the problem and find possible solution(s) to it. Responsibility necessitates



commitment of the reflective practitioner to take action and implement the solution(s) and wholeheartedness entails the teacher to overcome fear and evaluate the implemented solutions to the problem. Therefore, this study employed the three dimensions of reflection i.e., diagnosis, testing, and belief in personal causation, to help me and the teachers develop an explicit and holistic picture about reflective practice. For the purpose of the study, I provide the status of English language and the research setting in Yemen.

### **1.1.1 Status of English Language in Yemen**

English language is used as a foreign language in Yemen. It is the second official language after Arabic (the native language). It is taught in Yemeni public (governmental) schools starting from class seven of the basic education level (class 1-9). In most private schools, it is introduced in the nursery and first grade levels. English is also a compulsory subject in the curriculum of the Yemeni universities. It is the medium of teaching in some private English schools, the College of Medicine, College of Engineering and in some other colleges that offer Malaysian programs such as Information Technology, Business Administration, Interior Architecture and Graphic Design. English is also taught in the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Languages and graduates obtain B.A. degree in English. Moreover, English is used in the media such as television, newspapers, radio, etc., and has been desired and favored by most of the Yemeni people as it is a means of employment. Teacher education and teacher training programs in Yemen participate in preparing and training Yemeni English teachers.

Some of the Yemeni university teachers are well prepared especially those who have undergone the training and have formed their own teaching repertoire as a result of their accumulative teaching experiences. Most often, teachers who have M.A. and Ph.D. undergo such preparation process. Yet, the preparation of the teachers with the bachelor's degree, who have been groomed basically to become school teachers, tend to lack some practical teaching aspects like working with other school teachers and discussing with the latter the actual teaching problems encountered. Those teachers had the chance to join the university as they obtained the bachelor's degree. It is reasonable if such teachers do not have sufficient knowledge and experience pertaining to reflective practice in university teaching. However, the lack of effective reflective practice among experienced teachers, that focuses on the teachers' beliefs and practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011) and occurs regularly, individually and collaboratively in a formal setting in Yemen universities, entailed the present study to explore reflective practice among teachers and what affects their reflection.

### **1.1.2 Research Setting**

Before presenting the setting of reflective practice in tertiary education in Yemen, it is worth mentioning that the concept of reflective practice has been very common in the western countries since the beginning of 1980s (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Nevertheless, the actual teaching situation in Yemeni universities reflects the fact that the concept of reflective practice is still new for many university teachers including experienced teachers (based on my personal communication with some of the university teachers). Even if some aspects of reflective practice may appear in one form or another (e.g., the teacher's portfolio, teacher's self-appraisal), these

seem to be incomplete and infrequently practiced as evident in some Yemeni universities based on my experience, as a teacher. Furthermore, reflective practice is not presented as part of the mission statements or strategic objectives of higher education and universities in Yemen (Duret, Abdulmalik, & Jones, 2010; Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005, 2007). If reflective process is practiced by some teachers (un)consciously, it may be done at the individual level or informally with peers (e.g., informal chatting on the way to/ from the university). Many obstacles tend to stand in the way of teachers such as the teaching environment that may not be supportive or the lack of awareness about how reflection can be practiced effectively.

In addition, novice teachers who have just joined university teaching may not be in a position to engage in effective reflection as they have limited knowledge and experience (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Gimenez, 1999; Killen, 2007). Hence, the present study is devoted to explore reflection process among university teachers of English with many years of experience. Unlike inexperienced teachers, the former can show capacity to engage in reflective practice as they are more self-confident and may have sufficient knowledge required for reflection (Farnan & Grisham, 2005; Killen, 2007; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). The study offers university teachers an insight into the concept of reflective practice and assisted them to reflect consciously on their teaching practices through their participation in the study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This qualitative study aims to explore how reflection is practiced among university English teachers at a private university in Yemen. Given that beliefs and practices

are important components of reflective practice, more in-depth understanding of how teachers engage in reflection needs to be explored. Previous research studies mainly focused on teacher's beliefs about reflection; however, little is known about how reflection is currently practiced among the university teachers (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). This is only telling half the story (Kane *et al.*, 2002) or part of the story (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011) as it only gives insights about teachers' beliefs. However, teachers lack awareness about their actual practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011) which is caused by the lack of effective reflective practice (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Lyons, 2006; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). Such ineffective reflection among teachers might slow the professional development of teachers for many years (Fensom, 2007) as teachers may keep repeating the same practices with no evidence of their professional development or improved practice (Dewey, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Additionally, exploring reflection process among teachers can help to raise their awareness about what affects the assumptions underlying their practices (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006). Through an in-depth understanding of the teachers' reflective practice in the university, I hope to reveal insights into how reflection is practiced and the factors that affect the teachers to engage (or not to engage) in such a process. Consequently, more in-depth understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices can be offered. Hopefully, this will lead to effective reflection (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002).

Meanwhile, reflective practice has been identified as an important teaching tool for teachers in tertiary education (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brookfield, 1995; Kane *et al.*,

2004). EFL learning and teaching requires teachers' engagement in reflection which can lead to their professional development (Rahimi & Chabok, 2013). Professional development of teachers of English as a foreign language occurs through their reflection on language learning process (Gimenez, 1999). Gimenez argued that learning is embedded in the professional development and language teachers develop their knowledge through reflection on their teaching experience given that knowledge is constructed through the process of learning (Hartnell-Young, 2003; Hoban, 1997). Further research needs to understand university English teachers' reflective practice to enhance their professional development (Munoz, 2007).

Basically, constant reflective practice is crucial for developing teachers' knowledge and increasing such knowledge helps teachers to use reflection effectively and also leads to their professional development (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). That is to say, developing teachers' awareness about teaching and learning problems will assist them to reflect on their practices effectively. However, there is still a lack of effective professional development of the university teachers (Kane *et al.*, 2002) which is constrained by the ineffective reflective practice among teachers (Lyons). Due to the limited research in exploring teachers' beliefs and practices which are essential for the professional development of university teachers, Kane *et al.* (2002) stressed the need for research that can assist those teachers to understand the assumptions underlying their practices and to question them in light of their own beliefs. Yet, the assumptions underlying teachers' practices exist mainly as tacit knowledge that teachers hold but cannot articulate easily (Argyris & Schon, 1974). They can only be explored by observing teachers' practices and engaging them in collaborative discussions with others (Argyris *et al.*, 1985). Thus, teachers should engage in

collaborative discussions to share experiences and understand their teaching beliefs and practices which can lead to their professional development and meaningful teaching and learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

To engage in reflective practice, teachers need to pause and think through potential changes of their own beliefs and/ or practices (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). This is not only a practice that every university teacher has to do (Rando & Menges, 1991); rather, I contend, it is an essential part of a Muslim's belief that s/he should engage in a constant contemplation pertaining to his/ her beliefs and practices. This might depend on the personality of the teacher which can guide such beliefs and practices, but has been a missing element in the reflection process (Akbari, 2007). A reflective practitioner should be committed to a continuous improvement of practice and has a desire for lifelong learning (Dewey's, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

The review of related literature revealed that several research studies in higher education focused on the reflective practice of teacher practitioners (Amobi, 2005; Biggs, 2003; Boud & Walker, 1998; Gimenez, 1999; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006; McLean, 2007; Murray, Gillese, Lennon, Mercer, & Robinson, 2007; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). In the field of English language and second language teacher education and teacher development, many studies have been conducted to investigate reflective practice in relation to professional development and the empowerment of teachers of English (Akbari, 2007; Farrell, 1999, 2007, 2008; Fensom, 2007; Gimenez, 1999; Hsiu-Ting, 2008; Munoz, 2007; Richards, 2002; Richards & Lockhart, 1994, 2007).

At the university level, reflective practice among teachers of English has been the focus of very few studies (Akbari, 2007; Akbari, Behzadpoor, & Dadvand, 2010; Fensom, 2007; Munoz, 2007); yet, to my knowledge, no single study has attempted to understand how reflection is practiced in the natural setting by focusing on the two components of reflection i.e., beliefs and practices among university English teachers.

Furthermore, my personal experience as a university teacher reveals the absence of effective reflective practice among teachers. Also, no evidence has been found in higher education literature in Yemen about reflective practice among teachers (Duret, 2010; Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005, 2007). Also, understanding the reflection process may help to bridge the gap between the claims in the theoretical research and the reflective practice of teachers (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011).

For all the reasons mentioned above, researchers stressed the need for research that assist university teachers understand reflective practice by focusing on the two parts of the process i.e., beliefs and practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). The present study involves interviewing teachers, observing them in the classrooms, requesting them to write journals and stimulating students to comment on the teaching and learning issues. As a teacher, I find it crucial to understand teachers' reaction toward reflection and reflective practice and their sensemaking of the process in both the intrapersonal and interpersonal realms as revealed by Minah Harun (2007).

Therefore, by focusing on teachers' claims and practices, this study provides all those who are teachers with in-depth understanding of the reflection process in the natural setting. Such a process can raise teachers' awareness about the assumptions underlying their practices (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006). This can also give insights to administrators and policy makers on how they can assist to engage teachers in effective reflective practice which can contribute to the development of teachers and the whole teaching and learning process.

### **1.3 Research Purpose and Questions**

The overall aim of the study is to explore reflective practice among teachers in a particular university in Yemen. More specifically, we need to ensure whether reflection is practiced effectively as Davis (2003), and also, Mena Marcos *et al.* (2009) claimed; that is, some form of reflection has not been practiced effectively. It was also important for this study to understand what affects the teachers' reflection (Kane *et al.*, 2002).

Thus, the study attempts the following objectives:

RO1. To explore how reflection is practiced among university teachers.

RO2. To gain insights into the factors that affect reflection.

The objectives seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do university teachers engage in reflection?

RQ2. What are the factors that affect reflection?



#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The study highlights several significant contributions. It contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge of reflective practice as it fills in a significant educational gap in literature identified by researchers pertaining to reflection and how it is practiced among university teachers (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006). In other words, the study contributes to the enlightenment of future research by providing new knowledge pertaining to reflection process which focuses on teachers' beliefs and practices that researchers can pursue.

Practically, the study contributes to bridging the gap between teachers' beliefs and practices through a clear understanding of reflective practice, how it works and what it involves. Accordingly, the study encourages university teachers to reflect critically and effectively on their teaching practices and students' learning problems. Consequently, the study offers teachers the opportunity to develop awareness about effective reflective practice that can help improve their practices and enhance students' learning (Lyons, 2006). It also ensures teachers' empowerment and professional development in terms of constructing new knowledge and experiences and developing new personal theories of practice.

The study also provides useful input to those at the administrative level about the reflective process of teachers. Moreover, the study gives decision makers in higher education a holistic picture about how teachers' reflective practice can be enhanced for the improvement and empowerment of higher education in general and university English teachers in particular.

The study also contributes to the conceptual framework of reflective practice. The focus on the beliefs and practices of the reflection process and also on the factors that affect teacher's reflection in higher education are added to the conceptual framework of reflective practice. That is, the study will come up with a reflective practice model in the university that involves the two components of reflection i.e., beliefs and practices and the factors that influence it. Furthermore, one of the contributions of the study is providing a triangulation of research instruments i.e., interviews, journaling, classroom observations and students' comments on the teaching and learning issues as a multi technique approach that other researchers can use to investigate more cases on reflective practice among teachers or administrators.

### **1.5 Statement of the Researcher**

Reflective practice is one of the most significant aspects that characterize teaching in higher education (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brookfield, 1995; Kane *et al.*, 2004). It advocates the adoption of learner-centered teaching in which the teacher takes the role of a facilitator (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002; Hartell-Young, 2003; Richards, 2002) that suits the learning situation at the university level. In such a context, the university teachers are supposed to work as facilitators for students' learning. However, the actual scenario seems to be different.

My personal experience as an undergraduate student in the department of English in the Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University, Yemen raised my curiosity about the effective role of a teacher. Some of the teachers did not consider the role of the teacher as a facilitator. Rather, they followed the teacher-centered approach in their teaching. While pursuing my master's degree in the department of English, I was

able to learn more about teaching and learning theories and various roles of the teacher including understanding the teacher as facilitator. Through this exposure, I was able to reflect on my own teaching experience. Having a master's degree in English enabled me to join university teaching and face the challenge of fulfilling the effective role of the university teacher.

Being a university teacher for about ten years, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my own teaching based on the courses attended and from scholars during such training sessions. I tried to adopt this concept in some situations such as thinking about how to improve my teaching and enable my students' learning, discussing students' learning problems with my colleagues and with administrators, preparing my appraisal file and reflecting on it with the dean and also attempting to prepare the teaching portfolio.

However, I felt that the "reflective practice" concept was still vague and not valued by many teachers in the university. That is, this concept seemed to be unfamiliar to some teachers including experienced ones. Hence, the ineffective role of reflective practice of university teachers in Yemen should be treated seriously and meaningfully. The reflection should be explored with the help of those who employ such a practice. Given that ten years of teaching experience can be enough to bring a change in the teacher's teaching career and lead to his or her professional development (Dewey,1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), I engaged teachers who might have similar teaching experience. In addition, to professionally develop as noted by McAlpine and Weston (2000), I contended that university teachers should develop the role of reflective practitioners. One way to encourage them to reflect on their

practices and build their knowledge on reflection was through their participation in this study. Engaging teachers in such a reflective practice contributes to the empowerment of teachers and the professional development of higher education and also to the improvement of students' learning. In addition, the familiar environment for me made it easier to collect the data. That is, I am a university teacher and a former student. As a researcher, I was able to engage fully in such a process and learn more about reflective practice as narrated by the respondents.

### **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

The present study intends to understand how reflection is practiced among university teachers and the factors that might affect the teachers engagement in the reflective practice in light of the personal constructs theory (Kelly, 1955), critical social theory (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007) and theories of personal action (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

The study is based on the assumption that teachers as professionals and reflective practitioners rely more on their own teaching practices (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Teachers should be aware of the theories that influence their teaching practice and be in a position to develop a bottom-up knowledge based on their own experience (Fook & Gardner, 2007). However, teachers may lack awareness of their practices. In other words, they may be unaware of the assumptions underlying their practices. They can develop their own theories of practice and make them explicit by reflecting on their knowledge of experience if they are made aware of the importance of such practice. This perspective of developing theory from practice is drawn upon the perspective of reflective practice framework of Argyris and Schon (1974) and Schon (1983, 1987)

which viewed reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as necessary to reflect on received knowledge and develop awareness about how to use such knowledge in specific situations. Figure 1.1 shows the theoretical framework of the study.

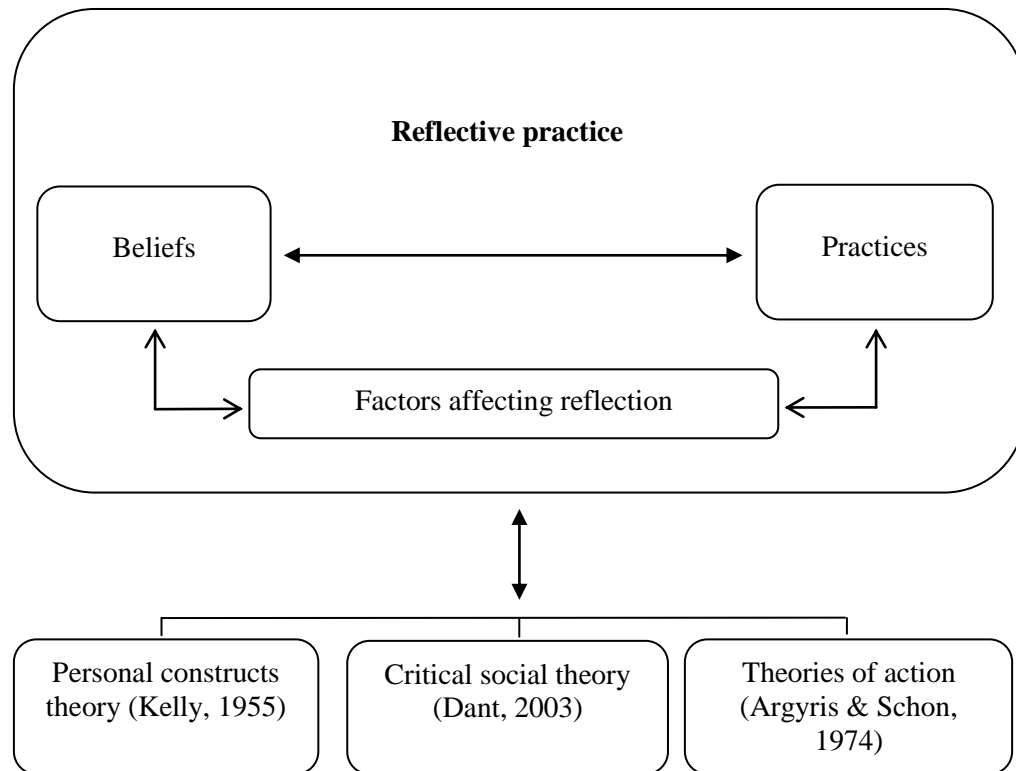


Figure 1.1: Theoretical framework

### 1.7 Scope and Limitation

The present study intended to explore reflective practice among teachers of English in the University of Science and Technology (UST), Yemen. This university is located in Sana'a city, the capital of Yemen. Given that reflective practice is a metacognitive process of thinking in relation to action (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009), the current study focused on university teachers whose teaching experience in the university is around ten years (the experts). Research has shown that experts have a

tendency to exhibit more metacognitive actions than non-experts and have more capacity to articulate them (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Killen's (2007) review of literature shows significant evidence that inexperienced instructors may not analyse, evaluate and direct their instruction practices in the metacognitive way which is the characteristic of an expert reflective practitioner.

Urzua and Vasquez (2008) acknowledged the meaning and significance of the metacognitive activities. They viewed awareness, intentionality, commitment, self-confidence, and responsibility, as aspects of teachers' metacognitive selves which indicate professional identity construction. The authors argued that reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are less relevant to teachers with little teaching experience. Farnan and Grisham (2005) argued that novice teachers may be ready to engage productively in the teaching process, but they need the support of experienced teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and enhance their professional development. Given that teachers whose teaching experience varies between two and five years are defined by Goolsby (1999) as novice, those teachers lack the ability to reflect critically on their teaching due to their limited teaching experience that may restrict constructing knowledge (Gimenez, 1999). Thus, the study excluded the involvement of the inexperienced teachers. I also excluded non-Yemeni teachers to avoid cultural misunderstanding with foreigners; besides, it would be easier for me to deal with people of my own culture.

As far as Brookfield's (1995) four perspectives of reflective practice are concerned, teachers can reflect critically on their teaching through various ways including their autobiographies as teachers and learners, colleagues' perceptions and experiences,

students' eyes and the related theoretical literature. However, the study did not intend to focus on reflection through teachers' autobiographies. Rather, the teachers' individual interviews assisted me to engage teachers in personal reflection about their learning and teaching experiences. The other three perspectives i.e., colleagues' conceptions and experiences, the related theoretical literature and students' perspectives provide perspectives on the reflective practice among the teachers in a particular university in Yemen.

The first study plan was to engage experienced university English teachers from the oldest and biggest public and private universities in Yemen i.e., Sana'a University (public university) and University of Science and Technology (private university) where many experienced university teachers could be invited to participate in the study. However, after I piloted the study and started data collection for the actual study at UST, the political situation in the country became unstable and the study in the universities in Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen, was suspended for almost seven months. The study was resumed in the University of Science and Technology, but continued to be suspended in Sana'a University (SU) for about a year. The political atmosphere remained unsecured and unstable. For these reasons, I made a change to my study plan by collecting all my data from UST only. In so doing, I was guided by Rubin and Rubin's (1995) perspective that qualitative, case study has a flexible design which can be modified during the study (Silverman, 2013). Thus, I had to finish data collection at UST.

## **1.8 Research Design**

The present study was conducted through a qualitative approach. Specifically, I used the case study approach to investigate the phenomenon under study i.e., reflective practice. This approach suits the complexity of reflection (Duff, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). In this qualitative design, I explored multiple cases through detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007) and obtained an “in-depth understanding of the situation” as the focus was on the “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). According to Duff (2013), multiple cases can provide richer in-depth data about the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973). The purpose of this design was to enlarge the study perspective and provide a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study (Dornyei, 2007).

The qualitative, case study gives a thick, intensive and holistic description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998; Geertz, 1973). This thick description provides detailed, in-depth and rich data elicited from the participants’ talks about their experiences and from other materials triangulated for gathering the data (Blatter, 2008; Duff, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Informative insights about the reflective process in the tertiary education were obtained through the triangulation of data collected from teachers’ individual interviews, journal writing, classroom observations and students’ comments on the teaching and learning issues.

The interviews assisted me to interpret and understand the meanings of the main themes in the life of the interviewees’ world as suggested by Kvale (1996). I adopted Kvale’s (1996) seven stages in designing and implementing the qualitative interviews.



These stages included thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. In addition, classroom observations helped to reveal teachers actions in the classroom (Allwright, 1983; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Merriam, 1998). The journal entry helped me to collect data about teachers in their natural situation (Dornyei, 2007). I also talked to the students who were taught by the informants. I contended that stimulating students to comment on the teaching and learning issues would help me to learn about the other side of the teaching and learning process in the university. The triangulation of the data collection process enhanced the reliability, validity and findings of the study (Ashcroft & Palacio, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Huettman, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Stage & Russel, 1993). I adopted the role of a participant-observer and facilitator during the data collection for more insights.

The focus of the study was on the two parts of the reflective practice i.e., beliefs and practices. As such, the study helped and encouraged teachers to reflect on their thoughts and practices, and construct knowledge and awareness about teaching and learning problems. This occurred through the uncovering of the assumptions underlying the teachers' daily practices. Helping teachers to live this experience of reflection and discussing their espoused theories and their theories-in-use assists to develop their awareness of reflection. This then, will lead to teachers' empowerment and the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

### **1.9 Definition of Relevant Terms**

The current study includes the following keywords:

**Reflective practice:** is a way of constructing and reconstructing reality to achieve a change in teaching (Schon, 1983).

**Teacher's beliefs:** are propositions or statements of connection among things perceived as true which might influence teacher's practices (Zheng, 2009).

**Teacher's teaching practices:** are the instructional techniques that a teacher uses in the actual teaching and learning situation for achieving the learning outcomes (Stern, 1983).

**Teacher's professional development:** is a continuous process of learning which leads to improvement in the performance of teacher (Underhill, 1997).

### **1.10 Summary and Outline of the Study**

Chapter one starts with a brief discussion of the reflective practice, its components and its significance for the professional development of practitioners and the enhancement of the teaching and learning process. It also highlights a mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and practices and what might cause such a scenario which leads to some sort of ineffective reflective practice. It focuses on the engagement of the teachers in the process of treating the teaching and learning problems. As such, this chapter acknowledges a need for a formal, regular and collaborative reflective practice which assists the teachers to develop awareness of reflective practice and the assumptions underlying their practices. Consequently, teachers can learn from the insights that guide their daily practices.

Chapter two provides the theoretical background about the development of the reflective practice including its definitions, levels, types, patterns and related difficulties. It discusses the theories and scholarly perspectives which assist to understand the reflective practice. It also discusses case studies related to reflective

practice shedding light to higher education in Yemen. It looks at teacher's beliefs and practices, and also a priori literature about the factors that might affect reflection.

Chapter three presents the research methodology for data collection and data analysis. It discusses the qualitative case study approach and the instrument employed to gather in-depth data which includes semi-structured interviews, semi-structured classroom observations, journal entry and focus group discussion. It also explains the data analysis procedures through a qualitative content analysis method. It ends with a discussion of the validity and reliability of the study findings, limitations and a short summary.

Chapter four provides the findings whilst chapter five includes discussion. Chapter six presents the conclusion and implications of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter, which is divided into three parts, presents the existing research studies on reflective practice. The first part provides a theoretical background about the development of reflective practice. This includes the definitions of reflective practice, its significance, various levels, types and patterns. The second part is about reflective practice and related theories. The third part discusses case studies and reflective practice in higher education. It also provides a priori factors which might affect the reflective practice.

As a process which triggers all forms of high professional competency (Barry, 1996), the reflective practice does not emerge in a vacuum. The background about reflection shows that the shift toward reflective thinking has emerged as a reaction to the technical and simplistic view of teaching which was common in the 1980s (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Teaching was seen as transmitting knowledge to learners (Richards, 2002). Since then, experts in the teacher education and staff development realized that teaching is complex and that teachers' professional knowledge can be developed and constructed from research and from teachers' day to day experience (Brookfield, 1995; Eraut, 1985; Fensom, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Richards, 2002). Specifically, teachers' knowledge can be enhanced through reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000); that is, the reflective practice focuses on increasing practitioner's awareness of the implicit knowledge and on emphasizing the role of this knowledge in the design of action (Barry, 1996).

## 2.2 Theoretical Background of Reflective Practice

This section provides the origins of reflective practice, various definitions of reflection, its difficulties, patterns and significance. It also explains the features of a reflective practitioner, the process of reflection, its levels, tools, and types.

Although reflective practice is traced back to John Dewey (1910), it began to emerge in teaching and learning literature in the early 1980s (Eryaman, 2007; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). The work of Schon (1983, 1987) inspired a revival of interest in reflective practice in the field of education (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Kolb (1984) also perceived reflective practice as an essential element of learning.

Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983, 1987) are two of the most cited contributors to foundational concepts of reflective practice (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Nonetheless, the meaning of reflective practice encounters tensions between the two various views of Dewey and Schon. Dewey emphasizes scientific or research-based knowledge whereas Schon focuses on context and experiential knowledge (Fendler, 2003; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Current literature indicates that the two views of Dewey and Schon, research-based and experiential-based knowledge, are essential dimensions of reflective practice because teachers need external (research-based knowledge) and internal knowledge (experiential-based knowledge) for the best decision-making (York-Barr, *et al.*, 2006). Thus, the integration of Dewey's (1933) and Schon's (1983, 1987) views are crucial for reflective practice as they can help teachers reflect on their espoused theories and actual practices, and experiences to develop professional knowledge about teaching and learning.

Dewey's (1933) reflective thinking is characterized by three main components. First, reflective thinking has a process and a product. Reflection is a careful way of thinking (process) that results in meaning making and understanding (product). Second, it requires a specific tendency towards three attitudes: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility. These attitudes include an active desire to consider various perspectives, overcome fears and uncertainties to make meaningful change and a thorough interest in a cause, and an interest in the meaning of what is learned. Finally, reflective thinking involves language and communication (Ramsey, 2003). Language must be used as an intellectual tool for reflection, that is, a “conscious tool of conveying knowledge and assisting thought” (Dewey, 1933, p. 239). Language is a means for constructing reflective teaching portfolios to enable and develop awareness of teaching process (Lyons, 2006) and also for writing reflective journals which can help teachers to connect thought, feeling and action (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Recently, the idea of reflective practice has been adopted and developed by many researchers (Akbari, 2007; Akbari *et al.*, 2010; Fendler, 2003; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Rahimi & Chabok, 2013; Richards, 2002 ; Rodgers, 2002; Tarrant, 2013; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Reflective practice occurs in a teaching situation which has been described by Eraut as a hot action, with the sense that “educators must develop habits and routines in order to cope; and that self-awareness is difficult as there is little opportunity to notice or think about what one is doing” (Eraut, 1985, p. 128). I contended that educators need to reflect on their teaching experiences and practices to be able to develop awareness about teaching and learning problems that may take place in the setting of hot action. They need to constantly reflect on their theories to bring a

change in their teaching context and develop new knowledge about teaching and learning in the university context. Barry (1996) argued that reflective practice is very important and relevant to the understanding of ongoing action and to enabling and organizing the apparent flux of events.

Therefore, to reflect on and change our theories, beliefs, or practices, we must slow down and have reflective conversations that allow us to think through potential changes (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). York-Barr *et al.* (2006) agreed with the Chinese proverb which says that “sometimes you must go slow to go fast”, as a basis for change. However, shifting from a culture of doing to a culture of learning and doing is not easily accomplished (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). This implies that learning from our teaching experiences is more important than mere teaching practices. York-Barr *et al.* asserted that “reflective practice cannot be done in the fast lane. Although much of educational practice occurs in the fast lane, educators must locate a rest area to reflect on past practices and to determine adjustments for future practice” (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006, p. 3). Reflective practice is viewed as an active and central element in enhancing our awareness of ongoing practices (Barry, 1996; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). In light of the previous discussion, reflection is a must for creating teachers’ awareness of their beliefs and practices.

### **2.2.1 Definitions of Reflective Practice**

Researchers argued that reflective practice has no universal definition, but several definitions with various perspectives have been found in the literature (Akbari, 2007; Farrell, 2007, 2008; Gimenez, 1999; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). These definitions are concerned with reflection, reflective thinking, reflective thought and reflective

practice. However, all the definitions focus on reflection that hopes to seek a change in the teaching and learning situations. For example, Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) defined reflective practice as a form of self-consciousness and a way for changing teaching practices. They concur with Schon (1983) who viewed reflective practice as a way of constructing and reconstructing reality to achieve a change in teaching. Similarly, Fensom (2007) contended that reflective practice is triggered by a sudden problem and characterized by a decision to find a solution and bring a change in teaching behavior. Montie *et al.* (1998) viewed reflective practice as a cognitive process and an open view of a purposeful pause to study thoughts and actions for a better understanding of teaching process which can lead to practices that enhance students' learning.

A reflective practice is also considered a process in relation to treating particular problems. Barry (1996), for instance, considered reflective practice an action-based process which concerns skills of identifying and treating complex difficulties. Reflection is also referred to as a dynamic thought process that centers on awareness and improvement (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Such a process involves a state of doubt in which thinking begins to search for an appropriate solution to the doubt or problem (Dewey, 1933). Reflective practice is also viewed as a problem solving, deliberate and purposeful act of thinking to attain a better understanding of a situation or a problem that leads to action (Loughran, 1996).

More critical definitions are those that involve both thoughts and actions of reflective practitioners. Reflective practice is seen as authentically critical, a questioning orientation, and a profound commitment to the discovery and analysis of positive and



negative information about the quality and status of a professional's designed action (Argyris & Schon 1974).

Based on Dewey's (1933) and Schon's (1983, 1987) works on reflection, Kirby and Teddlie (1989) developed an operational definition of reflective practice which has three dimensions: diagnosis, testing and belief in personal causation. The authors defined diagnosis as identifying a particular problem based on the practitioner's previous experience and professional knowledge, the unique situation, people involved and the social values. Testing refers to the evaluation of the problem solution based on the practitioner's personal values and theories. Belief in personal causation represents practitioner's commitment to the personal values and theories required for setting the problem and the acceptance of responsibility to take actions and find an appropriate solution to the problem.

Kirby and Teddlie (1989) claim that applying these three strategies of reflection can be an indicator of teachers' effective reflective practice. The analysis of these three components shows how teachers adopt reflection in their teaching. The effectiveness of teachers' reflection is revealed through the adoption of the three dimensions of reflective practice: diagnosis, testing, and belief in personal causation. I contended that the analysis of these three components assists us to understand reflection and how it is practiced among teachers. Thus, this study adopts Kirby and Teddlie's definition of reflective practice as an operational definition.

Reflective practice implies that reflection begins with a process of thinking and ends in a product of a new change and new understanding of the situation. For the purpose

of this research, the terms reflection and reflective practice are used interchangeably as they are very frequently used in literature and the term reflective practice is used to involve both the thought and action adopted at the individual and collaborative levels.

Given that reflection consists of two important components, the thought and the action, this study hopes to reveal interesting insights into teachers' professional development and students' learning. Exploring reflection and understanding how it is practiced among teachers should assist both teachers and students. Students will be able to learn in the environment where teachers constantly engage in collaborative work with the former.

### **2.2.2 Reflective Practice: Some Difficulties**

Although there is a call for systematic reflective practice, Rodgers (2002) identified four problems associated with systematic reflection: (i) a difficulty in distinguishing between systematic reflection and other forms of thought; (ii) a difficulty in measuring the unclearly defined; (iii) it has no clear picture and it starts to lose its value; and (iv) a problem in investigating the influence of reflective practice and professional development on teachers' teaching and their students' learning. Yet, by going back to the roots of reflection as perceived by Dewey, Rodgers (2002) provided the following criteria for dealing with reflection and creating awareness of a systematic reflective practice: (i) it is a meaning-making process which can be developed through sharing experiences with others in the society; (ii) it is a systematic and thorough way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry; (iii) it

should occur in collaboration with others; and (iv) it requires attitudes that value the growth of self and others.

In line with the above, several researches viewed reflective practice as intentional, deliberate and leading to change in practice (Lyons, 2006; Montie *et al.*, 1998; Fensom, 2007; Argyris & Schon, 1974). However, Akbari (2007) claimed that reflection employed in the field of language teaching and learning is merely an impulsive and routine action which is opposed to systematic reflective practice.

### **2.2.3 Patterns of Reflection**

Teachers' teaching practices can be categorized into routine actions and reflective actions (Dewey, 1933). Dewey argued that routine action is guided by factors such as tradition, habit and authority and by institutional definitions and expectations. However, he indicated that reflective action entails flexibility, rigorous analysis and social awareness, and demands a desire to engage in constant self-appraisal and development.

Moreover, Kember *et al.* (2000) considered habitual actions as non-reflective actions whereas they described reflection and critical reflection as reflective actions. Reflection is viewed as the questioning of the assumptions underlying problem posing and problem solving process (Kember *et al.*, 2000; Mezirow, 1991). Critical reflection is perceived as a critical review of professionals' awareness about their practices and the reasons behind the way they perceive things and act in a particular way that leads to a change in their thoughts and actions (Kember *et al.*, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Smith, 2002; Smyth, 1992).

Reflective practice “is not just talking about work or thinking self-validating thoughts about how to teach or lead” (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006, p. 8), but a critical activity that requires practitioners to interact and act in authentic settings (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Such a process is viewed as crucial for university teachers (Fensom, 2007; Schon, 1983). However, some researchers claimed that reflection is not practiced as intended (Akbari, 2007; Akbari *et al.*, 2010; Davis, 2003; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). This motivates me as a researcher to explore reflection and how it is practiced among teachers in the university (Akbari, 2007; Fensom, 2007; Lyons, 2006). This is the setting that presents the educational research problem of reflective practice.

#### **2.2.4 Significance of Reflective Practice**

To become better instructors, teachers need to reflect on their teaching practices effectively (Akbari, 2007). A systematic reflection gives teachers more power to direct and control their own teaching practices in the classrooms that can bring about better language learning for their students (Gimenez, 1999). In general, reflective practice has several purposes.

Reflection can serve as a catalyst for continuous learning about educational practice and for change (Ghaye, 2005; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). It is essential to enable and organize the flux of events in the educational environment (Barry, 1996). Educators who do not reflect on and learn from their practices are more likely to continue doing the same thing (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Kane *et al.* (2004) viewed reflection as the heart of teaching excellence and the means of integrating the subject knowledge,

teaching skills, interpersonal relationship, research, and personality dimensions of teaching.

Furthermore, reflective practice can help to reduce the gaps between theory and practice, that is, what we claim to do and what we actually do which can enhance the overall knowledge of teaching (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). As an essential element of an academic teacher and a reflective practitioner, reflection engages a teacher in continuous self-directed development (Schon, 1983). It also makes teachers aware of the underlying beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching so that they can understand why they do what they do and what might need to change (McLean, 2007). This is because reflection uncovers the assumptions of teachers' practices in light of theories (Akbari, 2007), and helps them develop awareness about teaching and learning problems that may arise in classrooms (Brookfield, 1995).

Given that high levels of students' learning entail high levels of staff capacity (Killion, 2000; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), teachers need to engage in a constant professional development through reflective practice (Lyons, 2006). The goal of engaging teachers in such a reflection process is to evaluate teaching, ensure students' learning and develop educators' teaching skills (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Smith, 2009; Wallace, 1991). Educators can increase their learning and improve their practices by engaging themselves in reflective practice (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) that aims to achieve more understanding of a particular learning and teaching situation (Barry, 1996).

Reflective practice is crucial for the whole life of teachers as it empowers teachers and enhances their teaching techniques (Biggs, 2003). It provides experienced teachers with lifelong learning that leads to their professional development and enhances students' learning (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Richards (1990) asserted that reflective practice can help teachers move from a level where they may be guided basically by impulse, intuition or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking. The significance of reflection is also seen in elevating personal and impulsive actions to rational and informed practices (Akbari, 2007).

Thus, one can argue that reflective practice is not an end in itself, but a means to improve teaching and learning (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Rodgers, 2002). It is not merely about developing individuals; rather it enhances the communities of practice when it is used effectively (McLean, 2007). That is, when our reflection is constant, our practice can develop into a systematic inquiry that begins with personal reflection on our own learning and teaching experiences, but becomes collective when informed by our interactions with colleagues, students, and the theoretical literature (Brookfield, 1995; McLean, 2007).

### **2.2.5 Characteristics of a Reflective Practitioner**

In relation to teaching and learning process, Zeichner and Liston (1996) contended that reflective teachers should be aware of the teaching context and the assumptions underlying their teaching practices. These teachers should be able to solve teaching and learning problems, participate in curriculum development and also in their own

professional development (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In addition, they have the capacity to observe, evaluate and defend their practices in planning, implementing and evaluating the dilemmas of language (Nunan & Lamb, 1996).

Likewise, York-Barr *et al.* (2006) provided eight views of a reflective practitioner: (a) as someone who focuses on education's essential purpose: student learning and development, (b) is committed to constant improvement of practice, (c) takes responsibility for his or her own learning-now and lifelong, (d) is aware of self, others, and the surrounding environment, (e) has the thinking skills for effective inquiry, (f) acts in alignment with new understandings, (g) is capable of holding leadership role within community, and (h) has a desire to understand various types of knowledge that are internally and externally generated (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). These characteristics helped me, as a researcher, to understand the reflection practiced among the informants given that a reflective teacher has some of such features.

### **2.2.6 Process of Reflection**

Reflection process has three stages: (i) understanding the process at an intellectual level; (ii) application of the theoretical process in practice; and (iii) evaluation of the outcomes of implementation (Barry, 1996). Understanding a process at a theoretical level may not ensure its implementation because of the possible presence of theoretical disagreement or lack of possible implementation; on the contrary, the implementation of a process may be difficult if it is not properly understood or its implications are not entirely appreciated (Barry, 1996). In this sense, scholars indicated that the implementation of reflective practice might be difficult due to

implicit factors which require further inquiry (Akbari, 2007; Amobi, 2005; Killen, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Munoz, 2007; Ramsey, 2003). I contend that such factors are likely to affect teacher's thoughts and hinder reflection at the theoretical level or they can also prevent reflection at the implementation level. Yet, engaging teachers in the reflection process can raise their awareness about how such factors can be directed to help in practicing effective reflection.

### **2.2.7 Levels of Reflection**

Teachers can develop reflective attitudes and be reflective practitioners by gradually adopting the various levels of reflection. These levels can be employed individually, with peers, in small groups of colleagues and also with wide social community (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). At the individual level, an instructor has complete responsibility and control over his thoughts and practices; sharing reflective practice with peers can influence one's thoughts and practices (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Reflective practice in small groups represents the significant shift from individual reflection or reflection with peers to a team reflection in which, the potential impact of reflection increases as more people participate in a group (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). As such, teachers can engage in effective reflective practice if they team up and share teaching and learning experiences (Tarrant, 2013; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

A reflective practice at the individual level may constrain teacher learning (Hsiu-ting, 2008). Collaborative reflective practices engage a greater variety of perspectives for addressing the many challenging and complex dilemmas of practice and also the practitioners' points of agreement as shared basis for moving onward (York-Barr *et*



*al.*, 2006). It is seen as an embedded assessment for teachers during which they assess the effectiveness of their teaching on the students' learning and shape their professional development (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Thus, teachers can collaboratively engage in a fruitful reflective practice to share experiences about teaching and learning problems with more people in the educational realm.

### **2.2.8 Tools of Reflection**

Teachers can reflect on the teaching and learning process individually and/ or collaboratively using various tools. Such reflection tools include journaling, observing or listening to one's own practice through the use of video or audio tapes, reviewing a case, reading literature, developing a teaching portfolio, conversing about teaching, on line dialogue, regular meetings to review and design teaching and evaluation procedures, examining student work and case-study reviews (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). As a teacher, I concur with Dewey (1933) that language is seen as an important instrument that must be used as an intellectual tool for communication during reflection.

### **2.2.9 Types of Reflection**

Teachers can practice three types of reflection pertaining to time. These include reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is seen as unplanned reflection in the midst of action whereas reflection-on-action is a reconstructive intellectual review of one's actions and thoughts after an action is completed (Schon, 1983, 1987). Reflection-for-action occurs before action to plan for the expected consequences (Gimenez, 1999). Teachers often engage themselves in reflection-in-action (Hartnell-Young, 2003) which is viewed as an

individual activity (Akbari, 2007); yet many designers of teacher professional development programs focus on reflection-on-action because they perceive the latter as the most systematic and deliberate thinking back over one's actions (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Such type of reflection-on-action should be encouraged and practiced collectively and in groups in universities or centers of higher education (Akbari, 2007).

### **2.3 Reflective Practice and Related Theories**

Beside other scholarly perspectives (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Kember *et al.*, 2000; Rodgers, 2002; Schon, 1983, 1987), strands of theories are crucial for exploring and understanding reflective practice in this study such as theories of constructivism i.e., personal constructs theory (Kelly, 1955) and critical social theory (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007), and theories of action i.e., espoused theories and theories-in-use.

Constructivists have two views pertaining to the understanding of knowledge (Hartnell-Young, 2003; Piaget, 1973). The first view focuses on the individual's cognitive development (cognitive processing) and the second perceives learning as always requiring a social setting (social constructivism). Either two ways, the consequence is knowledge construction (Fosnot, 1996). In this, teachers are viewed as active learners who construct their own understandings based on their prior knowledge and beliefs (Putnam & Borko 1997). According to the constructivist view, the teacher is at all times a potential learner, able to construct meaning out of experience both individually and collaboratively (Fook & Gardner, 2007; Hartnell-Young, 2003; Jay & Johnson, 2002). As such, the constructivist learning theories

consider reflection as a crucial factor in the teaching and learning process (Farrell, 2008). Thus, such theories can help to understand reflective practice, explain the assumptions underlying teachers' practices and assist in linking and narrowing the gaps between teachers' beliefs and practices.

### **2.3.1 Personal Constructs Theory**

The personal constructs theory suggests that personal constructs, are necessary for making sense of experiences (Kelly, 1955). This theory assumes that all of our present interpretations of the world are subject to review and there are always some alternative constructions (meanings) available in the social setting. This is based on the philosophy that a person is capable of applying alternative constructions to any events in that past, present or future (Kelly, 1955). This theory is seen as crucial for teacher development because it helps teachers to reflect and construct meaning of the teaching and learning process through the engagement of teachers in collaborative discussions (Yaxley, 1991).

Thus, the personal constructs theory is crucial for understanding how reflective practitioners use reflective practice to construct knowledge and make meaning of their practice based on their experience. Giving teachers an opportunity to engage in reflection can help them build their own knowledge of the world they live in (i.e., teaching and learning environment). These constructs are also important for professional development because reflection on teachers' experiences and worlds requires reconstructing and redefining their reinterpretations of their world that will lead to professional development.

### **2.3.2 Critical Social Theory**

The critical social theory stresses the interaction between the empirical reality of knowledge and the members of society through reflection on various perspectives (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007). This is because personal reflection is very much related to that of others in the society (Dant, 2003) and also various meanings and practices are developed in social relationships through communication and dialogue (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Fook and Gardner (2007) summarized the common features of critical social theories which, I argue, are crucial for understanding reflective practice in the present study. First, power is personal and structural. Second, individuals can participate in their own power. Third, social change is both individual and collective. Fourth, knowledge is empirical and constructed. Finally, communication and dialogue are significant for constructing knowledge.

The critical social theory has two stages (Fook & Gardner, 2007), which I followed in this study to understand the informants' engagement in reflection. The first stage is concerned with reflection on the person's practice or experience using questions and engaging in dialogue to help elicit the assumptions embedded in descriptions of practice. These questions include beliefs about one's self and other people, professionalism and any potential gaps or contradictions between what is claimed and what is implied by what is actually done. The second stage deals with further dialogues and questioning in which practitioners derive changed practices and theories about practice that result from reflection. These dialogues and questions are about the contradictions that practitioners confront and where they come from, how

such contradictions are handled and what needs to be changed about the person's thinking or practices to be able to handle the contradictions.

### **2.3.3 Theories of Action**

Espoused theories and theories-in-use have been identified as theories of personal action that teachers bring to their work (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Espoused theories are formal guiding theories on which a profession is based whereas theories-in-use refer to the theories that appear to guide the day-to-day work of the professional in any profession (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Argyris and Schon (1974) argued that there is no apparent evidence that the day-to-day practice of professionals is informed by espoused theories. Moon (1999) asserted that theories-in-use characterize the pattern learned in the day-to-day work of the professionals. Furthermore, theories-in-use are essential to understand, explain and predict the world, so that we can design our action in appropriate and manageable terms (Barry, 1996). This type of theories is the one that evolve in practice when teachers confront particular teaching and learning problems that they need to solve.

However, the relationship between espoused theories and theories-in-use may be absent when the profession does not have a distinct body of knowledge (Argyris & Schon, 1974). This knowledge can be built and constructed through reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Richards, 2002). Argyris and Schon (1974) stressed the role of others in the reflective practice since colleagues and clients may be very perceptive in discovering the assumptions underpinning practitioner's practice.

To sum up, in this study, the theories of constructivism and theories of action provide a theoretical framework for understanding and explaining the reflective practice; that is, they explain how the teachers build their own personal theories or knowledge by reflecting on their beliefs and practices in relation to others in the community.

## **2.4 A Case Study: Reflective Practice in Higher Education**

The present research, which is a case study, provides an opportunity to explore the context of EFL in higher education in Yemen. It assists us to understand the complexity of reflective practice fully through the in-depth data gathered from the natural setting of the teaching and learning context (Duff, 2013).

### **2.4.1 Status of Higher Education in Yemen**

EFL/ ESL university teachers in Yemen are often a mixture of instructors with B.A. degree, M.A. degree and Ph.D. The majority of those teachers are Yemeni whereas the rest are foreigners (e.g., Indians and Iraqi), hired due to the shortage of Yemeni English teachers. Some English teachers who have been groomed to become school teachers are allowed to join teaching at the university given that they each possess a bachelor's degree. English instructors teach all language courses in the department of English and other departments where English language is taught as a requirement.

Meanwhile, higher education in the Yemeni context encounters certain difficulties such as the increasing number of students who join tertiary education every year and consequently a lack of facilities and teaching staff in both public and private universities (Duret *et al.*, 2010). In addition, there are some other barriers to higher education development as noted by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research:

At university level, university leaders and individual members of staff need to feel empowered and committed, and universities' own governance needs to be reformed to make them more accountable and responsive to the needs of Yemeni society. Universities also need to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary for effective self-management. (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005, p. 5).

In line with the above, there were many calls for higher education reform. Some of such calls which began as individual concerns of university teachers were reflected in the view of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2005) in its national strategy for the development of higher education in Yemen. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has developed its strategic vision in accordance with the "Yemen's strategic vision 2025" to reform and improve higher education in Yemen (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005). This case study hopes to shed light on reflection and how it is practiced among EFL/ESL teachers given that this will help to enhance the teaching of EFL/ESL in higher education.

#### **2.4.2 Teachers in Higher Education**

There has been a great emphasis on the importance of teaching and instructional performance of college teachers (Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006) and on the improvement of higher education teaching quality (Levine, 2005). The significance of this focus on college teachers' teaching is due to the lack of teachers' awareness of the little attention given to students' learning (Schuster, 2003). Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, therefore, can be achieved by focusing on the professional development of the individual faculty member (Levine, 2005).

Empowering teachers is important for effective teaching and learning process (Rotherham, Mikuta, & Freeland, 2008). In such a process, reflection is an essential element to develop the teacher's capacity to self-direct teaching and learning (Munoz, 2007). Critical reflection is crucial for university teachers as it provides teachers with opportunities to reflect on and improve their classroom practices (Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). Indeed, this will make teachers aware of the many different aspects that influence the outcomes of their practice.

In the higher education, teachers shift from less sophisticated ideas and abilities to more integrated thinking and skills (Ramsden, 1992). University teachers operate within various theories of teaching (i.e., transmitting content to students, organizing students' activities and enabling students' learning) that represent developmental change which shifts over time to more sophisticated view of teaching and learning (Ramsden, 1992).

Higher education in Yemen should benefit from these insightful views which consider the role of the reflective practice as important for educational reform and for the professional development of teachers.

### **2.4.3 Teacher's Beliefs and Practices**

Teachers' beliefs and practices should be looked at as two intertwined elements of the teaching and learning process. They are found as vital components of the reflective practice in literature (Dewey, 1933; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). Teacher's beliefs are defined as the propositions of connection among things perceived as true (Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988; Zheng,



2009). They are viewed as a filter for new knowledge and experience; yet, they have been developed based on previous knowledge and experience (Zheng, 2009). They have powerful effect on the teaching and learning process as they influence teachers' teaching practices and their professional development (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Zheng, 2009). They assist us understand teachers' teaching practices and their thinking process which can lead to the empowerment of teachers and consequently to the improvement of the teaching and learning process (Dewey, 1933; Tatto & Coupland, 2003; Zheng, 2009).

On the other hand, teacher's teaching practices are viewed as the instructional techniques that a teacher uses in the actual teaching and learning situation for achieving the learning outcomes (Stern, 1983). Understanding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices is important for enhancing the teaching and learning process and also for the professional development of teachers (Kuzborska, 2011). Reflective practice plays a significant role in strengthening such a relationship (Kane *et al.*, 2002) through the engagement of teachers in collaborative discussions with others as they can share experiences and understand their teaching beliefs and practices (Richards & Farrell, 2005; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Teachers' beliefs are perceived as espoused theories or formal theories opposed to their practices which are viewed as theories-in- use or informal theories (Argyris & Schon, 1974). To illustrate, espoused theories are formal guiding theories, or professional knowledge and understanding, on which a profession is based whereas theories-in-use refer to the theories that appear to guide the day-to-day work of the professional in any profession (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Moon, 1999). The former are

subjected to public debate, criticism, analysis, testing and error detection processes in the form of academic publications, conferences and the general media whereas the latter are primarily private, secret and implicit, and are not thoroughly tested in public or subjected to extensive analysis (Barry, 1996). Nevertheless, the relationship between espoused theories and theories-in-use may be absent when the profession does not have explicit knowledge (Argyris & Schon, 1974). This knowledge can be built and constructed through reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Richards, 2002).

However, there has been difficulty of self-reflective process as we may not realize the assumptions underlying our own practices (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Barry, 1996). Argyris and Schon (1974) stressed the role of others in the reflective practice since colleagues and clients may be very perceptive in discovering assumptions and bias underpinning practitioner's practice. Such assumptions are not easily articulated or changed by just providing new information, but through engaging teachers in observation and reflection to develop awareness of belief, behaviors and the influence of their actions (Hartnell-Young, 2003). Thus, understanding teachers' beliefs and practices and exploring what encourages or discourages agreement between them can help to create a holistic picture about teaching at the tertiary level.

#### **2.4.4 Teacher's Role**

The role that a teacher assumes in class is based on his/ her beliefs of teaching, the subject matter, the learners and classroom management in a particular context. Traditionally, teachers perceive their role as transmitters of knowledge to students (Harmer, 2001). This teacher-centered approach might be quite relevant in some

occasions, particularly when the teacher wants to motivate, instruct or explain something; however, there are some other occasions when the teacher needs to organize students in classroom activities such as pair work or group work (Harmer, 2001; Richards, 2002). In such situations, a teacher is viewed as a facilitator for the learning and teaching process rather than a controller of teaching, transmitting knowledge to the students (Hartnell-Young, 2003; Richards, 2002).

Although teachers may apply some other roles to their instructional classrooms such as controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and observer (Harmer, 2001), Means and Olsen (1994) argued that a teacher is no longer a controller of teaching process, but a facilitator and coach. Moreover, Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1995) suggested that as facilitators, teachers provide conducive learning environments to their students and create opportunities for students to work collaboratively with each other, to solve problems, do authentic tasks, and share knowledge and responsibility. A facilitator is viewed as a good communicator, able to provide students with specific feedback about their work and is concerned with the conducive environment and resources, the class climate, learning activities and content as well as feelings and emotions (Goleman, 1999).

Reflective practice advocates the adoption of learner-centered teaching in which the teacher takes the role of a facilitator for students' learning (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2002; Hartell-Young, 2003; Richards, 2002). Thus, a teacher should reflect on his/ her role in the light of the shift in teaching from a controller of the teaching process into a facilitator for students' learning.

#### **2.4.5 Professional Development of EFL/ ESL Teachers**

Professional development is crucial for teachers' teaching career. It engages teachers in a continuous process of learning about their practice (Underhill, 1997). In such a process, teachers engage in understanding themselves, their teaching practices, beliefs, values, principles, theories and in sharing their experiences with others (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Roberts, 1998; Woods, 1995).

Effective language teachers are seen as self-directed and creators of their own teaching strategies (Richards, 2002), which they can develop through reflection (Munoz, 2007). Several researchers viewed reflective practice as important for professional development of university teachers (Hartell-Young, 2006; Kane *et al.*, 2004; Munoz, 2007; Richards, 2002; Wlodarsky, 2005; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). To concur with Wlodarsky and Walters (2006) and Wlodarsky (2005), university teachers can develop awareness of their conceptions and practices and enhance their professional development by engaging themselves in a critical reflection process. In so doing, they can increase their knowledge (McAlpine & Weston, 2000) and achieve a deep understanding of instruction as a foundation for professional development (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

More importantly, in the process of teacher development, the teacher engages in reflection in collaboration with colleagues to enhance his or her skills and construct knowledge about teaching and learning (Richards, 2002). The teacher can also step back outside the teaching work as an observer and reflect on his/ her teaching practices (Brookfield, 1995).

Currently, there is an emphasis on the need to encourage instructors to find their own way of teaching and achieve professional development through reflection. For example, Munoz (2007) and Fensom (2007) contended that reflective practice is essential for professional development of university teachers. Farrell (1999) stated that reflective practice has become a remarkable feature of EFL/ESL teachers in teacher education. He argued that teacher development groups can provide great opportunities for English teachers to develop into professional educators.

In the same vein, the present study encourages teachers in the Yemeni context to engage in reflection on their beliefs and practices. This is a step towards the professional development as the teachers can develop more awareness of the teaching and learning process. Thus, professional development is the target that teachers constantly try to achieve to improve their performance and reflection is the means through which teachers can achieve their target individually and collaboratively with others.

#### **2.4.6 Case Studies and Reflective Practice**

Case studies are very common in different areas of specializations such as second language acquisition, pragmatics, bilingualism and multilingualism, workplace communication and classroom pedagogy, and other educational and professional fields (Duff, 2013). Several case studies were conducted to understand the reflective practice in higher education. For instance, in the study of the professional development of university teachers through reflective engagement, Lyons (2006) selected three teachers from his sample for a brief case study. McAlpine and Weston (2000) engaged six university teachers to understand the role of reflection in the

construction of teachers' knowledge. Hsiu-ting (2008) conducted a study to understand the impact of reflective practice on the development of ten ESL teachers' teaching and learning process in an online master's program in an American university. Fensom (2007) conducted a qualitative, case study for two teachers and four Ph.D. student teachers in the department of psychology to understand reflective processes about teaching practice demonstrated by novice teachers in the university.

In all the above studies, the case study approach was found an appropriate method for understanding a complex phenomenon like reflective practice. The present study, which is also a case study in a particular Yemeni university, engages five key informants in a reflection process to understand how reflection is practiced among teachers.

Several other qualitative method and mixed-method studies have been conducted in higher education to research reflective practice (Amobi, 2005; Farrell, 2008; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Munoz, 2007; Smith, 2008; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). Wlodarsky and Walters (2006), and Munoz (2007) used mixed-methods. Other researchers used a qualitative research design. These studies examined the nature and characteristics of reflective practice, the role of reflective engagement in the professional development of university teachers and understanding the reflective process of university teachers. The common point in the findings of these research studies is that reflective practice can assist in improving the quality of teaching and learning process in higher education and lead to the professional development of teachers if it is employed effectively. The findings also indicated a lack of research on the two components of reflective practice i.e., beliefs

and practices in the natural context among teachers in the university. This provides a clear gap for conducting the present case study.

Some of the studies conducted in higher education focus on the reflective practice of novice teachers (Amobi, 2005; Fensom, 2007). Amobi's (2005) study at the college of education in an American university explored teacher educators' understanding of reflection and the factors that affect the students' ability to reflect. Fensom (2007) also conducted a study to understand reflective process demonstrated by novice teachers in the university. However, investigating reflective practice is likely to be inappropriate with novice teachers as novices lack the experience and the knowledge that may enable them to engage in effective reflection (Akbari, 2007). Rather, exploring reflection is likely to be reasonable with experienced teachers who possess sufficient experience and knowledge to reflect.

More importantly, an extensive and comprehensive critical review was made by Kane *et al.* (2002) to explore the two components of reflective practice, that is, teachers' beliefs and practices. Kane *et al.* reviewed 71 studies and 50 papers that examined the beliefs of university teachers about their teaching and the implications of these beliefs for their teaching practice. The authors found that all the studies they analyzed focused on what teachers claim they do, but not on what they practice. Similarly, Mena Marcos *et al.* (2009) analyzed extensive studies on teacher reflection in the last 25 years for 50 conceptual papers on reflection, 122 articles on teacher development and 49 teachers' accounts of reflective practice. They investigated what was said pertaining to reflective practice in research and what was done in teaching. Mena Marcos *et al.* concurred that the studies they reviewed only focused on what

teachers claimed they did, but not what they actually did about reflective practice. The following framework of teacher's reflective practice (figure 2.1) which the authors developed in their critical review for the studies on teacher's reflection and professional development shows that research studies focused on what teachers say they know about reflection (say-know). The review indicated that what the teachers know through research studies about what to do for professional development (know-do) was insufficient. The review also showed that previous research studies mainly focused on what teachers say they do pertaining to reflection (say-do). Yet, what the teachers actually do about reflection is missing.

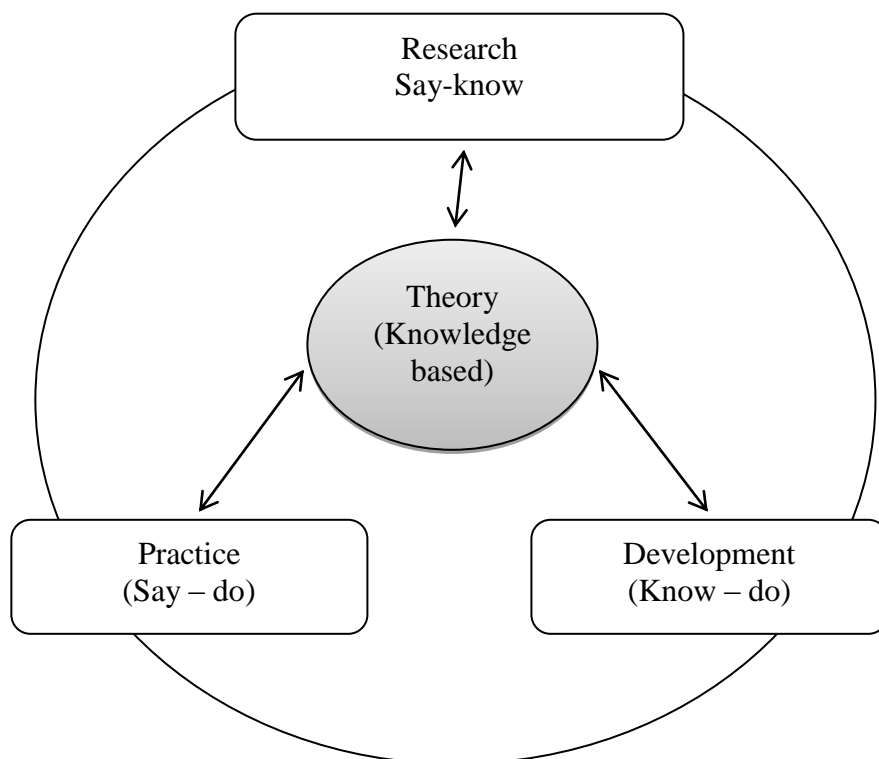


Figure 2.1: Framework on teacher's reflection (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009)

The extensive reviews done by Kane *et al.* (2002) and Mena Marcos *et al.* (2009) indicated a gap between the teachers' beliefs and practices. Such a gap might be



affected by implicit factors that constrain the university teachers' reflection and their professional development as claimed by Lyons (2006). Moreover, the lack of focus of the research studies on the practices of teachers (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011) motivates this study to focus on the two components of reflection i.e. beliefs and practices (Dewey, 1933). Based on the discussions and the findings of the studies above, this study explores how reflection is practiced among university teachers. It hopes to understand the complex process of reflection by focusing on what the teachers say about reflection and what they do in practice.

#### **2.4.7 Factors Affecting Reflective Practice**

Reflective practice has been recognized as generally good for teacher practitioners since they can be more intentional and purposeful in thinking about teaching (Zeichner, 1994). Yet, certain factors may exist to affect the occurrence of reflection (Akbari, 2007; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006; Munoz, 2007). Some of these factors which were inferred from a priori literature include reflective framework guidance, personality, experience, teachers' ability, teaching environment, training and formal learning (Akbari, 2007; Amobi, 2005; Killen, 2007; Lyons, 2006; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Munoz, 2007; Ramsey, 2003). Through exploring the reflective practice among teachers, this study gains insights into the factors that enable and constrain the reflection process, either a *priori* or emerging factors.

To further illustrate, researchers emphasized that a systematic reflective practice requires a reflective framework guidance that has a clear plan and rationale to base our practices on (Hubball *et al.*, 2005; Lyons, 2006; Ramsey, 2003; Reiman, 1999;

Schraw, 1998). To this guidance, Genor (2005) added some reflective activities such as portfolios, action research, writing educational philosophy statements, and telling stories within teacher dialogue groups. As a faculty teacher in English, Fonsom (2007) encountered difficulty in improving and developing his teaching practices due to the lack of systematic reflective process that university teachers should undergo. It was only through self-reflection and constant struggle for a very long time that lasted for 20 years that he was able to develop his teaching practices.

Personality plays a central role in the reflective practice of university instructors (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). McAlpine and Weston argued that a stable personality might give constraints to a successful reflection of experienced university teachers. This is because teachers are influenced and guided by their personality (Akbari, 2007). The three attitudes of personality i.e. open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness may have an impact on the teachers' reflective practice (Dewey, 1933). Some teachers are unable to engage in reflective practice as they fear to take risk (Amobi, 2005; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Also, the lack of motivation constrains the engagement of teachers in reflective practice (Davis, 2003; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Becoming a reflective practitioner, therefore, entails a continuous desire to engage in reflection (Munoz, 2007). Institutions can motivate teachers to reflect on their teaching effectively by offering them some rewards such as awards, promotions and enabling their training and engaging them in regular discussions about teaching and learning issues (Lyons, 2006). Thus, the personality traits such as fear, commitment, and motivation, which might be inferred from the present study, are important aspects that might influence the teachers' engagement in reflective practice.

Lived experience is important for the reflective engagement and professional lives of the university teachers (Lyons, 2006). It is probably the most influential factor on the development of beliefs which influence teachers' reflective practice (Fensom, 2007; Lyons, 2006; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

On the contrary, reflective practice assists teachers to learn from experience (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Experience and reflection on the experience are coupled (McLean, 2007). Based on the past experience, reflection can assist teachers in building new knowledge and new personal theories about teaching and learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Houston & Clift, 1990; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Neufeld & Grimmett, 1994). By reflecting on her experience, Smith (2009) highlighted the significance of reflective practice in bringing a change to her style of teaching. Following Gimenez (1999), this study stimulated the teachers to retell their lived experiences, which assisted them to reflect on their teaching practices and to become aware of the assumptions underlying such practices.

A supportive environment is fundamental for university teachers' engagement in effective reflective practice since it can lead to improvement in teaching and learning (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Yet, many teachers work in a vague environment pertaining to teaching practices and students' learning (Fensom, 2007). University teachers require a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning (Fensom, 2007). In such a conducive environment, which is risk-free or blame-free, teachers' reflection with colleagues can be beneficial when sharing feedback and discussing beliefs and insights that can help to uncover the assumptions underlying

the teachers' actions (Killion, 2000). Teachers, thus, should be given enough time to engage in reflection (Davis, 2003; Ramsey, 2003) so that they can plan, work with individual students, visit other classes, reflect (Hord, 1997) and articulate their personal theories (Griffiths & Tann, 1992).

Training is important for teachers as it can influence the construction of teaching and learning through reflection (Houston & Clift, 1990). Formal training is viewed as a fundamental factor that affects university teachers' reflection (McAlpine & Weston 2000) given that reflective behavior can be improved by training (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Selinger, 1991). Training the university teachers to engage in reflective practice can also influence their professional lives and assist to develop their awareness about the teaching and learning process (Lyons, 2006). Thus, training is important for teachers particularly when they are more experienced and capable of developing reflective attitudes. Shed in the same light, the current study focused on experienced teachers who have been teaching in the university for about ten years.

Teachers' engagement in effective reflective practice is based on their ability i.e., cognitive and innate (Amobi, 2005). Cognitive ability includes teachers' beliefs, knowledge and thinking (Alexander & Dochy, 1995; Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1990; Richardson, 1996) and innate ability refers to teachers' confidence, self-esteem and habit (Amobi, 2005). Reflective practice is deeply influenced by teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning (Munoz, 2007). Furthermore, knowledge has an impact on the teachers' reflection; that is, the more knowledgeable the teacher is, the higher level of reflection can be practiced (Akbari, 2007; Barry, 1996).

Nevertheless, the teachers' failure to engage in effective reflective practice is due to their inability to implement knowledge about teaching and also about reflection (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). In addition, the engagement of a person in an individual thinking is only viewed as a weak form of reflection which is opposed to the strong form of reflection in which reflective practitioners engage in collaborative discussion with other teachers (Farrell, 2008). Reflection at the thinking level, therefore, may be the first step towards more critical level of reflection in collaboration with others. This study explored how reflection is practiced among the university teachers.

Teachers' innate ability is also significant for the reflection of teachers (Akbari, 2007). To concur with Dewey (1933), Akbari (2007) also emphasized on the idea of learning how to reflect emotionally and cognitively to achieve self-improvement. Also, the conceptualizing of the habit of reflection occurs through experience and reflection on that experience (Dewey, 1933). This thinking habit can help to develop the ability of teachers for reflection.

Teachers can learn about reflection during their study in teacher education program or through training. This can help them develop professionally and enhance their teaching and their students' learning (Barry, 1996). However, the teachers' failure to improve their teaching practice may be because they did not learn about reflective practice (McAlpine & Weston, 2000).

University teachers receive little or no formal preparation for their role as teachers (Boice, 1992). They may not learn about their teaching beliefs and practices through

ongoing reflection during their formal education (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lortie, 1975). Rather, they learn from their observation to teachers and peers during their teaching. Thus, learning about reflection which seems to be missing in teachers' formal education may affect teachers' reflection on their teaching beliefs and practices.

On the other hand, reflection also affects teachers' learning. York-Barr *et al.* (2006) concurred with Dewey (1933) on the importance of reflection in continuous improvement of learning from experience. York-Barr *et al.* (2006) asserted that learning and positive growth that individuals experience as they engage in reflective practices provide an experiential basis on which to support and expand their reflective practice beyond themselves. York-Barr *et al.* remarked:

Dewey asserted years ago that experience itself is not enough. Ten years of teaching can be 10 years of learning from experience with continuous improvement, or it can be 1 year with no learning repeated 10 times. Learning and improvement can no longer be optional. Reflection, therefore, must be at the center of individual and organizational renewal initiatives. (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006, p. 27).

Based on the discussions above, understanding how reflection is practiced can play a significant role in strengthening the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002). As such, the engagement of university teachers in reflective practice can help them to understand reflective practice, uncover the assumptions underlying their practices and, therefore, narrow the gap between their beliefs and practices. This can lead to the teachers' awareness of their own teaching practices and enhance their professional development (Lyons, 2006). This study focused on the two components of reflective practice i.e., beliefs and practices.

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter has shown the theoretical background about reflective practice. Various definitions of reflection were presented including perceiving reflective practice as a purposeful act of thinking that results in meaning making and understanding of a problem which leads to action. The main components of reflection, namely, beliefs and practices and also the theories used as the basis for understanding the reflective process were provided. The gap between the teachers' beliefs and practices which would be narrowed by understanding reflection process was clearly highlighted. In particular, this chapter has provided the context for this case study in higher education in Yemen. Also, a priori factors which might affect the reflective practice among teachers were presented.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the method and instruments used to explore reflection process among the respondents. It includes the method of data collection and data analysis. It discusses the research respondents and the rationale for the selection process. It also provides the research procedures and ethical considerations, validity and reliability of the study, limitations and a short summary.

#### **3.2 Setting the Scene**

This study focused on a complex phenomenon i.e., reflective practice among the teachers in a university. To understand such a process, I employed a qualitative, case study approach to get an “in-depth understanding of the situation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19) which focuses on the “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The qualitative, case study approach suits the complexity of reflection (Duff, 20213; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Creswell *et al.* (2007) viewed case study as a methodology and a type of design in qualitative research. They perceived case study research as a qualitative approach in which the researcher investigates a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection employing several sources of information such as interviews, observations, audiovisual material and documents and provides a report on a case description and case-based themes.

The qualitative, case study gives a thick, intensive and holistic description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). This thick description provides detailed,



in-depth and rich data elicited from the participants' talks about their experiences and from other materials used for gathering the data (Duff, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Given that qualitative, case study advocates the triangulation of the data collection procedures (Duff, 2013), I used several techniques to get in-depth data such as individual semi-structured interviews, journal writing, classroom observations and focus group discussions with students. I discussed with the informants their views about teaching and learning problems and the efforts they make to solve those problems. I also discussed with them the teaching and learning incidents which they had recorded in the journal entries, and also classroom observations to the teaching and learning process. Finally, I discussed with the students their opinions about the teaching and learning issues in relation to the subjects taught by the informants.

Given that 10 years of teaching experience can be enough to bring a change in the teacher's teaching career and lead to his or her professional development (Dewey, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), I engaged teachers who had similar teaching experience like the researcher (10 years). Thus, the present study explored the engagement of university teachers in reflective practice in a private university in Yemen with the help of those who might employ such a practice. The familiar environment for me, as a researcher, made it easier to collect the data.

### **3.3 The Case Study**

The key assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are drawn is the perception of reality construction by individuals through interaction with the social world (Merriam, 1998; Duff, 2013). Merriam stated that "qualitative researchers are

interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

The main distinction between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the case and not the whole population of cases (Stake, 1988; Duff, 2013). The design of the case study is similar to a funnel in which the case begins wide and gradually ends with a focus (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Nevertheless, the focus of case study is not on the individuals. Rather, it is on the issue while the individuals only help to understand the issue (Creswell, 2003; Creswell *et al.*, 2007). A case study ends with an extensive explanation of what is learned from studying the cases (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). It provides rich and in-depth data about the phenomenon (Duff, 2013; Silverman, 2013).

For the purpose of my research, I adopted a qualitative case study which is a common approach in applied linguistics to investigate a complex phenomenon like the reflective practice (Duff, 2013; Silverman, 2013). Additionally, based on the purpose and questions of the study and how to explore reflective practice, I employed the naturalistic/ interpretive approach as contended by Denzin and Lincoln (1994). The terms naturalistic and interpretive research can be used interchangeably as equivalents to qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). This interpretive approach emphasizes that the action of the actor can be understood better from the actor’s perspective (Erickson, 1986). Merriam (1998) remarked that to understand the experience about a particular phenomenon, the researcher should uncover the participant’s perspective.

In light of the characteristics of the naturalistic approach mentioned above, I went to the natural setting and invited five university English teachers to engage in reflection on their beliefs and teaching practices. That is, to understand how reflection is practiced in the natural setting, I stimulated the informants to reflect on their teaching and students' learning problems, requested them to write journal entries, observed their classes, and also obtained their students' opinions about the teaching and learning process.

### **3.4 Informants' Profile**

In this qualitative research study, the informants were five English teachers from UST. They were warm and hospitable. The selection of the informants was based on their teaching experience in the university. That is, I selected teachers who volunteered with similar university teaching experience as I do (about 10 years). I knew this through their CVs available at the faculty. I contended that those five informants could share their perceptions and experiences about reflection. Almost all the informants had 10 years of university teaching experience except one teacher who was in the beginning of his ninth year. Following Goolsby (1999), the latter had sufficient knowledge and experience to engage in reflection as he was not a novice teacher. Therefore, all the informants who participated in this study were the experts who had enough teaching experiences about teaching and learning in the university required for reflection (Dewey, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). The following table (table 3.1) summarizes the profile of the key informants.

Table 3.1  
*The profile of the key informants*

No.	Informant pseudonym	Academic qualification	Gender	Age	Years of teaching experience	Mode of work
1	Ahmed	Master's degree	Male	30	8	Full time
2	Sarah	Master's degree	Female	36	10	Full time
3	Hassan	Ph.D.	Male	37	10	Full time
4	Ameen	Master's degree	Male	40	10	Full time
5	Muneer	Ph.D.	Male	42	10	Hourly paid

Other respondents in this research study were the students taught by the five informants. Six to 10 students taught by each informant voluntarily engaged in a focus group discussion to provide their own perspectives and complete the portrait of the university teaching and learning process. Only one focus group began with seven students and ended with two due to the unsecured atmosphere that resulted from an explosion which occurred in a place not very far from the university. The students seemed to speak clear English and expressed their viewpoints successfully. Some of the students liked the idea of discussing teaching and learning problems in the university and others found it a good context to practice their English language. Most students liked to speak English as some of them studied in English medium schools and some others either had TOEFL or were preparing for TOEFL, a strategy that UST follows to push students to get the TOEFL by the time they go to level three. Although the students were told that they could use their mother tongue (i.e., Arabic) to talk about things they could not express in English, they only wanted to speak English. They spoke good English. Nevertheless, only very few expressions were given in Arabic and I translated them into English.

### **3.5 Data Collection Method**

For the study, I visited the head of the English Department, clarified the criteria for selecting participants and requested him to suggest teachers who meet the criteria. The head of the English Department provided me with some information about the instructors and I also got further details from the secretary of the department. Subsequently, I explained to those who were interested to participate in the study the nature of their participation and established a good rapport with them. I informed the informants about the confidentiality of the collected data. I informed them that the data would only be used for research purposes and I also obtained their consent agreement to participate in the study before starting the actual study (appendices A & B).

Based on the interview guideline prepared, (appendix C), I interviewed the informants individually at certain appointed times which were convenient to them and audio-taped the interviews. I followed the interview by a classroom observation to get more data about the informant's claims about the reflection practiced in the natural setting i.e., classroom. I audio-taped the first two classes and video-taped the third one. Each classroom observation was followed by another interview to verify the data I gathered from the previous interview and classroom observation. By the end of the first interview, I gave each informant a journal entry to record teaching and learning incidents in that current semester which I discussed with him/ her later during the follow-up interview. As such, I gave each informant an opportunity to reflect on the previous interviews, the classes I observed and the incidents recorded in the journal entry. Arranging for focus group discussions with the students, I was able to collect

more data about the teachers' reflection from the students' perspectives (Brookfield, 1995). All of these assisted me to get rich data and a holistic picture about the engagement of teachers in the reflective practice.

All the research instruments including the interview questions, the classroom observation, the journal entry and the focus group discussion with students were piloted with two other teachers. Based on the piloting, revisions were made to avoid ambiguity for the actual study. As suggested by Kilbourn, "in the course of conducting a pilot study, directions to follow and questions to ask usually emerge and can be developed and honed" (Kilbourn, 2006, p.549).

In the pilot study, one of the respondents withdrew after the first meeting claiming that he was busy and could not continue. The analysis of the data collected from the other respondent led to the revision of some of the questions which seemed to be confusing. All the interview questions and probes were flexible based on the natural responses of the respondents. I also revised the classroom observation guideline for clarity. During the pilot study, I encountered some obstacles which I tried to manage in the actual study such as the difficulty in arranging for the interviews as the meeting rooms in the faculty were busy during the time of the interviews. In some cases, I had to postpone the interview with the respondent to the next day and sometimes I conducted the interview in a vacant classroom after teaching was over. In addition, I had some teaching duty at the time of the data collection including piloting and it took time to find appropriate slots to swap some of the classes with other teachers as to be free for the interviews or classroom observations. This is because I was doing a full time job and at the same time I was a full time Ph.D. candidate. Yet, I was allowed to

travel for my study for four months a year; and in some cases, I managed to get permission to stay in Malaysia, the place where I studied, longer, that is, for six to seven months. The following flow chart (figure 3.1) shows the data collection steps.

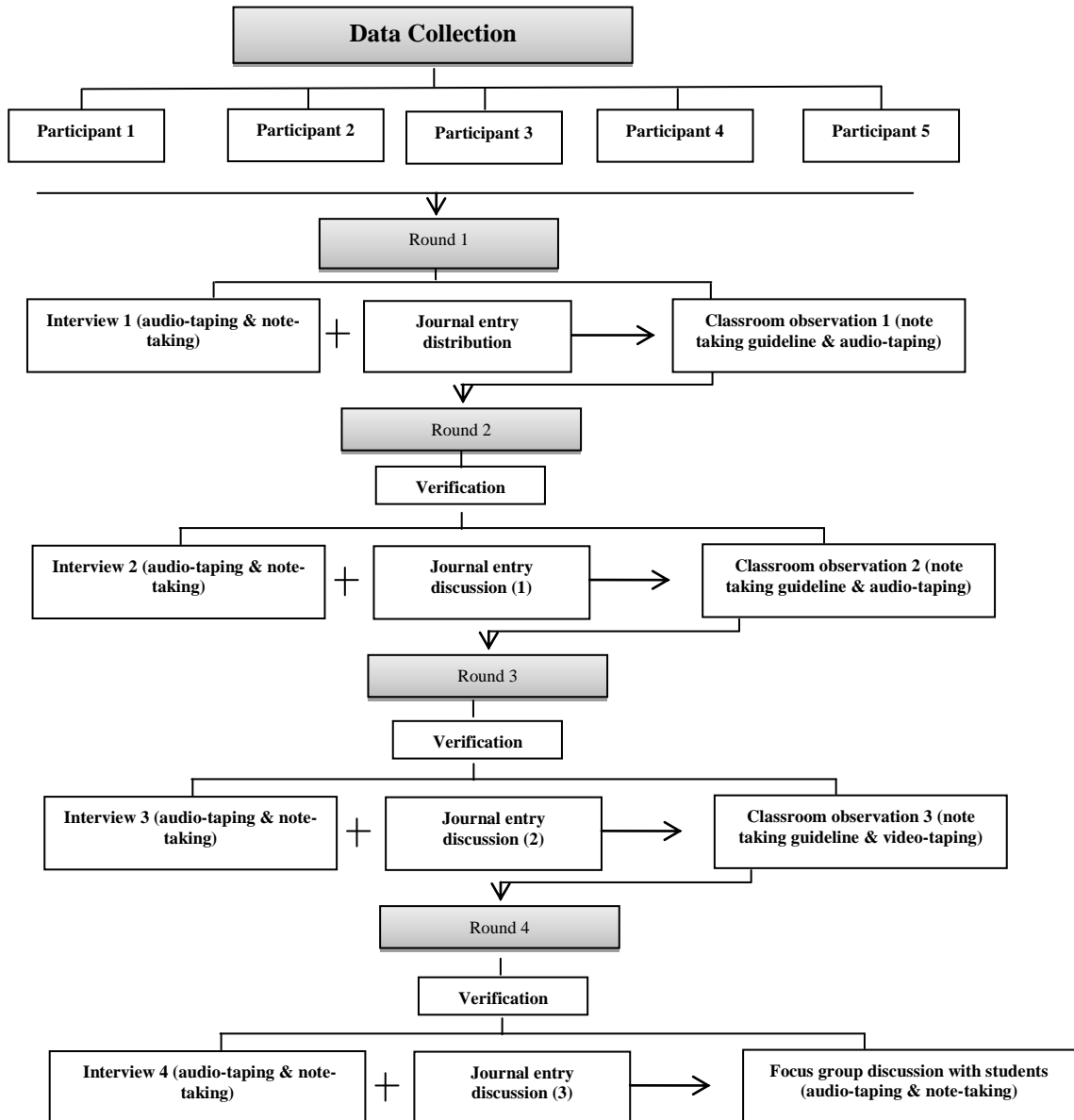


Figure 3.1: Data collection steps

### **3.5.1 Interviews**

In case studies the “qualitative interviewing is a technique that helps us understand people: why they do what they do in the chaos of living and their diverse perspectives. Not only does a qualitative interview generate information but it prompts people to talk about their lives” (Minah Harun, 2007, p. 144). In this essence, the interview instrument helped me to understand fully the reflective practice in the university by engaging teachers in a series of interviews to talk about their beliefs and practices pertaining to teaching and learning issues.

The main technique for collecting data for the present study was conducting in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with teachers before and after classroom observations. Both interviews and observations are considered the primary source of data in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Thus, four interviews were conducted for each participant (appendix D). In addition to the common use of the interview instrument for data collection in qualitative research (Rogers & Bouey, 1996), the use of this instrument gave the interviewer an opportunity to see participant’s life from different angles (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). These qualitative in-depth interviews were important for describing and understanding participants’ experiences and their results shed new light on the study problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). During these interviews, data were described in the subjects’ own words which helped me as a researcher to develop insights based on the subjects’ interpretation of their worlds (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The participants were given an opportunity to introspect their thoughts about the teaching and learning issues and retrospect their past experiences (Crook, 2012) in



relation to their learning and teaching experiences, the classroom teaching and learning episodes and the recorded incidents in the journal entries. Rubin and Rubin (2005) described qualitative interviews as more focused, rich, in-depth and detailed pertaining to the interviewees' experiences. They argued that during the interview, the interviewer elicits the depth and details about the topic based on the interviewees' responses.

I asked the interviewees questions based on their responses, but not necessarily in the order they were pre-prepared. As such, I perceived each interview as unique as the questions were posed based on what the interviewee knew and was willing to discuss (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In the qualitative interviewing, the focus of discussion begins on a narrow topic which then leads to more details about that topic attempted by the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviewer listened to and focused on what the interviewees said and not said (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Similarly, I showed interest in listening to participants to encourage them to continue telling their stories by smiling, nodding and using words like yes, right, fine etc and prompts. In so doing, I was able to get valuable information about the participants' viewpoints on the reflection practiced in the university.

The interview question strategy that the study adopted was based on Rubin and Rubin's (2005) view of getting thick or rich descriptions (Geertz, 1973). In this essence, I developed the main questions, probes, and follow-up questions as Rubin and Rubin suggested:

Main questions get a conversation going on a specific matter and ensure that the overall subject is covered, whereas probes are standardized ways to ask for more depth and detail and encourage the conversational partner to continue. To achieve richness and depth of understanding, those engaged in

qualitative interviews listen for and then explore key words, ideas, and themes using follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to expand on what he or she has said that the researcher feels is important to the research. (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13).

Thus, the main interview questions were prepared in advance to help answer the research questions and the follow-up questions sought for explanations of themes, concepts or events that the interviewee introduced (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probes helped to maintain the interview on the topic and sought for detailed information from the respondents (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also had the interviews audio-taped.

Audio-taping and video-taping are considered to be the main instruments for collecting data qualitatively (Erickson, 1986). As such, I audio-taped the first two classroom observations and video-taped the third one. In that way, I hoped to get an accurate description of the collected data given that I could listen to the recorded data repeatedly and transcribed them to study and understand the case of each participant fully. The recording assisted in explaining what had happened during classroom observations including the minute details (e.g., facial expressions).

Interviews in qualitative research are theme oriented which attempt to interpret and understand the meanings of the main themes in the life of the interviewees (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) described seven stages in designing and implementing a qualitative interview which were followed in this study. These stages include thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. Thematizing indicates that the researcher should be very clear about the purpose of the study and the topic to be investigated before starting the interview. Designing the

interview involves all the seven stages and should be planned before the interview begins.

Interviewing should be based on an interview guide that involves an outline of the topics to be covered and suggested questions that can be evaluated thematically and dynamically. Each interview question should be related to the research theme, which I attempted to follow; it contributes to knowledge production, considers the interpersonal relationship in the interview and helps to promote a good interview interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. I experienced this with many if not all of my respondents.

Transcribing is an important step which prepares the material from the interview for analysis. Analyzing the data is an issue that should be considered very early in the process of the study design and the method of data analysis is based on the purpose of the study and the investigated topic.

For this purpose, Kvale (1996) described five methods for analyzing and interpreting qualitative interviews which were followed in this study. These methods involve meaning condensation (summarizing the meaning expressed by interviewees into brief statements), meaning categorizing (coding meaning into categories), narrative structuring (creating coherent stories), meaning interpretation (interpreting deep meaning of the text) and generating meaning through ad hoc method (using various methods such as words, figures and flow charts).

Verifying is concerned with determining the reliability, validity and generalizability of the interview findings. Reliability indicates how findings are consistent. Validity determines whether the interview really examined what it is intended to be investigated. Generalizability refers to the possibility of applying the findings of the interview to other people outside of the interview.

Reporting is the last step in designing and developing an interview study. It refers to communicating the findings of the study and the methods used in a form that meets accepted scientific criteria, meet ethical standards such as confidentiality and respect and that is readable and useable for different audiences (Kvale, 1996). In the current study, participants were informed about the time of the interviews which lasted for about one to two hours depending on the topic discussed and the questions asked (Rabiee, 2007).

#### **3.5.1.1 Pre-Classroom Observation Interviews**

In the pre-classroom observation interviews, I stimulated the participants to talk about their learning and teaching background, teaching philosophy, English learning and teaching problems, the preparation for the courses they teach in general and for the individual classes in particular, their roles in the teaching classroom, their efforts in improving their teaching strategies and how they perceive students' learning. I also gave participants the journal entries which they were to maintain for follow-up interviews and write problematic teaching and learning incidents. Those recorded teaching and learning incidents were discussed later on with teachers individually in the follow-up interviews.

### **3.5.1.2 Post-Classroom Observation Interviews**

I held three post-classroom observation interviews that also provided teachers with an opportunity to pause and reflect on more issues pertaining to their teaching beliefs and practices and also on the classroom teaching and the students' learning. In the final interview, participants chose some video-taped segments from the last teaching classroom observations and commented on them. They explained more about the relationship between their espoused theories and their practices, and what affects the relationship between them. Based on the teaching and learning incidents that informants recorded in their journals, I discussed the recorded events with them and elicited more information on their reflective practice. That is, I was able to understand if reflection occurs by looking at the teaching and learning problems encountered, and whether the informants managed to solve such problems and also their commitment to resolve the problem. The journal incidents also assisted me to understand reflection and how it is practiced. I asked the informants to keep the journal entries for the next interview and write down more recent teaching and learning incidents.

In the follow-up interviews, I discussed more emerging concepts and themes about teachers' thoughts and practices and the recent recorded teaching and learning incidents (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). More specifically, by discussing the recorded incidents, I attempted to elicit how much the informants reflect on their beliefs and practices, verify the collected data with the informants (Kvale, 1996) and also to ensure saturation "when nothing new is being added" (Bowen, 2008, p. 140).

### **3.5.2 Focus Group Discussions**

I used semi-structured focus group interviews with students. This instrument is widely used in qualitative research (Dornyei, 2007; Flick, 1998). It helped me infer the students' perspectives about teaching and learning issues they had experienced during their study in the university. Following Rabiee (2007) and based on the students' willingness, I invited six to 10 students taught by each informant toward the end of the course, in the last two weeks, to participate in a group discussion on teaching and learning issues. According to Rabiee (2007), the manageable number of participants in focus group discussions varies between six and ten in each group. Rabiee (2007) argued that this number is large enough to generate various perspectives of participants and small enough to manage. Participants were informed about the time of the interviews which lasted for almost thirty to sixty minutes depending on the issues raised and the saturation reached (Merriam, 2009). I prepared a plan in advance and wrote down the purpose of the study, all thoughts to be discussed, the questions to be asked (appendix G), timeline and the number of group members to be involved (Krueger & Casey, 2001).

In focus group interviews, the participants' selection is purposive, but not necessary representative (Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale, & Bond, 1995). As such, the participants were selected based on the criteria that they belonged to the classes I observed and were interested to participate in the discussions with me as an interviewer and with other participants (Rabiee, 2007).

In the focus group discussions, I played the role of a moderator who enabled participants' discussions, made sure that nobody dominated the discussion and

everyone was effectively involved in the discussion (Dornyei, 2007). Though the majority of the students interacted actively in the discussions and expressed different points of view, some students were very brief in their answers. In some cases, they only confirmed the answers given by their friends either by repeating the same answers or using the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ words. The discussions with the students helped me to understand the reflective process in the university in the students’ perspectives Brookfield (1995).

Additionally, enabling the focus group discussions with the students assisted me to get more data about the teaching and learning process in the students’ perspectives (Thomas *et al.*, 1995). Focus group interviews can show various perspectives among participants about particular issues and the interviewer can generate great amounts of data in a short period of time (Rabiee, 2007). In each focus group interview, the discussions with the students continued until I felt there was a kind of redundancy of information (Merriam, 2009).

I audio-taped the focus group discussions and took notes immediately after the discussions were completed (Rabiee, 2007). This assisted me to reflect on the discussions and capture the non-verbal communication expressions that occurred during the interviews such as the signs of agreement with the viewpoints of peers by nodding which were useful for the data analysis (Rabiee, 2007). The focus group interviews were employed with students as an equivalent instrument to the journal entries used by teachers.

### **3.5.3 Classroom Observations**

The classroom is a place where all important elements such as educational ideologies, plans, policies, materials, methods, and teachers are all mixed together to form an exclusive environment which may enable or constrain students' learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). The language classroom is not only the setting for investigation, but an instrument of investigation. All processes which are going on inside the classroom become the essential focus of the study (Allwright, 1983).

The rationale for classroom observations was based on Patton's (2002) perspective that observation is the best method to understand a complex phenomenon in the natural setting. I was able to connect the readers with what happened in the actual setting through the thorough and accurate data I collected during the observations (Patton, 2002). That is, I used multiple observation tools such as the observation guideline, audio and video taping and field notes which were rich sources for the data.

In the present study, I was able to understand why things happened the way they did in the classroom (Allwright, 1983). Classroom observations focused on the teaching and learning that went on in the classroom. The three aspects of reflective practice i.e., diagnosis, testing and belief in personal causation were gathered implicitly and explicitly from the teaching and learning practices. I was fully aware of the fact that what I was observing was determined by the purpose of the study (Merriam, 1998). An observer needs to record classroom processes and take notes based on a predetermined category; then records should be analyzed with notes taken in the classroom to see how that can shed light on the topic investigated (Allwright, 1983).



In observation, an observer can observe behavior as it is happening (Merriam, 1998). The core value of observations is to give investigators an opportunity to see directly what others do rather than to rely on what they claim they do (Dornyei, 2007). For Dornyei, observation “is invaluable for providing descriptive contextual information about the setting of the targeted phenomenon” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 185). Thus, I visited the natural context (i.e., classroom) to obtain authentic data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

Semi-structured classroom observations were conducted three times for each informant in the two-hour classes using an observation guideline adapted from Merriam’s (1998) (appendix E). Merriam (1998) recommended a list of elements that researchers should consider during classroom observations. These elements contained the physical setting in the classroom, the participants, activities and interactions, subtle factors (such as informal and unplanned activities, non-verbal communication, what does not happen, etc.) and also observer’s field notes.

I engaged in classroom observation and took field notes based on the observation using an observation guideline. I observed teachers’ teaching and students’ learning activities. In that way, it helped me infer whether reflection occurred during teaching and whether what teachers claimed was practiced. I also observed the context in which teaching and learning took place and what affected teachers’ reflection in class.

Given that the classroom observation is more of a reflective assistance, not an evaluative tool (Lengeling, 2013), I requested the informants to comment on some classroom teaching and learning incidents observed, in the follow-up interviews.

These interviews were based on insights from the previous interviews, classroom observation outcomes and the discussion of the journals.

#### **3.5.4 Journal Entry**

A journal entry was also required of informants as part of the data collection (Dornyei, 2007) as it has a reflective nature (Smith, 2008). Dornyei claimed that in qualitative studies almost anything can be viewed as potential data. A journal entry format was adapted from Deutsch's (1996) based on Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) operational definition of reflective practice (appendix F).

The journal has five columns. The first column indicates the date of the learning and teaching incident. The second column is for recording the learning and teaching incidents. The third column determines the time of incident occurrence: whether it occurs before the action, while doing the action, or after such an action. The fourth column shows the descriptions of the causes of the incidents. The last column indicates the person(s) involved in the incident; be it the teacher, students, other teachers, administrators and so on. In addition, I recorded the aspects of reflection that were apparent in the description of the learning and teaching incidents in the margin of the journal. The ways which the teachers used to treat the teaching and learning problems and what affects the treatment of such problems were discussed during the interviews and written in the spaces provided in the margins on the right hand column of the journal entry.

The journal entry was given and explained to teachers to record as many teaching and learning incidents as possible that took place both inside and outside the

classroom pertaining to any teaching and learning issues. That was used later as a basis for discussing and understanding teachers' practices. It helped me to elicit informants' own interpretations of events and behaviors (Dornyei, 2007). The recorded incidents were discussed with the informants during every post-classroom observation interview.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Method**

Data analysis is “a process of organizing and sorting data in light of your increasing judgments, that is, of the meaning, finding interpretations that you are learning to make about the shape of your study” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 129). It includes examining, categorizing and tabulating the data to address the purpose of the study (Yin, 2003). In qualitative research, the researcher serves as a key instrument in collecting and analyzing the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Unlike quantitative research, the qualitative analysis focuses on the meaning of situations rather than searching for truth (Rabiee, 2007). According to Duff, “case studies normally involve rich contextualization and a deep, inductive analysis of data from a small set of participants, sites, or events” (Duff, 2013, p. 573).

To analyze the data, I employed a qualitative content analysis method (Baker & Ellece, 2011; Julien, 2008; Kohlbacher, 2006). I adopted a manual analytical method (Patton, 2002). In that analysis, I used a systematic coding scheme (Duff, 2013; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). As Patton suggested, the qualitative data analysis includes “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 463).

In the analytical process of the data, I used the margins provided on the right of the pages for coding, categorizing and putting the main themes of the data. I first downloaded the audio and video-taped data onto the laptop. Then I transcribed the audio and video-taped data by listening to the tape and writing down the data on A4 papers and then typing that into the Microsoft word document and sometimes by listening to and typing the data straightaway into the Microsoft word document. The errors in the respondents' utterances were corrected during the transcription process. The transcription process which was guided by the conventions followed by Bailey (1997) gave me an idea on how to transcribe non-verbal activities, the tone of the respondents, intonation, emphasis, pauses, and cut-off during or after words etc. Even though the entire process was very tedious, I made sure that it was done meticulously.

I kept a separate file for each interview and each classroom observation. I also used one file for each informant that contained the teacher's interviews, the classroom observations, the journal entry written by the informant and the focus group discussion with the students taught by the informant. All the files of the data were made ready for the analysis: - the interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations and the journals. My personal field notes, which I recorded immediately as soon as I had finished the discussions with participant or classroom observation or even my observations to the environment surrounding the teaching and learning process in the university as a whole, were also added to the data.

The files of every case were analyzed one by one- including the interviews, the classroom observations, the journal entry and the students' *voices* from the focus

group discussions. In that, I used colored highlight pens to highlight the main ideas and concepts in the texts and the margins provided on the right of the pages for coding, categorizing and classifying similar categories of the data into the main themes (Benaquisto, 2008). I tabulated the results using the Microsoft word document.

The data were read several times before the analysis, during the initial analysis and after the analysis was completed to ensure the appropriateness of the coding process which was refined throughout the whole process of analysis (Benaquisto, 2008; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). The process of coding was done inductively through finding new ideas and concepts and categorizing them in a way that assisted in organizing and interpreting the data (Benaquisto, 2008) and based on the research questions and the scholars' perspectives about reflection. In that, I considered what seemed to be reflective and non-reflective practices, how much teachers reflect and what affects their reflection. To reconsider the categorization and classification of the data, I used the cut and paste technique in the Microsoft word document.

I compared the main patterns I identified in the transcription of the interviews with those I got from the classroom observations and field notes, the journals and also from the focus group discussions to ensure that I stayed focused. The final results of analysis of all the four interviews for each informant were compared and contrasted to form one pattern (Duff, 2013). Similarly, the three classroom observations were compressed in one pattern. Then all cases were compared and contrasted to form the whole picture of reflection. The following is a flow chart of the data analysis steps (figure 3.2).

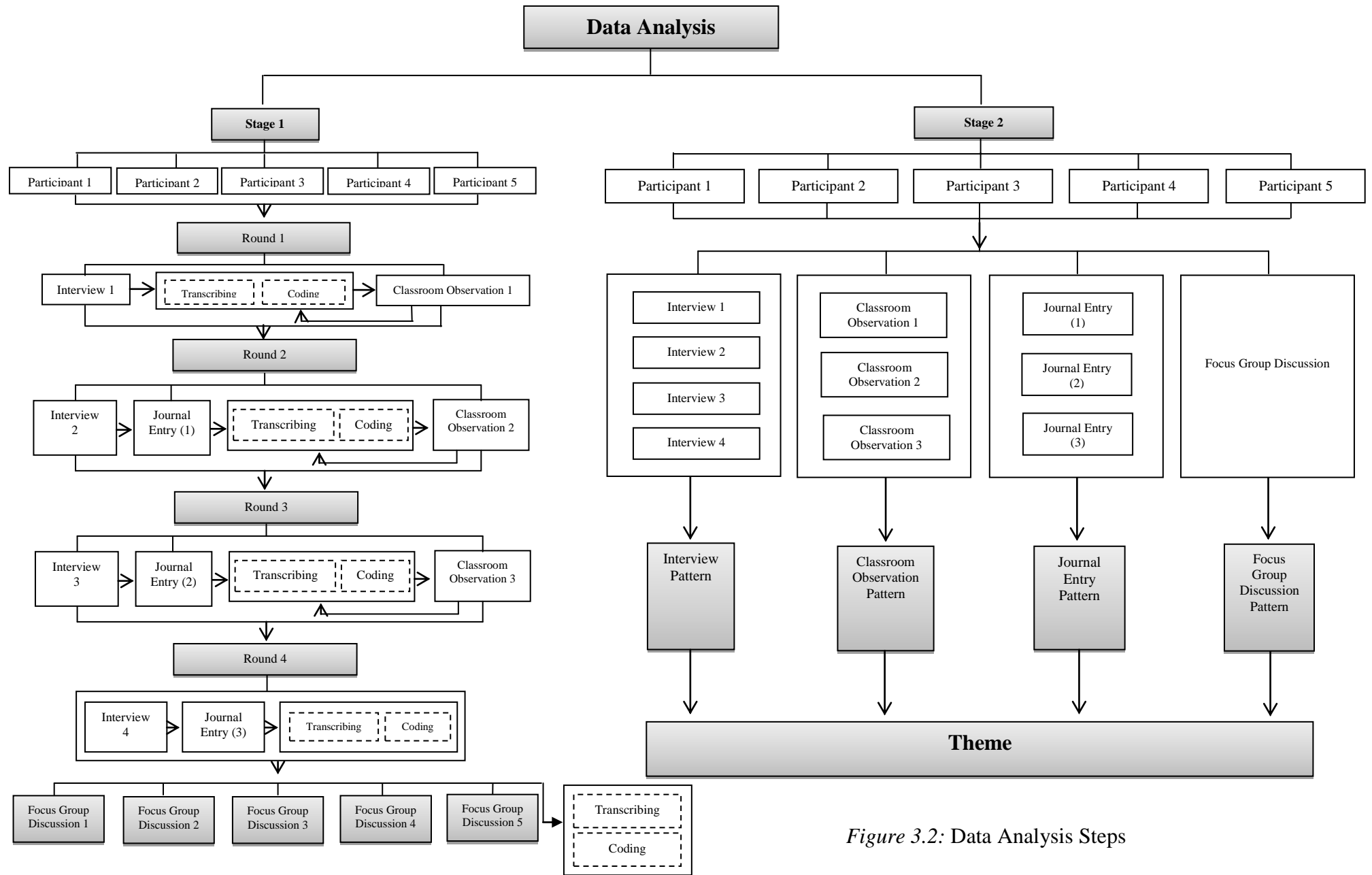


Figure 3.2: Data Analysis Steps

### **3.6.1 Individual Interviews and Focus Group Discussions**

Data analysis took place side by side to data collection. The transcription process took place immediately after audio-taping of the interviews were completed to avoid any loss of the collected data as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005).

To illustrate, the first stage of data analysis started while collecting the data and the second stage took place when data collection was completed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The process of starting analyzing data before the collection process was completed helped me to make decisions, narrow the study, develop analytical questions, write memos and comments about what I was learning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It also assisted me to verify the data with the informants (Kvale, 1996). Analyzing the data after the gathering phase was over assisted me to find common patterns that gave meaning to the case (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1988).

During the data analysis of all sources, I focused on the main aspects of reflection i.e., teachers' identification of teaching and learning problems, teachers' responsibilities and commitments toward the problems and the actual treatment of the problems (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). In so doing, I inductively inferred what the teachers believe in and what they actually practiced.

### **3.6.2 Classroom Observations and Journal Entries**

In a natural setting of teaching and learning process, a more systematic classroom observation and thorough analysis of data helped to understand classroom aims and incidents (Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Patton, 2002).

To analyze the data collected through the classroom observations, I first transcribed the audio and video-taped classroom observation data to feed and enrich the classroom observation guideline and field notes which I took in classes. Then the classroom observation data were made ready to work on. That is, to identify main ideas, code them, categorize them and classify them further into themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The same coding process was followed with the recorded incidents in the journals and the aspects of reflection were also analyzed on the margins of the journals.

Thus, I analyzed cases separately to understand each case fully and then collectively to “build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases” (Yin, 1984, p. 108). Individual case analysis helped me to detect processes and outcomes that occurred across cases (Duff, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Group comparison strengthened the study and enhanced its generalizability (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994) though it is not a target in qualitative research (Silverman, 2013). In qualitative research, generalizability is applicable to theories, that is, the results are generalizable to what other teachers can do, but not to what they actually do (Silverman, 2013).

Quotations of informants and students’ responses were used to convince the readers that things were in the setting as claimed and to convey to them the viewpoints of the participants (Erickson, 1986). The informants described their own learning and teaching practices and their students’ learning by giving their own stories narrated in their own words and inferred from their practices. I provide a summary chart of the study framework (figure 3.2).



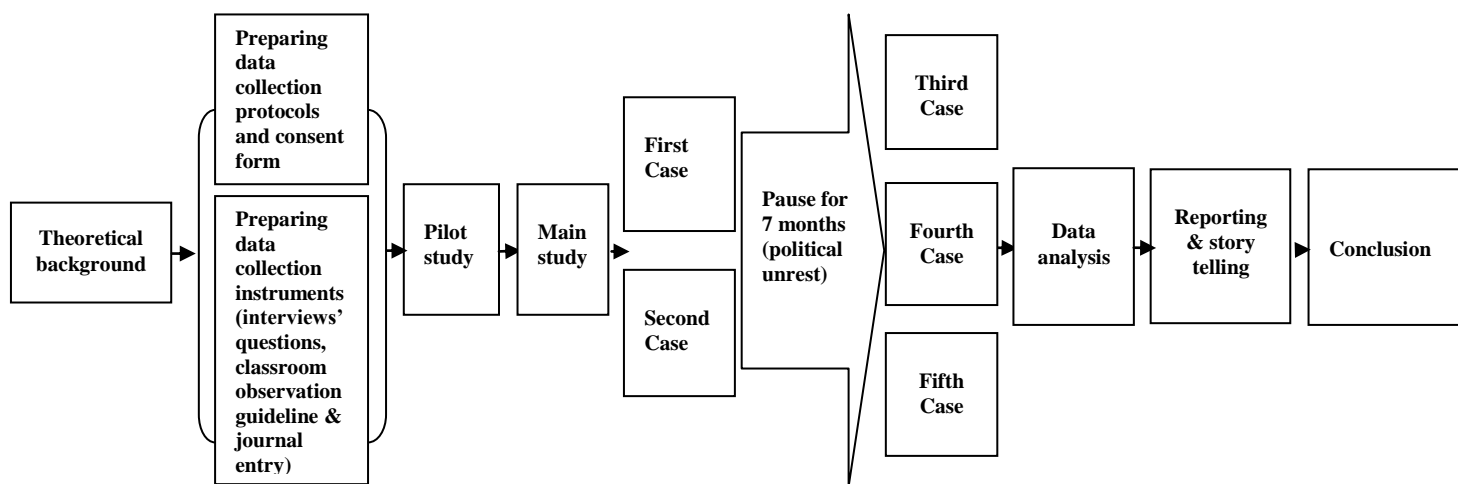


Figure 3.3: Study framework

### 3.7 Research Participants Selection

The present study employed lecturers at the University of Science and Technology, the first and biggest private university in Yemen in terms of the number of the teaching staff, students enrollment and facilities. It was established in 1994. The head quarter is located in Sana'a and it has some branches in main cities all over Yemen such as Aden, Taiz, Hodeidah, Hadramaot and Ibb. It has a total of 360 teaching staff members. The English teachers in the head quarter are 35; 15 teachers are full-timers and 20 are hourly-paid teachers; the previous figure indicated that the students enrollment is more than 17,000 (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2007).

In qualitative, case study research, the number of cases needed for the research study is based on the purpose of the study (Silverman, 2013). Duff (2008, 2013) suggested that two to six cases can be enough for doing a Ph.D. dissertation for gathering in-depth data and inferring important patterns/ themes which can be difficult in case of big number of informants (Duff, 2008, 2013; Silverman, 2013). Based on this, five

university English teachers (one female and four males) whose ages ranged between 30 and 42 years participated in the study in addition to the students (both males and females) taught by the same teachers. Four of the teachers were full-time staff and one was teaching on an hourly basis. The latter was a full time teaching staff at SU. Two of the informants were Ph.D. holders and the other three were master's degree holders.

The sample selection of the participants was purposive (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2013). It was based on the criteria that the informants were English teachers, willing to participate in the study, and their English teaching experience in the tertiary level was around 10 years as teachers with 10 years of teaching experience have adequate knowledge and experience to reflect (Dewey, 1933, York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). I contended that engaging teachers who had almost the same period of teaching experience like me (10 years) would assist in understanding reflective practice in the university context better. Among the fifteen full time teachers at US, only four met my research data collection criteria and they were willing to participate in the study and share their teaching experiences. Others either had more than 10 years of teaching experience or they were still fresh teachers. The fifth participant was an hourly paid instructor who showed interest to share his experiences in this study.

The students were also selected based on their willingness to participate in focus group discussions and on the fact that they were taught by the same informants. Each focus group included six to 10 students. That helped me to understand reflection in the university context through the students' perspectives (Brookfield, 1995).

### **3.8 Researcher's Role**

The role of the researcher can vary from a full participant to a complete observer based on the purpose of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990). I adopted the role of a participant-observer in classroom observations and a facilitator during the interviews, journal discussions and focus group discussions.

Being a participant-observer, I assisted some of the teachers in class to arrange the setting for group work activities, answered a question which was asked by one teacher to help students get a model answer. In some cases, I told students to wait for teachers when those teachers informed me through cell phone calls that they would be late for classes.

The study reflects my desire to understand the reflective process in the university realm. To experience this, I followed what Patton suggested that:

a participant observer shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study in order to develop how an insider's view of what is happening, the emic perspective. This means that the participant observer not only sees what is happening, but feels what it is like to be a part of the setting or program. (Patton, 2002, p.268).

To be an insider or outsider in qualitative and case study research is still a debate among researchers. Kerstetter (2012) argued that it is challenging for an insider to be able to analyze the situation which s/he is a part of completely and, on the other hand, perceived the role of the outsider as difficult to understand the environment of the study which is completely new for her/ him. Being an insider may create unwanted influence of the researcher on the participants, but to be an outsider will not bring immunity to the influence of the outsider; in addition, it will be difficult for the outsider to explore the context of the study better (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Being an insider enables the respondents' acceptance to be part of the study and assists the researcher to gather in-depth data as the respondents will be more open with the researcher whom they know (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) asserted that insider researchers understand the experiences of the group members they belong to better. However, as an insider I had to look at the phenomenon under study with an 'open eye' assuming that I knew nothing about it and even I was familiar with the context of the study, I assumed that there might be some other underlying issues which were unknown to me (Asselin, 2003). This view helped me as a researcher to avoid the tendency of 'going native' (Delamont, 2002) and strike a balance between the roles of the insider and outsider researcher. In this, I tried to follow Dwyer and Buckle (2009) who struck a balance between the insider and outsider roles of researcher:

The process of qualitative research is very different from that of quantitative research. As qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant "researcher" role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between. The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

As an insider, I had a connection with all the five informants as we have been working in the same university and I happened to meet some of them in some of UST activities such as workshops. As such, I was able to communicate with them easily and also came across some private issues that an outsider might not know

(Unluer, 2012). However, I did not have any authority to influence any of the informants which might affect the data collection process (Smyth & Holian, 2008). In addition, I was able to explain my role as a researcher to the administrators and respondents at UST (Unluer, 2012). If I were an outsider, I would not have been able to do data collection. It was unsafe to go to another university which I did not belong to for data collection using instruments such as audio-taping and video-taping due to the political unrest in that period. Nevertheless, I often reminded myself that being an insider or outsider, I should avoid being biased; rather, I should consider the ethical issues for valid data (Unluer, 2012). In doing so, I verified the collected data with the informants during follow up discussions and used the triangulated approach to get in-depth data.

### **3.9 Research Procedures**

All the interviews were face to face, in-depth semi-structured. They were conducted in the places which were convenient to informants and during their favorite times. After getting permission from the faculty administrator, most of the interviews were conducted in the college meeting rooms. Only when some teachers were busy in the due time, we had to rearrange for another meeting. In some cases, the meeting room in the college was not vacant and I agreed with one teacher to have the interview in his house. I also conducted one interview in the classroom with another participant after classes for the same reason. The female informant preferred to have the interviews in her office. Another participant wanted to have the interviews held in a tent by SU, the university where he teaches as a full timer, that is, in the Square of Change as the teacher was one of the protesters against the regime that time. I conducted three interviews with the informant in the tent tonight when the place was

very calm; I conducted the fourth interview in the faculty meeting room as agreed by the teacher.

Informal meetings and discussions with participants provided the unthreatening atmosphere of the study (Patton, 2002). I felt that the respondents were very comfortable and cooperative during the interviews as some seemed to talk endlessly. Yet, as a researcher, I had to listen and made use of what was narrated unless I felt it was a repetition of the same idea which was already discussed. Then I had to switch to another point by probing the informants more to engage new points of discussions (Kvale, 1996).

All the focus group discussions with students were conducted informally in vacant classrooms as arranged with focus group members. During the focus group discussions, I tried to be like a moderator helping all students to get a chance to share their opinions about teaching and learning process in the university.

All the respondents were informed about the research procedures which were followed in the study (appendix H). All the interviews and classes were recorded using an MP3 recording device which I bought for that purpose. The final classroom teaching for each participant teacher was video-taped using a video-taping camera which I borrowed from the department of public relations at UST in the due time. Field notes were also taken immediately and regularly after the interviews and also during and after classroom observation sessions to capture the non-verbal portraits of participants and other related issues of the teaching and learning process in the setting of the study. The recorded data were transcribed and made ready for analysis.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Before the data collection I developed a rapport relationship with the informants (Kvale, 1996; Roulston, 2008). I informed them about the research procedures regarding the nature of their participation in the research study (appendices H & J). I also informed them about the number of the interviews they would have, the number of classroom observations I would do and also the journal entry they would use to record teaching and learning incidents. I did not inform them about the focus group discussions with the students, but I requested them after the last interview to assist me coordinate with the group leaders to meet the students and chat about the learning issues in the university. I met the students who saw me before during my classroom observations and requested those interested to participate in group discussions of the teaching and learning issues. The students knew from their teachers that I was attending their classes for a research study. I also informed the teachers and students about the confidentiality of their names and that the data would only be used for the research purpose. I also informed the respondents that they were considered to be partners in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Throughout the data analysis and discussions of the study findings, I referred to the informants using pseudonyms: Ahmed, Sarah, Hassan, Ameen and Muneer. Similarly, I referred to the five focus group discussions as Ahmed's students, Sarah's students, Hassan's students, Ameen's students and Muneer's students.

I suggested the college meeting rooms as venues for the interviews, but I also informed the informants to choose their favorite venues and times to make them feel

comfortable. Vacant classrooms were suggested for the focus group discussions with students after classes finished. The participants were informed that the interviews would be centered on the discussions of the teaching and learning issues in the university, but they were not aware of the theoretical framework of the study.

The informants were given copies of the video-taped data to see before reflecting on them in the following and last interview. The results of the initial data analysis related to the informants were verified with them in the following interviews for the credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2009). It was through the inductive analysis of the data which was guided by the constructive theories and theories of action, I was able to build the conceptual framework of the study.

All the respondents' viewpoints assisted in theorizing about the reflection process. The participants played an important role in voicing out their opinions (Minah Harun, 2007) pertaining to reflective practice in the university realm. My role as a researcher was to strike a balance between what participants revealed and what was said in literature as revealed by Minah Harun's (2007) study on sensemaking, between two ethnic groups.

### **3.11 Validity and Reliability of the Study**

The validity and reliability of the study were assured by the use of the triangulation of data collection instruments. The triangulation of the research instruments i.e., four semi-structured interviews with each informant, three classroom observations, journaling and five focus group discussions with students helped to build informative insights about the reflective process in the tertiary education and enhanced the



reliability, validity and findings of the study (Ashcroft & Palacio, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Merriam, 1988, 1998; Stage & Russel, 1993).

### **3.11.1 Validity**

Triangulation is regarded to be the heart of validity for qualitative research (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). It involves various perspectives and offers greater accuracy in describing the phenomenon under study (Stage & Russel, 1993).

#### **3.11.1.1 Credibility vs. Internal Validity**

Credibility is used in qualitative research as an equivalent term for the internal validity which is employed in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The terms validity, credibility and trustworthiness were used interchangeably by some researchers (Borgen, Amundson, & Butterfield, 2008; Patton, 2008). The credibility of this qualitative case study was obtained by the use of the naturalistic approach, purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data and the training course and workshops I attended in qualitative research on data collection and data analysis as posited by Patton (1999, 2002). The credibility of the findings in this qualitative study were also enhanced by the use of the triangulation of the sources used in the data collection i.e., interviews, classroom observations, journaling and focus group discussions (Patton, 1999). My prolonged engagement in the field, interviewing participants, observing the teaching and learning process inside classrooms and even outside classrooms when possible, taking notes of what was going on, and verifying the results with the participants, also contributed to the credibility of the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2009).

### **3.11.1.2 Transferability vs. External Validity**

Likewise, transferability is used in qualitative research as an alternative term for the traditional concept of external validity in the quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba perceived transferability as the researcher's responsibility to give "the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Transferability indicates the possibility of applying the results of the study to similar experiences of the reader as thick description of the case is provided (Geertz, 1973). According to Duff (2013), transferability of the findings of the qualitative case studies is realized through the readers' comparisons of the studies to their own contexts particularly when they find that the case study is well-supported with related data.

In qualitative, case study research, generalization of the results to all other cases in the same population is not possible; yet, the generalization is possible when it provides implications for theoretical knowledge (Duff, 2013; Silverman, 2013). Generalizability is a target in quantitative research study and it is accomplished through the sampling representativeness which is not applicable in qualitative research (Silverman, 2013). It is not the main aim of qualitative inquiry as transferability is the alternative term (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the detailed description of the phenomenon enabled the transferability of the findings to the readers who are willing to understand the reflective practice experience in the university setting.

### **3.11.2 Reliability (Dependability vs. Reliability)**

In qualitative research, the term dependability or consistency was used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to express reliability. Like credibility, the dependability of the research findings were ensured through my exposure as a researcher to a training course in a qualitative research methods on data collection and data analysis techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 2009). I also enhanced the dependability of the research findings by providing quotations from the participants' talks about their worlds of teaching and learning practices following Lincoln and Guba (1985) which reflected the extent of reflection practiced in the university.

### **3.12 Limitations of the Study**

The present study was devoted to explore how reflection is practiced among teachers of English in the University of Science and Technology, Sana'a, Yemen. Given that reflective practice is a metacognitive process of thinking in relation to action (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009), the current study focused on university teachers whose teaching experience in the university is around 10 years (the experts). Such teachers have a tendency to exhibit more metacognitive actions than non-experts and have more capacity to articulate them (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Literature shows significant evidence that novice instructors may not be in a position to engage in effective reflection as they have limited knowledge (Akbari, 2007; Farnan & Grisham, 2005; Fensom, 2007; Gimenez, 1999; Killen, 2007). Thus, the study excluded the involvement of the novice teachers.

I could engage more teachers in this study in the normal political situation as it was proposed in my first plan (seven informants from two universities), but due to the

inconvenience caused by the unsecured political situation, I had to reduce the number of informants into five given the delay in doing the study for about seven months (Silverman, 2013). As a result, it had been a long pause between the first two cases (which were conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2010-2011; before the chaos), and the last three cases (these were conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2010-2011, after the Uprising of February 11, 2011; appendix I). Nonetheless, I felt that the study achieved in-depth understanding of the reflective process in the university context. I, for sure, reflected a great deal of my own teaching and teachers' responses in this study. Informants were Yemeni teachers given that it was easier for me who shares the same culture as theirs.

In addition to the instrument used in the study, a tool like teacher's portfolio was an invaluable qualitative instrument that could be used for studying a complex phenomenon such as reflective practice. Nevertheless, I only used individual interviews, classroom observations, journals and focus group discussions to maintain focused on the phenomenon under study. Another research method that can be used in future is the mixed-method approach which includes both qualitative and quantitative approach.

### **3.13 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated the methodology I employed to understand the reflective practice among university teachers of English. It describes the respondents, data collection and data analysis methods, and also research procedures and ethical considerations. I adopted a qualitative, case study approach which suits the complexity of the reflective practice. I emphasized the use of several instruments for

collecting in-depth data and how the triangulation of such instruments could increase the validity and reliability of the study, and enhance its findings. These instruments include individual semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, teachers' journal entries and also focus group discussions with students taught by the informants.

In this chapter, I also presented the criteria for selecting the respondents. I chose five university English teachers from UST and six to 10 students who participated in focus group discussions about teaching and learning issues in the university. The selection of the respondents was purposive. The teachers' selection was based on their willingness to participate and on their teaching experience in the university. The students' selection was based on their willingness to participate and on the fact that they were taught by the informants. I was aware of my role as an insider and outsider in affecting the data gathering and data analysis and I tried to strike a balance between the two roles to avoid being biased. I employed a qualitative content analysis method. I first transcribed the audio and video-taped data and analyzed the entire data. I highlighted the main concepts and ideas as I analyzed the data using colored pens. The highlighted data were then coded, categorized and classified into similar patterns/themes. The results of the coded data were tabulated and the cut and paste technique in the Microsoft word document assisted in categorizing the data and forming the main theme. I used the theme in telling the stories of the respondents and providing a holistic picture pertaining to reflective practice. All the study instruments were piloted and amendments were made for the interview questions and the observation guideline. The confidentiality of the respondents was maintained in the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The focus of this research study was on understanding the reflection process among university English teachers. This chapter presents the findings of the study through the multi-method approaches used to collect data i.e., interviews, classroom observations and field notes, the journal entries and the focus group discussions with the students taught by the informants. It indicates how much reflection is practiced among teachers and also what affects their reflection as narrated by the informants and students and observed by the researcher.

#### **4.2 Setting the Scene**

As soon as I realized that I would engage in the reflection process with the university teachers to understand reflective practice, I started preparing my mindset; the moment I arrived at UST in Yemen where I did my study, I told myself that I am a learner and an observer. I met three teachers for the piloting of the study. Two of them were very enthusiastic to reflect on and share their own experiences with me pertaining to the teaching and learning process in the university; nonetheless, the third teacher excused herself from participating in the pilot study. One of the two informants in the pilot study withdrew after the first interview. He claimed that he was very busy with many responsibilities. Later, I understand from their peers that such teachers did not like to share experiences particularly when it comes to classroom observations.

The main study was conducted in two phases. The first phase took place in the usual condition, before the political unrest in the country, and included two cases. The second phase occurred during the political unrest and involved three cases. As soon as I finished collecting the data from the first two informants and their students, and I was about to start with other informants, my field study was constrained by the political unrest in the country which caused the suspension of education in the universities in Sana'a. I had to wait for almost seven months to resume my data collection with other three teachers when the political situation seemed to be partially resolved. To ensure the natural responses of the informants, I met each informant in isolation so that they would not share their experiences about the study. To protect the identity of the informants, I used pseudonyms (Patton, 2002). As I had four males and one female, their pseudonyms reflected their gender. I referred to the males as Ahmed, Hassan, Ameen and Muneer and to the female as Sarah.

The findings of the study expose me to a lot of insights into reflection and how it is practiced among university English teachers. From the perspective of sensemaking in daily experiences (Minah Harun, 2007), I witness how teachers make sense of their reflective practice in the university through their ways of sharing with others (myself, in particular) about their teaching and learning experiences. The teachers are found to be engaged in various sorts of reflection as revealed by the interviews and from the classroom observations, the journals and also the focus group discussions with the students taught by the teachers. These reflections can be classified into three major categories: (a) level of reflection, (b) type of reflection, and (c) pattern of reflection. The reflection of teachers is affected by two sorts of factors i.e., the enabling and constraining factors. These factors are related to the teacher, students, curriculum,

teaching methods, institution and environment. Some of these factors were emphasized by the respondents as more influential on the reflective process than others.

Communication with the participants was conducted in a normal atmosphere which was peaceful and calm in the beginning of the study with the first two cases (i.e., the teachers and students), but changed dramatically to take place in an unsecured context with the other three cases. This shows that a conducive environment for successful communication as a tool of reflection (Ramsey, 2003) is important and that various meanings and practices are developed in social relationships through communication and dialogue when teachers share their experiences (Fook & Gardner, 2007).

During the study, there were times when some teachers were late for classes and I had to wait for them outside classes so that we can go to class together as a sign of respect for the teacher and also it could be a sensitive issue to get into the classroom and keep waiting for the teacher even though they were late. This happened with most of the informants. In such situations, my role was a combination of a researcher and a participant as I got closer to students, chatted with them, helped them to contact with some of the late teachers and made sure that those teachers would give the class. This created a good rapport with students whom I met, as soon as I finished my interviews with their teachers, for focus group discussions about the teaching and learning issues in the university. I also participated in helping some teachers in other things inside classes like arranging for group work activities and answering some questions asked by a teacher to help students understand vocabulary.



As illustrated, and in what follows, I present the narratives of the informants and provide illustrations to their reflections from the interviews and journals, give insights into my observation of classroom teaching and learning process and enlighten the process of reflection with students' comments about teaching and learning process. I provide references to support the reflection process as suggested by Dornyei (2007) that using "the words and categories of the participants make it much easier to produce a convincing and vivid case for a wide range of audiences" (Dornyei, 2007, p.41). Basically, I detail what the teachers claim they do based on their narratives in the interviews and what they actually do as elicited from classroom observations, the journal entries and the students' comments during the focus group discussions.

### **4.3 Reflection (Beliefs & Practices)**

"Learning new techniques for teaching is like the fish that provides a meal for today; reflective practice is the net that provides the meal for the rest of one's life" (Biggs, 2003, p. 7). Stemming from Biggs' (2003) view, I was motivated by my strong passion to encourage reflective practice in higher education in the Yemeni context and push it a step further. This is something I always think of and believe in. As such, I thought of engaging some university English teachers in introspective and retrospective process (Crook, 2012) about their beliefs and experiences. I contended that this would give teachers including myself a chance to think about teaching and students' learning and share experiences with others in the social community of practice (university). In so doing, the teaching and learning process in tertiary education will improve (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Additionally, my past experience of reflection would be enlivened with my engagement in this research study (Minah Harun, 2007). The social setting is also important for reflection because an individual can influence and be influenced by the social community when they share their personal experiences (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Through my discussions in the interviews conducted with the informants, it seemed that the social community of practice might face some obstacles that slow their reflection. For example, most of the informants revealed that they could only discuss teaching and learning issues with peers and colleagues informally and very rarely. The conducive social atmosphere which Fook and Gardner (2007) emphasized as an important environment for reflective practice seemed to be unavailable in the university.

To understand the process of teaching and learning fully, we need to focus on the two components of reflection i.e., beliefs and practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002, Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). In other words, we need to understand reflection based on what teachers claim they do and what they actually do.

The study helped me to witness teachers' claims about their actions; I witnessed how teachers practiced reflection inside and outside classroom. Outside of the classroom, I did not have the chance to observe teachers' engagement with their students or colleagues in discussing teaching and learning issues at least during my presence in the department teaching staff room. I only witnessed informal chats among some teachers about weak students without trying to discuss possible solutions and how to overcome such problems. I also observed teachers' engagement in preparation for their classes, checking some of students' work and attending unpleasant college

meetings. Some of such teachers might not even have the chance to personally think about teaching and learning problems thoroughly as revealed by the informants' journal entries. However, I witnessed some signs of reflection, particularly informal reflection, either in classroom observations, in the journals or even inferred from students' talks.

Though all the five informants shared their experiences with me, each one provided his/ her personal point of view. Thus, the holistic picture of the reflection practiced in the university was gradually revealed by the teachers while sharing their experiences and inferred from the field notes and observations, the journal entries and students' comments (Brookfield, 1995).

#### **4.4 The Setting of the Study**

The context I present here gives the reader an idea about the social setting of this study. The study took place in a private university, UST. The university is located in Sana'a which has the population of approximately 1,937,500 constituting around four percent of the total population in the country (24.8 million). It is situated at the Sixty Street, one of the biggest streets in the west part of Sana'a, around 200 meters far from SU, the biggest and oldest public university in Yemen. Some of the university buildings (i.e., boys' campus) are located at a hill and spread from the foot to the top of the hill. The university buses take students from the foot of the hill to the buildings located on the top of the hill. The university has a separate campus for girl students, which is about 800 meters far from the boys' campus. The girls' campus is situated in the University Street and includes the headquarters of the university.

To exemplify, UST established two separate campuses, one for girls and the other for boys. The university follows the policy of providing a separate education atmosphere which is conducive for families that like to send their children to separate education context as to continue in the same stream they began in school, receiving separate education. The university is respected in the society. It has become one of the well reputed universities inside and outside the country. It has attracted local and international students from countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Ethiopia, Somalia etc. It was quiet and safe before the uprising on the February 11, 2011, but the atmosphere surrounding the university and the whole city of Sana'a became unsecured due to the political unrest which caused the suspension of the study in the university for almost seven months. In such a political unrest, the girls' campus was closed completely as it was by the Squire of Change (the place where protestors who were seeking for political reform and change gathered in a peaceful uprising in February 11, 2011).

Like some other universities in Sana'a, UST had to suspend the study due to the unsecured atmosphere which was caused by the breaking out of war between the regime and those who supported the peaceful uprising. When the situation seemed better, UST resumed teaching and it restructured its buildings in the boys' campus to accommodate boys and girls in different sessions keeping the policy of offering separate education.

The atmosphere around UST remained partially unsecured as many unpleasant things took place like shellings, bomb attacks, aimless bullets, and lack of

electricity, transportation and security. Nonetheless, the university continued teaching as students did not want to waste more time. Moreover, the university did not want to lose more money, being a private university paying salary for about 218 full time teachers and hundreds of employees. At the time of the uprising, the university had 218 full time teaching staff and also 200 teachers who were teaching on hourly basis. English full time teachers were 15 and 20 teachers were paid on hourly basis. Some of the 20 teachers were full time teaching staff at SU and others had no full time jobs, but teach in different public and private universities on hourly basis. To illustrate, full time teachers in public universities can teach in other private universities on hourly basis. On the contrary, full time teachers in private universities particularly at UST are not allowed to teach in other universities given that they get more payment than those who teach in other universities.

The teacher to student ratio in the department of English is about one to 17. The percentage of girl students to boy students in the department of English was almost 87 percent to 13 percent respectively. The average monthly salary of teachers is about \$1800 for Ph.D. degree holders and \$1000 for master's degree holders. The teaching load of Ph.D. degree holders is 18 teaching hours and the master's degree holders is 20 teaching hours per week in addition to the administrative work.

The closure of the girls' campus and the restructuring of the university buildings to accommodate both girls and boys in addition to all administrative staff which were in the girls' campus created some problems for top management, teachers

and students. Top management could not transfer most of the equipment in the girls' campus for security reasons. Teachers felt handicapped as they could not use all possible facilities available at UST as before, especially the ones available in the previous girls' campus which was blocked. Students felt uncomfortable with the new changes as they had to have heavy schedules, sometimes three classes a day. Boys and girls had to swap the sessions in different days, three days for boys and the other three days for girls. But all had to accept the new environment caused by the inevitable changes in the university at least in that particular situation where changes were surrounding the whole country.

The university has seven faculties: Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Faculty of Administration, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Distance learning, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Computing. What was known as the International College (a college which ran international Malaysian programs such as business administration, information technology, graphic design and interior architecture for undergraduate students and some other postgraduate programs such as MBA and MIT) was restructured and all its programs were affiliated under other faculties.

All of the changes mentioned above and the unsecured environment happened after I finished collecting the data of the first two cases. The first case was from the International College and the other four cases were in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences where I moved recently. Before moving to Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, I was teaching at the International College.

Being a teacher at UST, I managed to collect data which could be very difficult in another university as it was unsafe to move to other places in the city even to very close places. One might be a target for aimless shooting which occurred sometimes. Moreover, in such circumstances, outsiders might not be welcomed to be part of the university community for certain political reasons particularly when members of such community felt that someone belongs to another university. Furthermore, I lived very close to UST and I could get transportation easily which seemed to be a problem for those who lived far away.

During data collection, I faced a problem of teaching duty, which I tried my best to overcome. I tried to be released from the teaching duty so that I could be free to collect data for my study, but all my tries were in vain. UST did not agree to release me from the teaching duty. I sometimes had to swap classes with other co-teachers to be able to go for classroom observations with participants in the due time.

#### **4.5 Multi-Methods Approach**

In this section, I discuss fully the data organized by a multi-methods approach. The data revealed not only the voices of the informants and what they claimed they did, but also what they actually practiced. The former was narrated by the informants through the interviews and the latter was inferred through the journal entries, my observations and the students' perspectives.

I identified the main components of reflection i.e., beliefs and practices pertaining to teaching and learning issues among all the informants in the university. These

components indicate the extent of the informants' reflection: the level, type and pattern. Embedded in reflection are two types of factors i.e., enabling and constraining factors which affect the reflection of the university English teachers.

#### **4.5.1 Interviews**

These qualitative interviews provide in-depth data about the informants' experiences. They assisted me to get insights into the informants' reflection. While the informants reflected on their own experiences, I also reflected on my experience listening to their reflective experience. For instance, when they were talking about the unsecured environment, I was also reflecting on what was going around. Since uprising on February 11, 2011, there had been ongoing chaos everywhere. The political situation was unstable. The surrounding environment was unsafe. I changed my residence twice for safety purposes. On the way to or from the university, I often hear explosions and shootings here and there. Sometimes, the roads were blocked because of check points or demonstrations. In such unsecured environment, I was worried if I would finish my field study. The situation might get worse and the study could be suspended again. Yet, I managed to gather in-depth data. The findings of the informants' interviews revealed certain beliefs and practices about reflection and the factors which influence it.

All the participants welcomed the idea of discussing teaching and learning experiences with me. For instance, when I told them about my research study, they all showed interest to participate and fulfill all requirements. They answered all my questions in the four interviews openly. All had a lot to say even though Ameen needed more probes and some of his answers were inconsistent which he amended



during the verification of the data in the follow-up interview. All the informants required direct or indirect clarification about the concept of beliefs. Only two participants, Sarah and Ameen, considered 'teaching philosophy' to be unclear and asked for clarification.

In my interviews, I started with very general things requesting the informants to introduce themselves and talk about their early schooling before taking them gradually to the university learning background and then to their teaching experiences in the university. In that way, I engaged them fully in narrating their stories and experiences about the teaching and learning process in the university and how they confront teaching and learning difficulties when they arise.

The questions I prepared in advance for the interviews were only guiding questions (about the theme of the research study, problem), but I had to cope with the respondents' stories and I sometimes probed them to get thick and detailed descriptions. I gave them a clear and thorough picture about the research and that I wanted to understand the teaching and learning experiences in the university context from their points of view.

All the informants had an opportunity to talk about their teaching and students' learning experiences in relation to the context at UST. Their narratives indicated their engagement in personal and collaborative reflection. The informants' experiences revealed how much they reflect and the factors that affect their reflection. Such experiences emerged as a result of listening patiently to their exciting narratives or probing them to get further details about their lived experiences.

The descriptions of the informants' backgrounds revealed the influence of their education particularly university education in the way they perceive teaching and learning problems. All the informants claimed that their perceptions and practices pertaining to teaching and learning were the result of their own teaching experiences. I inferred from their narratives that they had developed new perceptions about teaching and learning process by personal reflection and collaborative discussions with others such as students, peers or other colleagues in the department, at UST or even outside UST. All the informants considered the personality of the teacher to be the most constraining factor for the teachers' collaborative discussion of the teaching and learning issues. Most participants claimed that their collaborative discussions with others about teaching and learning problems were constrained by the lack of support from the department, unconducive environment, traditional beliefs, insufficient training and heavy teaching loads. I provide all the beliefs and practices which indicate the extent of reflection and also the enabling and constraining factors I elicited from the informants' narrations.

#### **4.5.1.1 Extent of Reflection**

The informants' claims about their beliefs and practices pertaining to teaching and learning problems revealed how much they engage in the reflection process. This includes the level, type and pattern of their reflection. The informants' narrations revealed the level of their reflection through their engagements in personal and collaborative reflection. Their talks indicated their engagement in different types of reflection pertaining to time i.e., reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and

reflection-on-action. The informants also revealed two patterns of action: routine actions and non-critical reflections.

#### **4.5.1.1.1 Level of Reflection**

All the informants claimed that they reflected on the teaching and learning issues even if that was done informally and individually. In addition, they revealed that they practiced informal collaborative reflections with students in the classroom (Hartnell-Young, 2003; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, much of the discussion that they claimed they engaged in took place informally between peers in the department of English or with colleagues at UST. However, the detailed analysis of the data obtained from the interviews revealed limited reflection of the university teachers at least in that current context.

In regard with the level of reflection, of all the five informants, only Ameen admitted that he never practiced individual reflection. Even though other informants claimed that they practiced individual reflection, I detected various perceptions about their reflection. For instance, Ahmed claimed that whenever teaching or learning problems occurred, he managed to treat them by himself. For example, he tried to solve the problem of the lack of students' books by photocopying some pages from the book for the students to work on. This reveals his personal reflection.

Sarah indicated how her way of teaching improved through personal reflection which was accomplished by her consistent thinking and checking of her teaching. She said "every time I sit with myself and think of the ways I present the materials to the students and the way I assess them; it's never the same every time". Hassan followed

certain informal ways to reflect on the teaching and learning dilemmas. His narration revealed his personal reflection on his teaching.

Ameen claimed that it is the responsibility of the teacher to overcome students' learning problem when they arise in class. Nevertheless, there were some contradictions in what he said about his beliefs and practices in the first two interviews and what he narrated later. For example, when I asked him in the initial interviews if he spent some time to reflect on the teaching and learning problems, he said, "mostly, I think back or reflect on my class". In the follow-up interview, he narrated: "In the context of teaching at the university level, a teacher never thinks back of his class. He or she thinks about that inside the class, not after the class".

Enthusiastically, Muneer also revealed his beliefs and practices of informal personal reflection. He remarked: "I think the teachers need to sit with themselves and think about the problems they have, and start thinking about their solutions". He claimed that teachers including himself become aware of the teaching and learning problems by thinking about the teaching and learning process individually.

The informants also narrated their opinions and practices on handling teaching and learning problems in collaborative reflection with students, peers in the English department, colleagues at UST and other teachers from outside UST. Ahmed viewed students as the cornerstone in the reflective process: "I am a lot affected by others' opinions, mostly students". He added "I myself will pay more attention when students tell me something to do than another teacher or the director because this has got something to do with an underlying challenge between students and the teacher".

He justified his claim by saying “you will try to adapt to students’ feedback on your teaching because it is all about the students, the ones that you always face”. This reveals Ahmed’s perception of the fundamental role of the students in the reflection process which he viewed as a two-way discussion between students and the teacher to overcome the teaching and learning problems. He also mentioned that he would rather share teaching and learning problems with peers than discuss them with administrators. He justified that “when you have comments from your friends, you pay more attention because these are the guys who are involved in the same business and at the same time it is challenging. You take it seriously more than when it comes downwards”. This revealed the gap between Ahmed and the coordinator. That was sensed in the tone of his voice and his smile while discussing that issue. He remarked: “The coordinator is very cooperative, but he doesn’t have the final word in certain issues”. Ahmed also mentioned: “From time to time, we discuss with peers in groups the experiences of teaching students from different colleges”. That was done during the training sessions which were rarely conducted for UST teachers as narrated by Ahmed.

Ahmed was the only informant who revealed his discussions of the teaching and learning issues with other teachers from other places outside UST. He mentioned that he started making sense of his teaching experiences when he had a chance to meet with teachers from language institutes, and share with them teaching and learning experiences.

Sarah was the only one who mentioned that sort of formal discussions were held regularly between the students in the English department and the coordinators or the

head of the department. Nonetheless, she mentioned that those discussions seemed to be routine actions (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933) as students did not bring actual problem and whenever they brought real problems, such problems were not followed by coordinators. She revealed her informal reflection with the students on their learning problems.

Sarah also believes in peer review as she clearly stated: “I believe in peer review”, because she thought that “a review is a rich source feedback for teachers ... to discuss worries and concerns with regard to their teaching”. Nonetheless, she revealed that she rarely discussed things with peers in the English department. She said, “I also ask other teachers who taught the same course and I try to find what other different things they did. I try to do this with teachers personally. I mainly do this”. That discussion was based on personal efforts. Yet, she narrated that there was a lack of formal reflection among peers: “Something that I really miss and I feel that it is of great benefit is to share other teachers’ experiences in the department”. For Sarah, it might be the traditional belief system and the heavy teaching load which constrained teachers to share and discuss experiences about their beliefs and practices. She remarked: “I think the university administrative is so cooperative ...but the problem is either the heads of departments are overloaded or traditional”.

The lack of reflection among peers in the department of English motivated Sarah to share her experience with other teachers in other departments. She narrated: “We sit and we talk about our worries and concern; and sometimes, I may ask them if I really face a problem ... Simply, I have many friends, but unfortunately, not in the English department”. She justified that informal reflection by stating that “there are some

general features that teachers of different disciplines share”. Sarah widened the scope of her reflection to share experience with UST teachers. This reflection could be a successful reflection particularly if it was done formally and systematically (Farrell, 2008).

From Hassan’s narrations, I inferred that two types of reflection occurred in the department of English. The first type was the direct discussions of the teaching and learning problems held between the students and the teachers through the seminars held in the department. However, such discussions which were held in the department of English vanished during the time of the political unrest in the country as narrated by Hassan: “Just these days are exceptions, but in the normal days, it is supposed that we have our own meetings with students to discuss their issues and our issues in terms of teaching and learning”. The other type was the indirect reflection with the students on the teaching and learning problems through the students’ feedback on the teacher’s performance. In this, Hassan said, “sometimes I give them a sheet of paper and I ask them to write about me. So in this case, I can find myself in their eyes; and this will be reflected in my performance for the coming batches”. He also claimed that he reflected with peers in the department, either with the seniors or juniors. He voiced out that he was ready to learn from all including his students.

Hassan mentioned that whenever he faced a teaching problem, he would engage in discussing his problem with any one he had access to in the department. Unlike Ahmed whose fear constrained him from discussing problems with the coordinator, Hassan’s wholehearted personality motivated him to reflect with whoever can help as he revealed in his narrations.

For Ameen, the discussion of the teaching and learning problems with students only takes place in the class. During our discussion, Ameen mentioned that once, he was asked by the former dean of the college to observe a teacher in class for the sake of learning from other teachers. This concurs with his belief that discussing teaching and learning problems should take place inside the classroom.

Muneer said that he sat with his students to discuss things and help them in how to overcome estimated problems. He mentioned that he always encouraged his students to ask for clarification whenever they faced a problem. He also claimed that he rarely discussed teaching and learning problems with peers informally in the English department. However, he mentioned that he once had a problem pertaining to one of his classes with girl students as they complained that he was fast while teaching. The head of the English department decided to attend his class. Muneer narrated that “the head of the department attended the whole class and then he told the students you are wrong”. This is the only formal discussion that Muneer engaged in when that problem was raised by the students, followed up by the head of the English department and feedback was given to the students “you are wrong”.

The narratives of Ameen and Muneer revealed the lack of reflection with colleagues from other departments at UST in discussing the teaching and learning problems. Throughout the interviews, the former emphasized his reflection on teaching and learning issues only in class. The latter might not find the time to sit with UST staff and discuss teaching and learning issues as he was teaching at UST based on hourly basis.



#### **4.5.1.1.2 Type of Reflection**

Three types of reflection emerged in the informants' narratives pertaining to the time of action. These included reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Only Sarah and Muneer claimed their engagement in personal thinking and discussions of estimated teaching and learning issues with students related to future classes. Such an action indicated their reflection-for-action. However, the way they thought about or discussed teaching and learning issues varied.

Sarah, for instance, engaged herself in thinking about how to use effective teaching techniques to engage all students in classroom activities. She also claimed that she engaged with students in discussing their favorites of the course they were going to learn and the way they like to learn in her first meeting with students: "We do talk about what they really hope for, what they really want from this course and how they really want it to be done. I do give them some time and then I counsel their personal needs". Her reflection-for-action was clearly revealed from this utterance: "This is always my first class with the students". Sarah's reflection-for-action was on the teaching and learning techniques (the how of the teaching and learning). However, the new thing in this was her focus on students' interests and their engagement in discussing what and how they liked to learn. This is the essence of the student-centered approach which was advocated by reflective teaching (Hartell-Young, 2003; Richards, 2002). In addition, Sarah's narration, "I go back to the course file done by other teachers and see what other things they have and just try my plan accordingly", shows her reflection-for-action.

On the other hand, Muneer revealed his reflection-for-action through personal thinking and preparation for classes. He narrated that he personally sat more on preparation particularly when he taught language skill courses because as he said, “if it is a language skill course, I sit more on preparation”. Unlike Sarah, Muneer seemed to follow a one-way talk with the students about future classes which might reveal the teacher-centered approach. He said that in the first meetings and before teaching the course, he gave students instructions on how to go about the course and informed them that they could get his assistance if they faced any problem. In doing so, Muneer appeared different from Sarah who reflected with her students in the very beginning of the semester about the course the students would study based on her past accumulative experiences about the teaching and learning process in the university. Yet, Muneer reflected with his students about future teaching and learning process by drawing students’ attention to estimated teaching and learning problems during that current semester. Thus, Sarah’s reflection-for-action was primarily based on her accumulative teaching experience whereas Muneer’s reflection was based on his estimation about the future teaching and learning expected problems.

Ahmed, Hassan, Ameen and Muneer claimed that they engaged in reflection-in-action. Nevertheless, their reflection was interpreted differently. For instance, Ahmed focused on reflection in class related to students’ low proficiency level which led to his modification of his teaching methods. He narrated: “We sometimes have to think even within the class because we come across certain difficulties such as the students’ current level, which does not match the syllabus given. So I have to somehow adopt another way of teaching”.

Hassan presented a mere perception of how he could realize that students were facing a problem during the lesson from their facial expressions. However, he did not reveal his role in treating the problem which made such action as a non-reflective action (Akbari, 2007).

Ameen emphasized his belief in reflection-in-action only. When he was asked about the time of reflection on teaching and learning issues, he narrated: “In the context of teaching at the university level, a teacher never thinks back of his class. He or she thinks about that inside the class not after the class”.

Muneer provided a concrete example for his reflection-in-action. He said that he had to reflect on one of the students’ problems in class. In that class, the students came unprepared for the debate he assigned them to do. However, he was ready to do an immediate reflection at that moment and overcome the problem by teaching the students an alternative lesson he prepared in advance.

Ahmed, Sarah, Hassan and Muneer revealed that they engaged in different personal and collaborative reflection-on-action. Their collaborative reflection included discussions of the teaching and learning issues with students, peers, colleagues at UST and other teachers from outside UST.

For example, Ahmed narrated: “The time I just finish the class and I feel that I did not do well, I really think back of things I should do”. Sarah revealed that she sits to think back on the whole course when she finishes teaching. She claimed that she does such a reflection if she is going to teach the course again. Yet, such an action revealed Sarah’s belief of reflection as a personal benefit. This is against the idea of

the critical social theory which perceives a person as part of the social community and cannot be separated from the social community of practice (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007).

Hassan revealed two ways to reflect on the teaching and learning problems. In the long run, he conducted progressive tests and quizzes in addition to the assignments given to students. In the short run, he thought back on the objectives of the classes and whether he had achieved them. Muneer believes in looking back on teaching and learning issues in tranquility.

Collaboratively, Ahmed mentioned that he found quizzes useful to check students' progress and reflect on their performance. Unlike the indirect feedback which Ahmed got about the students' difficulties through quizzes, Sarah knew her students' learning problems through their direct communication with her. Hassan claimed that he engaged his students in reflection on the class or the whole course at the end either orally or in writing. For Muneer, a teacher could identify students' learning problems after conducting a quiz or exam for them.

On the contrary, Ahmed revealed the lack of regular collaborative reflection-on-action with his peers. He said, "we don't very frequently sit to discuss real matters". His reflection on teaching and learning problems with peers seemed to be constrained by the big teaching loads. Nevertheless, he used subject profiles of peers to find out how to overcome problems when they emerged. Ahmed also revealed that the teachers' discussions of teaching and learning problems at UST were rare due to the lack of training on such issues.

Sarah claimed that she tried to share teaching and learning experiences with other teachers in her department, but she did not get support. She remarked “something that I really miss and I feel that it is of great benefit is to share other teachers’ experiences in the department”. Being the only experienced female teacher in her department, Sarah attempted to find other female teachers to share her worries and concerns in the university. She felt she could discuss some of her teaching difficulties and students’ learning problems with female teachers.

Hassan believes in peer discussion of teaching and learning problems. He narrated his own experience: “I faced a lot of difficulties either in teaching or learning, but there are solutions actually. One of the solutions is to ask your senior instructors on this subject”. Hassan and Ameen did not manage to discuss teaching and learning issues with colleagues at UST i.e., those who belong to other departments for two different reasons. The former found it a sensitive issue and violation of privacy and the latter did not believe in looking back on teaching and learning issues outside the classroom.

Muneer’s narrations revealed that he believes in sitting with peers and colleagues to discuss teaching and learning problems. For him, to have a successful discussion is “to sit with other colleagues, experts and those who have more experience; you can get a lot from them especially when they talk about some specific things in your career, teaching process”.

Muneer valued reflection-on-action in solving the students' learning problems: "From my background in the University of Science and Technology, sometimes if there are any problems which are related to the students, they call teachers even us, those who are part-timers and we discuss them". However, given that he was a full time lecturer at SU, he seemed to be too busy to sit with teachers at UST and discuss teaching and learning issues.

#### **4.5.1.1.3 Pattern of Reflection**

Throughout the interviews, I detected two main patterns of reflection in the narratives of the informants. These include routine actions and non-critical reflections. For example, Ahmed tried to treat some of the teaching and learning problems by himself. He tried to avoid sharing teaching and learning problems with the coordinator. This made his way of thinking about the solutions to his teaching and students' learning problems non-reflective, but a routine action as it was done individually (Farrell, 2008) or as a habitual action with students in class (Akbari, 2007; Kember *et al.*, 2000).

Sarah also employed a routine action of individual thinking on the whole course. She uttered: "When I finish the course, I always sit with myself and think of the course itself". However, what seemed to be different was her belief of that reflection: "I try to modify or, let's say, improve it if I am going to teach the same course the following year". Moreover, for her, even reflection with students through the meetings held with the level coordinators to treat their problems was a kind of routine action as students did not raise real issues.

Hassan's narration indicated that he performed an individual reflection at the end of his teaching. He explained "I ask myself a question at the end, did I achieve the objectives or I didn't"? This routine action done by Hassan was different from other informants in that he reflected on the objectives of the class and on the students' learning progress at the end of every class. Moreover, in long term, he asked the students for a feedback on his teaching. He explained: "In this case, I can find myself in their eyes; and here it will be reflected in my performance for the coming batches". Based on the students' feedback, the teacher could reflect on his teaching. Nevertheless, Hassan narrated that the students who assisted him to reflect on his own problems would not benefit from such reflection as the long term result would benefit next semester students. In addition, the teacher did not show efforts to engage in formal discussion on his teaching problems with some colleagues (Farrell, 2008; Hartnell-Young, 2003; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Ameen's practices were only related to classroom teaching. He revealed that he tried to help students overcome emerging problems during teaching in class. Muneer also narrated some routine actions with students in the beginning of the course. The teacher did not engage the students in discussing things they liked and things they disliked to experience during the study of the course. Rather, he only provided them with some instructions about the course. Thus, such an action seemed to be non-reflective because it was a one way-direction from the teacher to students about future plan (Kember *et al.*, 2000).

Ahmed, Sarah and Muneer claimed that they had developed new beliefs about the teaching and learning process as a result of their reflection. Nonetheless, their

narrations revealed that they experienced very limited changes in their practices. For instance, Ahmed claimed a partial change in his practices. When he was asked about the changes he experienced, he narrated: “Teaching in the university can be somehow sophisticating and boring. So I always try to make it similar to the one in the institutes”.

It seemed that there was no change in Ahmed’s beliefs about teaching and learning issues in the university. For him, change required two things: “One of the things is the students’ commitments and the other thing is when you blend in a society where all teachers are very cooperative; you will have then to adapt and change. That’s not in the university”.

When Sarah was asked about the changes she experienced pertaining to her beliefs and practices, she related that to the reading course she was teaching. She narrated: “I keep changing my beliefs by the way. For reading, for example, though I have taught this forever, but every course, I come up with something new. I try to change”. She claimed that what helped her to change her beliefs and practices was her reading on pedagogy. She remarked: “These experiences just change the way I provide the course”. However, later on, she admitted that she had a problem in some of her practices which she could not overcome or change. That is, she faced the difficulty of simplifying things to her students.

In the same vein, Muneer claimed: “We developed many language learning and teaching beliefs during our, you know, practice in the field itself”. However, he said



that he developed such beliefs through personal reflection or reading in books which could not elevate the teacher's reflective actions to be critical.

Thus, all the informants revealed their engagement in some routine actions. Also, all the discussions of the teaching and learning issues lacked the formal setting of reflection (Hartnell-Young, 2003; Kember *et al.*, 2000) as the informants revealed that they discussed things in the department or at UST with no formal plans or agendas. The only formal discussions that Ahmed and Muneer mentioned they engaged in occurred with the coordinator and the head of the English department respectively on discussing the students' learning problems. However, that sort of reflection was not systematic as it only occurred once (Farrell, 2008; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). In addition, it did not involve the whole community of practice (e.g., other teachers in the English department) (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), but remained between the teacher and the coordinator or the head of the English department. Such reflective actions could develop further into critical reflections which might lead to a dramatic change in the teachers' beliefs and practices. This change cannot occur in a context of 'trial by fire' as the teachers do not feel safe to discuss the teaching and learning problems they face with administrators (Kane *et al.*, 2002). Rather, teachers needed to engage in formal and systematic collaborative discussions with others in the community of practice (Dewey, 1933; Kember *et al.*, 2000). In so doing, they could share their experiences pertaining to teaching and learning issues in the university (Fook & Gardner, 2007; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Yet, there were some factors which affected the informants' reflection.

#### **4.5.1.2 Factors Affecting Reflection**

Based on Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) definition of reflective practice (i.e. as diagnosing the teaching and learning problem, being committed and showing responsibility to take action to solve the problem, and testing and evaluating the solution to the problem), I elicited certain enabling and constraining factors from teachers' talks about treating teaching and learning problems.

##### **4.5.1.2.1 Enabling Factors**

The informants' stories revealed that the factors which enabled teachers to reflect include the teacher's personality, teachers' awareness of teaching and learning problems, learning background, teacher's knowledge, teaching experience and reading. Such factors are related to the teacher. Notably, other factors such as beliefs, documentation, motivation and using technology are related to both the teacher and the institution. Supportive reflective system and training are related to the institution. Factors associated with teaching method include effective classroom management and clarity of objectives. One more emerging factor is related to the students i.e., performance feedback. Nature of the course is related to curriculum; and the conducive teaching and learning environment is associated with the environment.

##### **4.5.1.2.1.1 Teacher's Personality**

The personality of the teacher may drive the teacher to keep thinking about the teaching and learning problems of the course s/he teaches (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) to be favorite by students as in the case of Ahmed, who did constant reflection on his teaching and the students' learning problems. He was aware of the teaching and learning problems though he might not be aware that he was practicing reflection. He

narrated his efforts to cultivate the feeling of intimate relationship between the students and his subjects through treating all the students' learning problems. He said, "when I teach, I try at the very least to be favorite by my students and that is by voicing all the problems. These are the basic. I try to drive the students to think positively about the subject itself". According to his narration, students always come first. He remarked: "I really don't care about management, at least here in the university. So it's my students. OK! So, if I believe that there is a problem, I try my best to change that".

Ahmed felt that he was open up to his students' opinions and observations as he voiced out that "the student himself can notice a lot of things that the teacher himself may not notice". Guided by his personality (Akbari, 2007), he mentioned that "it's all about the teacher's personality. Once I hear that the students like a certain teacher, I try to know why". Fear which is viewed as a barrier for the teachers' reflection (Dewey, 1933; McAlpine & Weston, 2000) was a pushing factor for Ahmed's reflection on students' learning problems. That is, he perceived the fear of firing from job as the main cause for his reflection because that would keep him think about his teaching all the time. He said, "if I do not change my practice, I might be fired".

For Sarah, personality is an important feature of a successful teacher who has a good relationship with students, humble, does not mind to sit with others and share with them what she has. She added that a teacher with a good personality is up-to-date, well-organized, well prepared for her teaching whatever experiences she has and

always gives new ideas when she is asked for advice. To put it in her words, she mentioned that such

teachers are really humble and they do not mind others to share what they have. They are really helpful. When you come to ask them for advice, they really give you good ideas; this means, they don't mind sitting with you, no matter how experienced they are. They are well organized when it comes to planning teaching.

Sarah perceived these features of the personality as enabling elements for the engagement of teachers in the process of discussing teaching and learning problems. She further described other personality traits that a teacher requires for reflecting on his/ her teaching and students' learning problems as quoted in her words:

Basically, an open teacher is somebody who would never be shy to talk about his problems, somebody who is in constant search for his teaching practices, and does not mind to ask for advice. He is somebody who changes over time and never stays with the same techniques.

In this quotation, Sarah described the features of a reflective teacher. These were the features that she claimed she possesses which helped her to reflect on her teaching problems. She narrated "I am so simple. I am close to the students and if they have any problem with the course, they come to me and we talk about it. I have no problem in changing the way if it is really, you know, a true problem".

In the same line, Hassan revealed that overcoming the teaching and learning difficulties "depends on the personality of the teacher himself". He described teachers who possess personality traits that enable them to reflect on and discuss teaching and learning problems with others as "humble people who accept the critical points or the criticism of others; because they are transparent enough and

they don't suffer from, you know, psychological barriers that prevent them from improvement".

Humbly, he said, "We don't want to be the people who claim to be perfect". Nonetheless, he believes that for a teacher "self-confidence is very important to discuss his own problems". Open-mindedly, he revealed that he informally engaged with others in the community of practice i.e., teachers and students to discuss the teaching and learning problems which he encountered:

I face a lot of difficulties either in teaching or learning, but there are solutions actually. One of the solutions is to ask senior instructors on this subject. Another one is to ask also classmates, because some of them perhaps experienced those problems. So you can benefit from them and this doesn't mean that you are undermining your potentials. The third one is, sometimes, I learned from the students themselves. Sometimes I explain a certain point, but I find that the students don't understand it. I ask one of the students to explain it. I find that he explains it in a way that is much better than mine.

Briefly, Ameen who seemed to be very selective in his answers perceived a successful teacher as the one with personality traits who "enthusiastically intends to improve himself, cooperative, very keen to learn and very keen to give". He added that he is a person who "admits that he cannot be perfect".

Muneer also revealed the importance of the personality of the teacher in enabling the discussion and treatment of the teaching and learning problems. He explained that "if the teacher starts discussing learning and teaching issues with the students frankly to know the problems with regard to his own way of teaching, I think this also helps him to improve his ways of teaching". Such open-minded personality, as Muneer narrated, "helps to get a complete understanding of the whole process of teaching and learning".

Muneer was influenced by one of the speakers in a training course he attended some years ago whose personality was transparent. As he narrated about that teacher: “once we had, you know, an ESP course in Sana’a University and I liked one of the teachers. He said, ‘I am a teacher, but I am ready to say in any time, I am wrong’”. Such personality that Muneer admired accepted weaknesses which would possibly assist in treating the problems of the teacher. Furthermore, Muneer viewed self-confident teachers as highly motivated to sit together and evaluate themselves for the sake of improving their teaching and students’ learning. This was evident in his words: “Self-confidence is very important for the teachers to sit with themselves and start reflecting on what and how they are teaching; how they can improve themselves. How they can teach in a better way even if their students praise them”.

According to Muneer, trust is part of the personality of the teacher which can assist the teacher to reveal teaching and learning problems and discuss them with others to come up with appropriate solutions. When trust is mutual between the teacher and others, “he can invite other people to come and sit in his classes and then discuss, especially those whom he trusts”. Thus, the personality features mentioned above were narrated by informants and viewed as crucial for reflection of teachers on the teaching and learning process (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

#### **4.5.1.2.1.2 Teacher’s Awareness**

During my discussion with Ahmed about the teaching and learning difficulties, he emphasized the importance of awareness in overcoming such difficulties. He remarked:

Weak students, you know, always rely on those good students for assignments; and sometimes if you cannot manage it well, good students will dominate inside the class and weak students will keep silent. So we have to think of these issues.

This example shows Ahmed's awareness of weak students who rely on good students. This awareness motivates the teacher to reflect on this problem. Such awareness helps the teacher in constructing new perceptions (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Urzua & Vasquez, 2008).

Ahmed also asserted that teacher's awareness about his own problem could enable him to reflect on that problem. He admitted that he was able to reflect on his teaching problem when he knew about it through the coordinator. He remarked:

I used to think that I was somehow using the best teaching method, and maybe I was the best teacher, but it turned out that I was completely wrong. Why? I can only accept my weaknesses when I see others' success. And at the same time, I believe that students' comments about teachers being reported to him, not directly, maybe by the coordinator, can also be a very good way to tell about weaknesses and strengths which is a very effective way to push to change.

Additionally, through the video-taping, Ahmed became aware of his teaching problem in the class. He admitted that he saw himself on the video-tape dominating the class: "I was not supposed to talk a lot specially in writing classes, but until last time it was most of the time on grammatical issues. I had to do a lot of talk to explore what the classes were".

Sarah believes that teachers' awareness of their capabilities may push them to make the maximum benefit of what they have (i.e., strengths) and work on what they lack (i.e., weaknesses). In how a teacher can raise awareness about the teaching and

learning issues, she explained that “if he knows that he is really good in something, this is something that he can take the maximum benefit of; and if he knows he has some problems in some areas, this is something he should be working on”. She was able to see her teaching and the students’ learning problems on her video-taped class. She realized the mismanagement problem of the class, the passivity of some students and her ineffective role in the class:

I didn’t care to change the class setting though it was not well-organized. Some of the students at the end were not that active in class and that was because of the setting itself. I was not able to activate them. I should have thought of changing the class setting right from the beginning. My movement was really ill-treating to students. I should not do that. I have to think well how to move and when”.

Hassan’s awareness of the teaching and learning process arose from the strategy he followed with learners. He claimed that he could see himself through his students’ eyes. This concurs with Brookfield’s (1995) view of reflection through the students’ perspectives. Hassan narrated: “At the end, sometimes I give them a sheet of paper and I ask them to write about me. So in this case, I can find myself in their eyes; and this will be reflected in my performance for the coming batches”. This means that his awareness of the students’ learning problems assisted him in reflecting on his future teaching plans. Meanwhile, when he reflected on the video-taped class, he identified his teaching problems and the students’ learning problems “in the eyes of the camera” as he mentioned in one of the interviews:

That let me know my merits and demerits. I found that I tried to get my students involved in the subject as much as I could. I found that my students weren’t participating enough. They weren’t enthusiastic. If I got a chance of teaching that again, it’s a matter of the method of teaching itself. I was in the subject to the extent that I ignored some of the poor students.



Furthermore, Hassan was aware of the students' problems in the target and source languages which are crucial for the study of translation. That is, some students were weak in English language and Arabic language. He explained that he tried to overcome such problems by assisting the students to cope with the intended learning objectives of the program.

Interestingly, through the video-taped class, Ameen was able to see the teaching and learning problems in his class: "I would say that the class shouldn't have been done that way especially teaching techniques or methods; I mean, aids should have been involved in that class instead of just putting or listing down vocabulary on the whiteboard and working on those dry words". From Ameen's perspective, "if a teacher found himself or herself didn't do well, next time, he would be able to overcome any problem when he or she evaluates the work he did in a particular class". Thus, the teacher's realization of the problems related to his work or students' achievement can assist him to rectify such problems.

Muneer perceived that to improve the way of teaching, teachers should be aware of their problems. He believes that the teacher's awareness of the teaching and learning problems is the basis for appropriate solutions to such problems. He emphasized: "We cannot talk about solutions if we don't specify the problems". In his reflection on the video-taped class, Muneer realized the problems that occurred in his class which were related to the teaching and the learning process: "I think there were things which I had to avoid. For example, I gave them the exercises and the answers were there. Actually I put the answers in pencil and I intended to remove them, but I didn't". From that video-taped we learn two things. First, Muneer did not take

enough time to reflect on the exercise he prepared for students. Second, such documentation tool is important for reflection as he narrated: “keeping such classes on videos, many things appear to you, whether from the teacher or from the students”. Thus, teacher’s awareness can influence and be influenced by his/ her reflection.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.3 Learning Background**

The informants cited their own past stories about their learning background. Ahmed was first motivated to learn English by his father who started teaching him English before he studied English classes in school. Later, his narrations provided inductive indications of how his past learning experiences both in school and in the university influenced the way he reflected on his teaching and students’ learning problems. He was very much influenced by his first English teacher (i.e., Iraqi teacher) in the first grade of the preparatory school whose way of teaching was not a one-way teaching. Rather, that teacher would give the students a chance to practice English, encourage them to learn, revise things with them and praise them in front of all. These seem to be signs of a reflective teacher (Richards, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Such learning background assisted the informant to form certain beliefs about how a teacher should act to deal with teaching and learning issues. Also, some of his university teachers influenced him in the way they dealt with the students and engaged them in the discussions during teaching.

Through his reflection on past university study, Ahmed distinguished between two types of teachers: The first kind was “those teachers who had the ability ... in terms

of delivering the subject and getting students more involved in the subject”. This revealed that such competent teachers influenced him in the way they taught and dealt with students. However, he claimed that the other type of teachers “couldn’t really master the class” because of “their poor performance”. Unsatisfactorily, he described the latter as “the unlucky teachers”.

It seemed that some university teachers, particularly two teachers influenced Ahmed’s beliefs about the way he perceived teaching and learning process and how to motivate learners though he repeatedly emphasized that he only used his own way of teaching.

When Sarah was asked about some of the things that helped her to develop as a teacher and learner, she said, “we had the teachers ... I had just enough time to read”. For, Sarah, three things helped her to develop: the teachers, the time and reading.

Hassan stated that his learning background which was influenced by his old teachers and also by his learning experiences as a former student helped him to understand and solve the teaching and learning problems in the university context:

A teacher is basically an ex-student, which means that perhaps in his daily life, he experienced a lot of teaching methods from his teachers who taught him in the previous stages. You can say it’s one of the important sources of improving his way of teaching through his ex-teachers, which means that he can learn from them the pros and cons of teaching methods. At the same time, as an ex-student, he knows how the student thinks.

For Hassan, the learning stage of the teacher seemed to be very influential on the way he perceived the teaching and learning issues and how to treat them regardless whether his learning beliefs were traditional or current ones.

According to Muneer, learning background enabled him to develop beliefs about effective teaching methods and approaches:

We learned a lot of teaching methods, techniques and approaches, those ones which were traditional and the ones which were more effective like communicative method and aural oral method. These things helped us to develop some kind of background that enabled us to tackle learning and teaching problems later on when we started practicing in schools and university.

Muneer provided an example of an American expert who seemed to be influenced by early education in terms of looking at teaching and learning problems. In one of the workshops attended by the informant, that expert said, “I am a teacher, but I am ready to say in any time, I am wrong”. When Muneer was probed further about why he believes the expert said that, he remarked: “I think because of his educational background”. For Muneer, his learning experiences as a student in the university helped to develop his beliefs and awareness about teaching and learning. He said, “after finishing B.A. for example, the scope of understanding such a field was a little bit narrow. Then after, you know, doing MA, and after doing PhD, it developed in terms of dealing with students”.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.4 Teacher’s Knowledge**

Ameen and Muneer perceived teachers’ knowledge as an enabling factor for their reflection. For example, Ameen perceived sufficient knowledge as the power which provided him with the ability to identify and tackle teaching and learning issues. “Capability commanding of knowledge is sufficient, you know, to make teachers confident and to be aware of the students”. When Ameen was exposed to the term reflection, he voiced out that “teachers should know, or should read on reflection just

to gain knowledge on reflection, what reflection means, and how reflection can be practiced. Then he or she can transfer from the theoretical part to the practical part”. Ameen’s narrations implied the role of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and general knowledge in enhancing the reflective practice of teachers.

Muneer revealed the importance of both pedagogical and content knowledge in tackling teaching and learning problems and also enhancing professional development. He narrated that “there are some teachers who are a little bit weak in their background, but they are good at teaching methodology; so they can achieve their goals and they can help the students to get what they want”. The teacher believes that pedagogical knowledge could cover up the shortcoming in the teacher’s content knowledge.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.5 Teaching Experience**

The informants valued the role of teaching experience in their engagement in reflection. For instance, Ahmed pointed out that “as we teach more and more, we get more and more. It’s about experiences; it’s about difficulties (...) at the very least, I try to avoid problems in coming classes”. Thus, more experience enables more reflection. Reflection may also lead to improved experience (Dewey, 1933). Ahmed admitted that he learned from his experience by personal reflection and from sharing others their experiences during informal discussions held in the department of English between peers, at UST among colleagues, and even through his discussions with experienced teachers from outside UST. He also added that his teaching experience was developed through his reflection with very experienced teachers. He narrated:

When I discuss with such teachers, I can then add things up to my own experience. At the same time, I like it when I talk over things with teachers who have been teaching for a long time, especially those who taught at different places, have more experiences.

Sarah viewed teaching experience as important for teachers through which they can learn a lot of things. She narrated that “anyone who passes through any teaching experience learns a lot”. However, having teaching experience is not enough without reflection on that experience to construct knowledge which can guide teachers’ practices (Dewey, 1933). Sarah illustrated that such reflected upon experience “helps in terms of how to manage time, how to manage students, problems, etc.”

Hassan revealed that his teaching experience in teaching different courses in many places has contributed to building his theoretical competence about teaching and learning. Moreover, he claimed that his teaching of various skill courses has assisted him to sharpen his knowledge and awareness about the teaching and learning process. He considered his teaching experience as the core source for correcting lots of his misconceptions pertaining to teaching and learning. For him, these misconceptions become clear as a result of his learning through reflection on his teaching experience.

Ameen concurred that exchanging experiences among teachers will help them to give what they have and get what they lack. He said, when teachers “sit together, they share their experience and make use of the experience in discussing issues”.

Muneer also revealed his perception of sharing the teaching experience in the social setting as a basis for reflection on teaching and learning problems. He indicated that

reflection on a teaching or learning problem requires teachers “to sit together, share points of view about that problem and agree about a set of solutions. I think this one is the best way especially among a group”. Though the scenario presented here seemed to be formal, it remained one of the informant’s hopes, which was not evident in the reality.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.6 Reading**

The informants revealed that reading has paved the way in front of them while reflecting on the teaching and learning process. For example, Ahmed expressed his personal experience in how reading enhanced his reflection on his knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogy. He remarked: “The more I read, even in past, I think that I discover things that I even give the students in a better way than the way I used to give them”.

In Sarah’s view, reading is a key factor to knowledge and everything else as it is part of the Muslim’s beliefs. For her, “it’s even part of our own beliefs that we must learn to know that reading is the key to knowledge, to everything”. While pursuing her master’s degree, Sarah had the time to read and reflect on what she read in relation to her past teaching experience which caused a radical change in her teaching practices. To illustrate further, she mentioned:

Reading was the thing that really made the changes I am really proud of now. But I feel that after I pass through practical experience, then I come and read about it. I can see what teachers around the world are doing. Then because I am just reading out for need, I learn new ways, new ideas etc. These experiences just change the way I provide the course. So I feel these experiences can be changed regarding new attitudes and new ideas I develop.

In the same vein, Hassan suggested “reading documents to learn about the experiences of others”. For him, reading provides teachers with some knowledge about others’ experiences, in particular, reading documentaries. He also believes that reading about students and their psychological and cognitive problems can help teachers to close the huge gap between the teacher and students. He said that

reading about the student himself and his way of acquiring knowledge in terms of psychological problems and cognitive ones can make the teacher familiar enough with the student and fill in that huge gap; because sometimes the lecturer lectures to himself; and he sometimes neglects the other side, who is the student here in this case.

Ameen recognized how reading can enable the development of teachers’ awareness of how to deal with teaching and learning problems. “I think nobody can teach without getting an experience and getting knowledge of teaching from different books”. He added that what develops teachers’ knowledge and makes them think about teaching and learning process is “reading up source books on teaching and learning methods and on those who have deep experiences in teaching and learning expertise”.

Muneer believes that reading different materials and searching the net help teachers to solve the teaching and learning problems. To put it in his words: “Sometimes when I face problems, I usually go back and read materials; nowadays, also, the internet helps a lot”.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.7 Beliefs**

From the different perspectives of the informants, I learned how the informants’ beliefs enabled their reflections. Ahmed’s perception of the teaching and learning process as he narrated:



We have to open up to students. OK! So I feel like I perceive that my English teaching is somehow amenable for students I hope. I try to be as friendlier as possible. I try to provide them with the chance to talk. I depend more on their friends' correction. I always ask about comments. This is my perception about teaching.

Ahmed's beliefs were influenced by his very first English teacher in grade seven. He uttered: "My philosophy is that you first have to make students smile at the very beginning because this is what happened to me when I was a student". The informant perceived his role in class as a teacher, communicator and helper to enable the process of learning. He sometimes gave the students a chance to play the role of the teacher. He voiced out: "My role in the class is a teacher, communicator and helper". He stressed using group work activities in his classes. He pointed out: "I usually go through groups. I sometimes assign students to run the class. Some other times, I ask students to be the teacher". Ahmed seemed to adopt the learner-centered approach which is a sign of a reflective teacher (Richards, 2002).

Ahmed also believes that if a teacher was open up to others sharing his problems and experiences, he would either get advice from others about how to overcome his teaching problems or motivate other teachers to open up and talk about teaching and learning experiences. He narrated:

If a teacher is discussing his problems assuming that he is the kind of teacher who is somehow open up to others, he is going to get benefits for his own having some good suggestions from experienced teachers. Okay! But, you know, although some teachers would say things are okay, but, you know, they take benefits at least. That's why I said, it's a two way benefit; it's a two-way street. If I don't get the benefit, some others will benefit.

Sarah believes in the involvement of learners in the learning process as something central. She said that "teachers must guarantee, let's say, students' involvement. You

have to make students practice”. She confirmed that she liked to enable students’ learning and hated to be the main source of information. She said, “I really hate to be the one authority for information. This is the role I really hate to play. But I really want just to facilitate learning”. Even though she believes in the learner-centered approach, she did not talk about the engagement of students in group work activities like Ahmed. In addition, towards the end of the interviews, Sarah said that she believes in reflection as something important for improving practice and bringing a change in attitudes and ideas. For her, “one cannot, you know, improve without reflection. Reflection is really effective and it does change you. It does help you make new attitudes and ideas”.

When I conversed with Hassan about how he plans for his teaching, he stated that his plans were based on his beliefs that he was not an idealistic teacher. He said that he considered the actual level of students and the status of English taught as FL in Yemen. In diagnosing the students’ learning problems in general, he said, “I am not an idealistic person. I know that students of English department all over Yemen suffer a lot studying English as a second language and it is not even a second language. It is a foreign language”.

The informant’s reflection on planning his lessons suggested that the way he followed in his teaching was based on his beliefs that translation was quite an advanced skill, unlike other language skills. This belief was inferred from his narration that “in terms of teaching translation, it’s quite advanced. Because it’s supposed that I teach translation to students who can or have at least a good command of both languages, English and Arabic”.

From an academic point of view, Hassan believes that translation should be taught to postgraduate program students, but not to the undergraduate students as it is the case in Yemen. He mentioned that “some universities teach translation as a postgraduate program, but here in Yemen, we teach it as an undergraduate program”. He justified his view that students need to acquire the language first to be able to translate. To put it in his words: “We found a lot of difficulties, just in putting this in action and we think that the primary reason refers to the acquisition of the language itself”.

Ameen received more probes to provide details about his beliefs about teaching and learning. I learned that his beliefs were developed during his study in the university through the influence of some teachers. For example, he claimed that he was influenced by one of the professors. I provide his narration about that teacher which revealed that Ameen was deeply influenced by his way of dealing with the teaching and learning issues:

He made his presentation unique. When he started his class, he never got in his class straightaway. Before that, he tried to get his students involved in his class by asking them some, you know, relevant questions or some rhetorical questions; then you feel as a student that he was gradually taking you step by step into the class; and even one hour was enough. For him, the class had to be enjoyable and the students around him had to be an essential part of the process. I mean, reversely, he welcomed their efforts or attempts to answer his questions. This was one of the lecturers that I am taking as a model or as a good example when I am teaching.

In the context of teaching and learning, Ameen believes that “students are playing an essential role” in the class. He also believes that formality shouldn’t be there at all in the class”. When he was probed to talk further about his beliefs, he added that his old beliefs which he gained from teachers in the university changed completely

during his teaching as he started to think of teaching and learning in a different way. That was, he believes that there should not be a space for students to memorize and their linguistic needs should be considered. He remarked: “My shift was not only sticking to the materials to follow literally what’s there. That’s not my belief, you know. There shouldn’t be a space for students to memorize”.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.8 Documentation**

Documentation was found related to both the informants and the institution. It enhances reflective practice among teachers (Tonkin & Reagan, 2003). For instance, Ahmed realized the benefit of having our work documented when he referred to the course file prepared by another teacher and got the necessary help: “I got some problems. I couldn’t provide extra activities. So I took one of the teacher’s subject portfolio and I got an idea on how to run that class”.

Sarah’s journal entry raised her awareness about things that she might forget. When she was given the opportunity to reflect on the recorded lessons and incidents, she voiced out:

I really learned a lot through this and at least it makes your eye open on what you really ah, you know, suffered from during classes. I mean, one should always document that. I mean when you leave things just without documentation, you forget. You may repeat the same mistakes several times, several years, if we do not document things. But documentation will make you aware of such problems and they will just stay there in your mind.

This indicates how documentation works as an enabling factor for Sarah’s reflection. She believes that writing the journal entry like the one I asked her to do for documenting teaching and learning incidents was very helpful. It was through her

writing of the incidents in the journal, she realized that most of the problems faced in class came from her and that she needed a lot of time to solve them.

I discovered that most of the problems I faced in class were because of me; and I do need so much time to solve them. I come to realization that writing is really helpful, not just thinking about how good or bad the class was. It should be documented in points.

Unlike some informants who viewed video-taping documentation as impractical such as Ameen, Sarah found it helpful and practical. Through reflection on her teaching in the video-taped class, she was able to detect some teaching and learning problems in her class:

I think I have a problem with class control. I am convinced now that I have to be much stricter with regard to morning classes, in particular. Interruption is really a big problem in my class. Though I consider myself as a strict person, but after watching the video, I really withdraw that. Again, I have to be more focused with regard to my aims in the class. I really want to write down my aims as I used to do in school. I have to do that. That will keep me focused. Designing the questions and other activities involved should be directed towards my aims in the class. It's not enough just to depend on the book.

Through the documentation of classroom observation by using video-taping strategy, Sarah realized her teaching problems and also the students' learning problems. She said,

I'm really glad to have such an experience. I saw it twice and three times and I found something else, something new about myself. I come to a realization that I have to improve. It's not that successful. It's not really helpful. The class has lots of problems. I discovered that most of the problems are totally my own responsibility. And this is really huge.

According to Hassan, documentation of teaching and learning experiences which is not valued in Yemen in general and in the university in particular is an important data bank for teachers to refer to when they face difficulties. He narrated that

documentation either visual or audio, audio-visual and also written is very important as a kind of data bank for the teachers about the difficulties of their

lives and difficulties of teaching and learning; however, we suffer from [this] here in Yemen. Even in this university, some teachers consider it as a kind of violation of privacy, but I think it is very important to take, you know, a snapshot of the environment, the classroom environment etc.

Hassan even wanted to listen to the audio-taped classes which I documented to reflect on his performance. “I wanted just a copy of your MP3 because I want to listen to my performance in the eye of the camera”. In addition to the video-taped classes, I also gave him the audio- taped classes to reflect on.

Meanwhile, for Ameen “it’s good to have or to create a course portfolio or course file in which everything related to teaching and learning should be documented. That is very indispensable, very fruitful for teaching and learning process”. In addition, video-taping his last class assisted him to identify his teaching and students’ learning problems easily and suggest possible solutions.

Reflection-on-action which Ameen denied during the early interviews with him, took place during our discussion upon seeing his own video-taped class. He remarked:

I would say that the class shouldn’t have been done that way specially teaching techniques or methods; I mean, aids should have been involved in that class instead of just putting or listing down vocabulary on the whiteboard and working on those dry words. I should have put pictures, movies, clips and other available facilities. I would say that I should have given students a short reading passage, which contains, you know, vocabulary related to the subject so that they know how to use these words in the context instead of just giving students separate words in single utterances or single phrases.

Muneer acknowledged documentation as a very useful strategy for teachers to record things and experiences which they can refer back to solve problems and improve the teaching or learning process.

At another level, he narrated that documentation is also useful “for the department, faculty and university administration” as they can refer back to documented experiences and reflect on them for solving similar problems they face. For Muneer, documentation saves the loss of information about teaching and learning experiences as “teachers may forget as soon as they finish the semester”.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.9 Motivation**

Motivation was one of the enabling factors revealed in the informants’ narrations. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were inferred as two types of pushing elements which enabled teachers’ reflection on the teaching and learning issues. For instance, Ahmed’s narration revealed the two types of motivation. First, he was motivated by his inner feelings to treat the students’ learning problems when they emerge. He said “when I face something that affects the students, this is what drives me more to solve this problem”. He emphasized his intrinsic motivation saying “I don’t want to encounter problems with the students. I prefer to have my own problems that I can manage, but not with the students”.

Another motivating factor that he also revealed was the extrinsic motivation i.e., financial issues which could also push teachers and himself in particular to reflect on the teaching and learning issues. He voiced out: “I like money”. He considered money to be one of the factors that may affect the teacher’s reflection as it motivates teachers to think about their teaching and students’ learning more seriously. In his opinion, “Teachers should be given bonuses for good teaching and good evaluation”. For him, that “will keep a good job”.

Intrinsically, Sarah was motivated by her personal needs for a change pertaining to her teaching. This intrinsic motivation was revealed in her words: “Things that can really influence what you really do in class is your need for change”. She had strong beliefs that she changed her beliefs a lot as a result of her personal efforts and interest:

I changed my beliefs a lot. I started depending on theories that consider the teacher as the only source of information. But now, we talk about how we can make the learning learner-centered, how students can play an active role in the teaching and learning process; and this is really a huge change, because we are talking about two different opposite schools. We’re taught using the old ways, the old theories. It needs a lot of effort from our side to think of how we can make teaching learner-centered, but we are trying our best. I mean, one really tries to find good teaching methods that really activate the learner and make him the center of the whole class, not the teacher.

Sarah narrated that desire was the motive for teachers to reflect on their teaching practices to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. She believes that “one always reflects when he really wants to evaluate himself and enhances his overall strengths and tries to minimize his own weaknesses”. Based on her personal interest, she tried to sit with other teachers and see their course files to improve her plans for the course she was going to teach. She said, “I also ask other teachers who taught the same course and I try to find what other different things they did. I try to do this with teachers personally”.

On the other hand, if there was a room for extrinsic motivation as an enabling factor for Sarah’s reflection, it could be her plan to start a program for exchanging experiences among teachers at UST as she was in charge of the Learning Centre in the university. Thus, the program she wanted to run could be seen as the extrinsic



motivation which enabled her engagement in the discussion of the teaching and learning issues in this study. In her conversation, she remarked:

I do run here the Teaching and Learning Centre. We have started exchanging experience program, just, you know, piloting to see if it is going to work. It's a very simple way to get improved. Teachers can easily do this and it's not something that they should be frightened of. I mean, a teacher can choose the colleague he feels comfortable with. It is done all over the world. It's nothing that we should be worried of. I think it's the other way round. It is something that we should be always doing.

Ameen claimed that teachers should have a constant desire to professionally develop by learning more and more about teaching and learning. This intrinsic desire was stated in his words:

when a teacher is getting involved in this process and, you know, learn more and more about how she or he can conduct a class, and reflects on his way of teaching process, he or she admits the need for more knowledge about this; and the way is still, you know, endless and far away for being professional. So the path is endless and the knowledge that he or she gets is groundless, you know. So no one can just reach a certain point of time that he can claim that he is super or perfect.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.10 Using Technology**

Technology has become one of the fundamental tools for enhancing critical reflection on the teaching and learning process in the social context (Harrington, 1992). Of all the informants, Hassan was the only one who openly highlighted the use of technology as a new tool that could enable the discussion of teaching and learning issues in the university. He stated that the use of technology like the learning management system (LMS) and forums could help the teachers and students to discuss the teaching and learning problems better. He emphasized that "it's very important that the teachers know exactly the newly invented tools and newly used methods of teaching such as the internet, using PPTs or power point slides and these things. Otherwise, he will be left behind".

As discussed, technology is seen as important in treating the teaching and learning problems particularly if teachers make use of the technology instruments available at UST. Ameen revealed that “instructional media” which is available at UST can be used to translate the theories of learning which he learned. Muneer also admitted that facilities are available at UST like data show projectors and other equipment.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.11 Supportive Reflective System**

Ahmed recognized that the communication system at UST is a supportive means for reflection. My discussion with him about the teaching and learning problems in the university revealed the fact that the communicative system is a must for reflection. This is because through such a system, the teachers and all around such as students, coordinators and administrators can communicate effectively to overcome the teaching and learning problems. For example, as Ahmed narrated, if the students “have problems, in our college, they should go first to the teacher. If they cannot be resolved, then the teacher sends them to the coordinator and then to the head of department”.

Ahmed narrated one of the stories about one of his teaching classes in the English Language Centre at UST. The Centre is a unit which prepares UST students and other outsiders for TOEFL. For Ahmed, communication system is one of the most important factors that enabled his reflection on the students’ learning problem and his teaching problem. That is, when the students did not understand one of his classes as he used advanced language and techniques. The students passed their learning problem to the coordinator who discussed the problem with the teacher who

overcame that problem. This explains what the critical social theories emphasize that meanings and practices are developed in social relationships through communication (Fook & Gardner, 2007) which is considered to be one of the important tools for reflection (Ramsey, 2003).

Sarah believes that teachers need a lot of support for discussing teaching and learning problems which can bring a lot of changes in the way teachers view their teaching. She narrated that teachers “need a lot of support from other sides. That’s the logical relevant correct way to do it. The department should always provide opportunities for exchanging ideas”. She justified that “listening to other people and what they do in their classes and how they solve problems can add a lot”. She further added that this is “because you have only one way to look at things and when you listen to others, you start to know how other people are different; totally, you can solve similar problems and this is really helpful”.

During our discussion, Sarah emphasized that if there is a supportive system which is stated in her words as “the opportunities” for exchanging experiences among teachers, it can help them a lot to reflect on their teaching. She argued that “when opportunities like experience exchange between views are facilitated, this is something that can directly help teachers to reflect on their teaching”.

Hassan said that the cooperation between the teacher and the people around including the students and colleagues create a supportive atmosphere for teachers to think about teaching and learning. He mentioned that a supportive atmosphere will result in “having more cooperation between the teacher and his colleagues, and also

the students with more understanding of the students' problems". Furthermore, the supportive reflective context I provided assisted Hassan to think back on the teaching and learning process in his class. He voiced out: "if I got a chance of teaching that again, it's a matter of, you know, the method of teaching itself. I was in the subject to the extent that I ignored some of the poor students".

When I talked to Ameen, I realized that he perceived discussing the teaching and learning problems with others and talking about experiences is better than reading about that in books. He uttered that "when it comes to practice, when it comes to real situation, when you hear people talking about their experience, that's much better than reading about them". I had provided Ameen with an opportunity to discuss his teaching and students' learning problems. Without such a support, Ameen would not reflect on such things as he admitted before.

Muneer revealed that a systematic way to discuss teaching and learning problems can help teachers better to manage their problems as they can sit in a group and brainstorm the problems; for instance, they can discuss how to overcome them based on their experiences: "Each one may give his opinion and then they may discuss the problem and agree about the solutions; they give their experience".

#### **4.5.1.2.1.12 Training**

Ahmed viewed training as one of the most important things that enabled his reflection. He admitted that during training sessions he had the chance to discuss with peers in groups the teaching and learning experiences in different colleges in the university.

Sarah who believes that training is very important for teachers in the English department so that they know how to reflect on the teaching and learning process effectively. The indirect role of training in enhancing reflection can be sensed in the words she narrated. The repetition of the words 'at all' as emphasized by Sarah, not only indicated the lack of training, but also the importance of training for the teachers in her department: "Training is something that we lack. English teachers have no ah, you know, training at all, AT ALL".

In the same vein, Hassan indicated that teachers' attendance of seminars and symposiums about the teaching and learning difficulties they face can develop their awareness about how to cope with teaching and learning problems and enhance their teaching experiences. For him, "teachers have to be given, you know, some courses, attend some seminars, some symposiums about the difficulties and problems of teaching they face. They can discuss in workshops how to improve teaching and learning".

When Ameen was asked about what could help him in pausing and reflecting on his teaching and students' learning problem, he emphasized that training is an important tool for effective reflection. He said: "I think teachers should be exposed to training, should be well-trained on how important reflective practice is". He indirectly indicated the need for such training in the English department to motivate teachers to reflect on the teaching and learning issue.

Through his attendance of the ESP training course held in Sana'a University, Muneer learned one of the characteristics of a reflective teacher. That characteristic is to be ready to accept your weaknesses as claimed by a teacher he knew: "I am a teacher, but I am ready to say at any time, I am wrong".

#### **4.5.1.2.1.13 Effective Classroom Management**

A well-organized classroom is an appropriate context for teacher's reflection with students on their learning problems. This is the context which Ahmed claimed that he had during his classroom teaching. He mentioned that he managed his classes in such a way that students felt comfortable and had the opportunity to discuss teaching and learning issues with him. He explained, "I also try to split up the class into groups to make the class fun to the students, let them talk, break the ice between the teacher and the students". The teacher emphasized the use of the reflective teaching techniques in his teaching such as engaging the students in group work activities, monitoring their discussions and commenting on their responses. Ahmed also claimed that effective classroom management could help teachers to enable the teaching and learning process. He said that "effective class management can facilitate learning and teaching process" which, consequently, enables reflection.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.14 Clarity of Objectives**

Sarah stated that focusing on class objectives would help her more in treating teaching and learning problems: "I have to be more focused with regard to my aims in the class. ... That will keep me focused. Hassan also mentioned that setting the objectives of the class or the objectives of the course would assist him to think back about his teaching and his students' learning problems when he finished the class or

the course. He narrated that “putting the objective is very important to keep you on track. ... What guarantees that you go through this track are the objectives you put in the short run or in the long run”. Unlike Sarah who just referred back to the class objectives, Hassan revealed two types of objectives: the objectives of the lesson and the objectives of the course.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.15 Students’ Performance Feedback**

Ahmed found that the students’ performance feedback through quizzes was a useful instrument to check students’ progress and reflect on their performance. He said, “when you have a lot of quizzes, you first evaluate them, you correct their mistakes and you highlight the things that they shouldn’t do next time”.

Sarah looked at the students’ feedback on their learning problems pertaining to the boring texts of her reading subject positively. The students’ request for changing the texts assisted the teacher to start thinking on that problem and finally changed the textbook. Nevertheless, the change was late and only took place with some other students in the following semester due to some routine procedures which the teacher had to fulfill in the English department. The teacher recalled: “The students were complaining about the text itself. It was boring and topics were not interesting and I changed this semester. I tried to find some book that has some interesting passages”.

Hassan narrated that he attempted to raise his students’ awareness about the importance of their feedback for treating teaching and learning problems. He said, “I tried to explain that we want to reach a one-way situation which is for me to improve my way of teaching and to get what they want”. He viewed that students’ feedback to

the teacher about their performance or his performance can reveal the teaching and learning problems and help the teacher to think about how to resolve such problems. He said, “I think the yardstick through which you measure your performance in teaching is the student himself”.

For Ameen, performance assessment is the basis for reflection on teaching and learning problems. He believes that the feedback on the performance of the teacher from the perspective of students can help to raise teacher’s awareness about the process of teaching and learning and enable his or her reflection. He also mentioned that he could treat teaching and learning problems which might be detected through constant evaluation of students’ learning.

Muneer mentioned that students’ feedback raises the teacher’s awareness about teaching problems and assists him or her to reflect on them: “Sometimes, you are not aware of the problem. When students tell you about it, I think this is something useful. You can benefit from that and modify your way of teaching”. Interestingly, Muneer asserted that students’ low proficiency level sometimes pushes teachers to reflect on the students’ performance. He claimed that the students’ low proficiency level in one of his classes made him translate some of the unfamiliar words for students to help them overcome the problem of understanding the class.

#### **4.5.1.2.1.16 Nature of the Course**

The nature of the course determines the way the teacher has to follow in preparing for the course. More importantly, understanding the nature of the course will definitely assist the teacher to reflect on the teaching and learning problems



effectively. In his reflection on the teaching and learning issues, Hassan pointed out that the nature of the subject taught might play a role in determining the way the teacher looked at teaching and learning:

In applied linguistics, sometimes they don't consider speaking Arabic as a useful solution ... Suppose that they teach English as a process, not a product. For me because I teach translation, I have to use Arabic, but as a product, not a process. I mean sometimes it depends on the subject itself you are teaching.

Hassan mentioned that teaching translation is totally different from teaching skill courses and the communicative approach does not help in teaching translation as the students do not know the equivalents of English in Arabic language; they just know the meanings: "Teaching a skill subject like writing is completely different from teaching translation. We suffer a lot when we ask the students to translate. They know the meaning, but they don't know the equivalents; that's it". He emphasized that translation is a difficult subject which requires teachers who are very familiar with the two languages:

Since subjects differ, sometimes you cannot say that there is a certain way that is applicable to more than one subject. Since I am teaching these days translation, translation is a quite difficult subject because it needs that teacher who is well-familiar with the two languages, the source and the target languages, and who is well-educated even in his source language even if it is his mother tongue, in terms of vocabulary, in terms of rhetorical devices, in terms of literature and also linguistic norm, morphological aspects. So it is quite difficult, but I try to focus on the theoretical background first. Then I try to apply it on the practical background.

For Muneer who taught linguistics courses and had linguistics background, he would sit more on preparation when he taught language skills courses as he had to think of some topics for debates to attract the attention of students. He explained: "It depends on the nature of the material that I am going to teach. Maybe there are some kinds of discussion debates just to attract the attention of the students".

#### **4.5.1.2.1.17 Conducive Teaching and Learning Environment**

Ameen revealed that a conducive environment could have a positive influence on both the teaching and learning process. He said that the facilities at the university assisted him to practice the theories he learned during his study in the university. Muneer stressed that conducive learning and teaching environment was very important to encourage students, teachers and administrators to work together. He remarked: “If there is a good academic environment, the standard one, that one we want, it will be encouraging one; and it will help all parties, either you know students, teachers and administration to work within such environment”. He mentioned that the environment at UST is more conducive than other private and public universities because of “the small number of the students, the university buildings are very suitable and the availability of equipment”.

#### **4.5.1.2.2 Constraining Factors**

The informants’ stories revealed the factors which constrained their engagement in reflection. The factors related to the teacher include the teacher’s personality, lack of knowledge, personal problems, lack of awareness, lack of commitment and some other factors which are associated with both the teacher and institution such as lack of documentation, lack of motivation, lack of effective communication, heavy teaching load and traditional beliefs. The factor, traditional beliefs is also related to the students. Another factor related to students is the lack of students’ interaction. Other institutional factors involve insufficient training, unsupportive system and lack of facilities. Lack of classroom management is related to the teaching methods. Nature of the course is associated with the curriculum. The unconducive environment is an environmental factor.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.1 Teacher's Personality**

The narratives of the informants revealed that the personality of the teacher was not only found as an enabling factor, but also as a constraining factor for reflection. For instance, Ahmed revealed that he would not discuss some of the teaching and learning problems such as his heavy teaching schedule with the coordinator due to his fear of getting more assigned work or being accused as uncommitted.

Though Ahmed felt confident about his particular way of teaching, he revealed that he was quite reserved about classroom observation particularly when it is done for the purpose of evaluation which might have some consequences on his living. He has never observed or invited others to observe him in classrooms. For him, peer classroom observation is unsafe. Nevertheless, he admitted that through his discussions with other experienced teachers about teaching and learning issues, he learned a lot. He suggested that teachers should be more open in discussing the teaching and learning problems with others as he considered that a two-way stream in which either the two parts of the discussion will benefit, either to give or to get useful information.

Ahmed also claimed that some teachers do not have an open-minded personality to accept their weaknesses and move toward change. He argued that such teachers “may not accept the idea that they are weak at certain levels or in certain aspects of teaching. So if the teacher has that kind of thought, it is very difficult to accept others' comments”.

Additionally, he was quite reserved to discuss teaching and learning issues with others before getting to know their personalities. He narrated:

Five months ago, I was in the teachers' room and there were teachers talking about how to run a debate with the students within the class. One of the teachers was talking openly. He was just proposing something. The other teacher was aggressively defending his point of view to the extent that the other teacher got upset. So at that time, I really thought, you know, we really had to see how people accept ideas. Teachers' personalities are different".

In my discussion with Sarah about classroom observation, I inferred how the teacher's personality can constrain the reflection process. She believes that observing others while teaching "is a kind of sensitive issue that teachers try to avoid". This revealed the sensitivity of teachers' personalities which constrains teachers from observing and discussing teaching and learning issues.

Similarly, Hassan revealed the sensitivity of the teacher's personality which acts as a constraining factor for reflection. For example, while talking about exchanging classroom observation visits among teachers, he mentioned that "some people take it sensitively" and do not like others to observe their teaching. Even the informant has not invited anyone to observe his classes because for him "it is quite sensitive".

For Ameen, the personality of the teacher may fail to assist him/ her in solving teaching and learning problems. He cited "if, for example, a teacher is not confident, he becomes very tensed; then the students will, you know, get restricted, yah".

Muneer believes that involving teachers who feel overconfident in collaborative discussions will constrain such discussions. This is because of "the feeling of each

teacher that he is perfect and he is the best; and he may enforce his, you know, way of thinking and even his teaching methodology and he views it as the best”.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.2 Lack of Knowledge**

Through her narratives, Sarah revealed that, during her university study, she was not exposed to enough theoretical and practical knowledge about teaching. She admitted that she did not receive enough theoretical and practical knowledge that she could use to overcome teaching and learning problems which she has been experiencing until recently. She stated: “As teachers, we were not well prepared, maybe, because we were the first batch here at the UST. Things have changed since then”.

What I learned from Hassan was that teaching translation in Yemeni universities lacks the focus on the theoretical background that students should be exposed to before they go to the practical part. He clarified: “Translation in Yemen is taught as a text given to students without any reference to its theoretical background”. He narrated that most of the teachers who taught translation were not specialized in translation. As a result, such teachers would face a problem in teaching the students the theoretical part and then the practical implementation of theories. For Muneer, “the lack of teacher’s background knowledge of teaching methods” could constrain the teacher to reflect on the teaching and learning process.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.3 Personal Matters**

A natural part of human nature is the teachers’ ambition to seek improvement both financially and academically. Ahmed was one of the informants who hoped to pursue his higher studies and receive better salary. However, his narration revealed that he

was one of those university teachers who encountered some personal problems that could be barriers to do reflection on learning and teaching issues in the university. He openly stated that he taught evening classes in language institutes to improve his living.

Sarah had her own personal and family responsibilities in addition to her teaching and administrative duty. Such personal matters created obstacles for Sarah to reflect effectively on the teaching and learning issues. Hassan stated that a teacher's personal problems affect his performance and also the way of communication with others which, consequently, affects reflection negatively. Such personal matters affect a teacher like him negatively.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.4 Lack of Documentation**

Self-appraisal which is important for the development of the teaching skills of the teacher was not done in the university as revealed by Ahmed though he himself used to do it in the past. This shows a decline of the reflective practice of the informant. Sarah and Muneer also felt the need for documenting teaching and learning problems before teachers forget them.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.5 Lack of Motivation**

Ahmed was demotivated by the low payment he got from UST. He was also unhappy that the colleges did not motivate teachers to have some gathering for discussing teaching and learning issues friendly and openly and share their teaching experiences. He believes that the lack of extrinsic motivation from the colleges

constrained the teachers to hold such meetings. Such demotivating context constrained the reflective practice of the informant.

Some more examples were cited by Sarah who talked about some teachers being demotivated to develop professionally. She said:

I know teachers here at the university who taught me; they are still the same. They have no desire to change or gain higher status. We are now the same, you know, with some of my teachers. We are both MA holders, and this really has to do with the teacher himself; he has to be self-motivated to learn new ideas and change.

Sarah mentioned that such teachers lacked the interest to discuss teaching and learning activities in the department seriously:

They have no interest to do other things, you know, other than teaching. I try to do it in some other ways, like when we share something to be done for the department, like action research or something that can enable me and other teachers to work together on something; and this is not taken seriously. And they are not ready.

She mentioned that she attended a biweekly seminar in the department of English. However, she believes it was not that interesting or beneficial as teachers presented old topics in a traditional way which usually ended with heated arguments in front of the students.

Sarah believes that the heads of departments in different colleges seemed to lack interest to improve the teaching and learning process by making any changes. She felt that the reason might be due to the big load on the heads of the departments and the lack of enough full time teaching staff. Unlike Ahmed who blamed the university, Sarah indicated that the departments should hold the responsibility of improving the teaching and learning process and they are to be blamed for the

demotivated teachers. She justified her view by stating that the university presidency advocates all kinds of reform to improve the teaching and learning context.

However, Sarah said that she started losing interest in teaching perhaps because of the routine action she repeated in all classes. This reveals the essence of reflective practice in motivating teachers to be innovative. For Muneer: “There is no motivation from the academic environment itself”. He claimed that the sources of demotivation include peers and administrators.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.6 Lack of Effective Communication**

The informants revealed that the lack of effective communication among teachers affected their reflective practices. For example, in the context where most of the teachers in the English department were males and only very few of them were fresh female teachers, Sarah claimed that she faced difficulty in communicating with male teachers for doing some collaborative work in the department.

Clearly, Hassan stated that miscommunication with the university administration affected the discussion of the teaching and learning issues. He emphasized that he was not able to solve the problems he encountered because of “miscommunication, inconveniences”. Thus, as far as there was no effective communication, reflective practice would be difficult to achieve.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.7 Traditional Beliefs**

The discussion with the informants about teaching and learning issues revealed that ‘traditional beliefs’ constrained the engagement of teachers in effective reflection.



Sarah revealed that some teachers did not want to change due to their beliefs. She narrated that “no matter how many courses you provide them with, no matter how many sessions and seminars you hold, it has to do with their own beliefs”. According to Sarah, some university teachers had traditional beliefs about teaching and learning. She said that those teachers viewed the students as passive learners and their traditional beliefs constrained their reflection on the old techniques of the teaching and learning process in the university.

She even claimed that those teachers were teaching texts they themselves studied long time ago: “Most teachers here still teach the same things they were taught. They never update whatever they have...even some texts now, I remember, the texts I studied, which are STILL given to students today and this is a real problem”.

Hassan admitted that some teachers were still following traditional ways of teaching, himself included. He also added: “I feel I am still in the shell of traditional way of teaching”. Though he claimed that there was a slight change in his beliefs about teaching and learning from what he had in the past, but he admitted that it was not dramatic.

Inconsistently, Hassan claimed that he believes in involving students in class discussions. Nevertheless, he claimed that his way of teaching was attributed to the people around him like students, colleagues and executives who still believe in the traditional way of teaching and learning and did not help him to change. For Muneer, teachers’ practices were influenced by their old teachers’ beliefs when they came to deal with teaching and learning issues.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.8 Lack of Awareness**

Though Ahmed claimed that he tried to overcome students' learning problems when they arise, he admitted that the lack of awareness about his teaching problem constrained his reflection on that problem. He only knew about it through the coordinator.

Unless a teacher is aware of his/ her own problem, he/ she cannot reflect on it. This was the gist of what I got from Sarah when she was narrating her stories about her teaching experience in her department: "Sometimes you are not aware of the problem, you know, until you hear about it from another teacher; and then you realize, yes, it is a problem". She stressed that she was unaware of her actual performance and the teaching and learning problems in her classes till she saw her video-taped lesson. Thus, the lack of awareness constrained Sarah's reflection.

From Ameen's perspective, teacher's lack of awareness about the teaching and learning problems could be an obstacle for treating those problems. For Muneer, "sometimes a teacher may not be aware of his or her teaching problem". Such lack of awareness might constrain his reflection on what he did not know. Muneer admitted that he himself had no idea how to evaluate himself. This constrained his reflection on his teaching performance.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.9 Lack of Commitment**

Generally speaking, when teachers do not feel the responsibility towards their profession, we do not expect them to engage in a reflective process for discussing the

teaching and learning worries and concerns. Hassan, who had some teaching experience in public university, claimed that most of the teachers in public university did not think back on the teaching and learning process. He revealed that such teachers were uncommitted as they did not care about students. To put it in his words: “In the university level especially in public schools, most of the teachers are not concerned with the problems of the students. A teacher gives his lecture and if the students don’t ask or give him enough feedback, he doesn’t care”.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.10 Lack of Classroom Management**

Ameen stated that if teachers fail to manage their classes well, then they may fail to manage teaching and learning problems. He said, “if there is a lack of control, a lack of class management, then the result is teaching failure”. Thus, the lack of well-organized classes will create an obstacle in front of the teacher to reflect on the emerging problems in the class.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.11 Heavy Teaching Load**

Ahmed narrated that teachers were unable to sit and discuss teaching and learning issues. He remarked: “At the university, people are very busy and teach a lot of subjects. So we don’t very frequently sit to discuss real matters”. As an appropriate solution to the problem of heavy teaching and administrative loads, Ahmed suggested that the university has “to increase the number of teachers”.

The issue of the teaching and administrative load of UST teaching staff and its consequences was fully narrated by Sarah. She revealed that the heavy teaching load hindered her reflection on the process of students’ learning: “Now it’s impossible for

me to follow each and every student because we have, you know, heavy teaching loads”. As such, she felt that there was a gap between her and the students as she did not have enough time to sit with them and understand their likes and dislikes due to her new administrative responsibility in Learning Centre at UST, being the director of the Centre.

Additionally, she expressed her dissatisfaction about the heavy teaching load and administrative work which constrained her reflection: “I feel unable to manage teaching and working here in the Learning Centre. I do need a lot of time to prepare for my classes. I do not find that enough time to focus on preparation for classes”. She also narrated: “I really do not have enough time to think back about my teaching”.

When I probed Ameen to justify why teachers do not spend time to discuss the emerging teaching and learning problems in the university, he narrated: “Teachers are heavy loaded. If we go to our college and the others at the university level, the whole thing in teaching here is to be loaded upon teachers”.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.12 Insufficient Training**

Ahmed mentioned that the training held at UST was not sufficient. He narrated: “we get like once a year training at the university; we can be taught how to teach students and also how to learn new experience that we might need during our teaching”. This shows the lack of training for UST teachers in general and English teachers in particular. He indicated that like other teachers, he had to attend such workshops which seemed to be short and ineffective as they were all theoretical talks. He

stressed that even in such training sessions which he attended, the teachers did not discuss the teaching and learning problems. Ahmed mentioned that language institutes provided him with training sessions which he always wanted to have at UST. He said that such training sessions enhanced his professional development.

Sarah stated that the deficiency in treating the teaching and learning problems in her classes was attributed to the insufficient training she received during her education in the university. She mentioned that the training she had through the British Council was based on personal contact, but had nothing to do with the department of English or UST. For her, even such training was not enough. Sarah believes that teachers in the department of English could be improved through training planned by the English department. Sarah confirmed that the lack of active training made her unaware of the actual teaching and learning problems which she only realized when she saw the video-taped class. She repeatedly emphasized that “there is no active training for teachers”.

Notably, Hassan also indicated that he received training during his teaching in the university through the British Council. However, he emphasized that attending some seminars was not enough as such seminars did not help teachers to reflect on their teaching and students’ learning problems:

The topics discussed in the seminars were not enough. We could have discussed a lot of topics actually. We had a lot of problems in the process of teaching which were worthy discussing. I think we need to do more workshops and more seminars on the problems of language teaching and learning.

Ameen received several training sessions on the methodology of EFL outside UST. At UST, he received training on teaching methodology in general, but nothing on

EFL. He narrated: “At UST, we had several training sessions, but they were not more focused on teaching, particularly teaching English as a foreign language; rather they were focused on almost all methodological aspects of teaching in general”. However, Ameen claimed that even the training he attended was not beneficial for him as nothing was new or challenging; rather, he said, it was something he studied in the university.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.13 Unsupportive System**

Ahmed’s stories revealed the lack of support which teachers expect to get from the administrators at UST. He believes that the management of the college constrains teachers’ reflection on the teaching and learning problems. He mentioned:

The university usually produces good talks about these things. They really provide the opportunities for colleges to do these things, but maybe because of lack of certain budget that the deanship at every college cannot regulate this kind of meetings every month; or they don’t follow up.

He also narrated that he could not do fruitful reflection on teaching and learning problems due to the lack of support from the coordinator. In addition, he mentioned that the social setting in which he could be blended with other teachers to discuss their worries and concerns was missing. Regrettably, he voiced out the lack of support for teachers to engage in reflective practice in the university: “This is something that we lack in the university”.

Sarah indicated that there was a lack of support for teachers from the department of English: “Everything the teachers do is just individual; it has nothing to do with the department”. She always hoped for support from the department in terms of the facilities that would help her to work in a conducive teaching and learning

environment. She said “the department should help me. I need to have some other, you know, somebody to help with regards to the materials and other things, but I still dream to get them done”.

She stated that there was a lack of cooperation and support among colleagues in the department of English which hindered her from sharing teaching and students’ learning experiences with other teachers. When she was asked about the reasons for the lack of cooperation among the teachers, she blamed the department for the lack of arrangement for teachers to sit with each other, share experiences and discuss problems. Sarah believes that teachers’ teaching experiences should be discussed and managed through the department where teachers could be provided with necessary help:

A teacher makes use of his previous experiences in teaching and tries to improve his present teaching practice. I believe this is something that has to be managed through the department where teachers should be provided with some kind of help; but in reality, this is something that is not possible.

Sarah claimed that she did not get support from the department to implement her beliefs about students’ assessment pertaining to reading. She said that she was not able to reflect on the old assessment criteria prescribed by the department pertaining to reading skills. She stated that she could not translate her belief in the learner-centered approach into practice due to the lack of support from the department. She said, “if I want to change, I need a lot of support which is not available to me”.

Sarah also shed more light on how to overcome the lack of support in the department. She suggested that to overcome the lack of support in the English department, there should be cooperation between the teachers and the head of the

English department. This could push all the department staff including the head of the department to work together and support each other. Her view revealed the lack of systematic and critical reflection on the teaching and learning process in the department of English. She narrated that treating the teaching and learning problems “needs a lot of support from other sides,” and that “the department should always provide opportunities for exchanging ideas”. Based on Sara’s narration, the lack of support for the teachers in the English department constrains their reflection.

Hassan revealed his high expectation of the university support for the teaching and learning system. He described the university as “the best of the worst”, comparing UST to other public and private universities in Yemen. He claimed that there was a lack of a supportive system for effective teaching and learning process. He described the administrative system at UST as unsupportive as it does not encourage teachers to discuss their teaching and learning problems.

Unlike Sarah or Hassan, Ameen did not blame the department or the university in the first place for the lack of support for teachers to engage in collaborative discussions of teaching and learning problems. Rather, he claimed that teachers did not engage in effective discussions of the teaching and learning process because there is no effective follow up from the college. Muneer gave us an idea about what happens in public universities pertaining to reflection on the teaching and learning problems. He stated that there is no support for teachers’ discussions about teaching and learning issues in the public universities.



#### **4.5.1.2.2.14 Lack of Facilities**

When Ahmed shared some of the obstacles he faced when he reflected on the teaching and learning process, he said that the lack of facilities in the university constrained the treatment of the teaching and learning problems. He remarked: “We don’t have a lot of resources. We don’t have a good lab. ..We don’t have headphones. We don’t have, you know, screens to show students something. It really shocks. Sorry to say that; but this is one of the problems”.

Sarah emphasized that the lack of the teaching and learning facilities was a constraint for her to engage in deep thinking on the teaching and learning process. When she talked about the ideal teaching classroom, she said: “I really dream of a class where all the facilities that the teacher needs are available...”

Hassan spoke about the lack of materials in the theoretical part of translation which might lead to students and teachers’ lack of competency that would affect the practical part. He mentioned: “In my area which is translation, the books are not enough, especially in the theoretical part, perhaps due to the lack of specialists in my area”. He explained the importance of the theoretical part: “The theoretical part in translation, through which you can judge that doing this translation or that translation is proper or improper, is crucial”.

Muneer who has a rich teaching experience in public university admitted the lack of facilities in the university context. That lack of facilities has created a non-reflective environment which constrained the reaction between the teacher and students. In words, he mentioned: “In Sana’a University, for example, if you are thinking of

developing your way of teaching by using the data show, this facility is not there. Then you try to teach as others do using the traditional way”. He further added that even the “students sometimes can’t buy books. They can’t go even to search or serve the net. I think this is also one of the hindrances that may affect the teaching and learning process”.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.15 Lack of Students’ Interaction**

The informants revealed that the lack of interaction between the students and the teacher constrains the reflection process. They claimed that passive students may not reveal their learning difficulties. As such, the teacher will not be aware of the students’ learning problems which will, thus, remain unsolved. Sarah indicated that although some teachers in the department of English were assigned to coordinate students’ problems, those students were not aware of the real learning problems they faced which could be passed on to the coordinators for discussing and finding appropriate solutions to them. She narrated that the lack of interaction between the students and the coordinators constrained the reflection on the students’ problems.

Hassan stated that the students’ shyness might create some difficulty for them to realize their learning problems and how to solve them. When he talked about how he discussed students’ learning problems, he said that “some of them are too shy to ask and here comes the problem”. Muneer also mentioned that the lack of students’ interaction might cause unclear picture about the learning problems that they faced which might constrain the teacher’s reflection.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.16 Nature of the Course**

Muneer revealed that the nature of the course may constrain the students' interaction with the teacher especially in linguistic courses as the teacher becomes the sender of information and the students are seen as receivers. For him, the belief that language teaching is a matter of involvement of teacher and students together vanishes while teaching linguistic courses. Given that in such linguistics courses the interaction between the teacher and students is very limited, he said, "when problems appear, teachers think about the solutions". For instance, Muneer changed a prescribed textbook when the students did not find it.

#### **4.5.1.2.2.17 Unconducive Environment**

The informants were not happy about the teaching and learning environment at UST in general and during the political unrest in particular as it became more problematic and led to unfavorable consequences pertaining to teachers' reflective practices. However, it was perceived differently by the informants.

Ahmed indicated that the unconducive learning and teaching environment was a problem for him as he believes in the communicative approach to teach English to students. But he claimed that his beliefs could not be translated into practices especially when he had big classes with many students: "You cannot really follow up students' projects and assignments if you have a big number". That was an obstacle to the teacher's teaching and also to his reflection on the teaching and learning process. He believes that the university tried to provide the best environment, but the teaching and learning environment still seems to be unconducive: "We still have some problems like the number of students and other equipment. These things, I

think by time, can be avoided”. In comparison to other public universities, Ahmed considered the environment at UST as better; however, it was still uncondusive. He claimed that he did his best to teach in such an environment, but that could be different if he taught in a more conducive environment.

Sarah revealed that the British Council through which she received some training pertaining to teaching and learning issues suspended such training sessions for security issues in Yemen. Those security issues had nothing to do with the political unrest which started lately in the country after the uprising of February 11, 2011.

Hassan believes that the environment at UST is not very conducive; however, it is better than other public and private universities in Yemen: “This university, I think, is doing, you know, a tremendous job in comparison with other universities”. He also revealed that during the political unrest, there were some discouraging things in the university. The administrators did not consider the teacher’s personal excuses even if someone was ill. Hassan did not only describe his case, but he also gave a picture of the environment surrounding all teachers at UST myself included.

He narrated that the surrounding environment affected his productivity. That is, the unsecured atmosphere in the country had a negative impact on the discussions of the teaching and learning issues in the university. He mentioned that in normal situations (before the political unrest), the English department had a formal way of discussing teaching and learning problems through holding seminars for teachers and students together.

Ameen's narration about his reflection on the teaching and learning issues revealed his severe experience pertaining to the unsecured atmosphere which surrounded the teaching and learning process during the political unrest. He believes that teachers should only reflect on their lives, but not on teaching and learning issues as the atmosphere was not safe at all. As he was sharing this information with me in one of the interviews, I felt the risky atmosphere when none of us might be safe especially when I heard the sound of explosions not very far from the university building. To illustrate, the country was politically unstable and some conflicts were still going on between the protesters and the regime. The latter kept showering some of the areas with rockets and shelling including a military camp which was close to the university area. As Ameen remarked: "The environment that's surrounding teaching and learning these days is not conducive ... From time to time, you hear bombing, shelling, explosions ..."

Muneer stated that the current environment in the university in general did not encourage teachers to work with full energy. He mentioned that the current surrounding environment influenced teachers' beliefs and practices negatively as the teachers were unable to prepare for their teaching properly because of electricity and internet problems, and sometimes could not arrive to the university on time due to transportation problems and political unrest in the country. This affected the teaching and learning process as a whole and the treatment of the emerging teaching and learning problems.

Additionally, Muneer viewed the current situation in the country (i.e., the political unrest) as the main source of obstacles to the teaching and learning process which

constrained teachers' reflection. He remarked: "In such circumstances which the country is undergoing, there are a lot of obstacles especially transportation. Students come late. In most cases they are absent, boys in particular; also there are many other problems".

To sum up, from the informants' narrations, I inferred that the informants seem to practice informal personal and collaborative reflections. Some of those practices are reflective actions and the others are only routine actions. Formal reflection only appears in the narration of two informants. Pertaining to the time of reflection, reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are inferred from the informants' stories. The factors which enable and constrain the informants' reflection are associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment. The personality of the teacher, reading and teaching experience are found to play prominent roles in enabling reflection. On the contrary, the personality of the teacher, heavy teaching load, lack of support, lack of training, lack of extrinsic motivation and the uncondusive environment appear to play important roles in constraining teachers' reflection.

#### **4.5.2 Classroom Observations**

Although most of the informants in this study emphasized that classroom observation is 'sensitive', all of them welcomed me for observing their classes. They all perceived it as an instrument through which I would collect data for my research study. As such, throughout the classroom observations, I was able to detect the informants' reflective teaching activities and the extent to which their claims about

the teaching and learning issues match the actual practices. The data of classroom observations revealed the factors which affected the informants' reflection.

#### **4.5.2.1 Practices (Extent of Reflection)**

I detected the informants' practices in dealing with emerging teaching and learning issues in class which showed the extent of their reflection. This included the level, type and pattern of reflection.

##### **4.5.2.1.1 Level of Reflection**

I witnessed that all the informants engaged in collaborative reflection with students to help them overcome their learning difficulties. For instance, I recorded reflective aspects in Ahmed's writing classes for BBA and BIT male students in the first semester of the academic year 2010-2011. It was a three credit hour course taught as one class per week. Some of his practices included clarifying students' doubts and answering their questions.

Notably, what Ahmed claimed he believes in during the interviews was seen in action inside the classroom such as the adoption of the learner-centered approach and group work activities. The learner-centered approach was evident in the learning-teaching context in his writing classes as the discussions of the teaching and learning process took a two-way interaction between the students and the teacher. Yet, in some parts of the classes when students were supposed to be engaged in more writing activities, the teacher appeared to be the master and did much of the talk while students were listening.

Similarly, I also observed Sarah reflecting on students' learning issues in her reading classes for second year female students in their first semester in the English department. It was a three credit hour course taught in two classes per week. During her teaching, the teacher responded to the students' questions and commented on their responses and tardiness for classes.

From my classroom observations to the teaching and learning process in Sarah's classes, I witnessed that classroom management, group work activities, and her encouragement for students to participate in classroom activities enabled her discussions with students and assisted her to overcome their problems. To some extent, Sarah succeeded to engage students in a two-way interaction which pushed towards practicing her beliefs in the learner-centered approach. For instance, in one of her reading classes, she gave the students an opportunity to express their opinions about "Languages", the topic they were discussing and to be critiques of their own by commenting on each other's answers. Yet, not all the students actively engaged in a two-way interaction. She admitted that a lot of the teaching and learning activities in her classes needed a pause to reflect upon such as how to activate passive students in class.

I observed Hassan reflecting on some of the teaching and learning issues in his theories of translation classes for third level students of translation program in the department of English in the second semester of the academic year 2010-2011. For example, I found him self-confident, teaching his students, discussing with them difficulties related to previous classes, responding to their questions and commenting on their answers. However, I noticed that most of the talk done in classes was by the



teacher and only very few students participated in class discussion. That created a gap between the beliefs and practices of the teacher and slowed his reflection. What Hassan claimed that he believes in (i.e., engaging students in classroom activities) was not evident in the natural teaching and learning situation in classroom. Rather, he appeared to follow the traditional way of teaching, the teacher-centered approach.

I also observed Ameen's three credit hour vocabulary class which was taught twice a week for first year students in their second semester. During Ameen's teaching, I witnessed how he introduced the students to the topic of the lesson (i.e., money) step by step by asking questions and getting answers from the students. I also witnessed his reflection on certain emerging issues in the class such as explaining emerging difficult words that students fail to understand, responding to students' questions and commenting on their answers. He also commented on the extra vocabulary he gave to students and how they could make use of it. Obviously, Muneer always paused to respond to the students' questions, comment on their responses and clarify the problematic points in his phonetics and phonology classes.

#### **4.5.2.1.2 Type of Reflection**

The types of reflection I witnessed in the informants' classes pertaining to time included reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. I also noticed irrelevant reflection-in-action and lack of reflection-in-action with some teachers. The most common type practiced by all the informants during my observations was reflection-in-action. I witnessed the engagement of all the informants with their students in this type of reflection as the teachers tried to discuss the students' emerging learning difficulties and give them immediate feedback on

such difficulties. Ahmed engaged his students in classroom discussions adopting pair work and group work activities and managed to treat their emerging learning difficulties by giving the students the chance to correct one another and providing his final comments. Pair work and group activities also gave more scope for the students to discuss their learning problems with the teacher who clarified their doubts and answered all their questions. This was the context where Ahmed's reflection was apparent during the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

In her classes, Sarah motivated passive students and encouraged them to participate in classroom discussions to stay focused:

During the second classroom observation, Sarah realized that many students were not participating in classroom discussions. To engage those passive students in the discussion, she kept encouraging them to answer the questions she asked or the ones in the exercises in their textbook. She sometimes used motivating expressions like "who would give it a try? And some other times, she called the students by name. Using such a way, the teacher motivated the students to participate actively in the class discussions. In addition, when the students had some doubts about some of the points under discussions, she clarified things to them before she went further. However, in the third classroom observation, I only observed the teacher choosing the students who raised hands to answer questions, and neglecting passive students. (Field notes)

Hassan followed the strategy of raising questions about the lesson and getting the answers from the students who were supposed to prepare the lesson at home and come to discuss things in the class. I highlighted this in my field notes:

The teaching and learning strategy that the teacher followed in his classes was that he asked some students to read part of the text in the handout individually and he asked questions about it. Some students were able to answer the teacher's questions as they had prepared for the class at home. The teacher explained difficult emerging points which students had problems with; nonetheless, some students seemed to be unsatisfied with some of the answers as I observed them gazing at the teacher expecting more clarification. During the discussion of the lesson, only very few students interacted with the teacher actively. The active students were sitting in the first two rows. Other students, who were sitting behind, were passive;

nevertheless, the teacher did not reflect on such passive students except one late student who did not even carry her handout to the class. That teacher asked that student about the lesson and her handout. The student could not answer the teacher's question about the lesson. She said that her home was messy because of the war which broke out in her neighborhood lately and that she could not find her handout. (Field notes)

In his second class, Hassan started the lesson by highlighting the points he was going to discuss with the students 'the main strategies for dealing with the equivalence translation problems'. Then he asked the students to provide explanations and examples about the main points. Whenever students fail to explain certain points or provide examples about them, he gave examples and elaborated things for the students:

During the second classroom observation, very few students, about seven, were noticed participating in classroom discussions and those students were sitting in the first row. Other students were sitting passively and did not participate until the teacher asked one student to answer a question, but when the student failed to answer, the teacher gave the answer to that question. Almost the students who answered the teacher's questions were the ones who often asked the teacher for some clarifications. I also observed that the teacher paused during the students' inquiries and clarified things before he moved to a new point. (Field notes)

During the third classroom observation which I video-taped, I witnessed Hassan telling the students that they could stop him any time during the class and ask if they had doubt or even come to him outside the classroom. In such a class, I observed the teacher moving step by step, pausing and answering questions when raised by the students and making sure that no one had a question about the previous part before he moved to the second part. I did not witness any pair work or group work activities at least in the classes I attended with Hassan. Moreover, the teacher did not pay attention to passive students.

In my observation to Ameen's first class, I only saw six students out of the 25 in the list. I only observed two students interacted with the teacher actively. In such a context, I witnessed a two-way interaction in a very limited scope between the teacher and the two active students. It was only while doing one of the exercises, the teacher called some students by name to provide answers to the questions. Therefore, what seemed to be common in the teacher's classes was the teacher-centered approach as the teacher explained things and students listened. It was rare that he asked and the students answered his questions.

In another classroom observation, eight students were present and Ameen involved more students in classroom discussion, but the teacher also seemed to dominate classroom teaching. The two-way teaching strategy was not seen. During my first, second and third classroom observations, I noted:

Ameen only presented vocabulary by uttering the words to the students, writing some of them on the board or reading them in the handout or paper. In case the students did not understand a word, the teacher gave them an immediate feedback on the meaning of the word. Teaching aids like pictures, drawings or videos were not noticed during my classroom observations. However, students seemed to be interested in learning new vocabulary. The teacher intended to involve all students in doing some exercises calling students by name to encourage them to participate, but it turned out that most of the answers were given by the same active students who participated all the time, at least in the three classes I observed. (Field notes)

Yet, there were several things that Ameen could have reflected on such as lack of students' handouts/ books, students' absenteeism, and students' passivity in class. The unsecured atmosphere might have constrained the teacher's reflection on such issues. Moreover, pair-work and group-work activities where smart and weak students could work together and learn from each other were not evident during any of the classroom observations. Such activities could give the teacher the chance to

reflect on students' doubts. What I inferred from my discussions with the teacher about his classes including the video-taped class was that such discussions brought the teacher to the real sense of reflection and its importance. The teacher admitted that he learned a lot through this experience of reflection on his teaching and students' learning process.

During teaching, I observed Muneer encouraging all the students to engage in classroom discussions including passive students. He called those students by name and praised them when they responded to his questions. He was going around the class while teaching giving some life to the class. I witnessed the teaching strategy he followed in his teaching which I recorded in my field notes:

Muneer would explain a point and throw questions about that point to the whole class, got the answers from the students and then reflected on those answers. He provided students with the model answers. He even used the board to write definitions of some new terms and examples. In one of his classes, he used some cards to refer back to the main points he was discussing. He discussed the parts of the lesson step by step, clarified things to the students, paused and repeated some of the points he explained so far when the students asked for repetition. He often asked students if they had a problem before he moved to a new point. In his third class, the teacher gave students a chance to practice reading some words putting the stress on the right syllable. Muneer ended his third class which was the last but class in the semester by giving the students an idea about the nature of the final exam as requested by the students. (Field notes)

In my classroom observations, I was able to detect the informants' diversity in the types of reflection they practiced in class. The interaction between the teachers and the students in the classroom gave a room for reflection to take place. There were evidences of irregular reflection-for-action practiced by Ahmed, Sarah, Hassan and Ameen and reflection-on-action that Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer engaged in. However, there was irrelevant reflection-in-action practiced by Sarah and there was

also a lack of reflection-in-action which should be practiced by Sarah, Hassan and Ameen.

I witnessed one example of Ahmed's reflection-for-action in one of his classes. He provided the students with additional exercises which were related to the class. His preparation of such extra exercises indicated his reflection on his lesson plan before the teaching took place. Another example was what I observed and noted in the beginning of one of the classes:

In one of his classes, Ahmed did not begin the class before he requested a student to draw the curtains of the closed window and switch the lamps on as it was winter time and the weather was cold. The teacher asked students if they were comfortable and could see the board clearly. He tried to make the teaching and learning environment conducive for the students at least inside the class. However, the classroom was just big enough to accommodate the 20 students who attended the class. It would be very crowded for the 30 enrolled students if they showed up. During my presence in his three classes, I did not notice all the 30 students in the classroom. I knew from the teacher that some students had dropped the subject. (Field notes)

Similarly, Sarah prepared additional questions related to the lesson which were not available in the book. I noticed those questions when she wrote them on the board and asked the students to answer them. During her reflection, she revealed that she prepared such questions to introduce the new lesson to the students. Hassan also briefed the students about the test they would take and raised their awareness that tests are only tools for measuring their performance, but not means by their own.

In one of his classes, Ameen provided students with an additional vocabulary handout which revealed his reflection on students' performance and what could help them to improve. But, some students seemed to be passive. Muneer managed to treat some of his problems in advance. For example, when he was going to be late for one

of his classes, he called me and asked me to inform the students that he would be late for 30 minutes as he had a compensation class with some other students at UST.

Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer were seen reflecting on the previous lessons with students regularly. I observed Ahmed revising the previous lessons before he started the new ones. For example, he revised one of the lessons he already taught when he found that most of the students did not get the gist of that lesson. In addition, I observed Hassan revising and reflecting with the students on the previous classes and clarified students' doubts. However, the teaching and learning interaction between Hassan and the students during reflection-on-action process varied between one-way and two-way interaction. I also witnessed Muneer's regular reflection on previous classes before he started the new ones. He asked students questions, commented on their answers and gave them feedback.

Sarah practiced irrelevant reflections-in-action. For example, she asked students to do a reading aloud activity in her reading class and kept correcting their mispronounced words which deviated the reading skills to speaking skills given that the objective of the class was to develop the students' critical thinking skills. However, certain teaching and learning issues which seemed to be relevant were not reflected upon. For example, the informants could have reflected on students' absenteeism at least to make students feel that teachers follow up things. Sarah did not reflect on students' unpunctuality as many students came to class late in a usual atmosphere when the situation was secured. She did not reflect on the passivity of some students. Hassan did not reflect on the lack of cooperation between the smart students and their peers in the class. Encouraging pair work and group work

activities among students could advocate the students' collaborative work. As a result, in Hassan's classes, the passivity of some students was not reflected upon by the teacher. Likewise, Ameen did not reflect on the passive students who did not participate in classroom discussions as he focused on the active students most of the time. He did not also reflect on the lack of students' handouts which affected their participation in the class.

#### **4.5.2.1.3 Pattern of Reflection**

The pattern of reflection which emerged from my classroom observations to all the informants included routine actions and non-critical reflection. The routine practices lacked the teachers' evaluation of the solutions to the students' learning problems (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). However, Ahmed, Sarah and Muneer showed some sort of reflective actions during their classroom practices.

For example, Ahmed and Sarah engaged students in pair-work and group-work activities and commented on their responses. Muneer involved almost all students in classroom discussions including passive students. Such practices revealed the sense of reflection, that is, his awareness of passive and weak students assisted him to solve their problems by engaging them in class discussions. Nevertheless, such reflections seemed to be non-critical as they represented limited informal reflective practices with students. Such reflections could become critical if they were taken to a wider community of practice where the informants can share their experiences with other teachers formally and systematically.



#### **4.5.2.2 Factors Affecting Reflection**

From my classroom observations to the teaching and learning process of all the informants in the natural context, I identified certain factors which enabled and constrained their reflection. I categorized the factors which enabled reflection as factors related to the teacher, students and teaching methods. On the other hand, the factors which constrained reflection were associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment.

##### **4.5.2.2.1 Enabling Factors**

Reflection enabling factors which are related to the teacher include the teachers' awareness of the students' learning problems, teacher's personality, teaching experience and teacher's competency. Some enabling factors are associated with the teacher and students such as the students' extrinsic motivation and interaction. Other factors which are related to the students involve students' attitudes towards the course and intrinsic motivation. Factors related to the teaching methods include effective teaching strategy, effective classroom management, good preparation, effective group work activities and clarity of class objectives.

###### **4.5.2.2.1.1 Teacher's Awareness of Students' Learning Problems**

My observations to Ahmed's classes revealed his awareness of the students' learning problems which made him pause and reflect on the students' learning difficulties. For example, the teacher started one of his classes reflecting on the previous lesson, but when he realized that most of the students had forgotten the lesson, he had to explain the previous lesson again. From my observation, only five students out of 17 seemed

to remember the previous lesson as the class took place after the Eid holiday. That was confirmed by the teacher in his reflection on the class during the post classroom observation interview. Ahmed illustrated: “If you noticed, only five students still remember the things I gave them before. Some of the students did not completely understand the lesson. OK! They kept nodding their heads, but they did not understand”.

Another issue that Ahmed realized during teaching was the passivity of some students during classroom discussions which the teacher overcame by encouraging the passive students to participate and asking them questions. A third example to illustrate Ahmed’s awareness and concern about his students learning problem was that during the break time he photocopied some of the pages from the book for those students who did not have books or handouts to engage them in the classroom discussion.

I observed Sarah pushing and encouraging students especially the low proficiency level students to participate in the class discussions. Those weak students were clearly identified from their deficiency in answering even simple questions. She was even aware of some students’ problems especially those who wasted time chatting together when she had assigned them a task to read. She drew the attention of such students to focus on reading. In her second class, before she began the new lesson, the teacher asked students about the mid-term test and how they did and she spent a few minutes reflecting on that issue with the students.

Hassan demonstrated limited awareness of his classes. For instance, he asked a student who was sitting alone about her handout. Towards the end of the first observed class, he had to end the class when he realized that students became very exhausted after they had covered a big portion. In the third observed class, he gave students an idea about the nature of the final exam they were expecting after two weeks when he felt that the students were anxious about exams. The teacher also reflected on a point he had explained so far when he found that students did not understand it. Another thing that Hassan himself confirmed during his reflection in the post classroom observation interview was that he had to revise the class he taught so far because so many students were absent for that class. He revealed his reflection on that class when he said that “it was like a revision because a lot of students were absent. So yah, I remember”. However, Hassan did not focus on the passive students in the class. Rather, he engaged active students in classroom discussions.

In my observations to Ameen’s classes, I found him explaining the meaning of some new vocabulary and writing extra examples on the board when he realized that the students did not understand the words. In addition, in the first observed class, he paused in the very beginning of the class to treat the problem of students’ tardiness as he knew that they were available in the faculty building, but they were late for his class. He even once reflected on the repeated cell-phone buzzes which disturbed the class and managed to control the disturbance caused by the students’ cell phones. Ameen’s awareness of the students’ low proficiency level in English made him translate some of the unfamiliar words for the students into their mother tongue (Arabic). This was what the teacher spoke about in one of his reflections on his classes “there are, you know, different proficiency levels. Students, you know, are

quite poor in terms of vocabulary. Then I had to translate in Arabic for some students”.

Muneer was aware of the passivity of some students in his classes. When he threw questions to the whole class, he realized that some students did not raise hands like others. I clearly observed him calling such students by name and encouraging them to participate. He also paused and clarified doubts when he realized that students had some problems with the things he had explained. In addition, he was aware of the students’ problem in stressing the appropriate syllable of polysyllabic words and to help them overcome the problem, he gave them a chance to practice.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.2 Teacher’s Personality**

I was impressed by Ahmed’s cheerful and open-minded personality from the first classroom observation. For instance, when some students provided incorrect answers or asked questions about things he had just explained, he smiled at students and provided them with the appropriate answers very patiently. Even when students informed him at the end of the class that time was up, he stopped teaching the final part of the lesson as he felt the students wanted to leave. Even when the class was disturbed by student’s cell phone rings, the teacher only gazed at the student with a smile and the student switched off the cell phone immediately. My field notes highlighted some of his personality traits:

During my classroom observations to Ahmed’s classes, I witnessed his friendly way while dealing with students. When they participated, he smiled at them and praised them using expressions such as ‘good’, ‘well done’ etc. Following that way, he motivated them to engage in group work activities and answer his questions. I also noticed his patience when he answered all the students’ questions and clarified their doubts. Ahmed even distributed copies of the same exercise, which he photocopied, to those who did not have books. He passed by and clarified things to all the groups. After the students finished

doing the activity, he asked the groups to swap the work and comment on it. Then he gave his final comment based on what the students said. (Field notes)

Sarah had an enthusiastic character as she kept encouraging her students in particular the passive ones using expressions like “who will give it a try?” and succeeded to engage them in classroom discussions. She also felt the responsibility to help poor students patiently by giving additional explanation when necessary; and she even wrote the answers for them on the board. She also praised students who provided answers to her questions using expressions such as ‘Thank you!’ and ‘Good!’, and encouraged others to participate calling them by name.

Hassan’s personality which was marked by patience, flexibility and strictness was one main reason for enabling him to cope with and reflect on the teaching and learning issues in his classes. For example, when the students asked him some questions, he smiled and provided answers to their questions even though some of the questions seemed to be very simple. He also provided written examples on the board. Moreover, when the students felt exhausted at the end of the class and requested him to wind up the class, he responded to their request positively.

In my first classroom observation to his class, Ameen was very strict with the students who were late for the class. That is, when he knew that the students were available in the building, but late for his class, he told them that next time he would mark them absent. Ameen’s strictness and his reflection-in-action on the students’ tardiness were very fruitful. In my second and third classroom observations, I noticed that almost all the students were in the classroom in time. However, the teacher was

seen dealing with students very friendly. One more thing was that the teacher asked students to keep their cell phones silent when they were buzzing repeatedly.

Muneer was observed encouraging his students and praising them for the efforts they made to participate in class discussion. He also showed a combination of strictness and flexibility. For instance, in one of his classes, he did not allow late students to get in the class, but after the students apologized, he let them in. During his reflection on that class, the teacher justified: “actually, I don’t want them to miss the class”.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.3 Teaching Experience**

The informants’ teaching experience enabled them to reflect on the students’ learning problems successfully. For instance, I observed Ahmed reflecting on the students’ learning problems either the ones related to the previous classes or the current classes. Throwing some questions to the students about the previous lesson in the beginning of the class, he was able to identify the students’ problems and reflect on them successfully. In addition, he reflected on the current lessons by engaging the students in pair work and group work activities and treating the emerging problems.

Similarly, Sarah’s way of encouraging the students and engaging them in group-work activities resulted in the interaction of the students in the classroom discussion which enabled her to identify their learning difficulties and treat them. The way Hassan presented his lessons and responded to the students’ questions indicated that the teaching experience of the teacher has built the confidence of the teacher who appeared capable of handling the students’ learning problems. Ameen’s way of taking his students gradually into the heart of the lesson in an exciting way and

reflecting on the emerging vocabulary should be the result of a long teaching experience of the teacher. Muneer's classes which he always kept full of life, his several pauses during teaching and reflection on the students' problems speaks volumes of his teaching experience.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.4 Teacher's Competency**

Teacher's competency is essential for enabling reflection. During the teaching of the second and third lessons about jobs and money respectively, Ameen gave the students detailed information about some of the emerging vocabulary related to jobs and money which clarified students' doubts about the words they had problems with. The teacher's command of the subject matter assisted him to reflect on students' vocabulary problems and helped the students to overcome those problems.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.5 Students' Interaction**

In most of the informants' classes, I noticed how the students' interaction enabled teachers' reflection. For instance, in Ahmed's classes, the students' interaction with the teacher and also with each other during pair work and group work activities pushed the teacher to clarify the students' doubts about writing simple and compound sentences. The interaction between Sarah and her students during classroom discussion enabled her to identify the students' reading difficulties and reflect on them. Hassan's responses to the students' inquiries resulted from the interaction between the teacher and the students even though the interaction was limited. Hassan provided the students with more examples to elaborate the points he discussed with them about the strategies for dealing with equivalence problems in

translation. Moreover, the students' interaction during the revision part assisted the teacher to identify students' shortcomings and remedy them.

Like Hassan, Ameen only reflected on the answers provided by active students who interacted in classroom discussions. Remarkably, Muneer's classes were characterized by students' vivid interaction both in the revision part and the main lesson which made the teacher clear about students' learning problems. Based on students' interaction and their responses to his questions, the teacher provided the students with feedback and helped them overcome their difficulties. For example, when he identified the students' difficulty in stressing the right syllable in polysyllabic words, he gave them a chance to do more practice.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.6 Students' Attitudes towards the Course**

I witnessed that Hassan's students seemed to be exam oriented as they asked the teacher about the exam they would expect at the end of the semester. This attitude pushed Hassan to reflect on the students' inquiries. He tried to raise the students' awareness that exam was only a means for measuring their performance. He clarified that the main objective of the course was not to take exams, but to gain knowledge about the theories of translation. Similarly, I witnessed Muneer's reflection on the students' anxiety about the exam as he clarified the nature of the exam they would expect.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.7 Intrinsic Motivation**

In one of Ameen's vocabulary classes, I noticed that the students were interested to know more vocabulary about job. That stimulated the teacher to reflect on students'



desire and provided them with more vocabulary about jobs. Moreover, he provided students with additional lists of vocabulary which were related to the topics discussed in the classes.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.8 Extrinsic Motivation**

Ahmed and Sarah were obviously seen motivating the students to work individually and in groups by encouraging them and praising them for the efforts they made in discussions in class. Such stimulus assisted the teachers to identify the students' problems which emerged during classroom discussions and try to remedy them. In addition, Muneer's encouragement for students to engage in classroom discussions particularly passive students calling them by name helped him identify and reflect on the students' learning difficulties.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.9 Effective Teaching Strategy**

In the second class, Sarah engaged students in group work activities. She encouraged all in the groups to participate including passive students. She also gave the students the opportunity to express their own opinions about the topic discussed, languages. All these aspects which indicated a step towards a learner-centered approach assisted the teacher to overcome the problem of the students' passivity and engage them in classroom discussions. In his teaching, Hassan depended on students' preparation at home and the classroom was the place where he asked questions about different parts of the lesson and got answers from the students. In case the students did not answer questions or they had doubt about anything, he reflected on that part and clarified things to the students providing examples to support the answers.

Through my observations to his classes, Ameen introduced the lesson theoretically and then engaged the students in individual activities to answer some exercises in the handouts. When the students voluntarily provided wrong answers, he reflected on the students' errors and provided them with the appropriate answers. I observed Muneer's reflection on the previous lessons as he clarified the students' doubts about some of the points in those lessons. He also encouraged all the students and engaged them in classroom discussions. He paused several times and asked students if they had any problems about the points he explained so far. This strategy enabled the teacher to treat emerging problems immediately in class and the students seemed to be very comfortable about it.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.10 Effective Classroom Management**

Well organized classes assisted the teachers to reflect on the students' learning problems and achieve the aims of the lessons. For example, during one of the classroom activities, Ahmed organized the students in four groups in such a way that he assigned active students to be the leaders of the groups during their discussions of the different topic sentences and related supporting sentences. Such well-organized discussions were more life and helped the teacher to go around groups, checked their work and comment on it. Sarah's classes were characterized by a u-shape setting. That kind of setting made it easy for the students to move and form circles when the teacher asked them to discuss things in groups. The students were seen forming their group discussions quickly and the teacher was able to go around, monitor their work and reflect on their difficulties easily.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.11 Good Preparation**

Sarah's third class revealed her well-planned lesson which enabled her reflection on the students' learning issues. To illustrate, the teacher started her class by writing the title of the lesson 'Fables' on the board. She also wrote some questions which were not available in the book, but developed by the teacher as I knew from her during the interview. After she made the students answer the questions on the board orally, she asked them some questions about the picture in the beginning of the lesson in the book. In doing so, she took the students gradually to the heart of the topic which they started discussing using different individual, pair work and group work activities. Through such well-planned activities, the teacher was able to reflect on the students' doubts about perception questions and made students give their various opinions about fables.

In Hassan's classes, I realized the typical way he followed in conducting his classes. However, I inferred that his good preparation assisted him to teach his lessons very smoothly. He revised the previous class with students, clarified their doubts and answered their questions about it. Then he started the new lesson by discussing the points of the lesson one by one throwing questions to the students and getting the answers from them. In case students fail to provide appropriate answers, the teacher reflected on those answers and modified them. I observed Muneer's smooth presentation of his lessons and the students' interaction which enabled the teacher's reflection on emerging problems easily. From this, I inferred the teacher's good preparation for his lessons.

#### **4.5.2.2.1.12 Effective Group Work Activities**

Ahmed used effective group work activities in his classes. The discussions of students in groups gave them a chance to share and exchange experiences and at the same time helped them and the teacher to reflect on the learning difficulties they faced. The teacher listened to the students' discussions of the topics and clarified their doubts which emerged during the discussions. I highlighted this in my field notes:

Group work activities were the most effective activities I witnessed during my classroom observations to Ahmed and Sarah particularly when the teachers managed them well. They gave more scope for the teachers' reflection. For instance, I saw Ahmed engaging the students in effective group work activities through which he was able to move around and reflect on the students' learning emerging doubts and questions. Forming group work activities, Sarah also tried to engage the students in more discussions and reflected on their discussions. (Field notes)

#### **4.5.2.2.1.13 Clarity of Class Objectives**

From my observations to the teachers in their classes particularly, Hassan, Ameen and Muneer, I noticed that they made the students aware of the objectives of the classes in the beginning of each class. In so doing, both the teachers and students were aware of what they were seeking during the lessons. Thus, teachers reflected on the emerging issues in their classes based on the objectives of the lessons.

#### **4.5.2.2.2 Constraining Factors**

Reflection constraining factors which are related to the teacher include the teachers' tardiness, misconceptions, leniency and health problem. Factors related to the students are carelessness, passivity, low proficiency level and tardiness. Factors related to the teaching methods include lack of focus on objectives, lack of classroom management, ineffective teaching strategy and lack of using technology. Lack of

facilities is related to the institution; and lack of conducive environment is the environmental factor.

#### **4.5.2.2.1 Teacher's Tardiness**

Though my classroom observations to Ahmed's classes happened to be in a secured atmosphere, I did not see him in his class in the due time. Surely, that affected his reflection on the tardiness of the students which was common in all the classes I observed. Being late for his classes constrained his talking to the students about their tardiness. In addition, he did not have enough time to reflect on the students' performance effectively. Likewise, I also witnessed Hassan's tardiness to his classes, though he told me in the interview that he intended to be late to give the students a chance to be in class before he got in. The effect of such tardiness was obvious on Hassan's reflection on his teaching and the students' learning. In one of his classes, the teacher was about 20 minutes late and he had to end his class 15 minutes before the due time. That is, there was a clash in the schedule with another teacher who had a class in the same room. I obviously noticed that the teacher had to finish the lesson quickly without giving a chance for more discussions about the different parts of the lesson as usual.

#### **4.5.2.2.2 Misconceptions**

Repeatedly, I observed Sarah giving the students an opportunity to listen to the reading texts on the CD and read aloud. She even corrected their mispronounced words. That misconception of teaching reading skills to the students slowed her reflection on the students' reading skills as the focus was deviated from developing the students' reading skills to some other listening and speaking skills. When the

teacher reflected on that issue, she admitted that it was one of the traditional beliefs she inherited from some of her teachers in the university. She also mentioned that she did it in response to the students' request who wanted to listen to a model reading of the texts and at the same time she viewed it as a good chance of exposing students to the native speakers' accent.

#### **4.5.2.2.3 Leniency**

Ahmed's leniency was very obvious in his classes. He did not show strictness towards students who did not carry their books or handouts to class. If the students brought their books or handouts, the teacher could spend more time on discussing the students' learning emerging issues rather than writing some of the things which were available in the book on the board. He also did not touch the issue of students' tardiness for classes as he himself was late which in turn led to constraining his reflection.

The very common thing in Sarah's classes was her leniency. She did not reflect or comment on the students' tardiness which prevented them from being involved in classroom discussions fully. Sarah said: "I do not mind that students come late since they at least decided to attend and there are no marks for attendance. It really bothers and interrupts the class, but I have this personal belief that it is better than staying outside the class".

#### **4.5.2.2.4 Health Problem**

It is something usual that when a teacher is not feeling well, his or her performance will be affected. That was what happened to Sarah in her third class. I observed her

coughing during teaching. That affected her reflection on the passive students who were not involved in group work activities. During our discussion in the post-classroom observation interview, she admitted, that she even forgot some of the things she planned to do in class because she was not feeling well in that class.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.5 Students' Carelessness**

Notably, many students in Ahmed's classes had no books or handouts. That hindered the students from being fully engaged in class discussions. If the students cared about their books and handouts and carried them to the class, they would be able to engage in effective classroom discussion and get the teacher's clarification about the problems they faced. I found the same problem with some of Ameen's students who did not carry handouts to class. As a result those students were not able to participate actively in classroom discussions, and the teacher, therefore, did not know what difficulties they had to reflect on.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.6 Passivity**

Passivity of some students was a common constraining factor for teachers' reflection which I noticed during my observation to Ahmed's first class, Hassan's classes and Ameen's first and second classes. That passivity did not help the teachers to identify the problems of passive students. Yet, passivity itself was a problem that the teachers had to reflect on.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.7 Low Proficiency Level**

Some students in Ahmed's classes, Sarah's classes and Ameen's classes had a low proficiency level in English which was inferred from their answers to some of the

questions asked by the teachers. Consequently, their low proficiency level affected their participation in class and, therefore, the reflection of the teachers on their learning problems. That was because when they did not participate effectively in class, the teachers did not realize the problems those students encountered which they could reflect on.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.8 Tardiness**

The tardiness of students was obvious for Ahmed's classes, Sarah's classes and Hassan's classes. It was regular in the case of Ahmed's students. Some of the students were late for all the observed classes. Nevertheless, it was less common in the case of Sarah's students and Hassan's students. Being late for classes narrowed their opportunity to engage in classroom discussions and limited the teachers' reflection on their learning problems.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.9 Lack of Focus on Objectives**

In Ahmed's classes, I did not always observe the teacher making the objectives of the lesson clear to the students. For example, in the second class, it was only in the midst of teaching the lesson, he informed the students that they were working on writing a good topic sentence and supporting sentences for writing a good paragraph. The teacher could clarify such an objective in the beginning of the lesson. Sharing the objectives of the lesson with the students in the beginning of the class would help them engage actively in the classroom discussions through which the teacher would be able to treat the students' emerging learning problems.



Sarah's deviation from teaching reading skills to focusing on listening and speaking skills in the class indicated the lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson. Instead of reflecting on the students' reading skills problems, she spent time reflecting on listening and speaking skills, which were not the target of the class. During the interview session with the teacher, she stated that she better had to write the objectives of the class on the board to stay focused while teaching.

#### **4.5.2.2.10 Lack of Classroom Management**

Ahmed's writing classes seemed to rely more on oral discussions than written tasks which indicated the lack of time management. That sort of time mismanagement narrowed the opportunity of students to be engaged in sufficient writing tasks that would help the teacher reflect on the students' writing problems.

For Sarah, managing group work activities was a problem. When she asked the students to work in groups and discuss some reading exercises, some students in the groups were seen working individually. The group work activity seemed to be ineffective for such students as the teacher did not manage to engage all students in the different groups in the discussions with their peers. Many students who worked individually were not seen providing answers to the teacher's questions or asking the teacher questions like those active participants in the groups. In that case the teacher's reflection was limited to the active participants.

#### **4.5.2.2.11 Ineffective Teaching Strategy**

Although I witnessed some teaching strategies in the informants' classes which enabled their reflective practices, I also observed some other strategies which

constrained reflection. For instance, I noticed Ahmed doing too much of oral presentations for his writing classes which gave less focus on the students' writing skills as a process. I also observed Sarah teaching the reading texts available in the textbook which the students might have prepared at home. Consequently, such a strategy might not help the students develop their reading skills. Rather, it might constrain the teacher's realization of their reading problems. Also, Hassan followed a systematic way in all his classes. He revised the previous class and presented the new one by reading the texts and sometimes by asking some volunteer students to read. Then he threw questions to students to answer. The students who normally participated in the discussion were those active students; however, passive students were not seen participating in classroom discussions.

In Ameen's teaching classes I did not notice any revisions on the previous taught lessons which could create an opportunity for further reflections on students' learning problems. Pair work and group work activities which could engage students in collaborative discussions were not observed. Furthermore, passive students were not looked after. That teaching strategy constrained effective reflection of the teacher on the teaching and learning problems in class.

Muneer's classes appeared to be successful, but what seemed to hinder the teacher's reflection on some students' problems was the lack of group work activities through which students could engage in collaborative discussions with their peers. Such collaborative discussions could reveal more learning problems. All of these strategies constrained the emergence of students' learning difficulties and the teachers' reflection on them.

#### **4.5.2.2.12 Lack of Using Technology**

What struck me during the field work was the lack of using ‘technology’ in majority of the lessons given that the name of the university (University of Science and Technology) implies the role of ‘technology’ in the teaching and learning process. Nonetheless, there were some data show projectors installed in many rooms in the different buildings of the university. Sarah did use a CD player in her reading lessons. Surely, the use of technology could enable more effective discussions in the classes and result in teachers’ reflections on the emerging teaching and learning issues.

#### **4.5.2.2.13 Lack of Facilities**

Ahmed taught all his classes in a small classroom which was just enough for the attendees. In post classroom interviews with the teacher, he mentioned that there were no vacant classrooms to move to during that timing. Having a big enough classroom would certainly create a better atmosphere for organizing group work activities and treating teaching and learning problems in class.

In one of the classes, Hassan suffered because of the lack of classrooms resulted from the restructuring of UST buildings during the political unrest. In that class, the teacher had to leave the classroom earlier than the usual time because of the clash with another teacher who had a class in the same venue. In such atmosphere, reflection on the students’ learning problems became very limited.

#### **4.5.2.2.2.14 Unconducive Environment**

The place where Ahmed conducted all his classes was seen as an unconducive classroom as it was not big enough for all the students who enrolled for the course. Out of the 30 students who enrolled for the course, only 17 to 20 attended the three classes I observed. Conducive environment with a bigger classroom could provide a better environment for the teacher's reflection on the teaching and learning issues in class.

Classroom observations for Hassan, Ameen and Muneer occurred during the political unrest. Some of Hassan's students were late for their classes and some others were absent due to the transportation problem and the unsecured atmosphere in the city as justified by the teacher in the post classroom interview. Only 16 out of 27 students attended classes. Such an environment was unconducive for effective reflection to take place in class as people became worried about things taking place outside classrooms such as the explosions they heard from time to time. Moreover, there was a lack of classrooms due to the shift of girl students from their campus to the boys' campus.

Ameen's classes were very small. The number of boy students who had enrolled for the vocabulary course which was 25 shrank into eight students. That was due to the unsecured environment. The teacher did not reflect on absenteeism as it had become reasonable for the students not to show up in such unstable atmosphere. During my presence in class, I felt the danger of the unsecured environment in the sound of the ambulance passing by which might be carrying dead or injured people just some moments after we had heard some explosions not very far away from the university

building. In that situation, people became worried about what was going on outside and the focus of reflection was shifted from inside to the outside atmosphere. I did not observe reflection about previous classes. Rather, reflection was very limited to the emerging vocabulary difficulties which arose during the discussion of the main lesson.

The unsecured atmosphere affected Muneer's classes and his reflection on the teaching and learning issues. For instance, the teacher was late for about half an hour for one of his classes. That was because he had a compensation class for male students which he failed to conduct the week before due to some explosions around the area where the university building is located. This indirect influence of the unsecured environment on the time of the teaching and learning process limited the teacher's reflection as he had to be faster to finish his class in the due time.

To sum up, classroom observations assisted me to understand reflection on the teaching and learning process in the natural context. They helped me and also the readers who have the same interest to know about the other part of the story i.e., teachers' reflection in the natural setting (i.e., classroom). That is, I was able to see closely the teaching and learning problems that the teachers and the students encountered in class, how the teachers reflected on the teaching and learning problems and what affected their reflection process. Various degrees of reflection-in-action were practiced by all the teachers. In addition, aspects of irregular reflection-for-action and reflection-on-action were also witnessed inside the classrooms. Different enabling and constraining factors for reflection emerged. The enabling factors were related to the teacher, students and teaching methods. The personality of

the teacher and the teaching experience were found to play prominent roles in the reflection process in class. The constraining factors were associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. Some of the constraining factors such as the lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson and the uncondusive environment tend to have important roles in pulling teachers from practicing reflection in class.

### **4.5.3 Journal Entries**

Throughout the journal entries, I learned more about the reflective practice among the university teachers. Practically, the journals provided data about the extent of reflection i.e., level, type and pattern practiced by the informants. They also revealed factors which affected the informants' reflection i.e., enablers and constraints.

#### **4.5.3.1 Extent of Reflection**

Though all the informants recorded incidents in the journal entries, the extent of their reflection was seen through the various recorded incidents. These incidents provide rich data about the level, type and pattern of reflection.

##### **4.5.3.1.1 Level**

All the informants recorded teaching and learning incidents in the journal entries given to them at the end of the first interview. However, the level of their reflection on the journal varied. Ahmed recorded all the incidents before the second interview. No more incidents were recorded after that. Rather, oral discussions about other incidents took place during our discussions. Sarah recorded the incidents after the second and third interviews. She did not manage to record any incidents before the

second interview though she showed interest to use the journal entry. Hassan recorded all the incidents before the second interview. Those incidents were related to the previous semester. Though the teacher said that he would record more recent incidents relating to that current semester, nothing was added. That might show his irregular individual reflection on the teaching and learning issues particularly in that unstable political context.

Ameen recorded only one incident after the third interview though I politely reminded him about the journal entry twice. Muneer who showed interest in writing the journal entry recorded the incidents regularly and carried the journal to the interview sessions for discussion which showed his active participation and regular reflection on teaching and learning process.

#### **4.5.3.1.2 Type**

Most of the incidents which were recorded by all the informants occurred during teaching. Specifically all the informants recorded incidents which occurred during teaching and such incidents constituted the majority of the overall recorded incidents in the journal entry. Other incidents that the informants recorded included incidents which occurred either before teaching and/ or after teaching was completed. For instance, Ahmed only recorded one incident which happened after teaching was completed. Sarah recorded a few incidents that occurred before teaching. Similarly, Hassan recorded a few incidents which happened before teaching. All the incidents recorded by Hassan were related to the previous semester, but no single incident was related to that current semester which might show his tendency to reflect on the past events. Ameen only recorded an incident which occurred during teaching. This

concur with his view that reflection only takes place while teaching. Muneer also recorded incidents which took place before and after teaching.

#### **4.5.3.1.3 Pattern**

The findings of the journal entries showed that only very few recorded incidents were considered as reflective actions based on Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) definition of reflective practice. Those incidents were recorded by Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer. Only Hassan practiced actual reflections-for-action as shown by some of the recorded incidents which had the three aspects of reflection i.e., diagnosis, testing and belief in personal causation. Additionally, Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer recorded actual reflections-in-action. Furthermore, Ahmed and Muneer recorded reflections-on-action.

For example, during teaching, Ahmed realized that the students had forgotten the main points of the previous lesson. He felt the responsibility to revise that lesson for the students as they had a long Eid holiday which lasted almost for two weeks. After he had revised the lesson, he also ensured that the students had understood the main points by asking the students more questions about the lesson. In addition, he recorded a reflective incident which occurred after he had completed teaching. As he stated in the journal entry: "One of the students kept repeating the same grammatical mistakes though I explained them to him and gave him extra tasks affiliated with his problem. I asked him to repeat similar tasks when mistakes reoccur".

Before teaching the lesson, Hassan found that the data show projector was not working and he stated that he communicated with the technician who fixed it for



him. Another incident which I quoted from his journal entry: “Hyper active students interrupted others, but I used them as good examples for other students”. Muneer also recorded some reflective incidents. As stated in his journal entry: “I couldn’t use the tape recorder for listening activities. I acted as an alternative for the recorder”. In addition, Muneer had to teach a class that he taught so far again as many students were absent due to the unsecured situation which caused students to be absent for that class.

Other recorded incidents were considered to be the first steps for teachers’ reflective practices, but not reflective actions as they lacked one or two of the three main aspects of reflection (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). Ahmed recorded some incidents which indicated that he only identified the students’ problems represented by the lack of books and the passivity of some students in class. He made some personal efforts to solve the problems by reporting the lack of books to the program coordinator and asking the passive students to team up with others, but the problems remained unsolved. Another incident showed that Ahmed only identified the students’ problem. However, no personal efforts were made to find an appropriate solution to the problem. The incident as stated in the journal: “Students do not usually relate their skills to what they studied before and sometimes make minor mistakes because of that problem; the objectives of the course may not be discussed clearly with the students”.

Some of the incidents, which Sarah recorded, indicated her ability to identify the teaching and learning problems and her commitment to treat the problems, but there were no appropriate solutions to the problems. For example, as she stated in the

journal: “The topic of the reading was GM Food (Genetically Modified Food). This was the first time to read about the topic. I tried to find some information about it, but I couldn’t find what I needed”. This incident showed the lack of actual reflection-for-action. Sarah also diagnosed some other problems which she recorded, but she felt unable to make any efforts to solve them. For example, she realized that she had a problem in controlling her class and also she felt that she could not simplify things to the students. However, she did not take serious actions to overcome such problems. This showed her ineffective reflection on the teaching and learning process.

Most of the incidents that Hassan recorded were not regarded as reflective actions. In such incidents, Hassan only identified the problems and in some cases he showed commitment to solve them. For instance, when some students were late for his class, he asked them not to be late again. However, the problem was not solved as the students repeated the same action. Ameen recorded one incident which cannot be regarded as an actual reflection as it only represented the first aspect of reflection i.e., the diagnosis of the teaching problem. In one of his classes, Ameen realized that the students had done the exercises he prepared to do with them. He said that he got confused as he was teaching the same course to different groups. He then had to teach a new lesson which he did not prepare in advance. After he had finished teaching the class, he found that the answers he gave to students were not appropriate. He did not reflect on that lesson with the students later. That incident indicated the lack of the teacher’s effective reflection-in-action which he claimed he practiced.

Some of the incidents recorded by Muneer did not seem to be actual reflections. In one of such incidents, he only diagnosed the teaching and learning problem. In that incident, there was a shift for one class from Sunday to Thursday. The students did not show up and the teacher did not teach the class again. Similarly, in another incident, the teacher realized that the students had a problem when he suggested an unsecured place where they could get the book they would study. Instead of making real efforts for a solution to the students' problem, the teacher and the students started a heated argument about the Uprising of February 11, which, in some students' opinions, caused the unsecured atmosphere.

#### **4.5.3.2 Factors Affecting Reflection**

Through the journal entries and based on the discussions of the recorded incidents with the informants, I identified certain factors which affected the informants' reflection. I learned more about the factors which enabled or constrained the informants' reflection on the teaching and learning process using the journal entry as a reflective instrument.

##### **4.5.3.2.1 Enabling Factors**

The factors which enabled the informants' reflection were related to the teacher and the institution. Factors related to the teacher involved ability to overcome the problems, teaching experience, feeling of responsibility and flexibility. The availability of facilities was associated with the institution.

#### **4.5.3.2.1.1 Ability to Overcome Problems**

Ahmed and Muneer showed ability in treating the teaching and learning problems which emerged during teaching. As stated in the journal, when Ahmed started teaching the new lesson, he realized that the students had a problem related to the previous lesson. He then gave the students a thorough revision of the lesson he explained in the previous class. In the midst of his teaching, Muneer acted as an alternative for the tape-recorder due to the electricity problem. Thus, both the informants were able to deal with the emerging teaching and learning problems and solved them smoothly.

#### **4.5.3.2.1.2 Teaching Experience**

Ahmed and Hassan employed their accumulative teaching experience to remedy the teaching and learning problems they confronted. For example, Ahmed found a gap between two levels of students, good and poor and to close the gap, he made good students as examples for poor students and that worked to a big extent. Based on his teaching experience, Ahmed affirmed, during our discussion of that problem which he recorded in the journal entry that poor students learn from good students. Similarly, Hassan had a problem with hyperactive students who disturbed his class, but he used them as good examples for other students.

#### **4.5.3.2.1.3 Feeling of Responsibility**

Ahmed and Muneer's feeling of the responsibility to overcome the problems they encountered was revealed from the discussions of the journal incidents with the teachers. This feeling of responsibility which represents a personality trait of the reflective practitioner enabled the remedy of students' problems. For example,

Ahmed felt the responsibility to cooperate with female students and re-explained a lesson already taught by a former teacher which they said they did not understand. Likewise, Muneer also had to teach a class he explained so far again as many students were absent due to the unsecured situation.

#### **4.5.3.2.1.4 Flexibility**

The flexibility of Muneer assisted him to change the topic he intended to teach to the students pertaining to speaking skills. He stated that he was well-prepared to teach another topic in case the students did not prepare for the debate. When the teacher realized that the students did not prepare for the debate, he showed flexibility to adjust his plan and engage the students in a new lesson which he prepared in advance as an alternative.

#### **4.5.3.2.1.5 Availability of Facilities**

Hassan mentioned two incidents which indicated the availability of facilities as an enabling factor in treating the teaching and learning problems. He stated in the journal that he managed to overcome some technological problems like getting the data show projector fixed and he also installed a computer instead of the one which was not working. Yet, these incidents referred back to things which occurred in the past semester when the political situation was at ease.

#### **4.5.3.2.2 Constraining Factors**

The factors which constrained the informants' reflection were associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. Factors related to the teacher included lack of awareness, lack of background knowledge and personal

matter. Factors related to the students were lack of interest, fear and shyness and low proficiency level. Factors associated with the teaching methods involved lack of course objectives clarity for students, lack of lesson preparation and teacher's inappropriate role. The institutional factors were lack of resources, lack of imposing university rules and regulations and lack of cooperation among teachers, students and administrators. The uncondusive teaching and learning environment represented the environmental factor.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.1 Lack of Teacher's Awareness**

The lack of Sarah's awareness about the importance of the critical thinking skills constrained her reflection on the development of the students' critical thinking skills. The teacher identified the problem of the lack of focus on the students' critical thinking skills, but she did not make efforts to treat the problem and enhance the students' critical thinking skills.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.2 Lack of Background Knowledge**

The lack of Sarah's background knowledge hindered her reflection. To illustrate, as stated in the journal, the teacher faced a problem in presenting the literature class to students as she lacked information about literature. She was concerned about how things would go, but she did not manage to solve the problem.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.3 Personal Matter**

Sarah also experienced a personal matter i.e., illness which affected her presentation and performance in class negatively. She was not able to reflect on her performance. She was not able to use the things she prepared in class.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.4 Lack of Interest**

Hassan faced a problem in treating some of the teaching and learning difficulties due to the lack of students' interest. He stated in the journal that some students did not bring their assignment because they were less enthusiastic. That lack of students' interest constrained the teacher's efforts to treat the problem.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.5 Fear and Shyness**

Hassan also encountered another teaching and learning problem. Some students were less active. The students' fear and shyness did not help to show their learning problems which the teacher could treat.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.6 Low Proficiency Level**

Sarah stated in the journal that she confronted the problem of pushing weak students to participate in class activities. She tried to motivate such students to participate in classroom discussions; however, the low proficiency level of some students constrained her reflection on that problem.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.7 Lack of Objectives Clarity for Students**

One of the problems that Ahmed faced during the teaching and learning process was that his students were not able to implement what they studied. He stated that the lack of the objectives clarity of the course for students constrained the students' learning and also his reflection on their learning problems.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.8 Lack of Lesson Preparation**

Ameen encountered a teaching and learning problem which he did not manage to remedy successfully due to his lack of lesson preparation. When he was in the class, he realized that what he wanted to teach to the students had been done before. He got confused as he was teaching the same course to different groups. He taught a new lesson which he did not prepare in advance and provided the students with inappropriate answers to the exercise questions. He was not able to reflect on the exercise questions which he did not prepare in advance.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.9 Teacher's Inappropriate Role**

One of the things that Sarah recorded in her journal entry which she believes was a distracter for the students' performance was her continuous unplanned movement in class. She stated that the adoption of that inappropriate role prevented her from reflecting on the students' learning process in class effectively.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.10 Lack of Resources**

When Sarah taught a lesson about the 'GM Food', she did not find enough information to prepare for the class. She stated that the lack of resources in the university constrained her reflection on the lesson during the preparation process.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.11 Lack of Imposing University Rules and Regulations**

Hassan stated that he encountered a problem with a student who cheated the answers in the translation test from another. According to the teacher, the solution to such a problem was hindered because of the lack of imposing the university rules and regulations pertaining to cheating. Nevertheless, what Hassan mentioned here was



not applicable to all colleges and departments at UST as I have witnessed many cases in different colleges and departments in the university where students received severe penalty because of cheating.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.12 Lack of Cooperation among Teachers, Students and Administrator**

The constraining factor pertaining to the lack of cooperation among the teacher, the students and administrator is related to the teacher, student and institution. Muneer recorded a problem which occurred in the university when there was a change in the schedule and one of the classes was shifted from Sunday to Thursday, but the students did not like the change and they were absent for the class. The teacher did not manage to take the missing class again. The lack of cooperation between the students, the teacher and the administrator constrained reflection to solve that problem.

#### **4.5.3.2.2.13 Unsecured Environment**

One recorded incident in Muneer's journal entry which occurred in his class during teaching was when he directed the students where they could get the textbook for his course. But, when the students realized that the place was not safe they had an argument with the teacher about the political situation in the country. Instead of getting a solution to the lack of the students' textbook, Muneer and his students had a conflict because of the unsecured political situation.

To sum up, the recorded incidents in the journal entries and the discussions of such incidents with the informants show the extent of the informants' reflection and the factors that affect it. The informants' reflections vary as shown in the different

incidents they recorded, that is, the consistency in recording the incidents, the type of reflection pertaining to time of the incidents and the way they deal with the teaching and the learning problems. Most of the journals' incidents which were recorded by all the informants occurred during the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, only very few of them are reflective actions and the majorities are merely routine actions. This may show that reflection is not practiced in the university effectively. Even if it is employed, as Ameen stated, it can only take place in class i.e., reflection-in-action. However, such real reflections-in-action were practiced by Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer to a very limited extent. In addition, very few incidents in the journal entries are actual reflections-on-action. Those incidents were recorded by Ahmed and Muneer. Only Hassan recorded actual reflections-for-action. All those informal reflections need to be reflected upon further formally and collaboratively in group or team discussions with colleagues and university administrators to engage in critical reflection which can lead to a change in the teachers' beliefs and actions.

The journal entries show that the factors which enabled the informants to reflect on the teaching and learning process include factors related to the teacher as well as to the institution. The ones which are related to the teacher involve the ability to overcome problems, teaching experience, feeling the responsibility and flexibility; only one enabling factor is related to the institution i.e., the availability of facilities. The teaching experience of the informants seems to be important for enabling reflection. The constraining factors are associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. The factors which are related to the teacher include the lack of awareness, lack of background knowledge and personal matter. The factors which are related to the students involve the lack of interest, fear and

shyness and low proficiency level. The factors related to the teaching methods are the lack of objectives clarity for the students, lack of lesson preparation and the inappropriate role of the teacher. The factors associated with the institution involve the lack of resources and lack of imposing the university rules and regulations; and the unsecured environment represents the environmental factor. The lack of objectives clarity for the students and the unsecured environment appear to have prominent roles in constraining reflections.

#### **4.5.4 Focus Group Discussions**

Usually when a teacher is assigned to teach a particular course, he has certain objectives which s/he tries to achieve. Students also have some expectations of what to get from that course. Yet, there might be a gap between what teachers intend to do and what students hope for, and what they actually get. The teacher may claim that s/he does the best to teach the course. In some other cases, s/he may also blame the students for being unable to learn though teachers also hold the responsibility for facilitating students' learning (Richards, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

To provide the students' points of view, I gave the students a chance to voice out their claims about the teaching and learning issues through the focus group discussions. I, thus, give the readers and teachers, myself included, a complete picture of the whole scene about the reflective practices of English teachers on the teaching and learning process. The students who engaged in the first, second, third, fourth and fifth focus group discussions were taught by Ahmed, Sarah, Hassan, Ameen and Muneer respectively. Ahmed's students were six males; Sarah's students were six females, Hassan's students were 10 females, Ameen's students were six

males and Muneer's students were seven males in the beginning and the number shrank into two because of the unsecured atmosphere during the time of discussion. Thus, the data I gathered through the focus group discussions revealed in-depth information about the informants' reflection. The data show the extent of reflection and also the factors which affect it.

#### **4.5.4.1 Extent of Reflection**

The results of the data analysis of the five focus group discussions revealed the students' claims about the informants' engagement in treating the teaching and learning problems. They revealed the level, type and pattern of reflection practiced by teachers.

##### **4.5.4.1.1 Level**

The focus group discussions revealed that all the informants engaged in various aspects of reflection on the teaching and learning problems from the points of view of learners. The students' narrations revealed the teachers' engagement in irregular reflection on the teaching and learning process. The students indicated that teachers sometimes assist them in overcoming their learning difficulties.

##### **4.5.4.1.2 Type**

The students revealed that all the informants employed aspects of irregular reflection-in-action. For example, when the students were asked about the classroom discussions which were likely to take place between the students and the teacher on their learning difficulties, Ahmed's students revealed that he often paused while teaching, asked questions and assisted students to overcome their problems. Sarah's

students indicated that some aspects of irregular reflection-in-action were practiced by the teacher in her classes. They narrated: “Only we ask about words that we don’t know”. They confirmed that when they asked the teacher, she paused and answered their questions. On the other hand, some students claimed: “We don’t find any chance” to discuss some of the things in the class. Similarly, Hassan’s students indicated their relative engagement in classroom discussions with the teacher. They revealed that the teacher asked questions and also provided them with feedback on their responses. From Ameen’s students, I learned that he sometimes practiced aspects of irregular reflection-in-action. I also inferred from the discussion with Muneer’s students that irregular reflection-in-action took place in the phonetics and phonology classes. That is, they revealed that the teacher sometimes engaged them in classroom discussion and helped them to overcome their emerging learning difficulties.

The data also revealed that all the informants engaged in various aspects of reflection-on-action. For example, from Ahmed’s students, I inferred that their teacher practiced regular reflection-on-action. They narrated that when they had some difficulties, they went to the teacher after the class. They narrated: “The teacher explains to us in another way. He gives us more examples”. From Sarah’s students, I inferred that she practiced irregular reflection-on-action with them. They said that “sometimes” they found a chance to discuss learning difficulties with the teacher outside class. But some of them narrated: “Sometimes we go to ask about the teacher, but we cannot find her”.

Similarly, during my discussion with Hassan's students, I learned that he engaged in irregular reflection-on-action. Some students said that when they had problems, they went to the teacher and he assisted them. One of the students narrated: "I went to the teacher and I asked him how to improve my translation skills. He advised me to translate at least three paragraphs per day. I did that and it was very useful". However, some other students revealed that sometimes they could not get the teacher's assistance when he was not free.

The discussion with Ameen's students revealed his rare reflection-on-action. Some students narrated the way they discussed their learning problems with the teacher outside class: "If the teacher is free, he will discuss things with students... Sometimes when we have difficulties in some parts of the previous lessons, we cannot get clear answer or support from the teacher". Likewise, Muneer's students revealed his rare reflection-on-action. They voiced out various experiences of their discussions with the teacher: "Before we start the lesson we revise the last lesson ... When, for example, we have exam and we have a difficult question, we go to the teacher after the exam and he explains the answer to us ... We also ask the teacher to change the way of teaching and he uses another way.

The discussions with the students also revealed the informants' various practices of reflection-for-action. Ahmed and Sarah appeared to practice some aspects of irregular reflection-for-action. Ahmed's students and Sarah's students revealed that they engage in discussing future learning issues with their teachers. Nonetheless, focus group discussions with Hassan' students, Ameen's students and Muneer's students revealed the lack of the teachers' reflection-for-action with the students on

their learning problems. For instance, Hassan's students mentioned that what the teacher discussed with them was "not future, may be past" and "Just the past". Ameen's students narrated: "Some teachers don't give any sign about the lesson we took before or the one which we are going to take ... Sometimes we feel that this lesson is related to the last lesson or maybe it contains ideas that we are going to take in the future". Muneer's students narrated: "We don't discuss things about future, but we discuss about the past ... we revised the last lesson".

#### **4.5.4.1.3 Pattern**

From the students' narrations, I inferred that not all the five informants engaged in all the steps of reflection (i.e., diagnosis, testing and belief in personal causation) (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). The students' talks revealed that only Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer practiced reflective action; however, there was a lack of teachers' critical reflection as there was no formal setting for teachers and students to sit and discuss their learning difficulties (Kember *et al.*, 2000) with other members of the educational community (Fook & Gardner, 2007; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

#### **4.5.4.2 Factors Affecting Reflection**

From the focus group discussions with students, I inferred various emerging factors that affected the informants' reflection on the teaching and learning process. These factors were classified as enabling and constraining factors. The factors which enabled reflection were related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. On the contrary, the factors which constrained reflection were associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment.

#### **4.5.4.2.1 Enabling Factors**

The enabling factors which are related to the teacher included teacher's personality and some other factors which are also related to the students such as avoiding personal problems, extrinsic motivation, affection, preparation and interaction. Factors related to the teaching methods involve effective communication and effective teaching methods. The availability of resources represents the institutional factor; and conducive environment is the environmental factor.

##### **4.5.4.2.1.1 Teacher's Personality**

From the students' narrations, I inferred that the personality of the teacher was one of the factors which enabled the teachers' discussions of the teaching and learning problems with students. For example, Ahmed's students indicated that what assisted to discuss their learning difficulties and share their opinions in class was the teacher's friendly manner. They narrated: "The teacher is like our friend".

##### **4.5.4.2.1.2 Affection**

From the discussions with Ahmed's students and Hassan's students, I identified affection as one factor that can positively affect reflection on the teaching and learning problems (Akbari, 2007; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Hartnell-Young, 2003). Ahmed's students indicated that affection was necessary for the "cooperation between the teacher and the students". Similarly, Hassan's students stressed that for better discussion of teaching and learning issues, the students and teacher need "to be faithful".



#### **4.5.4.2.1.3 Preparation**

Ahmed's students viewed preparation for the class by both the teacher and students as something which can enable the teaching and learning discussion in the class. The students stressed the importance of "preparing before coming to the class". They said that "both the teacher and students should prepare".

#### **4.5.4.2.1.4 Avoiding Personal Problems**

The discussions with Ahmed's students and Muneer's students revealed that avoiding bringing personal problems to class can assist the teachers and students to focus on discussing students' learning problems rather than talking about personal problems which may disturb students' learning. When the students were asked about how teachers and students could overcome the teaching and learning problems, Ahmed's students stated that "the teacher and the students should leave their personal problems outside the class". Muneer's students narrated that "teachers should not bring their personal problems to the classroom".

#### **4.5.4.2.1.5 Extrinsic Motivation**

Through focus group discussions, I found that extrinsic motivation was an enabling factor which was related to both the student and the teacher. Ahmed's students, Sarah's students and Hassan's students revealed that one of the things that could enable the teachers' discussions of their learning problems was the teacher's encouragement for the students to participate in classroom discussions. This could create a context for teachers' reflection on the students' emerging learning difficulties. Ahmed's students stated that the "teacher should concentrate on all the students and encourage them to participate, but not only concentrate on four or five

students”. Sarah’s students expressed the way the teacher could motivate students to engage in participating in classroom discussion: “If there are weak students, don’t insult them, but encourage them and let them talk. Some students do not participate; tell them no problem, try; I like the teacher who tells students, try”. Hassan’s students were hoping for teachers who encourage them to participate in classroom discussions, but not teachers who spent most of the time talking and talking. They narrated that they hoped to have a teacher who “asks students to talk and practice their language even if they make mistakes ... a teacher who helps students and encourages them, the one who makes students share ideas. He makes the class interactive and makes the subject interesting.... He discusses things with the students outside the classroom ... but not the one who is sitting in chair and just reading to the students and preaching them saying words and words”.

#### **4.5.4.2.1.6 Interaction**

Discussions with Sarah’s students and Ameen’s students shed light on the importance of the interaction between the teacher and the students in the treatment of the teaching and learning problems. According to Sarah’s students, interaction between the teacher and the students would be possible when the teacher “makes students participate, but doesn’t ... just keep talking”. They emphasized the importance of engaging students in classroom interaction by limiting the role of the teacher to give a scope for students to interact and participate. They hoped for “teachers who don’t talk, talk and talk”, but the ones who “make students participate”. Similarly, discussion with Ameen’s students revealed their hope for a teacher who could engage all of them in classroom interaction as stated by one

student: “I like the teacher who makes all students participate and do some activities in the classroom”.

#### **4.5.4.2.1.7 Effective Communication**

The discussions with Sarah’s students, Hassan’s students and Ameen’s students indicated that effective communication was a remarkable feature of successful teaching and learning strategy. It enables teachers’ discussions of the students’ learning problems. Sarah’s students advocated the teacher’s use of simple language to communicate with the students during the discussions of their learning difficulties. They mentioned that “teachers should use simple words”. Hassan’s students narrated that “communicating with each other”, between the teacher and students fostered the discussion of the teaching and learning problems. Ameen’s students revealed that in private universities like UST, communication between the teacher and students inside the classroom was easy and effective. That was because “the teacher can communicate with the students easily as the number is small”.

#### **4.5.4.2.1.8 Effective Teaching Methods**

Ahmed’s students and Sarah’s students revealed that teachers’ teaching methods had a fundamental role to play in fostering the discussion of their learning problems. Ahmed’s students perceived that an effective teaching method begins with a clear plan of the course: “The teacher should give the students the teaching plan in the beginning of the semester” and then “the teacher and the students should follow the plan”. Sarah’s students revealed that the teacher should use interesting teaching techniques in the class to engage the whole class in discussion. Some of the students

said that they were able to overcome their learning difficulties “because the way of teaching is interesting”.

#### **4.5.4.2.1.9 Availability of Resources**

Through my discussions with Sarah’s students, Hassan’s students and Muneer’s students about what could help them overcome their learning problems, the students confirmed that the availability of resources is important for a successful discussion of the learning problems with their teachers. Sarah’s students narrated that the reading materials were interesting. They said that they had an “interesting book for reading” which created a chance to discuss their emerging learning difficulties with the teacher. Hassan’s students stressed the availability of the authentic context for learning new things through the translation of the current political situation: “Nowadays, because of the political situation, we can know about the world”. Muneer’s students mentioned that “teachers should use more references to make teaching better”.

#### **4.5.4.2.1.10 Conducive Environment**

Sarah’s students, Ameen’s students and Muneer’s students emphasized the importance of the conducive environment in the teaching and learning process. Sarah’s students stated that “quietness in class” is necessary for classroom discussions. Ameen’s students presented the conducive environment at UST by striking a comparison between the size of classes in the public universities and private universities. They narrated that “in public universities, you cannot understand the teacher especially when you are in a big and crowded classroom”. However, “in private universities, the classes are small. We are here one boy group, about 14 students. The teacher can communicate with the students easily as the number is

small”. That number was even smaller during my classroom observations to their classes as I only saw eight students in the class. Muneer’s students revealed that “creating a good environment for teaching and learning” involved “facilities like data show and computers”. Thus, I inferred from the students’ talks that a conducive environment is very important for enabling the discussion of their learning problems with teachers.

#### **4.5.4.2.2 Constraining Factors**

On the other hand, the constraining factors are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution, curriculum and environment. The factor, traditional beliefs is related to the teacher. The lack of commitment, lack of extrinsic motivation and lack of preparation are related to the teacher and students. The other factors associated with the students are the personality, low proficiency level and lack of intrinsic motivation. Lack of effective teaching techniques is a factor related to the teaching methods. Factors associated with the curriculum include lack of updated courses and difficulty of the courses. The institutional factor is the lack of facilities; and the environmental factor is the unsecured environment.

##### **4.5.4.2.2.1 Teacher’s Traditional Beliefs**

When I talked with Hassan’s students about their learning difficulties and the obstacles they faced, one of the emerging problems was the negative influence of the teachers’ traditional beliefs on the discussion of the teaching and learning issues. Generally, they said that they could not discuss some of the teaching and learning problems with some teachers as “it’s not acceptable” for some teachers and “they see it like criticizing”.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.2 Lack of Preparation**

Hassan's students indicated that the lack of preparation for the lessons by the teacher and students was one of the things which constrained the remedy of the students' learning problems. When they were asked about the things that slowed down the treatment of their learning problems, they stated that the "teachers in the university itself just want us to finish". They narrated: "everything is done in a hurry.... I could not prepare at home for most of the classes that we have taken. ... I didn't have enough time to prepare things".

#### **4.5.4.2.2.3 Lack of Commitment**

Ahmed's students and Muneer's students revealed that the lack of students and teachers' commitment constrained the discussion of their learning difficulties. Ahmed's students stated that the unpunctuality of "both students and teacher" affected the discussions between the teachers and the students. However, they indicated that if the teacher was late or absent he would affect the learning process more. They stated that the "teacher is more important because if the student is late, he will affect himself, but the teacher will affect the whole class". They narrated: "If the teacher is absent, we need to take an extra class". Muneer's students also confirmed that one of the things which hindered the discussion of the teaching and learning issues was "the absence of teachers or students".

#### **4.5.4.2.2.4 Lack of Extrinsic Motivation**

Through discussion with Muneer's students, I inferred that the lack of extrinsic motivation from teachers constrained the engagement of students in discussing their

learning problems. The students revealed that some students did not engage in classroom discussions because “some teachers don’t encourage students to participate”.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.5 Student’s Personality**

My discussions with Ahmed’s students, Sarah’s students, Ameen’s students and Muneer’s students revealed that the student’s personality had a prominent role in the discussion of the students’ learning difficulties with their teachers. When I asked the students why some students did not engage in discussing their problems with teachers, Ahmed’s students mentioned that “sometimes they don’t care”. Sarah’s students stated that some students did not participate in classroom discussions because “some feel shy” and “some are afraid to make a mistake”. Ameen’s students said that some students did not participate because “they feel shy”; and Muneer’s students confirmed that “some students feel shy”. Such personality features affected the students’ participation in discussing their learning difficulties with their teachers negatively.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.6 Low Proficiency Level**

From the discussions with Ahmed’s students, Sarah’s students, Hassan’s students and Ameen’s students, I inferred that the low proficiency level of some students constrained teachers’ reflection on their learning problems which remained unknown to the teachers as those students did not participate in classroom discussions. Ahmed’s students stated that some students did not participate “because of their low performance”. Sarah’s students asserted that “some students don’t have many words to use in discussion in the class”. Hassan’s students said that “some students don’t

improve themselves ... some students like simple language and when teachers talk sophisticated language, they say we cannot understand”; and Ameen’s students mentioned that “some students don’t have the basics of the language”.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.7 Lack of Intrinsic Motivation**

Ahmed’s students and Ameen’s students revealed that some students lack motivation which affects the discussions of their learning problems with the teachers. Ahmed’s students narrated that “some students don’t like to participate” in classroom discussions because “they are not willing to”. Ameen’s students revealed that “some students don’t have motivation” to participate in classroom discussion. Thus, as some students lack the inner desire to participate in classroom discussions and voice out their problems, reflection on such unknown problems remains impossible.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.8 Lack of Effective Teaching Techniques**

The discussions with Ahmed’s students, Sarah’s students and Ameen’s students revealed that the teaching methods of the teachers might have a negative impact on the teaching and learning process and therefore affect the discussions of the students’ learning issues in class. Ahmed’s students said that they faced difficulties because of “the way teachers deal with the students”. They said: “One of the teachers made the class very difficult for us. She was very tough with us”. Sarah’s students narrated that what did not help them to engage in discussing issues with the teacher in class was “when the teaching was boring” particularly when there was “not enough practices in reading”. For Ameen’s students, the teaching style of the teacher could constrain the discussion of their vocabulary problems with the teacher. They narrated: “We have the problem of vocabulary. The teacher gives us many words, but



sometimes some words have more than one meaning and when we ask the teacher, he asks us to go and study”.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.9 Lack of Facilities**

Ahmed’s students indicated that the “lack of facilities” such as books did not help both teachers and students to overcome the learning problems. One of Muneer’s students also stated: “I think one thing is missing here in this university; it is a laboratory for translation”. Though my discussion with Ahmed’s students occurred when the situation was stable and the discussion with Muneer’s students took place during the period of political unrest which affected UST facilities particularly after the blockage of the girls’ campus which contained a lot of facilities, the two focus group discussions revealed the same idea of the lack of facilities at UST. This showed that the lack of university facilities was an obstacle for the treatment of the students’ learning problems even in the normal situation.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.10 Lack of Updated Courses**

Ahmed’s students and Muneer’s students revealed some of the curriculum problems which constrained the discussions of their learning difficulties with the teachers. Some of Ahmed’s students remarked: “We don’t feel there is benefit from this course”. They believe that the process writing course was very simple and not up-to-date. Therefore, they suggested that “the university should offer a more advanced course” and “provide students with updated materials”. Similarly, Muneer’s students hoped for more useful and updated courses. I inferred that more updated courses might arise more learning difficulties which the teachers could reflect on.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.11 Difficulty of the Course**

Muneer's students faced some difficulties in the phonetics and phonology course in the "terms taken from other languages ... definitions ... things that need memorization". They revealed that these difficulties were hindrances for their discussion with the teacher.

#### **4.5.4.2.2.12 Unsecured Environment**

Discussions with Hassan's students, Ameen's students and Muneer's students revealed that the environment in the university created a problem in front of the teachers and students to focus on the teaching and learning process. From their talks, I inferred that the unsecured situation in Yemen was the main obstacle for the lack of teaching and learning problems' treatment.

Hassan's students said that because of the political situation, "the atmosphere is trouble" both inside and outside the university. Some students stated that as a result of the unsecured situation, "there is no electricity" and "there is no internet". One of the students narrated: "Once we had a class and we heard an explosion. We asked the teacher to go to the basement. But he told us, 'if you want to continue with me, you are welcome and if you want to go, you can go'. ... And in an atmosphere like that, you can't learn". Another student added: "This is not a quiet atmosphere". The students also mentioned: "Sometimes we cannot come to the university because the road is blocked or there are some demonstrations".

Ameen's students stated that "the political crises affected teaching and learning". Muneer's students said that "students cannot study at home because of the bad

situation; there is no electricity ... and there is the transportation problem ... Sometimes it is difficult to go to the university because of shooting and fire”. In such unsecured atmosphere, I began one of the focus group discussions with seven students, but ended with two as other students left when they heard an explosion. Though more students could give more information, I was still able to get a lot of information from the two students who remained till the end of the interview. This could be one of the limitations of the focus group discussion with students. Yet, what happened obviously indicates how the unsecured atmosphere constrained reflection process.

To sum up, the focus group discussions with the students have provided one of the essential tools of reflection through which I was able to see the teacher’s reflection. The students’ narrations revealed that the teachers practiced irregular and informal reflections with the students even though some of those practices seemed to be routine actions as they did not have the three dimensions of reflection (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). Some enabling and constraining factors for reflection emerged. The enabling factors are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. Effective communication seems to be an important enabling factor on the teachers’ reflections. On the other hand, the constraining factors are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment. The students also revealed that the unsecured environment plays a prominent role in constraining the teachers’ reflections. I provide a summary of the extent of reflection and the factors which affect it among UST English teachers using the multi-methods approach (table 4.1).

Table 4.1

*The extent of reflection and the factors affecting it*

Respondent	Reflection	Interviews	Classroom observations	Journal entry	Focus group discussion
Ahmed	Extent	<p><b>Level:</b> personal &amp; collaborative (informal &amp; formal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-in-action &amp; reflection-on-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular, personal &amp; collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action, reflection-on-action &amp; reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular, personal &amp; collaborative reflection (recorded incidents before the second interview)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> incidents during teaching &amp; after teaching</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> collaborative discussions of teaching and learning problems with students when possible (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> irregular reflection-for-action-reflection-on-action-irregular reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>
	Enabling factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, awareness, teaching experience, learning background, reading, beliefs, documentation &amp; motivation)</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective classroom management</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> beliefs, documentation, effective classroom management, motivation, supportive reflective system &amp; training</p> <p><b>Students:</b> performance feedback</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive teaching and learning environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's awareness of students' learning problems, personality, teaching experience, students' extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective classroom management &amp; effective group work activities</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p>	<p><b>-Teacher:</b> teacher's ability to overcome problems</p>	<p><b>-Teacher:</b> personality, avoiding personal problems, extrinsic motivation, affection &amp; preparation</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective teaching methods</p> <p><b>Students:</b> extrinsic motivation, affection &amp; preparation</p>
	Constraining factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personal matters, personality, lack of documentation &amp; lack of motivation</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> heavy teaching load, insufficient training, unsupportive system, lack of documentation &amp; lack of motivation</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> discouraging environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's tardiness &amp; teacher's leniency</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> ineffective teaching strategy, lack of focus on objectives, lack of classroom management &amp; lack of using technology</p> <p><b>Students:</b> carelessness, passivity, low proficiency level &amp; tardiness</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of facilities</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unconducive atmosphere</p>	<p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of course objective clarity for students</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of commitment</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of effective teaching methods</p> <p><b>Students:</b> personality, low proficiency level, lack of intrinsic motivation &amp; lack of commitment</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of facilities</p> <p><b>Curriculum:</b> lack of updated courses</p>
Sarah	Extent	<p><b>Level:</b> personal &amp; collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action &amp; reflection-on-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular, personal &amp; collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, irrelevant reflection-in-action, lack of reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular personal &amp; collaborative (recorded incidents after the second and third interviews)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> incidents before teaching &amp; during teaching</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> discussions of teaching and learning problems with students when possible (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> (aspects of ) -irregular reflection-for-action -irregular reflection-on-action -irregular reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action</p>

Respondent	Reflection	Interviews	Classroom observations	Journal entry	Focus group discussion
	Enabling factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, awareness, teaching experience, learning background, reading, beliefs, documentation &amp; motivation</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> beliefs, documentation, motivation, supportive reflective system &amp; training</p> <p><b>Students:</b> performance feedback</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive teaching and learning environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's awareness of students' learning problems, personality, teaching experience, &amp; students' extrinsic motivation</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> teaching strategy, effective classroom management &amp; good preparation</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's teaching experience</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> extrinsic motivation</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective communication &amp; effective teaching methods</p> <p><b>Students:</b> extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> availability of resources</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive environment</p>
	Constraining factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of knowledge, personal matters, personality, lack of awareness, lack of effective communication, lack of motivation &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> heavy teaching load, insufficient training, unsupportive system, lack of effective communication &amp; lack of motivation</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of students' interaction &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured atmosphere</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> misconceptions, leniency &amp; health problem</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> ineffective teaching strategy, lack of focus on objectives &amp; lack of classroom management</p> <p><b>Students:</b> low proficiency level &amp; tardiness</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of teacher's awareness, lack of teacher's background knowledge &amp; teacher's personal matter</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> inappropriate role of the teacher</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' low proficiency level</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of resources</p>	<p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of effective teaching methods</p> <p><b>Students:</b> personality &amp; low proficiency level</p>
Hassan	Extent	<p><b>Level:</b> personal &amp; collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-in-action &amp; reflection-on-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action, reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, lack of reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular personal &amp; collaborative (recorded incidents before the second interview)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> incidents before teaching &amp; during teaching</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions &amp; non-critical reflections (past semester)</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> discussions of teaching and learning problems with students when possible (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> lack of reflection-for-action</p> <p>-irregular reflection-on-action</p> <p>-irregular reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions &amp; non-critical reflections</p>
	Enabling factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, awareness, teaching experience, learning background, reading, beliefs, documentation &amp; using technology</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> beliefs, documentation, using technology, supportive reflective system &amp; training</p> <p><b>Students:</b> performance feedback</p> <p><b>Curriculum:</b> nature of the course</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> focus on class objectives</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's awareness of students' learning problems, personality, teaching experience &amp; students' interaction</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> teaching strategy, good preparation &amp; clarity of the objectives</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' attitudes towards the course &amp; students' interaction</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's teaching experience</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> availability of facilities</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> extrinsic motivation &amp; affection</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective communication</p> <p><b>Students:</b> extrinsic motivation &amp; affection</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> availability of resources</p>

Respondent	Reflection	Interviews	Classroom observations	Journal entry	Focus group discussion
	Constraining factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of knowledge, personal matters, personality, uncommitted teachers, lack of documentation, lack of effective communication &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> insufficient training, lack of facilities, lack of documentation, lack of effective communication &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of students' interaction &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> discouraging environment &amp; unsecured atmosphere</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's tardiness</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> ineffective teaching strategy &amp; lack of using technology</p> <p><b>Students:</b> passivity &amp; tardiness</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of facilities</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> uncondusive environment</p>	<p><b>Students:</b> lack of students' interest &amp; students' fear and shyness</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of imposing university rules and regulations</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of preparation</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured political environment</p>
Ameen	Extent	<p><b>Level:</b> collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action &amp; lack of reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> irregular personal (recorded an incident after the third interview)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> during teaching</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> discussions of teaching and learning problems with students when possible (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> lack of reflection-for-action, aspects of rare reflection-on-action &amp; irregular reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action</p>
	Enabling factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, awareness, teaching experience, teacher's knowledge, reading, beliefs, documentation &amp; motivation</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> beliefs, documentation, motivation, supportive reflective system &amp; training</p> <p><b>Students:</b> performance feedback</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective classroom management</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive teaching and learning environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's awareness of students' learning problems, personality, teaching experience, teacher's competency &amp; students' interaction</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> teaching strategy &amp; clarity of the objectives</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' intrinsic motivation</p>		<p><b>Teacher:</b> students' interaction</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> effective communication</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' interaction</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive environment</p>
	Constraining factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, lack of awareness &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of classroom management</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> heavy teaching loads, insufficient training, unsupportive system &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of students' interaction &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured atmosphere</p>	<p><b>Teaching methods:</b> ineffective teaching strategy &amp; lack of using technology</p> <p><b>Students:</b> carelessness, passivity, low proficiency level &amp; tardiness</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> uncondusive environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's personal matters</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of lesson preparation</p>	<p><b>Students:</b> personality &amp; low proficiency level</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> lack of effective teaching methods</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured political environment</p>

Respondent	Reflection	Interviews	Classroom observations	Journal entry	Focus group discussion
Muneer	Extent	<p><b>Level:</b> Personal, collaborative, informal &amp; formal</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action &amp; reflection-on-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> regular collaborative (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> reflection-on-action &amp; reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> regular personal &amp; collaborative (recorded incidents before the second, third &amp; fourth interviews)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> (before teaching, during teaching &amp; after teaching)</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine actions &amp; actual reflections</p>	<p><b>Level:</b> collaborative discussions of teaching and learning problems with students when possible (informal)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> lack of reflection-for-action -rare reflection-on-action -irregular reflection-in-action</p> <p><b>Pattern:</b> routine action &amp; non-critical reflection</p>
	Enabling factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> personality, awareness, teaching experience, teacher's knowledge, learning background, reading, beliefs &amp; documentation</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> documentation, supportive reflective system &amp; training</p> <p><b>Students:</b> performance feedback</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive teaching and learning environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's awareness of students' learning problems, personality, teaching experience, students' extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p> <p><b>Teaching methods:</b> teaching strategy &amp; clarity of the objectives</p> <p><b>Students:</b> students' attitudes towards the course, students' extrinsic motivation &amp; students' interaction</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> teacher's ability to overcome problems &amp; teacher's flexibility</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> avoiding personal problems</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> availability of resources</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> conducive environment</p>
	Constraining factors	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of knowledge, personality, lack of awareness, lack of motivation &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> unsupportive system, lack of facilities, lack of motivation &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of students' interaction &amp; traditional beliefs</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> discouraging environment &amp; unsecured atmosphere</p>	<p><b>Teaching methods:</b> ineffective teaching strategy &amp; lack of using technology</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unconducive environment</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of cooperation among the teacher, administrator and students</p> <p><b>Students:</b> lack of cooperation among the teacher, students and administrator</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of cooperation among the teacher, students and administrator</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured political situation</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> lack of commitment &amp; lack of students' extrinsic motivation</p> <p><b>Students:</b> personality, lack of commitment &amp; lack of students' extrinsic motivation</p> <p><b>Institution:</b> lack of facilities</p> <p><b>Curriculum:</b> nature of the course</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> unsecured political environment</p>

#### 4.6 Summary

The findings of the study reveal insightful information about English teachers' reflective practice at UST, Yemen. The findings result in some categories of reflection. These categories include (1) levels of reflection, (2) types of reflection, and (3) patterns of reflection. The levels of reflection involve (a) individual reflection

and (b) collaborative reflection. Individual reflection is done informally by the teacher himself or herself in isolation. Collaborative reflection is employed informally with students, peers in the department of English, colleagues at UST, and even with other teachers who did not belong to UST staff. In addition, very rare formal reflection is revealed by two informants. The types of reflection pertaining to the time of occurrence are (a) reflection-for-action, (b) reflection-in-action and (c) reflection-on-action. The third category of reflection, which is related to pattern, involves (a) routine action and non-critical reflection.

In addition, the results reveal certain emerging factors that affect the teachers' reflection. These factors are categorized into two types: (a) enabling factors and (b) constraining factors. Both types of factors are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study to present a comprehensive and holistic picture of how reflection is practiced and the factors that affect it at UST by referring to the research questions of the study. To answer the questions, I used the data gathered from the teachers' interviews, their written journal entries, my observations to the teaching and learning process, and also the students' focus group discussions.

#### **5.1.1 Research Question 1: How do university teachers engage in reflection?**

##### **5.1.1.1 Interviews**

Based on the informants' claims about their beliefs and practices, I elicited certain levels, types and patterns of reflection among teachers. The levels of reflection are irregular individual and collaborative reflection. Individual reflection was stated in Ahmed's words: "If I face any problem, I have to manage it on my own". Sarah also narrated: "I sit with myself and think of the ways I present the materials to the students and the way I assess them". Hassan said that he changed a textbook for the students when he found it difficult for them, and Muneer mentioned that he believes in personal reflection.

Collaborative reflection was clearly revealed through Ahmed's narration of his treatment for the students' learning problems in class. Sarah voiced out her rare engagement in reflection with peers in the department of English and also with her students. Hassan's claims reveal his informal reflection with students in class and

also with junior and senior peers in his department to overcome any emerging teaching and learning problems. Unlike the other informants, Ameen only believes in informal reflection with students in class. Muneer believes in collaborative discussions of the teaching and learning problems with colleagues. Ahmed and Muneer revealed that they experienced a seldom, formal collaborative reflection at UST which only happened once between Ahmed and the coordinator and Muneer and the head of the English department.

The above personal and collaborative reflections revealed that the informants engage in certain types of reflection pertaining to time. That is, they engaged in irregular reflection-for-action such as the case of Sarah and Muneer, reflection-in-action as claimed by all the informants and reflection-on-action which all informants, except Ameen, claimed to practice.

Through the informants' narrations, I found that Ahmed, Sarah and Muneer practice routine actions and reflective actions whereas Hassan and Ameen only practice routine actions. Yet, none of the informants practice critical reflection. Such claims about the patterns of reflection were further illustrated through classroom observation.

#### **5.1.1.2 Classroom Observations**

Generally speaking, throughout classroom observations, I witnessed the teachers' actual practices of reflection in the natural context. I inferred various levels, types and patterns of reflection which match the informants' narrations to a big extent. For instance, I observed all the teachers practicing informal collaborative reflection-in-

action with the students inside the classroom. In addition, I witnessed aspects of irregular personal reflection-for-action in the classes taught by Ahmed, Sarah, Hassan and Ameen. I also observed signs of reflection-on-action in the classes taught by Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer. I witnessed that of all the informants, Ahmed, Sarah and Muneer practiced routine actions and reflective actions whereas Hassan and Ameen practiced routine actions.

I witnessed that Ahmed, Sarah and Muneer succeeded in helping the students to engage in class discussion and overcome their learning difficulties which arose in class. Additionally, their practices in class did not only show reflection-in-action, but also indicated that what they claimed they believe in i.e., the learner-centered approach was practiced in action. Nevertheless, Hassan and Ameen adopted the teacher-centred approach. This concurs with what Hassan said in one of the interviews: “I feel I am still in the shell of traditional way of teaching”.

### **5.1.1.3 Journal Entries**

In the same vein, the journal entries revealed the informants’ engagement in irregular reflections which were done at the personal and collaborative levels. Muneer was the only informant who reflected on the journal entry regularly. The recorded incidents revealed the types of the informants’ reflection which include reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action.

Pertaining to the patters of reflection, Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer recorded very few incidents which were considered to be reflective actions as they had the three aspects of reflection (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989). To illustrate, Ahmed recorded this reflective

incident which occurred after teaching was over: “one of the students kept repeating the same grammatical mistakes though I explained them to him and gave him extra tasks affiliated with his problem. I asked him to repeat when mistakes reoccur”. However, the majorities of incidents that the informants recorded were non-reflective as they did not have all the three dimensions of reflection (Kirby & Teddlie, 1989).

Thus, the recorded reflective actions in the journal entries were very limited compared to all the recorded incidents. Furthermore, the extent of actual reflection-in-action was also limited compared to all the recorded incidents which took place while teaching in class and also to all the incidents in the journals. This may advocate Ameen’s belief that if reflection occurs, it will only take place in class. Moreover, the findings of the journal entries are consistent with some scholars’ claim that reflection is not practiced effectively in the university (Davis, 2003; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009). In addition, all the reflective actions were informal reflections with students. Such informal reflections need to be shared with other teachers in the department of English and even other departments at UST, and also with administrators to develop critical reflections.

#### **5.1.1.4 Focus Group Discussions**

The findings of the focus group discussions revealed that not all the informants engage in collaborative reflective practice with students. The students revealed that only Ahmed, Hassan and Muneer practice reflective actions; however, there is a lack of the teachers’ critical reflection as there is no formal setting for teachers and students to sit and discuss the learning difficulties (Kember *et al.*, 2000) particularly

with other members of the educational community (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

The students' narrations revealed that all the informants employ aspects of irregular reflection-in-action. They claimed that the teachers often pause and help them to overcome their learning difficulties. They also claimed that all the informants engage in aspects of reflection-on-action. Ahmed's students and Sarah's students revealed that the two teachers practice some aspects of irregular reflection-for-action. However, Hassan's students, Ameen's students and Muneer's students revealed the lack of the teachers' reflection-for-action.

Thus, based on the findings of this study from the informants' interviews, my classroom observations, the journal entries written by the informants and the focus group discussions, I identified different levels, types and patterns of reflection among the English teachers at UST. The levels of reflection include irregular individual and collaborative reflection with students, peers in the department of English, colleagues at UST, and even other teachers from outside UST. In addition, very rare formal reflection was revealed by two informants with the coordinator and the head of the English department. The types of reflection pertaining to the time of occurrence involve reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-for-action is done by the informants individually and also in collaboration with the students and other teachers in the department of English. Reflection-in-action takes place in the class with students and reflection-on-action is done individually and collaboratively with the students, peers in the English department, colleagues at UST and other experienced teachers who do not belong to UST. The

patterns of reflection involve informal routine actions and reflective actions. However, critical reflection of the teachers was not evident. This variation in the degree of the informants' reflection was caused by some factors which affected their reflection.

## **5.1.2 Research Question 2: What are the factors that affect reflection?**

### **5.1.2.1 Interviews**

Based on the findings of the study, the informants' narrations revealed two types of factors that affect their reflection on the teaching and learning issues. These factors include enabling and constraining factors which are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment.

Enabling factors related to the teacher include the personality of the teacher, teachers' awareness of teaching and learning problems, learning background, teacher's knowledge, teaching experience and reading. Some other factors such as beliefs, documentation, motivation and using technology are related to both the teacher and the institution. For instance, I inferred that Ahmed's beliefs about the teaching and learning process were the basis for his reflection as they motivated him to open up to students, give them a chance to comment on each other's answers and provide them with friendly correction.

Performance feedback is related to the students. This factor, as Hassan narrated, can assist the teacher to reflect on the students' problems given that he will identify their problems from their performance. Factors associated with teaching methods include

effective classroom management and clarity of objectives. Ahmed, for example, claimed that effective classroom management can facilitate learning and teaching process and consequently enable reflection. With regard to the factor related to curriculum, Muneer revealed that his reflection is based on the nature of the course. He mentioned that he sits more on preparation when he teaches language skills courses as he has to think of some debates to attract the attention of students.

The factors related to the institution are the supportive reflective system and training. Sarah revealed that training is an essential element for teachers to develop their awareness on how to treat various teaching and learning problems. Also, Muneer emphasized that the conducive teaching and learning atmosphere which is associated with the environment will help the “students, teachers and administrators to work together”.

On the contrary, the constraining factors related to the teacher include the teacher’s personality, lack of knowledge, personal problems, lack of awareness, lack of commitment and some other factors which are associated with both the teacher and institution such as lack of documentation, lack of motivation, lack of effective communication, heavy teaching load and traditional beliefs. I inferred from Sarah and Ahmed’s narrations that the lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is one of the constraining factors for the teachers’ reflection. Sarah, for instance, narrated that the lack of intrinsic motivation of some teachers in her department constrains their reflection: “They have no desire to change”. Ahmed also revealed that the colleges do not motivate teachers to have some gathering for discussing teaching and learning issues friendly and openly.

Traditional beliefs and lack of students' interaction are factors related to the students. Hassan revealed that the lack of the students' interaction in the discussion inside the class constrains the teacher from realizing the students' problems and treating them. Lack of classroom management is related to the teaching methods. Ameen narrated that if teachers fail to manage their classes well, then they may fail to manage teaching and learning problems.

Nature of the course is associated with the curriculum. Muneer claimed that the nature of the course may constrain the reflection of the teacher on the teaching process. He mentioned that the belief in interaction between the students and the teacher is not applicable while teaching linguistic courses as the teacher becomes the sender and the students are receivers.

Other institutional factors involve insufficient training, unsupportive system and lack of facilities. Muneer also revealed that the lack of facilities particularly in public universities constrain teachers from overcoming the teaching and learning difficulties. Pertaining to the environmental factor, Ahmed revealed that the uncondusive environment constrains the treatment of the teaching and learning problems. Furthermore, Ameen described how the unsecured environment affected the reflection of the teachers on the teaching and learning problems: "The environment that's surrounding teaching and learning these days is not conducive ... From time to time, you hear bombing, shelling, explosions ..."



From the informants' claims, I inferred that enabling factors such as the personality of the teacher, reading and teaching experience have important roles in enhancing the informants' reflective practice. The informants' claims revealed that the personality of the teacher is very significant and has prominent roles in reflection. In Ahmed word's, "it's all about the teacher's personality. Once I hear that the students like a certain teacher, I try to know why". Fear, a personality trait, which might be an obstacle for other teachers to reflect on the teaching and learning problems (Dewey, 1933; McAlpine & Weston, 2000), is an enabling factor for Ahmed, which pushes him to reflect on his teaching and the students' learning problems. This is very clear in his statement: "If I believe that there is a problem, I try my best to change that. If I do not change my practice, I might be fired". Sarah also revealed the influence of her personality on reflection: "I have no problem in changing the way of teaching if it is really a true problem". For Hassan, treating the teaching and learning problems greatly "depends on the personality of the teacher himself". For him a humble and transparent teacher who accepts criticism can overcome his teaching and students' learning problems. I also inferred the features of the reflective practitioner (Dewey, 1933; Rodgers, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) from Ameen's words as he described a successful teacher as a person who "enthusiastically intends to improve himself. He is cooperative, very keen to learn, very keen to give" especially when he "admits that he cannot be perfect". Muneer was very much influenced by the personality of one speaker during a training session who openly said "I am a teacher, but I am ready to say in any time, I am wrong". Thus, such personality traits (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933; Rodgers, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) are the features which make the personality of the teacher more prominent in the reflection process.

Reading, which is viewed as one of the main tools of reflection (Brookfield, 1995; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006), appears to be one of the most significant enabling factors on the informants' reflection. For example, Ahmed narrated that "the more you read, the more you benefit students". Sarah emphasized that her reading and learning background during her master study formed her solid theoretical background that has helped her in overcoming many of her teaching and students' learning problems. Hassan claimed that, in addition to the assistance he gets from the students and other experienced teacher to solve the teaching and learning problems, reading is the main support. Ameen also mentioned that reading is very important to improve the teaching and learning process. Muneer revealed that his beliefs and practices pertaining to teaching and learning were improved as a result of his reading about teaching and learning problems he encountered. Thus, I inferred that through reading, the teachers obtained knowledge of espoused theories about the teaching and learning process which guided their practices during reflection (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Kane *et al.*, 2002).

Teaching experience was very influential on the informants' reflections. For Ahmed, teaching experience was very important for developing his reflection on the teaching and learning issues. Sarah mentioned that through teaching experience, teachers learn how to manage students' problems. For Hassan, teaching experience helps teachers to treat misconceptions about teaching and learning. He also admitted that he learned through reflection on his teaching experience. Ameen mentioned that when teachers "sit together, they share their experience and make use of the experience in discussing issues". For Muneer, teaching experience is essential for reflecting on the teaching and learning problems. Reflection also enhanced the informants' teaching

experience (Dewey, 1933) as in Ahmed's narration: "The basic experience I usually have is my talk to very experienced teachers". This revealed that reflection and experience influence one another (Wallace, 1991).

On the other hand, I inferred that some constraining factors appear to have more effect on the teachers' reflection than others. Such factors include the personality of the teacher, lack of support, lack of training, heavy teaching load, lack of motivation and uncondusive environment. For example, Ahmed had some fear to discuss some teaching and learning issues with the coordinator as the latter might think that Ahmed was uncommitted. For Sarah and Hassan, it is sensitive to observe other teachers' classes. Ameen said that a tensed teacher cannot manage to treat the students' problems; and for Muneer, the feeling of over confidence constrains the teacher from engaging in collaborative discussions with other teachers. Thus, such personality traits like the fear and lack of open-mindedness are the main obstacles which constrain the informants' reflection (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933).

Through his narration, Ahmed revealed that the lack of the university support for teachers constrains their reflection: "if I face any problem, I have to manage it on my own; otherwise, it will carry on existing". Sarah narrated that the teachers "need a lot of support from other sides", that is, from the English department. Ameen also mentioned that the college needs to follow up the teaching and learning process which can result in effective reflection. Even Muneer revealed that people in charge do not support the discussion of the teaching and learning issues among teachers.

From the informants' narratives, I learned that the lack of teachers' formal and systematic discussions of the teaching and learning issues is due to the insufficient training for UST teachers. Also, the informants revealed that heavy teaching load affected their reflection negatively. Ahmed, for instance, narrated that the heavy teaching load constrains teachers' reflection. Sarah also emphasized: "It's impossible for me to follow each and every student because we have, you know, heavy teaching loads". Ameen stated that "teachers are heavy loaded" and cannot sit and discuss things together.

In the same line, I inferred that the lack of motivation very much affects the way the teachers deal with the teaching and learning problems. Ahmed's claim: "I am not paid well", reveals that he is demotivated by the low payment he gets from UST. He also said that the colleges at UST do not motivate teachers to have some gathering for discussing teaching and learning issues. Like Ahmed, Muneer also claimed that the lack of extrinsic motivation from the administrators constrains his discussion of the teaching and learning problems. Against the lack of extrinsic motivation mentioned by Ahmed and Muneer, Sarah's narration revealed that the very limited intrinsic motivation also constrains the teachers' reflection in her department.

Inevitably, the uncondusive teaching and learning environment at UST was a common constraining factor for the informants' reflection particularly during the political unrest in the country as inferred from their narrations. Ahmed, for instance, whom I interviewed before the political unrest, was not able to implement his belief in the communicative approach due to the uncondusive environment represented by the huge number of students in some of his classes and lack of language laboratories.

For Sarah, the uncondusive environment constrained the training provided by the British Council where she could reflect on her teaching practices. Hassan, Ameen and Muneer whom I interviewed during the period of the political unrest described the surrounding environment at UST as discouraging and unsecured for teachers to reflect on the teaching and learning process. Thus, working in such a discouraging and unsecured environment makes the teachers less enthusiastic to reflect on the teaching and learning process.

#### **5.1.2.2 Classroom Observations**

Notably, in classroom observations, I inferred reflection enabling factors which are related to the teacher, students and teaching methods. The factors related to the teacher include teachers' awareness of the students' learning problems, teacher's personality, teaching experience and teacher's competency. Some other enabling factors are associated with the teacher and students such as the students' extrinsic motivation and interaction. For example, in Ahmed's classes I witnessed how his awareness of the students' learning problems made him pause while teaching and reflect on the students' learning difficulties. That is, when he realized that most of the students had forgotten the lesson about adjective clause and adverb clause, he revised the previous lesson.

Other factors which are related to the students involve students' attitudes towards the course and intrinsic motivation. I also observed that some of Ameen's students were very interested to know more vocabulary about jobs. That stimulated the teacher to reflect on their desire and provide them with more vocabulary about jobs. He even gave them additional lists of vocabulary related to the topics discussed in the class.

The factors related to the teaching methods include effective teaching strategy, effective classroom management, good preparation, effective group work activities and clarity of the objectives. I witnessed Sarah's encouragement to all the students to participate in the classroom activities including passive students. In so doing, Sarah was able to overcome the problem of the students' passivity and engage them in the discussion.

On the other hand, the constraining factors are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. The factors related to the teacher include teacher's tardiness, teacher's leniency, misconceptions and health problem. For example, I observed Sarah giving the students an opportunity to listen to the reading texts on the CD and practice reading aloud. The misconception of teaching reading skills to the students slowed her reflection on the students' reading skills as the focus was deviated from developing the students' reading skills to some other listening and speaking skills.

The factors which are associated with the students involve carelessness, passivity, low proficiency level and tardiness. I witnessed that the passivity of some students was a common constraining factor for reflection in Ahmed's first class and Hassan's and Ameen's classes. Passive students did not voice out the difficulties they faced so that the teachers could reflect on them. The ineffective teaching strategy, lack of using technology, lack of focus on objectives and lack of classroom management are the factors related to the teaching methods. Observing Hassan's three classes

revealed that the teaching and learning strategy he followed i.e., teacher-centered approach constrained his reflection on the learning problems of passive students.

The lack of facilities is a constraining factor related to the institution. Ahmed taught his classes in a small classroom which was not conducive for effective teaching and learning. It was just enough for the attendees. Having a big enough classroom would certainly create a better atmosphere for organizing group work activities more comfortably and treating teaching and learning problems in class. In addition, the unsecured atmosphere, which was an obstacle in front of Hassan, Ameen and Muneer's reflection on the students' learning problems, is related to the environment. For example, during my presence in one of Ameen's classes, we heard some explosions. In such a risky atmosphere as Ameen revealed in one of the interviews, people become worried more about their safety than teaching and learning issues. I did not even witness reflection on the previous classes. I only observed Ameen teaching the main lessons and leaving.

In classroom observations, I witnessed that the personality of the teacher and teaching experience were prominent enabling factors of reflection. I observed the informants taking the responsibility to treat the students' learning problems. My observations confirm the informants' claims about the personality traits they possess which enable them to reflect on the students' learning problems in class. For example, I observed Ahmed's cheerful and open-minded personality tackling all his students' problems patiently and dealing with the students friendly. Sarah's character was full of enthusiasm and always encouraged her students to participate and reflected on their learning problems. Hassan's personality was a combination of

flexibility, patience and strictness. He allowed late students to join the class after giving them a verbal warning, not to be late again. He also answered the students' questions during classroom discussions patiently though those questions seemed to be very simple. I observed Ameen dealing with his students very friendly and reflecting on emerging difficult vocabulary. Like Hassan, Muneer's personality was a combination of strictness and flexibility. In the beginning of one of his classes, he did not allow late students to join the class, but after they apologized, he let them in. Thus, such personality features assisted the teachers to overcome many of the students' learning problems.

From my observations to the effective teaching strategies which the informants followed in their classes and the way they treated many emerging difficulties for students, I inferred that teaching experience should be the basis for such practices. For example, Ahmed was able to reflect on the students' learning problems by referring back and clarifying the students' doubts about the previous lessons. Sarah encouraged the students to engage in group-work activities which led to their interaction in the classroom discussion. Hassan presented his lessons and responded to the students' questions smoothly. Ameen's exciting way of step by step teaching and his reflection on the emerging vocabulary should be the result of his long teaching experience. Muneer's classes which were full of pauses and reflections on the students' learning problems indicate his rich teaching experience.

On the contrary, some constraining factors have prominent roles in the reflection process such as the lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson and the uncondusive environment. I did not always witness Ahmed making the objectives of the lesson



clear to the students in the beginning of his teaching. For example, in the second class, it was only in the midst of teaching the lesson, he informed the students that they were working on writing a good topic sentence and supporting sentences for a good paragraph. Sharing the objectives of the lesson with the students could help them raise issues they might not understand that would assist the teachers to handle them. Sarah's deviation from focusing on reading skills to teaching listening and speaking skills in the class indicated the lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson. Interestingly, during reflection on her classes, she admitted that she needs to focus on the objectives of the lesson.

The uncondusive environment was obvious in Ahmed's classes which were conducted in a small classroom allocated for accommodating 30 students enrolled for the course. Nevertheless, I witnessed that Hassan's classes, Ameen's classes and Muneer's classes were small as the big number of the students shrank due to the unsecured atmosphere which resulted from the political unrest. In addition, sometimes the students were late for classes because of transportation problems and even when they were in class, they became worried about things happening outside especially when they heard explosions. Thus, such uncondusive atmosphere constrained the teachers' reflections on the students' learning problems in class.

### **5.1.2.3 Journal Entries**

The findings of the journal entries revealed that reflection enabling factors are related to the teacher and institution. The factors which are related to the teacher involve teacher's ability to overcome problems, teaching experience, feeling of responsibility and teacher's flexibility. The journal entries revealed that the accumulative teaching

experience assisted Ahmed and Hassan to remedy the teaching and learning problems they confronted. Ahmed found a gap between two levels of students, good and poor and to close the gap, he made good students set examples for poor students and that worked to some extent as the latter learned from the former. Similarly, Hassan had a problem with hyperactive students who disturbed his class, but he used them as good examples for other students. The availability of facilities which assisted teachers in treating the teaching and learning problems represents the institutional factor. For example, Hassan managed to overcome some technology problems like getting the data show projector fixed and installing a computer instead of the one which was not working.

The constraining factors are associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. The factors which are associated with the teacher include the lack of awareness, lack of background knowledge and personal matters. Sarah's journal entry revealed that the lack of her awareness about the importance of the critical thinking skills constrained her reflection on the development of the students' critical thinking skills.

The factors related to the students include students' low proficiency level, lack of interest and fear and shyness. The lack of cooperation among the teacher, students and administrator is a common constraining factor for the teacher, student and institution. Hassan stated in his journal that the lack of the students' interest in doing their assignments constrained his efforts to treat their learning difficulties which might have emerged from the assignments.

The factors which are associated with the teaching methods include the lack of course objectives clarity for students, lack of lesson preparation and teacher's inappropriate role. Ameen encountered one teaching and learning problem which he could not manage to remedy successfully due to the lack of lesson preparation. He had to teach a new lesson which he did not prepare in advance and provided the students with inappropriate answers to the exercise questions.

The factors related to the institution are the lack of resources and also lack of imposing university rules and regulations. The lack of resources in the university constrained Sarah's reflection on the lesson 'GM Food' during the preparation process. The environmental factor revealed in the journal entries is the uncondusive environment. As shown in Muneer's journal entry, the teacher was not able to treat the problem of the lack of textbooks. The students could not buy the books because the book store was located in an unsecured area.

The findings of the journal entries indicated that the teachers' teaching experience is the most powerful enabling factor for the informants' reflection on the teaching and learning process. For instance, Ahmed and Hassan used their accumulative teaching experience to overcome the teaching and learning problems they confronted as illustrated earlier. However, the lack of objectives clarity for the students and the uncondusive environment which resulted from the unsecured political situation appear to important constraining factors for reflection. For example, Ahmed stated in his journal that the students faced difficulty in implementing what they studied. He confirmed that the lack of the clarity of the course objectives for the students constrained their learning and also his reflection on their learning problems.

Additionally, the unsecured environment had a negative impact on Muneer's reflection. The teacher directed the students where they could get the textbook for his course. But, when the students realized that the place was unsecured, they had a heated argument with the teacher about the political situation in the country.

#### **5.1.2.4 Focus Group Discussions**

From the focus group discussions with students, I inferred reflection enabling factors which are related to the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution and environment. The factors related to the teacher include teacher's personality and some other factors which are related to the teacher and students such as avoiding personal problems, extrinsic motivation, affection, preparation and interaction. For instance, the role of affection in enabling teachers' reflection was revealed by Hassan's students who claimed that for better discussion of teaching and learning issues, the students and teacher need "to be faithful". I inferred from Sarah's students that extrinsic motivation is very important for engaging the students in classroom discussions which can lead to treating their learning problems: "If there are weak students, don't insult them ... encourage them".

The factors related to the teaching methods are effective teaching methods and effective communication. Hassan's students revealed that effective communication enables the discussions of their learning problems with the teachers. The availability of resources represents the institutional factor. Sarah's students revealed that the availability of resources like the "interesting book for reading" enabled them to discuss their emerging learning difficulties with the teachers and learn better. The

environmental factor is the conducive environment. Ameen's students revealed that a conducive learning environment fostered the discussion of their learning problems with the teacher in the class as the number of students was only 14.

On the other hand, I elicited constraining factors which are associated with the teacher, students, teaching methods, institution, curriculum and environment. The factor related to the teacher is the traditional beliefs. The lack of commitment, lack of extrinsic motivation and lack of preparation are related to the teacher and students. For example, I inferred from the students that the traditional beliefs of some teachers stand like an obstacle in front of the students when they want to discuss teaching or learning issues with the teachers. Hassan's students, for example, revealed that they cannot discuss some of the teaching and learning problems with some teachers as "they see it like criticizing".

The other factors associated with the students are the student's personality, low proficiency level and lack of intrinsic motivation. I also inferred that some students' personality features like shyness and fear constrain the discussion of their learning problems with their teachers. Lack of effective teaching techniques is related to the teaching methods. My discussions with Ahmed's students revealed that they face difficulties with some other teachers because of the way they handle their classes and deal with students which constrain the reflection of such teachers on the students' learning difficulties.

Factors associated with the curriculum include lack of updated courses and difficulty of the courses. I inferred from the students' talks that the lack of updated courses did

not encourage them to discuss their learning difficulties with the teachers. The institutional factor is the lack of facilities which, as Ahmed's students and Muneer's students revealed, constrain the reflection of the teachers on the students' learning problems. The unconducive environment caused by the unsecured atmosphere made the discussions of the students' learning problems with their teachers difficult as narrated by Ameen's students: "The political crises affected teaching and learning".

Based on the findings of focus group discussions with the students, I inferred that effective communication between the teacher and the students is an important enabling factor for reflection. Specifically, the focus group discussions with Sarah's students, Hassan's students and Ameen's students indicated that effective communication was a remarkable feature of successful teaching and learning strategies which enabled the discussions of the teaching and learning issues in class. For instance, Sarah's students perceived effective communication in the simple language the teacher uses to communicate with the students during the discussions of their learning difficulties. Hassan's students narrated that effective communication between the teacher and students fosters the discussion of the teaching and learning problems. Ameen's students revealed that in private universities like UST, communication between the teacher and students inside the classroom is easy and effective as the number of students was very small compared to the big number of students in public universities.

On the other hand, the students also revealed that the unconducive environment, which appeared to be unsecured particularly in the second phase of the study, was one of the most powerful constraining factors for the discussions of their learning

difficulties with the teachers. From the discussions with Hassan's students, Ameen's students and Muneer's students, I inferred that the unsecured political situation in Yemen was the main constraining element for the treatment of the teaching and learning problems. Hassan's students, for example, commented on the unsecured environment which constrained the teacher's reflection on the teaching and learning process. One of them mentioned: "The atmosphere is terrible" both inside and outside the university. Another student narrated: "Once we had a class and we heard an explosion". A third student said: "This is not a quiet atmosphere". A fourth student added that "in an atmosphere like that, you can't learn". Ameen's students stated that "the political crises affected teaching and learning". Muneer's students said that "students cannot study at home because of the bad situation". They also narrated that "sometimes it is difficult to go to the university because of shooting and fire". Even during my discussion with one focus group, I began with seven students and ended with two due to an explosion which occurred in a place not very far from the university building. As such, the unsecured atmosphere disturbed the students' learning process and did not help them to engage fully in the discussion of their learning difficulties with the teachers who were also constrained by the same factor i.e., unsecured environment.

Additionally, I highlight some of my field notes pertaining to factors which constrain teachers' reflection:

What struck me was that when I shifted to the department of English in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, I realized what most of the participants were talking about such as the lack of training, lack of motivation and also the lack of support from the department to the teachers. There seems to be a kind of routine work done in the department. That is, things are only assigned to the teachers, but one does not feel that he engages in some formal reflection on his teaching activities. I met the head of the English department several times to discuss some teaching and learning difficulties. He appeared

to be very competent and aware of the teaching and learning difficulties that teachers and learners encountered in the department, but he seemed to be handicapped as he did not get sufficient support from the university. That was what he revealed to the teaching staff during the English department meetings and what I myself felt as a teacher at UST. I still remember one of his statements when he said that they (college and university) only flood him with papers and requests that he had nothing to do with. Similarly, the teachers in the English department had a bitter experience as they failed to get direct assistance from their department to help them overcome the teaching and learning difficulties. (Field notes)

## **5.2 Summary**

The findings of this study reveal the engagement of the informants in various levels, types and patterns of reflection. Also, the study shows that two types of factors, both enabling and constraining elements, affect the informants' reflection. Some enabling factors such as the personality of the teacher, reading, teaching experience and effective communication tend to play prominent roles in encouraging teachers to engage in reflective practice. On the other hand, constraining factors such as the personality of the teacher, lack of support, lack of training, heavy teaching load, lack of motivation, lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson/ course and uncondusive environment appear to play important roles in constraining reflection. These factors pull the informants from practicing regular, formal personal and collaborative reflection.



## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides reflection on the preceding parts of the study and on my own journey among respondents as an insider researcher. I theorize about reflective practice for providing a holistic picture of the reflection process in the university realm. I also provide concluding remarks and implications which emerge from the study for a further research agenda.

#### 6.2 Retrospection and Moving on

As shown in the preceding chapters, research studies have been done in higher education to investigate the reflective practice among university teachers (Amobi, 2005; Biggs, 2003; Boud & Walker, 1998; Gimenez, 1999; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Lyons, 2006; McLean, 2007; Murray *et al.*, 2007; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). Given that beliefs and practices are important components of reflective practice, more in-depth understanding of how teachers engage in reflection needs to be explored. However, little is known about the reflection process which focuses on university teachers' beliefs and practices (Hos & Kekec, 2014; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). In Yemen, the concept of reflective practice, which has been very common in the western countries since the beginning of 1980s (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991), seems to be new for many university teachers based on my personal communication. This is not surprising as reflective practice is not stated as part of the mission statement of higher education policy in Yemen (Duret *et al.*, 2010; Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005, 2007). In such a context,

teachers may not be aware of the assumptions underlying their practices and if they happen to practice reflection, it could be at an individual level or done informally with peers. I contended that understanding reflection and exploring how it is practiced among teachers would help to make teachers, myself included, aware of their practices and make sense of reflection for professional development, and meaningful teaching and learning (Fook & Gardner, 2007).

### **6.3 Discussion**

Throughout this research, the main concern has been to understand how reflection is practiced among university English teachers in the Yemeni context. Specifically, the findings are analyzed with reference to the questions of the study: how do university teachers engage in reflection; what are the factors that affect reflection?

The dissertation began by searching literature and providing the theoretical background about reflective practice in relation to the research questions (Abhakorn, 2014; Akbari, 2007; Akbari *et al.*, 2010; Amobi, 2005; Barry, 1996; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Davis, 2003; Farrell, 2008; Fensom, 2007; Hos & Kekec, 2014; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Killen, 2007; Lyons, 2006; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Munoz, 2007; Rahimi & Chabok, 2013; Smith, 2008; Tarrant, 2013; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). However, a priori literature did not control my study of reflective practice as my intent was to understand how reflection is practiced among teachers through all possible emerging data. Furthermore, no single theory can explain reflective practice. Rather, strands of theories guide this study i.e., the personal constructs theory (Kelly, 1955), the critical

social theory (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007) and the theories of personal action (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

The study is based on the scholars' perception that beliefs and practices are the two main components of reflective practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Dewey, 1933; Lyons, 2006; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) and also on Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) view of reflection as the diagnosis of the teaching and learning problem, testing and evaluating the solution to the problem and belief in personal causation.

Through the multi-methods approach employed in the study, I learned a great deal about reflection. In the interviews, the informants narrated their stories (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009). I also inferred information from the informants' actual practices in the natural context (Dornyei, 2007; Merriam, 1998) through classroom observations and journal entries, and also from students' focus group discussions. This assisted me to match the informants' claims to their actual practices. Additionally, by giving teachers an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs and practices, they become aware of the assumptions underlying their practices (Fook & Gardner, 2007; Hubball *et al.*, 2005; Killion, 2000) especially after they saw their videotaped classes. For instance, Sarah admitted that she learned a great deal through her participation in the reflection process particularly being observed and given the opportunity to reflect on her classes. To put it in her words, she said: "My experience through these three classes, because I had to think about my teaching, made a lot of difference to me. I never thought that just three classes would make such a difference". Similarly, Muneer confessed that through his participation in this

study, he realized he was practicing reflection during his teaching which he was not aware of before. Hassan also realized that he was still in the traditional shield as he found himself doing most of the talk in the classroom though, earlier on, he claimed that he believes in the students' interactive role in the class. Even Ameen who said during the earlier interviews that teachers can reflect on teaching and learning process before teaching, while teaching and after teaching is completed, withdrew his claim. Later, he said that reflection is neither practiced before nor after class as the teachers are worried about their lives because of the unsecured atmosphere which was surrounding the teaching and learning process during the time of my field work. Rather, he emphasized that reflection is only practiced during teaching.

In the interviews, I always reflected with the informants on their narrated lived experiences and practices, and kept highlighting emerging issues either in the same interview or in the follow up interview to verify such issues with them (Kvale, 1996). They all ended up with stories which revealed how much they engage in reflection and what affects their reflection.

The findings of the study show that the informants appear to engage in one sort of reflection or another. To illustrate, the data revealed that all the informants engage in irregular and informal personal and collaborative reflections on the teaching and learning process (Day, 1999; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Even though, Ahmed and Muneer claimed that they discussed teaching and learning issues formally (Hartnell-Young, 2003) with the coordinator and head of English department respectively, their reflections remain very rare. All the three types of reflection highlighted in literature pertaining to the time of their occurrence are evident in the claims and

practices of teachers. That is, the informants appear to practice irregular reflection-for action (Killion & Todnem, 1991), regular reflection-in-action and irregular reflection-on-action (Schon, 1983, 1987). Based on Kirby and Teddlie's (1989) view of reflective practice, some of the informants' practices like asking and answering students' questions in class seem to be routine actions particularly when there is no evaluation for such routines (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933). Some other practices are reflective. Yet, critical reflection which is the essence of the teaching and learning process (Howard, 2003; Kember *et al.*, 2000; Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006) is not evident among teachers. To illustrate, scholars refer to critical reflection as formal, systematic and collaborative discussion among practitioners in a wide community of practice (Dewey, 1933; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Kember *et al.*, 2000; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

In line with the discussion above, it becomes obvious that certain factors enable the occurrence of teachers' reflection. On the contrary, the absence of effective reflection, based on literature (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011) and the study conducted here, is caused by certain factors which are revealed from the data of this study. Some of such enabling and constraining factors seem to have more influence on teachers' reflection than other factors. The personality of the teacher, reading, teaching experience and effective communication are found to play important roles in the reflective practice among teachers. As revealed from the data, the teacher's personality appears to be very prominent in enabling teachers' reflection as illustrated by all the informants. This is also supported by scholars' view (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) that personality affects the person's actions positively. Reading is identified in literature as a tool for reflection

(Brookfield, 1995; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Sarah considers it as a key factor to knowledge and everything and also part of a Muslim's beliefs. However, personal reflection on teaching and learning problems through reading in books cannot elevate the teacher's reflection to be critical (Dewey, 1933; Kember *et al.*, 2000). The informants' teaching experience which I learned from their narratives and through classroom observations led to their reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the effective way of communication adopted by the teachers (Ramsey, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007) encouraged the students to open up and discuss their learning difficulties which the teachers helped to overcome.

On the contrary, the personality of the teacher, lack of support, lack of training, heavy teaching load, lack of motivation, lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson or course and uncondusive environment tend to be prominent constraining factors for reflection. The data reveal that the personality of the teacher also seems to be a constraining factor for the teachers' reflection as highlighted in literature (Akbari, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). As Ahmed put it: "Teachers' personalities are different". All the informants revealed that it is sensitive to share teaching and learning issues with some teachers particularly classroom observation. Lack of support is one of the main obstacles that constrain the informants' reflection (Fensom, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Specifically, they lack the support from the department, the college and the university. They even revealed that they do not receive sufficient training through which they can learn how to reflect on the teaching and learning problems systematically (Lyons, 2006). Based on this, the lack of training for UST teachers in general and English teachers in particular is one of the main reasons beyond the lack of teachers' formal and systematic discussions of

the teaching and learning issues. If such discussions are conducted formally and systematically as posited by scholars (Farrell, 2007, 2008; Gimenez, 1999; Hartnell-Young, 2003; Lyons, 2006), they will lead to more effective teaching and learning process (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

In the same vein, the informants also shared their severe experience pertaining to the heavy teaching load which constrains their reflection practices. This makes teachers feel demotivated and negatively affects their engagement in effective discussions of the teaching and learning issues with others (Davis, 2003; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). They even narrated that the university does not pay attention to how to motivate teachers to engage in collaborative discussion of teaching and learning issues (Davis, 2003; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). In such a demotivated atmosphere, the teachers sometimes lack focus on the objectives of the lesson which affects the reflection on the lessons they teach. This is what happened to some of the informants like Ahmed and Sarah in their classes. Furthermore, the unsecured environment has caused too much trouble for both students and teachers myself included to reflect properly and effectively on what is going on. This is because effective reflection requires a conducive teaching and learning environment which is risk free (Killion, 2000; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Nonetheless, the surrounding environment has been problematic; it pulls teachers and constrains their reflection (Killion, 2000). The informants described the atmosphere at UST as unconducive. More specifically, during the political unrest, they described it as risky and unsecured particularly when we heard explosions in the surrounding area. Such unsecured environment has led to unfavorable consequences pertaining to teachers' reflective practices.

As inferred from the data, constraining factors appear to have more power than enabling factors as they pull the teachers from being engaged in a systematic and collaborative reflection. This is evident in the lack of formal and regular collaborative reflection among teachers at UST. However, teachers' engagement in informal personal and collaborative reflection on their beliefs and practices contributes to the development of their awareness of treating teaching and learning problems, reflective teaching experience and also of their personality traits. These factors can push teachers towards more reflective practices (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933; Hartnell-Young, 2003; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Reflection also can help to redirect constraining factors as we notice in the development of the informants' awareness and personality traits such as open-mindedness as a result of their engagement in reflection.

Thus, elevating reflection from the irregular and informal personal level to the regular, formal collaborative and team level in the wide community of practice (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Rodger, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) can assist to achieve effective reflective practice (Kember *et al.*, 2000). That is to say, team reflection, particularly when it is done formally and systematically, can lead to the change of the teachers' beliefs and practices and help to narrow the gap between them. This can be done by giving teachers a chance to engage in collaborative reflection for a few hours to share ideas and experiences which might change their perceptions and/ practices (Patton, 2002) and lead to their professional development and improved practice of the teaching and learning process ( Fook & Gardner, 2007; Osterman, 1991; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Such collaborative reflection is supported by the critical social theory (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007) which views the



individual as part of the community who, cannot act in isolation, but, influences and is influenced by others (Dant, 2003; Kelly, 1955) providing effective reflection. Fook and Gardner remarked:

If effective social change is to be achieved it must occur on both personal and collective levels. One does not preclude the other, but the two are intertwined. Social changes involve personal changes, and vice versa. In this sense, then, it becomes important for the individual person to be able to recognize how their own personal changes are linked with changes on broader levels. (Fook & Gardner, 2007, p. 36).

#### **6.4 Personal Reflection**

Reflection “is not a fad whose time has come and gone, but perhaps the most essential piece of what makes us human, of what makes us learners” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 864). This quote points to the fact that reflection is a fundamental part of human life. Sometimes it is done as a daily practice that individuals engage in when they do certain activities like shopping and eating even if they are not conscious that what they do is reflection. Yet, it becomes fruitful when we know why we do what we do. More importantly, reflection becomes effective when we engage with others in a conscious and well-organized way for the sake of improving our experience and practices. Thus, reflection is a conscious journey which has no end. We only pause to learn from our own experience and from others’ to be able to confront the emerging challenges.

As I write this, I keep reflecting on my own beliefs and practices. I am fully aware of the reflection process as I have read literature and engaged with the respondents in such a process. I also realized that being an insider researcher, I was able to engage fully in discussions with teachers who share their personal details (Unluer, 2012). However, being an insider, I might fall in the trap of ‘going native’ (Delamont,

2002). To avoid such a trap, I had to keep alert and listen to and observe everything familiar and unfamiliar (Asselin, 2003). I always recall that I should consider the ethical issues for valid data (Unluer, 2012).

During my discussions with the informants, I never appeared with a priori perspectives that the informants had to adopt, but relied on discussing emerging issues. Nevertheless, I admit that I share similar difficulties which the informants confront. Through the lens of the informants who are actually my colleagues at UST, I learned a great deal about reflection (Brookfield, 1995).

This study not only highlights the importance of reflection among the informants, but also makes me more conscious of my own problems. It involves admitting one's weaknesses as an insider even though many of us tend to avoid using this word because it suggests that we are weak. No teacher likes being labeled as 'weak'. Weakness also has the connotation of limitation. This creates awareness in me not only as a teacher, but also as a researcher that I also have my own weaknesses.

My previous experience about reflection was very limited. As I remember, I was first exposed to the concept of reflective practice during my master's degree study before a decade. Becoming a university teacher, I have had an opportunity to engage in some sorts of irregular reflective practices. I was able to discuss my self-appraisal with my British former dean in the International College at UST, a practice which only occurred once before the dean moved to Britain, and chat with my peers about some teaching and learning problems. As I learned that reflective practice advocates the learner-centered approach, I was always thinking of engaging students in

classroom activities such as pair work and group work pushing towards a learner-centered approach. I tried to adopt the role of a facilitator for the students' learning. In so doing, I tried to help the students avoid the learning experience I encountered when I did my bachelor's degree as some teachers appeared to follow the teacher-centered approach and did not consider the language skills differences among the students.

In line with the above, another sort of irregular reflective activities that we do is to prepare the teaching portfolios. But most of the time these portfolios are not well-prepared as they are not reflected upon in the department. The quality of the portfolios depends on the personal interest of the teachers. For the department, preparing a teaching portfolio is a requirement which teachers should do and keep on the shelf. However, as revealed by the informants, sometimes such portfolios seem to be very useful to refer back to particularly when they confront certain problematic teaching or learning issues.

Yet, through my personal communication, I have come to know that the concept of reflective practice seems to be new for many teachers including experienced instructors. I recall my meeting with an expert in EFL/ ESL who asked me about the topic I work on and when I told him, 'reflective practice', he said that it should be a new concept in western education. At that time, I knew that reflective practice had been used in western education since the beginning of 1980s (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). In addition, the formal reflective practice that I experienced once with my former dean, whose educational background is western, emphasizes that the concept of reflective practice which seems to be new for us has been very common in

western countries. To the best of my knowledge and based on the reports of higher education in Yemen, reflective practice is not part of the focus of higher education (Duret *et al.*, 2010; Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005, 2007).

I felt passionate to contribute to the development of higher education in Yemen in general and university teaching in particular. By tackling this study, I intended to raise the teachers' awareness and those who are concerned about the reflective practice among the university teachers.

Through this study, I was exposed to a wide range of information about reflective practice in literature and from the respondents which I did not know before. I always thought like many people that reflection is personal and not necessarily be done in collaboration with others. Yet, I come to know that reflective practice is not only a concept to believe in or an impulsive action that we practice daily (Akbari, 2007; Dewey, 1933). Rather, it is a practice which we should adopt formally and systematically to improve the teaching and learning process and enhance our professional development (Fook & Gardner, 2007; Osterman, 1991; Schon, 1983, 87; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). Having said this, I do not intend to show that I know better than my colleagues about reflective practice. Rather, I want to emphasize that this reflective study has exposed me to more reflective sessions not only on others' teaching and learning beliefs and practices, but also on my own beliefs and practices.

This study motivates me to open up more and share experiences with others. I realized that when I engaged in discussions with the respondents, I learned very

useful things. For instance, I learned from Hassan that we have to learn about others' perspectives. For him, things which are obstacles for others may seem to be useful for us. In words, he said: "One's poison is another's need". Sarah and Muneer inspired me with their strong desire for reflection. Sarah remarked: "I am really glad that I have this experience this semester. We need this kind of refreshment". From the focus group discussions, I also learned about the likes and dislikes of students which made me reflect on such issues like the informants.

Interestingly, UST intends to implement classroom observation strategy among peers for evaluation purposes. However, engaging the teachers in this strategy seems to be challenging to implement at UST as some teachers resist it for certain reasons. First, most of the teachers complain that they are heavy loaded and that they have no time to engage in classroom observation. Second, some teachers consider it as breaking their privacy as in the case of Hassan. Third, some other teachers, like Ahmed, suggest that classroom observation should not be threatening or done for the sake of evaluating teachers' performance (Lengeling, 2013). Fourth, as I have learned from peers, it seems that the university perceives classroom observation as a one-way direction where the observer evaluates the observee, but does not assist him or her to discuss the merits and demerits of the classroom teaching and learning process. I contend that to implement such a strategy which Sarah and Hassan described as very useful, the university should better look at classroom observation as an assistance tool which can aid teachers to share their ideas and experiences and learn from one another, but not as an assessment for evaluating teachers' performance (Lengeling, 2013). We need to cultivate the idea of sharing experience among teachers. We can train teachers to be aware of its importance and encourage them to implement it with

their peers for the sake of learning from one another. Rewards can be given by the department or the college for teachers who implement classroom observation strategy and share experience with others.

What strikes a person is that the administrators in the university have decided to implement such a strategy, but they do not follow up things. Such things only remain theoretical and unimplemented. This might be because of certain obstacles like the ones mentioned above.

More importantly, the informants raise issues which we all encounter in the university. We lack extrinsic motivation and support from the administrators to engage in formal and systematic reflection. I believe that the university holds responsibility for the lack of effective reflection. The university should provide training, support and conducive environment for reflection. It should cultivate reflection among teachers and motivate them to engage in formal and systematic collaborative reflection. As stated by one of the informants in the study: "I think teachers should be exposed to training, should be well-trained on how important reflective practice is".

Accordingly, the university needs to consider tailoring the concept of reflective practice in the curricula of tertiary education so that teachers and students can be familiar with reflection. This is because reflection can function as a catalyst (Ghaye, 2005; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006) for teachers' professional development (Biggs, 2003; Farrell, 2007, 2008; Gimenez, 1999; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Otherwise, without a formal and systematic reflection, teachers will have to work for ages to develop and

change (Fensom, 2007). Nonetheless, we still have our own motives. We should have a firm belief that we can change for better. If we can cultivate a desire in ourselves for change, we will find a way for achieving effective reflection. We can read literature about reflection and its importance in enhancing teaching and learning process (Brookfield, 1995; Schon, 1983, 1987). This will help us to move from personal to collaborative reflection. We can then push administrators to provide support for formal collaborative reflection.

I feel that the engagement of administrators in this reflective study could add value to the study particularly when many obstacles for teachers' reflection are related to the institution. If the university administrators are involved in such a reflective process, they could help to push reflection move forward.

Like the informants who participated in this study, I have learned a great deal about how reflection is practiced in the university. I understand that an effective reflective practice requires a context where people can collaborate to deconstruct and construct their beliefs and practices for building their theories of practice. It cannot be conditional in terms of achieving personal or institutional benefits only as Sarah mentioned: "I try to modify or, let's say, improve it if I am going to teach the same course the following year". This is against the idea of the critical social theory which perceives a person as part of the social community of practice and cannot be separated from it (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007). Sarah's reflection in that context can be looked at as an individual reflection to construct and deconstruct her personal beliefs and practices (Kelly, 1955), which should be used to enhance collaborative reflection. That is, by providing her personal reflective thoughts and

practices, others in the teaching community can reflect on them and share their ideas and experiences (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

Significantly, my thorough review of literature and the data of the study emphasize the ineffective reflection practiced by the English teachers in the university context (Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011). The informants emphasized their informal and irregular reflection due to certain factors which affected their reflection. I myself realized that my informal reflective practices are also pushed and pulled by similar factors. However, conducting this reflective study is the right beginning of my reflective practice which has begun to continue.

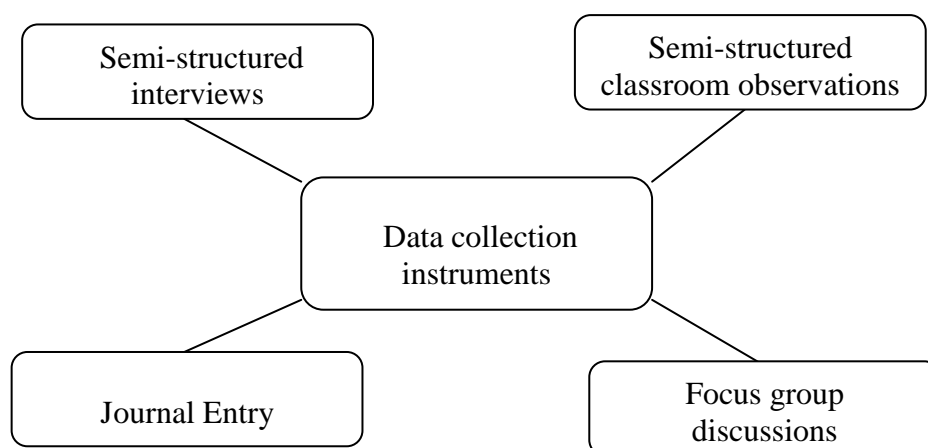
Thus, reflection begins as a thoughtful practice at the personal level where teachers as individuals can reflect on their beliefs and practices constructing and deconstructing their knowledge based on their personal experiences (Kelly, 1955). Yet, this reflection should be developed further into critical reflection which can lead to a dramatic change in the teachers' beliefs and practices (Kember *et al.*, 2000; Rodgers, 2002; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). When the teachers engage in collaborative and systematic discussions with others in the community of practice i.e. students, colleagues, administrators and other interested people, they can share their experiences pertaining to teaching and learning issues and learn from one another (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006).

## **6.5 Theorizing Reflective Practice**

Throughout the study, I tried to be a learner to get in-depth data from the respondents about reflective practice. Through a multipronged research approach including semi-



structured interviews, semi-structured classroom observations, journal entry and focus group discussion (figure 6.1), I gained insights into the phenomenon i.e., reflective practice.



*Figure 6.1:* Triangulated approach for data collection

All the way through the study, I listened to the respondents' narrations and observed the teachers' practices in the natural context of the study. I then weaved the two parts of the story i.e., the claims and practices (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009) together to offer the reader and myself the holistic picture of reflection practiced by English teachers in the university realm. Thus, this study provides a new conceptual framework (figure 6.2) which includes the missing parts in the previous studied i.e., the focus on the actual practices of teachers, not only on their beliefs (Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011), and it also involves the factors that affect the reflective practice among teachers i.e., enabling and constraining factors (Lyons, 2007). The study would be incomplete without exploring the actual practices of teachers based on claims and reality.

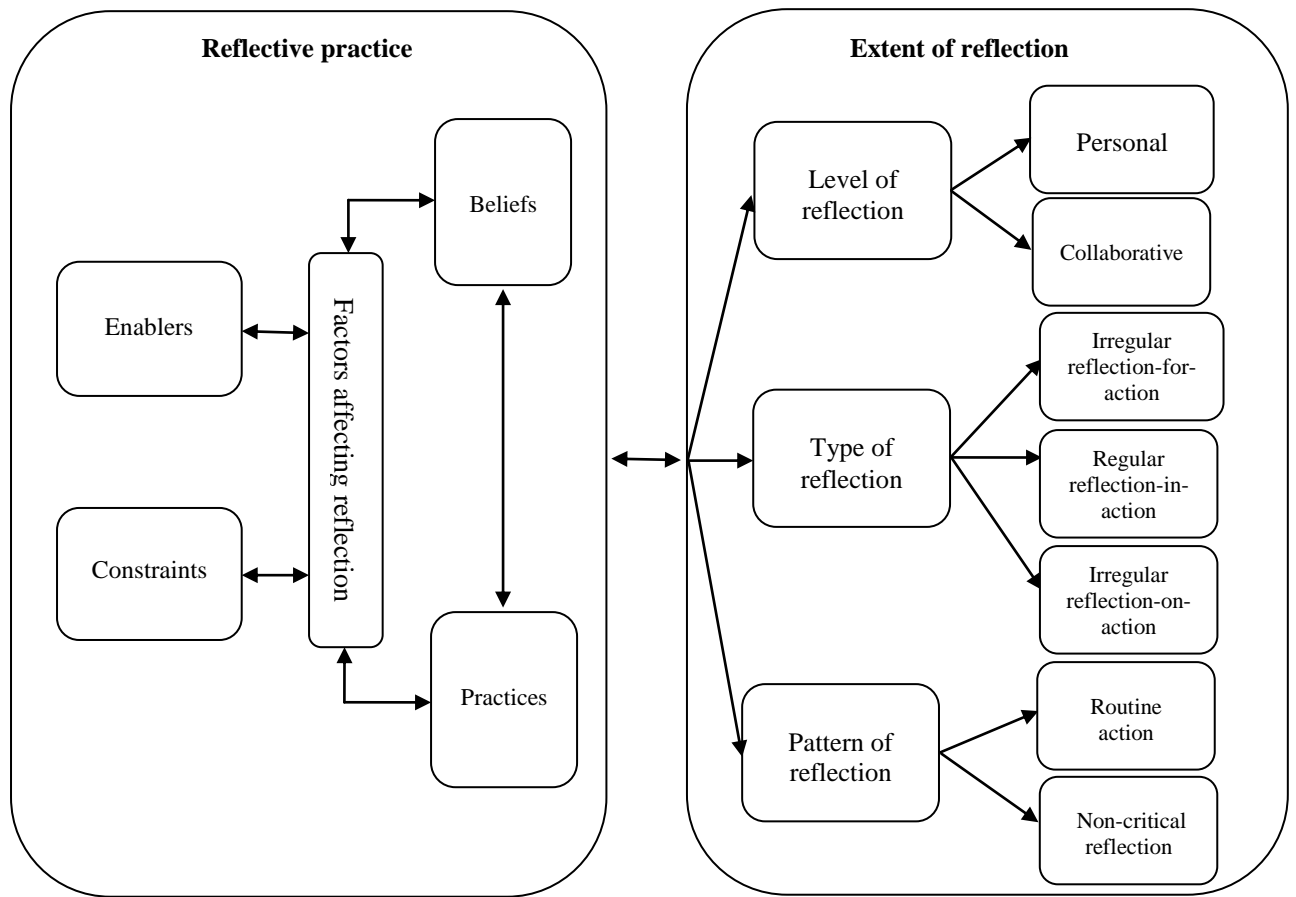


Figure 6.2: Conceptual framework of reflective practice

Based on literature and the findings of the study, I view reflection as a dynamic and conscious process which begins at the individual level and continues to engage others in treating a particular problem. It focuses on beliefs and practices. As such, personal reflection can make us aware of our own beliefs or espoused theories, but to be aware of our practices or theories-in-use, we need to be engaged in effective collaborative reflection. Effective reflective practice entails a purposeful pause on thoughts and actions which can lead to enhancing students' learning (Montie *et al.*, 1998). It involves critical activity that requires practitioners to interact and act in authentic setting, but not just talk about personal thoughts of how to teach (York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). It is not superficial like impulsive and routine actions (Akbari, 2007). It has a rationale, criteria for measuring and consistent evaluation (Huball *et*

*al.*, 2005). It has a clear structure and framework guidance (Ramsey, 2003; Reiman, 1999; Schraw, 1998). It is systematic, distinct and constant (Lyons, 2006; Rodgers, 2002; Schon, 1987). It must occur in both personal and collaborative level as the two are intertwined (Fook & Gardner, 2007). It should engage professional groups where practitioners can share experience and develop awareness (Karban & Smith, 2006).

I argue that what makes the reflective process effective or otherwise is the type of factors which affect reflection. Enabling factors enhance this process and constraints make it ineffective. In other words, enablers will push the reflection process forward and constraints will pull it backward. However, overcoming the constraints will help teachers to engage in reflective practice and push them towards more dynamic reflection. The factors which enable and constrain reflection among the English teachers at UST are illustrated in figure 6.3.

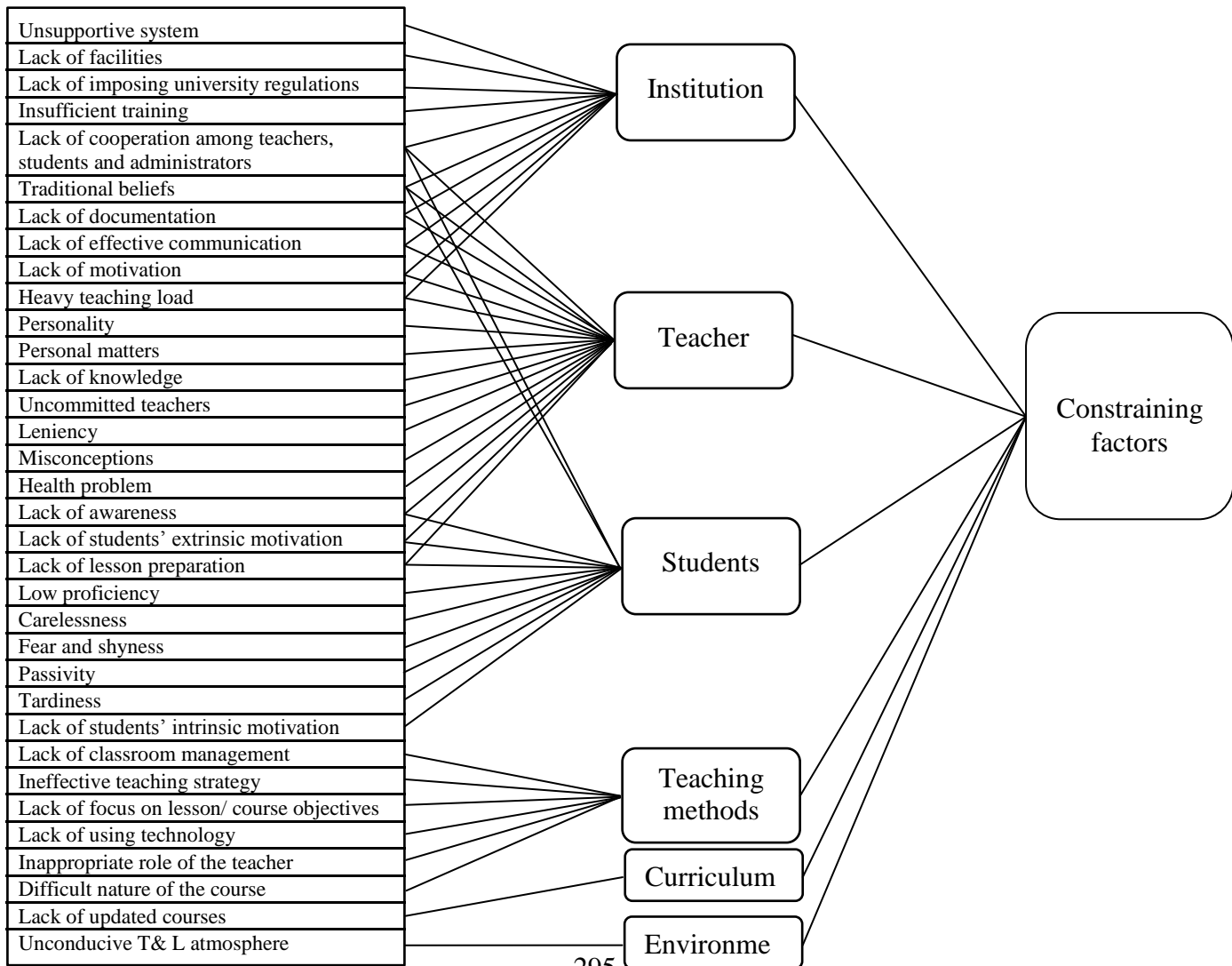
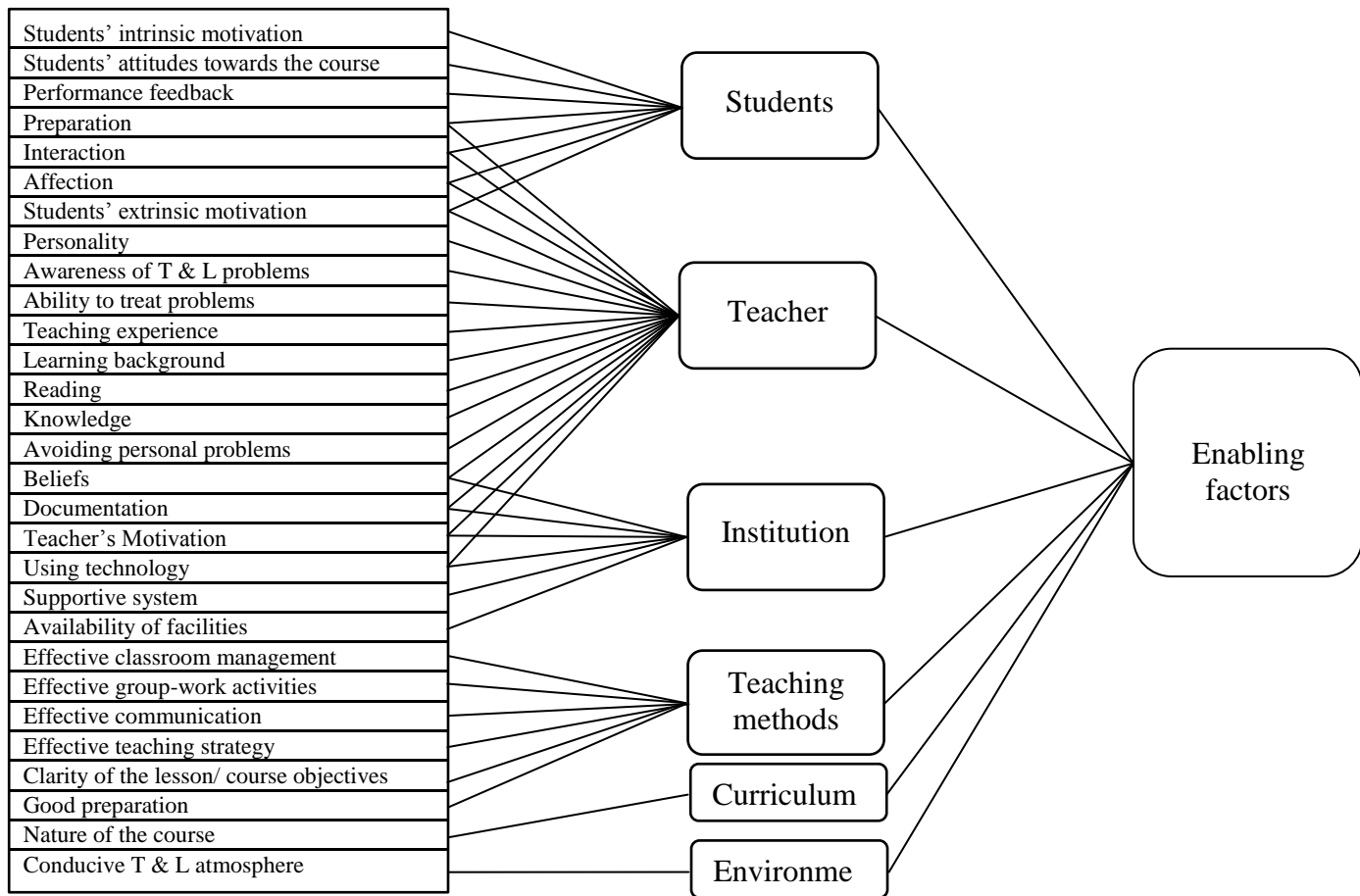


Figure 6.3: The factors affecting reflection

Furthermore, some enabling factors such as teacher's personality, reading, teaching experience and effective communication and also other constraining factors like the personality of the teacher, lack of support, lack of training, heavy teaching load, lack of motivation, lack of focus on the objectives of the lesson/ course and uncondusive environment are found to play prominent roles in the informants' reflection. This means that these factors affect the informants' reflection. Enabling factors can lead to more effective reflection. On the contrary, the constraining factors above have significant roles in pulling teachers from practicing effective reflection. Additionally, the active arrows between the reflective practice and the enabling and constraining factors in figure 6.2 show the mutual relationship between them. That is, the extent of reflective practice is based on how much such factors affect the teachers' beliefs and practices. The enabling factors can enhance the extent of reflection whereas the constraining factors cause limited reflection. Also, teachers' engagement in effective reflection enhances the enablers and minimizes the roles that the constraining factors play in reflective practice.

I argue that personal reflection is the start point for effective collaborative reflection. That is, as individuals, sometimes we are blind to see our own actions consciously. By this, I mean, we need others to collaborate and reflect with us as they can help us see the reality of our actions which we cannot see. They can help us be conscious of the assumptions underlying our practices. This will help to make the cyclical process of reflective practice suggested by Wallace (1991) effective. That is, our conscious reflection on the practice will lead to improved practice which will be reflected upon again to provide new improved practice and so on. Thus, we should engage in a dynamic reflection process which begins with personal reflection as a preliminary

stage and move towards collaborative reflection. Practically, if we draw a model for the level of reflection practiced among teachers at UST (figure 6.4), we can see that teachers engage in informal and irregular personal and collaborative reflection.

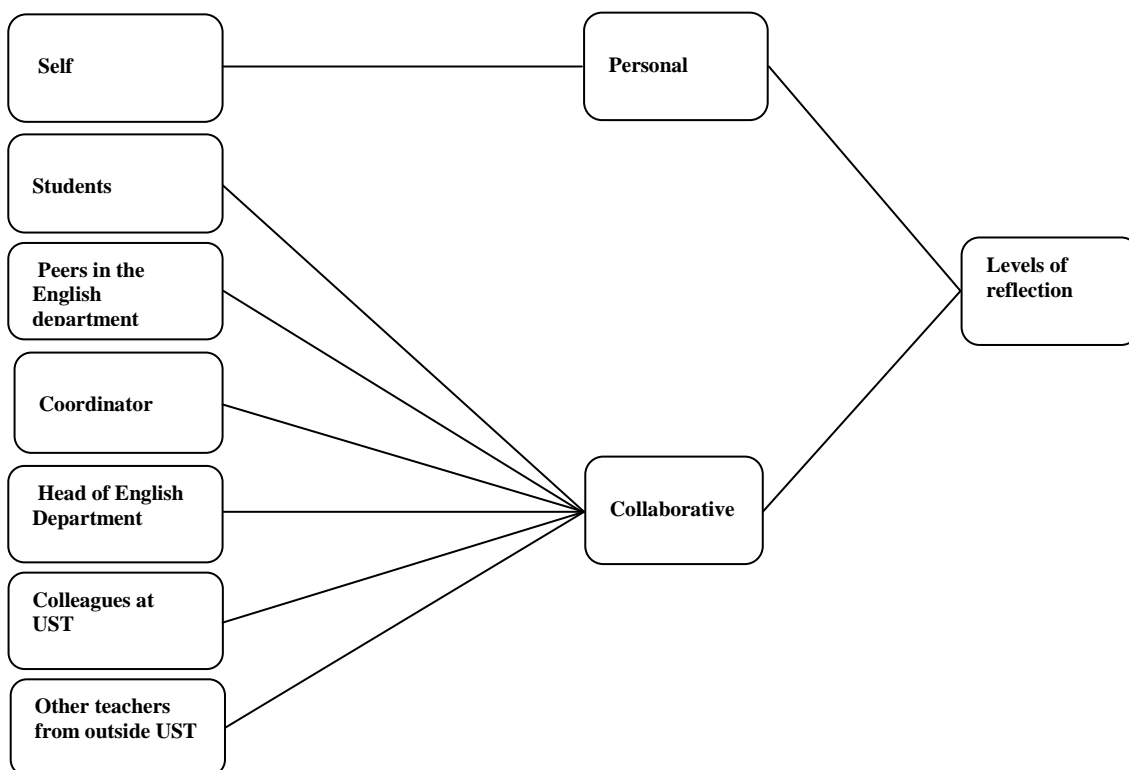


Figure 6.4: Levels of reflection

Evidently, there is a tendency for informal and irregular personal and collaborative reflection among teachers, but the formal and regular reflection is missing. This indicates that the process of reflection at UST lacks formality. It also lacks awareness among teachers about reflection though some of their practices are reflective actions. Hence, there are hopes for effective reflection which engages people such as individuals, peers, colleagues, administrators and any others in the community of practice like policy makers in formal and collaborative discussions of teaching and learning problems in the university context.

This study reveals three types of reflection pertaining to time. These are reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (figure 6.5). Though the common type of reflective practice among teachers is reflection-in-action, I argue that this reflection is still ineffective as most of teachers' practices in class are routine actions. This type of reflection can be effective if teachers become conscious of their reflective practices and evaluate their reflection in class with the help of students (Schon, 1983, 1987). Furthermore, teachers can learn better about their practices in class if they discuss such classroom problems with others outside class such as peers, colleagues or administrators in reflection-on-action sessions. This will enhance their reflection-in-action experience in the future (Schon, 1987). I also argue that there should be some more focus on reflection-for-action which is implied in Schon's (1983, 1987) studies and practiced irregularly by teachers as the findings of this study reveal. A further research study on the influence of reflection-for-action on the teaching and learning process is required.

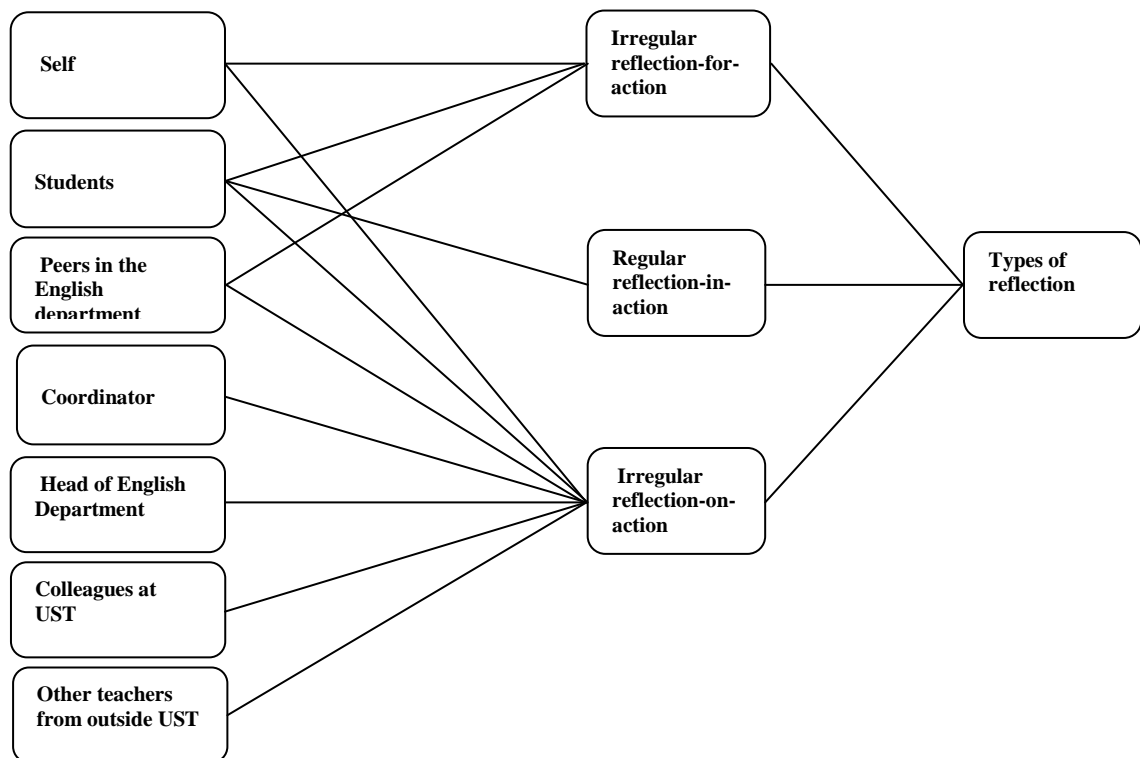
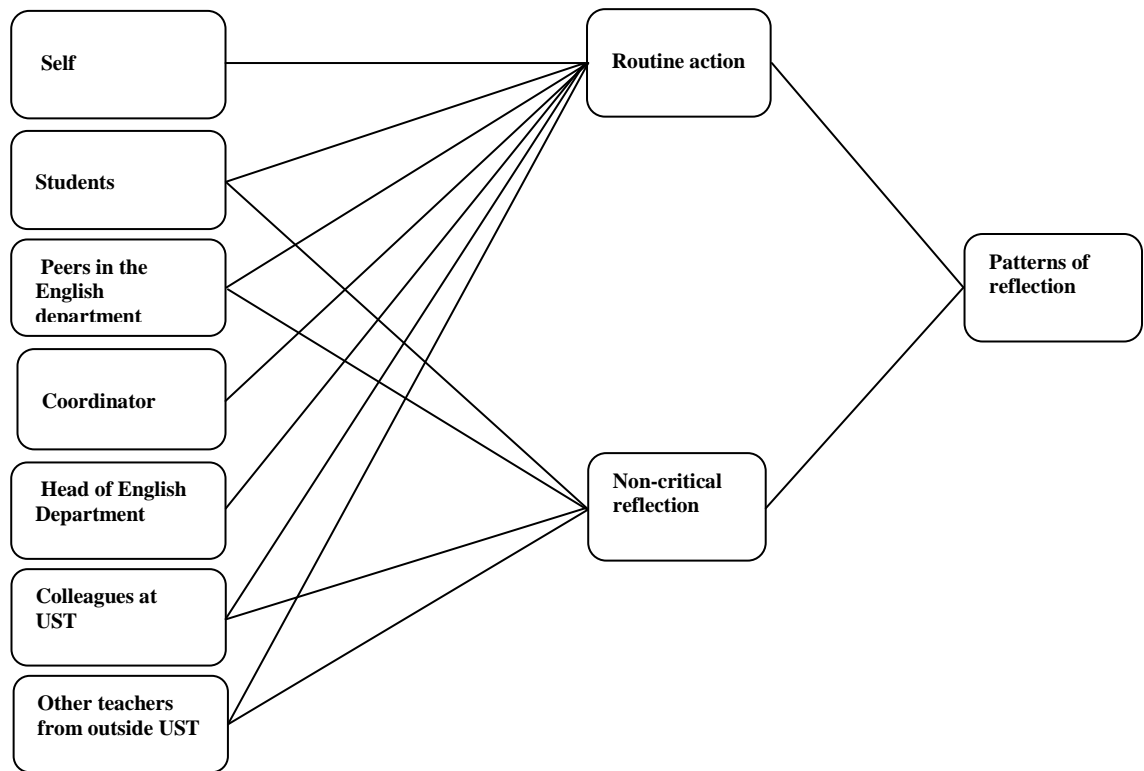


Figure 6.5: Types of reflection

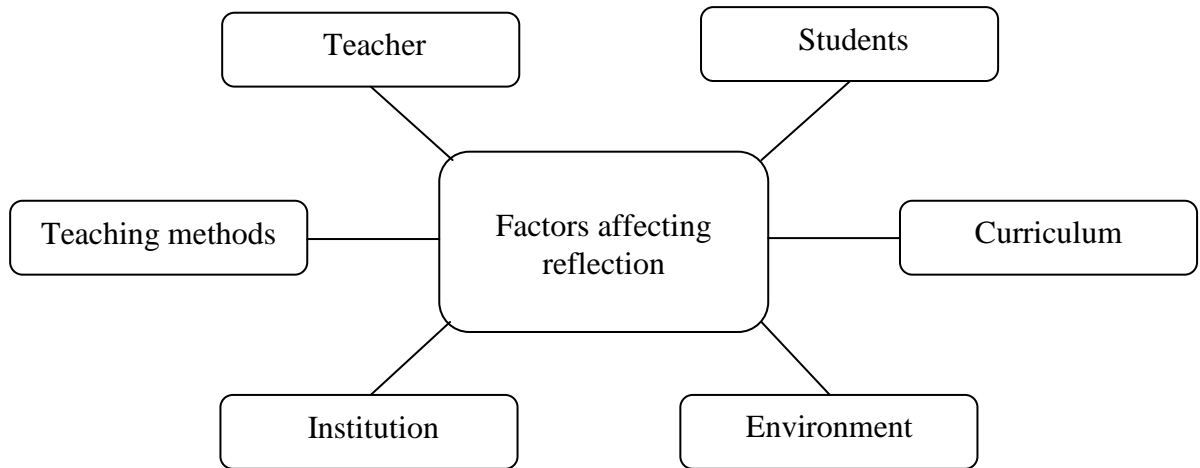
Also the pattern of reflection as revealed in this study shows routine actions and non-critical reflection among teachers (figure 6.6).



*Figure 6.6: Patterns of reflection*

Based on the study results, reflection is based on self-efforts and supportive collaboration; embedded in this are the factors which affect the extent of reflection. This means that when reflection takes place certain factors enable its occurrence and when it is absent or ineffective other constraining factors hinder it. Hence, for understanding these factors, we may ask about the sources of such factors. I would divide the sources into six possible categories. As figure 6.7 illustrates, these categories include the teacher, students, teaching methods, curriculum, institution and environment.





*Figure 6.7: Sources of factors affecting reflective practice*

Thus, reflective practice can be self-driven as it is influenced by factors related to the teacher such as the personality, intrinsic motivation, experience, awareness, knowledge, beliefs etc. which can push the teacher to reflect personally or to engage in collaborative reflection with others. It can also be influenced by students, institution, the teaching methods, curriculum and environment. Either self-driven or driven by others, it all depends on the factors that affect it. Yet, to achieve effective reflective practice, we have to move from informal, irregular and personal reflection to formal, regular and collaborative reflection.

Given that the teaching and learning process involves four main components as indicated by Rodgers (2002)-- the teacher, learners, content and the context-- the reflection process entails the “interactions between the self, others, and one’s environment” (Rodgers, 2002, 863). This interaction between the university teachers as individuals and the surrounding teaching and learning environment at UST is irregular, informal and limited due to the factors which constrain the reflection

process. This makes most of the teachers' practices seem to be routine actions and non-critical reflections, that is, ineffective reflections.

Thus, for effective reflection among UST teachers, more systematic and formal interaction between the self and other members of the community, which is the essence of the critical social theory, is required (Dant, 2003; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Rodgers, 2002). The critical social theory views the relationship between the individual and the society as a framework for change which shows that every individual influences and be influenced by the social community as presented by Fook and Gardner (2007). Additionally, "Through self-reflection we can interrogate how our needs and desires are related to those of the rest of the society of the modern world" (Dant, 2003, p. 163). I argue that the university teachers should engage in formal and systematic reflection in the wide community of practice which can lead to their professional development and improved practice. In doing so, they can engage administrators and all others who are concerned with the teaching and learning process to discuss how to employ reflective practice and also how to overcome the barriers of reflection.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The engagement of the informants in the reflection process through participation in this study raised their awareness of their practices particularly when they were given a chance to reflect on their practices in class. More importantly, the informants who appear to engage in more reflective practice, show more knowledge, experience and awareness of how to deal with the teaching and learning problems than others. This indicates the influence of their reflection back on such factors. However, reflection is

not a temporary practice like the informants' engagement in this study, but a lifelong learning process.

This study clearly demonstrates that the informants cannot only depend on self-driven factors which may only push them to engage in personal reflection that leads to routine or non-critical reflection. Rather, they require support of other sources-driven factors such as administrators to overcome the reflection's obstacles and engage in formal and systematic collaborative reflection. Consequently, in such reflection process, teachers share experience which can lead to awareness of their beliefs and practices and also to their professional development.

## **6.7 Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the ongoing calls for understanding reflection on teachers' beliefs and practices (Hos & Kekec, 2014; Kane *et al.*, 2002; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009, 2011), this study has provided in-depth information about how university English teachers engage in reflective practice. This implies that the study leads to a critical awareness of the different layers of reflection. Even though Kember *et al.* (2000) talked about reflective actions (i.e., critical and non-critical reflection) and routine actions, the common pattern of reflection that the English teachers at UST practice is limited to informal non-critical reflection and routine actions. Future research might investigate the appropriate tools for cultivating and developing awareness of critical reflection among teachers in the university.

In addition to a priori factors mentioned by some scholars (Akbari, 2007; Amobi, 2005; Killen, 2007; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Mena Marcos *et al.*, 2009; Munoz,

2007; Ramsey, 2003), this study demonstrates two types of emerging factors which affect the reflection among the university teachers i.e., enabling and constraining factors.

This study only engaged the teachers and students in the reflection process. However, involving the university administrators in this process could enhance the theoretical part of the study by providing more insights into the phenomenon from the administrators' perspectives. A further research study might engage the university administrators in the reflection process to understand the role they might play in promoting effective reflection among teachers.

Practically, the study gives teachers, administrators and decision-makers in-depth information about effective reflective practice, in particular, its process and relevance to teacher education. It indicates that participating in the reflection process has provided the informants with an opportunity to close the gap between their espoused theories (i.e., beliefs) and theories-in-use (i.e., practices) and raised their awareness of their beliefs and practices which they were not aware of before. This shows how giving the teachers a chance to engage in reflection for a few hours might change their perceptions and/ or practices (Patton, 2002). In this study, reflection assisted the informants to construct and deconstruct their beliefs and practices (Kelly, 1955) which they would not achieve without reflection. As such, reflective practice is strongly recommended as the gateway for the professional development of the university teachers (Biggs, 2003; Farrell, 2007, 2008; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Gimenez, 1999; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Osterman, 1991; Schon, 1983, 87; York-Barr *et al.*, 2006). University administrators and policy-makers can make use

of the study findings to enhance reflective practice among teachers and set plans to cultivate reflection process in teacher education programs.

Based on the findings of the study, some constraining factors for reflection play prominent roles in teachers' reflection. These factors, which include the teachers' heavy teaching load, the uncondusive environment, lack of support, lack of training and lack of extrinsic motivation, are related to the institution. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that the university administrators reconsider the teaching loads and other administrative responsibilities assigned to the teachers, motivate teachers, provide them with training and support and ensure a conducive teaching and learning environment. Specifically, administrators are strongly recommended to provide a conducive and supportive environment for systematic and formal reflection among teachers not only in the department of English, but also in other departments of specializations.

Based on the findings of this study, one of the constraining factors for reflection is the lack of the informants' awareness about reflection. The challenge then is how to cultivate reflection among teachers and motivate them to reflect. I suggest that the university adopts reflective practice theoretically and practically. At the theoretical level, the university may include reflective practice as part of its mission and provide the teachers with theoretical background about reflection, its significance and how it can be implemented individually and collaboratively. Practically, teachers (i.e., novice and experienced) can be trained to reflect on the teaching and learning process individually and collaboratively, informally and formally using the different possible reflective tools such as the introspection of one' thoughts and practices, and

retrospection sharing others past experiences. Engaging novices in collaborative reflection will help them learn from seniors' experiences. Thus, a systematic and formal reflection among teachers is strongly recommended. Adopting reflection, we can guarantee a thorough discussion of teaching and learning problems which is the heart of the reflective practice particularly when it is done collaboratively with members of the community of practice including administrators.

In addition, launching a reflective practice journal/ forum in higher education in Yemen can aid to cultivate the concept of reflection and provide teachers with an opportunity to share experience and enhance their professional development as a lifelong path. Also, the university can allocate formal sessions for teachers to rest and reflect on their experience. In so doing, the university teachers will be able to close the gap between their beliefs and practices and improve the teaching and learning process.

The conceptual framework resulted from this study can be used to develop a questionnaire for measuring the reflective practice among a wide range of teachers in higher education. Moreover, the triangulation of the data through the semi-structured interviews, semi-classroom observations, journal entry and focus group discussions has provided an effective multi-methods approach for gathering in-depth information about reflective practice. Hence, other studies can employ a similar approach to understand any complex phenomena related to teaching and learning

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