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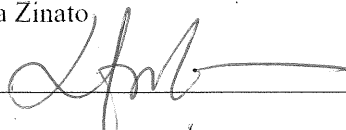
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**BECOMING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER: A CASE STUDY OF
CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IN A COOPERATIVE LEARNING CONTEXT**

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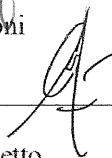
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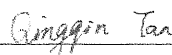
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Abstract

Reflective practice (henceforth RP) has increasingly become embedded within discourse concerning teachers' professional development in recent years. Yet RP enjoys little popularity in the research of Chinese language learning and teaching. This study aims to explore the current understanding of reflective practice among a purposeful group of in-service Chinese language teachers and its impact on their professional development in a cooperative context in Italian high schools. The objectives of this study are: 1) to investigate the teachers' current understanding of RP and their level of engagement; 2) to examine the prominent themes in their reflections; 3) to explore the depth of their reflection; 4) to identify the impact of reflective tools used in this study on their capacity of reflection; 5) to ascertain the significance of reflective practice on their professional development.

This study utilizes qualitative methodology and case study approach. Adopting a purposive sampling approach, five in-service Chinese language teachers were selected. Data for this research were gathered from semi-structured interviews, reflective feedback sessions, introductory workshops, classroom observations, reflective journals, e-portfolios, and field notes.

The findings indicated that, first of all, all participants had limited knowledge and little engagement in RP when they joined this study. However, through the systematic research process, they developed a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of RP. Secondly, the themes of participants' reflections can be divided into six main categories, including classroom teaching, evaluating teaching, self-awareness and professional development, educational environment, learners, and theories of teaching. The breadth of participants' reflections was influenced by their experience, educational background, and support and feedback from others. Thirdly, experienced teachers exhibited higher levels of reflection compared to novice teachers. Fourthly, the participants preferred group discussions and one-on-one reflective feedback sessions with critical friends over e-portfolios and reflective journals, as they believed these activities provided valuable opportunities to cooperate with peer teachers and tailored feedback. Last but not least, all participants confirmed the value of RP in fostering their professional development and experienced varying degrees of positive pedagogical or cognitive transformations, which were correlated to the participant's experience and the degree of open-mindedness to reflective practice. Regarding to barriers to implementing RP, several factors were identified, including time constraints, limited opportunities for collaboration, personal characteristics, and potential technological issues. Despite these obstacles, all participants expressed a positive intention to continue using reflective practice in their future work.

Keywords: reflective practice, cooperative learning, Chinese language teachers, professional development.

Dedication

I humbly dedicate this thesis to my beloved grandparents! Your love is the guiding star in the darkest nights, the comforting sunshine in the coldest winters, and the driving force propelling me forward. I vividly recall the cherished moments of my childhood, seated together around the dining table, surrounded by the love and kindness of my grandparents. In the midst of laughter and conversation, I made a promise to them: I will go to college! Now, I am proud to say that this childhood vow has been fulfilled.

谨以此文敬献我的祖父母！你们的爱，是暗夜的星光，冬日的暖阳，是我前行的力量。犹记幼时，祖孙三人围坐在餐桌旁，看着慈祥的爷爷奶奶，笑谈中，我向他们许诺：我要考大学！如今，这份儿时的承诺，终得圆满。

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

A growing demand for learning and teaching of Mandarin Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL) is sweeping around the world. A significant increase has been reported in the number of overseas students in Mainland China: there were 397,635 overseas students from 202 countries and regions in 2015; by 2018, the number had risen to 492,185 from 196 countries and regions (MOE.GOV.CN, 2016/2019). According to the latest Confucius Institute Annual Development Report (Chinese International Education Foundation, 2023), there have been 492 Confucius Institutes (CIs), 819 Confucius Classes (CCs) established in 160 countries and regions by the end of 2022, and the number of registered students of CCs and CIs has reached 1.5 million, reflecting a year-on-year increase of 48.5% over 21%. In addition, by the end of 2021, there are 10 specialized agencies under the United Nations, including UNESCO, FAO, and UNWTO, adopting Chinese as an official language and 76 countries have incorporated Chinese into their national education systems. The number of foreigners learning Chinese exceeds 25 million, and the cumulative number of people learning and using Chinese is nearly 200 million (MOE.GOV.CN, 2022).

Italy is actively immersed in the current trend and is witnessing a growing interest in Chinese language education. There has been a notable increasing in the enrollment figures of Italian students in Chinese language courses, both at the tertiary and secondary educational levels. The surge in popularity of Chinese language education among Italian students can be attributed to several factors. One significant reason is diplomatic relations between China and Italy. The establishment of official diplomatic ties between these two nations in 1970, which was commemorated through the celebration of their 50th anniversary, has steadily fortified their bilateral relations in the last few decades, fostering collaboration in diverse fields, such as politics, economy, society, culture and education, etc. Another key reason is the rapid growth of China's economy and its increasing international influence have further contributed to the appeal of learning Chinese. As China plays a more prominent role in global affairs, it generates a myriad of opportunities for Chinese learners. As a result, the growing cooperation and exchange between Italy and China have fostered a vibrant environment for Chinese language education (Gabbianelli, 2022; Li & Zhuang, 2020; Jin & Shi, 2019).

The history of Chinese language learning and teaching can be traced back to sixteenth century in Italy when Chinese language was studied for theoretical and missionary purposes by Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci (also known as 利玛窦 Li Mǎdòu in China), Michele Ruggieri (罗明坚 Luó Míngjiān), Martino Martini (卫匡国 Wèi Kuāngguó) and Lazzaro Cattaneo (郭居静 Guō Jūjìng), etc. (Antonucci & Zuccheri, 2010; Bertuccioli, 1993). Among them, Matteo Ricci was one of the most influential figures who succeeded in establishing mutual understanding, culturally and linguistically, on a significant scale between Europe and China. Because of his success, the Jesuit Friars realized the importance of mastering Chinese language and comprehending Chinese culture to achieve their missionary objectives. Ricci's groundbreaking work, the *Treatise on Mnemonic Arts* (《西国记法》) developed in 1596, introduced Western techniques for memorizing Chinese characters, laying the foundation for his successors. Michele Ruggieri, another prominent figure, made significant contributions to the process of Chinese learning in Italy. Collaborating with Ricci, Ruggieri played a key role in compiling the *the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary* (*Dicionário Português-Chinês*) which was considered as the first attempt to provide a lexicographic guide in a European way of teaching (Brockey, 2007, cited in Iannotta, 2018). This work presented both Chinese and Portuguese entries, featured by Chinese characters' Romanization. Furthermore, the first Chinese grammar book, entitled *Grammar of Chinese Language* (*Grammatica Linguae Sinensis*), was published in 1696 by an Italian Jesuit missionary Martino Martini (Paternicò, 2009).

In the eighteenth century, the first center for the study of Chinese language in Europe, the Chinese College of Naples (il Collegio dei Cinesi), were established in Italy by Matteo Ripa (Lanciotti, 1984) which was of religious use at the beginning to educate the future missionaries and secularized in the wake of “economic and political perspectives towards Asia [mainly China]” in the second half of 19th century (Cirriello, 2006, p.7). Chinese learning and teaching were marginalized from the late period of the 19th century to the 1960s, due to multiple reasons such as the unification of Italy, the two world wars as well as the diplomatic policies, etc. Since 1970s, Chinese language teaching and research has experienced a resurgence in interest and activity in Italian universities. However, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, Chinese learning and teaching (CLT) had remained a marginal subject in terms of the number of students and its role in the Italian schooling system (Li & Zhuang, 2020).

It has been brought into a new stage of Chinese learning and teaching in Italy in the last two decades both at the university and secondary school levels. There are more than forty universities in Italy offering courses of the Chinese language and culture at different proficiency levels (Li & Zhuang, 2020). Since the first Confucius Institute (CI) of University of Rome was established in 2006, which is the second CI in Europe and the fourth in the world, the number of CIs and Confucius Classes (CCs) has rapidly increased to 12 and 43 respectively until 2018 and the cumulative number of registered students in the Confucius Institutes in Italy is nearly 230,000 (Jin & Shi, 2019; Hanban, 2019), while there are around 30,000 registered students in 2017 (Li & Zhuang, 2020). Chinese language education has already spread to all of the 20 regions of Italy with the establishment of Confucius Class at the University of Cagliari (Zhang, 2016).

At the secondary level, Mandarin Chinese was first introduced into high school as an experimental subject in 2000 (Antonucci & Zuccheri, 2010), eight years later, the Italian Ministry of Education announced that Chinese was to be included in baccalaureate exam in some language secondary schools (Iannotta, 2018). In 2016, with the release of *the Syllabus of Chinese Language (Il Sillabo della Lingua Cinese)*, CTL has officially been incorporated into the Italian national education system (Jin & Shi, 2018). Statistics showed that across the country, there were 279 institutes, around 8% of the total of Italian high schools, providing Chinese courses, with the involvement of around 17,500 students in 2017. Among these schools, 41% have already included Chinese as a subject of baccalaureate exam, while 47% intend to do so (the Intercultural Foundation, 2017). A survey carried out on 501 students between 14-19 years old shows that Chinese is viewed as the second important foreign language, after English but before Spanish and German, for those who consider the knowledge of foreign languages a fundamental tool for their professional success (Ibid.).

This growing demand in the learning of Mandarin Chinese has resulted an urgent need for qualified Chinese language teachers. Many researches (e.g., Li & Tucker, 2013; Zeng, et al., 2019; Zhao & Huang, 2010; Orton, 2011) have reported the shortage of qualified teachers for Chinese as a second/foreign language (CSL/CFL) programs in different countries around the world. In Italy, due to the fact that very few institutions provide certified teacher education programme for Chinese, teacher supply has been identified as one of the most pressing issues for the sustainable development of Chinese education (Baroli, 2015; Masini, 2009; Gabbianelli, 2022). Furthermore, some scholars (e.g. Zhu & Sun, 2014; Jin & Shi, 2019) indicated that the loss of domestic Chinese

teachers who hardly received a long-term contract made the shortage situation even worse.

To satisfy the demand for qualified teachers of Chinese, the major of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL) has developed rapidly in China in recent years. There are 363 universities and colleges in China offering undergraduate programme in TCSOL, while 108 of them offering master programme in TCSOL in 2016. Professional doctorate of education in TCSOL has also been initiated in 2018 (Zeng, et al., 2019). Statistics from the Confucius Institute Annual Development Report 2022 showed that there were more than 4,000 directors, teachers, and volunteer teachers have been sent to Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms across the world in 2022, as well as over 6000 oversea local faculty and staffs (Chinese International Education Foundation, 2023).

Since the first Confucius Institute of University of Rome established in 2006, dozens of Chinese teachers have been seconded to Italy to facilitate the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as well as organising cultural activities in local communities and schools. Some of these teachers are experienced teachers on secondment from their regular teaching positions while the other volunteers are graduates or postgraduate students passionate about Chinese teaching and cultural exchange.

Meanwhile, Italian government has also attached great importance to cultivate native Chinese language teachers. In 2012, the government launched public internships program for the post-graduate students who planned to become Chinese language teachers and later, in 2016, the MIUR announced public examinations and allocated permanent positions for the recruitment of high school Chinese language teacher, resulting in the appointment of 13 teachers who officially began teaching Chinese language courses at high schools from the academic year 2017-2018 (Iannotta, 2018; Jin & Shi, 2019), while a subsequent selection in 2018 led to 66 Italian teachers of Chinese becoming eligible to teach in curricular courses across various regions of Italy (Gabbianelli, 2022).

At the same time, the Confucius Institutes in Italy also endeavored to educate and train domestic Chinese teachers. The Confucius Institute at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” (Università degli studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”) has established the first master program for Chinese language teaching in Italy for native Italian undergraduates in cooperation with the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. The Confucius Institute at

the University of Milan has engaged in multiple collaborations with the Lombardy Department of Education, offering training courses for Chinese teachers, including those seconded by Hanban and domestic Chinese teachers in Italy (Jin & Shi, 2019).

In the first chapter, following the brief introduction outlining the study's background in the current section, the rationale for selecting reflective practice as the research theme will be elaborated. Then, the study's objectives will be outlined, accompanied by a discussion on its significance in the context of Chinese Language education in Italy, as well as its potential implications to the broader field on a global scale.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Given such a large number of Chinese language teachers, their professional development has not gained enough attention in their education as well as in academic research. Reviewing the literature in TCSOL, most researches focused on the theoretical linguistics of Chinese, such as phonology, lexical studies, syntax, and on the pedagogy, second language acquisition, and textbook materials, etc. and few scholars have studied Chinese language teachers' professional development and there are almost no empirical studies on reflective practice (Guo, 2021; Dai et al, 2022).

Searching on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) which is the largest and mostly-used academic online library in China with the key words "Professional development of Chinese language teachers" or "reflection of Chinese language teachers" or "Reflective practice of Chinese language teachers", the close-related results in total are less than 20. Excluding articles written in a general manner, there is only one researcher, Tianmiao Wang focusing her research interests on international Chinese language teachers' professional development and reflection. She explored the current status of Chinese language teachers' professional development (2015) and attempted to construct a framework for their professional development (2019). She (2015) also noticed the scant research on the professional development of Chinese teachers and therefore appealed for more importance should be placed on it. After conducting a study on the framework of Chinese volunteer teachers' competences, Feng, Tan, and Li (2015) indicate that reflective competence is a fundamental skill that Chinese language teachers should possess. Actually, according to *Professional Competence Standards for International Chinese Language Teachers* (the International Society for Chinese Language Teaching, 2022), the capacity of reflection is a required

competence of international Chinese teachers, however, the *Standards* is without giving any guidance for reflection. The aforementioned studies have established a foundational framework and indicated the imperative for further investigations concerning the professional development of Chinese teachers. Nonetheless, only a limited number of these studies have concentrated on addressing specific facets of Chinese teachers' professional development.

Reflective practice (RP) is widely regarded (e.g., Schön, 1983, 1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Finlay, 2008; Ghaye, 2011; Mann & Walsh, 2013) as an essential way to keep sustainable professional development. It has become one of the defining features of professional competence and has been embedded in the professional education across numerous fields, including teacher education, social works, nursing, etc. (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Larrivee, 2008; Mann & Walsh, 2013; Farrell, 2015). A growing interest in teacher's reflection and reflective practice is also reflected in the research of language teacher education and development programs since 1990 (Farrell, 2012; Martínez, 2018). Richards and Farrell (2005) indicated that the development that "serves a long-term goal and seeks to facilitate teachers' understanding of their teaching and of themselves as teachers . . . [involves] examining different dimensions of a teacher's practice as a basis for reflective review" (p. 4). Both of them regarded "teacher learning as reflective practice" (P.7). Larrivee (2008) suggested that the term of reflection usually concerned practices ranging from analyzing a single aspect of a lesson to considering the ethical, social and political implications of teaching practice while reflective practice referred to the professional performance resulting from using a reflective tool for decision-making and problem-solving. Zepke (2003) defined reflection is a process to help us learn from our own or others' experiences and to put that learning into future practice. In addition, Bartlett (1990) also asserted similar views that teacher development, in general, occurs through reflective practice. These scholars have clearly declared the key role of reflection, which leads language teachers toward developing their teaching and improving their personal growth.

Moreover, many scholars (e.g., Wang, 2015; Wang, Moloney & Li, 2013; Tinsley & Board, 2014) indicate that the context facing to teachers of Mandarin Chinese who work in CCs and CIs is very complex, however, the teachers' education or in-service training for them is tend to be centralized and lack of contextualization. By investigating the challenges and difficulties that Mandarin Chinese teachers has

confronted in the UK, Lu, et al. (2019) concluded that “training and professional development tailored to the local context seems imperative” for Chinese language teachers to facilitate their effective teaching. Li & Jin (2016) analyzed the Chinese language teaching in Confucius Institute of University of Milan and suggested that even though CI teachers had obtained their teaching qualifications or pre-service training in China, it was not enough to gain a whole new understanding of the domestic education system, the domestic culture, the needs of the students and the competence of speaking a new language.

Reflective practice could be an ideal solution to this concern. Research on reflective practice does not “set out to tell teachers what effective teaching is, but rather tries to develop a critically reflective approach to teaching, which can be used with any teaching method or approach” (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 3) in different kinds of situations and with different kinds of content. Mann & Walsh (2013) declared that a better understanding of reflective practice can improve the teachers’ awareness of the real world of professional practice and lead their work towards better outcomes in professional development. Pang (2017) believed that reflective practice can effectively help language teachers improve their instruction and preparation in a culturally, socially, and linguistically diverse classroom setting.

In consideration to my own educational experience in TCSOL and my professional work experience over the past few years, it has come to my attention that reflective practice appears to be ignored in TCSOL education program and in the in-service training, let alone there are scarce opportunities to in-service training. During the initial phase of my teaching career, I made attempts to enhance my teaching practices through the utilization of reflective practice. However, I found it was very difficult to improve the level of reflection and felt the need to draw upon more solid theoretical approaches around one year later. Furthermore, when I interacted with my CI colleagues, I noticed that professional development and personal growth were common challenges encountered by the majority of my colleagues. Although they have access in universities to continuous professional development, suitable courses specifically targeted for them remain limited. They also reported there are few opportunities for cooperation in the workplace. Associations, like the Association of Chinese Teaching who endeavours to establish close links, mutual understanding and cordial cooperation among Chinese language teaching professionals and researchers, have not practically reached out to the teachers.

In conclusion, Current research has largely neglected the professional development and reflective practice of Chinese language teachers. This suggests that the teachers of Chinese may not be familiar with the principles of reflective practice and effective strategies to incorporate them into their professional development, which triggers my motivation to embark on a research endeavor focusing on exploring reflective practice in the CSL/CFL field.

1.3 Purpose of this study

As Confucius said "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous" (2-15). Dewey (1933) suggested that a major objective of education is to cultivate learners' capability of reflection so they can think and act intelligently rather than becoming the slaves to routine thought and action. He saw reflective inquiry as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends [that] constitutes reflective thought" (P 16). He insisted that when teachers embedded systematic reflections into their actual teaching practice, then they could be more aware of their thought and action which will ultimately lead to professional development and personal growth as a teacher.

Therefore, in consideration of the rapid development of Chinese language learning and teaching in Italy, **the overall aim** of this study is to improve the Chinese language teachers' capacity of reflective practice with the application of E-portfolios in a cooperative learning context and lay a groundwork for the future research in Chinese language teachers' professional development. **The objectives** of this study are: 1) to investigate a selected sample of Chinese teachers' (both teachers from China and Italian domestic Chinese teachers) current understanding of reflective practice and their level of engagement; 2) to examine the prominent themes in their reflections; 3) to explore the depth of their reflection; 4) to identify the impact of reflective tools used in this study on their capacity of reflection; 5) to ascertain the significance of reflective practice on their professional development. Based on the above five objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. What is the participants' understanding of reflective practice before and after participating in this study?
2. What are the prominent themes in the reflections of the participants?
3. What is the level of their reflection -- Is it descriptive or reflective?

4. How does the use of E-portfolios impact the teachers' capacity for reflective practice in a cooperative learning context?
5. How does reflective practice enhance the professional development of teachers?

The research on reflective practice in the field of TCSOL, on the one hand, are scant (Shen, 2015; Wang, 2019) which indicate that Chinese teachers are not familiar with the notion of reflective practice. On the other hand, many influential scholars (Wang, 2015, 2019; Zhao, 2021; Lu, et al., 2019) in the field of TCSOL notice the importance of reflective practice to the professional development of Mandarin Chinese teachers. Most recently, Zhao (2021) proposed that, facing with complex teaching context and demanding tasks, the teacher of Mandarin Chinese should engage in reflection and become reflective practitioners. Thus, I believe that an introduction and detailed guidance to reflective practice would bring a fresh and innovative perspective to Chinese language teachers and teacher educators as well.

1.4 Significance of this study

This research will help shed light on how a purposeful group of Chinese teachers adopt reflective techniques that aid in effectively teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. It provides these Chinese teachers the opportunity to examine a series of personalized questions that could strengthen their practice.

To a larger extent, the significance of this study can be twofold. On the conceptual level, firstly, it begins to address the lack of empirical research on reflective practice in the field of teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language. Secondly, it assists stakeholders at various levels (e.g., policy makers in government organizations and teacher educators in higher education institutions as well as universities hosting Confucius Institutes and local schools offering Chinese programs) providing more tailored Chinese language teacher education and more targeted in-service teacher training in the future. In addition, it provides rich data and concrete evidence for the reflective practice field, which is considered lacking in data-led and evidence-based research (Mann & Walsh, 2013).

On the practical level, this study provides a guide for the Chinese language teachers in Italy to solve the changeable problems in the local context and to offer quality Chinese language teaching. Furthermore, it helps teachers increase their

awareness of self-examination, facilitate their professional development and personal growth, and eventually emerge as reflective practitioners.

1.5 Assumptions of this study

This study is based on three assumptions. First, it is assumed that teachers of Mandarin Chinese are in the best position to examine their own teaching and they are willing to do it for their professional development and personal growth. Second, it is assumed that Chinese teachers show their readiness for contribution and welcome opportunities to learning new theories and skills to renew their teaching beliefs and improve their practice. The third assumption of this study is that Chinese language teachers positively take responsibility for teaching Chinese classes and improving their student's performance.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Reflective practice has become a defining feature of teachers' professional competence and attracts much attention from the academia as a critical means of teachers' professional development (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Finlay, 2008; Ghaye, 2011; Mann & Walsh, 2013; Leigh, 2016; Farrell, 2021). Moseley et al (2005) identify strategic and reflective thinking as the highest level of thinking and learning in education. Reflective practice serves as a valuable tool for teachers to critically assess their teaching methods, pinpoint strengths and growth areas, and enhance the quality of their instruction. Freeman (2016) argues that reflective practice provides a way into the less "accessible aspects of teacher's work" (p. 208). This process fosters professional development by enabling teachers to identify areas for improvement, collaborate with peers, facilitate personal growth, offer cost-effective professional development, and transform into reflective practitioners. Numerous texts have been published highlighting the significance of reflective practice for professional development among teachers in the field of second or foreign language teaching and learning within the western academia. However, Current research has predominantly overlooked the professional development and reflective practice of Chinese language teachers. This suggests that Chinese language educators may not be well-acquainted with the principles of reflective practice and the effective strategies to integrate them into their professional growth.

This chapter begins with a concise overview of the literature concerning teachers' development and growth. It subsequently provides a systematic exploration of the concept of reflective practice. This examination includes a historical review of reflective practice, its various definitions, the different levels of reflection, scaffolding for reflective practice with a special attention given to cooperative learning and E-portfolios. The review, encompassing both teachers' development and reflective practice, transitions from a general perspective to a focus on Chinese language learning and teaching.

2.2 Teacher development

The understanding of teacher development can vary widely across different research

studies, given its potential associations with several related concepts, such as teacher training, teacher preparation, professional development, and continuing professional development. Mann (2005) draws a clear distinction between the concept of teacher development and these related terms. According to Mann, teacher training primarily serves the purpose of introducing trainees to available methodological choices and acquainting them with the vocabulary and concepts commonly used in the field of language teaching. In this context, trainers typically demonstrate a variety of models and techniques. However, such training has been criticized as a less effective form of teacher development, as it can subtly steer teachers in predetermined directions, aiming at short-term goals that may not contribute to a deeper understanding of themselves and their teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher development, as outlined by Richards & Farrell (2005), on the other hand, involves overall growth that "serves a long-term goal and seeks to facilitate teachers' understanding of their teaching and of themselves as teachers" (p. 4).

Professional development, in many occasions, is more career-focused and tends to have a narrower, more instrumental purpose (Killeavy & Moloney, 2010). At the institutional level, the term "teacher development" is often synonymous with continuing professional development" (Barduhn, 2002). In contrast, teacher development is broader in scope and encompasses personal and moral dimensions (Mann, 2005). Some scholars view teacher development as a conscientious commitment on an individual level, one that engages with both professional growth and ethical considerations (Pettis, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 2014). This view suggests that effective teacher development involves not only acquiring new skills and knowledge, but also reflecting on one's values and beliefs as an educator, and considering the ethical implications of one's actions in the classroom.

In this study, I take a similar stance to Mann (2005), placing self-development at the center of the definition of teacher development. I perceive it as the process of articulating an inner world of conscious choices, responding to the external context of the teaching environment. This perspective extends beyond professional development, embracing personal, moral, and value dimensions. There is a widespread view that teacher development is an ongoing process of learning and growth that involves both acquiring new knowledge and skills, and reflecting on one's own practice (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Zeichner & Liston, 2014). It is "a process of becoming and can never be finished" (Mann, 2005, p. 105).

Hill (2000) advocates for professionals to actively engage in their own development processes, asserting that individuals who take ownership of their learning and growth are likely to exhibit increased motivation, engagement, and effectiveness in their work. Professional development is not a reflection of insufficient training for teachers; rather, it's a recognition that not everything a language teacher needs to know can be adequately covered during preservice training (Farrell, 2015).

There are several approaches that contribute to the professional development of language teachers, among which action research and reflective practice are considered the most influential. Mann (2005) suggests that reflective practice and action research represent two ends of a continuum, where “reflection is a pre-requisite of development and research is a desirable option for development” (p. 108).

Action Research is frequently practiced and endorsed as a form of ongoing professional development for language teachers (Burns, 2005, 2009; Banegas et al., 2013; Sugiyama et al., 2020; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Saeb et al., 2021). As Burns (2005) asserts that action research serves as a primary ‘vehicle for practitioners’ personal and professional development’ (p. 70). Action research has significantly contributed to placing the practitioner at the center of efforts. This stems from the fact that the research is carried out by these very practitioners, with the aim of understanding and improving language teaching practices while demonstrating their professional responsibility. Through action research, educators gain opportunities to analyze issues, concerns, and interests originating from their classrooms and devise strategies for their enhancement and implementation. In contrast to conventional applied science methods, teachers act as both researchers and implementers, shaping their plans based on their own research findings (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This process often involves collaborative work with colleagues or students, aligning well with the social constructivist perspective that views teachers as developing not in isolation but through interaction with other participants, within specific contexts (Burns, 2009).

According to Saeb et al. (2021), action research can contribute to language teachers' professional growth by increasing their awareness of their role as teachers and their students' needs, providing opportunities for self-reflection on practice, boosting professional confidence, fostering a sense of leadership and autonomy, and creating a positive classroom atmosphere. In their collaborative action research, Banegas and a group of English-as-a-foreign-language teachers (2013) found that participating in collaborative action research can lead to teachers' development, enhance their

motivation and autonomy, subsequently influencing students' motivation and their learning outcomes. Research also indicates that action research can help novice language teachers develop reflective skills that remain a powerful tool for long-term professional development (Sugiyama et al., 2020).

Reflective practice stands as another pivotal approach for enhancing the professional development of language teachers. (Burton, 2009; Richards & Nunan, 1990; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Wallace, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Farrell, 2021; Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021). According to Richards and Nunan (1990), advocates of reflective teaching propose that "experience alone is inadequate for professional growth, and that experience, coupled with reflection, serves as a much more potent catalyst for development" (p. 201). Richards and Lockhart (1994) contend that experience, by itself, falls short as a foundation for professional development but can serve as an initial point for teacher growth. They assert that "critical reflection entails scrutinizing teaching experience as a basis for change, involving the formulation of questions about how and why things are the way they are" (p. 4). Back in 1933, Dewey had also pointed out that we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.

Reflective practice allows teachers to examine their teaching practices and draw insights from their experiences to improve their teaching methods and instructional skills (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021). Through reflective practice, educators can pinpoint areas in their teaching that require enhancement and devise effective strategies to address these challenges. Simultaneously, it equips them with the ability to make timely adjustments in response to the evolving needs of their learners (Schön, 1987). As Burton (2009) states, "being reflective assists teachers' lifelong professional development, enabling them to critique teaching and make better-informed teacher decisions" (p. 298).

Roberts (1998) asserts that the primary avenue for learning and enhancing teaching lies in the practice of reflection, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Reflection involves an internal dialogue, and within this cognitive process, language teachers cultivate an awareness of their teaching practices. This awareness is an outcome of the reflexive dialogue between knowledge and experience, which can occur through individual reflection or collaborative efforts, as emphasized by Bolton (2002). Kumaravadivelu (2003) also advocates that second language teachers should engage in "a continual process of self-reflection and self-renewal" (p.17) to construct their

personal teaching theories. In alignment with this, Farrell (2021) argues that professional development through reflective practice is a teacher-initiated approach to personal growth. It is founded on the belief that both experienced and novice language teachers can enhance their understanding of their teaching by purposefully and systematically reflecting on their experiences. These preceding ideas and arguments collectively underscore the significance of professional development and growth for teachers, emphasizing the crucial role of reflective inquiry into practice in this process.

In addition to action research and reflective practice, collaboration plays a vital role in advancing the professional development of language teachers. Collaborative efforts can take various forms, ranging within the classroom to extending beyond the school environment. These forms include team teaching (Hoa, 2022), peer coaching (Atay, 2004; Tarwiyah, Dewi, and Syukur, 2021), learning communities within schools (Roberts and Pruitt, 2003), and national organizations and special interest groups spanning across the country (Bailey, 2002). Group settings promote the opportunity for shared experience and understanding of complex scenarios by hearing from different perspectives and opinions. Ur (1993) says “. . .teacher development requires input from vicarious experiences, other people’s observations and reflection. . .and from other people’s experiments and from theories learned from research and the literature” (p. 22). Group reflection is more likely to happen organically, ideas are teased out and multiple perspectives are brought to the table (Grant et al., 2017). It focuses on group interaction through careful consideration of group dynamics (Ferguson-Patrick & Jolliffe, 2018). Cooperative learning includes “critical thinking, problem solving, sensemaking and personal transformation, the social construction of knowledge” (Boud, 2001a: 7) and gives learners the opportunity to exercise critical thinking and clarify thoughts. In a cooperative learning context, learners develop their personal growth through a comparison with others. As a result, they “learn to listen to what others have to say and how they say it, share ideas and perspectives, give and receive help, seek ways of resolving difficulties, and actively work to construct new understanding and learning” (Gilles, 2007, p.2). In the current project, the researcher aims to establish a cooperative learning environment that encourages teachers to ask questions, seek feedback, and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and professional practices.

2.2.1 Teacher change

Teacher change is an essential part of teacher development (Willis & Willis 1996; Mann, 2005; Prabjandee, 2020). It refers to the process in which educators modify their knowledge, beliefs, and practices in response to a range of factors, including professional development, social context, and technology integration (Hargreaves, 1994; Guskey, 2002; Li, 2019; Prabjandee, 2020). Richardson and Placier (2001) suggests that teacher change is a concept associated with “learning, development, socialization, growth, improvement, implementation of something new or different, cognitive and affective change, and self-study” (p.905) and its focus encompasses both pre-service teacher education students and those who are on the verge of retirement.

One primary aim of teacher education programs is to promote teacher change (Guskey, 2002; Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001; Li, 2019). However, studies on teacher training programs have found that change is not an easy task (Richardson, 1998; Cohen & Hill, 2000). The factors that may lead to teacher change have been a subject of interest for researchers for years. Through a review of the literature, Richardson and Placier (2001) assert that research on the factors affecting teacher change can be categorized into two main directions: the individual level and the institutional level. They identify three key mechanisms for influencing change in individual teachers: 1) voluntary and naturalistic changes, which examines changes related to teachers’ biographies, personal attributes, experiences, and differences in their approaches to change; 2) stage of development, which represents a special case of naturalistic change, involving an analysis of teachers’ developmental stages and research on teachers’ stages of development within specific programs or contexts; 3) formal programs designed for teacher preparation and improvement of teaching.

Cheung and Wong (2017) adopted a narrative approach to explore how the teacher’s reflection affects their capacity for change, with an emphasis on teaching practice under education reforms in Hong Kong. Their findings suggest that the higher the level of reflection teachers engage in, the more motivate they become to explore new teaching practices, not only to meet the learning needs of students in classroom but also to address the broader social context. Guskey (2002) explores the relationship between professional development and teacher change, proposing a model in which significant changes in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs are more likely to occur when teachers observe improvements in students’ learning outcomes as a result of adopting a new classroom practice. In a narrative inquiry examining the factors influencing self-

initiated teacher change, Li (2019) asserts that teacher resilience, reflection, and continuing professional development are the most critical factors for promoting teacher change. Teacher change develops along with deepened and broadened reflection of teaching content, methods, beliefs about students, and other socio-cultural issues. In addition, professional development programs, including research experiences for teachers, have shown promise as effective forms of professional development that provide teachers with opportunities engage in scientific inquiry, with the aim of fostering the translation of these experiences into classroom inquiry (Blanchard, Southerland & Granger, 2009).

Numerous scholars have explored methods aimed at fostering teacher change, with significant contributions from researchers such as Richards et al. (2001), Tam (2015) and Tripp and Rich (2012a). In Tam's (2015) longitudinal study, the impact of a professional learning community (PLC) on transforming teachers' beliefs and practices was thoroughly investigated. The study revealed that the key elements facilitating teacher change within a PLC include the establishment of a cohesive structure, the promotion of a collaborative culture, and the implementation of effective learning activities. These components play a crucial role in assisting teachers in overcoming initial challenges and igniting their motivation for transformative growth. Richards et al. (2001) identified several effective practices within teacher training that significantly enhanced teacher change. These practices included in-service courses, seminars, conferences, feedback from students, teachers' self-discovery activities, trial and error experiences, and collaborative efforts. Tripp and Rich (2012a) delved into the impact of video-aided reflection on the process of teacher change and uncovered that the utilization of video proved instrumental in promoting change. Specifically, video support was beneficial for teachers' change as it enabled teachers to: (a) concentrate their analysis, (b) gain fresh insights into their teaching, (c) develop trust in the feedback they received, (d) establish a sense of accountability for practice improvement, (e) remember to implement necessary changes, and (f) witness tangible progress in their teaching journey.

The literature reviewed emphasizes the significance of teacher reflection, professional learning communities, and professional development programs in facilitating teachers' transformative processes. These aspects will be thoroughly examined in the forthcoming teacher development section and will be integrated into the research design for data collection.

2.2.2 Research on professional development of TCSOL teachers

Limited research exists concerning the professional development of Chinese language teachers within the field of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL). Only one scholar, Professor Tianmiao Wang, has primarily focused her research interest on this area of study. Wang (2015) delved into the current status of professional development of Chinese teachers and identified several obstacles in the professional development of Chinese teachers. Firstly, the constraints within pre-service teacher education arise due to the complexity of the Chinese language education, which involves diverse teaching contexts and learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and various age groups. Secondly, in-service teacher training demonstrates limitations, as it predominantly emphasizes on theoretical knowledge, often detached from practical application. Therefore, she proposed that the primary strategy for the professional development of Chinese teachers is to establish a foundational concept rooted in the theory of teacher professional development. This concept entails: 1) prioritizing personal development, placing teachers at the center; 2) nurturing a culture of 'lifelong learning' among teachers; 3) regarding teachers as self-directed reflective practitioners, actively engaging in introspection of their values while consistently evaluating their interactions and relationships with others.

Drawing from the theory of teacher professional development and the characteristics of the discipline of international Chinese education, Wang (2019) introduces a threefold professional development model for Chinese language teachers. This model primarily relies on a Reflective Model, supplemented by the Craft Model and the Applied Science Model. Wang highlighted specific pathways for the professional development of Chinese language teachers, including professional growth portfolios, reflective teaching, micro-teaching method, action research, narrative research, and teacher professional learning communities.

Additionally, Wang (2020) delves into the realm of teacher metaphors and investigates their ramifications for the professional development of international Chinese teachers. These implications encompass several facets: firstly, teacher metaphors contribute to comprehending the underlying significance of teachers' daily actions; secondly, they function as a crucial representation of teachers' practical knowledge; and thirdly, they serve as a tool for teachers' introspection and self-reflection.

Lu, Zheng and Liu (2019) conducted an investigation into the challenges faced by

native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin employed in British schools and the professional development that they aspire to achieve. The study revealed that participants encountered several difficulties, such as a lack of English proficiency and intercultural competence, unfamiliarity with the local education system, and inadequate pedagogical methods and classroom management skills to address disruptive students, those with special educational needs, and teaching assistants. The researchers recommended tailored training and professional development programs contextualized to the local educational setting to enhance these teachers' effectiveness and integration. Additionally, they emphasized the necessity for further research into in-service training and ongoing professional development opportunities for Chinese teachers.

In summary, the body of research pertaining to the professional development of Chinese language teachers remains limited and primarily comprises introductory discussions on the topic. There is a significant dearth of empirical studies assessing the applicability of current theories of teacher professional development within the context of Chinese language education. Furthermore, practical strategies aimed at enhancing the professional and personal growth of Chinese teachers are noticeably absent. Consequently, this study endeavors to bridge this existing gap by delving into the realm of empirical research. It seeks to evaluate the efficacy of prevailing theories of teacher professional development through reflective practice within the specific domain of Chinese language education. Moreover, it aims to identify and propose practical methodologies to support the professional advancement of Chinese language educators.

2.3 Reflective practice

Reflective practice has become an integral aspect of personal and professional development across various professional fields, including social works, legal profession, nursing and education. For example, it has been introduced as a valuable tool in nursing education, facilitating closing the gap between theory and practice, and promoting essential skills of critical thinking, self-direction, and enhancing professional development (Heydari et al, 2014). Reflective practice in the field of education has exerted a significant influence across various aspects of a teacher's life, spanning from educational programs designed for novice teachers to professional development initiatives tailored for experienced educators. As Roberts et al (2021) highlight that reflective practice holds a central to position in aiding “the development of teacher education courses to ensure future teachers can reflect on their practice and document

this in a way that is sustainable” (p.1).

Reflective practice holds the central position in the field of second language education, particularly within the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Numerous studies have explored the impact of reflection practice on language teachers’ professional and personal growth. The reflection process cultivates practitioners’ self-awareness and critical thinking, allowing them to critically analyze their teaching methods, identify areas for improvement, and enhance their teaching skills (e.g. Farrell, 2015; Zeichner & Liston, 2014; Freeman, 2016). Reflection also helps teachers develop a deeper understanding of students' needs and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly (e.g. Ashraf et al., 2016; Çimer et al, 2013). Moreover, reflective practice has strong positive relationship between teacher’s autonomy and job satisfaction (Aliakbari et al.,2020).

Although educators agree that reflective practice is a desirable approach among teachers, there remains 'less agreement on the definition of reflective practice, how to effectively implement it' (Farrell, 2015, p. xi), and a dearth of empirical studies and data-led evidence to substantiate its beneficial outcomes (Mann & Walsh, 2013). Furthermore, within the field of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL), insufficient attention has been devoted to research on reflective practice, which it rightfully deserves. Consequently, I aim to bridge this research gap in the TCSOL field by introducing a reflective approach.

2.3.1 Origins of reflective practice

The exploration of the significance of reflection in human life and personal growth can be traced back to Ancient Greece and China’s Spring and Autumn period. In Ancient Greece, both Plato and Aristotle addressed relevant ideas in their works (Ghaye, 2010; Mortari, 2015). Socrates (Plato, Apology of Socrates, 38a) contends that a life lacking in reflective thinking is incomplete, and on this basis, he conceives education as a process aimed at fostering the habit of reflection, enabling individuals to deeply explore the intricate webs of thoughts woven into life itself. During China's Spring and Autumn period, The influential classic *Analects of Confucius* presents Zengzi's discourse in the fourth section of the first chapter: "吾日三省吾身：为人谋而不忠乎？与朋友交而不信乎？传不习乎？ *Wú rì sān xǐng wú shēn: wèi rén móu ér bù zhōng hū? Yǔ péng you jiāo ér bù xìn hū? chuán bù xí hū?*" which translates to “Each day I examine myself

in three ways: in doing things for others, have I been disloyal? In my interactions with friends, have I been untrustworthy? Have not practiced what I have preached?" (Muller, 2021). This expression highlights the introspective nature of reflection advocated within the Confucian tradition.

The educationist and philosopher John Dewey has been extremely influential in contemporary discussion about the concept of reflection and emphasize its importance in experiential learning and individuals' growth. In his book *How We Think* (1933), Dewey first outlined that reflective thinking was not just contemplating issues that interests us but defined it as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p.9).

He perceived reflective thinking as purposeful cognition, emphasizing the necessity to test and question established beliefs by employing the scientific method, which involves deductive reasoning and experimentation. Meanwhile, he acknowledged the role of emotions and feelings in reflective thinking. He recognized that individuals often seek swift solutions due to the prevailing influence of cultural norms and environmental factors on our thought processes and expressed his concerns about this type of routine thinking, where actions are guided by impulse, tradition, or authority. He argues that educators who fail to engage in reflective thinking about their work become confined to repetitive routines. He suggested that reflective thinking "emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity... enable us to know what we are about when we act...[and] converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action" (Dewey, 1933, p.17).

Dewey highlighted that one of the primary challenges in learning was mastering the art of reflective thinking. Consequently, he proposed a six-step framework for reflective thinking which provides suggestions for educators to scrutinize their experiences, evaluate and analyze them based on the evidence derived from their practice, and subsequently plan the actions they intend to undertake. He asserted that by integrating these systematic reflections with their teaching experiences, educators could heighten their awareness, thereby fostering professional development and facilitating growth in their teaching abilities.

Dewey's insightful concepts regarding reflection and reflective thinking have deeply influenced in contemporary research on reflective practice. Many scholars' investigations into reflective practice trace back to Dewey's discussions, establishing

their studies upon the foundation laid by his insights. It could be argued that the fundamental ideas presented in this study also align with Dewey's original formulations of reflection.

In the decades following Dewey, the emphasis on reflection and reflective thinking diminished due to the influence of positivism in education. This shift led to the prevalence of technical rationality, which asserts that problems can be solved through rigorous application of scientific principles and specialized expertise. An example of this paradigm shift is seen in the evidence-based practice movement, favoring quantitative studies and established protocols over intuitive practice (Schön, 1983; Finlay, 2008). Martínez (2018) argues that in traditional teaching-learning paradigms, the emphasis was on memorizing vast amounts of content without considering its practical application in students' academic or real-life contexts. Additionally, teacher education models often perceived practitioners as 'empty vessels' merely absorbing popular teaching methodologies without actively engaging or critically evaluating them.

Freeman and Johnson (1998) highlighted historical changes in language teacher education in the last few decades and they suggested that until the 1980s, most classroom-based research focused on defining effective teaching behaviors, positive learner outcomes, and teacher-student interactions believed crucial for successful L2 learning. Consequently, the primary approach to teacher education involved equipping teachers with externally observable, discrete skills and behaviors (Borg, 2006). However, by the mid-1980s, a growing realization emerged that teaching involved complexities beyond mere observable behaviors, which led to studies examining teachers' holistic and qualitative perspectives, acknowledging the intricate nature of teaching (Borg, 2006).

Schön (1983) advanced Dewey's arguments and brought the concept of "reflective practice" to prominence through his seminal work, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals think in action*. He initially assumed that proficient practitioners "usually know more than they can say" and they possess a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit (p. viii). Schön outlined methods for professionals to become aware of their implicit knowledge and extract lessons from their experience. One of his most important and lasting contributions was to distinguish two forms of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Finlay, 2008).

Reflection-on-action is a reflection after the professional action or incident, where professionals describe, analyses and evaluate their past practice in order to gain insight

for enhance future practice. Schön described it as "...thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our know in action may have contribute to an unexpected outcome" (Schön, 1987, p.26).

In contrast to reflection-on-action, Schön placed greater emphasis on reflection-in-action considering it a hallmark of expert practitioners who were able to assess their practice and response as they occur. In Schön's (1983) words:

"We sometimes think about what we are doing. Phrases like 'thinking on your feet', 'keeping your wits about you', and 'learning by doing' suggest not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it. Some of the most interesting examples of this process occur in the midst of a performance." (p. 54)

Reflection-in-action involves exploring our beliefs and experiences in connection with our theories-in-use. To engage in reflection-inaction, one must be mindful of our knowing-in-action, transcending established ideas as practitioners compile and draw on a collection of images, ideas, and actions (Farrell, 2012). According to Schön, reflection-in-action constituted the essence of 'professional artistry' – a concept he compared to the technical rationality. He argues that in order to cope with the complex, unpredictable and messy professional practice, practitioners need more than adherence to established protocols. They relied on both practical experience and theory, utilizing improvisation while "think on their feet" (Finlay, 2008).

Schön's notion of reflection encompassed more than intellectual thinking, acknowledging the significance of professionals' emotions and their interconnectedness with action. Through reflection, professionals aim to construct fresh insights to guide their action in evolving situations. As he wrote:

"The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomena before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation." (Schön, 1983, p.68).

Schön believed that with persistent reflection, professionals acquired the ability to monitor and adapt their practices concurrently as they gained expertise. Conversely, novice practitioners, due to lacking knowing-in-action, often rigidly adhered to rules and procedures, applying them mechanically.

2.3.2 Definitions of reflective practice

Since the publication of Schön's works in the late 1980s, reflective practice gained momentum and became a "fad" in the 1990s (Mann and Walsh, 2013). Subsequently, research focusing on teacher reflections has seen a notable increase within teacher education over recent decades (Yuan and Mak, 2018; Martínez, 2018). To date, reflective practice remains closely associated with mentoring, peer engagement, and the cultivation of critical reflection based on personal experience (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016).

However, it is widely criticized that the relative terms of reflection are often loosely defined and have been ill-used to embrace a wide range of concepts and definitions (e.g. Hatton and Smith, 1995; Rodgers, 2002; Collin et al., 2013; Mann and Walsh, 2013). Just as Zeichner and Liston (2014) indicated, "one of the central problems has to do with the vagueness and ambiguity of the term and with a misunderstanding of what is entailed in reflective teaching" (p. 8).

Rodger (2002) identified four problems arising from the lack of consensus on the definition: 1) confusion between systematic reflection and other types of thought; 2) difficulty in assessing a vaguely defined skill; 3) diminished value of reflection due to the absence of a clear 'picture' of what it looks like, and 4) the challenges in researching the effects of reflective teacher education and professional development on teachers' practice and students' learning. Collin, Karsenti and Komis (2013) also expressed concerns that the lack of theoretical grounding can engender several hazards, including weakening comparability between empirical studies, devaluing the findings, and questioning the value of reflective approach.

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss definitions concerning reflective practice. According to Larrivee (2008), **practice** encompasses an individual's array of knowledge, dispositions, skills, and behaviors. In teacher education, practice serves as a means-to-an-end tool to foster reflective teaching -- a constant, dynamic process of assumption, implementation, and assessment, leading to continuous modification and subsequent future exploration (Parker, 1997).

The terms reflection, critical reflection and reflective practice are frequently confused and incorrectly considered to be interchangeable. According to Dewey (1933), reflection is an active and deliberative cognitive process that involves interconnected ideas, considering underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking typically engages with practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before reaching at

potential solutions. Reflective action, in contrast to the routine action which derives from impulse, tradition or authority, entails persistent and systematic consideration of practice in the light of knowledge and beliefs, ultimately fostering change and professional growth for teachers (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Farrell, 2012).

Dewey's work establishes a crucial connection between reflective thinking and its practical applications. However, it is Schön identifies that reflection can occur before, during, or after an action. Schön (1983) emphasized that reflection, by actively utilizing one's tacit and practical knowledge derived from prior practice, is closely intertwined with action. He described reflective practice as the ability to reflect during and after one's actions so as to engage in continuous learning. In another book (1987), he depicted reflective practice as a critical process enabling individuals to refine their expertise in a particular discipline. Essentially, Schön's concept of reflective practice serves as a tool for teachers, enabling them to step back, examine their actions, rethink their roles, and determine the correct course of action (Lou, 2008).

Drawing from Dewey and Schön's ideas, numerous researchers have defined reflection as a systematic and deliberate process for collecting data and analyzing prior experiences in order to achieve continuous improvement of their professional practices (Richards and Farrell, 2005; Killion and Todnem, 1991; Tripp and Rich, 2012b; York-Barr et al., 2006). This process can be enriched by dialogue and collaborative effort (Mann and Walsh, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Martínez, 2018). Hatton and Smith (1995) view reflection as a metacognitive process that transcends isolated facts, enabling individuals to perceive a broader context for interpreting behavior and events. They define it as "deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement" (Hatton and Smith, 1995, p. 40).

Meanwhile, other scholars describe reflection as a special form of thought (McNamara, 1990; Sparks-Langer and Colton, 1991) or an active, persistent and careful consideration of one's beliefs and knowledge (Zeichner & Liston, 1996) or a cognitive process triggered by a confused and perplex event, incident, or situation (Richards, 1994; Bain et al., 2002; Muir and Beswick, 2007; Goethal et al., 2004). Additional definitions of reflection highlight creatively, imaginative, and self-critical thinking regarding classroom practice (Lasley, 1992); or the importance of one's intuition and emotions, stemming from their active engagement within one's natural work setting (Mann and Walsh, 2013; Farrell, 2015; Yuan and Mak, 2018; Huynh, 2022); or critical contemplation of the social, political, and ethical contexts associated with professional

work (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Thompson and Pascal, 2012).

Rodgers (2002) returns to Dewey's work, outlining four key criteria that characterize both the purpose and contextual conditions for meaningful reflection:

- (1) Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationship with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
- (2) Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
- (3) Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
- (4) Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and others. (Rodgers, 2002, p. 845)

In this current study, I adopt an inclusive view of reflection, encompassing all previously discussed perspectives. I perceive reflection as a cognitive process involving active, systematic, and rigorous thinking, which emphasizes the use of past experiences and evidence to inform future actions, problem-solving, and decision-making. This process aims to foster appreciation for personal and intellectual growth in both oneself and others. Furthermore, it is deeply rooted in the context of practitioners' natural settings and can be facilitated through collaborative efforts.

Many studies highlight the distinction between reflection and critical reflection (e.g. Hatton and Smith, 1995; Finlay, 2008; Thompson and Pascal, 2012). For instance, Gün (2010) posit that reflection involves looking back at one's teaching experience and drawing general conclusions about the classes taught. In contrast, critical reflection involves teachers scrutinizing their practice to improve their level of awareness of their actions and the underlying reasons. Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest that critical reflection takes account of broader consideration of historic, cultural and political values or beliefs when framing and addressing practical problems. However, this study regards critical reflection as a subset of reflection which will be further explored in section 3.3.

The term *reflective practice* carries various meanings, spanning from professionals engaging in introspection in solitude to participating in critical dialogue with others. Some define reflective practice as merely adopting a thoughtful approach to their professional practice. For instance, Larrivee (2008) considers it as the on-the-job

performance resulting from using a reflective process for daily decision-making and problem-solving. Alternatively, for others, it involves employing carefully structured methods to reflect on one's practical experiences.

Finlay's (2008) definition earns a great agreement, defining reflective practice as the "process of learning through and from experience towards greater insights of self or practice" (p.1). The process of learning serves as the foundation for all interpretations of this complex term. Regardless of its form, the reflective practitioner should learn and evolve from engaging in it. As a result, reflective practice finds extensive use in teacher education, enabling student teachers to learn and develop (Meierdirk, 2016).

Beauchamp (2006) conducted an extensive theoretical analysis, examining 55 definitions of reflective practice and identifying its definitive aspects (process, objects and rationale). She considers reflective practice as a multifaceted process involving examination, thinking, understanding, problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, construction, development, and transformation. This process focuses on various objects, such as practice, social knowledge, experience, information, theories, meaning, beliefs, self, or issues of concern, aiming to achieve specific goals or rationales. These objectives may include thinking differently or more clearly, justifying one's stance, thinking about actions or decisions, changing thinking or knowledge, taking or improving action, enhancing student learning, or affecting personal or societal change.

On the basis of Beauchamp's definition, Collin et al (2013) introduce grounded and generic as two additional inherent properties of reflective practice. The grounded property emphasizes the close relationship between reflection and action. The generic property reflects a more sociological perspective, emphasizing reflective practice as a process occurring within the social individual, not just the professional individual.

The present study is anchored in Finlay's (2008) definition of reflective practice, while also considering the insights put forward by Beauchamp (2006) and Collin et al. (2013). Subsequent sections will delve deeper into various facets of reflection, encompassing levels, content, and the reflective process.

2.3.3 Levels of reflection

Research suggests that reflection encompasses two dimensions: breadth and depth (Luttenberg & Bergen, 2008). The breadth dimension involves the content of teachers' reflections, while the depth dimension relates to the levels of reflection (Lane et al., 2014).

Various factors influence the depth of teachers' reflections, among which experience plays a significant role. According to Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006), experienced teachers tend to engage in deeper reflection due to their accumulated knowledge and exposure to diverse classroom situations. This accumulation, coupled with intuition and adaptability, enables ongoing refinement of teaching strategies, fostering insightful introspection. A supportive environment, including collaborative peer discussions or mentorship, is another important factor in encouraging deeper reflection among teachers. Hatton and Smith (1995) note that while reflecting, students might feel vulnerable, such as self-blame for any perceived weaknesses. They suggest collaborative reflection with peer support as a beneficial alternative to individualistic approaches, facilitating deeper reflection. The application of technology, like video-recorded lessons, aids teachers in revisiting and reinterpreting critical incidents, promoting not only greater depth of reflection but also personal growth (Husu et al., 2008; Gibbons & Farley, 2019). Bain et al. (1999) examined weekly journal entries by pre-service teachers during an 11-week practicum and found that the written feedback was the most significant factor influencing the depth of reflection. In comparing experiential and cognitive journal writing, no notable differences emerged in overall reflection quality among students. Despite supervised dialogue not leading to higher written reflection levels compared to self-analysis, journal writing proved beneficial even without intensive reflective supervision. The time they spent on writing and the length of writing do not influence the dimension of reflection.

Moreover, reflective frameworks, such as the levels of reflection model proposed by Korthagen (2014), can also serve as important tools for fostering deeper reflection among practitioners. Korthagen (1985) introduced a phase-based reflective model, ALACT, aimed at promoting meaning-oriented reflection. However, recognizing its limitations in encouraging deep reflection, he subsequently introduced the Core Reflection approach. This approach aims to bridge personal and professional aspects in teaching, delving into the deeper meaning of teaching situations. Core Reflection encourages reflection not only on the environment and teaching behavior but also on beliefs, professional identity, and the sense of meaning. Empirical studies on this Core Reflection model highlight its potential to significantly deepen reflective practices in teaching and learning experiences (Korthagen, 2014).

Lane et al. (2014) suggest that compared to the breadth dimension of reflection,

the depth dimension seems to be less reliant on context, making it more trainable and amenable to improvement. Fund et al. (2002) present a two-dimensional framework for evaluating student teachers' written reflective journals. One dimension focuses on the object of writing (content), while the other addresses the form of writing. They observed that while the content of writing remained unchanged over time, most students progressed from a descriptive form to a more critical form, signifying an improvement in their depth of reflections.

Therefore, to evaluate quality of practitioners' reflective thinking and promote the depth of reflection, numerous theoretical frameworks have been introduced, describing various levels of reflection. Drawing from Habermas (1972)'s theory of knowledge-constitutive interests, Van Manen (1977) proposed three levels of reflection. The first level, technical rationality, emphasizes the efficiency and effectiveness of means to achieve predefined objectives, which are not open to critical examination. Reflection at this level primarily focuses on the application of educational knowledge and basic curriculum principles for the purposes of achieving a given teaching objectives, without considering the broader educational context and teaching outcomes (Yan & Luo, 2014). At practical action level, the second stage of reflection, teachers scrutinize assumptions and predisposition's underlying competing pedagogical goals while assessing the educational implications resulting from their teaching methods (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). In contrast to the technical reflection, the practical level takes the context of the educational experience into consideration to make informed choices. The third level, critical reflection, advances beyond the preceding stages by integrating moral and ethical standards to guide professional decision-making, assessing the fairness, justice, and respectfulness of one's actions (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Furthermore, critical reflection contextualizes personal analysis within broader socio-historical and politico-cultural frameworks (Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Through an extensive literature review on reflection in teacher education and in-depth analysis of their students' written report, Hatton and Smith (1995) proposed a four-level framework: descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection. The initial level primarily describes events or literature without offering reasoning or justification, lacking true reflective elements. Descriptive reflection, the second level, progresses by providing reasons for events or actions in a descriptive manner, often relying on personal judgment or literature. The third stage, dialogic reflection, involves self-analysis and exploration of potential reasons behind

experiences or actions, employing qualities of judgment and considering alternative viewpoints while stepping back from events. Critical reflection, the final stage, involves “reason giving for decisions or events which takes account of the broader historical, social, and/or political contexts” (p.41). It is interesting to note that as reflection deepens, the breadth of reflection simultaneously becomes broader.

Valli (1997) introduced a five-level developmental framework, asserting that reflective thinking includes five stages, starting from technical reflection, advancing to reflection-in and on-action, then to deliberative reflection, followed by personal reflection, culminating in the highest stage, critical reflection. In contrast, Zeichner and Liston (1996) identified five distinct levels of reflective practice in teaching. These levels progress from rapid reflection, an immediate teacher response, to repair, review, research, and finally retheorizing and reformulating. At this pinnacle level, educators critically evaluate their practice and theories in light of academic theories. Bain et al. (1999) developed a five-tier framework named: reporting, responding, relating, reasoning, and reconstruction, with each level representing increasing degrees of reflective depth.

After conducting an in-depth literature review, Larrivee (2008) concludes that the prevailing reflective frameworks outline three distinct levels of reflection. The first level emphasizes on teaching functions, actions, or skills, typically viewing teaching incidents as isolated occurrences. Scholars have often used terms like "technical" (e.g., Farrell, 2004; Valli, 1997; Van Manen, 1977) or "descriptive" (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Jay & Johnson, 2002) to characterize this level. The term "surface" was chosen to encompass broader concerns than technical matters in her own framework, indicating that “values, beliefs, and assumptions that lie ‘beneath the surface’ are not being considered at this level of reflection” (Larrivee, 2008, p.343). The second level delves into the theory and reasoning behind current practices. Within the literature, this level lacks consensus in its connotation and has been termed practical (Van Manen, 1977), theoretical (Day, 1993), dialogic (Hatton & Smith, 1995), and conceptual (Farrell, 2004). The term "pedagogical" was chosen to encompass these varied concepts, signifying a heightened level of reflection rooted in the application of teaching knowledge, theory, and/or research. The third, a more elevated layer, involves educators considering the ethical, social, and political consequences of their teaching, grappling with the fundamental objectives of education.

Consequently, introducing the non-reflective stage, Larrivee (2008) proposes a

four-level reflective framework, which can be summarized as:

Pre-reflection – This level is not reflective. At this stage, teachers merely describe classroom situations and react instinctively to students, without attempting to explore alternative responses or offer justification for events. They rely on instinctive responses, often attributing problems to students or external factors, viewing themselves as victims of circumstances.

Surface reflection - In surface reflection, teachers concentrate on the strategies and techniques employed to achieve predetermined objectives. Their focus is on pragmatic effectiveness rather than considering the inherent value of these objectives.

Pedagogical reflection - At this level, teachers attempt to bridge theoretical concepts with practical application, reflecting on educational goals and theories underlying approaches. Pedagogical reflection involves teachers' efforts to comprehend the theoretical basis guiding classroom practices and to ensure alignment between their professed theories (what they say they do and believe) and their enacted practices (what they actually do in the classroom).

Critical reflection – Teachers engage in reflection on the moral and ethical consequences of their teaching practices on students at this stage, examining both personal and professional belief systems. Critically reflective practitioners not only focus inward to assess their own practice but also analyze the outward social contexts influencing these practices, aiming to address equity and social justice concerns in and outside the classroom while aligning their practice with democratic principles.

In summary, Larrivee's framework of reflection (2008) acts as the primary conceptual framework for analyzing the depth of participants' reflection in this study. Additionally, previous reflective frameworks, along with the latest research on depth of reflection, are considered significant points of reference within the current research.

2.3.4 The breadth of reflection

2.3.4.1 Themes of teachers' reflection

There are many reflective research exploring the contents or topics of teachers' reflection (e.g. Rodgers, 2002; Power et al., 2002; Lee, 2005; Farrell, 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2012; Ho & Richards, 1993). According to Rodgers (2002), teachers can reflect on their class from three distinct aspects: 1) the actual contents being taught; 2) the

learner's learning of the content; and 3) the teachers' teaching and how it is affecting the student's learning. She referred to Hawkins' (1974) framework, known as the 'I-Thou-It' (see figure 1), which illustrates the interaction among these three factors (teacher/teaching, learner/learning, and content). Additionally, she also emphasized that these factors are significantly influenced by various context, extending from the classroom, school, community environments, and even to the national and global levels.

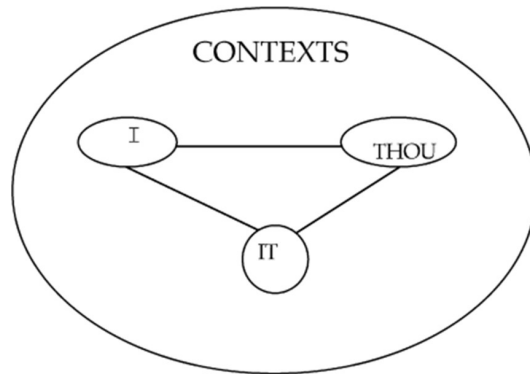


Figure 1 I, Thou, It, and Contexts (Rodgers, 2002, p. 859)

Farrell (2014) presented a case study describing a 2-year collaborative group consisting of three experienced college ESL teachers in Canada. These three teachers spontaneously formed a reflection group and met regularly in order to explore and reflect on their work, facilitated by the researcher, as part of their professional development. He highlighted six main topics that arose during the teachers' reflective conversations: school context, perceptions of self as teacher, learners, approaches and methods, evaluating teaching, and problems with teaching and solutions to teaching. Among these topics, school context, perceptions of self as teachers, and learners were the three most frequently discussed, collectively account for over 70% of all comments.

Through the analysis of reflective journals from four high school English teachers, Liu and Meng (2010) discovered five categories of reflection content, including: classroom instruction, student learning, teacher-student interaction, teacher development, and educational context. Using the framework identified by Liu and Meng (2010), Yan and Luo (2014) investigated the reflective teaching practices of foreign language teachers in higher education from three perspectives of the content, the level, and the process of their reflection through a critical incident narrative questionnaire. Their findings indicates that the reflection topics of these educators primarily centered around classroom instruction, student learning, teacher development, and educational context. Among these areas, reflections on classroom instruction and

student learning accounted for the majority, at 44.5% and 33.3% respectively. In terms of the depth of reflection, most reflections remained at the technical level and practical level, with very few instances of critical reflection.

In the field of Chinese international education, there is currently only one empirical study on reflective teaching that I have come across. Based on classroom observations and interviews, Liu (2017) conducted an analysis of the content and depth of reflection among nine student teachers in an international Chinese teacher education program. The research revealed that these participants predominantly reflected on classroom instruction skills and the teacher-student relationship, accounting for over half of their reflections. However, due to a lack of practical experience and limitations in research capabilities, there was less focus on reflecting about the educational context. Regarding the development of depth of their reflection, guided by the feedback and demonstration provided by course lecturer, the level of the participants' reflection has gradually progressed from technical reflection to practical reflection. However, due to the limitations imposed by their learning experiences and teaching practice, they have not yet reached the stage of critical reflection in their reflective practices.

Ho and Richards (1993) analyzed the reflective journals written by ten experience teachers enrolled in an in-service TESOL teacher education program at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. The study highlighted that these teachers predominantly focused their reflection on the challenges faced in their teaching practices and the teaching approaches and procedures they employed. Moreover, it was noted that there were individual differences in the teachers' reflective capacities, with some teachers displaying more reflective qualities than others. Additionally, the study found that teachers' critical reflection abilities did not show much differences over time. This study identified five broad categories of in-service teachers' reflection, each with corresponding subcategories outlined as follows:

1. Theories of teaching
 - 1.1 Theories and beliefs about teaching and learning
 - 1.1 Applying theories to classroom practice
- 2 Approaches and Methods
 - 2.1 Approaches and methods in teaching
 - 2.2 The content of a lesson
 - 2.3 The teacher's knowledge
 - 2.4 The learners background information

- 2.5 The school context
- 3 Evaluating teaching
 - 3.1 Evaluating lessons
 - 3.2 Diagnosing problems
 - 3.3 Solutions to problems
- 4 Self-awareness
 - 4.1 Perception of themselves as teachers
 - 4.2 Recognition of personal growth
 - 4.3 Setting personal goals
- 5 Questions and teaching
 - 5.1 Asking for reasons
 - 5.2 Asking for advice and suggestions (p.28-29)

In addition, numerous reflective studies focus on specific aspect of reflection, such as teacher identity (Lim, 2011; Trent, 2010) and teacher beliefs (Lin, Shein and Yang, 2012; Polat, 2010). Lim (2011) delved into the underlying structure and dimensionality of autobiographical reflections from 90 Korean ESL student teachers, focusing on how their personal histories and teaching beliefs contributed to the origin, formation, and development of their professional identities. The findings of this study suggest that core concepts, such as career pursuit backgrounds, perceptions of effective English teaching, and teachers' confidence and aspirations, plays a crucial role in shaping the professional identity of the EFL student teachers. Furthermore, the teachers' knowledge and experience serve as the driving force guiding their professional development related to teacher qualities and teaching practices. Lin et al. (2012) utilized metaphorical analysis to explore how pre-service teachers view themselves as EFL teachers at the beginning of their teacher education programs. The study suggested that the written metaphors not only provided insights into the participants' beliefs of teaching prior to entering the classroom, but also served as a framework for evaluating teaching and an effective approach for teachers to enhance their self-awareness and professional development.

Drawing from these insightful studies, the current study utilizes the framework outlined by Ho and Richards (1993) and Farrell (2014) as the initial code schema to analyze the topics within participants' reflections in this research. Additionally, other pertinent research works are used as references to support this analysis.

2.3.4.2 Impact factors on the breadth of teachers' reflection

Several factors contribute to the breadth (content) of teachers' reflection. The foremost significant factor that affects the breadth of teachers' reflection is the practitioner's teaching experience. One cannot expect a pre-service teacher, who lacks prior knowledge of the students or the school, to reflect comprehensively after observing a single class. Collier (1999) analyzed the reflections of four student teachers and found that, due to the limited and narrow nature of their practicum experiences, most of their reflections remained at a descriptive and technical level, equal to van Manen's (1977) first level. Only one participant demonstrated a more expansive and open-minded approach, reaching the third level of critical reflection. Power et al. (2002) evaluated the development of 13 associate teachers' reflection throughout a practicum program, with data collected from reflective journals and group discussions. They observed that a broader scope of reflection began to emerge after the completion a professional internship. Concerning the specific aspects of the associates' reflection, they identified 15 categories, ranking successful teaching as the highest priority, followed by assessment strategies, management strategies, personal growth, and reviewing past actions, ranked second to fifth, respectively. Additionally, reflections from the participants also highlighted concerns about relationships with staff, parents, and students, as well as class-related issues, achievement of outcomes, and professional development.

The breadth (content) of teachers' reflection is also significantly influenced by the presence of a mentor who provides feedback and guidance. In a study by Ibrahim et al. (2012), 15 pre-service teachers were examined regarding their self-reflection, particularly on pedagogical content knowledge. The findings showed that their reflections primarily centered on two main themes: 1) pedagogical content knowledge, which encompassed five subcategories: course content, the importance of course topics, student difficulties, teaching methods, and assessment techniques 2) general issues, which included four subcategories: class management, time management, facility-related matters, and instances of no reflection. The study discovered that without guidance, the reflections were limited in number and appeared descriptive and superficial. However, when these student teachers received guidance and feedback from their lecturer, the quantity of their reflections on both pedagogical and general issues increased. Moreover, the quality of their reflections improved, becoming more critical and in-depth.

The breadth of a reflection can also be influenced by the nature of the context. In a study conducted by Lee (2005) to assess reflective thinking and its development in preservice teachers, student teachers' reflections were evaluated from the perspective of content and depth. The study revealed that the content of student teachers' reflections primarily centered on the field experience context, including their observations, actions taken, limitations faced, and aspirations for future field works. Initially, instructional skills were the primary concern during the early stages of student teaching. However, as teaching experience accumulated, reflection on disciplines and instructional skills decreased. Instead, there was an increase in concerns related to lesson preparation as they gained more teaching experience. Kember and his colleagues (1999) also noted that researchers lacking familiarity with the backgrounds of student teachers and the context knowledge in which they were reflecting, were incompetent in analyzing their journal writing and assessing the levels of their reflective thinking, using a framework focused on breadth. Moreover, a study conducted by Sulaiman (2018) on TESL student teachers suggests that the nature of participants' teacher education, experiences in a community of practice, and the development of their professional identity as adult learners are important factors that contribute to the breadth of their reflection.

2.3.5 Modelling reflective practice

In this section, I will introduce several influential reflective models and discuss the models applied as analytical frameworks to analyze the reflective data for the current study. In order to facilitate practitioners' reflection, numerous studies make efforts to establish reflective models that offer a structured reflective process. Synthesizing the literature, there are several advantages to follow a specific process for reflection. Firstly, a specific reflective process provides a structured approach for practitioners to organize their thoughts, experiences, and emotions in a systematic manner, thereby making the reflection process more effective and meaningful. Secondly, a structured process offers guidance on how to conduct reflection. It helps individuals understand what aspects of an experience to focus on, how to analyze their thoughts and feelings, and how to draw conclusions or learning outcomes from the reflection. Thirdly, a structured process fosters regular engagement in reflection. Following a particular process makes reflection a habitual practice rather than an occasional or random activity, thus promoting continuous learning and growth. Furthermore, reflection without a structured process might be vague or incomplete. An identified process ensures a

comprehensive exploration of experiences, leading to a more profound learning experience and increased self-awareness. Last but not least, a structured reflective process is integral for professional development, enabling practitioners critically evaluate their practice, identify areas for improvement, and enhance their professional skills and competencies.

According to Dewey (1933), the process of reflection can be divided into six phases, which can be summarized as:

1. Experience: Involves encountering an experience, fact or object.
2. Perplexity: Entails a state of doubt, perplexity, or mental difficulties due to the encountered experience.
3. Diagnosing: In this phase, one seeks to completely understand the problem or perplexing situation, breaking it down into its components.
4. Suggestions of possible solutions: Individuals generate some suggestions or hypotheses to address the problem based on past experience, knowledge, and the relevant information or data gathered by observation and initial analysis.
5. Reasoning: Involves critically evaluating and testing the potential solutions or hypotheses through reasoning, experimentation, or further analysis.
6. Application: This stage encompasses applying the chosen solution or hypothesis into practice and observing the outcomes. It often leads back to the beginning of the reflective cycle, initiating a continuous process of learning and improvement.

These phases demonstrate the cyclic nature of reflective thinking, highlighting continuous and iterative processes of problem-solving and learning. It is important to note that the purpose of the thinking plays a crucial role in considering possible solutions, as Dewey stressed, “the nature of the problem fixes the end of thought, and the end controls the process of thinking.” (p.15) For instance, a traveler seeking directions to a city must explore various signs and test suggestions based on alternative references.

Korthagen (1985) introduced the ALACT reflective model, delineating an ideal process of reflection derived from practice, comprised of five distinct phases: 1) Action, 2) Looking back on the action, 3) Awareness of essential aspects, 4) Creating alternative methods of action, and (5) Trial, looping back to the first phase (action) to initiate the subsequent cycle (see Figure 2). This model functions as spiral, emphasizing the

ongoing and iterative process of professional development.

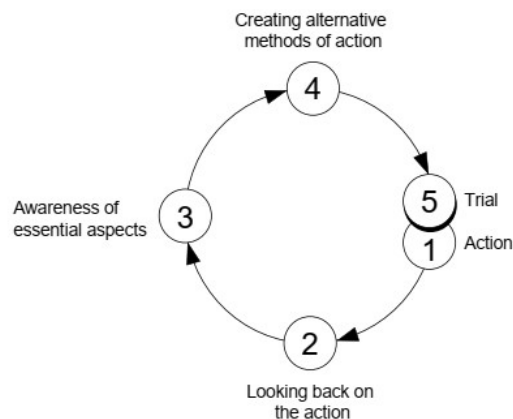


Figure 2 The ALACT model (Korthagen, 1985)

In order to further facilitate the practitioners' reflection, Korthagen and Kessels (1999) supplemented this model by providing a series of guiding questions for each phase within the five-step reflective process. These questions guide practitioners through each stage:

Phase 1 Action (=phase 5 of the new cycle)

1. What did I want to achieve?
2. What did I want to pay particular attention to?
3. What did I want to try out?

Phase 2 Looking back

4. What were the concrete events?
 - What did I want?
 - What did I do?
 - What did I think?
 - How did I feel?
 - What do I think the students wanted, did, thought and felt?

Phase 3 Awareness of essential aspects

5. What is the connection between the answers to the previous questions?
6. What is the influence of the context/the school as a whole?
7. What does that mean for me?
8. What is the problem (or the positive discovery)?

Phase 4 Creating alternatives

9. What alternatives do I see? (solutions or ways to make use of my discovery)?

10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
11. What do I resolve to do next time?

This set of questions, tailored for each reflective phase, served as the basis when I formulated the structured questions for the current study.

Wallace (1991) proposed a reflective model aimed at fostering the development of foreign language teachers. The model suggests that teachers' beliefs or mental constructs stem from and influenced by a range of sources including both received knowledge and experiential knowledge, highlighting the crucial role of a pre-training stage. This stage provides time and opportunities for teachers to explore their current beliefs, schemata and knowledge bases.

The model comprises four key components: received knowledge, experiential knowledge, a reflective cycle and professional competence. Received knowledge refers to knowledge acquired through academic studies in a specific field (e.g. linguistics). Experiential knowledge refers to knowledge-in-action gained through professional practice (e.g. classroom teaching). The reflective cycle represents an ongoing process of reflection and evaluation on both received knowledge and experiential knowledge in the context of professional practice. Lastly, professional competence signifies when the teacher meets the minimum requirements and demonstrates proficiency in their professional expertise. However, this model may oversimplify the process of reflection and lack detailed guideline to enrich and deepen the reflective process. The model is illustrated in Figure 1, displaying the interplay between received and experiential knowledge, reflective cycles, and the development of professional competence.

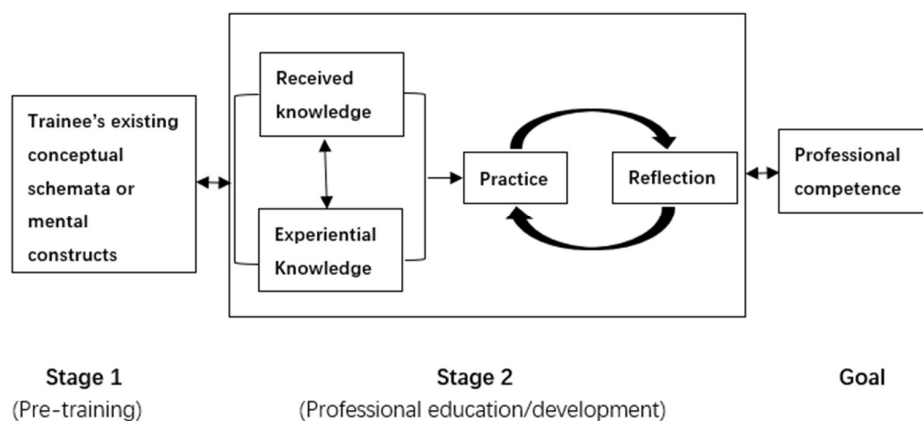


Figure 3 Reflective practice model of professional education and development (Wallace, 1991)

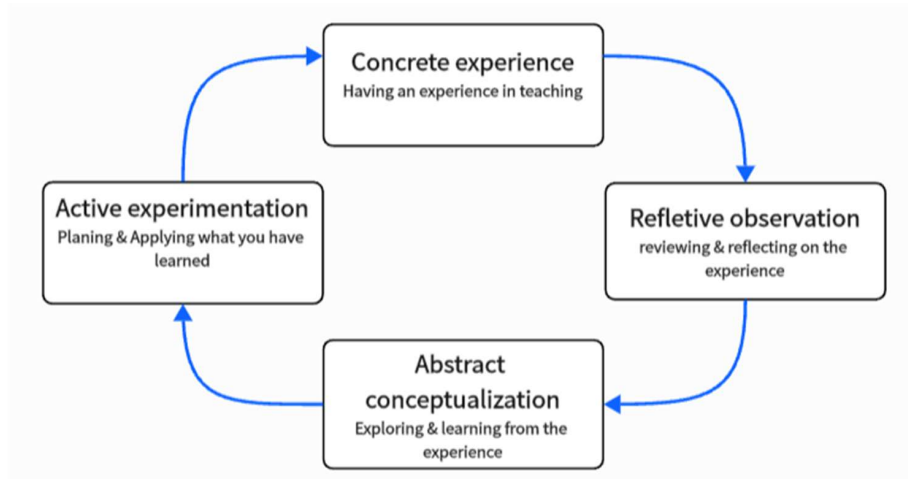


Figure 4 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)

Based on theories of learning, Kolb (1984) created the Experiential Learning Cycle (see Figure 4), a four-stage model centered on acquiring understanding through direct experiences. The model consists of four essential stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Kolb emphasizes the interdependence of these stages, asserting that effective learning involves a cyclic process of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. As per the cycle, learning begins with an individual encountering an experience and positively reflecting upon it. This reflection leads to the analysis and formulation of abstract concepts. Learners can then test with their hypotheses in various situations. The model describes two modes of knowledge acquisition: concrete experiences and abstract conceptualisation. The other two stages, reflective observation and active experimentation, help learners transform their experience into knowledge. Each of these stages acts as a foundation for the next stage. The model may not may not adequately address the influence of contextual factors and sufficiently emphasize the role of emotions or affective aspects in the learning process, which can significantly impact learning and reflection.

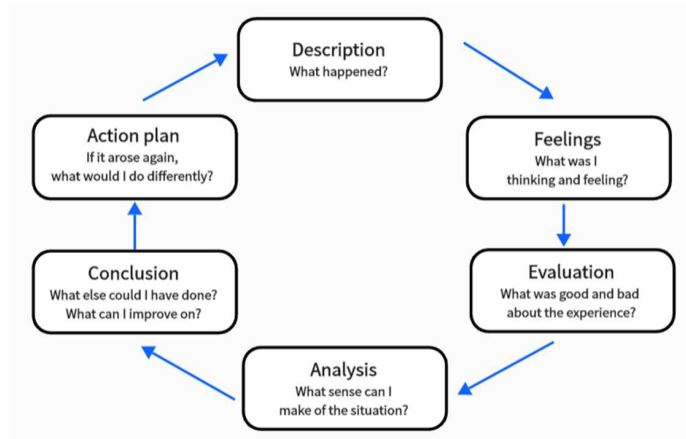


Figure 5 Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988)

Derived from Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, Gibbs' reflective model (1988, see Figure 5) divides the reflective process into six stages:

Description of the experience;

Feelings and thoughts about the experience;

Evaluation of the experience, including both positive and negative aspects;

Analysis to make sense of the situation;

Conclusion about what was learned and possible alternative actions;

Action plan outlining potential approaches or general changes for similar situations in the future.

This widely used model in academic and professional settings provides a structured framework for individuals to reflect on their experiences, learning from them, and planning future actions. It builds on Kolb's model by breaking down the reflective observation stage into feelings and evaluation of the events, acknowledging the impact of practitioners' personal emotions on the situation. However, despite the further breakdown, it can be argued that this model could still result in fairly superficial reflection, lacking explicit emphasis on critical thinking or examining diverse assumptions and perspectives. It might not sufficiently encourage a deep exploration that leads to transformative learning or shifts in perspectives or practices.

Rodgers (2002) revisits Dewey's (1933) discussion and argues that his six phases of reflection can be collapsed into four stages:

1. Presence to experience;
2. Description of experience;
3. Analysis of experience;
4. Intelligent action/experimentation.

She emphasizes the continual interweaving of questions, problems, and ideas throughout all four stages, evolving and refining themselves. Rodgers emphasizes that the progressing from experience, to spontaneous interpretation, naming the problem and reasoning through its complexities must lead to change in beliefs and practices. Considering the participants busy schedules, Rodgers' reflective framework was eventually chosen as the primary base for this study due to its simple nature and alignment with other reflective models in similar layers, focus and processes.

2.3.6 Teachers' attitudes for reflective practice

In Dewey's (1933) discussion of reflective thinking, he keenly noted that conducting systematic and persistent reflective activities requires more than just acquiring specific knowledge and methods; practitioners must also have four specific attitudes which remain important today: open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, responsibility, and directness.

Open-mindedness entails a willingness to actively listen to diverse opinions from different viewpoints without favoring a single side of an issue. It involves giving attention to alternative views and does not imply unquestioned acceptance of all ideas without critical evaluation. Rather, it signifies a readiness to consider different perspectives while acknowledging the "possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (Dewey, 1933, p.30), along with recognizing the limitations of one's own perspective. This attitude fosters a positive stance toward being more tolerant of new themes, facts, ideas, and questions.

Whole-heartedness involves genuine enthusiasm or complete engagement in teaching and reflection, as Dewey (1933) observed, it occurs "when anyone is thoroughly interested in some object and cause" (p.31). Teachers who exhibit whole-heartedness are passionate about their teaching practice, actively employing diverse teaching methods and strategies to enhance student learning. They care about students' learning and growth, striving to provide continual support and guidance. These educators consistently reflect on and improve their teaching methods to better meet students' needs and nurture their potential. In contrast, the absence of whole-heartedness leads to teacher indifference toward their students and teaching practices. These teachers fail to dedicate time to observe and gather evidence about their teaching methods and their students' learning processes. They are not brave enough to face their fear, uncertainties and challenges encountered in the classroom. As Farrell (2012)

suggest, whole-heartedness involves “overcoming fears and uncertainties to critically evaluate their practice in order to make meaningful change” (p. 10).

Responsibility involves the acknowledgement of accountability for one's thoughts, actions, and decisions. It requires recognizing the consequences of one's choices and being willing to learn from experiences, whether positive or negative, to improve future actions. Dewey (1933) expressed that to be intellectually responsible “is to consider the consequences of a projected step; it means to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position already taken. Intellectual responsibility secures integrity; that is to say, consistency and harmony in belief.” (p.32) Responsible teachers take ownership of their actions, decisions, and the outcomes of their teaching. They often ask “what is the impact of my actions and thoughts on the students?” They acknowledge their crucial role in students' learning and bear responsibility for their progress. Such teachers display flexibility and adaptability to address the diverse needs of students. They adjust their teaching methods and approaches to accommodate different learning styles and abilities.

Directness in reflection conveys a confidence that is genuine but lack of self-absorption, as Rodgers (2002) noted, “almost childlike in its genuineness yet adult in its lack of self-absorption,” and focuses on an absence of anxiety about oneself (p. 860). As teachers' reflective practice evolves, they may transition from self-absorption to developing a clear self-awareness, moving beyond excessive concern for self towards observing and understanding their teaching context. Reflective teachers adopting direct attitude are confident in the validity of their own experience and spend less time worrying about external judgement. Their reflections often revolve around personal learning and improvement drawn from daily experiences, focusing on what they've learned and how they've improved, rather than solely on what they've taught. This approach stems from their keen awareness, enabling them to observe classroom dynamics and adjust their teaching accordingly. However, this directness is often lacking in beginning teachers. Novice educators, deeply identified with content and their teaching, may miss important aspects of the learning environment, particularly the students and their learning processes. Their reflections tend to remain fixated on the self, lacking broader observation and consideration of the learners and their learning experiences.

Alongside these four fundamental attitudes, Rodgers (2002) added curiosity and the desire for growth as essential elements of reflection. Curiosity, a natural trait in

children, embodies a sense of wonder about the world that adults often need to nurture within themselves. Unfortunately, when many educators encounter perplexity, instead of exploring the reasons for their confusions, they tend to blame either to the students or themselves, some may even give up, citing difficulties in understanding or a lack of time. In contrast, curiosity reflects a positive and open-minded attitude toward both personal and others' learning. The desire for growth is a profound motivation deeply rooted in one's own necessity. Educators possess a strong drive to enhance their personal and professional practices, consequently benefiting their students' learning. Rodgers (2002) asserted that the absence of these two traits would result in a lack of the courage necessary for genuine reflective practice.

2.3.7 Reflective instruments

In order to promote teachers' reflective practice, it is imperative to utilize some effective reflective instruments. These instruments serve as invaluable tools for self-assessment and self-awareness, allowing individuals to critically contemplate their experiences, thoughts, and actions. Jaeger (2013) suggests that several effective methods, including examining case studies, journaling, conducting self-studies, and analyzing an audio or visual recording of teaching, have been proved to be valuable in the development of teachers' reflection. In this section, some of the most frequently used reflective instruments will be introduced, including reflective journal, classroom observation, cooperative learning, e-portfolios and video analysis.

2.3.7.1 Reflective journal

Numerous studies have understored the significant impact of journal writing on enhancing teachers' reflection (e.g. Ho and Richards, 1993; Larrivee, 2008; Thorpe, 2004; Farrell, 2013, 2018). Reflective journals serve as written accounts, documenting various dimensions of their teaching experiences, including classroom events, and providing them with an opportunity "to step back for a moment to reflect on their work" (Farrell, 2018, p.3). They can achieve multiple purpose, such as capturing an experience, recording an event, exploring our feelings, and making sense of what we know. Furthermore, reflective journals can be perceived through various lenses: as a form of self-expression, a record of events, or even as a form of therapy (Boud, 2001b). Ryan (2011) suggests that student teachers can improve their reflective writing skills by demonstrating components of a high-quality reflective account, in other word,

presenting them with an exemplary piece of writing that showcases the specific criteria used for assessment.

According to Ho and Richards (1993), journal writing can be seen as an opportunity for teachers to describe and explore their own teaching practices through the writing process. Regular reflective journal writing can help individuals explore their own beliefs and practices, enhance awareness of their teaching styles, and develop a deeper understanding of their experiences and thoughts (Farrell, 2013). It aids teachers identifying their weaknesses, seeking improvements, and connecting their existing knowledge with new information (Abednia et al, 2013). Moreover, it enables them to identify recurring patterns and themes in their experiences and improve their ability for self-monitoring their teaching practice (Thomas & Geursen, 2013; Balbay, 2020). Thorpe (2004) also highlights reflective journals as a significant tool in promoting active learning among students.

Spalding and Wilson (2002) suggest that pre-service teachers can benefit from journal writing at least from four aspects: 1) establishing a permanent record of experiences; 2) building and maintaining relationships with professors; 3) exploring personal concerns, issues and biases, and 4) engaging in internal dialogue. Similarly, according to Moon (1999), journal writing can improve the writing quality and critical thinking and questioning skills, help learners understand their learning processes, fosters learner's engagement and professional practice, and enhance creativity, reflective thinking, and collaborative interactions within a group.

However, relying solely on reflective journals might not suffice for comprehensive critical reflection, as they often offer limited perspectives and are constrained by individual viewpoint, potentially leading to biased reflections. Mann and Walsh (2013) notice that written forms of reflection play a dominant role in the literature of reflective practice at the expense of possible spoken forms and stress the need to consider a broader context beyond individual written reflective texts. Therefore, practitioners are encouraged to use diverse reflective instruments to deepen their reflective practices.

2.3.7.2 Classroom observation

Classroom observation have been defined as “the purposeful examination of teaching and/or learning events through the systematic process of data collection and analysis” (Bailey, 2001, p.114). It is considered a “key component of teacher professional development” (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011, p.450), because any effort to enhance

language teachers' training and improve the quality of language teaching must center around the teaching and learning processes occurring within the classroom. Farrell (2018) asserts that classroom observations can assist language teachers in gaining a better awareness of the actual occurrences in their classrooms and the reasoning behind their decisions. When others observe teachers in action, the observers can provide valuable insights into their teaching methods and practices, enabling teachers to identify areas for improvement and make changes to their teaching strategies (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021).

Garman and Holland (2016) argue that it is imperative that “teachers see themselves as agents of their own practice and in charge of the direction of their learning” (p. 57). According to a study of 185 teachers from diverse educational levels by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011), the majority part of the participants (84.8%) considered classroom observation as an important approach for teaching improvement. However, numerous activities might happen at the same time, making it difficult for teachers to stay fully aware of all that's going on in classroom (Xu, Zhu & Liu, 2023). Therefore, pre-service teachers are often required to observe classes at various education levels and school sites in order to develop a better understanding of the teaching profession and effective teaching in the field across diverse contexts (Grandy, 2016). By receiving support from instructors who scaffold the capacity of teacher candidates to analyze social, historical, and/or political contexts and their implications on education, classroom observations offer an opportunity for more critical reflection.

Classroom observation can take various forms: it can be conducted individually through self-observation, in pairs with critical friends, or in teacher groups where members observe each other's classes in turn. Farrell (2021) suggests that writing a self-report is an efficient way to engage in classroom observation, allowing teachers to make a regular assessment of their classroom practices.

The approach to classroom observation can be either qualitative or quantitative. As per Farrell (2021), keeping a self-report in a quantitative way “involves completing a checklist of some sort in which the teacher marks which practices were used during the lesson and how often they were used” (p.226). O'Leary (2014) highlights that quantitative instruments yield generalizable results, offer numerical data for analysis, maintain objectivity, and serve an explanatory purpose. In contrast, qualitative approaches, such as observation records, portfolio analysis, and interviews, are exploratory, recognizing the complexity and dynamism of teacher quality. They are

subjective and open to interpretation.

It is worthy to point out that despite its significance in enhancing teaching quality, fostering reflection, and nurturing professional development, classroom observation is often met with resistance. Many teachers, including the most experienced ones, do not like being observed, as the process evokes feelings of uneasiness, distrust, insecurity and anxiety (Aubusson et al. 2007; Borich 2008; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011). Some novice teachers fear judgment, while veteran educators may believe that their established teaching practices do not need to be observed (Ponticell et al., 2019).

2.3.7.3 Cooperative learning

Reflective practice is not a solitary process, on the contrary, it is best done on a collaborative basis with peers and colleagues (Malthouse and Roffey-Barentsen, 2013; Hall, 2020). According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), cooperative learning refers to an instructional approach wherein learners collaborate in teams to achieve a shared goal. This method, comprising five key elements—positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, appropriate utilization of collaborative skills, and group processing—is believed to be more productive compared to competitive or individualistic efforts. Cooperative learning facilitates the construction and expansion of learners' conceptual understanding of the subject matter, creates opportunities for receiving feedback on performance, and offers support and encouragement for ongoing learning efforts. Within cooperative groups, learners can observe exemplary group members as behavioral models, thus acquiring attitudes and values, such as the importance of continuous improvement. Additionally, it is within these cooperative groups that students establish a shared identity as members of the college community (Johnson et al., 2007).

Cooperative learning can be practiced in various forms, including with “critical friends” (Farrell, 2018; Hatton and Smith, 1995) and/or involvement in a development group (Farrell, 2014, 2018). Costa (2008) describes a critical friend as “a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers a critique of a person’s work as a friend” (p. 124). The essence of feedback within this framework aims to support and advocate for a colleague’s work and professional growth rather than focus on evaluation or judgment purposes (Costa, 2008; Kelley et al., 2022). Farrell (2018) indicates that engaging in reflective dialogues with critical friends can strengthen teachers’ awareness of classroom events and their

reflective capacities during their own self-reflections. Critical friends create a platform to express their thoughts while also offering constructive suggestions in a supportive manner.

In a study involving students in a teacher education program using critical friends as a primary tool for fostering participants' reflective abilities, Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest that "critical friend" is a powerful strategy in cultivating the development of student teachers' reflection. Several reasons contribute to this finding. Firstly, critical friend encourages engaging in conversations, questioning, and even challenging, the trusted other, to scrutinize lesson planning, implementation, and assessment of teaching. Secondly, the structured nature of the critical friend technique creates a safe environment that encourages self-revelation. Thirdly, it allows students to distance themselves from their actions, ideas, and beliefs, enabling them to subject these aspects to scrutiny in the presence of a trusted peer with whom they are willing to take such risks. Lastly, it offers an opportunity for giving voice to one's own thinking while receiving sympathetic yet constructive feedback (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Recent studies also indicate that critical friendship can effectively enhance and strengthen teachers' professional practice when teachers come together to exchange experiential stories, analyze various elements such as dilemmas, interactions, and offer constructive feedback that fosters colleagues' professional development (Kelley et al, 2022; Peters, 2011).

Farrell (2014) defines teacher development groups as gatherings of language instructors who come together to collectively reflect on their teaching experiences, aiming to foster each other's strengths and address individual limitations. Collaboration stands as an essential element in the realm of teacher professional development. Through collaborative efforts, teachers pool their personal and professional knowledge, enabling them to achieve outcomes that surpass what an individual working independently could attain. This collective endeavor generates a wider range of ideas to tackle classroom challenges, extending beyond what any singular teacher might produce (Farrell, 2014, 2021).

Group settings foster the chance to collectively share experiences and gain a comprehensive understanding of different scenarios through the diverse perspectives. Gustavsson et al. (2019) argue that group discussions stimulate a collegial learning environment and enhance the teachers' pedagogical and didactical competence, fostering an open attitude to each other's teaching practice. Moreover, such discussions

are meaningful and creates a cooperative culture that “can both support and challenge teachers in their professional development” (p. 351). Havnes (2009) suggests that group dialogue plays a crucial role in teacher teams’ ongoing construction of knowledge in practice. It involves coordinating and sharing pedagogical knowledge, creating collaborative spaces for problem-solving, and collectively examining teaching practice.

Collaboration, dialogue and collective reflection, team cohesion and safety emerge as vital conditions for teacher groups (Havnes, 2009; Meirink et al., 2010) while other studies emphasize the importance of shared norms and intentions, as well as the organization of collective tasks in the local school culture (Leithwood et al. 1997; Rosenholtz, 1989). According to Farrell (2021), trust among group members is highlighted as 'one of the significant obstacles' (p. 232).

In conclusion, the researcher aimed to create a cooperative learning environment to allow the teachers ask questions, obtain feedback and thus gain a deeper understanding of their experience for this current project. This cooperative learning framework encompasses both aforementioned forms: critical friends and teacher group discussions. Specifically, the researcher acted as the critical friend, observing the teaching practice of the participants and engaging in one-on-one reflective dialogue afterwards. Simultaneously, the participants formed a development group to collectively discuss the challenges encountered in their teaching practices, exchange experiences, and share opinions.

2.3.7.4 E-portfolio

With the development of technology, e-portfolio has evolved into an essential and convenient tool for teacher learning and reflective practice in both academic and professional fields. An e-portfolio is defined as “a digital container capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, video and sound” (Abrami and Barrett, 2005, p.1). It provides novice teachers a space to showcase their work and the knowledge gained in a format that is both student-centered and enhances the development reflective thinking skills (Jaeger, 2013; Oner and Adadan, 2011). It becomes increasingly popular not only for their capacity to offer multimedia presentation and assessment possibilities in educational and professional environments, beneficial for authentic assessment and the evaluation of prior learning, but also for their potential to support the process of knowledge construction (Abrami and Barrett, 2005; Ayan & Seferoglu, 2011).

Pitts & Ruggirello (2012) suggest that e-portfolios provide a multimedia space for systematic documentation of teacher's experience, achievement and professional growth within the domain of reflective practice. They have widely been used in teacher education as a means to demonstrate compelling evidence of growth and competency (Abrami & Barret, 2005), to focus teacher thinking and to serve as a medium for translating theory into practice (Hauge, 2006). The expectation is that E-portfolios help to connect professional growth to the process of learning to teach. Carroll (2021) conducted a study examining the experience of first-year physics teachers utilizing e-portfolios as the primary assessment method for their class. The study found that students' engagement with e-portfolios fosters the development of academic self-efficacy and self-regulation, leading to self-reported reductions in academic stress.

Shepherd and Skrabut (2011) emphasize that when utilized effectively, e-portfolios have the potential to enhance reflection, cultivate content and pedagogical skills, facilitate communication between teachers and administrators, and foster personal inquiry and growth. Oner and Adadan (2011) outline three fundamental characteristics of an effective teaching e-portfolio. Firstly, it should encompass a personal philosophy and professional goals. Secondly, the e-portfolio must offer substantial evidence illustrating the connection between one's teaching practices and theoretical underpinnings. Finally, an effective portfolio should integrate critical reflections on one's decision-making processes within the classroom.

An e-portfolio could contain diverse materials depending on its purposes, ranging from lesson plans, anecdotal records, student projects, class newsletters, video/audio-tapes, to teacher evaluations and letters of recommendation. According to Farrell (2021), there are three primary types of teaching portfolio that in-service teacher can compile: 1) working portfolio, 2) showcase portfolio, and 3) critical incident portfolio. The working portfolio serves to document growth and progress towards meeting specific performance standards set within the institution, district, or at the national level. On the other hand, the showcase portfolio emphasizes a teacher's exemplary work and accomplishments. Lastly, the critical incident portfolio focuses on documenting selected incidents that offer valuable insights and illumination to teachers.

Numerous studies highlight the tensions between rigid and structured templates, and more flexible constructions that allow for individual creativity and self-expression (e.g. Barrett, 2005; Borko et al., 2007). Within teacher education programs, e-portfolio templates vary widely, ranging from highly structured format, such as foliotek, to

loosely defined ones guided by rubrics, enabling students to independently organize and construct their entries using website design programs, such as Google Sites. Adhering strictly to structured templates may result in e-portfolio entries lacking a clear purpose, with limited integration of knowledge and weak connections between evidence and practical application in terms of personal growth and learning to teach. Conversely, employing structured templates aids teachers in applying conceptual frameworks and showcasing emerging themes pertaining to competency areas, such as the utilization of pedagogical knowledge in designing instruction and assessments (Pitts & Ruggirello, 2012).

2.3.7.5 Video analysis

In addition to the more traditional modes of fostering reflection such as journal writing and classroom observation, the interest in the use of video for in-service and pre-service teacher development of reflective practice is growing in the last two decades (Hamel and Viau-Guay, 2019; Barth-Cohen et al., 2018; Harford and MacRuairc, 2008). Perry and Talley (2001) define video as ‘a powerful tool for bringing the complexities of the classroom into focus and supporting preservice teachers in connecting knowledge and practice’ (p.26). Using video in teacher education serves various purposes, including fostering the capacity for self-reflection on teaching skills. Studies indicate that exposing preservice teachers to diverse and complex classroom situations through video, coupled with collective analysis, promotes deeper reflection, facilitating a stronger connection between classroom actions and broader pedagogical principles or perspectives (Hixon and So, 2009; Marsh and Mitchell, 2014).

Video possesses advantages due to its compacity to convey the subtle and intricate dynamic of classroom learning in real time, enabling practitioners to analyze the same situation several times from different perspectives, thereby facilitating reflection-on-action through numerous chances for re-watching (Brophy, 2004; Brunvand, 2010). By using video as a data source, educators gain access to numerous real-life experiences within the teaching and learning environment, enabling teachers to observe a broader spectrum of practice and allowing them to recognize and critically evaluate effective practice (Loughran, 2002; Rich and Hannafin, 2009).

Harford and MacRuairc (2008) explored the use of peer-videoing in a classroom setting as a tool promote reflective practice among twenty pre-service teachers in a one-

year long Post- Graduate Diploma Education program. The findings revealed that students' active engagement with the peer-videoing process served as a "powerful function as a catalyst" in developing their reflective skills, which in turn, significantly impacted on their classroom practice, thus bridging the gap between reflection and practice (Harford and MacRuairc, 2008, p. 1890). Peters (2011) conducted a study involving fifty-one student teachers who utilized teaching videos to improve their professional practice. The research revealed that employing videos in cooperative learning with a critical friend protocol significantly influenced teacher development and learning, particularly enhancing tasks that demand higher-order cognitive thinking.

Rather than focusing their research on teaching practice and teacher-student interactions, Barth-Cohen, Little and Abrahamson (2018) conducted a qualitative education research on student learning and decision-making process of pre-service teachers regarding pursuit teaching careers through qualitative video analysis. They found that qualitative video analysis is an effective and cohesive approach for pre-service teachers to conceptualize the learning and teaching within their subject matters.

Following a comprehensive review of studies concerning video usage in teacher education, Tripp and Rich (2012a) indicate that video allows preservice teachers to redirect their attention from themselves toward their students and their learning. In addition, the participants showed a preference for video-based training tasks involving interaction with trainers and/or peers over individual processes, despite trainers more frequently suggesting individual tasks such as written work.

In summary, the instruments introduced in this section have proven to be effective tools for enhancing teachers' professional development and elevating their levels of reflective thinking in diverse ways. In this study, I adopted journal writing, classroom observation, cooperative learning, and e-portfolios to gather data, with a particular emphasis on the latter two instruments. Employing multiple data sources can triangulate evidence and enhance the validity of the research. I opted out of using video analysis due to time constraints faced by the in-service teachers involved in my research, limiting their availability. Further discussion on the data collection procedure will be provided in Chapter three.

2.3.8 Critiques of reflective practice

Even though reflective practice is a desirable, foundational dimension for the practitioners' professional and personal development and becomes one of the essential

parts of teacher education programs, there still exist some critiques and limitations that worthy exploration.

Mann and Walsh (2013) assert that reflective practice has attained orthodox status in the field of applied linguistics, TESOL, and education. However, they point out a lack of substantial, data-driven linguistic evidence to unequivocally establish its value. In addition, existing studies predominantly rely on written forms, indicating a need for more diverse sources of evidence.

Collin et al. (2013) conducted a critical exploration of reflective practice at three level: theoretical, practical and methodological. Within theoretical perspective, they highlighted a lack of clarity and consensus concerning the definitions and terminologies associated with reflective practice (see also in Hatton and Smith, 1995; Rodgers, 2002; Farrell, 2015; Mann and Walsh, 2013). For instance, while one article might use the term 'reflective practice,' other authors might favor 'reflective teaching,' 'reflection,' 'reflexivity,' or similar variations. On the other hand, even when the same term is employed, different authors may attribute considerably distinct concepts to the notion of reflective practice. In addition to the debates surrounding terminologies and definitions of reflective practice, its association with action and emotion has been a subject of discussion in the literature. Moon (1999) argues that reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are interconnected processes along a continuum. These processes involve rapid and often unconscious actions during the course of an activity or, further along the continuum, more deliberate and conscious reflection. Mortari (2015) suggest that a rationalistic view of reflection tends to solely on its intellectual aspect within the epistemic process, often neglecting the emotional dimension. Nevertheless, emotional lived experience, including moods, sentiments, passions, significantly influence the heuristic process and frequently plays a pivotal role in shaping epistemic choices.

When categorizing reflective practice into different levels, it inherently involves discerning between what is perceived as 'good' and 'bad' reflective practices, and consequently, distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' reflective practitioners. Moreover, establishing a hierarchy of reflection levels might inadvertently prioritize certain domains of reflection over others. Collin et al. (2013) propose that all levels of reflective practice hold value for teachers. The choice of employing a particular level should be contingent upon pedagogical circumstances rather than solely on the teacher's reflective capacity. According to their perspective, the evaluation of reflective practice should not hinge on reaching a specific 'level,' but rather on the breadth of 'levels'

applied in practical teaching contexts.

Critiques of reflective practice extend to the practical and methodological levels. At the practical level, criticisms span various facets, from the reflective domain and process to the role of the practicum, with debates on the importance of the practicum in cultivating reflective practice. Meanwhile, at the methodological level, several critiques emerge, including weak comparability among empirical studies due to a lack of theoretical foundation, challenges in observing reflective practice in action, complexities in assessing reflective practice, and concerns about studies misusing reflective practice for promotional purposes, lacking robust conceptual frameworks (Collin et al., 2013; Korthagen, 2001). These challenges pose significant barriers to understanding and teaching reflective practice.

Finlay (2008) conducts a thorough examination of potential concerns within reflective practice across four distinct perspectives: ethical, professional, pedagogic, and conceptual. Ethically, engaging in reflective practice, striving for constant self-improvement, can evoke profound emotional impacts, potentially leading to self-disapproval and self-rejection (Quinn, 2000). As Brookfield (1995) indicates, reflective practice involves cultural and personal risks, not always resulting in a sense of empowerment for everyone involved. Additionally, educators might face the temptation to exceed their level of expertise (Boud and Walker, 1998). From the professional perspective, improper utilization of reflective frameworks may devalue practitioners' work instead of enhancing it. Studies suggest that a top-down approach often results in mechanical checklist completion, lacking critical thinking and boundary-pushing (Smyth, 1989; Boud and Walker, 1998; Smith and Lev-Ari, 2005; Martínez, 2018). This mechanical approach risks making reflections bland, self-evident, and in agreement with existing practices, potentially reinforcing biases and ineffective methods (Boud and Walker, 1998).

Pedagogically, two primary concerns arise: developmental readiness and the potential counter-productivity of enforced reflection. Research indicates that learners must be developmentally prepared to engage in critical reflection, which correlates with their professional experience (Griffin, 2003; Burrows, 1995). Additionally, the compulsory nature of reflective practice in learning and assessment settings can result in superficial, strategic, and guarded reflections, negating its intended benefits. Fendler (2003) criticizes the fact that reflection often teaches practitioners to rationalize their beliefs instead of questioning and interrogating one's motives or intentions. Finally,

conceptual concerns highlight variations in the conception of reflexivity across different disciplines, revealing divergent theoretical and methodological commitments. Postmodernists emphasize social critique and discursive focus, contrasting with the more individualistic stance of phenomenological or psychodynamic practitioners.

Mortari (2015) asserts that it is impossible for reflection to attain a complete awareness of the intricate experiential life of consciousness due to three inherent constraints. Firstly, reflection's capacity is confined to extracting fragments from the continuous stream of thought, leaving the larger part of mental life obscured within the background. Secondly, as a retrospective cognitive activity, reflection is inherently limited—it can only apprehend what the reflective act can retain, failing to encompass the entirety of the object of attention. Lastly, the sheer complexity of mental life necessitates an external perspective, akin to a spectator observing the flow of consciousness from an objective point outside oneself. However, such an external position is unattainable for us. Even though the analysis of the process of the mind is inevitable partial and provisional, reflection remains indispensable as it provides insights into our cognitive positioning during thinking process.

The critiques and limitations outlined above neither discredit nor dismiss reflective practice from professional development and education. Rather, they underscore the importance of its selective application, sensitive teaching, and cautious implementation. It is imperative for practitioners to approach reflective practice critically and reflexively, avoiding blind adherence to the tools provided. Despite the potential challenges discussed, numerous studies advocate that learning to cultivate reflection remains integral to effective teaching and professional growth, a point extensively addressed throughout this chapter.

2.4 Summary

This chapter begins with an exploration of teacher development. Aligned with Mann's perspective (2005), I consider teacher development not merely as a technical obligation but as a continuous learning process, as well as an intrinsic, conscious, and moral commitment. I emphasize the key role of self-inquiry and critical thinking in fostering the continuous professional development and growth of teachers.

Then, the review delves into the seminal contributions of Dewey and Schön to the concept of reflective practice from a historical point of view. To establish a sturdy foundation for our study, I examined diverse definitions of reflective practice. Building

upon Finlay's (2008) definition, I define reflective practice as an ongoing process rooted in continuous experiences, leading to deeper insights into oneself and/or one's practices.

Further exploration encompasses various dimensions of reflective practice, delineating reflective levels (pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection), reflective contents (encompassing teaching theories, applications, teaching methodologies, self-awareness, and considerations of social, ethical, and political contexts), and the reflective process (involving concrete practice, description, analysis, and experimentation).

Next, I discuss the attitudes that are essential to enhance the productivity of reflective practice, including responsibility, whole-heartedness, open-mindedness, directness, curiosity, and the desire for growth. Additionally, I introduce several commonly used reflective instruments that serve to scaffold reflective practice: reflective journals, classroom observations, cooperative learning, e-portfolios, and video analysis.

Finally, I examine the existing concerns and limitations within current research on reflective practice. There is a notable lack of empirical data-led studies are lacking, with the majority relying on written forms, typically conducted by individuals.

In the field of Chinese language education, while *Professional Competence Standards for International Chinese Language Teachers* (the International Society for Chinese Language Teaching, 2022) highlight the importance of reflection, it lacks guidance on how to conduct reflective practice. Moreover, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on the professional development and reflective practice of Chinese language teachers.

Building upon the insightful concepts acquired from the literature, I have identified these research gaps, which drive me to design the current study of reflective practice in the CSL/CFL field, with an emphasis on cooperative learning and e-portfolios. They also serve as guiding principles in conducting this research, and the next chapter will elaborate on the approach I have implemented.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Choosing the appropriate research methodology is crucial for the success and overall quality of a research. It determines the type of data collected, how it is collected, and how it is analyzed. The proper research methodology ensures data quality, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

The choice of a research method depends on the research questions, objectives, data collection methods and available resource in the chosen context. Patton (2015) suggests that "researchers should be aware of the strengths and limitations of different research methods and should choose a method that is appropriate for their research question and goals" (p. 41). He asserts that researchers should consider using multiple data collection methods to triangulate their findings and increase the validity of their results. Guided by these insights, this research employs various data collection methods, including interviews, classroom observations, workshops, group discussions. Additionally, it incorporates technology —specifically E-portfolios —as an important instrument for data collection. The diverse range of data resources will be further discussed in the data collection section.

This chapter begins by outlining the rationale behind the choice of qualitative methodology and case study, followed by the presentation of the research questions. Subsequently, I will introduce the sites and participants involved in the study. Following these sections, a comprehensive overview of the data will be provided, encompassing various aspects such as data forms, sources, collection procedures, management, and analysis. Finally, the chapter will conclude by discussing validation methods and strategies employed in this research.

3.2 Rationale for qualitative research

When deciding on a research methodology, the first thing that comes to mind is whether the research project should be qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methodology is often used to explore how people make sense of their lives or experiences and how these experiences are organized or constructed (Van Lier, 2005; Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). Therefore, qualitative method was chosen firstly because the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth account of the participants'

experience with reflective inquiry in their teaching. As Creswell (2013) defines:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (P. 44)

In this definition, a special emphasis has been placed on the research *process*, highlighting the interpretive lens rather than philosophical assumptions, and on the rigorous *procedures* used to explore the social or human phenomena. Erickson (2023) also highlights the importance of meaning-making process and the narrative approach inherent in qualitative research. He characterizes qualitative inquiry as the pursuit of understanding and narrative description of individuals' daily activities and the significance these actions hold for them. This approach “identifies meaning-relevant kinds of things in the world—kinds of people, kinds of actions, kinds of beliefs and interests—focusing on differences in forms of things that make a difference for meaning” (p.87). According to Patton (2015), qualitative research is an approach that facilitates in-depth and detailed exploration of research issues. Researchers employing this method approach fieldwork without predetermined categories of analysis, thereby enhancing the depth, openness, and meticulous nature of qualitative inquiry.

Secondly, the qualitative method was chosen because the study involved collecting data from multiple sources in the participants real-life settings. By reviewing three introductory qualitative research books, Creswell (2013) outlines several common characteristics of qualitative research: 1) implementation in a natural setting; 2) research as key instrument; 3) multiple forms of data; 4) the engagement in complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic; 5) a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue; 6) emergent design; 7) the emphasis of reflexivity; and 8) the provision holistic account. Tracy (2020) also posits that there are three fundamental qualitative concepts: self-reflexivity, context and thick

description.

Quantitative research, on the contrary, focuses on the measurement and analysis of numerical data to assess hypotheses and address research questions. It employs techniques such as surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis, uncovering patterns and cause-and-effect relationships. Tracy (2020) states that Quantitative approach “transforms data – including conversations, actions, media stories, facial twitches, or any other social or physical activity – into numbers” (p.4). Additionally, she asserts that the role of researchers in qualitative and quantitative methods is another primary difference. In quantitative research, the research instrument is separate and independent from the researcher who controls it. In contrast, qualitative methods position the researcher as the instrument, with observations recorded through the researcher's mind and body. In such scenarios, self-reflexivity regarding one's objectives, interests, inclinations, and biases becomes particularly crucial (Tracy, 2020).

Creswell (2013) provides various rationales to select qualitative approach as the research methodology, which include:

1. Exploring a problem or issue in-depth.
2. Seeking a complex, detailed understanding of the issue.
3. Empowering individuals to share their stories, enabling their voices to be heard, and minimizing the power imbalances between the researcher and participants in a study.
4. Adopting a literary, flexible writing style that conveys stories, or theater, or poems, without the restrictions of formal academic structures of writing.
5. Understanding the contexts or settings in which participants address a problem or issue.
6. Using qualitative research to complement quantitative research by explaining the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models.
7. Developing theories in situations where existing theories are incomplete or inadequate for certain populations or fail to capture the complexity of the problem being studied.
8. Employing qualitative research when quantitative measures and the statistical analyses are inadequate for address the problem. (p.47-48)

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods possess their unique strengths and weaknesses. The use of different research methods, instruments, and procedures can yield distinct types of data. Additionally, various paradigms and methods have

value and are worth exploring and utilizing. The choice of methodology depends on the research goals as well as the researchers' personal inclinations, preferences, and skills.

I am driven by the desire to understand the concealed meaning of specific social phenomena and to interpret the meanings people make of their experiences. The primary objective of the research is to explore the experiences of a selected group of high school Chinese language teachers in Italy, to whom the researcher introduces the theory of reflective practice, and scrutinizes their professional development in a narrative approach. Additionally, data collection of this study, involving various sources and forms, occurs in the participants' natural settings. Given these conditions, I believe the qualitative method is the most suitable choice for the present study.

3.3 Rationale for case study

Research suggests that there is a primary shift in second language teacher education research toward qualitative-oriented research approaches, such as ethnographies, case studies and action research, as quantitative research may not adequately capture the complexity and richness of individual experiences (Lou, 2008; Meihami & Husseini, 2022). Yin (2009) indicates that the case study method is increasingly being used in organizational studies and various social sciences with a growing confidence in it as a rigorous research approach in its own right.

Case study methodology involves in-depth examination of a case within a real-life, natural context and setting in order to gain a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena and generate new insights (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Creswell (2013) defines case study as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p.97)

The particular case in a case study could take the form of a concrete entity, such as a person, a small group of people, an organization, or a partnership (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

I have chosen the case study method for this research because it allows for accurate and detailed descriptions of the participants' experience when integrating the reflective practice into their teaching and learning process, which might be unfamiliar to the

participants in the field of CSL/CFL teaching. My objective is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the case, including an examination of their levels and depth of reflection, the primary content of their reflections, and the difficulties they encounter while applying reflective practice theory. I aim to provide a holistic account of how reflective practice influences the teachers' teaching theories and leads to behavioral changes. As Yin (2009) asserts, the case study "is particularly useful for theory development and testing and for building a cumulative library of research" (p. xv). Therefore, I believe case study is the best fit for this research project.

3.4 Research questions

This study aimed to introduce, investigate and interpret the specific concept of reflective practice designed to improve the reflective abilities of CSL/CFL teachers. Therefore, it sought to address the following five questions:

1. What is the participants' understanding of reflective practice before and after participating in this study?
2. What are the prominent themes in the reflections of the participants?
3. What is the level of their reflection -- Is it descriptive or reflective?
4. How does the use of E-portfolios impact the teachers' capacity for reflective practice in a cooperative learning context?
5. How does reflective practice enhance the professional development of teachers?

These questions were critical because their potential answers can yield valuable data and concrete evidence for the field of reflective practice. They can also assist the stakeholders in tailoring Chinese language teacher education programs and targeted in-service teacher training in the future. The issues raised and their potential solutions during the interviews can also serve as a guide for the Chinese language teachers in Italy, helping them address evolving challenges in their local context and deliver high-quality Chinese language instruction. Furthermore, these findings can raise teachers' awareness of self-examination, facilitate their professional development and personal growth, and eventually emerge as reflective practitioners.

3.5 The issues of Site and Participants

In the original research proposal, my primary targeted participants were exclusively Chinese language teachers working in the Confucius Institute (CI) in Italy. This was

initially based on my work experience in Ireland, where most of Chinese courses offered in high schools were taught by CI teachers, I assumed that the situation in Italian schools would be the same. However, I soon realized that Italy differed significantly from Ireland. I discovered that many native Italian Chinese language teachers were employed by local schools, with the CI teachers playing a complementary role in Chinese language education in Italy. As a result, I reconsidered the issue of participants and discussed it with my co-supervisor, Prof. Bisetto, and ultimately adjusted my initial plan. I decided to include both Italian and Chinese teachers of Mandarin Chinese when the data collection process officially commenced.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) addressed the importance of maintaining the flexibility to make adjustments to a research design as the research progresses; nevertheless, with each modification, the researcher must provide a reasonable explanation that validates the adjustment and ensure that the revised plan remains aligned with the original rationale for the chosen data collection methods.

Finally, I recruited a group of five in-service Chinese teachers who were teaching Chinese language and culture at four different high schools within a single region in Italy during the time of this study.

Prior to delving into the matter of entering the research site and collecting information from the participants, a qualitative inquirer must first gain permission from university or college institutional review boards as well as individuals at the research site. This entails obtaining approval from an institutional ethical committee, ensuring the evaluation of research projects for their potential harmful effects on and risks to participants. Moreover, the qualitative project description may need to adhere to established protocols and provide information about the protection of human subjects (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). In the context of this present study, I submitted a concise research proposal outlining the study's procedures and a copy of consent form. According to Creswell (2013), a consent form should include these following information: 1) the right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time; 2) the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection; 3) the protection of the confidentiality of the respondents; 4) the known risks associated with participation in the study; 5) the expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study; and 6) the signature of the participant as well as the researcher (p.153). Furthermore, the commission also emphasized that the provided information must contain all the information in accordance with the European Personal Data Protection

Regulation, specifically Article 13 of EU Regulation 2016/679.

For a case study, access typically begins with a “gatekeeper” who serves as the initial contact for the researcher and guides them toward the potential participants (Creswell, 2013; Chen 2000). The gatekeeper usually holds membership within a cultural group or possesses insider status, which equips them to better identify individuals who might be the information-rich cases. Chen (2000) suggests that it is essential to first understand the power structure within which the individuals work and its relationship with the researcher when identifying the gatekeeper. Gaining access to the field is not only a matter of method but also one of important skills of coordinating power relationships.

Upon my arrival in Italy, numerous colleagues and friends continually emphasized that the bureaucratic challenges in Italy could present significant issues for everyone. With this in mind, prior to searching for the potential participants, I sought the assistance of my co-supervisor to send the initial introductory email to the foreign director of a Confucius Institute located in Northern Italy, aiming to acquire the necessary contact information of the participants. Once I obtained these details, I also enlisted my co-supervisor's help in sending the inaugural email to the potential participants. I believe this approach not only enhanced my credibility but also demonstrated my respect for the participants.

3.6 Sampling strategies

Sampling involves the selection of individuals for interviews, as well as the choice of particular locations, times of day, various events, and activities to observe during fieldwork. A good qualitative researcher has to employ purposeful sampling to select information-rich participants that align with the research questions, objectives and purposes of the project (Tracy, 2020.)

In consideration of the project’s theme, I established three fundamental criteria while seeking participants: 1) Chinese language teachers; 2) high school teachers; 3) novice teachers. The selection of high school teachers was motivated by their significant representation among all Chinese language teachers in Italy (The Intercultural Foundation, 2017). The second criterion enabled me to access a broader pool of potential participants, thereby enhancing the project's practical significance and its applicability to real-world practice. I aimed to involve novice teachers because the novice teachers usually meet more difficulties than experienced teachers, potentially

requiring more practical approaches to improve their teaching practice (Mandel, 2006; Farrell, 2016). Joiner and Edwards (2008) noted that 24% of teachers leave the profession within the first year, 33% leave after three years, and between 40% and 50% drop within the first five years. However, when I started to look for the participants, I discovered a limited number of Chinese teachers in nearby regions. Adhering strictly to novice teachers might have resulted in insufficient participants. Additionally, the comparison of reflections between novice and experienced teachers could offer interesting insights from various angles, such as differences in their focus of reflection and common problems they might encounter. As a result, I abandoned the last criterion.

To achieve purposeful sampling among several strategies, I first chose convenient and snowball sampling for this study. Convenient sampling is typically characterized as a simple, economic and convenient way to access the potential samples. Snowball sampling involves researchers initially identifying several participants who fit the study's criteria and then enlisting these individuals to suggest others who could also be suitable examples for the specific study. Just like a snowball rolling downhill, snowball sampling approaches can rapidly expand (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020)

I opted for the convenient sampling strategy due to limited public transportation options and my inability to drive. These factors posed a considerable challenge in reaching potential cases situated far away from the researcher's city of residence. Ultimately, I could only include teachers within a maximum of two hours' travel time by public transportation.

Convenient sampling is often criticized for possibly reflecting the researcher's laziness and coming at the expense of information and credibility (Creswell, 2013; Chen, 2000; Tracy, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to provide a rationale for the selection. The Chinese education within the high school in the northern part of Italy plays robust role across the country. Since Chinese was first introduced as an experimental course in high schools at the beginning of the 21st century, some schools in this region were among these schools (Zhu & Sun, 2014) and the only one Chinese-Italian international school in Italy is also located in this region. The participant selection results also demonstrated that the participants' working schools introduced Chinese at an early stage. I believe that utilizing convenience sampling does not undermine the research's credibility and representativeness.

Regarding snowball strategies, with the support of my co-supervisor, she firstly contacted the foreign director of a Confucius Institute that maintained extensive

connections with the high schools offering Chinese courses. Through this contact, I obtained the contact details of three potential participants: Rosa, Stella and Mario (all pseudonyms), who were teaching at the high schools in my resident region. Following this, my co-supervisor sent the initial introductory email for my research to the teachers, and I followed up with my own contact email (see Appendix 1), including attachments of the Introduction to the Research Project (see Appendix 2) and the Introduction to the Researcher (see Appendix 3). Luckily, all of them chose to participate in my research.

After establishing the initial relationships with the teachers, I applied the snowball strategy and requested these teachers to introduce me to other Chinese teachers they knew nearby. Fortunately, all of these teachers were very friendly and helpful. Rosa and Mario kindly recommended their colleagues. Through Rosa's introduction, her colleague, Giulia, finally agreed to attend the research. However, Mario's colleague declined due to her busy writing commitments. Stella, having taught Chinese for many years, was acquainted with numerous teachers in nearby region. She actively introduced me to two other teachers from nearby schools who might be interested in my project. Then I contacted with these teachers and, at the beginning both of them expressed keen interest in the study. As our email discussions went on, one of the teachers, Dapeng, displayed a growing curiosity about reflective practice, and eventually, he decided to become part of our project in following the interview. However, the second teacher withdrew due to not currently being in a teaching role and awaiting a new position. However, she recommended another teacher to replace her. I reached out to this recommended teacher and conducted an introductory interview, during which she conveyed her willingness to join. Unfortunately, she later decided to withdraw before the commencement of our workshop, stating her overwhelming workload.

Meanwhile, I also reached out a Chinese director of another Confucius Institute, attempting to establish contact with CI teachers. Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses. Later, I gradually realized that the CI teachers did not typically teach in the high schools, which did not align with our second criteria. As a result, I decided to discontinue my efforts to involve Confucius Institute teachers in the study.

In the end, there were five teachers decided to join our project. As I dealt with their background information, I found that these five participants coincidentally met the requirement of "maximum variation sampling" strategy. This method involves selecting participants who represent wide and diverse variations of the phenomena being studied, and thus to fully describe multiple perspectives on the cases (Creswell, 2013; Tracy,

2020). In our study, the participant group exhibited variations in terms of professional experience, native language, and the courses they taught, which were potentially key variables influencing teachers' reflections. Analyzing and comparing the differences in their reflections holds significant value for the field of reflective practice, providing insights that can benefit practitioners as well.

The number of participants hold an important role for qualitative studies. Patton (2002) indicated that qualitative studies typically focus in depth on small but purposefully selected samples, sometimes even on single cases. According to the literature of research on teachers' reflective practice I have read, the number of participants ranges from 2 (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021) to 30 (Yan & Luo, 2014). However, Creswell (2013) suggests that it is advisable not to include more than 4 or 5 participants for a single case study. Wolcott (2008) has also pointed out that having more than 1 case can dilute the level of detail that a researcher can provide. In the current study, we engaged five participants, a number that I believe can yield sufficient data and thus offer a comprehensive portrayal of the topic to be studied.

3.7 Brief introduction of the participants and their workplaces

In this section, I will provide a brief introduction to all the participants one by one, followed by essential information about their working schools. The timeframe mentioned in the introduction corresponds to the beginning of the research project, which started in mid-December 2021. Some basic background details can be found in the following Table 1.

Table 1 Background information of the participants

Participant	Gender	Native language	Highest educational qualification	Teaching experience in years	Course taught	Teaching hours per week
Rosa	Female	Italian	MA in Chinese Language and Literature	2	Comprehensive Chinese	13
Giulia	Female	Italian	MA in Chinese Interpreting and Translation	0.5	Comprehensive Chinese	12
Stella	Female	Italian	MA in TCSOL	10	Comprehensive Chinese	12
Dapeng	Male	Chinese	MA in Music Performance	7	Oral Chinese	13
Mario	Male	Italian	1. BA in Chinese Language and Literature; 2. TFA certificate	21	Comprehensive Chinese; Chinese Culture	22

Rosa

Rosa graduated from a well-known university, with a master degree in Chinese Language and Literature. After completing her studies, Rosa had worked as an Italian teacher in a private international school in Beijing for three months, where she embarked on her first teaching role and gained some general teaching skills. After this short work experience, she turned to work in a company that had business connections with China for a couple of years.

To keep and improve the knowledge of Chinese, she decided to become a high school Chinese teacher. she dedicated herself to attending compulsory courses in various subjects such as pedagogy, psychology, and others, ultimately earning 24 credits which is the fundamental requirement for all Italians aspiring to become Chinese teachers.

At the time of this study, it was her second year taught the faculty of her current school and she was responsible for teaching one Chinese class in Grade 2 and all the Chinese classes from Grade 3 to Grade 5, with a total of 13 teaching hours per week. In terms of the professional development, she had taken some online courses on teaching methods and also participated in a Chinese in-service teacher training session since she joined this school.

Before she joined this project, she has limited knowledge about reflective practice. Despite being content with her teaching as she observed her students' ease in the classroom, she still chose to participate in the study after I introduced my research to her. Her decision stemmed from a genuine desire to enhance her teaching skills, improve student learning outcomes, and develop her classroom management abilities, etc. Furthermore, she expressed:

I'm not really used to observing or reflecting on my teaching, so it's difficult for me to see my own problems. Having someone who can watch my classes and give me feedback would be really helpful.

Giulia

Giulia holds a master's degree in Translation from Chinese into Italian, which she earned from the same university as Rosa. Throughout her college years, she studied Chinese systematically for 6 years and used to be an Erasmus student in North China for six months. However, Giulia faced the challenging situation of the Covid Pandemic when she graduated, which made it difficult for her to find employment.

Being a Chinese language teacher was her first formal job and she joined Rosa's school just a couple of months ago. She felt satisfactory with her current job, witnessing noticeable improvements in her students' learning outcomes and she also mentioned that this job allowed her to understand the language better. However, there are concerns about the future of her career, given her open-ended contract that will conclude at the end of the academic year and she was not sure if she could teach there the next year. Although she had no prior knowledge of reflective practice, she expressed keen interest in participating in the study after my brief introduction to it, hoping it would aid in enhancing her teaching practice.

Rosa and Giulia currently work at the same high school which is one of the biggest schools in the city. This school is part of the Italy-China Memorandum school network, consisting of various schools from northern Italy, dedicated to teaching the Chinese language. The Chinese program offering by the school actively collaborates with the Italian-Chinese international school in a nearby city to enhance the learning experience. Initially introduced as extracurricular classes for the past couple of years at the beginning, the school's Chinese courses transitioned to become a compulsory subject for students who choose to study it three years ago. Additionally, Chinese has been included as one of the subjects in the baccalaureate exam. This change has significantly elevated the importance of the Chinese course compared to before, resulting in an increase in its teaching hours. However, the teachers have also pointed out some potential downsides of this change. As a compulsory course, students who select Chinese are not able to drop out easily, even if they later find it challenging to follow or discover that they don't enjoy it.

The school offers a total of 25 teaching hours for all Chinese courses. To be more specific, there are two Chinese classes for Grade 1 and 2, each with 4 hours per week, and one class for Grade 3 to 5, with 3 hours per week. Giulia is responsible for Grade 1 and one class of Grade 2, totaling 12 teaching hours, while Rosa handles the remaining classes. Given that both Rosa and Giulia are relatively new to teaching, they actively engage in regular communication to discuss various aspects of their teaching approach, including classroom management, teaching methods, teaching materials, etc.

Rosa and Giulia are the sole Chinese teachers at this school, with open-ended contracts renewed annually based on the demand for Chinese courses. Due to the short-term nature of their contracts, they both showed some concerns about their future career

prospects. In Italy, becoming a permanent teacher in public schools requires passing national exams, which adds to their uncertainties.

Stella

Stella is a native Italian teacher of Chinese, who gained her BA degree from a well-known university in the south of Italy with a major in Chinese language and literature. After graduation, she worked in an international trading company as a sales officer, where she was responsible for handling the Chinese market. Because of this job, she was enrolled in a training program for managers called the “EU-China Junior Managers Training Program” in the early 21st century. The program was offered by a renowned foreign language university in Beijing and last one and a half years. During this program, Stella made large progress in her Chinese language proficiency and deepened her passion for Chinese culture and language.

Stella shared a short story behind her decision to become a Chinese teacher. A couple of years ago, when she moved to Verona with her family, she hoped to maintain her Chinese language skill. Therefore, she consulted an old friend if there were any advanced Chinese courses for her and surprisingly, her friend proposed an opportunity to teach Chinese at a high school. Stella seized the chance and began her career in Teaching Chinese. At the time of this study, she had served as a Chinese teacher for 9 years and had been working at her current school for 7 years.

Stella demonstrated a strong passion for Chinese culture, language, as well as the language teaching. She expressed her desire to inspire her students, saying, “I hope to pass my passion to my students and motivate their passion on Chinese culture and language as well”. Driven by a strong sense of responsibility to enhance her teaching, she invited her Chinese friend to help her teach oral Chinese twice a month, aiming to expose her students to authentic language use. She also made many efforts to attract more students to choose Chinese courses during the school’s Open Day and was proud when some students tell her “I still remember your Chinese class which was really interesting.”

Stella was the sole Chinese teacher at the school, responsible for a total of 12 teaching hours. If there were only teaching tasks, Stella stated that she could handle them and enjoyed preparing and teaching her classes. However, the frequent teaching meetings became a challenge for her. These meetings were intended for communication among language teachers from various subjects to discuss student learning progress. As

her Chinese class comprised students from different language classes, she had to attend all the meetings, even if there was only one student in her class. Consequently, she had to attend 12 meetings every month, each lasting at least 1 hour, which proved time-consuming and led to considerable confusion for her.

She took many approaches to enhance her professional development. She often watched online Chinese language teaching demonstration class to learn various teaching skills and classroom management techniques, etc. Additionally, she actively sought for training courses specifically designed for Chinese teachers. In 2022, she was enrolled in an in-service training master in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages, which lasted around 1 year. During the semester, the courses usually delivered on weekends and in August, it was a full-time program with six hours of daily classes, including weekends. The program was scheduled to conclude by the end of the year. She put an emphasis on the collaboration among Chinese language teachers and considered the opportunity to cooperate with other teachers as one of the most important and practical aspects of the master's program. However, she felt disappointed that there were not enough chances to discuss her classroom challenges and questions with other teachers at her workplace.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Stella participated the Italian national teacher selection exams and successfully passed. However, she was allocated to a school in Sardinia. After careful consideration, she had to give up that permanent position in order to take care of her two children. Consequently, she remained at her current school with a sense of insecurity about her future career, as nobody knew if the school would renew the contact.

She joined this program because she was dissatisfied with her current teaching practice as well as the limitation of teaching hours for each grade and her objective was to improve her teaching skills, with a focus on teachers' role, students' outcome and teaching methods.

Stella's workplace is a public school, one of the earliest to offer Chinese courses since 2005. Mario, another participant in this study, also used to work here. Currently, the school provides Chinese courses exclusively for Grade 3 to Grade 5 students. There are two classes for Grade 3 and one class each for Grade 4 and 5, with three teaching hours dedicated to each grade.

In collaboration with a nearby *Confucius Institute*, the school established a

Confucius Classroom in 2014¹. The Confucius institute had provided many teaching resources to the school and the school offered one classroom exclusively for Chinese cultural events and storing these materials. Stella took charge of decorating this classroom with a traditional Chinese style, featuring a hanging map, red lanterns on the walls, as well as red couplets and the traditional Chinese classroom slogan, 好好学习, 天天向上 *hǎohǎo xuéxí, tiān tiān xiàngshàng* ‘Study Hard, Make Progress Every Day’!

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Confucius Institute also organized summer camp every year to select the top 15 Chinese learners from all the affiliated Confucius classrooms, providing students with extra motivation in their Chinese language learning journey. However, due to the pandemic, most events were cancelled and the collaboration between the school and Confucius institute had been ceased. By the time of this study, the Confucius institute had gradually resumed its activities and offered free tutor classes for students interested in taking the HSK test. The entire HSK tutor program lasts for 10 hours, with 5 sessions, each lasting 2 hours.

Dapeng

Among all the five participants, Dapeng is the only native Chinese speaker, originally from the northern party of China. Different from other participants, he didn’t have any background in Chinese education. He held a MA degree in Musical Performance earned from an Italian musical college. After completing his studies, he sought employment in Italy, where he gained work experience in business and translation at first. Born in a scholarly family with his father as a professor in Chinese literature at a Chinese university, he was influenced by his family environment. When an opportunity arose for him to teach Chinese at a local language high school, he eventually made the decision to become a Chinese language teacher.

At the time of this study, he had been working at his currently high school for over 7 years and served as the sole oral Chinese teacher. He was responsible for all the oral classes offered by the school, totaling 13 hours per week. Similar to Stella, Dapeng also faced the same issue with Stella, his students came from 18 different classes, including some students from other languages, he had to invest a significant amount of time attending all the class meetings, which were held at least twice per term, with each

¹ Both Confucius Institute and Confucius Classrooms are educational centers established worldwide to promote Chinese language and culture. Named after the ancient philosopher Confucius, these institutes and classrooms are operated by the *Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)*. They offer Chinese language courses, cultural activities, and resources to enhance cross-cultural understanding.

meeting lasting for at least one hour.

Driven by a deep passion for teaching and in order to improve his professional skills, he dedicated himself to enriching his knowledge through extensive reading and a continuous pursuit of learning. First, he attempted to observe other language teachers' classroom, but he eventually abandoned the idea due to their conservative attitudes and concerns about being judged. Second, he turned to reading relevant books and watching online Chinese demonstration classes as another means of improvement. Additionally, he sought to further his education by applying for a master's program in Chinese literature at a renowned university. However, when he realized that the courses provided focused overly on theoretical linguistics and grammars, which did not meet his expectations, he chose to discontinue the program midway.

He paid much attention to student learning strategies and expressed that it was important to communicate with the students equally. He felt satisfactory with his teaching profession, indicating that he had made noticeable improvements in his teaching practice and received positive feedback from students. However, he was dissatisfied with his communication competence with a limited vocabulary that matched his students' level. For instance, with first-grade students, his colleague suggested he communicate using only around 100 vocabulary words, which presented a significant challenge. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, he was fortunate to teach in a prestigious high school where students possessed a strong academic record before enrollment, leading to classroom management being rarely an issue.

In terms of reflective practice, he came across this conception before but had no profound understanding of it, he expressed his interest in joining this research project to further enhance his teaching methods and practice. He said:

I never see myself as an experienced teacher and I always remind myself that I have to learn something new every day. I usually regard myself a novice teacher.

The school where Dapeng works is a historical institute with a cultural tradition spanning more than two hundred years. It is also one of the earliest schools to offer Chinese courses and is among the first to include Chinese into baccalaureate exam. According to Dapeng, the school has the highest number of students learning Chinese among Italian public schools, and their learning outcomes are more advanced compared to other schools. Additionally, the school has cooperated with a nearby Confucius

Institute and established a Confucius Classroom. However, it seemed that not many teachers pay much attention to the Confucius Classroom to gain more independence in teaching. Nevertheless, the school does send its outstanding students to attend the summer camps organized by the Confucius institute.

There were three grammar teachers and Dapeng was the only oral teacher responsible for oral classes. The school had a total of 13 Chinese classes, three classes for grade one to three, and two classes for grade four and five. Each class had approximately 20 students. For grade one and two, there were three teaching hours for Chinese instruction per week, and starting from Grade three, Chinese culture and history were introduced, adding one teaching hour to make four hours per week. With all the teaching hours, there was one hour designated for oral Chinese in each class, amounting a total of 13 hours which were taught by Dapeng.

It is necessary to introduce a distinct characteristic for Italian language classes. Typically, a native Chinese teacher and an Italian Chinese teacher cooperate to teach a single program (Gabbianelli, 2021; Zhu & Sun, 2014). The Italian teacher is usually responsible for the entire program, including grammar, writing, Chinese culture and history, while native Chinese teacher focuses on delivering the speaking class. This allows the students to have enough opportunities to listen to standard Chinese and practice the language. Interestingly, in this project, only Dapeng's school and the school of the last participant, Mario, follow this approach, while the other participants teach the entire Chinese program by themselves

Mario

Mario earned a BA degree in Chinese culture and literature. After completing his studies, he went to China to learn the language for two years at two famous foreign language universities in Beijing and Xi'an. In 2014, he obtained a **TFA** certificate for teaching².

Mario was the most experienced teacher, boasting around 21 years of teaching Chinese. He began his teaching career in 2003 when he secured a position to teach Chinese grammar at a university in northern Italy. In order to move back to his hometown, he started teaching Chinese at a high school since 2005. Over the last two

² TFA certificate: TFA stands for "Tirocinio Formativo Attivo" (Active Training Apprenticeships). The TFA system is a postgraduate course designed to qualify individuals as public secondary education teachers recognized by the Italian state. Introduced by Ministerial Decree No. 249/2010 in September 2010, the TFA system replaced the previous SISS (Scuole di specializzazione per l'insegnamento)(Teacher Specialisation Schools) (EU Parliament, 2013).

decades, he has taught Chinese culture at two high schools, including his current one, where he has been working for more than 14 years. His main responsibility was to teach Chinese culture which covered a wide range of topics, including Chinese geography, Chinese mythology, Chinese history, philosophy and literature, etc. Due to the high demand for Chinese speaking classes, he began teaching speaking classes two years ago. His workload consisted of 22 teaching hours per week. Unlike other participants, he is the only one with a full-time position and a long-term contract, which provides job security and shields him from uncertainties about his future job prospects.

When asked why he chose to become a Chinese teacher, he replied, "Because I have liked China and Chinese culture since I was a child." He also mentioned being influenced by his parents, who both studied languages, making language a common topic within his family.

Throughout his professional experience, there were a lack of opportunities for in-service training specifically targeted for Chinese language teaching and the professional development of Chinese teachers. The last systematic training he received was in 2014 when he took the TFA program, which provided him with valuable knowledge in linguistics and teaching techniques. To compensate for the limited training opportunities, he devoted a considerable amount of time to collaborating with colleagues from other languages, particularly with his Chinese colleague who was an experienced Chinese teacher before joining the faculty of his current school. He mentioned, "Her experience was very useful for me at the beginning because I wanted to teach in the Chinese way."

Regarding reflective practice, he admitted not knowing much about it but found the name intriguing. He expressed his desire to learn more about it, stating, "I want to know all about it because the name is very catching." Consequently, he decided to join the research group to explore the concept further. He said:

Because I want to become more aware of my role and I want to become a better guide for my students. I realized in the last two or three years that the gap between the generations is growing faster and faster, bigger and bigger. Therefore, I have to be updated about teaching skills and their way of thinking. I have to speak their language, not mine, to effectively communicate with them.

Mario's workplace is a well-known international school which is a science high school but also excelling in language education, offering courses in English, German,

Spanish, Chinese and more. Chinese program has been running for more than 15 years and the Confucius Classroom was established in 2014.

The school covers all levels of the Italian school system, including elementary, middle school, and high school. Mario primarily taught in the high school, with only 3 hours of teaching in the middle school. Since our research mainly focuses on high school Chinese education, we will provide more detailed information about the high school system.

The high school consists of three types: traditional European high school, international high school, and experimental high school. The first two schools have 5 grades, while the last one has 4 grades. Chinese was compulsory for students in the international section, but students in the traditional European section had the option to choose it. Each grade had three Chinese classes, with two teaching hours per week - one for Chinese culture and one for spoken language. Both Mario and his Chinese colleague shared the responsibility of teaching these Chinese classes equally. Additionally, they also offered an HSK course for students who wished to improve their Chinese proficiency. This course was not compulsory and was considered an extra-curricular activity, usually taught after school in the afternoon.

3.8 Forms of Data

The type of data to collect for qualitative research is closely related to the research questions and the researcher's access (Tracy, 2020). Any evidence that serves the purpose of your research and helps answer your research questions can be considered valuable data (Chen, 2000). Creswell (2013) categorizes all types of qualitative data into four fundamental forms: observations (ranging from nonparticipant to participant), interviews (ranging from closed-ended to open-ended), documents (ranging from private to public), and audiovisual materials (including materials such as photographs, compact discs, and videotapes) (p. 159).

Case study data collection encompasses a variety of procedures as the researcher constructs a comprehensive portrayal of the case. Qualitative studies, especially in the context of case studies, employ a diverse range of evidence sources, such as interviews, participant observations, direct observations, documents, archival records, audiovisual materials, field notes, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009; Bogdan and Biklen, 2003; Stake, 1995). Specifically, interviews and participant observations should be documented using audiotape or video recordings and transcripts. Additionally,

researchers have noted the emergence of various new sources of qualitative information in the literature, including web-based interviews, text from email messages, virtual focus groups, observation through examining videotapes, weblogs and life journals (Stewart and Williams, 2005; Garcia et al., 2009; James & Busher, 2007; Nicholas et al., 2010; Creswell, 2013).

There are several advantages to collect qualitative data via the internet. Firstly, it enhances the cost and time efficiency by reducing travel and data transcription expenses. Secondly, it provides participants with time and space flexibility, allowing them more opportunity to reflect on and respond to information requests. Moreover, online data collection fosters a nonthreatening and comfortable environment and provides greater ease for participants discussing sensitive topics (Nicholas et al., 2010).

Since the data collection process was initiated in early 2022, during a time when the Covid-19 pandemic's impact persisted, ongoing restrictions on physical contact and site entry regulations were in place. Moreover, due to participants' busy schedules in both teaching and personal lives, most interviews of this study were conducted via Zoom meetings. This approach not only granted participants more flexibility but also reduced physical interactions to minimize the risk of virus transmission.

The data sources for this study primarily originated from two semi-structured interviews, three one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, three classroom observations, three online group discussions, participants' reflective journals, texts from emails, field notes and reflective field notes taken during classroom observations, E-portfolios established by the participants, as well as audio and video recordings from the interviews, workshop, group discussions, and classroom observations. Transcripts of the audio and video recordings were also used.

All participants signed a consent form (See Appendix 6) on a voluntary basis and completed a survey for background information before substantive data collection began. The consent form outlined the study's purpose, procedures, benefits, confidentiality, participants' rights to withdraw at any time, and the utilization of their data. This enabled participants to understand their role in the study and granted permission for the use of tape and/or video recording during interviews, classroom observations, group discussions, and workshop activities. At this stage, I assumed the responsibility of safeguarding and maintaining participant confidentiality.

3.9 Data collection procedures

In brief, the data collection process involved two **semi-structured** interviews, introduction workshops, three classroom observations followed by three one-on-one feedback sessions, and three group discussions. In addition to these interactions, all participants were requested to write reflective journals regularly and create E-portfolios for their teaching and reflection throughout the study. Continuous email communication was maintained throughout the whole process. Each interview, one-to-one reflective session, group discussion, and workshop was recorded (either through audio or video) and subsequently transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

The data collection procedure began with the email contact with the potential participants. After two or three email exchanges, the teachers agreed pleasantly to participate in the first interview. Interviews, a purposeful form of conversation, serve as a research method in which researchers collect or construct primary data via oral interactions with the participants. Because social science research involves the conceptualization of human beings, the construction of meanings, and the individuals' expression of language, interviews have become a highly valuable research method within the realm of social science (Chen, 2000). Furthermore, interviews are highly effective qualitative research approach, providing rich and comprehensive insights into people's opinions, behaviors, experiences, and various phenomena (Chen, 2000; Majid, et al, 2017; Muthanna, 2019; Glegg, 2019).

The study involved two semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant individually, one at the beginning and another at the end of the research period. These interviews were designed to investigate the teachers' diachronic understanding of reflective practice before and after its implementation in their teaching, as well as to evaluate the role of reflective practice in their professional development.

3.9.1 The first-round interviews

Conducting qualitative Interviews can pose challenges for inexperience researchers. Therefore, piloting interviews is a crucial and beneficial step in the qualitative research process, as it stresses the need for adjustments and refinements before the main study. Moreover, pilot interviews can aid in establishing criteria for selecting potential participants and enhancing the interview guide, especially the interview questions (Majid, et al, 2017). Therefore, in order to ensure the validity of the first interview protocol (see Appendix 4) and acquire first-hand insight into Chinese Learning and Teaching (CLT) in Italy, I conducted three pilot interviews with three experienced

teachers. These teachers included one who taught at the university level, one who worked at both the university and high school levels, and one who taught exclusively at the high school level. I recruited these participants through personal connections, and all of them were Chinese professionals working in Italy.

I gained some fundamental ideas on CLT in Italy from the initial analysis of these interviews and some of these findings were quite unexpected. Firstly, all the teachers mentioned that CLT has been gaining momentum in recent years, with a steady increase in the number of students year by year. Consequently, there is an urgent demand for more qualified Chinese language teachers, which aligns with the research gap identified in this study. Secondly, a distinctive feature of CLT in Italy is the collaboration between Italian Chinese language teachers and native Chinese teachers to co-teach the same classes. This sets it apart from many other European countries like Ireland and the UK. However, the effectiveness of this cooperation varies significantly in different contexts. Thirdly, despite a unanimous agreement among teachers that tailored in-service training would be beneficial, there is almost no such training available for Chinese teachers. This finding underscores the critical importance of the present research. The fourth issue relates to the varying emphasis placed on CLT by different schools, with teaching hours ranging from 3 to 6 hours per week. This variation leads to significant disparities in students' proficiency levels. Fifthly, although there has been some improvement in the availability of teaching materials compared to a decade ago, especially due to increased attention from the government and academia, the issue of insufficient materials still persists, particularly for specialized purposes such as materials for children and travel-related content. The last but surely not least problem of Italian CLT lies in the scant relevant research and debate on the learning and teaching of Chinese.

These initial findings had further motivated my commitment to conducting applied research on the professional development of Chinese teachers through reflective practice. Moreover, these pilot interviews provided two substantial confirmations: firstly, the interview protocol proved to be fairly effective in yielding valid information aligned with the research questions, and secondly, they served as valuable practice for enhancing my interview skills, a critical aspect of conducting successful interviews.

Let's refocus the first-round interviews with the participants, with the majority of them taking place online. Several factors contributed to this decision. Firstly, these interviews took place in December 2021, coinciding with the end of the semester when teachers were heavily occupied with their teaching and administrative duties. Finding

a suitable time for in-person interviews was challenging, whereas online interviews provided the flexibility we needed. Secondly, the ongoing prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2021 necessitated precautions and the reduction of physical interactions.

Given these considerations, the majority of interviews, workshops, and group discussions of this study were conducted online. As research indicates, online interviews offer numerous advantages, including convenience for both the interviewer and interviewee, time efficiency, cost-effectiveness, greater scheduling flexibility, and easier access to candidates from distant locations (Kendall, 2014; Seitz, 2016). However, they may also entail some drawbacks such as technical problems, inaudible segments, and loss of intimacy compare to in-person interviews (Seitz, 2016; Muthanna, 2019; Glegg, 2019). Hence, I opted for face-to-face interviews with Stella. This choice was based on her ability to manage her own time, lived close to my university, and her preference for in-person meetings.

It took two weeks to schedule the initial interviews with the participants due to their availability constraints. These interviews explored the teachers' personal and professional experiences, their motivation for choosing to become Chinese language teachers, and their initial comprehension of reflective practice. All the online interviews, as well as the later workshops, feedback sessions and group discussion were recorded via zoom and in-person interviews were recorded by my smartphone.

The interviews adhered to Tracy's (2020) definition of interviews as "conversations with a purpose" (p. 157). In this context, the purpose of the conversation was to gather information from the participants. Since it was my first time to meet the participants during the first interviews, to ensure that I received detailed feedback, I attempted to create a comfortable and stress-free atmosphere. I began the interviews with casual conversations, introducing myself to my participants and presenting my research interest. I emphasized to the interviewees that their responses would remain strictly confidential and exclusively for research purposes, encouraging them to express themselves freely. The initial introduction proceeded as follows:

In this research, I will explore the CSL/CFL teachers' preliminary understanding of reflective practice in Italy and attempt to support them to cultivate their capacity of reflective practice, thereby promoting their professional development and personal growth. In order to transcript properly, I request for your permission to record the interview and I assure you all of

your responses during the interview will be strictly confidential and for research purposes only. I will also request you to check and confirm the contents of the transcription first once it have been done. Therefore, please rest assured and communicate freely during the interview. The interview will last around 45 minutes to 1 hour.

The interviews went smoothly. The teachers provided candid and open responses to my questions, even when they encountered difficulties in understanding certain questions or concepts. At times, their unfamiliarity with specific ideas prevented them from offering precise answers. Nevertheless, after receiving further clarification and explanation from me, they made earnest efforts to respond to the best of their ability, drawing upon their own experiences and comprehension.

At the end of these interviews, I asked if the interviewees would like to participate in my research project. I conducted the first interviews with six teachers, and to my surprise, five of them finally decided to participate in my research. The one who declined said she had too many commitments at that time, just before we started the introductory workshop. This exceeded my expectations, as I initially had concerns about recruiting participants due to the substantial time commitment required for the project.

In terms of the language used during the interviews and the following research activities, despite most participants being native Italian speaker, I could only offer the teachers to choose between Chinese and English due to my limited proficiency in Italian. Among the initial six teachers interviewed, only Dapeng and Stella opted for Chinese, while with the other four, we predominantly used English. However, regardless of whether we spoke Chinese or English, it undeniably had a significant impact on their ability to express themselves accurately, except for Dapeng, who is a native Chinese speaker. I will discuss this limitation in the last chapter of my research.

3.9.2 Introductory Workshops

Based on my own educational and professional background, I assumed that most CSL/CFL teachers might not be familiar with the concept of reflective practice. The preliminary analysis of the first-round interviews confirmed my assumption. All the participants expressed their unfamiliarity with reflective practice. Notably, three of them stated that they had never encountered the term "reflective practice" in their professional context. This fact signifies not only a lack of engagement but also a

fundamental unfamiliarity with the concept. An exception was Dapeng who acknowledged some prior exposure to reflective practice but admitted that practical implementation had been hindered by time constraints.

Therefore, I designed a two-hour workshop (see Appendix 7) for the participants to introduce essential concepts of this research, such as reflective practice, cooperative learning, e-portfolios and teachers' professional development. The goal of the workshop was not only to give the teachers an introduction to certain concepts, but also guide them towards a more profound engagement with reflective practice, recognizing it as an intellectually stimulating practice, which would further bolster their ongoing professional development by fostering their capacity for reflective inquiry.

Through this workshop, I encouraged them to incorporate reflective practice into their daily practice and explore their current practices and reconsider the notion of teaching as a purely technical rationality, shifting towards viewing it as professional artistry. During the workshop, I created numerous opportunities for participants to engage in discussions about the concepts, sharing their insights and teaching theories derived from their own teaching experiences. I compiled these valuable ideas into Word files as valuable research data, awaiting further analysis. For the sake of participants' convenience, the workshop was conducted online through and recorded by Zoom meeting.

A total of six teachers, from five different schools, participated in the first round of interviews. Considering that the teachers had their own commitments, and to facilitate better coordination of their schedules, as well as ensuring that each teacher had ample time and opportunities to participate in workshop discussions, I decided to divide the six teachers into three groups, each undergoing one workshop session. In the case of Dapeng and Stella's group, due to the depth of our discussions, the two-hour workshop did not cover all the planned content, so we scheduled an additional one-hour workshop to complete the remaining topics as originally planned. Additionally, one interviewed teacher decided to withdraw from the research project, resulting in a workshop with only one participant, Mario.

Following the workshops, I distributed the seminar's PowerPoint presentation and key references mentioned during the session to facilitate their further learning.

3.9.3 E-Portfolios and reflective journals

In the workshops, I spent a small part of time to instruct the participants to create an E-

portfolio using Google Site to showcase their experience, skills, and teaching materials, and more. E-portfolios provide a multimedia space for systematic documentation of teacher's experience, achievement and professional growth within the domain of reflective practice (Pitts & Ruggirello, 2012). They have widely been used in teacher education as a means to demonstrate compelling evidence of growth and competency (Abrami & Barret, 2005), to focus teacher thinking and to serve as a medium for translating theory into practice (Hauge, 2006). The expectation is that E-portfolios help to connect professional growth to the process of learning to teach. Nowadays, E-portfolios have been placed a firm emphasis as a form of reflective practice by many institutions and universities. However, they are not exclusively attested in the context of Chinese language teacher's professional development in Italy. Therefore, E-portfolio serves as both a data source and reflective tool for this research.

After the workshop, I also encouraged the participants to start to write reflective teaching journals regularly, specifically twice a week. They were encouraged to upload these journals to their E-portfolios or send them to me via email. Reflective journals serve as a written account, capturing various dimensions of their teaching experiences, including classroom events, and providing them with an opportunity for thoughtful reflection on their professional work (Farrell, 2018). Regular reflective journal writing can help individuals explore their own beliefs and practices, enhance awareness of their teaching styles, and develop a deeper understanding of their experiences and thoughts (Farrell, 2013). Moreover, it enables them to identify recurring patterns and themes in their experiences and improve their ability for self-monitoring their teaching practice (Thomas & Geursen, 2013; Balbay, 2020). To alleviate pressure on participants, I collected their reflective journals every two weeks.

To aid in their reflection, a Reflective Question List (see Appendix 9) was provided to the teachers, drawing insights from various relevant literatures and reflective models, including Dewey's suggestion on the reflection process (1933), The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), ALACT model for reflection (Korthagen, 1985, 1988, 1999), and many others. In this reflective question list, I divided the reflection process into four stages: 1) Concrete Experience, 2) Reflective Observation, 3) Analysis and 4) Action Plan. For each stage, specific guiding questions were provided for the teachers. For example, in the "Concrete Experience" stage, the facilitating question included:

Stage 1 -Concrete Experience

What aspects worked well in today's class that you particularly liked?

What action did you take, and how?

What did students react and participate?

What evidence supports your belief that it went well?

What was the outcome of this situation?

3.9.4 Classroom observations and one-on-one reflective feedback sessions

In classroom, numerous activities might happen at the same time, making it difficult for teachers to stay fully aware of all that's going on (Xu, Zhu & Liu, 2023). Classroom observations can assist language teachers in gaining a better awareness of the actual occurrences in their classrooms and the reasoning behind their decisions (Farrell, 2018). When others observe teachers in action, the observers can provide valuable insights into their teaching methods and practices, enabling teachers to identify areas for improvement and make changes to their teaching strategies (Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021).

Therefore, **three classroom observations** were conducted for each participant to examine their diachronic change after they embedded reflective practice into their teaching after the introductory workshop. Classroom observations commenced in February 2022, amid the ongoing influence of the pandemic. The participants kindly reminded me to receive my third vaccine dose to obtain the necessary green pass for access to public places, which I had already completed by the time of their reminder. Meanwhile, they also kindly reached out to their school principals or leaders to seek permission for me to observe their classes. Fortunately, all the schools warmly welcomed my research and granted me permission to be present in their classrooms.

The observation schedule depended on the teachers' class schedules and my own availability. Each session typically involved observing two class periods, with each class lasting approximately 45 minutes. Giulia taught the first grade with 16 registered students, while Rosa instructed the second grade with 21 registered students. Mario's classes were from first grade and third grade, with 8 and 16 registered students respectively. Dapeng, as a native language teacher, primarily taught oral language courses. Due to the class schedule, I observed classes from third to fifth grade, with class sizes ranging from 18 to 22 students. Stella's classes I observed were from third to fourth grade, with 10 to 14 registered students. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly every class observation session had students who were unable to

attend due to COVID-19 infections.

During the observations, I took non-judgmental field notes regarding classroom issues that arose and the participants' responses. To avoid disrupting the teachers' regular teaching, I aimed to remain inconspicuous and simply observe the teaching process, paying attention to classroom activities and tasks, as well as the teachers' pedagogical skills, body language and their spoken words. Regarding the students, my observations focused on their interactions with their teachers, their level of participation in classroom activities, and their responses to specific teaching activities or actions.

In addition to the field notes taken during classroom observations, I also regularly maintained reflective field notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), reflective field notes refer to a more personal account of the field experiences, with a focus on the researcher's "speculation, feelings, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p. 112). These reflective field notes were consistently kept throughout the entire research process, recording my personal thoughts and judgments about the teachers' actual teaching practice and their grasps of the concept of reflective practice. With these reflective field notes, I attempted to document my insights into the participants' improvement of their reflective ability, as evidenced by their individual teaching processes.

The classroom observations were initially scheduled to occur every two weeks consistently, however, many unexpected issues emerged during the process, including midterm tests, the Easter holiday, and adjustments to the teachers' lesson plans. Eventually, the majority of classrooms observations were taken every two weeks, while some were delayed by three or four weeks compared to the previous ones.

It is crucial to determine whether the field notes I took on the class align with the teachers' own critical reflection on their teaching practices. To achieve this alignment, a **one-on-one reflective feedback session** was conducted following each observation, allowing for triangulation of the data collected. In this way, each participant's progress can be tracked by the researcher.

Mann and Walsh (2013) indicate that reflective practice is often carried out in a written format and tends to be an individual endeavor. They argue that we should embrace a dialogic and collaborative approach to reflection, which can potentially lead to a more comprehensive articulation and analysis. Considering the teachers' busy schedule and the potential time efficiency of dialogic reflection, we adopted the reflective dialogues as an additional data source.

Each follow-up session was divided into two parts. In the first part, teachers engaged in self-reflection, sharing their overall feelings about the class and explaining the rationale behind their instructional decisions. The researcher assumed the role of an interviewer and an attentive listener. In the second part, the session transformed into a discussion and feedback exchange. During this phase, the researcher acted as a “critical friend” (Farrell, 2018, p.3), engaging in reflective dialogue with the teacher and offering advice as a trusted "friend" to strengthen awareness of classroom events and the teacher's reflective capacities during their own self-reflections. Critical friends allow teachers to express their thoughts while also offering constructive suggestions in a sympathetic manner (Farrell, 2018).

One-on-one reflective sessions are one of the primary data sources for this study. They took place on the same day or the following day after each classroom observation when the teachers' memory of classroom events was still relatively fresh, allowing them to better recall their classroom actions and the reasons behind those actions. However, due to the teachers' time constraints, some sessions may be delayed for three to four days.

3.9.5 Group discussions

Cooperative learning stands as a fundamental aspect of this study. To provide more opportunities to cooperate with other Chinese teachers, I designed three group discussions into the research process. According to Farrell (2014), teacher development groups are gatherings of language instructors who come together to collectively reflect on their teaching experiences, aiming to enhance each other's strengths and address each other's limitations. When teachers collaborate as a group, they can achieve results that may be beyond the reach of an individual teacher working independently, as collective effort generates a broader range of ideas to address classroom challenges than any one individual can produce.

The format of teacher group discussions was quite simple. Each teacher prepared 2-3 recent issues that they were particularly concerned about or wished to resolve in advance, and brought them up during the discussion. Then, the other teachers, drawing from their own experiences and theories, offered their solutions or suggestions to address the questions posed by the inquiring teacher. Through such discussions, we could also relatively easily gain insight into the main issues that different teachers were primarily focused on at that stage.

I endeavored to create a safe and comfortable discussion environment that would encourage open and unrestricted dialogue. Before we started the initial discussion, I made a brief introduction for everyone so that we could get to know each other better. In fact, except for the two novice teachers, the three experienced teachers were already acquainted with each other. Therefore, it was relatively easy to establish an enjoyable atmosphere for the participants which allowed them to freely share their thoughts and actively raising questions during the discussions. In the following two discussions, we also started with a brief chat of our recent updates to strengthen our rapport before diving into the formal discussion.

The most significant challenge I encountered for organizing the group discussions was coordinating everyone's schedules. Finding a time when all five teachers were available proved to be far more difficult than anticipated, given that some teachers had family responsibilities and others had prior commitments. Despite my diligent efforts to find suitable time slots for each teacher, Mario had to miss the second discussion due to unexpected circumstances, and Dapeng sometimes had to participate in the discussions while on a train, among other challenges. Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers actively engaged in every group discussion, and I am confident that the data we gathered was valuable.

3.9.6 The second-round interviews

Once all the classroom observations and group discussions were completed, I scheduled the second-round interviews with each participant approximately three months after the initiation of the first classroom observation. The primary objectives of the second-round interviews were to explore how participants' understanding of reflective practice had evolved over time and to gauge the changes and developments they perceived in their teaching practices after incorporating reflective practice. A new interview protocol was prepared (see Appendix 5). As in previous interviews, I offered participants the choice of speaking either Chinese or English, whichever they felt more comfortable with. Eventually, Dapeng and Stella chose Chinese, while the others opted for English.

During the interviews, I asked the participants' insights and opinions regarding the effectiveness of different reflective tools employed in the research, including reflective journals, E-portfolios, one-on-one reflective feedback session, and cooperative discussions. The completion of the second interviews marked the conclusion of the data collection process. For readers' reference, a data collection timeline is provided to offer

a concrete and precise overview (see Appendix 10).

As I bid farewell to the participants, expressing my heartfelt appreciation for their time and efforts invested in this research, they, in turn, conveyed their sense of privilege in being part of the study. They noted the significant progress they had made and found the research to be exceptionally practical and beneficial. All recorded interviews, workshop sessions, and reflective feedback sessions have been transcribed, and the written reflective journals and field notes are awaiting coding and analysis using the theories outlined in the literature review.

3.10 Data management

Data management encompasses not only the physical handling of increasing volumes of records but also the intellectual management of their increasing complexity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). After each interview, observation, and group discussion concluded, I promptly converted the recordings into computer files. Meanwhile, I began compiling the collected data and transcribing the recordings as the research progressed. Consequently, assembling the gathered data and transcriptions from tapes is a crucial yet challenging task, given the copious amount of data generated by qualitative methods. Patton (1980) states that “the data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous. I have found no way of preparing students for the sheer massive volumes of information with which they will find themselves confronted when data collection has ended” (p.297).

The accuracy of transcription is crucial to ensure the reliability of analyzed data, although its exact level may vary depending on the research's specific goals (Pentland, et al., 2019). For instance, consider a study examining the influence of verbal cues on attitudes and emotions during persuasive speeches. Precise transcriptions are essential to avoid missing nuances like tone and emotional expressions, which could lead to incorrect conclusions about persuasion's mechanisms and their impact on emotional and attitudinal responses. However, in the present study, I focused exclusively on Chinese language teachers' responses to questions about reflective practice and language teaching in the area of International Chinese education. Thus, I did not require verbatim transcripts of the interviews. Nevertheless, I faithfully and comprehensively conveyed the participants' speech. Moreover, the transcriptions accurately reflected the language we spoke—Chinese, English and some Italian—during the interviews and

group discussions³. For essential Chinese-language data included in this work, I translated it into English.

The transcribed data from the two interviews conducted with each participant, three one-on-one feedback sessions and the three group discussions, along with the reflective journals, served as primary data sources for our analysis. Details of the transcription's duration and total word count can be found in the Table 2. The majority of interviews and all group discussions were recorded using Zoom meetings. However, interviews with Stella were conducted in person and recorded by my smartphone. For English dialogues, I primarily used the transcription tool Trint, while for Chinese dialogues, I employed iFlytek.

Table 2 Overview of transcription duration and total words for each participant

Participant	Time length (minutes)	Number of words
Giulia	310	28,800
Rosa	350	36,560
Dapeng	443	85,908
Stella	345	51,585
Mario ⁴	264	26,800
Group discussions	320	48,000

The workshops were also recorded using Zoom, but they were not transcribed verbatim. The main purpose of these workshops was to introduce participants to relevant concepts of this research. I took the central role throughout the workshop, although the participants also had enough opportunities to actively engage and provide their feedback on these key concepts based on their experience. As a result, I primarily focused on summarizing the key feedback and discussions with the teachers during the workshops into written files, which served as a data source for analysis.

After completing the transcription of the data, I created backup copies of all my materials, including the transcripts, the participants' written reflective journals, important email exchanges with the participants, and all the recordings. I stored a

³ In group discussions, to help Italian teachers express themselves more accurately, they might use the Italian language to convey their ideas when Chinese or English proved insufficient.

⁴ Mario had a shorter transcription duration because he was too busy with other commitments and could not participate the second feedback session. Instead, he provided a reflective journal. For the third feedback session, which lasted approximately 75 minutes, but only the final 12 minutes of content were saved due to technical issues.

clearly labeled primary copy on my Cloud disk for easy retrieval. Simultaneously, I organized hard copies of all the documents, neatly labeled and placed within a folder for easier access and use when needed.

Once the transcripts for each participant were finished, I sent them along with an email to the participants, requesting their review and confirmation for accuracy. This process allowed every participant the opportunity to offer more comprehensive explanations or correct any potential errors. Stake (1995) suggests that participants should actively participate in directing and contributing to case study research. They should be invited to review preliminary drafts of the researcher's work and offer alternative language, "critical observations or interpretations" (p. 115).

3.11 Data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis entails several interconnected steps, including "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them" (Creswell, 2013, p. 179). This process forms a spiral of activities essential for the analysis and representation of the data.

Qualitative data analysis can employ different approaches. It may adopt a top-down approach driven by specific research questions and the researcher's focus, or a bottom-up or inductive approach driven by the data itself (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, a combined top-down and bottom-up approach was utilized with the assistance of qualitative analysis software, NVivo 14 for Windows. Specifically, for research questions 1, 4, and 5, an inductive approach was primarily employed, allowing the data to guide the analysis. For the second research question, I adopted Ho and Richards' (1993) categories as a priori framework, supplemented by the classifications proposed by Farrell (2014) and Yan and Luo (2014) for analysis for the prominent themes of participants' reflection (see Section 2.3.4.1). Regarding the third research question on reflective levels, I relied on Larrivee's (2008) study, which introduces a reflective framework consisting of four levels: pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection (see Section 2.3.3). I chose to use this framework as it thoroughly synthesizes prior discussions on the depth of reflection, offering a more comprehensive and up-to-date perspective on the matter.

Once the analysis approach was determined and the a priori frameworks were

established, I imported all data files, including reflective journals, field notes, transcripts of interviews, one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, and group discussions, into NVivo to create a new project for this study. Utilizing the a priori frameworks, I developed an initial code schema comprising various categories and subcategories (or “nodes” in NVivo). Subsequently, I proceeded to review all data, systematically categorizing participants' comments. Throughout this process, I remained receptive to emerging ideas or themes. This approach enabled me to maintain focus on my research questions while also acknowledging and addressing potentially significant issues that may not have been initially anticipated.

During the coding process, the initial code schema underwent multiple revisions to ensure accurate representation of participants' reflections. Iteratively reviewing original themes, subthemes, transcripts, and quotes was crucial, as it facilitated the detection of consistencies and the emergence of unexpected subthemes. This iterative process of categorization involved adding, refining, accepting, or rejecting themes and subthemes, while also identifying potential areas for further exploration.

Additionally, it was observed that many participant comments could be coded under multiple nodes. For instance, a comment by Mario regarding his educational goal of fostering independent thinking and societal contribution could be categorized as "educational and personal goal" within the theme of "teachers' self-awareness and professional development," as well as "critical reflection" within the theme of "reflective levels."

The initial phase of analysis involved sorting various comments into distinct categories based on their corresponding themes. Upon completing the initial analysis, a more comprehensive code schema was developed. Subsequently, I commenced the second round of review, focusing on verifying the accuracy of categorization by examining comments within each subcategory. Concurrently, all category names were re-evaluated. At times, when comments under certain themes was limited and closely related to another theme, consolidation into a single theme was considered. For instance, to enhance analytical precision, the node previously labeled "curriculum arrangement" was ultimately merged into the "school context" category. The final set of themes and subthemes are presented in Chapter 4.

3.12 Validation strategies

After a comprehensive introduction to different perspectives of validation in qualitative

research, Creswell (2013) summarizes that validation is “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 249). The validation of a qualitative research can be achieved by assessing its authenticity, significance, usefulness, rigor and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). Spending extensive time in the field, providing detailed and rich descriptions and establishing close relationships with the participants all contribute to making a study more trustworthy and accurate. As Tracy (2020) indicates that only if a report is considered trustworthy, readers can feel sure about using its data and finding to act and make decisions.

Creswell and his colleagues Miller (2000) outline eight validation strategies that are often used by qualitative researchers, including prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review and debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, thick description and external audits. He (2013) recommends that qualitative researcher should engage in at least of two of these procedures in any study. However, recent studies indicate that there is no evidence that regular member checks improve the credibility or trustworthiness of qualitative research (Thomas, 2017), and using member checking as a means to ensure validity or reliability is not recommended (Morse, 2016). Instead, Tracy (2020) advocates for member reflections as a more dependable approach. Following these suggestions, this study has employed thick description, triangulation and member reflections as validation strategies.

3.12.1 Thick description

Thick description, an important approach to achieve the qualitative credibility, means rich details provided by the researcher when describing about people, processes and activities or when writing about a theme (Bochner, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). It enables readers to make decisions about the applicability to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013) and to determine whether the findings can be generalized “because of shared characteristics” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32). The ability of a qualitative researcher to connect thick description and tacit knowledge, which refers to the body of implicit and unexpressed meanings hiding beneath the surface, is pivotal (Tracy, 2020). Detail can emerge through descriptions of physical attributes, actions, and activities. Therefore, researchers need to “not only examine explicit interactions and behavior, but also pay attention to awkward silences, winks,

nods, humor, and flirtation – as these often relate to key cultural understandings” (Tracy, 2020, p.275). According to these statements, this study provides detailed information not just into the participant backgrounds and school context, but also entails thorough analysis of teachers’ classroom practice, their concerns and reservations when talking about certain drawback of their teaching and schools in interviews.

3.12.2 Triangulation

The concept of triangulation originates from realist paradigms that aim to eliminate biases from research and achieve convergent findings on a single reality (Tracy, 2020). Triangulation involves corroborating evidence that the researcher has used multiple and diverse sources as a way to illuminate a theme or perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). This entails comparing and cross-checking the reliability of information collected from different time using different methods. When qualitative researchers find evidence supporting a code or theme in various data sources, they are triangulating the information, which adds credibility and dependability to their findings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the data has been derived from multiple sources, including interviews, reflective journals, group discussions, field notes and classroom observations.

3.12.3 Member reflections

According to Tracy (2010), member reflections refer to the practice of “sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study’s findings, providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation and even collaboration” (p.844). This practice involves sitting down with the participants, sharing ongoing analyses or conclusions, observing their reactions, and incorporating these reactions and their insights into subsequent rounds of data analysis. Member reflections indicate that participant feedback is valuable not as a validity strategy, but rather as a space for additional insights and credibility. Through this approach, researcher can also gain an understanding of how their findings are comprehensible and meaningful to the participants (Tracy, 2020). Upon these ideas, I invited the teachers to check the accuracy of the interview transcripts and engaged in discussing with them regarding the emerging findings and sought their opinions on if I correctly portrayed their professional and personal experiences in Chinese language learning and teaching. Meanwhile, I took notes of their reactions, feedback and critiques to facilitate subsequent revisions of the

report.

3.13 Summary

This study employed qualitative research methodology, incorporating an exploratory and descriptive case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), to explore the experience of a purposeful group of Chinese language teachers working in Italian high schools who have incorporate reflective practice theory into their teaching. The use of qualitative method allows me to thoroughly examine and provide holistic narrative of the participant's experiences when employing reflective inquiry into their teaching practice (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). Case study was selected because it is the most effective way to construct a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of what to be studied (Stake, 1995). I recruited five participants from nearby high schools with purposeful sampling strategies, which included convenient sampling, snowball sampling and maximum variation sampling. The data for this research were collected from multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, classroom observations, introductory workshops, group discussions, one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, reflective journals and field notes. Thick description, triangulation and member reflection strategies were utilized to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data. I believe these rigorous research procedures have enhanced the credibility and reliability of the present study.

Chapter 4 Results of the study

4.1 Introduction

The results were derived through the analysis of collected data using the qualitative analysis tool NVivo 14 for windows. The data collection for this study spanned a 20-week period from mid-December 2021 to the beginning of May, 2022, during which time, I attempt to explore the CSL/CFL teachers' understanding of the concept of reflective practice, their daily concerns, and the role of reflective practice in their professional development. The study involved five participants who were teaching in local high schools within a single region in Italy. Data mainly gathered through semi-structure interviews, one-on-one reflective interviews, introductory workshops, reflective journals, classroom observations as well as the reflective field notes.

Case study research can be presented in various forms, depending on the field and objectives of the study. According to Creswell (2013), some case studies contribute to theory development, some serves as straightforward descriptions of cases, while others are more analytical in nature and involve cross-case or intersite comparisons. The primary goal of a case study significantly influences the overall structure of the written narrative. A case study report often includes an explication of the problem, a thorough description of the context, an account of the observed transactions or processes within that context, presentation of themes, assertions, and interpretations of the researcher, and the results of the study (Stake, 1995; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). Stake (2000) suggests that the purpose of a case study report is to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of a specific case, rather than to represent the world as a whole. The structure of this chapter is primarily based on the sequence of the research questions.

4.2 Research question 1: What is the participants' understanding of reflective practice before and after participating in this study?

The primary data sources contributing to this question are two semi-structured interviews conducted at the beginning and the end of the study, supplemented by comments extracted from participants' background survey, reflective journals and one-on-one reflective feedback sessions. Based on the responses by the participants, this question can be addressed from two perspectives: 1) the participants' initial

understanding of reflective practice and their engagement in their teaching practice before attending this study; 2) the participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice after attending this study.

4.2.1 Participants' initial understanding of reflective practice and their engagement

At the start of the project, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, exploring their initial comprehension of reflective practice and their engagement with it. This aimed to further understand the role of reflective practice in the professional practice of in-service Chinese language teachers. The summary of their answers can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Participants' initial understanding of reflective practice

participant	what is your understanding of reflective practice?
Rosa	Never heard about it; the first time to know it.
Giulia	No idea.
Stella	I don't know much about reflective practice. Is it about learning from others' efficient methods in class?
Dapeng	I have heard of it, but I don't know too much, almost nothing. It seems to have something to do with psychology, right?
Mario	No, but the name is very catchy, and I want to know all about the reflective practice.

In general, the majority of the participants had no prior knowledge of the concept of reflective practice, and they had not incorporated it into their teaching practice. Giulia expressed that she occasionally reflects “unconsciously” on “what I did during class, what the students said or things like that”, while the other participants stated similar ideas. Only Dapeng had encountered reflective approach in the past, but he admitted, “due to time limitations, I never applied it to my practice”. None of them maintained reflective journals, utilized e-portfolios, or engage in regular reflective discussions with their colleagues. According to Farrell (2012), unconscious thinking about practice does not qualify as the reflective teaching, which he defines as “a form of systematic inquiry that is rigorous and disciplined” (p.14).

It is worthwhile to explore the opportunities and approaches that participants utilize for their professional development. Many teachers noted a scarcity of in-service

training opportunities for their professional growth. In the “Participant’s Background Information Survey”, Giulia, Rosa, and Mario ticked “No” in-service training provided by their schools. In contrast, Dapeng highlighted frequent teacher training sessions on pedagogical skills, special education, educational regulations and policies, as well as civic education, occurring at least once a week. Stella mentioned two or three training sessions annually, each lasting two to six hours, focusing on inclusive education, teaching equality, the application of new technologies in teaching, and more. Both Stella and Dapeng pointed out that none of these in-service trainings was tailored for Chinese teachers in Italy.

In pursuit of professional development, participants often engage in self-directed learning through collaboration with colleagues, reading books, watching online demonstration courses in Chinese language teaching, and seeking opportunities from other institutions. Giulia and Rosa, working in the same school, frequently collaborate, discussing teaching methods, pedagogical skills, and students’ psychology. Rosa attended a training session offered by the Confucius Institute at the University of Milan. Stella took many efforts for more professional development, and expressed, “I have to look for training courses myself if I want to attend courses tailored for Chinese teachers”, and enrolled in a one-year master program in TCSOL at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. Notably, she emphasized that reflective practice was not mentioned throughout the entire program. Mario, the most experienced participant, also highlighted the lack of professional training opportunities for in-service teachers, with the last comprehensive training program being the TFA program in 2014. His primary approach to professional development is collaborating with his Chinese colleague and engaging in discussions on various teaching topics.

Dapeng employed diverse methods to enhance his professional practice, including reading books, observing classroom teaching of colleagues from other subjects, and watching online demonstration classes. He mentioned, “I have watched many online free courses, such as on the American website COURSERA. There is a Chinese language teaching course from Tsinghua University on the website, and I followed it for some time”. Dapeng also pointed out a challenge faced by Chinese teachers in Italy: Italian educational department might not recognize certificates issued by Chinese institutions. He stated, “At the beginning, I considered attending training programs in China because there is no such opportunity in Italy. However, firstly, there are very few

such opportunities, and secondly, Italy does not recognize them at all. Therefore, I believe that self-study is more targeted, and the goals are clearer”.

Due to the close relationship between the schools where participants work and the Confucius Institute, which traditionally provided training opportunities for Chinese teachers once a year before the epidemic, these training sessions had to be suspended during the unfortunate circumstances of the epidemic. Following the end of the epidemic, in-service training for Chinese teachers resumed over the past two years (after the conclusion of data collection). However, these training opportunities provided by Confucius Institutes have consistently faced criticism for their lack of systematicity and being decontextualized (Lu, Zheng, and Lin, 2019). Stella also pointed out that the quantity of training provided by the Confucius Institute often depends on the Chinese and foreign Directors at the time. A more responsible director tends to organize more diverse activities.

In summary, all participants have limited knowledge of reflective practice and seldom use it systematically in their practice. Opportunities for in-service teacher training are scarce, with none specifically tailored for Chinese language education in Italy.

4.2.2 Participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice

Upon deciding to participate in this study, participants committed to incorporating reflective practice into their teaching methods. They were instructed to maintain reflective journals documenting their classes and create e-portfolios to archive examples of lesson plans, student work, teaching strategies, assessments, and personal reflections. Every two to three weeks, the researcher observed their classrooms and conducted one-on-one feedback sessions with the observed teacher within the next two days. These sessions involved reflecting on the observed class, exploring the reasons behind their behaviors in class, and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses. After several months of immersed application of reflective practice, just before concluding the study, the researchers once again asked the participants about their understanding of reflective practice in the second semi-structured interviews. Surprisingly, this time, the participants' comprehension of reflective practice was remarkably consistent with the views advocated by many experts in reflective research. Key points from participants can be found in the Table 4.

Table 4 Participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice

participant	what is your understanding of reflective practice now?
Rosa	It is a very important instrument to improve both on professional and personal level; it offers a way to think more about what you do; reflection can be facilitated by various instruments, including reflective journals, e-portfolios, and collaboration with others.
Giulia	It's a moment I give to myself to think about what I did, and to realize what I could do better; it's a useful way to improve ourselves, and also to find a better way to teach to students.
Stella	It is a practical approach for teachers; every teacher should take some time to reflect, but it should be incorporated with other teaching methods;
Dapeng	Reflection encourages us to think and study in life and teaching. Reflective practice helps elevate the analysis of our teaching to a theoretical level and allows us to put learned theories into action. It is a bridge, connecting theory and practice.
Mario	My understanding is about the necessity of improving my teaching skills; it puts me in front of a mirror where I can be aware of my character, attitudes toward the class, or even my emotions; cooperation is crucial for reflection—cooperation with students, with colleagues, with the tutor, and cooperation with different parts of ourselves.

Before delving into further analysis, I must acknowledge that, except for the interviews with Dapeng, which were conducted in Chinese, our mother tongue, whether the interview with Stella in Chinese or with other teachers in English, neither of these is their native language. Therefore, in order to enhance readability when quoting teachers' remarks, necessary interpretations and edits were made to the participants' narratives, limited to addressing common repetitions and grammatical errors found in spoken expressions.

Rosa

Rosa described reflective practice as an essential method that demands continuous effort, involving not only reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) but also reflection-for-action (Killion and Todnem, 1991). This process has increased her confidence in her teaching practice and strengthened her relationship with her students. She stated:

It is a way a teacher can improve not just our teaching but also our relationship with this job and with the other teachers, with the students. Reflection is part of our job, maybe 50% of our job. It's not just that you prepare and go into the class. It made me stop and think more about my lessons, not just about writing my reflections and how I feel after the lesson, what was good and what was wrong. But it makes me reflect while I prepare lessons. As I get to know the

students better this month, it makes me a bit more self-assured in the organization of the lessons and makes me feel more at ease with the class. I feel much more comfortable with myself. So, this makes me feel stronger in my role as a teacher. (Rosa, the second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

She realized that reflective practice could be facilitated through various tools, such as reflective journals, e-portfolios, and collaboration with others. She emphasized the significance of the written form of reflection, whether done by hand or with a computer, for her teaching practice. She used a metaphor to describe this, stating:

It allows me to have a different eye on the class, and the written journals enable me to respond more quickly to situations that has happened before. Because the journals keep the moments right after they occurred. when you read them after 2 or 3 weeks, the memories you have are much more precise. It's like when you read a book, while reading, you immediately imagine the scene. (Rosa, the second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

She believed that there is much more to teaching practice, emphasizing the importance of pausing to reflect rather than merely taking actions without thoughtful consideration of the connection between the reasons and results of those actions. As she articulated:

It's not just a matter of how you organize lessons, exercises, and activities; it's also about how much you reflect on what you do and how you interact with the students. The relationship with them, and every aspect of the class happening during the class, has a cause and a consequence. (Rosa, the second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

From these remarks, it is evident that Rosa had significantly advanced her understanding of reflective practice. She held a highly positive evaluation of reflective practice, believing that it has enhanced her abilities on both a professional and personal level. She expressed, “It is also useful for life and not just for school”.

Giulia

Similar to Rosa, Giulia also viewed reflective practice as an effective means to enhance her professional practice, which provides her with additional time to contemplate her teaching methods and explore alternative approaches, a benefit not only for her but also for her students. She shared the following:

It's a useful way to improve ourselves as teachers, to improve our teaching methods, and gain a better understanding of our relationships with students and

our work. Reflective practice is a moment I give to myself to think about what I did and to realize what I could do better. It is a moment that I usually don't take for myself because I'm always in a rush. So, it's a good way to reflect on what I teach and consider the many possibilities for improving my work. (Giulia, the second semi-structured interview, 30/04/2022)

Meanwhile, she highlighted that reflective practice is not only a thinking process; one must also translate the outcomes of reflection into subsequent actions. She expressed:

During reflective practice, I can think about what I can do better, and the next time I have class, I can strive to improve. It means trying new methods, experimenting with different supports, or trying a different approach to students, which may be more effective or beneficial for them, or for me. (Giulia, the second semi-structured interview, 30/04/2022)

Giulia's evolving comprehension of reflective practice appears to be relatively conservative and limited. It mainly centers on reflection as a means of self-improvement and professional development, emphasizing it as a thinking process. This perspective overlooks the broader impact of reflection on self-awareness and the role of reflection in integrating theory and practice.

Stella

During the research process, Stella was the participant who provided the most positive feedback. After the first classroom observation and one-on-one reflective feedback session, she enthusiastically expressed her thoughts to me via email, writing:

I really want to thank you for your feedback! I have to say that this reflective practice is REALLY useful! It makes me consider deeply some aspects of teaching in general, and of my way of teaching in particular! I really hope to have time to dedicate to this activity in the next future! (Stella, email on 12/02/2022)

However, due to my limited proficiency in Italian, our communication was mainly in Chinese, which greatly constrained her expression. As a result, she encountered great challenges when talking about her evolving understanding of reflective practice. The subsequent section synthesizes and interprets her responses.

Likewise, Stella considered reflective practice as a valuable teaching approach, highlighting the importance of regular reflection for teachers aspiring to achieve professional development. She particularly advocated for the compatibility of reflective

practice with other teaching methods, noting that it can enhance the efficiency of other teaching approaches in practice. She expressed:

Reflective practice is a highly beneficial method for teacher growth. I believe every teacher needs to engage in reflection to enhance their teaching. While I have learned other teaching methods before, they often encounter challenges in specific teaching situations. Therefore, when these methods are integrated with reflective practice, they become more effective and yield better results. (Stella, the second semi-structured interview, 28/04/2022)

After participating in this research, she thought reflection had become part of her teaching, she said:

Now, after every class, I will reflect on whether there are problems or good aspects of the class. However, if I don't have time, I won't write a reflective journal and make detailed reflection, but there must be a reflection process. Even though, not having time to write it down makes me feel bad, because such thinking cannot be considered a complete reflection. (Stella, the second semi-structured interview, 28/04/2022)

Despite facing challenges in precisely articulating her thoughts, she affirmed that she developed a deeper understanding of reflective practice through participation in this study. She expressed, "I used to think that reflection was merely casual thinking, but now I truly consider this to be a very interesting research."

Dapeng

Dapeng is a reflective practitioner who transitioned from being a novice teacher with no professional background to becoming an experienced teacher with an impressive teaching effect. This transformation is inseparable from his long-term self-study and reflection. Consequently, he soon recognized the importance of reflection for personal growth after joining this research, stating:

I think reflection is very important for a person's improvement because you have to constantly observe yourself. Many people don't have the courage or the opportunity to really look in the mirror and take a look at their own behavior, and analyze their behavior, the reasons, and motivation behind it, and then elevate the analysis into theory. I find reflection very useful and beneficial. (Dapeng, the first reflective feedback session, 22/02/2022)

Therefore, as the research came to an end, and he revisited his understanding of reflective practice, he accurately captured its essence. He firmly believed that reflective practice is a systematic and in-depth inquiry (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2012), demanding practitioners to contemplate the reasons and essence behind phenomena, he said:

During this research process, I learned that reflective practice is not merely about thinking about problems, going through them in my mind, or only seeing the surface of certain phenomena without thinking deeply. After learning this scientific method, when we observe issues such as communication and collaboration among colleagues, we can adopt a more professional attitude and method to analyze the problem, making it concrete, stylized, and systematic. In the end, this process allows us to elevate simple thinking about phenomena to inquire into the essence. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

Furthermore, he advocated that reflective practice acts as a bridge connecting theory and practice (Larrivee, 2008; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999; Rodgers, 2002), providing practitioners with the opportunity to better apply the theories they have learned in the past. At the same time, it allows them to distill their own theories from their practice. He expressed this viewpoint:

In my opinion, reflective practice is not only a teaching method but also a practical tool for work. It has allowed me to more effectively apply the theories I learned in educational psychology to practice. While I've always been interested in educational psychology, my understanding stayed at a theoretical level. Therefore, I consider reflection a practical channel where one can genuinely apply theories or scientific methods learned previously but never specifically applied in practice to actual work. Although I used to read many books, they often remained at the theoretical level, with, at most, a superficial understanding. If I need to apply them to practice, I believe reflection is a good way. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

Interestingly, as Dapeng participated in the research, he gradually recalled that he had learned about reflective practice in the past. However, at that time, he did not pay much attention to it and did not systematically apply it in practice. He uncovered notes from that year and remarked:

Look, I've just mentioned it. I made a note in 2019 and wrote down the ways of reflective learning and teaching. It can be roughly divided into: 1) teaching

journals; 2) case analysis; 3) role exchange; 4) watching the teaching video; 5) conducting action research; 6) peer observation; 7) cooperative teaching, and 8) building the teaching portfolio. You see, I knew everything at the time, but I did use it in practice. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

At last, he summarized his fresh understanding of reflective practice by emphasizing its significant role in enhancing practical ability. He expressed:

Reflective practice allows individuals to focus more on themselves, finding breakthroughs in continuously improving their teaching and communication skills. When we generally talk about enhancing teaching capabilities, I feel that, in many cases, we passively read books or attend lectures. However, reflection requires active thinking and research. Therefore, to a large extent, the effects are more obvious and efficient. (After participating in the research), now it has become a habit for me. I can almost reflexively apply reflection every time in my work, so I find it very effective. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

Mario

Teacher Mario candidly shared his evolving perspectives on reflective practice before and after his involvement in the study. Initially, he underestimated the significance of reflection, perceiving it as mere simple thinking. However, as the study progressed, he came to realize that reflective practice holds the potential for fostering growth on both personal and professional levels. Much like Dapeng, he acknowledged that reflection is an active cognitive process rather than a passive response to encountered problems. He articulated:

My understanding is about the necessity of improving my teaching skills. Before we started our collaboration on reflection and reflective practice, I was convinced that reflection was just a simple activity of thinking about something. But thanks to you, I understand that reflection is something more; it is not a passive activity, but an active one. This was very important to me because I think that it is an improvement not only for my teaching skills but also for my life. I hope it will become a part of our cultural tradition because I think it is very useful and important, not only for the job. (Mario, the second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)

He described reflective practice as a mirror, enhancing his self-awareness from various angles, stating: “It puts me in front of a mirror. Because we should be aware of our character, our attitudes towards the class, or even our emotions. Sometimes a student could make you angry or make you happy. But it's difficult to be aware alone. So, we need a mirror. Maybe reflective practice could be the mirror we need.” This analogy underscores the idea that reflective practice serves as a tool for introspection, prompting educators to consider aspects of their character, classroom interactions, and emotional responses.

Mario adeptly identified another crucial element of reflective practice—the potential for reflection from various perspectives, including his own, his students', his colleagues', and tutors'. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, he articulated,

Reflective practice helps you find a different point of view and, consequently, a different way of solving a problem. For example, you find a problem within the class. You try to solve it in a way, and but it doesn't work. Next time you reflect on it and try to solve it in a different way, but the problem is still there because your original self is still there. Therefore, by reflecting with your tutor, by reflecting with a critical friend, by reflecting in a group, you are exposed to different perspectives on the same problem. Perhaps some of your colleagues have already solved it, so you can try their approach and try a different way of problem-solving. (Mario, the second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)

In summary, the participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice comprehensively covered essential aspects. They recognized it as an intentional, systematic inquiry that demands rigor, capable of enhancing self-awareness and fostering a better understanding of one's practice and thoughts. Moreover, they emphasized its ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately leading to transformative changes and professional growth for teachers. The participants highlighted the versatility of reflection, stressing that it can occur from various perspectives, including one's own, students', colleagues', and experts' viewpoints. Several tools were identified to enhance reflection, such as maintaining reflective journals, establishing e-portfolios, and engaging in collaborative efforts with peers.

From these insights, two key inferences can be drawn: 1) with the progression of the research, participants' comprehension of reflective practice is deepening and

becoming more comprehensive; 2) reflective practice can be cultivated through purposeful training and consistent application.

4.3 Research Question 2: What are the prominent themes in the reflections of the participants?

This study primarily adopts the categories proposed by Ho and Richards (1993) as the main framework, supplemented by the classifications proposed by Farrell (2014) and Yan and Luo (2014) as starting points for data analysis. Subsequently, adjustments were made to the existing framework based on newly emerged themes from the specific data. As a result, six main thematic categories were identified, namely: 1) Theories of teaching, including teaching theories and application; 2) Classroom teaching, including teaching approaches and methods, teaching objectives, classroom management, and more.; 3) Learners, including their classroom performance, motivation and attitude, etc.; 4) Teachers’ self-awareness and their professional development, encompassing their perception of self as a teacher, professional training experience, and teachers’ challenges, and more; 5) Evaluating teaching, covering problem diagnosis, evaluation, and potential solutions; 6) Educational environment, involving school context, and broader educational context and policies, and more.

These thematic categories underwent significant modifications from the initial reference framework. Therefore, further elaboration on the specific classification of each theme and sub-theme is provided in Table 5. Each theme and sub-theme are accompanied by a short definition and direct quotations from the participants in order to clarify them.

Table 5 Themes discussed and reflected upon by participants

Topic Category	Sub-category	Definition
Theories of teaching	Theories and beliefs	A belief or conviction – e.g. what constitutes good language teaching, “To ensure a successful Chinese language class, it requires a balance between the teacher's personality and their understanding of Chinese culture.” (Dapeng, reflective journal, 15/03/2022)
		A personal opinion – e.g. expressing an opinion about the value of role play, “I think that role playing is a very useful exercise for shy students.” (Mario, the first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)
		An expert's views – e.g. referring to Ebbinghaus forgetting curve, “Based on the Ebbinghaus forgetting curve, it's essential to review material promptly at critical moments.” (Dapeng, the first reflective feedback session, 22/02/2022)

		Teachers' teaching principles – e.g. description of their teaching principles, “My teaching principle is to make learning enjoyable, emphasize students’ individuality, and relate to real-life situations.” (Dapeng, the third reflective feedback session, 03/04/2022)
	Application	How a theory was applied - e.g. Trying to implement the flipped classroom model in teaching practice, “We flipped the classroom...I sit behind them and listen to the group speak in among the other groups and students.” (Mario, the first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)
Classroom teaching	Approaches and methods	E.g. description of a teaching approach and procedure – e.g. “We just did some exercises today, and if the students had some questions, I tried to explain the content again.” (Giulia, the first reflective feedback session, 15/02/2022). There were four main teaching approaches mentioned: Student-centered approach - teaching focused on students' needs, interests, and involvement, “I showed students previously arranged material (PPT, Images using games to enhance students learning and short videos) to keep their attention and let them understand.” (Stella, reflective journal, 24/01/2022) Task-based approach - teaching centered on practical tasks to enhance learning outcomes, “There are two main tasks in my spoken language class, one is the student report, and the other is summarizing related vocabulary based on a root word.” (Dapeng, the first reflective feedback session, 22/02/2022) Game-based approach –, “In fifth grade, we played a descriptive game. We described a classmate's personality and appearance—hair, eyes, height, etc.—and another classmate guessed.” (Stella, the second reflective feedback session, 9/03/2022) Connection between knowledge and real life – Linking teaching contents to real-world, e.g. “I am trying to help the students to use the language in the context, for example, if a student wants to go the bathroom, he needs to speak Chinese for it.” (Rosa, the first reflective feedback session, 15/02/2022)
	Teaching objectives	Discussing about the teaching objectives, e.g. “My objective for today’s class was just to correct the homework.” (Giulia, reflective journal, 25/03/2022)
	Teaching content and materials	E.g. referring to the teaching content, “Today, we reviewed the auxiliary verbs, 会, 能, 想.” (Stella, the third reflective feedback session, 06/04/2022) Teaching materials and textbooks – talking about teaching materials and textbooks, e.g. “The YouTube site is Mandarin Click. And the video course I used with them is Slow Chinese.” (Mario, the first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)
	Technology application	Discussing about the use of technology in their teaching, e.g. “I created a different kind of exercises using the website Wordwall, the exercise was

		on reordering words to create a sentence.” (Rosa, reflective journal, 24/03/2022)
	Classroom management	Discussing about maintaining order and discipline in class, e.g. “I entered in the class and the students were very lively. I asked them to sit, close their eyes and breathe deeply five times to calm down.” (Rosa, reflective journal, 24/03/2022)
	Assessment	Reflecting on the evaluations of students learning outcomes, e.g. “I involve every student in the evaluation of the work and the lesson of the day.” (Mario, the first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)
	Participation and interaction	Talking about Student involvement and interaction within classroom activities, e.g. “I feel that the activities for the fourth grade were well-received by students. Because they weren't just listening to others, they were participating themselves.” (Stella, the third reflective feedback session, 06/04/2022)
	Instruction language	Talking about instruction language used in their class, e.g. “I try to use Mandarin in class. Sometimes, speaking Mandarin alone doesn't guarantee learning. What's more important is immersing them in the Chinese language environment even for a few seconds.” (Dapeng, the third reflective feedback session, 03/04/2022)
	Classroom atmosphere	Reflecting on the classroom atmosphere, e.g. “They just want to feel free to talk because I am not that strict or rigid and I don't want to make a bad atmosphere in the class.” (Giulia, the third reflective feedback session, 05/04/2022)
Learners	Learning and family background	Talking about the students' learning and family backgrounds, e.g. “There are eight students in the class and three of them has already studied Chinese in the middle school.” (Mario, the first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)
	Motivation and attitudes toward Chinese	Reflecting on students' motivation and attitudes towards learning Chinese Language, e.g. “I believe that teaching is like a big wheel: the more you study and develop your attitudes, the more motivated you become to continue studying hard.” (Stella, reflective journal, 03/03/2022)
	Learners' individuality and psychological issues	Talking about the students' individuality and psychological issues faced by students, e.g. “Part of non-active students in this class probably are dealing with a very shy and introvert personality...” (Giulia, reflective journal, 03/02/2022)
	Classroom performance	Talking about students' behavior and achievement in class, e.g. “The students who usually were not very attentive asked me a lot of questions...” (Rosa, reflective journal, 10/03/2022)
	Learning strategies	Referring to how students learn Chinese, e.g. “The students today have no idea how to take notes, ask questions, or analyze problems.” (Dapeng, the first reflective feedback session, 22/02/2022)
Self-awareness and	Perception of self as a teacher	Reflecting on their roles, their teaching styles, and their language proficiency, etc., e.g. “This part of the school program makes me feel like

professional development		a scout leader, guiding his junior woodchucks to discover uncharted territory.” (Mario, reflective journal, 31/01/2022)
	Teachers' challenges	Talking about the challenges in their instruction, professional development, etc., e.g. “Due to contract issues, I'm not sure if I'll be teaching at this school next year.” (Stella, the first semi-structured interview, 17/12/2021)
	Teacher's Knowledge	Reflecting on pedagogical knowledge about the demands of class task, e.g. “I just followed the book because they had the write close to the character, the number of strokes.” (Giulia, the third reflective feedback session, 05/04/2022)
	Educational and personal goals	Reflecting on their educational and personal goals in Chinese teaching, e.g. “Firstly, I hope the students are happy, and then, that they develop an interest in Chinese culture, not only understanding it, but also experiencing it in a happy way.” (Rosa, the third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)
	Teacher development	Discussing the progress and improvement they had made in their teaching, e.g. “In the beginning I was an old-fashioned teacher, but over time I have changed and I believe that my results are now greater and better.” (Mario, reflective journal, 10/03/2022)
	Teacher-student relationship	reflecting on the relationship between the teacher and students, “Relationship with the students in this class is never a problem; this contributes to creating a pleasant learning atmosphere.” (Stella, reflective journal, 25/01/2022)
	Professional training experience	Discussing their experiences in professional training programs, e.g. “I have been watching a Chinese language course from Tsinghua University on COURSERA, the largest American website.” (Dapeng, the first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2022)
Evaluating teaching	Diagnosing problems	E.g. discussing the problems they encountered in the class, e.g. “Due to the impact of the pandemic, students are studying at home, resulting in significantly reduced teaching efficiency. Additionally, students' learning abilities have noticeably declined.” (Dapeng, the first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2021) Time issues – commenting on the limitation of time for Chinese class and the time arrangement in the class, e.g. “If there is something that is really frustrating for me, this is the lack of time! I mean, I cannot have any control on that issue! We only meet three times per week and I also need to introduce Chinese culture.” (Stella, reflective journal, 31/01/2022) Unique issues in Chinese language education – commenting on Chinese class-specific challenges compared to other language classrooms, e.g. “My own battle in the last 20 years is to make my colleagues understand that we Chinese teachers have to teach our students at writing.” (Mario, second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)
	Evaluating lessons	Positive evaluations of lessons – commenting that the lesson went well, e.g. “Today's class has been quite productive. This time I thought carefully

		<p>about what activities I could do in just 45 minutes, this way we managed to do all the things I've scheduled.” (Giulia, reflective journal, 03/02/2022)</p> <p>Neutral evaluations of lessons – commenting the teaching result in a neutral tone, e.g. “The result was rough and there is a lot of room for improvement, but I think it was an encouraging start for them and for me too” (Mario, reflective journal, 31/01/2022)</p> <p>Negative evaluations of lessons – Indicating that the objectives of the lesson were not achieved, e.g. “The feeling I had was of little control of the situation in the face of an unexpected event. I had not prepared an alternative plan B” (Rosa, reflective journal, 09/02/2022)</p>
	Solutions	<p>Alternative ways of presenting a lesson – e.g. teaching a lesson in a different way, “Tomorrow, I will focus more on the repetition exercise and provide more interactive opportunities for students.” (Rosa, the second reflective feedback session, 09/03/2022)</p> <p>Deciding on a plan of action – e.g. deciding to use dialogue exercises and activities more often, “As for oral classes, dialogue exercises should be a major focus. I believe it's possible to have a dialogue activity approximately once a month, dedicating most of the time for students to engage in dialogue practice.” (Dapeng, the second reflective feedback session, 19/03/2022)</p> <p>Seeking solutions from others - e.g. asking for suggestions for a particular teaching topic, “If pinyin is displayed on the PowerPoint slides, while helpful, students might become lazy and not recognize Chinese characters. However, if I include pinyin on one slide and omit it on another, they'll have to recognize the characters. What do you think about this approach?” (Stella, the second reflective feedback session, 9/03/2022)</p>
Educational environment	School context	Discussing school's Chinese teaching arrangements, support for Chinese teaching, etc., e.g. “Chinese teachers in this school are more free than other teachers as the students don't have final exams in Chinese, and we can organize our lessons and topics...” (Rosa, reflective journal, 20/03/2022)
	Cooperation with colleagues	Discussing issues related to cooperating with colleagues, e.g. “The oral teacher can only cooperate with the grammar teacher, with the grammar teacher taking the lead, and the oral teacher following the teaching schedule.” (Dapeng, the first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2021)
	Social and cultural issues	Reflecting the impact of social and cultural issues on Chinese education, e.g. “The pandemic has limited our interactive activities, but I hope to resume Chinese restaurant tastings and cultural trips to China soon.” (Mario, reflective journal, 10/03/2022)
	Educational policies	Referring to the impact of Italian educational policies on Chinese teacher development and instruction, e.g. “In Italy, teachers have a 'graduatoria' (ranking), and those ranked higher can prioritize choosing their teaching schools.” (Stella, the first semi-structured interview, 17/12/2021)

Table 6 presents the themes and sub-themes discussed by the participants along with their respective frequencies. Overall, the teachers primarily focused their attention on discussing classroom teaching, constituting 405 out of 1240 reflections. Following closely were discussions on evaluations of their teaching, self-awareness and professional development, and educational environment, with frequencies of 249, 213, and 163 respectively. Reflections on learners and teaching theories were the least addressed topics, with only 106 and 104 occurrences respectively.

Table 6 Frequency of categories of topics that the participants talked about

Topic Category	Sub-category	Category total	Average number	Dapeng	Stella	Rosa	Mario	Giulia	Total number
Theories of Teaching		104	20.8	33*	20	14	34*	3	
	Theories and beliefs		16.4	26*	16	13	24*	3	82
	Application		4.4	7*	4	1	10*	0	22
Classroom teaching		405	81	105*	49	82*	105*	64	
	Approaches and methods		38.2	50*	16	49*	48*	28	191
	Teaching objectives		9.6	12*	4	5	19*	8	48
	Teaching Content		13.2	17*	12	12	22*	3	66
	Technology application		5.8	3	6*	7*	9*	4	29
	Classroom management		6	5	3	7*	1	14*	30
	Assessment		2.8	9*	1	2	2	0	14
	Participation and interaction		2.6	4*	2	0	2	5*	13
	Instruction language		1.6	4*	1	0	2*	1	8
	Classroom atmosphere		1.2	1	4*	0	0	1	6
Learners		106	21.2	31*	22*	21	24*	8	
	Classroom performance		10.2	8	17*	10	10	6	51
	Motivation and attitudes		5.4	8*	2	9*	7*	1	27
	Psychological issues		3	12*	0	1	1	1	15
	learning and family background		1.6	2*	2*	0	4*	0	8
	Learning strategies		1	1	1	1	2*	0	5
Self-awareness and professional development		213	42.6	68*	29	56*	44*	16	
	Perception of self as a teacher		10.8	18*	6	10	19*	1	54
	Teachers' challenges		10.4	17*	14*	15*	3	3	52
	Teacher's Knowledge		5.2	1	0	14*	4	7*	26
	Educational goals		4.8	8*	3	7	3	3	24
	Teacher development		6	11*	0	7*	12*	0	30
	Teacher-student relationship		1.6	6*	2*	0	0	0	8
	Professional training		3.8	7*	4*	3	3	2	19
Evaluating teaching		249	49.8	50*	46	38	77*	38	
	Problems		21	12	22*	13	36*	22*	105
	Evaluation		11.2	9	4	13*	21*	9	56

	Solutions		17.6	29*	20*	12	20*	7	88
Educational environment		163	32.6	64*	39*	15	37*	8	
	School context		13.6	14*	21*	4	25*	4	68
	Cooperation with colleagues		9	28*	4	5	6	2	45
	Social and cultural issues		4.8	8*	5*	5*	4	2	24
	Educational policies		5.2	14*	9*	1	2	0	26
Total number			248	351*	205	226	321*	137	1240

*Asterisk indicates the number of comments greater than average.

With regard to the individual contributions, it is worth noting that experienced teachers, Dapeng and Mario, contributed significantly more reflections than the other three teachers. Stella, also an experienced teacher, had fewer comments, partly due to language constraints during interviews and reflective feedback sessions, as she expressed herself less fluently in Chinese, which was not her native tongue. Additionally, a technical issue resulted in the loss of one of her reflective feedback recordings, further reducing her overall comment count. These factors likely influenced the number of reflective comments in Section 4.3 as well.

In the following sections, I will delve into the six main themes in more detail according to the sequence of total reflections, offering representative quotations to clarify the findings.

4.3.1 Classroom teaching

Overall, within the theme of classroom teaching, teaching approaches and methods garnered the most attention, comprising 191 out of 405 reflections, nearly half of the total. This figure significantly surpassed the frequencies of the second and third sub-themes, teaching contents and teaching objectives, which appeared 66 and 48 times respectively. Additionally, there were occasional comments on students' participation, instructional language, and classroom atmosphere. Regarding individual contributions, both Dapeng and Mario exhibited similar levels of engagement in this category, discussing it 105 times each. Rosa also made notable contributions, with 82 comments, slightly above the average frequency of 81. However, Giulia and Stella's participation fell below the average, with 64 and 49 comments respectively.

In terms of the sub-category of teaching approaches and methods, Dapeng, Rosa, and Mario emerged as the most active contributors, accounting for 50, 49, and 48 comments respectively, while Giulia and Stella offered 28 and 16 comments

respectively. These comments reflected four key characteristics of their teaching methods.

Firstly, they demonstrated a student-centered teaching approach, evident across all five teachers. For instance, Dapeng elaborated on his strategy of tailoring content to students' proficiency levels, remarking:

The vocabulary load in the fifth lesson is quite heavy. The students can learn it immediately and can integrate it into the context to answer questions, I am already quite satisfied. Because the students in this class are quite good. If it were another class of the same grade, I wouldn't move on so quickly. I might focus more on the content in the textbook. (Dapeng, the third reflective feedback session, 03/04/2022)

Secondly, both Dapeng and Mario showcased a task-based teaching approach in their classes. Dapeng, in particular, exhibited a strong interest in this method, incorporating numerous tasks into his oral lessons. Notably, two main tasks featured prominently throughout the semester. One involved student duty reports, where a designated student delivered a report in Chinese at the beginning of each class. The other task revolved around summarizing related vocabulary based on root words.

Thirdly, four teachers, with the exception of Giulia, demonstrated an awareness of linking knowledge to real-life contexts to enrich student learning experiences. Mario emphasized this point, stating, "When we teach Chinese culture, it's much easier to improve participation because while teaching culture, there are so many topics relating to their lives, their everyday lives." (The first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)

Lastly, all teachers, except Mario, incorporated games into their lessons to facilitate student learning. These games ranged from online word games to physical activities. For instance, Stella described a recent activity in her class: "In our last lesson, I had the students play a flashcard game. It was a rapid-response competition to see who could answer the best. The result was very good because they were really lively." (Reflective feedback session, 9/03/2022)

Regarding the comments on the sub-category of teaching contents, while many focused solely on descriptions of specific lesson content, it is noteworthy that participants highlighted concerns regarding the availability of qualified and updated teaching materials and textbooks. Dapeng, for instance, offered insights into the textbooks currently utilized for his high school students, stating:

Previously, the textbook used by oral language teachers was *Changcheng Chinese*, which was probably used for two to three years, but later it was discontinued. This was because the content was too broad, and our school teachers focused more on basic grammar. Moreover, the content they learned was very complex. Our students have three to four hours of Chinese classes per week, with one hour dedicated to oral practice. Therefore, it was difficult for them to digest what they were learning.

So now we exclusively use the book *Il cinese per gli italiani (corse base)*, which is even older than us. This is a revised edition published in 2014. The new book of *Parliamo cinese* has been recommended to us for several years, but we don't want it. It's essentially the same as the existing one, edited by the same team. However, our school teachers find it too basic and not suitable for the difficulty level of our students. (Dapeng, the first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2022)

With the integration of technology as an essential component of education, all teachers had incorporated various technologies and multimedia into their teaching practices, particularly following the outbreak of the pandemic. This included the utilization of online teaching platforms, microwave office software, and online resources, etc. Mario emerged as the most proficient among the participants in utilizing technology. He once showed me his well-structured Google Drive containing all teaching materials. Mario also utilized online resources extensively to support student learning and integrated various multimedia resources into his teaching. Proudly, he remarked, “After we changed to the video course, I noticed a significant increase in student engagement, with more students eagerly participating by raising their hands to answer questions. So that's also an achievement for me” (The first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022)

New teachers, Giulia and Rosa, dedicated more attention to classroom management compared to the experienced teachers. Their focus on this aspect stemmed from their lack of essential skills in the area, leading to disorder in their classes. Giulia, in particular, shared her struggles with classroom management, explaining, “I can separate them, but I already separate that guy from the other students who's sitting in the front. So, I really did once and probably have to do it again with the girl.” (The first reflective feedback session, 15/02/2022)

Regarding the classroom atmosphere, Stella addressed the issue due to the shyness exhibited by many Italian students, who often were afraid of speaking up or answering

questions in class. Consequently, Stella consistently aimed to cultivate an active and interactive environment to encourage student participation. On the contrary, Giulia faced challenges in maintaining an active classroom atmosphere due to potential classroom management issues. She remarked, "Sometimes students engage in discussions related to our lesson, while other times they speak something else. They just want to feel free to talk because I am not that strict and I don't want to make a bad atmosphere in the class." (The third reflective feedback session, 05/04/2022)

4.3.2 Evaluating teaching

Overall, when evaluating their teaching, teachers primarily focused on identifying problems in their classes and seeking solutions, with 105 and 88 entries respectively, while making fewer comments on evaluating the lessons, totaling only 56 entries. It is noteworthy that experienced teachers generated more entries and were also more actively seeking solutions compared to novice teachers.

Several problems were identified by the participants. Firstly, differences in student proficiency levels led to varying levels of comprehension. Mario highlighted the challenges he often faces in teaching, stating, "It's very difficult as a teacher to communicate the same subject to everyone because everyone is different. So, when I speak, some of them are tuned in to my frequency, and some can easily understand what I'm talking about. But for others, it's not the case" (The first reflective feedback session, 17/02/2022). Secondly, differences in student personalities, such as shyness, resulted in students being reluctant to speak up. In the same feedback session, Mario expressed, "The main issue for them is speaking."

Thirdly, the limitation of time for Chinese class and the time arrangement in the class arose as critical challenges for teachers. As Stella wrote in her reflective journal, "If there is something that is really frustrating for me, this is the lack of time! I mean, I cannot have any control on that issue! We only meet three times per week and I also need to introduce Chinese culture." (Stella, reflective journal, 31/01/2022). Fourthly, unique challenges in Chinese language education were highlighted compared to other foreign languages, particularly regarding the Chinese writing system. Mario's remarks were representative, stating, "My own battle in the last 20 years is to make my colleagues understand that we Chinese teachers have to teach our students at writing." (second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022). Furthermore, new teachers also encountered numerous classroom management issues, such as student distractions and

excessive talking, etc. Additionally, technical malfunctions occasionally disrupt teaching.

Facing challenges in the classroom, teachers sought **solutions**. For example, when Mario realized the lack of cultural teaching materials, he said, "A textbook dedicated to Chinese culture would be very useful, but the school does not authorize its purchase. Therefore, we will turn to some internet sites dedicated to the topics covered." (Reflective journal, 21/02/2022)

Similarly, when Rosa discovered that reading and writing were challenging for students, she said, "I am thinking about a method or fostering a habit to let them search for vocabulary in the sentences, for example by 'forcing' them to write in their notebook and check at every lesson." Additionally, in group discussions, Mario and Dapeng contributed many practical teaching suggestions to other participants.

In terms of evaluations, the majority were positive, accounting for 40 out of 56, followed by 10 neutral evaluations and only 6 negative comments.

4.3.3 Self-awareness and professional development

In this category, participants directed the most significant attention towards their self-awareness as educators and the challenges they encountered, constituting 54 and 52 occurrences respectively, which collectively accounted for almost half of the entire category. Subsequently, discussions on teacher development throughout their experiences, teacher knowledge and educational goals within the profession, comprised 30, 26, and 24 occurrences respectively. Comments on professional training experience and the teacher-student relationship were occasional, with 19 and 8 reflections respectively.

In terms of individual contributions, Dapeng, Rosa, and Mario were most prolific, with 68, 56, and 44 comments respectively, whereas Stella and Giulia contributed 29 and 16 comments respectively. Dapeng exhibited a predominant presence across various sub-categories, while Mario appeared to focus more on his role in the classroom and his professional growth in recent years. Stella and Rosa demonstrated considerable efforts in addressing classroom challenges, while Rosa and Giulia frequently discussed the requisite knowledge for the profession.

In specific, **the perception of self as teachers** involves reflection on their roles, teaching styles, and language proficiency. Mario offered intriguing insights and

metaphors to describe his teaching role, portraying himself as 启蒙老师, introducing teacher, knowledge instructor, and tour guide on various occasions. He even likened himself to a scout leader, remarking, "This aspect of the school program makes me feel like a scout leader, guiding my junior woodchucks to discover uncharted territory." (Reflective journal, 31/01/2022) Despite primarily teaching Chinese culture for most of his career and recently beginning to teach the Chinese language, Mario occasionally recognized his limited proficiency in Chinese language, stating, "I can explain some things about Chinese language and grammar, but it's not my specialty" (First semi-structured interview, 21/12/2021). Giulia expressed similar concerns, remarking, "I am honest with them and let them know I'm not a native speaker. Sometimes, I don't understand certain things in Chinese myself, so I ask native speakers who know better. That's all I can say, but it's frustrating not to know everything in Chinese." (The first group discussion, 25/02/2022)

After observing Dapeng's class, I was surprised by his teaching and the students' level, and promptly provided him with my positive feedback. However, when discussing his role, Dapeng humbly stated, "I never see myself as an expert teacher. I always feel that I need to learn something new every day, so I consider myself as a new teacher among young teachers." (The first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2022)

Challenges encountered by the teachers emerged as another important topic for participants. Two primary types of challenges were identified: those encountered within the classroom and those faced in their teaching profession.

In the classroom, participants faced a variety of difficulties. Firstly, a prevalent issue among the participants was the absence of formal education in Chinese teaching, leading to a dearth of essential knowledge and pedagogical skills. Dapeng highlighted the importance of educational and psychological expertise in effective teaching several times during the research. As an oral instructor, he found it challenging to simplify complex content and maintain an immersive Chinese-speaking environment in class. Furthermore, novice teachers encountered hurdles in classroom management due to their lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Secondly, effective management of time and content posed as another critical challenge in class. The Italian teachers, all passionate about Chinese culture and teaching, were eager to transfer this enthusiasm into their students. Consequently, they sought to cover as much material as possible during class sessions. However, the

constraints of limited teaching time posed a dilemma. Stella, for instance, once articulated her struggle with this balance, stating, “When I have a lot of things to talk to students about a topic, I would like them to know as much as possible, therefore it is quite difficult for me to stick on the topic. Sometimes it could be a little bit confusing, at least for some students.” (Reflective journal, 24/01/2022). Lastly, the scarcity of teaching materials and resources further compounded the challenges within the classroom.

Moving beyond the classroom, participants also highlighted challenges in their teaching profession. In the first place, except for Mario with a long-term contract, the remaining four teachers expressed concerns regarding their professional future due to their temporary contracts. Despite their dedication, uncertainty loomed over the possibility of continued employment beyond the current academic year. This uncertainty extended even to experienced educators like Stella, who held over a decade of experience in Chinese teaching. While there were tenure positions available in recent years, contingent upon passing rigorous exams and selection processes, these opportunities were predominantly situated in the southern regions of Italy. This geographical constraint posed a significant dilemma for teachers who had already established family in the northern part of the country.

Secondly, there was a lack of professional training opportunities for teachers in general, with minimal tailored in-service training provided by schools for Chinese teachers. Consequently, participants primarily relied on self-directed learning and exploration for professional growth. This involved various approaches such as self-study, online courses, experiential learning, and observing colleagues' classes. Notably, Dapeng embraced multiple approaches, as he expressed, "I'm navigating my own path, gradually accumulating experience, and challenging myself. I'm eager to exchange ideas with peers in the same field, particularly fellow oral language teachers, but unfortunately, there are none." (The first semi-structured interview, 22/12/2022)

Last but not least, teachers often had to contend with numerous tasks unrelated to teaching, with class meetings being particularly time-consuming. Since students studying Chinese typically came from different classes, the Chinese teacher was required to attend all class meetings involving these students. Stella elaborated on this challenge, explaining, "I'm overwhelmed because the Chinese class is like a language group, with students coming from three different classes. So, I have to attend meetings for three classes. With the three grades I'm currently teaching, I need to attend at least

12 class meetings each month, each lasting at least one hour. I really don't have time." (The first semi-structured interview, 17/12/2021)

Regarding other sub-categories within this category, most of them were descriptive in nature, including discussions on personal development through experience accumulation, detailing professional training experiences, and exploring individual attitudes towards the teacher-student relationship. Further elaboration on these topics may not be necessary.

4.3.4 Educational environment

Overall, there were 163 comments on the educational environment, with experienced teachers Dapeng, Stella, and Mario contributing 64, 39, and 37 comments respectively, surpassing those of novice teachers Rosa and Giulia, who made 15 and 8 comments respectively. This discrepancy may be attributed to the seasoned teachers' extensive experience, granting them a deeper and broader understanding of their teaching over the years, while newer teachers were still struggling to accumulate pedagogical knowledge and improve teaching skills, focusing their attention in the classroom.

In terms of the sub-categories, discussions on school context and cooperation with colleagues were predominant, comprising 68 and 45 comments, respectively. Educational policies garnered 26 comments, while social and cultural issues received 24 comments.

In specific, discussion on **school context** covered a wide range of subjects, ranging from overarching themes like the history of Chinese education at the school, administrative responsibilities, to more specific topics directly relevant to Chinese language education. These included considerations such as the level of support provided for Chinese teaching, the arrangement of the Chinese curriculum, allocation of teaching hours, and exam arrangements. Notably, after the outbreak of the pandemic, several northern schools reduced the number of weekly teaching hours for Chinese. Many institutions employed only one Chinese language teacher, resulting in limited opportunities for collaboration with fellow Chinese language educators. Furthermore, Stella noted that before the pandemic, there was a dedicated classroom for Chinese language instruction, decorated with various items such as Chinese maps, calligraphy, and paintings donated by the Confucius Institute. However, this Chinese classroom had since been reassigned for use across all subjects.

Regarding **collaboration with colleagues**, Dapeng dedicated significantly more attention to this aspect compared to the others. This was due to his unique situation as the only oral language teacher in this study, necessitating collaboration with an Italian teacher responsible for teaching Chinese grammar, history, and culture. Since the grammar teacher typically led the Chinese course, Dapeng had to adapt his teaching content and pace to align with the grammar teacher's approach. Furthermore, consistent communication with the Italian colleague was essential, and the grammar teacher would stay in the class when Dapeng was teaching. These factors presented numerous challenges for Dapeng. For instance, Dapeng shared a scenario where he said, "Collaborating with the grammar teacher always makes me feel a bit constrained. That day, with Teacher A, when she argued with me about something in class, it easily disrupted the efficiency of the lesson, which might lead students to question our teaching. I usually prefer not to discuss the issues she raises in class." (The second reflective feedback session, 19/03/2022)

The subcategories of **educational policies and socio-cultural issues** primarily addressed the impact of these factors on Chinese teaching. Overall, the level of emphasis on Chinese language teaching in Italy's educational policies remains insufficient. Over the past few years, factors such as the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, have affected Chinese language instruction. For example, in Giulia's class, a student from Ukraine arrived midway through the semester. The teacher had to devote special attention to caring for the new student and helping their integrate into the new environment as soon as possible.

4.3.5 Learners

In general, experienced participants demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of various aspects of learner engagement compared to their novice counterparts. In specific to classroom performance, participants highlighted several factors that could influence students' classroom performance.

Firstly, differences in students' personalities resulted in varying levels of classroom engagement, ranging from active participation to passive behaviors. Secondly, variations in students' proficiency levels resulted in either dull or lively classroom environments. Thirdly, the content of the lesson was also relevant to classroom performance. Mario mentioned that students were more engaged in cultural topics, showing greater enthusiasm in cultural classes. Stella also highlighted this point.

Both teachers noted that students are particularly interested in cultural themes. However, Dapeng provided a counter example, mentioning that students are less interested in civic education content. he said, in some cases, certain classes were alike "stand-up comedy," with students paying little attention.

Fourthly, the size of the class emerged as a factor influencing classroom dynamics. Smaller class sizes facilitated better management and increased participation, which was noted in both Rosa's and Mario's reflective journals. Mario reflected in his journal on April 11, "One of the students, the best in the class, was absent this week. I observed that in this circumstance, the other two students regained space and self-confidence."

Finally, Giulia observed the correlation between classroom activities and student performance. While classroom activities generally encouraged student participation, Giulia noted that students' interest could decrease if they were tired. She remarked, "They were excited because of the activity we were going to do later. But sometimes it depends on the day. If they feel tired, they don't show interest to it." (The second reflective feedback session, 23/03/2022)

Regarding the student motivation and attitudes, Participants highlighted that teachers' attitudes towards students directly influence their motivation in Chinese class. Mario emphasized the importance of respecting students' answers, regardless of correctness, while Rosa suggested providing equal opportunities for all students to enhance their self-esteem. Additionally, teachers' positive and encouraging feedback on students' responses could enhance their interest. Rosa articulated, "I strongly encourage them to participate because it not only makes improvement but also provides confirmation of their progress. I know it's just the first level, but it's good for them to receive acknowledgment of their proficiency. We have to cultivate their passion for knowledge. So, it is important to give them positive vibes." (The third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)

Dapeng spent most attention on learners' psychological issues among all participants. He often mentioned that current students have poor stress resistance. During the research period, in his class, a student delayed exams for a month due to test anxiety.

4.3.6 Theories of teaching

Overall, the teachers devoted more attention to discussing theories and their teaching beliefs rather than exploring the practical application of these theories in their teaching

practices. Notably, experienced participants contributed more reflections in these areas compared to novice teachers. During interviews with Dapeng and Mario, I observed that both had well-established teaching theories for their professional practices.

Dapeng's teaching principles involved around integrating education with enjoyment, fostering a pleasant classroom atmosphere, emphasizing student individuality, and tailoring teaching methods accordingly. He emphasized connecting teaching with real-life scenarios, advocating for mutual equality, and respecting the teacher-student relationship. For example, he expressed, "Personally, I enjoy communicating with people without boundaries, and I incorporate enjoyment into teaching. Apart from creating a relaxed and enjoyable teaching atmosphere, it also provides students with space for exploration and independent learning. I generally do not like to dominate over others. Occasionally, individual students may misunderstand their unlimited freedom, so it is necessary to ensure authority at the appropriate times." (Reflective journal, 27/03/2022) These principles were evident in his classroom during my observation.

Mario, as the most experienced participant, had established a solid theoretical foundation for his teaching. He frequently referenced flipped classroom and maieutic teaching approaches throughout the research period, actively applying these theories in his Chinese culture classes. He stated, "I prefer the maieutic technique used by Socrates, that is to say many small questions." (Reflective journal, 10/03/2022)

4.4 Research Question 3: What is the level of their reflection -- Is it descriptive or reflective?

Since Ho and Richards' (1993) study classified the depth of reflection solely into two levels: descriptive and critical, the discourse on this topic has evolved significantly. More recent literature suggests a more nuanced understanding, with some studies proposing three levels (e.g., Van Manen, 1977; Jay and Johnson, 2002; Farrell, 2004), four levels (e.g., Hatton and Smith, 1995; Larrivee, 2008), or even five levels (e.g., Valli, 1997; Zeichner and Liston, 1996) of reflective depth. After careful consideration, I chose to rely on Larrivee's 2008 study as it thoroughly synthesizes prior discussions on the depth of reflection, offering a more comprehensive and up-to-date perspective on the matter.

Larrivee (2008) introduces a reflective framework consisting of four levels: *pre-reflection*, *surface reflection*, *pedagogical reflection*, and *critical reflection*. However,

pre-reflection, the initial stage, primarily involves teachers describing teaching procedures, plans, or classroom scenarios without delving into alternative approaches or providing justifications for the events. As such, it is not regarded as reflective. Consequently, in the subsequent examination of teachers' reflective levels, pre-reflection is excluded from consideration.

Table 7 The distribution of participants' reflective entries at different levels

Levels Participants	Surface reflection		pedagogical reflection		Critical reflection		Total number / percentage	
	Rosa	54	72.97%	9	12.16%	11	14.86%	74
Giulia	30	90.91%	2	6.06%	1	3.03%	33	100%
Stella	18	50.00%	11	30.56%	7	19.44%	36	100%
Dapeng	27	28.72%	43	45.74%	24	25.53%	94	100%
Mario	35	41.18%	25	29.41%	25	29.41%	85	100%
Total	164	50.93%	90	27.95%	68	21.18%	322	100%

Table 7 presents the teachers' performance at each reflective level, along with the total number/percentage for each participant. Starting with the overview, surface reflection accounts for 164 instances, constituting 50.93% of the total 322 instances. Pedagogical reflection encompasses 90 instances, representing 27.95%, while Critical Reflection comprises 68 instances, making up 21.18%. Examining the individual contributions, Dapeng, Mario, and Rosa made more entries overall, totaling 94, 85, and 74, respectively, whereas Stella and Giulia only contributed 36 and 33 reflective comments, respectively.

Although Rosa had a higher total number of reflective entries compared to Stella, an examination of Stella's proportion of reflections at higher levels (pedagogical and critical) reveals that it reaches 50%, whereas Rosa's proportion of reflections at higher levels is only around 27% (subtracting the surface reflection percentage of 72.97%). Furthermore, Mario's proportion of reflections at higher levels approaches 60%, while Dapeng's proportion of reflections at higher levels even exceeds 70%. Therefore, we might conclude that experienced teachers demonstrated a greater reflexivity compared to novice teachers.

Drawing from my own classroom observations, Dapeng's class displayed the highest level of student engagement, with the best proficiency level among all the participants' (this might also be attributed to the presence of a dedicated oral language teacher and longer class periods). Moreover, Mario, having over 20 years of teaching experience, stood out as a highly reflective educator known for his systematic teaching philosophy and methods. Consequently, it is plausible to infer that teachers who exhibit

higher levels of reflection also excel in their teaching practices, resulting in more prominent teaching outcomes.

It is noticeable, in the case of Giulia, that her performance in reflective entries predominantly engages in surface reflection, with 30 instances recorded (90.91%). Conversely, there were only 2 instances of pedagogical reflection (6.06%), and 1 instance of critical reflection (3.03%). Several factors may contribute to her low proportion of higher-level reflection. Firstly, she had just entered the field of Chinese education less than half a year before participating in this research, with no educational background in Chinese teaching. Consequently, much of her time may have been spent organizing the classroom, managing discipline, and learning school requirements, leaving little room for broader reflection on Chinese education. Secondly, engaging in pedagogical and critical reflection often requires teachers to possess relevant theoretical knowledge and skills. Lastly, due to the temporary nature of her contract with the school, Giulia may have been uncertain about her future in the job, which could have demotivated her from systematically reflecting on the moral and ethical consequences of teaching.

Next, I will provide examples of participants' reflective entries to illustrate each reflective level.

In surface reflection, teachers focus on the methods and techniques used to achieve predetermined objectives. Their emphasis lies more on practical efficiency rather than assessing the intrinsic worth of these objectives. For example, Giulia frequently employed dialogue exercises in pairs in her class. She explained, 'I think maybe in the part of the small conversation exercise, because I could check the performance of each couple of students. And if they had some questions, I could answer them and maybe explain the grammar, topic, or the exercise again if they didn't understand' (The first reflective feedback session, 15/02/2022).

Rosa addressed talkative students by changing her approach. She stated, "I asked them to calm down, but sometimes it's not so useful. If they react like that, I change and make different kinds of exercises. For example, I notice that when we do listening exercises, they are quieter because they have to challenge themselves and listen to the recordings." (The third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)

Similarly, Mario frequently utilized multimedia and technology to support his teaching. He once shared, "I think multimedia presentations are very clear, even if they

are too full of information. For writing, I use computer writing programs so I can immediately share notes with the class.” (Reflective journal, 10/03/2022).

At the pedagogical level, teachers strive to link theory to practice, aiming to understand educational theories and ensure consistency between their beliefs and classroom actions. This involves advancing their understanding of the theoretical basis guiding teaching decisions and practices. For instance, When Dapeng shared his views about the teacher-student relationship and his theories on managing students, he wrote,

At the beginning of each semester, I typically establish clear teaching objectives and methods with students, emphasizing mutual respect in communication. I also strive for a lively classroom atmosphere and further enhancement of teacher-student relationships. Nowadays, students prefer personable and approachable teachers. In some respects, student preferences are quite distinct, and teachers' personalities vary. I believe the key is to establish effective communication between both parties. (Dapeng, reflective journal, 15/03/2022)

Stella shared her methods for increasing students' participation in class, articulating:

First, they really need to see, either objects or pictures, because when we were young, we first looked at things and then knew how to say them. If we want to improve students' listening and reading skills, we must encourage them to look and listen more. That's the first method. The second method is to make the class interesting and cultivate students' interest. If the class is boring and the teacher keeps talking non-stop, students lose interest. For example, when introducing Chinese characters, let them understand the structure and meaning of the characters, show them some videos to reveal the secrets of the characters, so they can easily find Chinese interesting. Additionally, when they recognize some characters, they will feel a sense of accomplishment and be happy. So, I think, fun and a sense of achievement are very important. (Stella, the third reflective feedback session, 06/04/2022)

When reflecting how experience influences her teaching, Rosa wrote,

After many working experiences I have learnt that it is important to find somebody who takes care of you, that takes your questions and your ideas seriously. In this way I give all the students time and the opportunity to take their time to reply and to express their ideas and doubts. I think that it is important to rise students' curiosity, as I am very curious and like "realia" to

understand things better, so I brought in class to the students real things from China, for example coins and money, train tickets, original 剪纸 and a kit for calligraphy. (Rosa, reflective journal, 24/03/2022)

Critical reflection involves teachers examining the moral, ethical, and social implications of their teaching practices, both personally and professionally. They analyze how their actions align with democratic principles and aim to address equity and social justice concerns in and outside the classroom, considering the broader social and political contexts of education. For example, Dapeng discussed his teaching ideals through a successful teaching case in the second reflective feedback session. He shared,

For instance, in today's class of Grade 5F, possibly one of the best-performing classes, I achieved the teaching effect I desired most. Although it was actually an exam, I told the students, "This time, I give you completely freedom. We studied the internet, and you can connect it with your real life, relate it to anything, and produce any form of output, such as research, seminars, discussions, or speeches.

Then they specifically discussed the Ukraine war and also discussed the impact of TikTok on our lives. These topics immediately sparked all the students' thinking. However, their Chinese proficiency was still not sufficient, so I said, "Although this is an exam, the thinking part is extra, so you can use Italian." They then forgot even more that we were taking an exam today; this is real process of learning, a teaching activity aimed at seeking knowledge. (Dapeng, the second reflective feedback session, 19/03/2022)

Stella shared her views on the consequences of education to the society in her reflective journal, writing:

I think that everyone has an impact on society and, in this aspect, the role of the teacher is quite important. Teachers should be a role model to young people and for society itself, therefore every teacher should play this role to the best of his/her capacity. (Stella, reflective journal, 03/03/2022)

Mario wrote about the difficulties encountered by graduating students during the pandemic and reflected on how he and his colleagues provided support to them, remarking:

These two classes are at the end of their schooling; my sense of responsibility towards them is very high, because from next year they will no longer be

students, protected by the school walls and free to make mistakes, but they will have to be responsible citizens, capable of choosing the best for themselves and for others and contribute to the common good. In previous years there was some problems with the discipline and with the collaboration between classmates and in recent years the pandemic has also affected their emotional stability, but, thanks to the collaboration of all the teaching colleagues, it has been possible to obtain a cohesive and supportive group. (Mario, reflective journal, 31/01/2022)

4.5 Research Question 4: How does the use of E-portfolios impact the teachers' capacity for reflective practice in a cooperative learning context?

Scholars have extensively discussed the significance of various reflective tools in enhancing reflective practice. These tools include reflective journal writing (Ho and Richards, 1993; Boud, 2001b; Ryan, 2011), critical friend feedback (Farrell, 2018; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Costa, 2008), e-portfolios (Abrami and Barrett, 2005; Ayan & Seferoglu, 2011), and participation in professional development groups (Farrell, 2014, 2021; Havnes, 2009), etc. While much of this discourse originates from other research fields, this section aims to enrich the understanding of these tools' importance in enhancing reflective practice of Chinese educators, drawing on insights gathered from participants in the present study. These firsthand insights are poised to contribute to the ongoing discourse on reflective practice and its associated tools, offering nuanced perspectives and enriching the scholarly conversation.

4.5.1 Critical friends

According to Costa (2008), a critical friend is someone who is trusted and provides insightful questions, presents feedback from a different perspective, and offers friendly criticism of a person's work. Feedback within this framework is intended to promote professional growth rather than solely evaluate or judge (Costa, 2008; Kelley et al., 2022). Critical friends provide an environment where colleagues or friends can share their ideas and receive constructive feedback in a supportive manner. In this study, the researcher acted as the critical friend who observed the participants' class and then provided one-on-one reflective feedback sessions.

The participants unanimously acknowledged the value of reflective feedback sessions with critical friends in enhancing their reflection and teaching practice from

two key perspectives. Firstly, critical friends provide an alternative viewpoint for participants to evaluate their teaching, enabling them to transcend their subjectivity and the constraints of their knowledge. This process sheds light on aspects of their teaching that may have gone unnoticed or unacknowledged.

Dapeng articulated the positive impact of critical friends, noting, "When reflecting individually, subjectivity often dominates, leading to the inadvertent neglect of certain aspects. Consequently, there may be truths we are unwilling to acknowledge. However, when an observer points out areas we tend to overlook, they become specific issues that necessitate our attention. Therefore, I believe that if one can truly accept your advice, it is an especially effective way to improve our teaching abilities." Stella expressed how having a critical friend motivated her, stating, "Perhaps my motivation has increased as I strive to deliver engaging and interesting classes. Another teacher offering their perspective is undeniably beneficial."

Mario likened the role of a critical friend to that of a mirror, revealing " parts of my mind that are secret to me" in the third reflective feedback session on March 31, and later in the second semi-structured interview on May 2, he added: "A lonely reflection practice is not fruitful because it is a closed cycle. So, you follow always the same path repeatedly. You need someone who break you out of this cycle. Moreover, considering my specific individual character, this is even more helpful than using the question list and the reflective journal, because I need to talk to someone and see things from a different point of view. I generally like to change my mind, but it's not easy, because I'm very self-confident. So, I need to have someone critical in order to change ideas."

Both new teachers, Rosa and Giulia, acknowledged the limitations of solely relying on written reflective journals and emphasized the invaluable role of critical friends in bringing attention to unnoticed classroom issues. Giulia highlighted, "The reflective sessions are really helpful for me, because I can hear from another person about what I did in class. I think it's better to talk with someone instead of writing the reflection just by myself. For example, during the classroom observation, you could observe something that I couldn't realize, and in subsequent interviews, you can bring these observations to my attention. I think this way it's more useful for me than the reflective journals. Similarly, Rosa found reflective sessions more beneficial than writing reports, as they provided practical guidance and tips essential for her early

teaching career, stating, "Writing reports, I found it a bit difficult. But reflective sessions are very useful because since I have just started my teaching job, nobody tells me what is the good way to teach, helps and gives me some tips.

The second benefit of reflective feedback sessions with a critical friend is the customized and targeted nature of the feedback and suggestions provided to participants.

Dapeng expressed, "My feeling is that in collective communication, we get along very well. On the other hand, one-on-one communication is more targeted, especially because we can calm down and focus specifically on ourselves. Sometimes there are mental challenges, meaning that we are indeed reflecting during the communication process." Rosa elaborated, "Your feedback in the reflective sessions is more tailored to my classroom situation. For example, in the first observation, you provided me with tips such as asking the students to repeat sentences or walking more often through the desks to monitor their performance in exercises. With these suggestions, I became more focused not only on my own performance but also on their engagement in the class. Besides these practical aspects, when you pointed out different aspects of the class, you had a more critical eye on what occurred."

There are some potential issues worth noting. Firstly, classroom observation and the subsequent one-on-one feedback session may cause teachers to feel pressured or judged. This feeling may be influenced by the personalities of the participants. In this study, which involved only one new teacher, Giulia mentioned experiencing such feelings. She said, "Not depressing or annoying, but sometimes I felt a bit judged. Maybe it's just my perception of the thing. Of course, from your side, there wasn't this intention I'm sure about that. But you know, when you have someone observing your class, you already feel judged without saying anything." Therefore, it is essential for critical friends to be trusted by the participants. However, Stella also mentioned that this pressure is related to the identity of the critical friend. She said: "Perhaps if it were the director of the Confucius Institute, it might be a little bit more pressure, but if it's another teacher, I don't think it's a problem."

Secondly, critical friends should possess relevant professional experience and expertise similar to the participants and their feedback and suggestions should be practical and targeted, facilitating the participants' trust. Mario candidly shared his feelings, "the first time you said to me that I need to give students more time and space to speak. To be honest, at the beginning, I was just thinking, 'what did he say? What does he want from me?' But of course, I immediately understood that you said that in

order to make me more mindful about my teaching skills. You are very skillful and professional in what you do. And every time you suggest something, you do it very politely and indirectly. So, I immediately tried to apply it in my lesson. And it was successful.

Lastly, time constraints are also potential obstacles. Because teachers are busy, both classroom observation and post-cooperative reflection require time, which is not easy for teachers. Dapeng shared: "For me, sometimes it's just that time doesn't allow. But I think, if possible, we really should consider it as part of our professional duties as teachers. In other words, our job doesn't end after just teaching a class; reflection should be part of our work and teaching tasks."

4.5.2 Group discussions

Each participant highlighted the significance of group discussion, asserting that it enhanced reflection and professional growth. According to the feedback from teachers in the second semi-structured interviews, the most significant value of professional group discussions is the opportunity for such cooperative communication itself. Stella, Rosa, and Mario pointed out the scarcity of cooperative communication opportunities for Chinese language educators in Italy, unlike teachers of other foreign languages. Stella remarked, "As Chinese language teachers, except for Giulia and Rosa, there is only one of us in each school, so there really aren't any other colleagues to talk to. Every day I see other teachers sharing their experiences at school, but Chinese teachers cannot do the same."

The second advantage of group discussion lies in fostering collaborative exchanges, enabling participants to share teaching difficulties, gain diverse perspectives, explore various solutions, broaden their horizons, and enhance their professional development. As Dapeng noted, "Sometimes individuals' minds might be narrow, but when the problem is brought out for discussion, they will feel that their thinking is particularly smooth and open." Mario recounted, "I remember when we discussed the problems of the class, I found that every one of us has a different way to manage the problems. And at that time, maybe we didn't find a solution, but listening to a different way of thinking and reflecting later on them was useful to me."

Interestingly, novice teachers Giulia and Rosa, due to their limited classroom experience, initially may have overlooked some of their challenges. However, through discussions, they found out that they had similar problems from the questions raised by

other teachers. Giulia remarked, “I find it helpful because I have the chance to discuss with my colleagues or people who do the same work as me. So, it's a good way to confront each other about any problems and try to find the solution together or to give suggestions to each other. Moreover, because we discuss not just my problems, but also other teachers' problems. Most of the time, I realize that their problems are also mine. So, it's also useful from this perspective.” Rosa echoed similar sentiments, stating, “They were very useful. Actually, before starting the group discussions, I didn't have many questions to pose. But after hearing other teachers' questions, I reflected more and had questions to ask the group. Having another point of view from teachers with different experiences and classes is very useful and positive for us. For example, time management—I thought I could manage it. But after hearing other teachers' experiences, I realized I had similar problems. So maybe before, I didn't notice those problems, but by listening to their issues, I became more aware of my situation—a perspective I hadn't considered much before.”

The third advantage of group discussion is psychological support and comfort. Nearly every teacher noted that upon discovering that fellow teachers have encountered similar challenges, they experience a sense of relaxation and empathy. Stella expressed, “When they share the problems they encounter, I find that I also have the same problems, and this provides me with psychological assistance.” Giulia also remarked, “When I see that I'm not the only one facing certain problems, it's comforting; I feel understood.” Mario added, “It was very satisfying to find someone who truly understands you.” And Rosa shared, “Feeling normal because it's not just me but also other teachers who have the same problems I have. I don't feel alone.” The feeling of being “normal” may also contribute to Rosa's increased confidence in teaching by the end of the research.

However, potential issues arise with group discussions. Firstly, the quality of these discussions is influenced by teachers' personality and age. For instance, some teachers may be introverted while others are expressive, and some may lack confidence or fear judgment. Dapeng noted that some teachers may hesitate to be criticized or judged by others, or withhold information they already possess, leading to unproductive discussions.

Another issue arises from insufficient experience or relevant pedagogical knowledge, potentially leading to a lack of confidence in communication. Rosa shared, “As I don't have much experience, it was interesting for the first two group meetings when we put questions and the other teachers answered based on their experience.

Sometimes I can only rely on my reflections to offer suggestions, without drawing from personal experience. So, when addressing such problems, I didn't feel particularly useful." On the other hand, new teachers may not always fully comprehend the insights shared by experienced teachers. Dapeng remarked, "Last time we were with Rosa and Giulia, they were discussing classroom management issues. I won't criticize or say they didn't teach well, but I could sense their lack of extensive experience. When Mario shared about building student relationships, I resonated and shared my experience. Unfortunately, they didn't fully embrace our message, leaving them feeling puzzled, still stuck in the complaining stage and considering the class difficult without resolving the issue."

Additionally, unfamiliarity among group members may lead to communication barriers and hindered collaboration. Fortunately, the veteran teachers in this study were already acquainted, and the two new teachers worked at the same school, fostering quick familiarity and facilitating open communication among all.

The final challenge lies in teachers' busy schedules, making it difficult to find mutually convenient discussion times. In fact, during the study, instances occurred where one or two teachers were absent or had to leave early, inevitably impacting the effectiveness of the discussions.

4.5.3 E-portfolios

With the widespread application of computer technology in education, particularly after the outbreak of the pandemic, computer applications have become more prevalent than before. Many schools have adopted their own online teaching platforms, such as Moodle, Google Classroom, and common use of free online storage space like Google Drive. Therefore, before the start of this study, although teachers expressed that they had rarely heard of e-portfolios before, in practice, they had already been employed to varying degrees.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the research, I still requested the participants to establish their own e-portfolios through Google Sites, where they could include personal profiles, lesson plans, student assignments, reflective journals, and various teaching resources, etc. However, in the end, due to limited time and technological constraints, only Mario established a relatively organized e-portfolio, while Rosa, Giulia, and Stella developed more concise and straightforward versions. Dapeng was unable to create one due to time constraints. Even for teachers who did establish e-

portfolio websites, the usage during the research was not very extensive, as teachers already had some platforms for storing materials.

During the second semi-structured interview, we expanded the definition of e-portfolios beyond those established in this study to encompass various online platforms currently utilized by teachers in their instructional practices, including Google Classroom and Google Drive. We subsequently examined the effectiveness of these tools for data management and presentation in teaching and reflection.

Nearly every participant suggested that the primary function of e-portfolios, for them, was to store information and teaching materials, like a “database” (Dapeng), making them easily retrievable for future use. Stella highlighted, “E-portfolios have now almost become an integral part of teaching. Most teaching materials, including lesson plans, student homework, and online teaching resources, are stored here. E-portfolios are important because, on one hand, they facilitate easy retrieval, saving time, and on the other hand, they possess powerful storage capabilities, enabling us to select the best materials.” Giulia and Rosa primarily utilized the e-portfolios they created for the study to write and store their reflective journals, with Giulia expressing, “it is a good way to keep all the information and memories of reflections in one place.” Mario shared his experience, noting, “One of the best aspects of the portfolio is that I can store numerous articles and videos. Previously, I had to search the internet each time I needed an article, but now I am building my own archive of articles about China and Chinese culture.”

The second main function of e-portfolios is that materials can be stored for long-term use, facilitating their reuse, refinement, and sharing with students or colleagues. According to Rosa, “They are essential now, especially as we use Google Classroom for our students. I exchange information and materials. They can be used year after year.” Mario added, “Over the past two years, creating my e-portfolio using Google Classroom and Google Drive has been very useful because it makes sharing documents, files, videos, and so on with the students easier. It also makes it easier for me to find them because I don't need to create a new document every time; I just refine a previous document. Thus, my lesson preparation has become easier and quicker.” Dapeng emphasized, “Because this database requires constant updates, the updating process actually reflects my personal reflective achievements. As I make new progress, I will certainly apply the new findings and methods I have obtained to the existing materials.”

Moreover, e-portfolios have a positive impact on teachers' reflection and teaching practices. As Dapeng noted, "Sometimes, when I revisit previous materials, I reflect to myself, 'Oh, how foolish I was to include such immature things.' At that moment, I recognize my growth, much like how writing a diary allows you to reflect on your past self." Mario remarked, "It facilitates reflection because if you want to address a problem in class, you can easily find all the documents, class works, or homework you need because everything is stored there."

Regarding the impact of e-portfolios on teaching, Mario believes it primarily manifests in two aspects. Firstly, to maintain file organization, regular tidying is necessary. He stated, "one way in which e-portfolios have influenced my teaching is through their organizational aspect." Secondly, he believes e-portfolios foster more interactive teaching practices. He illustrated this with an example of student homework, stating, "Previously, the correction of homework by the teacher marked the end of the activity. But now, correction is just the second step. So, the student completes it at home, through the platform, the teacher corrects it, and the student revises it once more. If further corrections are needed, the teacher can continue to interact more with the students. I think that this really influenced my way of teaching because I'm becoming more interactive with my students."

However, the application of e-portfolios in reflection and teaching also encounters some obstacles. Firstly, internet-related limitations pose challenges. As Stella highlighted, "There's one issue; if there's no internet, I cannot imagine. For instance, my students once asked, 'Can we have classes in the park?' What should I do if I cannot access my online materials?" Additionally, due to network failures, some of Giulia's reflective journals were lost, despite being written and saved on the e-portfolio.

The second challenge pertains to technological limitations. Mario remarked, "The negative thing is just my low informatics skills because we need a program to improve our own skill about informatics. And because of my low informatics skills, it takes a very long time just to build this very simple site. I need more skills about computer."

Lastly, maintaining an e-portfolio requires regular organization of materials; otherwise, it can easily become disorderly. As Dapeng pointed out, "By the end of the semester, I simply delete everything because it becomes too chaotic, giving students the impression of a pile of burdensome materials. If there's no direct feedback, I feel putting it up there is useless."

4.5.4 Reflective journals

Reflective journaling serves as a primary tool to support reflection in the study of reflective practice. Therefore, despite employing one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews as the primary means to facilitate reflective practice among participants, they were also asked to write reflective journals twice a week as complementary tools for data collection.

However, time constraints pose a common challenge for all the participants. Consequently, the frequency and length of reflection journals varied. Mario and Stella demonstrated the most consistency, writing 2 to 3 journals per week. Giulia and Rosa completed fewer journals but managed 1 to 2 per week. On the other hand, although Dapeng recognized their value for reflection and teaching, he struggled to find time for regular writing. He expressed, "It's definitely helpful, otherwise I wouldn't write them. But it takes a particularly long time because you're not just writing reports or filling out forms; you have to spend a lot of time thinking. So, I feel that integrating it into the daily life of work isn't very realistic for in-service teachers."

Interestingly, both experienced and regular journal writers, Mario and Stella, believed that journal entries should be focused, addressing key teaching issues. Stella remarked, "I find writing reflection journals really useful. However, with some teaching experience now, unlike when I first started teaching, there aren't as many problems. So, whenever I write a reflection journal, I won't consider every aspect in detail. I'll focus on key issues encountered. Overall, I think writing reflection journals and using reflection checklists would be more effective for new teachers." At the end of the study, Mario seemed accustomed to writing reflective journals and reflecting on his teaching through them. He said, "I have a very strong sense of duty to write the journals, and I was trying to collect ideas from them."

Conversely, the two new teachers, Giulia and Rosa, noted difficulties in finding time and energy to write journals due to class scheduling. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the positive impact of journals on lesson preparation. Giulia noted, "It's a time that I give to myself, reflecting on what I need and what I do. It's useful because normally, I think about teaching during the day but not systematically. So, in this way, it can have some useful aspects."

Rosa raised a potential issue regarding the relationship between reflective writing and the self-confidence of practitioners. She observed that teachers lacking confidence may focus excessively on negative classroom events, potentially diminishing their

confidence further. Conversely, emphasizing positive aspects could bolster confidence. She stated, "It's not easy to write them. I usually think about my teaching experience negatively because I'm very pessimistic. While writing, I noticed that I spent more time and effort on negative aspects. Perhaps I was influenced by negative feelings about my classroom practice. But I believe I should change my perspective and focus on the positive aspects, as it makes me feel stronger and more positive in class."

In order to enhance teachers' writing of reflection journals, halfway through the study, I provided them with a list of questions. This questionnaire was based on the four stages of the reflection process proposed by Rodgers (2002), with several guiding questions provided for each stage. The purpose of introducing the reflection checklist midway through the study was to compare the differences between free writing and writing with the assistance of the checklist, to assess if the checklist had any impact on the depth of reflection for teachers. However, the research findings revealed that teachers preferred free writing. Mario was the only teacher who strictly followed the questions provided in the checklist for writing. He believed that the checklist, as an important reference, altered his writing approach. He said: "I tried to follow the question list. But the list was too long, which made the writing too prolonged and difficult. So, I went back to free writing. Then, I found myself writing the journal in a different way because probably I learned something from the question list, I learned about the focus. I realized that I missed the focus at the beginning, and the question list gave me that focus."

Rosa held the most positive attitude toward the question list. She used the question list as a reference when writing, which gave her a more comprehensive view of her own teaching. She shared: "The questions of the reflective question list are very positive. They made me think more comprehensive about my lessons, not just about writing my reflections and how I feel after the lesson. But it also made me reflect while I prepared lessons. As I am getting to know the students better these months, this makes me a bit more self-assured in organizing the lessons and makes me feel more at ease with the class. I feel much more comfortable with myself. So, this made me feel stronger in my role as a teacher. However, when I wrote the reflective journals, I didn't check the question list; otherwise, I would write a whole book for each lesson. But I read the questions and just concentrated on the most important questions on the event I wanted to describe."

Because reflection journals were not the primary method of data collection in this study, some details were overlooked while explaining the process of writing journals, such as not specifying the time allocated for each writing session to the teachers. This caused confusion for Rosa. Additionally, after providing the reflection checklist to the teachers, due to time constraints, I failed to clarify that the checklist was meant as a reference and not to be strictly adhered to. Eventually, the instructions for the reflection checklist were insufficient, causing confusion for Mario. He followed the checklist meticulously, answering each question one by one, but the resulting journals were not as effective as free writing; the content lacked fluency and depth of thought.

Therefore, when writing reflection journals, it should be confirmed with the teachers the writing schedule, such as writing 1 to 2 times per week, with each session lasting at least twenty minutes. When using the reflection checklist, it should be explained that it is merely a tool to assist in writing, providing more targeted and comprehensive reflections without needing to answer each question separately.

4.5.5 Participants' perspectives on the order of the importance of these instruments

After interviewing the teachers about the role of various reflective tools in reflection, I continued to inquire about their ranking of the importance of different reflective tools. Among the four teachers, group discussions and critical friend were ranked in the top two positions, while reflective journals and e-portfolios were almost always in the bottom two positions. Only Stella ranked critical friend and reflective journal in the top two positions. However, although the order was similar, the reasons for ranking varied slightly among them.

Rosa ranked the importance of reflective tools as follows: critical friend > group discussion > reflective journal and e-portfolio. She explained, "One-on-one reflection is more direct. When someone, like you, gives me feedback on what I did in class, I can understand it immediately. Group discussions are also direct because teachers share their own challenges, which makes you think about your own situation. On the other hand, e-portfolios and reflective journals are less direct. They require a lot of effort to reflect on yourself. It's like having two different souls of yourself, which is difficult and makes you doubt yourself more. In comparison, critical friends and group discussions are more direct and make reflection easier." However, Rosa acknowledged the importance of all the tools in enhancing practitioners' reflection. She said, "Reflective

practice involves journals, e-portfolios, one-on-one reflections, and group discussions, which changed a lot for me. The one-on-one discussions had the most impact, while group discussions made me more attentive to what students do and how I react. These two parts positively influenced me the most. However, I didn't find reflective journals and e-portfolios very useful—they took too long. Overall, having this 360° experience with all these different parts together was very important."

Giulia's ranking of reflective tools is: group discussion > critical friend > e-portfolio > reflective journal. she explained: "Maybe it's because of my personality, but I prefer a more practical way to reflect on my teaching. So, I think the group meetings, observation and the one-on-one interviews are more effective for me whereas the reflect journal is more personal. I reflect just with myself and I can't communicate with others. It is not useless, but I would put this as the last one for this reason. I need more interaction in this reflection process."

Stella ranked the reflective tools as follows: critical friend > reflective journal > group discussion > e-portfolio. She commented, "I believe having another teacher's perspective is really crucial because otherwise, it's hard for me to realize the issues on my own. Sometimes, even if there are significant problems, I find it hard to detect them by myself. And reflective journals can be completed independently, offering greater autonomy." Interestingly, she reported that these tools have different effects on reflection and teaching. For teaching, she considered e-portfolios the most important because nowadays, information technology is almost an integral and indispensable part of the classroom.

Dapeng's ranking was the same as Giulia: group discussion > critical friend > portfolio and journal writing. However, his reasons for this ranking were different. He believed group discussions and critical friend were more efficient, and due to time constraints, he didn't have time to establish an e-portfolio or write reflective journals. However, he added, "In terms of effectiveness, disregarding time investment, I think writing reflective journals would be the most useful. Next would be one-on-one discussions. Third would be group discussion, and lastly, the portfolio."

Mario ranked the reflective tools in a similar order to Rosa: critical friend > group discussion and reflective journal > e-portfolio. He explains, "I'd like to speak and I need someone to be critical with me. And I need to share opinions with someone else. So, the one-on-one reflection and group discussions are the most useful for me. But the reflective journal was useful too, maybe not as useful as the one-on-one reflection, but

for sure as useful as the group discussion. The last one is the e-portfolio; maybe I don't understand the full potential of the E-portfolio. And I need to delve deeper into the use of the e-portfolio and all the skills that I can apply to it.” Regarding the e-portfolio, Mario shared the same views with Stella that it became an essential part of daily teaching.

In summary, for in-service teachers, it is challenging to find time and patience to write journals or organize e-portfolios amidst their busy daily routines. Therefore, more interactive and efficient group discussions and critical friendship are more welcomed by them.

4.6 Research Question 5: How does reflective practice enhance the professional development of teachers?

Reflective practice stands as a cornerstone in applied linguistics, TESOL and education, yet there remains a dearth of empirical studies providing evidence for its value, process, and outcomes in these fields (Mann and Walsh, 2013). Given this gap, it becomes imperative to delve into the discussion surrounding these aspects of reflective practice in the context of teachers' professional development. Therefore, I attempt to address how reflective practice enhances professional development of Chinese language teachers by considering four key perspectives in the second semi-structured interviews with the participants. These perspectives encompass: 1) the value of reflective practice in professional development; 2) the impact of reflective practice on teachers' practice and instruction; 3) barriers to implementing reflective practice in teaching; and 4) participants' willingness to use reflective practice in the future. These perspectives offer a comprehensive lens through which we can understand the multifaceted contributions of reflective practice to the ongoing growth and development of educators. Subsequent sections will delve into each of these themes, providing a detailed examination of their significance.

4.6.1 Participants' perspectives on the value of reflective practice in professional development

At the conclusion of the study, I inquired the participants to explore whether they believed their involvement in the research met their expectations and invited them to share insights on the value of reflective practices. Virtually all participants affirmatively acknowledged their participation experience, deeming the study aligned with their

initial expectations. More importantly, they unanimously recognized reflective practice as a valuable instructional approach. It's worth noting that the value of reflective practice has been explored in greater detail in the section 4.2.2 titled "Participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice." For a more in-depth understanding of the value, please refer to that section. The following are their specific responses.

Rosa – *I feel much more at ease and confident in my knowledge and abilities*

Rosa, throughout the entire study, attempted to explore the value of reflective practice. In our second one-on-one reflective feedback session, she openly shared her thoughts, saying:

“I found writing reports a bit difficult for me. However, reflecting on the class with you is really useful. I've just started my teaching journey, and nobody has told me what the best teaching methods are or given me tips. I can only improve by doing.” (Rosa, the second reflective feedback session, 09/03/2022)

Later, during the third feedback session, Rosa expanded on her insights. She discovered that reflective practice not only helped her gain confidence in teaching but also enhanced her ability to handle students. She shared:

"Since the first time you came to observe my class, I've noticed a change in my teaching approach, and it makes me happy. I feel much more at ease and confident in my knowledge and abilities, especially with teenagers, which isn't easy." (Rosa, the third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)

Reflecting on her initial expectations, Rosa admitted uncertainty due to limited knowledge about reflective practice and the study when she decided to join. However, considering the benefits she gained from group discussions, feedback sessions, and the holistic "360° experience" of reflective practice, she concluded, "I think it went beyond my expectations."

Giulia – *It brought me many benefits*

Giulia confirmed that this research met her initial expectations, emphasizing the importance of group discussions. She shared, "Initially, I thought I would have to write reflective journals and to meet with some other people who I didn't know. I didn't expect the benefits of these meetings. However, as the project progressed, I discovered it brought me many benefits, positive aspects, and new ideas about my teaching. So, yes, it went beyond my expectations. I really appreciated the group meetings and the insights

they provided." When delving deeper into the value of reflective practice, Giulia pointed out that, for her, the most significant aspect is "taking the time to reflect on our teaching methods, especially for in-service teachers."

Stella – *I can see the positive changes in my teaching*

Similar to Giulia and Rosa, Stella also felt that the study's outcome surpassed her initial expectations. Stella affirmed the value of reflective practice, viewing it as a practical teaching approach. Throughout her involvement in the research, she consistently adapted and modified her teaching methods by engaging in regular reflection and discussions with peers. She attempted to discover a teaching approach that better suited her style and enhanced students' learning outcomes. She expressed,

I find reflective teaching incredibly beneficial because I can see the positive changes in my teaching. Engaging in this method has helped me develop a habit of reflection and gain a better aware of my own behavior. For instance, every time I go to class, I think about the potential outcomes of my actions. It makes me more reflective. You know, I viewed reflection as a simple thinking activity at beginning, but now I see reflective teaching as a comprehensive study and is really valuable. (Stella, the second semi-structured interview, 28/04/2022)

Stella highlighted the significance of reflection and recalled her recent completion of a master's course. She remarked, "Regrettably, the master's program I undertook did not introduce such a beneficial approach as reflective practice. In my opinion, the entire school should actively promote it. I believe this method has the potential to yield more effective teaching results."

Dapeng – *The more I reflect, the more I learn*

Unlike two novice teachers, Giulia and Rosa, Dapeng's goal of participating in the study was clear from the beginning. During the first semi-structured interview, he mentioned his preparation for the upcoming teacher enrollment examination at the beginning of next year, which would assess various theories and their practical applications. Joining this study, for Dapeng, presented a valuable opportunity to integrate these theories with real-world practice. Throughout the research process, Dapeng consistently emphasized the significance of pedagogical and psychological theories, underscoring their importance for the examination. In addition, Dapeng believed that the teaching profession is characterized by continual self-renewal and

learning. Reflective practice, in his view, emerged as a crucial learning approach. Therefore, when reflecting on whether his participation in the study met his expectations, he stated:

From an objective point of view, my teaching now appears more professional, organized, and systematic. I notice that several teachers appreciate communicating with me. Although I am not a professional in teaching research, the results of my reflections and the experiences I share prove valuable to them. Consequently, they enjoy discussing and learning from me. Through this research process, I have personally and professionally improved. Therefore, I believe the desired effect has been achieved. What I hope for even more is to pass the oral test of the teacher examination, completing my expectations entirely. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

In terms of the value of reflective practice, shortly after participating in the study, Dapeng expressed to me on several occasions the significance of reflective practice. He emphasized how engaging in reflective practice facilitated a heightened awareness of his own behaviors, undoubtedly exerting a more direct impact on his teaching approach. In his words,

Reflection improves the ability to self-analyze. If I don't think about my own behavior and analyze the starting point of this behavior, there is no way to establish effective communication with students. On the contrary, if I think about my behavior seriously, I will change my position and analyze it from the student's perspective. Through this analysis, I gain a better understanding of students' psychology.

Moreover, the impact of reflective practice on teaching is undoubtedly more obvious, as it involves specific adjustments, attempts, analysis, and comparison of different teaching methods. Therefore, it directly influences teaching quality and effectiveness. (Dapeng, the second reflective feedback session, 19/03/2022)

In the second semi-structured interview, Dapeng elaborated further on the significance of reflective practice and discussed the practical implications of his participation in the study for his teaching. He shared,

Reflective practice is valuable. Firstly, because teachers today often emphasize skills, and I believe that teacher skills are, to a large extent, linked to educational psychology. Reflective learning enables the practical application

of various theories of educational psychology. When these theories are successfully applied in practice, they become newly acquired abilities for me. Consequently, the more I reflect, the more I learn, and more effective I become.

Secondly, reflective practice has helped me understand myself better. Previously, my reflections focused mainly on my shortcomings. Now, I recognize the importance of learning about my strengths as well, so that I can have a comprehensive way of utilizing these abilities.

Thirdly, reflection is also highly beneficial for personal growth and long-term progress. Progress during the research process tends to be short-term and more utilitarian. However, I am more concerned with long-term progress. Improving one's working ability is not an easy task; it requires a gradual process, not an immediate leap to a higher level. There are times when you may feel stuck, and notable results are not immediately evident. Nevertheless, over the past months, I can distinctly feel that I have made significant progress.

Fourthly, reflective research is a learning tool, and I am learning to be more skillful in using this tool and incorporating it into my work. Sometimes, I approach problems with a reflective attitude. For instance, when I observe the behavior of students and colleagues, especially during collaboration and coordination, I find reflection to be very useful.

In short, I believe the most significant impact and the greatest benefit come from the fact that reflective practice has greatly enriched my perspective and enhanced my work abilities. (Dapeng, the second semi-structure interview, 07/05/2022)

Mario – *My life has changed*

Mario, already a reflective teacher before joining this study, expressed positive affirmation that the research has met his initial expectation, he mentioned, “I liked reflection and meditation even before we met. But I expected the research to make me more skillful about reflection. And I found that it achieved.”

When discussing the value of reflective practice, Mario shared insightful and detailed views, highlighting cooperation and humbleness as its primary values. He explained:

Cooperation is a major value I discovered within the reflective practice. We need cooperation in our profession, with the students, colleagues, tutors, and

even with the different parts of ourselves. I believe that we are not a stone; we are made of different selves. We don't possess just one soul or self. We have many selves within, and we must integrate them to become a good person, a 真人, a real person. Reflective practice is like a mirror, allowing me to look at different aspects of myself. And so that was useful in order to integrate my own self and collaborate with my other selves.

But cooperation isn't the only value, humbleness is another. Because if you want to reflect on something, you have to put yourself on the same level of your object of reflection. You cannot reflect on something from above and you cannot reflect on something from below. And you can reflect on something just on the same level. In addition, it makes me more humble, especially when you gave me suggestions and I realized that those suggestions were not only true, but also useful in order to solve problems and improve my way of teaching. So, humbleness, I think, it's another value within the reflective practice. (Mario, the second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)

Finally, he made an impressive conclusion on the impact of reflective practice, saying:

I really realized that in the last two or three months, my life has changed. I became more reflective, even in my daily activities. I became more calm. So, every time I need to think about something, I take my time. Maybe the process is not finished yet. I'm changing my way of approaching problems in life, not only in school. Reflected practice has influenced my way of teaching not only in the last two months, but I think that it will influence it forever because I really changed my perspective on the class. (Mario, the second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)

4.6.2 The impact of reflective practice on teachers' practice and instruction

Reflective practice is recognized as a valuable approach for effectively enhancing teacher performance and student outcomes (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Larrivee, 2008; Farrell, 2015; Freeman, 2016). Through reflective practice and interactive engagement, teachers are able to search for creative ways to refine their intellectual instruction (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Rodgers, 2002; Lou, 2008; Farrell, 2012).

While participants affirmed the value of reflective practice in the study and acknowledged that its outcomes met their expectations, there remains a critical need for

in-depth research to explore its tangible impact and the substantial changes it has brought about in participants' actual teaching, learning, and even in life. In this section, I will present empirical evidence derived from teachers' responses and my own observations throughout the research, delving into the specific impact of reflective practice on teaching and learning. By exploring these real-world contexts in detail, we attempt to unveil how reflective practice has influenced and improved pedagogy, leading to tangible outcomes in the field of education.

To examine the changes in each teacher's approach, I will proceed in two steps. In the first step, I will provide a concise overview of each participant's teaching style at the beginning of the study, drawing insights from my classroom observations. This initial step is first to offer the reader a brief understanding of the current state of Chinese language education in Italy. Second, based on the overview of participants' current teaching style, we can better discern the changes that have occurred. In the second step, I will delve into the changes observed in their teaching practices throughout the study, using information from teachers' reflective journals, one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, and interviews, as well as my own field notes.

4.6.2.1 The participants' teaching style

Rosa

Rosa had limited educational background and experience in language teaching before she became a Chinese language teacher. She used to teach Italian in a private school in Beijing for three months, where she had the opportunity to observe other teacher and receive some guidance. This constituted her primary training before becoming a language teacher. Once she assumed the role of a Chinese teacher at her current school, she engaged in further professional development, undertaking online courses on teaching methods and participating in an in-service teacher training session.

Due to Rosa and Giulia working in the same school and to streamline classroom observations, I scheduled their first observation for the same afternoon of February 15, 2022 after coordinating with them. Subsequently, I realized that this arrangement limited me to observing each class for only 45 minutes, despite their classes being 1.5 hours long that day. Consequently, I observed the first half of Giulia's class and the second half of Rosa's class. For a comprehensive understanding of Rosa's teaching style, I will also draw upon data from the second observation.

Rosa's classroom was generally teacher-centered, and during the first observation, she primarily employed the grammar-translation teaching approach. Within 30 minutes, she focused on a single teaching task, requiring students to translate four sentences from Italian to Chinese. In the second observation on March 8, she utilized some communicative language teaching method to deliver her class. Being a domestic Chinese teacher, the primary language of instruction was Italian. Students had limited opportunities to actively engage in and practice the target language of Chinese. Despite this, she made efforts to create real-life opportunities for students to use Chinese, such as when a student requested a restroom break.

She actively integrated multimedia and the internet into her teaching. Rosa utilized a variety of materials to present content and capture students' attention, including textbooks, PowerPoint slides, photos, and video clips. Depending on the topic, she incorporated games, often using Wordwall (an interactive and versatile online platform) to facilitate learning new words. However, there seemed to be a lack of emphasis on cultural content; for instance, on the day of the first observation coinciding with the Chinese Lantern Festival, this cultural element was not incorporated into her class.

Building a positive relationship with her students, Rosa fostered an active classroom atmosphere. She put considerable effort into cultivating students' interest, occasionally organizing extra activities outside the classroom, such as playing jianzi (踢毽子) on the day of observation. Many students displayed a strong interest in learning Chinese, actively posing questions about the day's topics. Rosa encouraged a supportive environment, offering ample space for student inquiries and responses. However, challenges arose at times, particularly with active students, where classroom management skills were not always effectively demonstrated.

Most of the classroom interaction in her class was between the teacher and students, with few opportunities for student-student interactive activities. While she attempted to provide equal opportunities to all students, there was a tendency to overlook the less active students seated on the sides of the classroom. Nevertheless, Rosa exhibited qualities of a proficient language teacher, maintaining a loud and clear voice and demonstrating effective class command in most instances.

Giulia

Giulia was a new Chinese teacher with only a couple of months of experience when she joined our project, lacking any formal education in language teaching. This was her

first official job after her graduation. In contrast to Rosa, her teaching approach was also primarily teacher-centered, where she played a substantial role in the classroom. Although she frequently utilized the grammar-translation teaching method—such as requiring students to translate Italian to Chinese—Giulia's teaching also exhibited characteristics of CLT approach. She engaged students in interactive opportunities, such as practicing conversations based on textbook content and participating in small group language exercises, meanwhile, she walked around to check students' performance and addressed their questions. However, she did not pay enough attention to provide constructive feedback after students answered questions or completed specific tasks.

Similar to Rosa, Italian was the primary language of instruction in Giulia's classroom, limiting students' exposure to Chinese. Giulia employed diverse teaching materials, including textbooks, audio-tapes, PowerPoint slides, and occasional online videos. She incorporated cultural elements into her classes, introducing Chinese traditional festivals like Ching Ming Festival (清明节) through online videos and often sharing insights into modern Chinese culture, society, and pop culture to motivate students.

Giulia demonstrated patience and established a close rapport with her students, fostering an active classroom atmosphere. However, she faced challenges in classroom management, attempting to befriend students but unintentionally compromising her authority, resulting in difficulty controlling disruptive behavior among some students. With classroom interactions primarily between the teacher and students, other students easily lost their focus, starting to chat with others, and less active students struggled to receive equal participation opportunities. Giulia, due to lacking pedagogical skills and experience, struggled to address these issues effectively. Time management posed another significant challenge, limiting the completion of tasks within a single class.

In summary, as a novice teacher, Giulia had achieved a good performance, maintaining an appropriate pace of speech, encouraging active student participation, and providing numerous interactive opportunities.

Stella

Stella had been working as a Chinese teacher for around ten years when we met and even so, her passion for teaching Chinese left a lasting impression on me. At the time

of her participation in this study, she was enrolled in a one-year master's program in TCSOL, making her the only teacher with a formal educational background specifically related to Chinese language teaching. The first classroom observation of Stella took place on the morning of February 16, 2022, and I listened to two consecutive 45-minute classes in fourth and third grade, which would result in a relatively more comprehensive and detailed record of Stella's teaching style.

Stella's teaching approach encompassed a blend of methods, including grammar-translation, audio-lingual, CLT, and task-based teaching method. However, the overall structure of the class was still dominated by the teacher's lectures, with fewer opportunities for student participation. The classroom medium language was predominantly Italian, resulting in limited exposure to the Chinese language for the students.

Stella was skilled in using multimedia tools and the Internet to support her teaching. The main teaching objective of Grade 4 was to review the vocabulary and she used the Quizlet platform to create word cards with vivid pictures to help her students understand and recognize Chinese characters. During these views, Stella highlighted the interconnection between words, ensuring students grasped relationships between terms. For example, if she taught "洗脸 wash face", she would review related words such as "洗手 wash hands" that they had learned before. She also incorporated audio recordings of texts to increase students' exposure to the target language and enhance their understanding, but the use of these materials was not sufficient. For instance, when she played the recordings, she explained more or asked questions about individual students, the overall class participation was limited.

In her reflective journal about teaching principles, she wrote, "I think students need to experience knowledge, not only gain knowledge! I try to introduce topics that students will face in real life." This philosophy has a direct impact on her teaching, with an emphasis on real-life application of language. For example, when she taught the new word "吃饭 eat" in Grade 4, she asked students where they had lunch based on their actual situation. In Grade 3, during the review of numbers and prices, Stella used students' textbooks, schoolbags as examples to raise questions and let students answer.

However, Stella's teaching style was relatively homogeneous. For example, during vocabulary reviews, almost half of the class was about Chinese character and student recognition, in which students were easily distracted during the process. Therefore,

effective time utilization and teaching efficiency emerged as major issues for Stella. The methods of questioning were not diversified enough as well, with the majority of questions directed from the teacher to the students, offering minimal interactive questioning among students.

Despite these challenges, Stella got along well with her students, and the classroom atmosphere was relatively relaxed and active. She emphasized the importance of cultivating students' interest in the language and culture, integrating real-life examples into her class and a considerable portion of her students were motivated.

Dapeng

Dapeng, with approximately 7 years of experience teaching Chinese, stood out as the sole native Chinese speaker among the participants. In his teaching role, he collaborated with an Italian teacher who served as a coordinator, responsible for covering major contents such as Chinese grammar, literature, history, and culture. Dapeng, primarily tasked with delivering spoken language classes, tailored his teaching schedule to align with that of the Italian teacher. My initial classroom observation of Dapeng's Chinese class took place on the morning of February 19, 2022, encompassing Grade 3 and Grade 5 classes consecutively.

Dapeng's classes were impressive. In my field notes for that day, I recorded, "It was like a Chinese teaching demonstration class, taught entirely in Chinese, which was really surprising." Although the class remained a teacher-centered structure, with Dapeng leading most of the instruction, he effectively captured students' attention. The students performed exceptionally well, demonstrating high levels of concentration. Therefore, in his class, students seldom disturbed the teacher, and classroom management was not a problem. It was hard to imagine such a class given by a teacher with no educational background related to Chinese teaching.

In specific, in the initial 5 to 8 minutes of each class, an assigned student presented on a chosen topic, using no more than three new words. Following the presentation, other students would raise questions to the speaker based on the content. Then the class started with Dapeng outlining the lesson schedule for the day. Although a textbook had been selected, the day's lesson for Grade 3 focused on a picture book that he found on the internet that were suitable for the students' level and close to their lives, in order to fulfill the school's requirement of civic education.

The teaching content, presented through a PowerPoint presentation with vivid images, effectively captured students' interest. Dapeng highlighted the connections between knowledge. For example, when introducing the new term 包 *bāo* 'bag', he thoughtfully reviewed associated vocabulary such as 书包 *shūbāo* 'schoolbag', 钱包 *qiánbāo* 'wallet', 红包 *hóngbāo* 'red envelope', etc. Moreover, cultural elements seamlessly integrated into his lessons. For example, when discussing the concept of “首都 *shǒudū* capital” in Grade 3, he encouraged students to recall the capitals of various countries, and in Grade 5, while teaching colors, he underscored the significance of “red” in Chinese culture.

Nevertheless, there were several shortcomings in Dapeng's teaching. His classes tended to be teacher-driven, limiting opportunities for students to actively engage with the language. Despite using numerous open questions to keep student involvement, interactive activities among the students were still limited. Following the introduction of new content, Dapeng did not allocate enough time for practice the language. Because of these problems, there were still occasional cases of some students being distracted. Additionally, the teacher did not leave time before ending the class to summarize and review the content of the day's lesson.

In summary, Dapeng's teaching methodology employed a combination of CLT, task-based techniques, and other approaches. His teaching plan was clear, with lessons flowing smoothly and maintaining a brisk pace, demonstrating efficiency. Noteworthy, because his instructional language was entirely in Chinese, Dapeng was very skillful at explaining complex words or concepts by choosing relatively simple words. He placed significant emphasis on linking class content to real-life situations and considered students' preferences, such as adding Chinese lyrics into the song "Happy" in order to foster students' interest. The Chinese proficiency of his students was notably better than that of other participants, possibly owing to more Chinese lessons per week and the presence of a specialized native language teacher.

Mario

Mario was the most experienced teacher among all the participants and had been teaching Chinese for more than 20 years. However, his focus on teaching the language only began after the epidemic; previously, he primarily taught Chinese grammar, history, and culture. Mario had developed his own systematic teaching theories with

years of experience. For instance, in culture classes, he frequently employed flipped classroom and task-based teaching methods, encouraging students to independently research specific cultural topics. The first classroom observation of Mario took place on the morning of February 17, 2022, I observed two 45-minute classes of the third grade and the first grade.

Mario's teaching style, perhaps influenced by years of cultural teaching, seemed more “old-fashioned” than that of the other participants. Although maintaining a harmonious relationship with the students, the class was still teacher-centered, with most of the time spent on lectures, as he said in the second interview, “I used to do my job from the beginning to the end”. Students had limited time for independent study and inadequate chances to practice and use the language.

In the Grade 3 class, the typical teaching procedure involved the teacher playing an audio recording of the text, sentence by sentence, and students were encouraged to pose questions to the teacher based on the content. Then, the teacher explained any relevant grammar points that might be involved. Although the teaching process incorporated numerous opportunities for interactive questions and answers, only one or two students could participate at a time, limiting chances for the entire class to practice the language collectively. As a result of this restricted participation, some students began to lose focus after approximately 15 minutes. Unfortunately, the teacher did not promptly notice and address this issue, remaining more focused on delivering his own explanations. The extended time spent on explanations contributed to a relatively calm classroom atmosphere, and those less active students received little attention.

Similar to Dapeng and Stella, Mario underscored the connection between knowledge, categorizing related vocabulary to assist student understanding and recognition. For instance, when introducing “*医生* doctor” in Grade 3, he also reviewed related terms like “*医院* Hospital” and “*中医* Chinese medicine.” However, sometimes, the teacher dominated the summarization process, with insufficient student engagement. He also stressed the link between knowledge and real life, exemplified in Grade 1, where he provided numerous real-life examples when teaching “*也* also.”

Mario was the most proficient and skilled teacher in using multimedia and internet among all the participants. His teaching materials were diverse, drawn from textbooks, online resources, and video clips, etc. He was also very familiar with the operation of online teaching platforms, and the e-portfolio that was set up for this study was also the

most systematic and organized one. His teaching materials and resources on Google drive were surprisingly organized.

He emphasized the integration of cultural elements into his language classes. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw that his Chinese class started with playing Baduanjin (八段锦, a kind of Chinese Qigong) with his students to help them achieve physical and mental calmness. The emphasis on cultural content was also reflected in the teaching of specific content, for example, when learning the word "doctor," he delved into Chinese cultural norms of addressing individuals, advocating the use of last name along with occupation or title to address a person in China.

Furthermore, Mario's Grade 1 class was conducted in the Confucius Classroom, a classroom in collaboration with the Confucius Institute. This classroom was adorned with various Chinese cultural elements. During our conversation, he expressed his belief that such decorations could be beneficial for students in directly perceiving Chinese culture. Upon his suggestion, other language subjects were also considering arranging a classroom that belongs to their respective subject.

To summarize, from my point of view, the teaching methods employed by local teachers tended to be more traditional and teacher-centered, with less emphasis on contemporary interactive, communicative and constructive teaching approaches, such as CLT and task-based methods. Despite mentioning by all participants in interviews that language classes should offer students more opportunities for participation, the observed reality indicated that students did not have enough opportunities to participate in the classroom. Conservatively estimating, the teacher-student ratio in terms of classroom time is at most 80% to 20%, potentially even 85% teacher-dominated to 15% student participation. Moreover, the efficiency of each class is relatively low, with a comparatively small number of instructional tasks accomplished.

However, teachers demonstrated a proficient use of multimedia and the internet to enhance their teaching. In comparison, novice teachers encountered greater challenges in classroom management. Nearly every participant struggled to provide equal attention and learning opportunities to students, particularly in local teacher classrooms, where actively participating students received far more exercises and opportunities to answer questions than their less engaged peers. Additionally, the weekly Mandarin class durations vary significantly among different schools, ranging from 2 to 5 hours. Only

Dapeng's school had a dedicated oral Chinese teacher, leading to notable disparities in language proficiency among students in the same grade.

Next, I will delve into the specific changes that teachers have undergone during the research process.

4.6.2.2 The diachronic change of participants' practice and instruction

Throughout the study, each participant underwent some positive pedagogical or psychological changes to a greater or lesser extent, which were correlated to the participant's experience and the degree of open-mindedness to reflective practice. As Dewey (1933) stated, open-mindedness is one of the crucial characteristics for reflective practitioners. Next, I will delineate the specific changes that each teacher experienced during the study, based on data from interviews, feedback sessions, reflective journals, as well as classroom observations.

Rosa

Rosa, a novice teacher with limited educational background in language teaching, eagerly embraced any opportunities that might enhance and improve her professional development. She approached the study with a highly open-minded attitude, welcoming suggestions from both fellow participants and myself during reflective feedback sessions and group discussions. Initially, she was unaware that her teaching methods leaned towards being teacher-centered and traditional. However, upon receiving feedback and suggestions, she promptly began experimenting with alternative approaches.

When reflecting on her growth during the study, the first significant change was her teaching methods. Specifically, she increased the use of mechanical repetitive exercises and introduced more pair-work opportunities for her students. These adjustments resulted in enhanced student engagement, even among those who were typically less attentive in class. Further details regarding this development are provided in subsequent paragraphs.

During the second reflective feedback session on March 9th, Rosa remarked that she was actively seeking to adjust her teaching methods and enhance student engagement, stating: "Last time we used half an hour to translate the sentences, but this time we have many more questions and answers, much more student and teacher interaction. I think, teaching effectiveness has improved a lot."

In her reflective journal entry on March 10th, she elaborated on the impact of this change on students' learning performance, noting that they became more active and engaged in the class the following day. She wrote:

The students who usually were not very attentive asked me a lot of questions; I didn't have to reproach them as much as before. Also, one student who is usually distracted in class and doesn't know many characters raised his hand to read the sentence. I noticed that after reading aloud together, the students who usually can't read had more self-esteem.

She described another experiment involving an increase in mechanical repetition exercises in the class and observed some positive changes resulting from this intervention. She said:

From the first time you suggested me to let them repeat, and I saw that they have become more accustomed to it because at first, they just made some strange voices to make everybody laugh. But now they take it more seriously, and I see that their pronunciation has developed a lot; it is much better than before. (Rosa, the third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)

Concerning the effectiveness of integrating mechanical repetitive exercises into the classroom, Rosa reiterated her findings during the second semi-structured interview on May 3rd. She asserted that this instructional adjustment had resulted in increased focus among students. Furthermore, the introduction of more interactive exercises and group activities had enhanced the rapport between teachers and students. She stated:

Reflective practice made me change and concentrate more on repetition and to make students work more together in pairs. I found the students became more attentive. So, for me, reflective practice is very helpful. It made me especially change the way of teaching and communicating with the class. I see that the relationship with students is different from the first part of the year. We have become closer. Now they listen to me more. I don't have to shout as much as I used to. So, I noticed some changes in our lessons. They trust me and I trust them. (Rosa, second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

The second significant change for Rosa was her increased self-assurance in making decisions regarding class topics, leading to a deeper passion for her profession. Before participated in the study, one of the primary challenges she encountered was selecting class topics and effectively managing the time allocated to each topic. This often resulted in an inability to complete intended teaching tasks. However, by the end of the

research, she had developed her ability to select teaching content and manage time more effectively. She reflected:

I feel much more at ease and confident in myself, especially when teaching teenagers. For example, I chose to teach the topic of weather first today, and then to do some geography later. I usually would finish one topic and then begin a new one, but this time, I was very sure of my decision, I prefer to do something new first and then continue with something not finished yet. And this made me much happier. Because I always think a lot about the selection of topics and I have big problems with decision-making, this makes me feel stronger. (Rosa, the third reflective feedback session, 24/04/2022)

In addition to boosting her confidence, she also mentioned that previously she often went off-topic during class. Now, because she is more conscious of her teaching behavior, she can autonomously control her classroom conduct, sharing “if I’ve already decided where to stop with the explanation, even if I think I have more to say, I will stop.”

Rosa's third notable change involved an enhanced comprehension of the classroom dynamics, enabling her to observe more closely and engage in deeper reflection, actively probing into the underlying reasons behind certain phenomena. She shared:

It made me more aware of the situation and took it also more professionally in the way that I try more and more to give the students the same opportunities. Part of our job is to concentrate and have an eye on every student. So, to be more careful about what happens in class and to notice every kind of situation that arises, rather than preventing things from happening, but to take care of every single difficult event or positive event. Every moment is important. If that thing, for example, happened, why did it happen? Should I have behaved in a different way to block that behavior? So, to find more answers to what happens every time during the lesson. I ask myself more questions than before. (Rosa, second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

Giulia

In discussing changes and improvements, Giulia provided a positive yet somewhat conservative response during the second semi-structured interview. She remarked,

“Yes, of course, I have changed, and I realize that I have made some improvement in my teaching, but maybe small changes.”

During the study, she began questioning her routine thoughts and practices, cultivating a deeper awareness of potential issues within her classroom. She expressed,

In this way, I can think about myself and what I'm doing. I also think about some solutions to problems or new ways of doing things. It's a sort of challenge because, each time, I try to do better and better. Yes, I might even try with mistakes, but I can try new things in order to find a better way for myself and for the students. (Giulia, second semi-structured interview, 30/04/2022)

As suggested by Rodgers (2022), reflective practice should extend beyond a mere mental exercise and the entire process should encompass the application of thoughtful considerations into actual practice. Consequently, Giulia not only reflected on various issues but also proactively sought and experimented with alternative solutions. For instance, during an afternoon class reflection, she noticed a lack of student attentiveness, and she experimented some solutions to this issue, she shared:

I thought that in the one-and-a-half-hour class, I should divide the lesson into two parts: the first part should cover the most difficult aspect, such as learning new vocabulary, which requires the students' total attention. The second part could be lighter and more enjoyable, like playing the Wordwall games, rather than just explanations, but maybe incorporating more conversation exercises, games, or something like that. (Giulia, Second reflective feedback session, 23/03/2022)

Specifically, Giulia classified her changes into two categories. The first involved actively seeking additional teaching materials and resources to augment her instructional approach. The second pertained to adjusting her communication style with students, as she explained:

For example, I tried to change the teaching support because normally I used the book most of the time. Now, I've experimented with new and different ways of teaching, incorporating other teaching supports like PowerPoint presentations or videos. I noticed that this change in methods can support my teaching and help students maintain their focus on the lesson. So, this can be considered a small change.

Also, I think I've altered the way I communicate with students in situations when they are talkative, lively, or making noise. I try to approach them

differently, listen more to their needs, and engage more with them. From this perspective, I've observed several changes and a sort of improvement on my part. They are small changes, but they still make a difference. (Giulia, second semi-structured interview, 30/04/2022)

After the initial group discussion and reflective feedback session, I observed additional subtle changes in her teaching practice. Notably, she demonstrated increased proficiency in classroom management and fostered more interactive opportunities for students, such as incorporating small group practices. However, it's essential to acknowledge that, due to limitations of work experience and requisite pedagogical knowledge, her advancements primarily manifested at a technical level.

Stella

Stella emerged as an exceptionally responsible and open-minded teacher. As the research progressed, her comprehension of reflective practice underwent a significant transformation. Initially, she viewed her participation in this study as a means to support my research and assist in collecting teaching data from fellow teachers. However, over time, she came to recognize reflective practice as a powerful tool for her personal and professional development. Consequently, Stella exhibited a keen enthusiasm for reflective practice and actively provided constructive feedback on her evolving teaching methods. In the second reflective feedback session, she acknowledged her changes in practice, expressing:

Reflective practice was really useful. Specifically, I believe your suggestions on using the last five minutes to review the main content have been genuinely helpful. I am not only incorporating this suggestion into my practice, but I also realize the importance of informing students about the teaching schedule at the beginning of each class. Furthermore, I have implemented the suggestion to enhance student engagement by providing more opportunities for them to practice the language. I encourage students to contribute more to the class discussion than I do. However, a challenge arose as some students were shy and hesitant to speak. They lacked the confidence to open their mouths. (Stella, second reflective feedback session, 09/03/2022)

In the final interview, as she reflected on the enhancements in her teaching, she highlighted the influence of the suggestions provided by other teachers during group discussions and feedback sessions. These interactions heightened her awareness of key

aspects of her practice, including the significance of reviewing materials before concluding a class and the need for improvements in time management and content preparation quantity. Notably, addressing the latter was a significant challenge for her before she joined the study. The following are her specific statements on these identified improvements.

In the past, perhaps I didn't pay attention to everything, but now I take a moment in each class to consider your advice and suggestions from other teachers. The research of the past three months has certainly had a significant impact on my teaching. For example, now, before the end of each class, I summarize the main points for the students. Such summaries are very useful for them. Additionally, in the past, I used to prepare a lot of content for each class but often couldn't cover it all, causing me a lot of anxiety. Now, I prepare a bit less content, ensuring that I can comfortably cover what I've planned for the class. I have a better sense of time management in each class now. (Stella, second semi-structured interview, 28/04/2022)

Nevertheless, she also noted some neutral changes. Scholars argue that a primary function of reflection is to enhance participants' awareness of their behaviors and practices (Dewey, 1933; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Farrell, 2015). However, this heightened awareness may present potential challenges for teachers who are newly integrating reflective approaches into their professional practice. Stella stated, "There's a possibility of both positive and negative impacts. Every time I teach now, I think about what I need to do, and it might have its benefits, but it feels more forced and unnatural. Perhaps before, I was a bit more chaotic in class, but definitely more natural than now." Nevertheless, she acknowledged that this may be indicative of her ongoing development of a new teaching style and approach. The transitional phase is challenging and feels somewhat unnatural; however, she firmly believes that once she has fully embraced this new mode of teaching, it will ultimately benefit both teachers and students. She sees this as an iterative, spiral process.

According to my field notes, at a technical level, Stella gradually paid more attention towards the student learning process. This was evident in her incorporation of additional interactive activities to enhance student engagement, including increased dialogue exercises through pair work and the introduction of more diverse questioning techniques. Additionally, she intentionally introduced more captivating games, such as

word games and role-playing activities, aiming to foster student interest. These observations substantiate Stella's own awareness of her pedagogical enhancements.

Dapeng

In relation to Dapeng's growth in this study, especially in terms of critical-level development, much has been discussed about in the sections “4.1.2 Participants’ evolving understanding of reflective practice” and “4.4.1 Participants’ perspectives on the value of reflective practice in professional development”. Here, I primarily highlight specific examples of his growth at the practical level.

Dapeng identified a notable change during the research process, primarily in the enhanced pacing of classroom activities. This improvement led to more seamless transitions between segments and precise management of both time and content for each lesson. Additionally, Dapeng highlighted the significant improvement in student participation as another crucial change. These two aspects remained focal points for him from the beginning of his participation in the study until its end, reflecting his evolving growth. During his initial reflective feedback session on 22/02/2022, he remarked:

Summarizing before dismissal, I believe, is very important, so these past few days I've dedicated at least five minutes in each class specifically for reviewing the key points of the lesson with the students. Additionally, I wasn't used to writing on the board much, but after your suggestion last time, I've started doing so.

Later, in the reflective journal on March 7th, he elaborated further: “Reviewing at the beginning of the class, summarizing before dismissal; encouraging collective repetition and practice of the main points of the lesson; increasing student participation in class and providing opportunities for active learning.” From initially focusing solely on summarization, this time he began to consider student engagement and reviewing at the beginning of the class.

In the second reflective feedback session on March 19th, Dapeng began to notice an increase in student engagement within the classroom, along with improved time management during lessons. He expressed:

Through this month and a half of correction, I've taken care of most of the students. For example, if a student is corrected and the issue he raised may be important and informative for other students, and when he finishes, everyone

repeats it again together. Therefore, all students in the class have also been engaged in.

Moreover, I feel much better about managing time now compared to before. I don't wait until the last minute before the bell rings to start summarizing with students or assigning homework. Overall, teaching is better in terms of time management and maintaining order. Consequently, all tasks can be completed as a whole.

In the third feedback session on April 3rd, Dapeng elaborated on the evolution of student interaction. He articulated:

Over these past few weeks, I've noticed some subtle changes with this student, such as paying attention to the level of interaction with each student. So, I'm quite satisfied that I can put into practice the identified areas I've been thinking about lately that are worth improving.

He finally concluded his improvement of classroom management during the second interview on May 07, he stated:

Now the classes are more coherent, with smoother transitions between different segments. For instance, we start with a retrospective preview, then have transitional activities in between, and finally end with a recap. Consequently, I'm able to manage time better in almost every class, making the lessons more organized. Additionally, I'm able to guide students through these steps based on the conclusions drawn from reflection. Therefore, both I and the students benefit to some extent.

Furthermore, Dapeng highlighted that his teaching materials and board work were more visualized. He integrated images and utilized key words to aid students in grasping the meanings of new vocabulary. This alteration had also been recognized by his Italian colleagues who collaborate with him.

In addition to the specific teaching changes mentioned above, reflective practice had positively impacted Dapeng's professional work. He noted that he took more frequent notes during work, documenting important experiences from both learning and work rather than simply listening and forgetting. This note-taking process aided in establishing the general structure of newly acquired knowledge which could be shared with colleagues in future exchanges. Furthermore, he expressed his intention to promote reflective practice as an important method among peers.

Finally, Dapeng also remarked that reflective practice had bolstered his confidence in teaching. He shared:

I think another aspect is increased self-confidence. I feel more comfortable during class. For example, when I am teaching, I have a clearer understanding of my teaching behaviors, the effects on student learning, and their responses. This understanding also extends to selecting teaching materials, students' attention in class, and considering the impact of the entire class or teaching environment, including the work environment, on our teaching.

Mario

Mario's transformation is evident on both psychological and practical levels. Given his extensive teaching experience focused on Chinese culture and his self-identification as a cultural teacher, he candidly acknowledged, "I wasn't a language teacher before, and my language skills were, and perhaps still are very poor." Previously, he predominantly employed a lecture-style approach in cultural classes, and this teaching style significantly influenced his language instruction. However, upon participating in this study, he identified a notable shift—becoming more empathetic towards students, fostering a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Reflecting on this change, he shared:

The main change is about empathy. I might have been too aggressive before. So, every time I have a problem with someone, especially a student, I wanted to force the student to understand me and to follow me on my own path. Now, I understand more clearly that every student has his own path, and I can, at least, accompany him on his own journey, but I cannot force anyone. (Mario, second semi-structure interview, 02/05/2022)

To substantiate his observations, Mario provided a concrete example from one of his first-year classes, consisting of only three students. Initially deeming it as the most challenging class he had ever taught, Mario perceived two students as passive until the only active student was absent for a lesson. He realized that the initially labeled 'passive' students were, in fact, cooperative and active. This realization highlighted the impact of his own biases, sparking concerns about the class dynamics. Consequently, Mario acknowledged that this event had a profound effect on his teaching approach, prompting a shift in perspective toward his students. He expressed, "I really changed in my teaching approach."

As an embodiment of his altered teaching approach, Mario initiated a practice of providing students more room for self-expression and endeavored to minimize his own influence within the class. He articulated this shift, stating:

Now, I usually give them more space. And it is not just a matter of exercising pronunciation or writing or whatever, but more space in the debate about the subject matter. So, before, I used to do my job from the beginning to the end. And that's all. But now, I started to give space to the students and surprisingly found that some of the students become very interested in the subject. But this surprise in my class was covered by the shadow of my influence before. So, I need to reduce my shadow on the class. In simple words, I need to reduce my ego.

And now, I assure you, it is a real pleasure to listen to them, not only to speak to them but also to listen to them. For example, when we studied Daoism and Confucianism, especially with the second one, they became more active and more participative. (Mario, second semi-structure interview, 02/05/2022)

In light of this evolution in his teaching, he recognized that, “We can go deeper into the subject by integrating the reflection, ideas, and opinions of the students within the lesson. And their opinions, even if they are perhaps naive or even wrong, can help us to understand the subject of philosophy better.”

Furthermore, Mario displayed increased reflective practices throughout the research process, showcasing a more comprehensive understanding of classroom issues. Rather than solely attributing blame to external factors, he began acknowledging potential issues within himself. He expressed:

I thought that the problem was within the students, but I found that the problem was in me, or maybe it's half and half. But I was only trying to manage the students' problem, completely ignoring my own issues toward them. And this, in itself, was a problem – a problem of understanding, a problem of mindfulness, a problem of honesty. Because I was not honest with myself. Maybe I was too proud, too self-confident, thinking I was a good teacher. So, the problem couldn't be my problem. And now, I have to change my mind. (Mario, second semi-structure interview, 02/05/2022)

Through reflection, Mario began to perceive potential issues from the students' perspective, recognizing that this approach "not only made it easier to understand the

students but also facilitated problem-solving." He referred to this process using the Chinese educational phrase "教学相长 learning through teaching".

In conclusion, as documented in his reflective journal entry on March 10, his participation in this research led him to assert, "Over time, I have changed, and I believe that my results are now greater and better."

4.6.3 Barriers to implementing reflective practice in teaching

While teachers acknowledged the value of reflective practice and its role in fostering positive changes in their teaching methods, it is undeniable that they encountered various challenges throughout the research process. Hence, delving into the barriers of reflective practice and addressing these difficulties will enhance the effectiveness of teachers in implementing reflective methods. This, in turn, will lead them toward greater achievements in their professional development.

Time is the foremost obstacle for nearly every participant when attempting to incorporate reflective practice into their teaching. Giulia, Rosa, Stella, and Dapeng all identified time as the major obstacle.

Several factors contribute to the time constraints faced by participants. First of all, for in-service teachers, they need to prepare lessons, deliver daily classes, and continually enhance teaching materials and methods. Additionally, numerous administrative tasks, such as conducting at least one to two meetings with parents to give feedback on students' learning progress every semester, demand a considerable portion of teachers' time. Dapeng aptly pointed out, "Because of the nature and schedule of our work, we do not have much spare time for reflective research and learning."

Secondly, aside from their school responsibilities, all participating teachers, except for Mario, held short-term contracts. This meant that, in addition to teaching, they managed personal commitments during their free time. For instance, Dapeng was pursuing another master's degree, Rosa engaged in a part-time job after school, and Stella had to take care of her family and children. Stella shared, "My top priority each day is organizing my classes and planning the day's lesson. Consequently, I must prioritize writing lesson plans first before considering to family matters, leaving reflection for the last available time."

Thirdly, given the time-intensive nature of teaching, it also consumes considerable energy from educators. Giulia and Rosa highlighted that, after finishing their classes

each day, they would arrive home late, feeling exhausted and disinclined to undertake additional tasks. Giulia expressed, "We often finish in the afternoon very late, and there are many tasks to do. I usually return home around seven. After that, I really don't want to do anything related to school but prefer to focus on other activities."

Lastly, the written form of reflection exacerbates the challenge of time constraints for in-service teachers. Many perceive writing reflective journals as an additional workload, contributing to feelings of overwhelm. Dapeng, Giulia, and Stella found writing reflective journals challenging. Stella shared that, although she sometimes lacks time to write, she consistently reflects on her daily classes. Dapeng highlighted the time-intensive nature of journal writing, stating, "The process of writing reflective journals takes a lot of time. It isn't simply filling out a form or writing a report; it takes a lot of time to think. So, I think it is unrealistic to incorporate it into our daily teaching." This barrier emphasizes the importance of finding practical and efficient ways to integrate reflective practice into the already busy schedules of in-service teachers.

Besides the time constraint, the second obstacle is a lack of opportunities for collaboration. Both Rosa and Stella emphasized that while reflection can be an individual effort, it becomes more enriching when there are others to discuss it with. Dapeng also underscored the significance of collaboration among teachers but critiqued the current situation, stating, "There are very few collaborative discussions. In the past, due to unfamiliarity with reflective teaching and research collaboration, teachers hesitated and felt shy. They often feared plagiarism, criticism, and judgment. Addressing these concerns could be a key avenue to transform the current state of education in Italy."

The third obstacle mentioned by teachers in incorporating reflective practice into their teaching is related to personal characteristics, including traits such as inertia, overconfidence, and fear of judgment. Dapeng identified inertia of thought as a significant hindrance, stating, "I think inertia is a big enemy. Overcoming it is challenging, and reflection serves as a means to motivate ourselves. However, developing a reflective habit is difficult and demands considerable time and effort." In contrast, Mario underscored the role of personal character, citing overconfidence as a notable barrier. He candidly shared, "One of my biggest obstacles is my self-confidence. I believed everything was going well because I considered myself a good teacher." Moreover, in my observations, I noticed that some participants, especially novice teachers like Giulia and Rosa, sometimes felt stressful and concerned about being

judged during the research process. When we discussed potential issues in their classes, they seemed quite sensitive and defensive. Rosa expressed, "Initially, it wasn't easy to hear the negatives about my lesson." These kinds of negative feelings could pose a challenge for participants in fully engaging with the research.

The last issue raised was related to technology. Technical problems, including malfunctions and connectivity issues, can disrupt the smooth execution of reflective processes, causing inconvenience and interruptions in the reflective practice workflow. Giulia was the only participant who faced such technological challenges, especially when writing reflective journals on her mobile phone.

4.6.4 Participants' willingness to use reflective practice in the future

Throughout the project, participants cultivated a more profound and positive understanding of reflective practice, yielding favorable outcomes as outlined above. Simultaneously, they acknowledged the presence of numerous barriers hindering the application of reflective practice in their teaching. Therefore, whether they intended to continue using reflective practice in the future became an interesting question to explore. During the second semi-structured interview, we delved into their willingness to incorporate reflective practice into their future teaching.

Rosa exhibited an open-minded and proactive attitude to reflection during the research. She devoted a significant amount of time to this introspective process, expressing, "I used to reflect a lot on everything to the point where my head is exploding sometimes." When asked about her plans to continue utilizing reflective practice in her teaching after the project, she responded positively, stating:

This is something I would like to continue doing. I will keep in contact with Teacher Mario and Teacher Stella; this can be useful to maintain our relations with other teachers. It can be beneficial, for example, if you have other teachers with whom you can discuss your difficulties on different topics. This is something I would like to go on because we are in the same place, we are all in the same city, and exchanging experiences is something that gives us more opportunities with the classes and more materials to work on with the students.

(Rosa, the second semi-structured interview, 03/05/2022)

In contrast to Rosa, Giulia maintained a more conservative stance regarding her commitment to continuing with reflective practice. She openly expressed her concerns about the time constraints associated with the writing process and articulated, "I find

writing the reflection for me is the hardest part because it takes me a lot of energy and time which I don't have right now. So, in the future I wish I could use reflective practice in teaching. I always say so, but I don't know if I'm able to do it.”

In response to this question, Stella offered a positive affirmation. Furthermore, she recommended regular reviews of this method with teachers and suggested providing more opportunities for cooperation and classroom observation. She expressed:

I will definitely use it. I believe reflective practice is really helpful for teachers and can transform our teaching methods. Therefore, I think the entire school should adopt this method, as it will undoubtedly yield positive results. However, it would be better if there is a refresh. I think if teachers want to be reflective practitioners, they need, for example, maybe one or two opportunities for collaboration or classroom observation every year. If teachers can only reflect alone and have limited opportunities for communication, after a while, we may lose the capacity and attention on the reflection. (Stella, the second semi-structured interview, 28/04/2022)

Whether to use reflective practice in the future does not appear to be an issue for Dapeng, he shared, “Since I have already formed the habit, I won’t stop using it. Moreover, once you acquire reflective practice as a teaching skill or method, you will actively incorporate it as a tool.”

Mario also provided a positive response to this question, underscoring that reflective practice has influenced his approach to giving students more space to express themselves. He articulated:

“For sure. I will change my approach in the future for sure. I will change some of my lessons. Because, for example, when I teach Chinese philosophy— Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—I was used to do my lesson, finish it, and say goodbye. But now, I discover that we can go deeper into the subject by integrating the objections of the students, the reflections, the ideas, and the opinions of the students within the lesson. And their opinions, even if they may be naive or even if they may be wrong, can help us to understand better the subject of philosophy or whatever the subject of that lesson. So, every time I teach Chinese culture in the future, I will give them more time in order to listen to their opinions.” (Mario, the second semi-structured interview, 02/05/2022)

As we can see, nearly every teacher expressed a positive commitment to integrating reflective practice into their future work, rather than stopping its use after the study

concluded. The path to becoming a sophisticated and professional teacher is undoubtedly a lifelong journey filled with learning and challenges. Teachers must consistently uphold belief in self-awareness, engage in self-exploration, and conduct self-evaluation. Additionally, they should maintain the desire for personal transformation and a passion for developing their own theories. I believe reflective practice will assist them in making informed decisions, fostering meaningful interactions, and cultivating fulfilling professional lives.

Chapter 5 Discussion of results and conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study represents an initial exploration of how a purposefully selected group of high school in-service CSL/CFL teachers understand the concept of reflective practice and how reflective practice influences their professional development within a cooperative context in Italy, drawing from qualitative study methodologies (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020) and case study approaches (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Five participants voluntarily took part in this study who were invited to discuss their understanding of reflective practice and reflect upon their teaching experiences within their natural contexts. They were also encouraged to share their perspectives and discuss any difficulties encountered with their peer teachers. The sampling strategies employed in this research included snowball sampling, convenience sampling, and maximum variation sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, introductory workshops covering critical concepts relevant to this research, one-on-one reflective feedback sessions, classroom observations, reflective journals, e-portfolios, and my field notes.

Each chapter in this thesis illustrates different stages of the research progress. The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the rationale and aims of this study, along with a comprehensive literature review on core concepts such as teacher professional development, reflective practice, reflective instruments, and critical comments on reflective practice in chapter 2. In the following chapter, I offer the rationale for the chosen methodologies and provide a detailed description of the procedures used to conduct the research. On the basis of data collected with the methodology, chapter 4 offers a comprehensive description of the findings to the research questions.

To conclude, this final chapter begins with a review of the research questions and a discussion of the findings in relation to these research questions, contrasting the obtained results with the theoretical framework upon which this research was based. This was carried out with the aim of providing empirical data to address existing issues and debates, thereby contributing to the current literature on reflective practice in the professional development of Chinese language teachers. It proceeds to discuss the implications for Chinese language teachers, Chinese language teacher education and in-service training programs, as well as for future research, followed by an examination

of the limitations of this research. Finally, a comprehensive conclusion summarizing the entire study will be presented at the end.

5.2 Discussion of findings

In this section, I will analyze the findings according to the research questions addressed in this study and discuss their contribution to the existing literature of reflective practice.

5.2.1 What is the participants' understanding of reflective practice before and after participating in this study?

This is a fundamental question to this research. The first sub-question – what is the participants initial understanding of reflective practice and their engagement – explores whether the participants know and understand the concept of reflective practice and if they use it in their teaching practice. Although reflection and reflective practice remain central in professional education programs (Mann and Walsh, 2013; Farrell, 2021), their adoption in the field of TCSOL is relatively limited (e.g., Wang, 2015, 2019). Therefore, the answer to the first question can provide the rationale of the entire research that the topic is worth of study and essential for enriching the existing literature. According to the findings, all the participants expressed that they had limited knowledge of this concept when they joined in the study, with only Dapeng having some familiarity with reflective approach but never systematically integrating into his daily practice (more details, please see Section 4.2.1). This result effectively addresses the research gap mentioned above and underscores the importance and value of the subsequent questions.

The second sub-question – what is the participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice – seeks to explore effective approaches for fostering teachers' reflective abilities and, through such approaches, examines teachers' diachronic understanding of reflective practice. This question delves into the theoretical background of reflective practice formation - why reflective practice is important, the essence of reflective practice - what reflective practice entails, and specific methods of reflective practice - how reflective practice is carried out.

Technical rationality, advocated by positivist paradigm, has been a dominating ideology in language education for a long time which posits that problems can be resolved through rigorous scientific methods and specialized expertise (Schön, 1983; Finlay, 2008). Influenced by technical rationality, scholars have sought optimal methods to enhance student learning in second language education for years and

therefore, various teaching methods have been proposed and applied in classrooms, including grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, total physical response, communicative language teaching, and more (Lou, 2008; Richards and Rodgers, 1999), believing that mastering these methods equips the practitioners with the ability to deliver an efficient language class. However, McDonough and McDonough (1997) argue that the traditional teacher education programs often overlook the complexity of specific context and the practitioners' background, beliefs, personal characteristics and experience. Instead, they emphasize rote memorization of vast amounts of content and passive absorption of popular teaching methodologies without active engagement or critical evaluation (Martínez,2018).

In response to technical rationality, since 1980s, teacher education has experienced a historical shift, with increasing recognition of the complexity of teaching and greater emphasis on teachers' autonomy, which has prompted studies that explores teachers' comprehensive and qualitative perspectives (Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Borg, 2006). Reflective practice has emerged as a prominent approach within this context, which views practitioners as autonomous individuals, capable of analyzing, understanding, and improving their teaching practices through reflective inquiry. This approach fosters their personal and professional development and marks a departure from the traditional top-down education and training models.

However, Martínez (2017) notices that numerous studies on reflective practice have been carried out in controlled environments, such as teacher education courses or with pre-service teachers enrolled in ELT undergraduate programs. These controlled settings diverge significantly from the natural contexts of everyday teaching, where teachers confront demanding schedules and are subject to diverse institutional norms and regulations. As a result, the outcomes of reflective practice research for ongoing teacher development and teaching methodologies may vary depending on the research context in which a study is conducted. Therefore, she suggests that reflective practice should involve the practitioners in authentic teaching situations, enabling them to develop self-awareness and understanding of their teaching methods through practical experience and comprehend the underlying principles guiding their decision-making process and practices. Consequently, they can make informed, evidence-based decisions to enhance their teaching effectiveness and promote student learning.

Considering the insights from Martínez's research (2017), the present study was implemented within the participants' natural teaching scenarios, employing systematic

procedures such as interviews, classroom observations and follow-up one-on-one reflective sessions, regular reflective journal writing and the establishment of e-portfolios. These reflective tools utilized aimed to more effectively engage teachers in the research process and yield more reliable responses (Hobbs, 2007). Furthermore, to minimize disruption to teachers' schedules, the research agenda, timing, and location for conducting the study were carefully negotiated with the participants.

In conclusion, the participants' evolving understanding of reflective practice underwent comprehensive and fundamental development, encompassing its essential connotations. They perceived it as a deliberate and systematic inquiry demanding rigor, capable of augmenting self-awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of their practice and thoughts, aligning with the insights of Dewey (1933) and Farrell (2012). Furthermore, they underscored its capacity to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately leading to transformative changes and professional growth for teachers. The participants emphasized the versatility of reflection, noting that it can occur from various perspectives, including their own, students', colleagues', and experts' viewpoints (Finlay, 2008; Farrell, 2021). They confirmed the significance of the reflective tools to enhance reflection, such as maintaining reflective journals, establishing e-portfolios, and engaging in collaborative efforts with peers. Furthermore, their new understanding of reflective practice covered all type of the reflection: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983), and reflection-for-action (Killion and Todnem, 1991) (see Section 4.2.2).

From the conclusions above, we can infer, firstly, that reflective practice skills can be greatly enhanced through systematic training and practical application. Secondly, it can be inferred that the reflective methods and approaches adopted in this study are effective in cultivating teachers' reflective abilities and enhancing their awareness of practice, which can provide valuable references for future reflective research.

Therefore, it is valuable to recap once more the methods of systematically applying reflective practice utilized in this research (see more details in Section 3.9), as they hold significant reference value for in-service teachers and future in-service teacher education and training programs.

Given that all participants were unfamiliar with the concepts of reflection and reflective practice, I organized a two-hour workshop (see Appendix 7) to introduce essential concepts such as reflective practice, cooperative learning, e-portfolios, and professional development for teachers. Through this workshop, participants were

encouraged to integrate reflective practice into their daily routines by keeping reflective journals and establishing their own e-portfolios. During the workshop, I provided instructions on creating an e-portfolio using Google Sites to showcase their experiences, skills, and teaching materials, etc.

Following the workshop, participants were encouraged to write reflective teaching journals regularly, specifically twice a week, and to upload these journals to their e-portfolios or send them to me via email. These journals served as a written account of various dimensions of their teaching experiences and beliefs, including classroom events, providing them an opportunity for thoughtful reflection on their professional work. To support their reflection, a Reflective Question List (see Appendix 9) was provided, outlining four stages of the reflection process: 1) Concrete Experience, 2) Reflective Observation, 3) Analysis, and 4) Action Plan. This structured approach facilitated a comprehensive reflection process for the teachers.

Additionally, three classroom observations were conducted for each participant to examine their progress after embedding reflective practice into their teaching. During these observations, I took non-judgmental field notes on classroom issues and participants' responses. To avoid disrupting regular teaching, I aimed to remain invisible, simply observing classroom activities, tasks, pedagogical skills, body language, and spoken words.

Aligning field notes with teachers' self-reflections was crucial. To achieve this, a one-on-one reflective feedback session was conducted after each observation, allowing for data triangulation. This approach helped track each participant's progress. Each follow-up session was divided into two parts. In the first part, teachers engaged in self-reflection, sharing their feelings about the class and explaining their instructional decisions, while I listened attentively. In the second part, the session became a discussion and feedback exchange, where I acted as a "critical friend", engaging in reflective dialogue and offering constructive suggestions to enhance their reflective capacities.

Moreover, three group discussions were held during the research period. Each teacher prepared 2-3 issues they were concerned about or wished to resolve, which were then discussed with the group. Other teachers provided solutions or suggestions based on their experiences and theories. These discussions offered insights into the main issues each teacher faced at different stages.

Importantly, the systematic approach was negotiated and tailored to fit the

participants' real-life teaching scenarios. The research agenda, tools, and methods of implementing reflective practice were discussed with the participants, considering their daily teaching schedules, institutional regulations, and other specific circumstances to ensure the process did not impose on their routines.

5.2.2 What are the prominent themes in the reflections of the participants?

The second research question focused on the key topics that participants reflected upon by the participants during the research period. This study primarily utilized the categories outlined by Ho and Richards (1993) as the primary framework, supplemented by the classifications proposed by Farrell (2014) and Yan and Luo (2014) as starting points for data analysis (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4.1). Six main categories were identified and listed by the frequency of occurrence, from most frequent to least frequent: classroom teaching, evaluating teaching, self-awareness and professional development, educational environment, learners, and theories of teaching.

The first three most discussed themes occurred 405, 249 and 213 times respectively out of 1240, accounting for 32.67%, 20.08% and 17.18%, totaling nearly 70%. This result differs from Farrell (2014)' findings, where the top three frequent mentioned themes were school context, perceptions of self as teachers, and learners, collectively account for over 70% of all comments. The potential reasons contributing to this difference include the participants in Farrell's research being experienced teachers, who no longer encountered as many challenges in classroom teaching but found the school context to have a greater impact on their teaching practices. In contrast, in my research, the Italian Chinese teachers, particularly the two novice teachers, still had numerous problems within the classroom, including classroom management, time management, and teaching materials, among others.

Research suggests that experience and the nature of context are two primary factors that significantly influence the breadth of teachers' reflection (Lane, et al., 2014; Collier, 1999; Lee, 2005). The finding of this research affirm that experience can be an important factor influencing the teachers' reflection focus. The breadth of topics reflected upon by experienced teachers was wider than that of novice teachers. Novice teachers tended to focus on events within the classrooms. In contrast, experienced teachers not only observed classroom events but also considered teaching theories and the broader educational context, recognizing their impact on teaching practice. However, my findings did not indicate the context significantly affected the participants'

reflective focus.

Ibrahim et al. (2012) indicate that the presence of a mentor who provides feedback and guidance influences the breadth of participants significantly. This study also confirmed the importance of outsiders' perspectives in teachers' reflections. Teachers in this study affirmed that the group discussions with other peer teachers and reflective feedback sessions with the critical friend (the researcher) helped them become aware of many previously invisible problems.

In addition to these factors, I discovered that participants' formal educational backgrounds also significantly influenced the content of their reflections. It was noted that participants tended to reflect less on teaching theories in comparison to other themes, with only a few mentioning theories such as Chinese linguistics, second language education, and pedagogical theories. Furthermore, novice teachers, particularly Giulia, who had recently begun her job a few months ago, exhibited limited professional pedagogical skills.

Finally, it is imperative to delve into primary challenges encountered by the participants, as understanding these challenges can facilitate teacher educators and relevant stakeholders in tailoring teaching education and training programs more effectively. Several key aspects deserve more attention: 1) In-service teachers, especially novices, exhibited a deficiency in Chinese language and pedagogical skills; 2) Existing local Chinese language teaching materials and resources were found to be inadequate in meeting the needs of teachers effectively; 3) Concerns regarding future career uncertainties were heightened among teachers due to temporary contracts, despite their overall job satisfaction; 4) Administrative responsibilities outside of teaching posed challenges for teachers, detracting from their ability to focus on teaching; 5) A notable absence of professional and targeted teacher training opportunities, particularly for Chinese language educators, underscores the necessity for schools to provide comprehensive support in this area.

5.2.3 What is the level of their reflection -- Is it descriptive or reflective?

This inquiry delved into the participants' levels of reflection, utilizing the reflective framework proposed by Larrivee in 2008 as the analysis basis (see Section 2.3.3). It is important to note that higher levels of reflection are not necessarily superior than lower levels (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Collin et al. (2013) critique the practice of grading reflective processes into various levels for two primary reasons. Firstly, this approach

tends to oversimplify reflective practice by categorizing it as either good or bad, thereby creating a binary distinction among practitioners. Secondly, it tends to elevate certain reflections above others. Consequently, this study adopted a similar stance to theirs, asserting that all levels of reflective practice are important for teachers, and that the choice between them “depends more on pedagogical circumstances than on the teacher's capacity to reflect” (p.110). Ultimately, the quality of reflection should be assessed not by the specific level attained by the teacher, but by the diversity and depth of levels integrated into their reflective practice.

The results revealed that experienced teachers showcased a greater reflexivity than novice teachers. This conclusion was not solely based on the frequency of participants reaching higher levels of reflection, but rather on their efforts to integrate theories into practice, thereby ensuring consistency between educational theories and classroom actions. Additionally, experienced teachers demonstrated greater awareness of the moral, ethical, and social implications of their teaching practices (see Section 4.4).

Based on these results, we can infer that the depth of teachers' reflection is closely related to their experience and educational background, which is consistent with Liu's (2017) findings on the depth of reflection among student teachers. Furthermore, besides experience and educational background, participants' feedback indicated that support from other teachers and the researcher during the research process also significantly influenced the depth of reflection. Discussions during group meetings and reflective feedback sessions inspired deeper thinking about their teaching and encouraged a focus on the societal impact of their teaching practice.

Many researchers have observed the interaction between the breadth and depth of reflection. Davis (2006) suggests that as teachers' knowledge develops (including knowledge of learners and learning, subject matter, assessment, and instruction), teachers are more likely to demonstrate a deeper level of reflexivity. This research aligns with the findings of these studies regarding the interplay between the breadth and depth of reflection.

5.2.4 How does the use of E-portfolios impact the teachers' capacity for reflective practice in a cooperative learning context?

The use of reflective tools can effectively foster the development of reflection (Jaeger, 2013; Hobbs, 2007). Mann and Walsh (2013) highlight the dominance of written forms of reflection over oral forms of reflective in the literature of reflective practice,

advocating for a more dialogic and collaborative approach. In this research, reflective feedback session with critical friend, group discussions were primary reflective tools, supplemented by e-portfolios and reflective journals. Therefore, this research question investigated the importance of these reflective instruments and the potential challenges associated with them.

The findings indicated that in-service teachers preferred one-on-one reflective feedback sessions with a critical friend and group discussions, as they believed these activities provided valuable opportunities to collaborate with peers, share teaching difficulties, and receive tailored, practical feedback. Another advantage of this cooperation is psychological support and comfort. Nearly every teacher noted that discovering fellow teachers faced similar challenges brought a sense of relaxation and empathy. However, there was a lack of cooperative opportunities with other Chinese language teachers beyond the scope of the research, highlighting the need for more such opportunities (see Section 4.5).

It is worth noticing Dapeng's case, where he, an oral teacher, had to cooperative with an Italian teacher responsible for grammar instruction. In Italian secondary schools, it is common to pair a grammar teacher with a native Chinese-speaking teacher for Chinese language instruction (Zhu and Sun, 2014). Zhu and Sun (2014) analyzed this cooperative model and identified two issues: firstly, an unclear division of teaching tasks, and secondly, frequent discrepancies in grammar explanations between local teachers and native speakers, leading to suboptimal collaborative outcomes. These issues also emerged in Dapeng's case. Additionally, Dapeng mentioned the challenge of frequently adjusting his teaching based on the progress of the grammar teacher, causing considerable difficulty. Therefore, in the final interview, Dapeng expressed a preference for one-on-one feedback, citing its targeted and effective nature, while other teachers generally favored group discussions.

Numerous studies suggest that e-portfolios are valuable tools for reflective practice, providing multimedia space for systematic documentation of teachers' experience and materials, thus offering concrete evidence to assess their practice and enhance their professional development (e.g. Abrami and Barrett, 2005; Pitts & Ruggirello, 2012; Shepherd and Skrabut, 2011). However, participants in this study acknowledged that while e-portfolios were considered essential for teaching, particularly in the technological era, they were often viewed more as databases rather than tools for reflection and professional development.

Despite reflective journal is recommended as a critical reflective tool in enhancing practitioner' reflection in many studies (e.g. Ho and Richards, 1993; Ryan, 2011; Farrell, 2013, 2018), and it was also perceived helpful for reflection, but time constraints posed a significant challenge for in-service teachers. In addition, Rodgers (2002) revisits Dewey (1933) insights on the process of reflection and outlines a four-stage framework, including presence to experience, description, analysis and intelligent experimentation. Nevertheless, due to their lack of formal educational background, the content of their reflections in journals was often limited, staying the first two stages of reflection process and focusing mainly on descriptions of classroom events and evaluations of teaching outcomes.

However, cooperation among teachers can effectively address this issue. Group discussions and/or one-on-one reflective feedback sessions provide a space for teachers to share their challenges, inspiring others to reflect on whether they face similar issues. In fact, Rosa, Stella, and Giulia all mentioned directly that during discussions, they discovered many issues they usually overlooked. Furthermore, cooperative occasions provide opportunities for everyone to analyze the underlying reasons behind these issues together, seek for solutions, and ultimately apply them in practice. Cooperative reflection can more efficiently complete the reflective process. However, effective cooperative discussions require a safe and mutually respectful environment to ensure that the issues raised by teachers are valued and treated respectfully; otherwise, individuals may feel negatively judged.

5.2.5 How does reflective practice enhance the professional development of teachers?

This final research question was explored from four perspectives: 1) the value of reflective practice in professional development; 2) the impact of reflective practice on teachers' practice and instruction; 3) barriers to implementing reflective practice in teaching; and 4) participants' willingness to use reflective practice in the future.

Reflective practice is a valuable instrument for teachers to critically assess their teaching methods, pinpoint strengths and growth areas, and enhance the quality of their instruction. This process fosters professional development by enabling teachers to identify areas for improvement, facilitate personal growth, offer cost-effective professional development, and transform into reflective practitioners (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Freeman, 2016; Farrell, 2015, 2021). The

participants in this study positively acknowledged the value of reflective practice in transforming their cognition, improving their awareness of their practice and the process of student learning, and thus leading to personal and professional development. For instance, Rosa enhanced her confidence in her knowledge and abilities in classroom teaching and Stella became much more aware of her teaching and student engagement, while Mario even said that the reflective practice had reformed his teaching approach “forever” (see Section 4.6.1).

Before investigating the diachronic changes after the teachers’ adoption of reflective practice, I conducted an analysis of their teaching styles based on my field notes from first classroom observations. Understand these teaching styles is crucial for gaining insights into the current state of Chinese language education in Italy, an area still lacking in comprehensive research. Generally, with the exception of Dapeng, who employed a more contemporary teaching approach, the other participants predominantly utilized traditional and teacher-centered teaching methods, showing less emphasis on interactive, communicative and constructive teaching approaches such as communicative language teaching and task-based methods. Despite expressing a desire for increased student participation in interviews, the observed reality revealed a lack of opportunities for student engagement in the classroom. Novice teachers, in particular, encountered significant challenges in managing their classrooms effectively (see Section 4.6.2.1).

By the conclusion of the study, each participant exhibited positive pedagogical or cognitive changes to a greater or lesser extent, which were correlated with their individual experiences and the degree of open-mindedness to reflective practice. As Dewey (1933) stated, open-mindedness is a crucial trait for reflective practitioners. For instance, Rosa and Stella, who approached reflective practice with a more positive attitude and willingness to experiment, underwent more significant changes and development compared to Giulia, who displayed a comparatively more conservative stance towards the research (see Section 4.6.2.1).

In terms of barriers to implementing reflective practice, several factors were identified, including time constraints, limited opportunities for collaboration, personal characteristics such as inertia, overconfidence, and fear of judgement, and potential technological issues. Despite these obstacles, all participants expressed a positive intention to continue using reflective practice in their future work.

5.3 Implications of this study

This study is an initial attempt to address the research gap concerning the lack of research in reflective practice in the field of Chinese language education, providing support for the use of reflective practice as a multifaceted thinking approach aimed at nurturing teachers' abilities in reflection, as required by the *Professional Competence Standards for International Chinese Language Teachers (2022)*. It also provides fresh and first-hand dialogic and data-led evidence that underscores the crucial role of reflective practice in fostering the ongoing professional development of practitioners (Mann and Walsh, 2013). Moreover, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on reflective practice on in-service participants, thus diversifying the scope beyond the predominantly emphasis on pre-service teacher education programs (e.g. Collin et al., 2013; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Lane et al., 2014; Liu, 2017).

This study is important for Chinese language teacher education and in-service training programs, particularly within the context of Italy. It introduces a novel teaching approach that emphasizes teachers' autonomy in their professional development, equipping them with a systematic understanding and detailed guidance on reflective practice. Next, I will delve into the implications of this research. Firstly, I will address its implications for Chinese language teachers, particularly those teaching in Italian high schools. Secondly, I will explore its implications for Chinese teacher education and in-service training programs. Lastly, I will outline some of the challenges existing within the current state of Chinese language education in Italy.

5.3.1 Implications for Chinese language teachers

In this section, I will discuss the effective methods that teachers consider helpful for developing their reflective abilities and advancing their professional development during the research process, aiming to provide Chinese teachers with useful suggestions.

5.3.1.1 Forming or Joining a development group

The first suggestion is to create and/or join a professional development group with other Chinese teachers. Group discussions were regarded as the most useful reflective tools by the participants, fostering their reflective abilities and professional development. Such discussions provide opportunities for sharing experiences and gaining a comprehensive understanding of different scenarios through the diverse perspectives (Farrell, 1999, 2014). Gustavsson et al. (2019) indicate that group discussions nurture a collegial learning environment and enhance the teachers' pedagogical and didactical

competence, fostering an open attitude toward each other's teaching practice.

This group is suggested to adopt a flexible and informal structure. However, Farrell (1999) cautions that too much flexibility might result in members coming and going for trivial matters, ultimately causing the group to drift. Therefore, it is necessary to establish some ground rules, such as negotiating a fixed time to meet that is suitable for every member, determining the duration of each meeting, and encouraging active participation.

A certain level of external input is essential for the group. Individuals and groups in a process of professional development require external challenges to enrich their reflection (Ur, 1993). This external input can come from professional journals, observations by other teachers, and insights from experts.

Lastly, creating a safe and trusting discussion environment is crucial. Havnes (2009) indicates that team cohesion and a sense of safety are vital conditions for the success of teacher groups. Farrell (1999) suggests during the discussion, anxiety often arises when sharing concerns and difficulties, which may hinder critical reflection. Therefore, individuals within the group should foster a non-threatening environment themselves.

5.3.1.2 Establishing critical friendship through classroom observation

Critical friendship is another efficient approach to reflective practice according to the participants which can offer targeted and specific insights about one's own class. Costa (2008) suggests that critical friendship involves a trusted colleague who asks thought-provoking questions, provides alternative perspectives, and offers constructive critiques in a supportive manner. The feedback provided within this framework aims to bolster a colleague's professional growth and advocate for their work, rather than focusing solely on evaluation or judgment (Costa, 2008).

Therefore, it is recommended that teachers find a trusted friend who is also a Chinese language teacher. They can observe each other's classes, then agree on a convenient time for both of you to discuss and analyze the observed situations in class, and brainstorm solutions together. This process helps teachers examine their teaching from another perspective, identify issues that they often overlook, and thus improve their teaching and students' learning outcomes.

5.3.1.3 Keeping reflective journals regularly

Reflective journals function as written records, capturing diverse facets of teaching experiences such as classroom events, and providing them with an opportunity “to step back for a moment to reflect on their work” (Farrell, 2018, p.3). Despite significant time constraints posing challenges for in-service teachers to maintain reflective journals, the participants, particularly the two novice teachers, still found them useful for improving their teaching skills. It provides them with dedicated time to calm down and reflect on what occurred in their classes. Dewey (1933) observed that teachers who fail to critically reflect on their work become enslaved to routine.

For in-service teachers, there might not be enough time to maintain teaching journals daily. Therefore, teachers can allocate 30 minutes once or twice a week to write and review their teaching records for that week. It is worth noting that participants in this study often restricted their reflective journal entries to basic descriptions of classroom issues and evaluations, lacking in-depth analysis. Hence, it is recommended that when teachers write reflective journals, they consult Appendix H of this study - Reflective question list for teachers. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this question list is to support and guide teachers' thought processes, rather than to compel them to answer each question one by one. Appendix H not only covers overall classroom reflections but also encourages reflection from various angles, such as the teaching process, outcomes, methods, and more. Teachers can use these diverse perspectives as references, focusing on one to two aspects each time to conduct thorough analyses of underlying issues and identify potential solutions.

5.3.2 Implications for Chinese language teacher education and in-service teacher training programs

Arguably, the primary contribution of this study is to furnish substantial evidence regarding the effectiveness of reflective practice on teachers' continuous professional development, while also identifying the potential issues within the Chinese language teacher education and in-service teacher training programs. In Italy, there were 279 institutes, comprising approximately 8% of the total number of Italian high schools, offering Chinese courses, with an estimated involvement of around 17,500 students in 2017 (the Intercultural Foundation, 2017). A stable supply of qualified Chinese teachers is key to ensuring the sustainable development of Chinese language education.

However, currently, there exists only one master's program in Chinese language teacher education in Italy, established through collaboration between the Confucius

Institute of the University of Naples L'Orientale and the University of Naples L'Orientale (Jin and Shi, 2019). Upon joining this study, Stella was enrolled in this program and noted the absence of reflective practice within its curriculum. Additionally, at the time when the participants of this study first joined the research project, they all indicated a lack of understanding of reflective practice. However, once introduced to the method of reflective practice, they displayed a keen interest in applying this new approach for their professional development. This suggests a potential need for more Chinese teacher education programs that incorporate reflective practice and foster opportunities for cooperative learning within their curricula to enhance teachers' reflective capacities for teaching.

On one hand, there is a lack of relevant pre-service Chinese language teacher education programs, while on the other hand, tailored in-service training for Chinese language teachers is also scarce. According to participant reports, although their schools occasionally provide some teacher training opportunities, there is a dearth of programs specifically designed for Chinese language educators.

Presently, many in-service Chinese language teachers possess inadequate formal training in Chinese language education. Analysis of classroom observations indicates that the instructional approaches of in-service Chinese language teachers remain conventional and teacher-centered, lacking essential pedagogical knowledge and skills. Therefore, there is a pressing need for more targeted in-service training initiatives tailored for Chinese language educators.

These programs should ideally gather information beforehand regarding the primary challenges faced by in-service teachers and their desired areas for professional development to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, based on the findings of classroom observations, it is evident that participants, particularly novice teachers, still require essential training in specific areas such as inquiry-based teaching methods and classroom management techniques. Provision of assistance in these areas through in-service teacher training programs could potentially offer more effective solutions to the challenges encountered by teachers in their professional practice.

5.3.3 Implications for future research

Based on the research findings, it is evident that there remain several noteworthy challenges in the realm of Chinese language education in Italy. Nonetheless, effectively tackling these issues necessitates broader adjustments and alignment with educational

policies and social support mechanisms. The following references are provided as potential avenues for further exploration in the fields of Chinese language pedagogy and teacher development.

First of all, there are relatively few stable teaching positions currently. In this study, most participants exhibited a notable lack of assurance regarding their future career prospects. Therefore, the implications of this insecurity on the career choices of Chinese language teachers and its impact on teaching and student learning outcomes deserves more attention.

Secondly, the cooperation between Chinese and Italian teachers is not highly efficient (Zhu and Sun, 2014). On the one hand, participants perceived limited opportunities for cooperative exchange. On the other hand, cooperation between Chinese and Italian teachers when teaching a class together is not consistently optimal. Identifying an effective approach to cooperation, increasing communication between Chinese language teachers across different schools, and fostering collaboration among Chinese language teachers within the same school require further research.

Thirdly, according to teachers' feedback, current indigenous teaching materials fail to meet the needs of educators. Some content is deemed outdated, while certain exercise designs lack diversity. Furthermore, there is a shortage of supplementary resources for certain cultural themes. Consequently, exploring the design and development of updated and locally adaptable teaching materials for Chinese language instruction, as well as organizing and providing convenient teaching resource packages for in-service teachers, warrants further investigation.

Last but not least, Chinese language teaching in Italian primary and secondary schools has been developing for nearly two decades. Although the Chinese language teaching syllabus was issued as early as 2016, Chinese language teaching still lacks macroscopic guidance and support at the policy level. There are significant discrepancies among different schools in terms of teacher numbers, curriculum design, textbook selection, and class scheduling, inevitably resulting in considerable divergence in student learning outcomes. Additionally, there is a lack of continuity between Chinese language teaching in high schools and universities. Drawing from my experience teaching at the university level, students graduating from different high schools exhibit significant variations in their proficiency levels in Chinese language. Nevertheless, university Chinese language programs fail to differentiate between students with varying proficiency levels; all students commence from the same starting

points, which is unreasonable for those with prior knowledge of Chinese. Addressing these discrepancies among schools and ensuring continuity across different educational levels requires further attention.

5.4 Limitations of the study

Although the researcher endeavored to ensure the rigor of the research methodology and the thoroughness of the data collection process, and implemented a purposive and representative sampling strategy, certain limitations were nonetheless present in this study.

The most significant limitation is about the time, including time constraints, study duration, and the timing of this research. Firstly, time constraints posed the biggest obstacle. Throughout the research period, both myself and the participating teachers juggled our own busy schedules and responsibilities. For the participants, besides their teaching duties, they had to manage additional administrative tasks required by the school. For example, Stella and Dapeng have explicitly stated their considerable time investment in attending class meetings every month. Additionally, apart from Mario, the other teachers were on short-term or part-time contracts, resulting in busy daily schedules outside of school. Stella had family commitments, Rosa held a part-time position at another school, and Dapeng devoted his spare time to pursuing another master's degree. These factors, both within and outside the school environment, exert varying degrees of influence on teachers' commitment to the research.

Secondly, the duration of the study also emerges as a potential issue. Although qualitative scholars acknowledge that the variability in time spent in the field depending on the specific qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2020). However, from the perspective of this study, I believe that if the duration could have been longer, such as an additional semester, the changes in participants' teaching practices through reflective practice might have become more evident, leading to greater professional and personal growth. Consequently, the research findings could have been more comprehensive and in-depth. However, due to the aforementioned time constraints faced by participants and practical considerations regarding doctoral research, extending the duration proved challenging.

The last issue related to time concerns the timing chosen to conduct the research. When data collection concluded, I asked the participants if they had any suggestions for refining the research design. All of them expressed satisfaction with the progress

and their participation in the research process. However, Mario provided an interesting piece of feedback. He suggested that conducting the research during the first semester, from September to January, would be preferable. Mario reasoned that during the first semester, he might have had more free time to dedicate to the study, whereas the second semester typically involves more administrative tasks, meetings, and holidays.

The second critical limitation of this study is the language barrier. Due to my limited proficiency in Italian, the research could only be conducted primarily in Mandarin Chinese and English. However, with the exception of Dapeng, the native language of the other four participants is Italian. This inevitably affected their performance during the research. The language barrier created communication and comprehension challenges between the researcher and the participants. While interviews, reflective feedback sessions, group discussions, and reflective journals are fundamental methods for data collection, conducting these activities exclusively in Chinese or English may have hindered participants' ability to fully express themselves or articulate their thoughts and experiences in their native language. This could have potentially led to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or incomplete responses, compromising the quality and depth of the data collected.

Fortunately, all the participants are proficient in English. Throughout the research, if I encountered important content that I didn't fully understand, I adjusted my questioning approach. Occasionally, I even utilized my limited Italian skills to confirm my understanding with the participants. I believe that through these methods, the majority of the data collected is sufficient and significant. However, it must be acknowledged that Stella's preference for conducting interviews and research primarily in Chinese significantly limited her expression and comprehension. As a result, the data regarding Stella is relatively less extensive compared to other participants. Despite this, Stella demonstrated one of the most positive attitudes towards reflective practice changes, indicating that she undoubtedly benefited from the research.

The third limitation concerns the absence of students' perspectives regarding changes in their teachers' participation in the study. Although all participants noted that during the research period, as they made changes and progress in their teaching, they observed numerous positive changes in their students as well. For instance, when Rosa attempted to introduce more interactive and practice opportunities for her students, initially they were unfamiliar with the new approach and engaged in playful behavior. However, they quickly adapted and became more engaged and attentive in class.

Despite these observations, due to various ethical considerations, data collection did not include the students' viewpoints regarding the changes after their teachers joined the study, nor did it capture any progress in the students' learning experiences and attitudes toward the Chinese class. Examining changes in both teachers' and students' learning outcomes or attitudes from the students' perspective could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of reflective practice.

This limitation underscores the need for a multi-dimensional approach to data collection in reflective research, encompassing perspectives from both teachers and students. By including the student viewpoint, researchers can gain insights into the reciprocal influences between teachers and students within the reflective practice framework, thereby enriching the analysis and interpretation of research findings. Moving forward, future studies should strive to address this limitation by incorporating student perspectives, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of the impact of reflective practice on teaching and learning dynamics.

Last, it is necessary to discuss the limitation arising from the researcher's subjectivity. Creswell (2013) emphasizes the importance of the subjectivity of researchers own lens, acknowledging the powerful position they hold in research and viewing the participants as the co-constructor of qualitative research. Tracy (2020) also recognizes self-reflexivity as a core concept of qualitative research, suggesting the researcher's background, values, and beliefs fundamentally shape their approach to and conduct of research.

In this current study, I made a conscious effort to leverage my subjectivity as a valuable resource for the research. Prior to commencing the study, my robust educational background and extensive experience in Chinese language learning and teaching enhanced my credibility among participants, establishing a foundation of trust in my qualifications to conduct the research. This expertise proved particularly beneficial during one-on-one reflective sessions, where I assumed the role of a critical friend for the participants. Feedback from teachers highlighted the professionalism and relevance of my insights, fostering deep discussions and ensuring that my input was valued and respected. Furthermore, my easy-going personality facilitated to build strong rapport with participants, creating a comfortable environment for teachers to candidly share their insights during interviews and feedback sessions. In short, I aimed to utilize my subjectivity as an asset in the research process, capitalizing on both my expertise and interpersonal skills to enrich the depth and quality of the study.

However, despite my best efforts to minimize bias, subjectivity still poses challenges. There is always a risk that my personal perspectives could inadvertently influence data collection and analysis, potentially compromising the objectivity of the research. Additionally, while my insights may provide valuable context, they may also limit the generalizability of findings to broader populations or contexts. In order to keep a balance between the advantages and pitfalls of subjectivity, I endeavor to uphold methodological rigor through strategies such as thick description, data triangulation, and member reflection, and strive to maintain neutrality through careful consideration and ongoing reflexivity during the process of data analysis and interpretation.

5.5 Conclusion

Due to the lack of research on reflective practice in Chinese language education, this study explored the impact of reflective practice on the professional development of a purposeful group of in-service CSL/CFL teachers in a cooperative learning context in Italian high schools. Five teachers voluntarily participated in this study, where they were introduced the concept of reflective practice and encouraged to systematically apply it into their daily teaching routines, aiming to improve their self-awareness and their professional development, with the help of the reflective instruments such as group discussions, critical friend, e-portfolios and reflective journals. Throughout the research process, numerous cooperative opportunities were provided to the participants, enabling them to share their perplexities and experiences encountered in their practice. Data for this research were gathered from semi-structured interviews, reflective feedback sessions, introductory workshops, classroom observations, reflective journals, e-portfolios, and my field notes.

Five research questions were addressed in this study. The results of the first question indicated that all participants had limited knowledge and little engagement in reflective practice when they joined this study. However, through the systematic process of research, they developed a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of reflective practice, which aligned with insights of many influential scholars such as Dewey (1933), Schön, (1983), Richards and Lockhart (1994), Zeichner and Liston (1996), and Farrell (2012). These findings suggested, firstly, that reflective practice skills can be enhanced through systematic training and practical application, and secondly, that further research on reflective practice should be carried out in the field of Chinese language education.

The second research question focused on the prominent topics reflected upon by the participants during the research period. Six main categories were identified and listed by the frequency of occurrence, from most frequent to least frequent: classroom teaching, evaluating teaching, self-awareness and professional development, educational environment, learners, and theories of teaching. Several noteworthy aspects emerged. Firstly, the breadth of topics reflected upon by experienced teachers was wider than that of novice teachers, indicating that the scope of teachers' reflection is influenced by their teaching experience. Novice teachers tended to invest more attention on events within the classrooms, such as classroom management, time management, and teaching material, etc. In contrast, experienced teachers not only observed classroom events but also considered teaching theories and the broader educational context, recognizing their impact on teaching practice. Secondly, participants generally reflected less on teaching theories compared to other themes, and few mentioned theories, such as Chinese linguistics, second language education, and pedagogical theories. This may be attributed to their lack of formal educational background. Thirdly, there was considerable variation in the emphasis on Chinese language teaching among schools. Some schools not only employed dedicated oral language teachers but also allocated more hours to Chinese language classes per week, while others did the opposite. Lastly, teachers faced several main challenges: 1) In-service teachers, especially novices, generally lacked knowledge in Chinese language and pedagogical skills; 2) Existing local Chinese language teaching materials and resources did not effectively meet the needs of teachers; 3) Temporary contracts caused concerns among teachers about future career uncertainties, despite their enjoyment of their jobs; 4) Administrative tasks outside of teaching posed difficulties for teachers in concentrating on teaching; 5) There was a lack of professional and targeted teacher training opportunities, particularly for Chinese language teachers, highlighting the need for schools to provide support in this area.

The third research question investigated the reflective levels of the participants. The findings revealed that experienced teachers exhibited higher levels of reflection compared to novice teachers. This was evidenced by their efforts to integrate theories into practice, ensuring alignment between educational theories, personal beliefs, and classroom actions. Experienced teachers also demonstrated greater awareness of the moral, ethical, and social implications of their teaching practices. These findings underscored the significance of teaching experience as a determinant of reflective levels.

The fourth question examined the importance and potential challenges associated with various reflective instruments in reflective practice research and application, including critical friend feedback, group discussions, e-portfolios, and reflective journals. The findings indicated that in-service teachers preferred group discussions and one-on-one reflective feedback sessions with critical friend, as they believed these activities provided valuable opportunities to cooperate with peer teachers and tailored and practical feedback. However, there was a lack of cooperative opportunities with other Chinese language teachers beyond the scope of the research, highlighting the need for more such opportunities. While e-portfolios were deemed essential for teaching in the technological era, they were often viewed more as databases rather than tools for reflection and professional development. Reflective journals were considered helpful for reflection, but time constraints posed a significant challenge for in-service teachers. Additionally, due to their lack of formal educational background, the content of their reflections in journals was often limited, focusing mainly on descriptions of classroom events and evaluations of teaching outcomes.

The final research question discussed about the significance of reflective practice, its role in the participants personal growth and professional development, as well as the potential challenges of its implementation in teachers' daily practice. All participants positively confirmed the value of reflective practice in fostering their professional development. In order to assess their changes following the application of reflective practice, I firstly described participants initial teaching styles at the beginning of the research, mainly based on my field notes from the first classroom observations. Generally, except Dapeng, all the other participants employed traditional and teacher-centered teaching styles with less emphasis on contemporary interactive, communicative and constructive teaching approaches, such as communicative language teaching and task-based methods. By the end of the research, all the participants experienced varying degrees of positive pedagogical or cognitive transformations, which were correlated to the participant's experience and the degree of open-mindedness to reflective practice. Regarding to barriers to implementing reflective practice, several factors were identified, including time constraints, limited opportunities for collaboration, personal characteristics (e.g. inertia, overconfidence, fear of judgement), and potential technological issues. Despite these obstacles, all participants expressed a positive intention to continue using reflective practice in their future work.

In summary, this study provided valuable insights confirming that reflective practice is an essential approach for continuous professional development of CSL/CFL teachers in Italy. However, in order to realize the potential of reflective practice in fostering teachers' professional development, it is crucial to ensure the availability of appropriate reflective tools, cooperative opportunities and support systems. This underscores the need for further research and integration of reflective practice into teacher education and training programs for TCSOL.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - First Contact Email with Potential Participants

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Qingqin Tan, a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Verona, under the supervision of Prof. Barbara Bisetto.

I got your contact information through SOMEONE. As an experienced Chinese language teacher, your expertise aligns with the focus of my research project, which aims to enhance Chinese language teachers' professional development through reflective practice.

The research explores the concept of reflective practice and its impact on professional development, utilizing E-portfolios and fostering collaborative opportunities among educators. More comprehensive details about the study and myself are enclosed in the attached document.

I am reaching out to inquire if you would be interested in participating in this research. Your insights and experiences would be invaluable. Should you be willing and available, I kindly request a short online interview, which would last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Your participation will greatly contribute to this study.

Please feel free to contact me for any additional information or clarification you may require. Your time and consideration are sincerely appreciated.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to a potential collaboration.

Yours sincerely,
Qingqin Tan

Appendix 2 - Introduction to the Research Project

About the research

This Ph.D. project aims to enhance the professional development of Chinese language teachers through reflective practice. The study is specifically designed to explore the current understanding of reflective practice among teachers and its impact on their professional development through the creation of E-portfolios in cooperative learning context.

Research procedures, methods and time

During the research, your participation will involve **one introduction workshop** on the method of reflective practice, **two semi-structured interviews** and **three one-on-one reflective feedback sessions**, **three classroom observations**, and **three group discussions**.

Two semi-structured interviews will be conducted at the beginning and end of the study to assess your diachronic understanding of reflective practice over time and its impact on professional development. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be recorded with your permission.

Before the study officially starts, there will be **a workshop** to introduce fundamental concept about reflective practice and teachers' professional development. The workshop is expected to last around 1.5 to 2 hours and will be video-recorded with your consent.

The researcher will **observe your classroom teaching** for three times, potentially scheduled once every two weeks. Non-judgmental field notes will be taken during the observation. Follow each observation, I will invite you to a **one-on-one reflective feedback session** to discuss about your teaching activities in the class. Each reflective session is expected to last 45 minutes and all the sessions will be recorded with your permission.

You will take part in three **group discussions**, possibly once every two weeks, focusing on addressing classroom issues or discussing concerns related to your career. Each discussion will last around one and a half hours.

This entire study process is estimated to span between two to three months, requiring approximately 10 hours of your time in total.

Confidentiality and right to withdraw

As the researcher, it is my responsibility to safeguard and ensure the confidentiality of your personal data throughout this study. Your privacy will be protected by the use of pseudonyms. You will have access to transcripts of your interviews and research findings. Should you find any inaccuracies or wish to make changes, you are encouraged to do so.

All collected data and relevant materials will be strictly utilized for research purposes. Findings resulting from the analysis may be presented at academic conferences and used for scholarly articles. Following the completion of my Ph.D., the data will be retained for two years, allowing for potential future re-analysis for further publications.

You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Potential benefits of participation

Beyond the researcher's sincere appreciation for your invaluable participation and contribution, you will also benefit from:

1. Potential improvement in personal and professional skills in Chinese teaching;
2. Opportunities to discuss the problems and difficulties you encountered in teaching with peers and the researcher;
3. Practical support for your daily teaching practice provided by the researcher;
4. Consultation and assistance concerning research methodology, including but not limited to action research, ethnographic approaches, and case studies, based on the researcher's expertise.

Data collected in this research will be probably shared within my supervisor's research group and other relevant members of the University of Verona community, under the supervision of my Ph.D. thesis supervisor. Sharing will strictly adhere to research purposes only and will not be disseminated or communicated to external parties.

I truly appreciate your time and participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at qingqin.tan@univr.it or reach me on my mobile number: 334-3093635.

Thank you a million in advance,

Qingqin Tan

Appendix 3 - Introduction to the Researcher

My name is Qingqin Tan. I am a **second-year** Ph.D. student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Verona. I have been studying in Italy since October 2020.

From September 2015 to August 2019, I worked as a visiting Chinese lecturer at the Confucius Institute of University College Cork (UCC). During this time, I also undertook the role of CI coordinator for the Chinese teaching staff since 2016. My responsibilities included training new Chinese teachers in UCC's teaching regulations and norms. **My motivation** to research Chinese teachers' professional development originated from my working experience during this period. I found it was a predominant problem facing by most of my Chinese colleagues.

I earned my M.A. degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other languages (TCSOL) from Beijing Normal University (BNU) and I was the recipient of the Award for Excellent Graduation Student of Beijing and the Award for Excellent Graduation Student of Beijing Normal University in 2015.

I used to work as a volunteer Chinese language teacher at North Bangkok University in Thailand from May 2013 to March 2014, where I was honored with the Award for Outstanding Volunteer Chinese Teachers of Hanban in 2014 when I left this position. Additionally, I worked as a Chinese teacher for various summer programs and served as a part-time Chinese lecturer at Beijing Union University while studying at BNU.

I have published two journal articles based on my teaching experience in Thailand. One was published in 2014 under the title of "*Problems of Chinese Education in Universities of Thailand and Possible Solutions: A Case Study of North Bangkok University*". The other, as the second author, was published in 2015 under the title of "*A Study on the Framework for Chinese Volunteer Teacher' Competence in the United States and Thailand*".

Appendix 4 - First Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Qingqin Tan

First, thank you very much for your time to participate in this interview and, most important, for your willingness to be part of this project. Your contribution is immensely valuable. My name is Qingqin Tan, you can call me Qingqin during the interview. I am currently a second-year PhD student at the University of Verona under the guidance of Prof. Barbara Bisetto.

In this research, I will explore the preliminary understanding of reflective practice among CSL/CFL teachers in Italy. Additionally, my aim is to assist in fostering their capacity of reflective practice, ultimately facilitating their professional development and personal growth. In order to transcript properly, I request for your permission to record the interview. Please be assured that all information shared during our conversation will be treated with strict confidentiality and used for research purposes only. Moreover, once the transcription is complete, I will provide you with the opportunity to review and confirm its contents. The interview will last around 45 minutes to 1 hour. Please feel comfortable to communicate openly and freely during our conversation.

Part one: Background information

Name	
Date and Time	
Gender	
Educational background	

1. How many years have you been studying Chinese?
2. Have you taken any proficiency test like HSK? If so, what levels have you achieved?
3. Why do you want to become a Chinese teacher?
4. Could you share some of the challenges you've faced in becoming a Chinese teacher in Italy, both professionally and in your daily teaching?
5. How long have you been teaching Chinese? Do you teach exclusively Chinese or other subjects as well?

6. What is your position in your school? Is your teaching role part-time or permanent?
Do you only work in one school?
7. How many hours do you teach every week?
8. Where is your work place/ school?

Part two: On Reflective Practice

1. Do you have access to specific professional development opportunities or teacher training programs provided by your school or external sources?
2. How do you actively seek to enhance your teaching practice? Can you share specific strategies or methods you use for professional improvement?
3. Have you learned about “reflective practice” and can you please describe your current understanding of "reflective practice" as manifested in your teaching?
4. Do you reflect on your teaching practice regularly? If yes, do you use any tool to facilitate your reflection? Can you give a specific example when you reflect on your teaching practice?
5. Do you collaborate with colleagues? If so, what does this cooperation entail? Is it a regular occurrence, and what topics or contents do you typically discuss? How do you feel about the cooperation?
6. Have you used e-portfolios for your teaching? If yes, could you share any experiences or challenges associated with using e-portfolios?
7. Considering your initial understanding of reflective practice, would you consider integrating it into your teaching? What potential obstacles do you foresee in applying reflective practice?
8. Do you know any other Chinese teachers nearby?
What are your expectations or anticipated outcomes from participating in this project?

Thank you once again for your valuable participation in this interview!

Appendix 5 - Second Interview Protocol

Interviewer		Time and Date	
Interviewee		Place	

Thank you very much for participating in this project. As you know, I am working under the supervision of Prof. Barbara Bisetto. The aim of this project is to explore preliminary understanding of reflective practice among CSL/CFL teachers in Italy and attempt to support them to cultivate their capacity for reflective practice, thereby promoting their professional development and personal growth.

After incorporating reflective practice into your teaching over the last three months, we come to the second interview now, aiming at further understanding your experiences. In order to transcript accurately, I kindly request your permission to record the interview. I assure you all of your responses during the interview will be strictly confidential and for research purposes only. Additionally, once the transcription is complete, I will provide you with the opportunity to review and confirm its contents. Therefore, I hope you can communicate freely during our conversation. The interview is expected to last approximately one hour.

Interview questions:

1. After participating in the research project, what is your current understanding of reflective practice?
2. Would you please share some specific examples illustrating how reflective practice has affected your teaching in the last few months?
3. Would you please describe briefly how keeping reflective journals has influenced your reflection and teaching? Are there particular instances or changes that stand out due to journaling?
4. In your opinion, how effective has the reflective question list been facilitating your reflection and how? Are there any negative influences?
5. Could you please describe the impact of using E-Portfolios on your teaching methods and outcomes?
6. Do you find the one-on-one reflective sessions following classroom observations beneficial for your reflection and teaching? If so, could you provide specific examples that highlight their usefulness?

7. How have group discussions impacted your teaching practice? Could you share some specific examples?
8. Please rank the following tools for reflection—reflective journals, E-Portfolios, one-on-one reflections, and group discussions—from most useful to least useful in supporting your reflective process? Could you provide reasons behind your rankings for each?
9. In your opinion, what are the main factors that hinder your reflection in your daily teaching?
10. Having participated in this research project, does it meet your expectations? Which specific aspects aligned with your expectations, and if not, what aspects fell short, in your opinion?
11. Reflecting on your participation in this research, do you see any value of reflective practice? Will you incorporate reflective practice into your future teaching?
12. From your perspective as a participant, do you have any feedback or suggestions regarding the research design, areas for improvement, or recommendations for future research on reflective practice?

Thank you a million again for dedicating your time and participating in this study. Your insights are invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Appendix 6 - Consent to take part in research

Becoming a reflective practitioner: A case study of Chinese language teachers' professional development in a cooperative context

(Pursuant to Article 13 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679)

- ✧ I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- ✧ I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview (according to Article 15 and the following of the Regulation), in which case the material will be deleted.
- ✧ I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- ✧ I understand that participation involves a workshop, five interviews, three classroom observations and three focus group discussions.
- ✧ I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- ✧ I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- ✧ I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- ✧ I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in conference presentation, the researcher's Ph.D. dissertation and published papers.
- ✧ I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- ✧ I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the researcher's laptop and in his office.
- ✧ I understand the data collected will be probably shared within the researcher's research group and other appropriate members of the University of Verona research community under the supervision of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis supervisor and only for research reasons until two years after the Ph.D. degree is conferred to the researcher (Pursuant to "Conservation limitation principle" Article 5 of the Regulation).
- ✧ I understand that under freedom of information legalization (Article 15 and following of the Regulation) I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- ✧ I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Appendix 7 - Outline of the workshop

1. Welcome
 - 1.1 Introduction to workshop contents
 - 1.2 Workshop goals
 - Develop a better understanding of reflective practice and related concepts;
 - Cultivate ability to engage in reflective practice within your profession;
 - Reconsider the perception of teaching as technical rationality versus teaching as professional artistry;
- 2 Self-introduction and icebreaker;
- 3 Characteristics of an effective Chinese language teacher?
 - 3.1 Discussion on general characteristics of an effective teacher;
 - 3.2 Introduction to Standards of good Chinese teachers (e.g., *Professional Competence Standards for International Chinese Language Teachers*, 2022);
 - 3.3 Teacher in post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001);
- 4 Professional development of Chinese language teachers?
 - 4.1 Definition (Mann, 2005);
 - 4.2 Teacher's knowledge (Shulman, 1986): received knowledge (Bartels, 2005) and situated knowledge (Freeman & Johnson 1998);
 - 4.3 The importance of teachers' professional development?
 - 4.4 Achieving professional development: action research (Burns, 2009); reflective practice (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Richards and Farrell, 2005)
- 5 Reflective Practice?
 - 5.1 Origins and Definitions: Dewey, 1933; Schön's reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (1983) and more;
 - 5.2 Benefits of engaging in reflective practice;
 - 5.3 Attributes of reflective practitioners: Open mindedness, responsibility and whole heartedness (Dewey, 1933) and directness (Farrell, 2012);
 - 5.4 Levels of reflection (Larrivee, 2008);
 - 5.5 The process of reflective practice (Dewey, 1933) and some reflective models (Wallace, 1991; Kolb, 1984; Korthagen, 1985);
- 6 Introduction to action research
 - definition, approaches, models, etc.
- 7 Introduction to cooperative-learning and group discussion

- definition, benefits, process, etc.
- 8 Introduction to E-portfolios
 - definitions, purpose and benefits, contents, procedures for compiling a teaching e-portfolio;
 - 9 Open discussion and questions session
 - Participants can share thoughts, raise questions, and express their viewpoints.
 - 10 Workshop conclusion

Appendix 8 - Participant's Background Information Survey

1. Name you prefer to be called: _____
2. Gender: _____
3. Age range(Please tick “√” your answer):
 21 - 25 26-30 31-35 36 - 40
 41 - 45 46-50 51-55 56 - 60
4. What college degree(s) do you possess?
 B.A. M.A.(taught) M.A.(research) M.S. (taught)
 M.S.(research) Ph.D Ed.D. Others: _____
What is your major of your highest education qualification?

5. How many years have you taught Chinese? _____ years.
6. What types of courses have you taught (Please tick “√” your answer)?
 Comprehensive Chinese Listening and Speaking
 Reading and Writing Grammar Tutorial
Others _____
7. What is the name of your current school?

8. In which region is your current school?

9. What is the type of your current school (Please tick “√” your answer)?
 Private high school Public high school International high school
school Other _____
10. How many years have you taught at your current school? _____ years.
11. What grade(s) are you teaching now? _____
12. How many periods do you teach per week and how many minutes per period?
 periods per week minutes per period
13. Are you satisfied with your current teaching practice (Please tick “√” your answer)?
 Yes. Why? _____
 No. Why? _____

14. What aspects are your main concerns about your teaching practice (Please tick “√” your answer)?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching skills in general | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of Chinese language |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Students’ performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural activities organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum design and materials usage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers’ role |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The use of technologies and multimedia | |

Others _____

If you prefer, you can describe here in more details: _____

15. Does your school provide any in-service trainings for teachers’ professional development?

Yes No. If yes, please go to question 16; If no, please skip to question 18.

16. Are these in-service trainings specifically for Chinese language teachers?

Yes No.

17. How often does it take place?

18. What topics or subjects are covered in these in-service trainings?

19. Why do you want to participate in this study?

Appendix 9 - Daily Reflective Question List for Teachers

1. How do you think today's class went?
2. What were your objectives for today's lesson?
3. To what extent did you achieve these objectives?
4. Did students accomplish the goals you had planned for this class?
5. What aspects worked well in class today that you particularly liked? Is this usually successful? (Please refer to the *Question List for Positive Events* below)
6. What aspects did not work well, leaving you dissatisfied? Is this typically an area of concern for you? (Please refer to the *Question List for Unexpected Events* below)
7. Were there any unexpected events that particularly caught your attention? (Please refer to the *Question List for Unexpected Events* below)
8. Why are you paying special attention to the above-mentioned aspects?
9. Are there any important aspects that you might not be fully aware of?

Question List for Positive Events

Stage 1 -Concrete Experience

- What aspects worked well in today's class that you particularly liked?
- What action did you take, and how?
- What did students react and participate?
- What evidence supports your belief that it went well?
- What was the outcome of this situation?

Stage 2 -Reflective observation

- Why did you choose to proceed in this way?
- What preparations did you do for this?
- What were your feelings and thoughts before, during and after the events?
- In your opinion, what were the students' feelings and thoughts?

Stage 3 – Analysis

- How do you interpret or understand this event?
- What possible factors may have influenced your behavior and thinking during this event?
 - Self factors
 - Student factors
 - Contextual factors
- What aspects do you think you can improve upon in the future? How will you achieve this?
- What skills/knowledge do you need to develop, so that you can handle similar situations more effectively in the future?

Consulting colleagues or literature might provide further insight in this stage.

Stage 4 – Action plan

- What steps will you take when you face similar situations, based on your reflections?
- What the strengths and weakness of these actions? Are they practical and operational?
- What resources or assistance will you need?

Question List for Unexpected Events

Stage 1 -Concrete Experience

- What occurred in the class that did not work well?
- How did you respond to this situation?
- What actions did you take, and how?
- What did the students react and respond?
- What was the outcome of this situation?

Stage 2 -Reflective observation

- What was the outcome of the actions you took in response to this situation?
- What were the positive and negative aspects of these actions?
- What are your feelings now?
- What do you think the students are feeling now?
- Do you believe the situation has been resolved or not? Why?

Stage 3 – Analysis

- What are the potential reasons that led to this situation?
- Why did you handle it in this way?
- What possible factors might have influenced your behavior and thinking in this situation?
 - Self factors
 - Student factors
 - Contextual factors
- How do you interpret and understand this situation?
- What positive aspects can you identify in this situation?
- What skills/knowledge do you need to develop, so that you can handle similar situations more effectively in the future?

Consulting colleagues or literature might provide further insight in this stage.

Stage 4 – Action plan

- What steps will you take when you face similar situations, based on your

reflections?

- What the strengths and weakness of these actions? Are they practical and operational?
- What resources or assistance will you need?

Critical Aspects for Teachers' Reflection

1. Reflection on ourselves

- Am I **passionate** about my teaching? Am I **patient** to my students?
- is **the pace of my speech** appropriate for my students?
- Are the **teaching language** and **body languages** I use suitable and effective for my students?
- Do I **diligently prepare** for each class?
- What constitutes my **teacher identity**? (teaching beliefs, values, and role expectation, etc.)
- What factors influence my teacher identity?
- How does my teacher identity impact my teaching practice?

2. Reflection on teaching process

- Is the teaching design suitable and effective?
- Are my course contents appropriate, and is the information on the blackboard clear presented?
- Have I created a comfortable and engaging environment on the class?
- Is the allocation of teaching time reasonable?
- Have I provided enough opportunities for interaction?
- Have I ensured equal participation opportunities for all students?

3. Reflection on teaching outcomes

- Have I achieved my teaching goal, and have the students grasped the content?
- What evidence can demonstrate that I have accomplished my teaching goal?
- If yes, what were the successful aspects of the class? How can I further improve?
- If not, why? How can I improve my teaching outcomes in the future?

4. Reflection on the use of technologies

- What type of technologies did I apply in the classroom?
- Have these technologies improved my teaching outcomes?
- Have I fully utilized technologies to facilitate my teaching?
- What other technologies can I incorporate to improve my teaching?
- Do I possess sufficient competence in utilizing technologies, and how can I improve in this area?

5. Reflection on teaching methods

- What teaching methods do I primarily employ in my daily teaching routine?
- Can these teaching methods effectively achieve my teaching objectives?
- Are there alternative teaching methods that could enhance my teaching practice?

6. Reflection on teaching skills

- Do I ask questions in a variety of ways?
- Is my classroom management effective?
- Do I possess a wide range of effective teaching skills to maintain classroom discipline and engagement?

7. Reflection on teaching contents

- Are the teaching contents appropriate and practical for the students' needs?
- Can the teaching contents arouse students' interest?
- Can the textbook meet my teaching needs? If not, what can I do?
- What are the learning outcomes for students concerning these teaching contents?

Some Closure Questions for Each Lesson

——To assess the learning outcomes from the students' perspective

1. What was the class about?
2. What did you learn?
3. What was difficult for you?

Note: Through the first-round classroom observation, I find teachers rarely make use of the last five to ten minutes to summarize the lesson and to check the students' learning outcomes, therefore, I place these questions here for reference.

Appendix 10 - Data Collection Timeline

Activities	Time Frame
Reaching out to the foreign director of a nearby Confucius Institute with the support of my supervisor to obtain contact information for Chinese teachers in my local area.	November, 2021
Emailing potential participants to inquire about their interest in participating in the research project and requesting them to sign the Consent Form for participation.	December, 2021 - January, 2022
Conducting first-round interviews with potential participants to explore their personal and professional experiences, understand their motivation for choosing to become Chinese language teachers, and assess their initial comprehension of reflective practice.	December, 2021 - January, 2022
Conducting introductory workshops for participants to introduce essential concepts of this research, including reflective practice, cooperative learning, e-portfolios and teachers' professional development.	January-February, 2022
Conducting classroom observations and one-on-one reflective feedback sessions with each participant to examine their diachronic changes after integrating reflective practice into their teaching. Non-judgmental field notes on classroom issues were taken.	February–April, 2022
Organizing group discussions on topics or issues that participants were particularly concerned about or aimed to resolve.	February–April, 2022
Conducting second-round interviews to assess the evolution of participants' understanding of reflective practice over time and to evaluate the changes and developments they perceived in their teaching practices after integrating reflective practice.	April to May, 2022

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