



of journal writing. However, in the present study the teachers were selected as the participants, and the investigation of the effectiveness of journal writing in their critical thinking on the teaching process and its challenges was the aim.

### Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Further Studies

To answer the two research questions, the present qualitative study was conducted through several techniques of data collection including weekly journal diaries, weekly semi-structured interviews during the process of research, observations, and field notes. As the findings indicated, through experiencing the weekly writing of the journal entries as a way of enhancing critical thinking on teaching, the English teachers considered the causes of all the problems of the English classes and also they gradually increased their self-confidence to the degree that they declared themselves as the possible sources of some of the problems in their classes. Based on the finding of the study, it can be concluded that writing journal entries could be helpful in improving the EFL teachers' ability to think critically on the problems happening in their English classes. Also, as the findings of the journal entries, the interviews, and the observation notes in the last month of the study showed, both participants were aware of the effectiveness of the journal writing in improving their critical thinking. Therefore, it can be concluded that they had a positive view of reflecting on the events and the problems in their classes through the technique of writing journal diaries.

Indeed, the findings of the present study would help the EFL teachers realize the benefits of journal writing in enhancing critical thinking as a useful way of facing the challenges of teaching English to EFL

students. Also, these findings can be of help to other stakeholders such as designers of teacher training courses. They can become aware of the potential of diary and journal writing and the positive view of EFL teachers about these activities. They can include these activities in their teacher training programs.

Since the present study was conducted with the contribution of two female participants and in one English institute, the results need to be corroborated with future studies with more cases and both genders and several English institutes.

### Acknowledgements

Our many thanks go to Dr. Suesan Ghahremani-Ghajar for her great motherly support. Moreover, we would like to appreciate our dear participant teachers who kindly helped us. We are also grateful to the editor-in-chief of Roshd Foreign Language Teaching Journal, Dr. Mohammad Reza Anani Sarab for his insightful comments on this paper.

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*Figure 1.* The Distribution of Common Points (1: Describing the Class, 2: Describing the Problems of the Classes, 3: Teachers' Attempts to Continue the Process of Teaching Even When They Dealt with the Problems, 4: Satisfaction of Teachers with the Process of Teaching, 5: Teachers' Attempt to Find the Origins of the Problems, 6: Teachers' Self-Confidence to Blame Themselves as the Causes of Problems) in Journals and Interviews During Three Months

To answer the second research question and to know about the participants' perceptions of the process of the study and its effectiveness in reflective teaching, the following points were extracted from the journal entries and the interviews in the last month of the study.

-I think it was a nice experience, because journal writing makes me think about what happened in my class. Since I started to write journals, I've become more careful about the events in my class. I think I can pay more attention to the details in the class. (12<sup>th</sup> interview, A)

- It (journal writing) affects the view that a teacher has about her class. When we come to the teachers' office, we usually mention the serious problems, but I think journal writing makes a teacher think about the problems. I suppose that it would be good if all the teachers of the English institutes write one journal after each session of their classes. (11<sup>th</sup> interview, B)

- I think that writing journals helps me a lot with understanding my students in my classes. Now I really like thinking more about the problems of my

classes. (11<sup>th</sup> journal, A)

- When I think more deeply about what happened in the class, I find more than one way to treat my students in that situation. So I think about the best alternative to be used for the same situation in the future. To do so, journal writing is very helpful. (11<sup>th</sup> journal, B)

In fact, their mentioned points in the journal entries and the common responses in the interviews pointed out that they were aware of the benefits of journal writing procedure in drawing their attention to the origins of the problems of their classes. Besides, they had a positive view of the process of journal writing.

This common point was admitted by the researchers' observations and field notes. As it was observed, at the last weeks of the data collection process the two participants had a more positive view of following the process of study and even were interested in writing weekly journals and taking part in the weekly interview sessions.

Indeed, the findings of the present study had some common points with Ghahremani-Ghajar and Mirhosseini (2005); as the findings of both studies indicated, the process of dialogue journal writing provided the individuals with opportunities for reflective thinking. Also, the participants of both studies had positive views of writing journal entries as they acknowledged that this process increased their ability to think more critically. It is worth noting, Ghahremani-Ghajar and Mirhosseini (2005) included high school students as the participants of their study and they helped their teenage participants be empowered and "express their voice" (p. 286) through the process

- Maybe if I had said one or two sentences in Persian, it would have made them (the students) talk a little more, or helped them not be shy any more. I mean, in this way, maybe they felt better and were more comfortable to talk in the class. (9<sup>th</sup> interview, A)

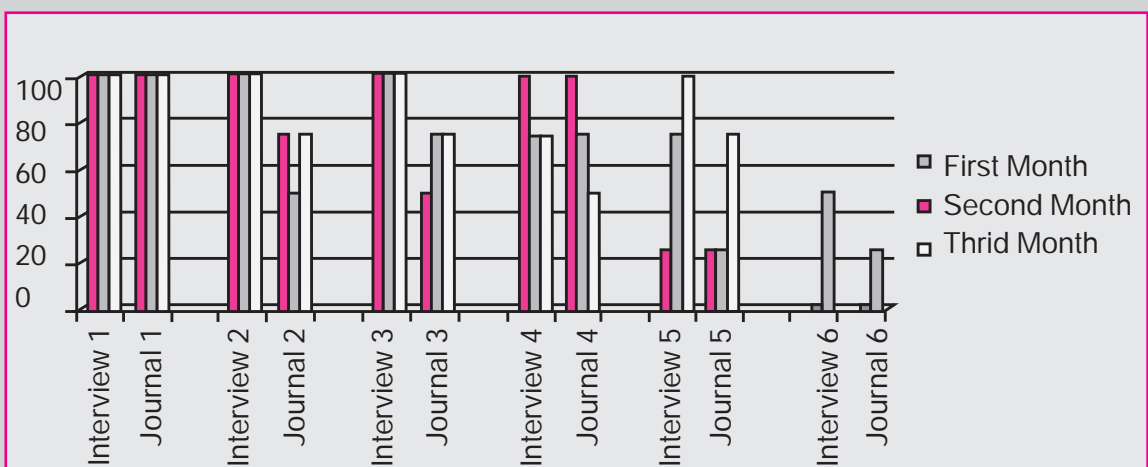
-After teaching the entire reading text, the students were still puzzled about the meaning of the new text. It was because I taught the first part (some new words) in the previous session. I shouldn't have done so. (11<sup>th</sup> interview, B)

- Maybe it was because of my behavior. Sometimes it is our fault. But, we do not acknowledge our fault. Only, we blame the students that they do not understand, or they are stupid ... but sometimes we are responsible for the fault. We don't understand, or we would like to blame others. (10<sup>th</sup> journal, A)

**Based on the finding of the study, it can be concluded that writing journal entries could be helpful for improving the EFL teachers' ability to think critically on the problems happening in their English classes**

What they mentioned regarding this common point was in line with the researchers' field notes. In fact, the two participants were more comfortable while they were discussing the problems of their classes in the interview sessions at the end of the study in comparison with the first interviews. In other words, in the last weeks they stated some possible sources including themselves as the origins of the problems of their classes without being embarrassed and without being worried about the possibility of being blamed for their lack of ability to manage their classes.

The following figure illustrates the rate of occurrence of each common point during the three months period.



Some sentences in the journal entries and interviews indicated that the teachers' critical minds were activated to search for the origins of the problems in the class. This common point was more evident in the semi-structured interviews in the last two months and in the journal entries in the last month (i.e. in 25% of the journals and interviews in the first month, in 25% of the journals and in 75% of the interviews in the second month, and in 75% of the journals and in 100% of the interviews in the third month). In fact, through comparing the rate of occurrence of this common point with the ones mentioned above, it became clear that reflecting on the events which occurred in the classes and thinking critically on the origins of the perceived problems improved during the three months. The observed improvement can possibly be the result of the process of journal writing and also the discussions held in the interview sessions between the researchers and the participants. Some instances of teachers' reflection are presented below.

- After the class I was thinking about this problem ... I wished the writers of this method (CLT) hadn't given theories and principles before experiencing four or five sessions themselves ... What they said (the writers) is based on this method (but) it doesn't work at all in my classes. (6<sup>th</sup> journal, A)

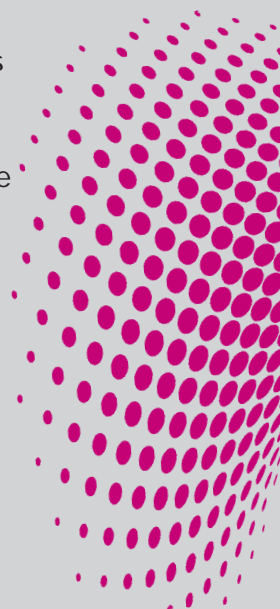
- At the end of that session of the class, at last I asked her (one of the students) about the problem that why she was always late. she apologized and said because she had been at work (before class) she was late. (10<sup>th</sup> journal, B)

- In my opinion, it was the other

teachers' fault that these students still have problems with accuracy. They (the previous teachers) should have worked more on these structural points. (4<sup>th</sup> interview, A)

This point was supported by the observation notes, too. As one of the researchers had the opportunity of observing all the discussions in the teachers' office between the two participants and between the two participants and the other teachers, she realized that not only did the two participants gradually raise fewer objections to the problems of their classes in comparison with the beginning of the process of the study, but they also encouraged their colleagues to find out the probable sources of the problems in their classes.

Also, quite a few of the journals and interviews conducted in the last month included some sentences showing the teachers' self-confidence to acknowledge themselves as the possible causes of some of the problems in the English classes (i.e. this point was mentioned in 25% of the journals and 50% of the interviews in the third month). This result suggests that the process of journal writing was helpful in enhancing the teachers' critical thinking and also it was effective in encouraging them to declare themselves as the sources of some of those problems. This finding was possibly induced by the interview sessions in which some questions regarding the vague points of journal entries were asked and the commented points of the researchers on each journal entry were discussed. Some of these examples are as follows:



- I was angry because I couldn't find the extension to turn on both TV and DVD. As a result, I couldn't show the film extract to my students. (*3<sup>rd</sup> semi-structured interview, A*)

- Some of them [students] were shy and reluctant to speak, so the class was so quiet, or sometimes they talked in Persian to each other. (*7<sup>th</sup> journal, A*)

- The problem was that my TTT [Teacher Talking Time] went up and the students were mostly silent. (*9<sup>th</sup> journal, B*)

-I don't know why it happened. But she was late again. She was always late. So every session she interrupted my lesson. (*6<sup>th</sup> semi-structured interview, B*)

In the gathered data, some sentences indicated the teachers' attempts to keep the flow of the lesson even when they were experiencing problems in their classes. In fact, no significant differences were seen in the occurrence of this point in the data collected over the period of three months (i.e. in 100% of the interviews in three months, in 50% of the journals in the first month, and in 75% of the journals in the second and the third month). Indeed, this common point was possibly mentioned because the participant teachers of the study were so experienced and professional that they did their best to follow the process of teaching and learning in their classes even under the challenging circumstances. Some of these examples are as follows:

-I made a great effort to persuade them to share ideas and take part in a friendly chat. (*1<sup>st</sup> journal, A*)

-I spoke in Persian for 5 minutes and explained that if they didn't understand 80% of what I say, it's not important

because I could explain what 1 said to them again. (*4<sup>th</sup> journal, B*)

-Only I could control the others' laughter [when they were laughing at their classmate], and I helped her keep calm a little bit. (*7<sup>th</sup> interview, A*)

Repeatedly in the journal entries and in the semi-structured interviews, we came across statements which evidenced the satisfaction of teachers at the end of the classes with the process of teaching and learning. This common point was more repeated in the journals and the interviews in the first month (i.e. in 100% of the journals and interviews in the first month, in 75% of the journals and interviews in the second month, and in 75% of the journals and 50% of the interviews in the third month). As this finding showed, the teachers' satisfaction with what they had done in their classes decreased during the period of three months. Although they were totally satisfied with their teaching process and class management in the first month, they paid increasing attention to the other aspects of their classes in the other months which caused their feeling of satisfaction to decline. Some instances are as follows:

-At the end of that session of the class, I was happy that they could use that grammar in their own words. (*2<sup>nd</sup> semi-structured interview, A*)

- Finally, I succeeded to cover the other half of the page ... I felt that they learnt a lot and were pleased with learning. (*5<sup>th</sup> journal, B*)

- It was apparent that they enjoyed a lot. They (the students) thanked me when they went out. (*8<sup>th</sup> semi-structured interview, B*)

that came to their minds regarding their perceptions of the process of journal writing in their weekly journal entries. Also, in the last-week interviews the participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of journal writing and its impact on the teaching process.

### Analysis and Discussion

Having collected the data through several techniques, the researchers coded the gathered data systematically by "initial coding" (Dornyei, 2011, p. 251), and "second-level coding" (Dornyei, 2011, p. 252). In other words, the researchers considered the instances of the common points and consequently counted and classified them into special categories.

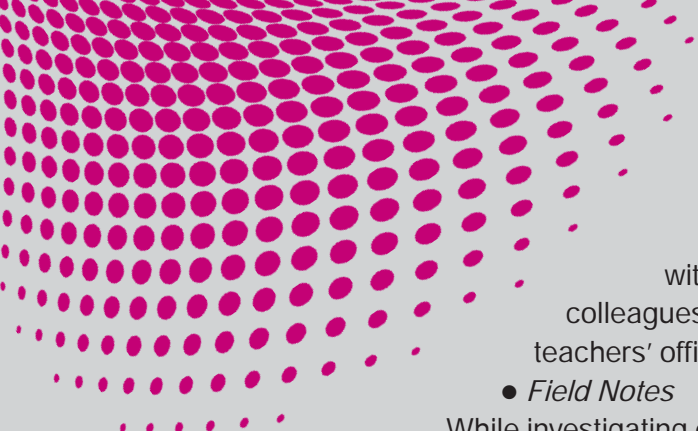
To answer the first research question of the present study, the researchers investigated each source of data and coded the common points indicating the reflection of teachers on the events happening in their classes. Then, by comparing the rate of occurrence of the common points in the main sources of gathered data including the journal entries and the interviews over a period of 90 days, it became clear that the rate of occurrence of some of these points during the three months was the same, but some of the others were merely apparent in the gathered data in the last month. Also, some of the other common points indicated an increase in frequency in the last month in comparison with the first two months. The common points are as follows:

All the journal entries and the semi-structured interviews started with some sentences describing the situation of the classes, the students, the topics, and the time of the classes. (i.e. this common point was mentioned in 100% of the journals

and 100% of the interviews over the period of three months). The high frequency of this common point was possibly due to the need felt by the participants to contextualize the events they wanted to report. In fact, they set the scene in the introductory part of their journal entries and the interviews and then introduced the issues they wanted to specify. The following examples further clarify this common point.

- It was the second session of Unit 3 class for me but not for the students. I couldn't come to the class for two sessions because of my illness. (*1<sup>st</sup> journal, A*)
- In the last 20 minutes of the class, I asked students to watch a film. Usually I do it every other session. (*3<sup>rd</sup> interview, B*)
- This class is about 7:45' in the morning in Ramezan. Although it is so early in the morning, every student is present. (*8<sup>th</sup> journal, B*)

The next common point indicated the problems occurring in the classes; the description of one or two of the problems was included in most of the gathered data (i.e. in 100% of the interviews in three months, in 75% of the journals in the first and the third month, and in 50% of the journals in the second month). The high rate of the occurrence of this common point can be attributed to the fact that EFL classes normally include some unpredictable problems that make the teaching process challenging. The following excerpts exemplify the mentioned point.



with their colleagues in the teachers' office.

● *Field Notes*

While investigating each journal entry, audio recordings, and observation sessions, "field notes" (Cowie, 2009, p. 185; Friedman, 2012, p. 184) were gathered by the researchers.

**Procedure**

As it was mentioned, since the study was conducted in Kish Institute of Science and Technology as one of the Private institutes of Tehran, the process of data collection took 3 terms including 90 days. To collect data, the researchers selected journal diary writing as the main source of data collection. The participants were asked to write one journal diary at the end of each week; 24 journal entries were written by the participants. At the beginning, they were asked to write narratives about the events happening in their classes that they preferred to write about. Then, through the process of journal writing, the researchers tried to lead the participants to the problems occurring in those classes. Therefore, every week, the participants willingly selected one of their classes and wrote a journal entry about the problem that occurred in that class. The journals took half a page to two or three pages, and they were written in English. In fact, some of the journal entries only included a narrative of the class, but in some of the entries submitted to the researchers the narratives focused on a specific problem.

To respond to every journal entry, and consequently to activate the participants' critical thinking on the problems, the researchers conducted weekly interviews. Having read each journal entry, the

researchers commented on the mentioned points in the journals, and raised some questions about the general points or vague issues mentioned in the journals to be asked and then to be discussed by the researchers and each participant in the weekly semi-structured interviews. Therefore, not only was each participant requested to retell the narratives of the entries and to clarify the obscure parts by replying to the researchers' questions but the commented points were also discussed in the interview sessions. In this way, the researchers indirectly guided every participant to view each event of her classes more critically. Each semi-structured interview lasted for about 20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The scripts were appended to the related journal entries, every week.

It is worth noting that since one of the researchers and the two participants of the present study taught English in the same institute, one of the researchers could observe the participants' reflections on the events happening in their classes through the teachers' discussions about the problems of their classes in the teachers' office.

**The present researchers tried to provide the teachers with the opportunity to write weekly journal diaries about their problems in their English classes and helped them find the causes of the problems**

Moreover, at the last week of the data collection process, the participants were asked to mention whatever points

thinking were the main aims of the study. The following research questions guided the present study.

1. How does dialogue journal writing assist English teachers to reflect on the origins of the problems occurring in their classes?

2. How do the participants perceive the process of journal writing regarding its impact on reflective teaching?

## Methodology

### *Participants and Setting*

Kish Institute of Science and Technology was selected as the site of research, and two of the female experienced teachers with the age range of 28-34 years old and 8 years of teaching experience were invited to participate in the present study. In fact, since these two teachers had been the colleagues of one of the researchers for some time, a good rapport had already been established between the researchers and the participants. The study was conducted over a period of 90 days

including three terms in the Institute in year 2012. To keep the participants anonymous, they would be named as A, and B in the following sections.

**English teachers normally share the problems that happen in their classes with their colleagues through the discussions they have with them in the teachers' office. However, they make no attempt to assist each other in finding the root causes of those problems**

### *Instrumentation*

The following instruments were used to collect the data:

- *Journal Diary*

As the main source of data, every week a journal diary was written by each participant of the study.

- *Semi-Structured Interview*

To clarify the vague points of each journal diary and to discuss them, the researchers provided comments on each journal entry. Every week a "semi-structured interview" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173) was conducted.

- *Audio Recording*

Not to miss any important points, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed carefully.

- *Observation*

Not to lose any single important point regarding teachers' reflections, one of the researchers observed the two participants while sharing their reflections on the events and problems of their classes

A





## Introduction

The main focus of foreign language instruction in high schools has been mostly on linguistic features. The emphasis on acquiring linguistic features as the final goal has led teachers to leave intact important semantic and pragmatic features which have been emphasized as contributive to the ability to communicate (Pennycook, 1990, as cited in Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005). One important aspect that has been ignored in this regard is reflective teaching that includes reflection on action (Zellermayer, 1990). It is worth noting that to reflect on action, not only should the teachers have the knowledge of the domain but they should also be able to find solutions for the new problems that they encounter for the first time. Besides, the teachers should be able to reflect on their reactions to discover what they can do in different situations (Zellermayer, 1990).

Examining the ability of EFL teachers to gain this capability was the goal that was followed in the process of the present study. In other words, English teachers normally share the problems that happen in their classes with their colleagues through the discussions they have with them in the teachers' office. However, they make no attempt to assist each other in finding the root causes of those problems.

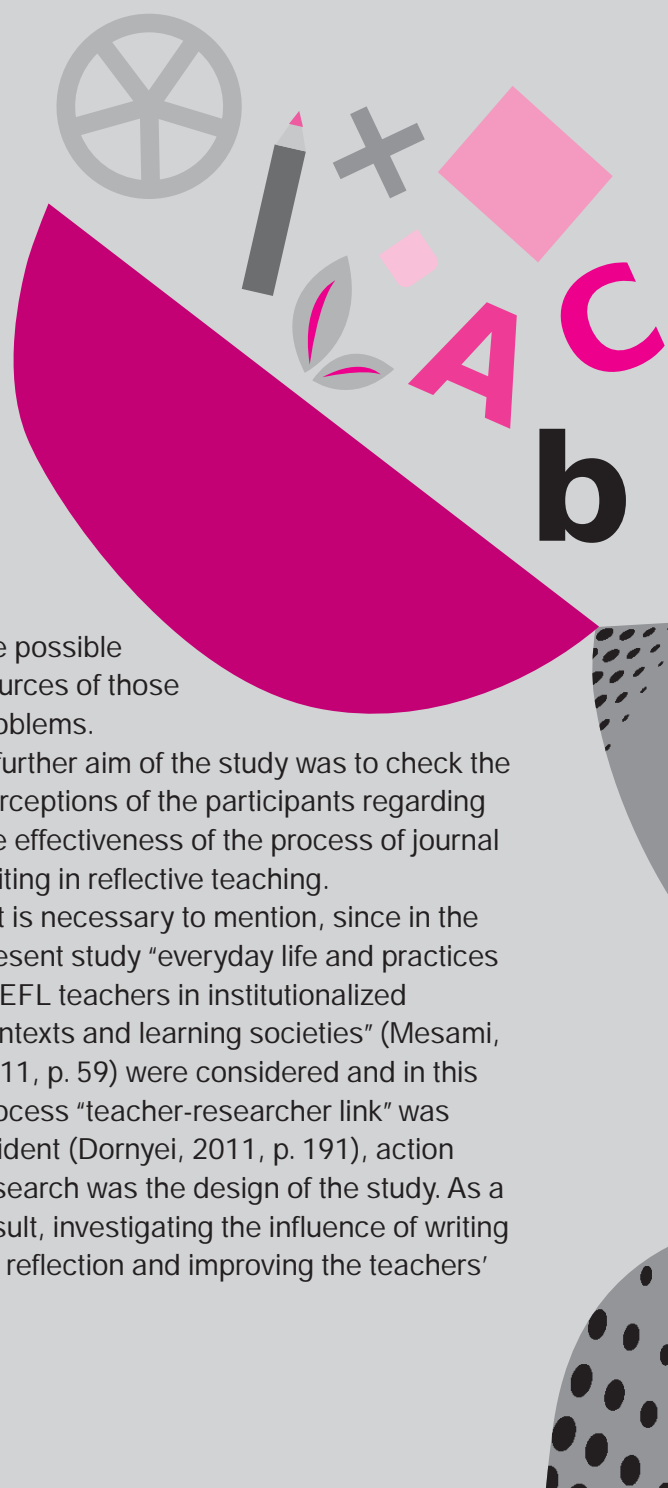
Since acquiring a "self-analytical approach" in teaching takes time and writing journal diaries is considered as a useful tool, in this regard (Hoover, 1994), the present researchers tried to provide the teachers with the opportunity to write weekly journal diaries about their problems in their English classes and helped them find the causes of the problems. The frequently repeated complaints made by the researchers' colleagues such as "I

don't know why my students were silent in the class" or "I don't know why my students don't understand" and also other "whys" led the researchers to conduct a qualitative study to see how the English teachers' reflective views on the possible problems in their classes could be taken as a starting point in a process which could help the participant teachers realize that they themselves could be one of

the possible sources of those problems.

A further aim of the study was to check the perceptions of the participants regarding the effectiveness of the process of journal writing in reflective teaching.

It is necessary to mention, since in the present study "everyday life and practices of EFL teachers in institutionalized contexts and learning societies" (Mesami, 2011, p. 59) were considered and in this process "teacher-researcher link" was evident (Dornyei, 2011, p. 191), action research was the design of the study. As a result, investigating the influence of writing on reflection and improving the teachers'



# The Effect of Dialogue Journal Writing on Reflective Teaching: A Qualitative Study

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## چکیده

این تحقیق در یکی از مؤسسات ملی زبان انگلیسی در تهران انجام گرفت، با این هدف که معلمان زبان را تشویق کند در مورد ریشه مشکلات احتمالی که در کلاس رخ می‌دهد تأمل کنند و در این زمینه اعتماد به نفس لازم را کسب نمایند تا برای برخی از این مشکلات، خود را به جای دیگران مقصر بدانند. این هدف با همکاری دو نفر از معلمان زبان مؤسسه به‌عنوان شرکت‌کنندگان در این تحقیق در طول ۹۰ روز محقق شد. نتایج نشان داد که شرکت معلمان زبان در روند تحقیق به آن‌ها کمک کرد در مورد دلایل مشکلات اتفاق افتاده در کلاس‌هایشان تأمل کنند. همچنین، از طریق تمرین ژورنال نویسی، آن‌ها توانستند اعتماد به نفس لازم را کسب کنند و خود را به‌عنوان یکی از عوامل ممکن برای این مشکلات در کلاس معرفی کنند. لازم به ذکر است که نقطه‌نظر شرکت‌کنندگان در این تحقیق، در مورد روند پژوهش، نیز مورد بررسی قرار گرفت.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** ژورنال نویسی، معلمان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی، آموزش اندیشه‌ورزانه

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study, conducted in one of the private English language institutes in Tehran, was to encourage EFL teachers to reflect on the origins of the problems occurring in their classes and consequently to help them achieve a certain level of self-confidence conducive to blame themselves, not others for some of the problems in their classes. The study was carried out by the contribution of two of the English teachers in the institute as the participants of the study over a period of 90 days. As the findings indicated, by going through the process of the study, the English teachers could reflect on the causes of the problems in their classes. Also, the practice of dialogue journal writing fostered their self-confidence to such a degree that they acknowledged themselves as possible sources of the problems happening in their classes. The participants' perceptions regarding the process of the study were also explored in the present study.

**Key Words :** dialogue journal writing, EFL teachers, reflective teaching