

The Effects of Reflective Teaching on Teachers' Performance

Maryam Ferdowsi ^{1*}, Akbar Afghari ¹

1. Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.

* Corresponding Author's Email: mferdowsi@yahoo.com

Abstract – Reflective teaching is a valuable teaching approach in which teachers collect information about their own classes and pay close attention to their behavior and teaching strategies critically. Hence, teachers can evaluate themselves find out their strength and weakness. Nowadays, the positive effects of reflective teaching on teachers' performance are obvious to most of EFL teachers. In the present study, the possible effect of reflective teaching on different aspects of teaching was investigated. The Participants of this study included five female EFL teachers in two language institutes in Esfahan. To collect the data Behzadpours' reflective teaching questionnaire (2007) was used. Their classed were audio-recorded and the teachers were interviewed separately. According to these results, the majority of the participants emphasized the effect of reflective practice on their communication patterns in the classroom, the affective climate of the class, classroom management, error correction, teachers' techniques and strategies, and the professional development.

Keywords: EFL teachers, teachers' performance, Audio-recording, reflective teaching, reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

Reflective teaching is one of the important processes in education since it helps teachers and learners development in many ways like problem solving and decision-making processes and it fosters critical-thinking abilities. Reflective teaching is an innovative approach in teaching; it is a valuable approach in which teachers use their intuitions and experiences to observe their performance, evaluate themselves, criticize their practices and accept other criticism open-mindedly. It helps them to progress and develop their teaching performance. Therefore, reflective teaching is a useful process which leads to teachers' professional growth.

Moreover, reflective approach to teaching involves changes in the way we usually perceive teaching and our role in the process of teaching. Teachers, who explore their own teaching through critical reflection, develop changes in attitudes and awareness which they believe can benefit their professional growth as teachers, as well as improve the kind of support they provide their students. However, like other forms of self-inquiry, reflective teaching is not without its disadvantages, since journal writing, self-reporting or making recordings of lessons are definitely time-consuming.

As it is clear, every teacher should contemplate on what is happening in the class to be able to get a clear view of learning quality of learners; with this approach the teacher can be more successful; therefore, s/he can “promote changes in pupils’ learning behavior”. “Reflective partnerships between teachers are particularly effective. Peer mentoring partnerships will support individual teachers in reflecting on and describing their practice. As a result of these focused discussions, a teacher is able to better understand practice and be able to take steps to improve practice” (Rose, 2007, p. 1).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers may start a process of reflection in different situations; they may concentrate to reflect on a specific problem in the class or to investigate on their teaching effectiveness on a specific point. In any cases, by applying reflective teaching they may decide to do something alternatively and dynamically. Influential teachers pay attention to the problems they encounter in the classroom to find an appropriate solution. This re-evaluation impacts their view about ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ to teach and finally leads to significant changes and developments in teaching experiences (Goldstein, 2008; Wood & Bennett, 2000).

According to Rahimi and Chabok (2013), professional development researches emphasize the fact that teachers have arrived to the point where they should put theoretical knowledge into practice. We have learned so much theoretical knowledge about how classrooms work from researches, but we have done very few researches on how to make them work better in order to empower students to become more literate and critical thinkers.

Marsh (2007) found out that university teachers’ scores on teaching style are generally stable over time with a slight but noticeable negative trend. This may show lack of reflective approach among in-service and experienced teacher. Hagen, Loughran and Russell (2006, cited in Yanping & Jie, 2009) declare that one effective method for developing reflective teaching among in-service teachers can be encouraging them to work together on reflection. This study also showed that more experienced teachers appear to want less intervention in their teaching.

Richards (1998) introduced the varied procedures that can be used by the teachers to investigate their teaching practice. Some of these procedures are also mentioned by Murphy (2001) and Tice (2002) and they properly labelled them as ‘tools’ (cited in Fatemipour, 2009). According to Richards, these reflective teaching tools are diary, teaching journals, peer observation, audio and video recording, student feedback, and action research.

In order to prepare a diary, the teacher writes about what happens in the class after each lesson. To benefit from the peer observation tool, the teacher asks a colleague to attend his/her class and collect information about the lesson. Audio and video recording give teachers a clear picture of class and show the teachers different aspects of their behavior. Students’ feedback is a tool used for finding learners’ opinions and perceptions about the teaching process (Tice, 2002).

There are different tools to conduct critical reflection like peer observation, journal writing, self-reporting, collaborative diary keeping, and finally recording lessons which is the

focus of present study. Audio- or video-recording of lesson can be a very useful reflection tool to evaluate different aspects of teaching, because it can capture moment by moment process of teaching. Many things happen simultaneously in classroom and some aspects of lesson cannot be recalled by teacher (Richards, 1991).

One study that considered the effect of reflective teaching on pre-service teachers and teaching development was that of Sharifi and Abdolmanafi Rokini (2014). They proved that “collaboration is a vital ingredient for reflective courses” (p. 57) while teachers can reflect on their peers and evaluate and judge each other in order to improve themselves. In addition, this study in line with Zeichner and Liston (1987) emphasized on the self-awareness as an important element in becoming a reflective teacher. They highlighted the necessity of self-awareness in pre-service teachers toward their own actions and toward their peers as well.

In another study by Jadidi and Keshavarz (2013), the researchers tried to find the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ reflection practice and strategy-based instruction. The finding of this study revealed that there was a high positive relation between the two variables. It also showed that Iranian EFL teachers are aware of the crucial role of their reflection; they realized that by being a reflective teacher they can significantly improve their teaching.

In spite of importance and effectiveness of reflective teaching approach on teacher education and teacher development, contrary to expectation, this field has not been devoted the attention it deserves in Iran. Although, there have been recorded a few studies on video-recording, to the best researcher’s knowledge, audio-recording has been neglected in teacher education programs in Iran. Since being videotaped and then watching their own performance sounds a bit uncomfortable and embarrassing to some teachers, the researchers decided to use audio recording.

The present study aims at investigating the possible impacts of applying regular reflective teaching practice on the teachers’ performance before and after using reflective teaching approach. In other words, this study explores the possible changes which the teachers are supposed to undergo on their teaching approaches and performance after applying reflective teaching practice to answer the following research question:

What are the possible impacts of reflective teaching on teacher’s performance after applying reflective teaching practice?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of this study were 5 Iranian female EFL teachers teaching adults, selected from 2 Language schools in Isfahan; Sadr Institute of higher education and Khane-Sanat va Madan Institute. Table 1 provides an over view of the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1: Demographic Data of the EFL Teachers

| Participants | Age | Gender | Major | Years of teaching experience |
|--------------|-----|--------|-------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | 31 | Female | Teaching | 5 |
| 2 | 35 | Female | Translation | 3 |
| 3 | 22 | Female | Literature | 6 |
| 4 | 25 | Female | Translation | 2 |
| 5 | 26 | Female | Teaching | 5 |

It is worth mentioning that the participants were all the researchers' colleagues in the language institute. Before conduction the research, the researchers asked the EFL teachers about their willingness to participate in the following research and explained the purpose of study briefly. The EFL teachers were made sure that the data would be kept confidential. Thereafter, they signed the Consent Form, this form will let the researcher to use the obtained information from audiotapes, questionnaires and interviews in researcher's defense session and other academic meetings and journals.

Moreover, one of the researchers was the participant observer. She was responsible for audio-taping the teaching process, listening to the audiotapes and analyzing and evaluating the teaching process.

B. Materials

In order to answer the research question, the researcher employed three different types of materials: (a) the reflective teaching questionnaire, (b) class audio-recording, and (c) teachers' face to face interview.

The reflective teaching questionnaire. The instrument which was used for measuring reflective teaching in this study was the one devised by Behzadpour (2007) that included 42 items in a multiple-choice test format. It is a five-point liker scale, consisting of five options of never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always, which has been designed based on six factors; cognitive, metacognitive, affective, practical, critical, and moral. Behzadpour's questionnaire was chosen for the purpose of this study because it was formed to measure teachers' reflection in the context of Iran and it enjoys a high reliability of .90 as a measuring instrument for teacher reflectivity (Behzadpour, 2007).

Class audio-recording. The English teaching process of 5 participants were recorded by voice recorder. For each participant, there were two 90-minute audiotapes after an interval of one month.

Teachers' face to face interview. In order to explore the main reasons of possible differences between teachers' performance before and after applying reflective teaching

practice, participants were attended face to face interviews. The researcher conducted three different interview sessions. Therefore, three different interview forms were prepared. The first interview form contained 10 questions, which was prepared by researcher herself; it was supposed to collect information about teachers' general views and strategies toward teaching. The second interview form was a 30-item form, which designed to explore the teachers' attitude toward their teaching. The last interview which conducted at the end of term, hold 16 items; it was prepared to elicit teachers' opinion about their teaching and investigate the changes they applied in their teaching practices after getting familiar with reflective teaching process. The second and third interview forms were adopted from Yahoug Jiang's book (2012).

C. Data Collection Procedure

In order to reach descriptive data, the researchers used variety of data collection methods. Both observational techniques such as audio-recording, and non-observational techniques such as interview and questionnaire were used in data collection stage. This triangulation approach enabled the researcher to capture as much as information as possible. Thus given that number of participants of the present study was limited (i.e., 5), we can argue that it is a qualitative research. Besides, interview and questionnaires are among the research methodologies which characterize qualitative research. However, this research also recourses to quantitative research methodologies, because according to Parron (1990), qualitative method can be distinguished from quantitative one based on sampling; he maintained that quantitative method focuses on large samples which are selected randomly, while in qualitative method we have small samples which are chosen purposefully (cited in Huang, 2008).

To start the research process, the researchers asked all the participants to sign the participants Audio-Video Consent Form, and the participants were ensured that the data would be kept confidential. In the second stage, the participants were interviewed for some demographic information like names, ages, gender, major, and years of teaching experiences. It took about 10 minutes for each participant. Thereafter, they were asked to explain about some of their general beliefs about teaching and learning process. By mean of this interview, the participants were supposed to clarify their teaching strategies and the activities they conduct before and after each session. They also were asked to mention the positive and negative points of their teaching. Finally, the participants talked about what they knew about the concept of reflective teaching.

After the first interview session, the participants filled the Behzadpour's 42-item questionnaire, which measures a wide range of personal attitude toward teaching strategies and approaches they use in the classrooms. In the next step, the English teaching process of these participants were audio-taped, for each participant there was a 90-minute-audio recording. One of the researchers attended the same class session, different aspects of teaching process like communication patterns, teacher's decision making, the affective atmosphere, teacher's feedback, error correction, teacher's appearance, management of the class, and rate of praise were considered by the researcher. The audio-recordings were done

by the use of voice recorder which was situated on the teacher's table. As voice recording may have a negative impact on the students' behaviors, the researcher did not let them be aware of the presence of the voice recorder.

The recorded voices of classes were burned on CDs and they were given to the teachers. All the teachers were asked to listen to their own class audio-record two or three times and pay attention to different aspects of their teaching, such as teacher-student relationship, the teacher's strategies in teaching, the positive and negative aspects of their teaching and all the remarkable details. After a one-week interval, the participants had a private interview session with the researcher. The interview consisted of 30 items that covered a wide range of questions related to all aspect of teaching approach, classroom management, strength and weakness of the participant's teaching process. At the end of the interview, the researcher gave her opinion about the participant's teaching and they discussed the ways to develop the participant's teaching ability.

It is worth mentioning that in order to decrease the participants' anxiety, they were informed beforehand, and therefore they could be prepared themselves for teaching process. In addition, the participants listened to their voice at home because according to Orlova (2009), teachers at first focuses on their acting and when this acting syndrome fades away they can focus on the teaching process and their interaction with students (cited in Kavoshian, 2013).

After an interval of one month (at the end of the term), the second voice recording session was done like the first one. After that, the recorded voices of classes were burned on CDs and were given to the teachers. The participants were supposed to listen to their voice in a period of 3 days and pay attention to their teaching details again. The final interview session conducted consequently and the participants answered to a set of questions such as the effectiveness of reflective teaching on their teaching, the advantages and disadvantages of reflective practice, the changes that they have undergone in their teaching strategies and some other related questions. Each interview lasted about 30 min for every participants and a small present was provided to thank them. Table 2 demonstrates the data collection procedure in a semester.

Table 2: Demonstrates the Data Collection Procedure in a Semester

| Data collection | Frequency | Participants |
|------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| First interview | At the beginning of the term | Researcher and participants |
| Questionnaire | Twice, at the beginning of the term/ and at the end of the term | Participants |
| Audio-recording | Twice, at the beginning of and at the end of the term | Researcher and participants |
| Second interview | After first audio-recording | Researcher and participants |
| Final interview | At the end of term | Researcher and participants |

D. Data Analysis Procedure

Data were triangulated in three main sources; questionnaire, audio-recording, and interview. All of the data collected, categorized, and labeled. For each participant there was a document including two questionnaires, two audio-recording transcriptions, and two interview transcriptions.

IV. RESULTS

After collecting the data, listening to the audio-recordings, and analyzing the transcription of the interviews, each participant's degree of reflection was evaluated. In this study, the researcher used the Kavoshian's reflective teaching framework. This framework includes 8 categories and explains content of reflective teaching. It also consists of different subcategories. Table 3 summarized this framework.

Table 3: Kavoshian's Reflective Framework

| Contents of reflection | Subcategories |
|---|--|
| 1- Communication pattern in the classroom | -Eye contact -Body language -Rapport - Students relationship |
| 2- The affective climate of the class | -self confidence -friendly atmosphere and have fun -Rate of praise |
| 3- Classroom management | -Students' attendance problems -Students' distraction -Disruptive behaviour |
| 4- Error correction | Teachers' indirect correction Peer correction |
| 5- Teacher's physical appearance | Wearing formal clothes Being worried about appearance |
| 6- Teachers' technics and strategies | Language use Manipulating equipment Use of teachers aids Teaching process |
| 7- Professional development | Recognizing personal goals Setting future goals |
| 8-Teachers' command of English | English pronunciation |

A. Communication Patterns in the Classroom

Murphy (2001) stated that classroom communication patterns can be considered as one of the most common topic investigated by reflective teaching (cited in Kavoshian, 2013). According to Kavoshian (2013), this category includes eye contact, body language, rapport, and students' relationship. All the participants emphasized the importance of the communication patterns; and they all had enough eye contact with their students. Their body language was sufficient to explain the topics. In addition, they all were successful in making an appropriate relationship among students.

B. The Affective Climate of the Classroom

The affective climate of the classroom has been mentioned as a crucial factor by most of teachers around the world (Bailey, 1991; Eley, 2006; Huang, 2008; Lee, 2011). Self-confidence, friendly atmosphere and have fun, and rate of praise are the subcategories of this part. The importance of affective climate in the classroom was supported by all the participants. 80% of the participants were confident about their abilities and qualities. They all could make a friendly atmosphere in their classes and they had fun with their students. 60% of the teachers were able to praise their students appropriately. On the other hand, 40% of the participants could not show their emotions efficiently.

C. Classroom Management

The importance of the classroom management was confirmed by all of the teachers. This category included students' attendance problems, students' distraction, and disruptive behaviour. Classroom management is another factor that most of the participants paid special attention to it. All the five participants showed sufficient classroom management practice.

D. Error Correction

The main subcategories of error correction are teachers' indirect correction and peer correction. For error correction category, the participants conducted different approaches. 40% of them just used teacher's direct correction. 60 % of the participants conducted self-correction and peer correction and eventually teachers' correction.

E. Teachers' Physical Appearance

Wearing formal clothes and being worried about appearance are two subcategories of teachers' appearance. Just 20% of the participants wore formal clothes, and 80% of them just wore casual clothes. None of them were worried about their appearance and they all seemed satisfied with their appearance.

F. Teachers' Techniques and Strategies

According to Huang (2008), the main subcategories of teachers' techniques and strategies are language use, manipulating equipment, and use of teachers' aids. Similarly, Kavoshian (2013) had achieved the same subcategories. In the teachers' techniques and strategies area, participants stated diverse ideas. 40% of the participants used teaching aids and multimedia wildly. 20 % of them did not paid adequate attention to importance of multimedia. 40% of the participants used multimedia occasionally.

G. Professional Development

Recognizing personal goals and setting future goals are two main subcategories of professional development. Professional development regarded as another important category among the participants. All the participants were able to recognize their personal growth. 80% of them always sat future goals for themselves.

H. Teachers' Command of English

Teachers paid close attention to their pronunciation and slips of the tongue. 80% of the participants had acceptable level of accuracy in pronunciation, but they were not completely satisfied with it and hope to improve their pronunciation soon.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Reflective teaching emphasized the importance of classroom research (McKay, 2005). Based on McKay study, this type of research helped teachers deal with problems they faced in the classroom. It helped them evaluate their classroom experience and come up with solutions that work in context of their classroom. The finding of this research is in line with McKay (2005); the participants benefited from listening to their own audio-recording to find practical solutions for the problems they encountered in the class.

Regarding the application of the audio recording tool, the finding was supported by the Tice's (2002) experience of using the tool for reflection. She believed that by recording the teaching session, the teacher can become aware of the things happening in the class. All the participants of the present study enjoyed the voice recording process and expressed that they decided to apply this tool frequently in their classroom in order to evaluate their teaching and measure their improvement.

The data obtained from this study showed that all the EFL teachers welcomed being audio-recorded because they felt comfortable during this process. The finding of this study in regard to the audio-recording is supported by Kember (2000) who believed that audio-recording is the least intrusive method for gathering data for reflection. On the other hand, this finding contradicts Fatemipour (2009) who stated that using audio-recording appears to be intrusive and affected the behavior of both teachers and students.

The data obtained from this study is in accordance with the Kurt and Atamturk (2011) findings that gender, education and experience do not play a role in teacher's reflection. In addition, they argued that awareness of the theory or the importance of reflection in teachers' professional growth did not necessarily mean that teachers apply reflection in their teaching experience (cited in Jadidi & Keshavarz, 2013). But this research study showed that by introducing reflective practice and training the EFL teachers, they would widely apply reflection in their teaching experiences and eventually benefit its advantages to develop their professions.

Farrell (2008) argued that teachers who engage in reflective practice can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in their teaching. According to the result of this study, teachers who applied reflective teaching practice in their real classes were more successful in their teaching.

As reflective teaching practice is a self-evaluation method in teaching, EFL teachers can benefit from this innovative method widely. Considering the various tools to conducting the reflective teaching, teachers can choose the most appropriate and convenient tools according to their personality and their needs. Audio-recording is an easy tool that every teacher can conduct it frequently in order to gain a complete picture of his/her own class. Due to recording moment by moment of class process through audio-recording, EFL teachers can collect data and evaluate themselves frequently. This frequent evaluation helps them to develop in their professions.

One of the limitations of this study is that, the process of audio-recording, listening, transcribing, self-reflection and analyzing the data is quiet subjective and time consuming. The other limitation is due to gender limitation; in this study all the participants were female.

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