

How can reflective teaching practice improve EFL teachers' classroom teaching skills? (A case Study)

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Abstract:

Reflective teaching practice is considered to be a personal awareness discovery process. It is actions and practices are used fundamentally by teachers to develop themselves as reflective practitioners. This study reviews how reflective teaching practice can improve EFL teachers' classroom teaching skills. The study adopted a quantitative research characterized by a questionnaire filled by 76 EFL teachers in 17 preparatory and secondary schools in Misurata, Libya. The data were analyzed by SPSS version 16. It concluded that reflective teaching practice helped teachers in developing their strategies and avoid committing the mistakes again. It demonstrates that reflective teaching will be very useful in formulating new methods of teaching based on their experience.

Introduction

In the light of recent events in education, reflective practice is considered to be a very significant strategy that increases the opportunity of sharing knowledge and experience among teachers. It is used as a tool to support teaching practice that becomes increasingly recognized across education.⁽¹⁾

The main reason for reflective practice emergence was the gap that exists between research and practice. That is to say that reflective practice aims to eliminate the gap between research findings and how they could be applied in the practical field.

It is considered as a means which can develop a greater level of self-awareness. This conscious awareness, however, is not an easy task to be performed. It needs much effort of professional practice. Practitioners often do not know what are the components that have led to success because they usually follow strategies arouse in the time of teaching. That is why many researchers insist that reflective teaching practice is to promote the awareness of critical thinking of teaching and to develop teachers to be professional.⁽²⁾

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Osterman & Kottkamp (1993) state that experiential learning is the old term for reflective practice. It was first stated by theorists Dewey, Lewin & Piaget. They claim that reflective practice leads to behavioral change. It is well-known that learning becomes better when people engage in that process.

Reflective practice always helps the practitioners to shorten and reduce the route between the problem and the solution. Unlike some other forms of research, action research enhances practice and helps practitioners to solve problems rather than developing theories and reviewing related studies. The important issue again is not the source but its utility.⁽²⁾

Contrasting other approaches to Reflective Practice Approach

Commonly, approaches for professional development share a common goal: improved practice. They tend to concentrate on theories that in turn become practically process. On the contrary, reflective practice serves the educational process of how knowledge becomes more directed and focused.

Distad & Brownstein (2004, p. 2) claim that reflective practice is a part of professional change of behavior. They state that teachers think systemically about their experience and learn better from their mistakes.⁽³⁾

It is assumed that reflective teaching practice change include emotional as well as rational dimensions (Osterman, & Kottkamp 1993). Teachers often change their personal behavior after their experiences in classrooms. They may view their actions, relations, and methods that they have used and choose the best and fruitful experiences they practiced.

Objectives of the study

This research aims to provide a clear understanding of the field of teachers grounded theories of the concept of reflective teaching practice. Furthermore, it aims to test how teachers can develop their own teaching methods and promote their skills of teaching.

Significance of the study

Many scholars believe that reflective teaching practice may lead to achieving the goals of innovation, engagement and internationalism (Benson, Hardy & Maxfield,2001). This study can raise awareness of reflective teaching practice and how teachers get benefit from their experience to form their own teaching skills and how they teach. It can also direct teachers to develop and promote their own teaching after they experience teaching and exchange their knowledge with other language teachers of language.⁽³⁾

Questions of the study

The main purpose of this study was to find the answer for how reflective teaching practice improves EFL teachers' classroom teaching skills and to what extent teachers can form their own styles of teaching after a certain time of experience.

The questions of the study are:

Are Libyan teachers practicing reflective teaching?

Do teachers get help from feedback they get from their teaching experiences?

To what extent do EFL teachers benefit to develop their strategies in their teaching?

Method

Research Design

This research adopted a descriptive method to investigate the perceptions of reflective teaching practice among teachers in Misurata secondary and preparatory schools and how they get benefit and an improvement. The study question led to the use of descriptive analysis of the data obtained from a questionnaire consisting of 21 statements to discover how reflective teaching practice improve EFL teachers' teaching skills.

Participants and Setting

The major emphasis was on the improvement of skills processed by EFL teachers through their teaching practice. The sample of participants was randomly chosen. They were 76 teachers teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), 69 females and 7 males from different schools in Misurata. The research site is in preparatory and secondary schools in Misurata where teachers experience differs from one teacher to another.

The questionnaire used in this study has been modified to suite the purpose of the research. ⁽⁵⁾

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is one of the very common type of research instruments that is used to collect large amounts of information. It is equally used in survey research and experiments. ⁽⁶⁾

In this study, the questionnaire used is a five point Likert-scale which required respondents to select (1) strongly disagree (2) partly disagree (3) neither agree or disagree (4) partly agree (5) totally agree. It has been distributed to 76 EFL teachers in 17 secondary and preparatory schools in Misurata.

Data Analysis

This paper adopted a descriptive method to explore research instrument used. A questionnaire data were analyzed as the major aim of this study which was how much experience played a role in developing teaching skills of EFL teachers and how their reflective teaching practice helped them to do so. That is why a questionnaire was used to collect large data of how much improvement of classroom teaching skills by EFL teachers. The responses of the questionnaire were entered and calculated using SPSS version 16 to explore the results.

To answer the study questions, the questionnaire statements were divided into three sections relate to the objectives of the study. The following division shows which of the statements are related to the questions of the research;

- Are teachers practice reflective teaching: 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 21.
- Do teachers get help from feedback they get from their teaching experiences: 4, 5, 6,7, 12, 13, 14 and 17.
- How much extent EFL teachers get benefit to develop their strategies in their teaching in classrooms: 8, 16, 18, 19 and 20.

Each group was put in a separate table to determine the frequency, the mean, the Std. Deviation and the rank for every of five Likert-scale responses for each individual item.

Results and Discussion

Results from Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 21 items covering the major aims of the study. 76 teachers responded to the questionnaire statements, 69 females and 7 males teaching EFL in secondary and preparatory school in Misurata, Libya.

The following table (1) shows what teachers say about how reflective teaching practice can improve EFL teachers' classroom teaching skills?

Table 1

Are teachers practicing reflective teaching?

Item	Totally agree	Partly agree	Neither agree or disagree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Dev.
Statement (1)	52(68.4)	18(23.6)	2(2.6)	2(2.6)	2(2.6)	4.5263	.88655	.10169
Statement (2)	20(26.3)	17(22.3)	10(13.1)	15(19.7)	14(18.4)	3.1842	1.48513	.17036
Statement (3)	35(46.0)	20(26.3)	6(7.8)	11(14.4)	4(5.2)	3.9342	1.26844	.14550
Statement (9)	36(47.3)	29(38.1)	7(9.2)	3(3.9)	1(1.3)	4.2632	.88496	.10151
Statement (10)	45(59.2)	16(12.0)	6(7.8)	5(6.5)	3(3.9)	4.2632	1.11198	.12755
Statement (11)	7(9.2)	16(12.0)	7(9.2)	19(6.2)	27(35.5)	2.4342	1.39843	.16041
Statement (15)	41(53.9)	20(26.3)	14(18.0)	1(1.3)	0(0.00)	4.3289	.82281	.09438
Statement (20)	10(13.1)	21(27.6)	12(15.7)	11(14.4)	22(28.9)	2.8158	1.44877	.16619

Table (1) shows the results of the questionnaire items which describe if teachers practice reflective teaching. As results show, the majority of teachers stated that they think of what they had done during their lessons so they improve their skills of teaching. While 18 (23.6%) of teachers partly agree that they reflect their teaching. On the other hand, few of them say that they do not reflect on their teaching skills and they do not think of reflective teaching at all.

Twenty teachers (i.e., 26.3%) agree totally that they follow instructions rather than be innovative because they do not want to violate the rules. Furthermore, 17 (i.e., 22.3) of teachers tend to follow orders and only 4 (i.e., 5.2%) disagree because they see that following instructions restrict their innovation in teaching. However, teachers 36 (i.e., 47.3%) reveal that they always try to look for areas of connectivity between their lives and their teaching and that gives them improvement in their teaching skills. 29 (i.e., 38.1%) agree that this connectivity may help them match between their life experience and of what they teach. While only 1 (1.3%) of teachers do not connect their teaching for their life experience.

Another item [10] shows the extent that teachers practice reflective teaching as making judgements. The majority of teachers 45 (i.e., 59.2%) tend to learn from their experience and then they use it to move forward. 6 (i.e., 7.8%) say that they are neutral and they do not concentrate on their experience when they teach.

Even though, a great number of teachers stated that they took into their consideration their past performance and they integrate their experience in their future strategies and teaching skills in classrooms, while no one 0 (i.e.,

0.00%) reported that past performance has not been integrated in their future teaching which means that teachers learn from their past practicing and grasp new strategies for their future teaching.

In sum, teachers generally practice reflective teaching and use their past experience to promote their teaching skills when they teach inside classrooms.

Table 2

Do teachers get help from feedback they obtain from their teaching experiences.

Items	Totally agree	Partly agree	Neither agree or disagree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error. Dev.
Statement (4)	11(14.4)	21(27.6)	16(21.0)	16(21.0)	12(15.7)	3.0395	1.31089	.15037
Statement (5)	45(59.2%)	18(23.6%)	7(9.2%)	3(3.9%)	3(3.0%)	4.3026	1.05855	.12142
Statement (6)	34(44.7%)	28(36.8%)	5(6.5%)	7(9.2%)	2(2.6%)	4.1184	1.05789	.12135
Statement (7)	36(47.3%)	26(34.2%)	10(13.1%)	3(3.9%)	1(1.3%)	4.2237	.91795	.10530
Statement (12)	30(39.4%)	28(36.8%)	11(14.4%)	6(7.8%)	1(1.3%)	4.0526	.99190	.11378
Statement (13)	10(13.1%)	9(11.8%)	9(11.8%)	14(18.4%)	34(44.7%)	2.3026	1.46987	.16861
Statement (14)	40(52.6%)	23(30.2%)	5(6.5%)	7(9.2%)	1(1.3%)	4.2368	1.01808	.11678
Statement (17)	45(59.2%)	18(23.6%)	7(9.2%)	4(5.2%)	2(2.6%)	4.3158	1.02255	.11729

Table (2) shows how much help teachers get from feedback they get from their teaching experience. Amazingly, the majority of teachers 82.8% stated that students' feedback of their teaching is important to them because it helps them to understand their students better. Only 6 (7.8%) of teachers say that feedback cannot be important for their teaching. Moreover, a great indicator of the importance of feedback can be understood by the item [6] which shows 62 (81.5%) of teachers think that feedback is important as this would give them an indicator of the areas of their strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, 9 (11.8%) of teachers indicated that they do not give any attention to students' feedback and 5 (6.5%) were neutral. The results show the importance of feedback and reflective teaching for EFL teachers to keep improving their teaching skills.

Interestingly, a great number 62 (81.5%) of teachers insisted that they always think of what and how they did and they reflect their effectiveness in their future teaching and this may help them to not fall in their mistakes again. While 4 (5.1%) stated the opposite. This indicated teachers' concern of their reflective teaching so they promote their skills of teaching.

Besides, item [13] emphasized that EFL teachers highlighted the importance of feedback. 48 (63.1%) of teachers stated that when students give them feedback, they do take it much into consideration. Teachers reported that feedback is important and they worry about it. Only 19 (24.9%) said the opposite.

Table 3

To what extent EFL teachers get benefit to develop their strategies in their teaching in classrooms

Item	Totally agree	Partly agree	Neither agree or disagree	Partly disagree	Totally disagree	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Dev.
Statement (8)	26(34.2)	28(36.8%)	10(13.1%)	10(14.1%)	2(2.6%)	3.8684	1.11166	.12752
Statement (16)	12(15.7%)	16(21.0%)	13(17.1%)	15(19.7%)	19(25%)	2.8158	1.43025	.16406
Statement (18)	44(57.8%)	18(23.6%)	12(15.7%)	1(1.3%)	1(1.3%)	4.3553	.89000	.10209
Statement (19)	18(23.6%)	13(17.1%)	17(22.3%)	17(22.3%)	11(14%)	3.1316	1.38893	.15932
Statement (20)	29(38.1%)	22(28.9%)	14(18.4%)	11(14.4%)	0(0.00%)	3.9079	1.07303	.12309

In the same way, responses to item [17] showed a similar result. 63 (82.8%) of teachers indicated that they preferred to know how they do whenever get any opportunity of feedback from their experience. As a result, they can improve the way of teaching, but only 6 (7.8%) of them do not recognize of feedback. Consequently, these results indicated that EFL teachers get help from feedback they got from their students or from reflecting on their teaching.

Table (3) above indicates to what extent EFL teachers get benefit to develop their strategies in their teaching in classrooms. Teachers usually like to practice reflective teaching to improve their strategies and skills.⁽³⁾

Here, the majority of teachers under investigation 62 (81.4%) reported that they need to look into new strategies to better deliver lessons so that they can remain relevant to their objectives. While only 2 (2.6%) stated that they do not pay attention to their strategies, 12 (15.7%) are neutral. In addition,

teachers try to reflect on what they do during their lessons. 51 (67%) of teachers agreed and totally agreed that they can enrich the strategies they use with new and more effective ones. Correspondingly, no one (0%) stated that reflective teaching gives nothing to the importance of teaching skills.

Overall, the study considers the test value of the responses 3. The mean of all responses for the 76 teachers which gives the height and the lowness was 78.4211, and the std. deviation of all responses which indicates how far the individual responses to a question vary or deviate from the mean was 8.54675. This showed that there was a high reliability of responses of the participants. Furthermore, the std. error deviation of the responses was .98038 which indicated that there was an accurate reflection of the mean of the responses rated. However, EFL teachers often develop their strategies using reflective teaching practice, as a result they do not fall in the same mistakes again. That is, teachers tend to practice reflective teaching so that new strategies and modified skills will be used to match students' needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Reflective teaching practice is considered to be widely used nowadays. Teachers should become 'practitioner- researchers' in order to reflect these strategies professionally. This cannot come by following the instructions of rigorous teaching methodologies given in books or magazines, but by going out and observe and formulate their own teaching methodology through reflective teaching practice.⁽¹⁾ The evidence from this study resulted that EFL teachers promote their own teaching skills after they benefit from students' and own feedback. Reflective teaching practice motivates EFL teachers to switch to other strategies that may help their students as a result of their reflective teaching. Not all the instructions might give teachers solutions to their problems they face in their teaching skills.

Findings of this study showed that EFL teachers get better feedback from reflective teaching, so they learn better about profession and have a set of practices to generate useful teaching skills.

Recommendations

Obviously, the results and findings in this study lead to the following recommendations:

- Teachers of EFL do recognize and practice reflective teaching so they can share their experiences so that mistakes in teaching lessened and benefit popularized.

- Various other workshops may merit how much reflective teaching practice help EFL teachers to promote their teaching and change their strategies in future teaching and learning.
- More studies needed suggesting guidelines of the use of reflective teaching in foreign language classroom and how teachers may get benefit from their dairies, portfolios, etc.

Limitations of the study

This study is a totally quantitative research and no grounded data were collected. It will be very effective and supportive to include some qualitative techniques alongside with quantitative research to be more reliable. Interviewing EFL teachers and observing them with longitudinal study will contribute to get much better information about reflective teaching practice.

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Appendix

A Questionnaire on how reflective teaching practice can improve EFL teachers' classroom teaching skills in Misurata secondary and preparatory schools.

Instruction: Please state whether you totally disagree, partly disagree, agree, partly agree or totally agree with the following statements by putting a tick (√) in the appropriate column

Name (optional):	Gender: F/M
No. of years teaching English:	Stage of education:

Statement	Totally disagree	Partly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Partly agree	Totally agree
1. I always think of what I had done during my lessons so that I can improve on it further.					
2. I tend to follow orders rather be innovative because I do not want to get in trouble.					
3. As a teacher I know that the mistakes I make can have an influence on the lives of my student.					
4. Using feedback and evidence, I feel very anxious about feedback given to me by students, it is as though they are evaluating and judging me as a person.					
5 I think students' feedback is important as it will help me understand them better.					

6. I feel that students' feedback is important as this would give me an indicator of the areas of my strengths and weaknesses.					
7. I always think that what and how I did during my lesson is an important indicator of my effectiveness.					
8. I know that in a lesson there are many areas, like content and context that can make or break a lesson.					
9. I always try to look for areas of connectivity between what and how I teach with my life experiences.					
10. Making judgments, whenever I am faced with a mistake that I have made I try to make connections and learn from my experience and then use it to move forward.					
11. I know I make mistakes but sometimes I feel I cannot do anything about it.					
12. I know that I am learning about my profession all the time and I have already a set of practices which I am comfortable with, although the feedback I get from students and my supervisor will help me improve those practices even more.					
13. When students give me feedback I do not take it much into consideration because I feel that it is just their opinions anyway. I do not worry about it as long as I feel I am doing my job.					
14. I think that it is important that I take students' feedback into consideration as that will help me improve on what I am doing now so that I will perform better in the future.					
15. I like to take into consideration my past performance and integrate it with what I am doing in the present to help me better prepare for the future.					
16. I am only interested in getting my assigned classes done properly, I basically do not have the time or interest in talking to my colleagues about their strategies and goals for their classes.					

<p>17. I like to know how I do in my teaching, so every opportunity I get I want feedback from my experience so that I can improve the way I deliver my lessons.</p>					
<p>18. Students learn very differently from when I was in school, I need to look into new strategies to better deliver my lessons so that I can remain relevant now as well as in the future.</p>					
<p>19. I have a certain way of delivering my lessons that I am comfortable with, I do not know why I do it the way I do it, I just do it.</p>					
<p>20. I try to reflect on what I do during my lessons so that I can enrich the strategies I use with new and more effective ones. Sometimes I can get inspirations by talking to my colleagues from other fields.</p>					
<p>21. I know what I am doing as a teacher and I do not spend much time reflecting on my practices as a teacher.</p>					