

Reflective practice for growth : the case of two novice teachers

Javidan Z^a, Besharati F^b

^a *M.A student ,Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas, Iran.*

^b *M.A professor Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas, Iran.*

Abstract

This study represents the results of reflective practice of two novice English language teachers in their teaching practice. The study aimed for three objectives. The first aim was to use Akbari et al's (2010) reflective teaching model to realize which reflective components may be found in the logs written by the two teachers. The second aim was to explore the chronological type of reflection the two novice teachers are engaged in. finally, the third aim was to discover how reflective practice changed the teaching practice of two EFL novice teachers. Two participants from two language institutions contributed to the study. Data collection procedures include daily reports that the teachers wrote about their classroom activities. They described their own reactions and feelings around the practices which happened during each session. The researcher then categorized the reflections in order, and also divided the reflections to three categories including reflection before action, reflection during action and reflection after action, and applied a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. Results indicated that the two teachers engaged in different reflective components as well as different chronological types of reflection. Also, it was found that the use of reflective practice could bring about positive changes in the novice teachers' teaching practice and improve their overall professional practice.

Keywords: reflective practice, Teacher professional development, teacher diary.

Introduction

The great assets of any educational system are teachers. They transfer knowledge, skills and values. Teaching as a profession involves a set of challenges and decisions. Teachers need to be aware that they can adjust themselves so that they are able to evaluate their own performance and try to grow. The complexity of teaching requires teachers to review their teaching methods and choose appropriate methods for the advancement of their careers and increase the performance and progress of learners. However, experience alone does not improve teachers' performance, so there is a need to engage teachers in continuous learning. One significant way to help teachers to progress is reflective practice. Reflective practice is an important tool for practice-based learning through which individuals learn from their professional experience rather than formal learning. It is one of the sources of professional development.

Teachers need to develop their profession and professional development allows teachers to learn new teaching skills and also allows them to interact with educators in other fields and use their experiences. Teacher professional development refers to activities that allow teachers to improve their skills and knowledge of teaching approaches (Bolam, 2000; Widodo, 2018).

Reflection practice is a key tool that can help teachers gain professional knowledge, expertise, and self-confidence. This reflection encourages teachers to discover their experiences through reflective practice and to write the results of what they have written in the form of a story and share with other teachers. Reflective practice is essential for the development and growth of teachers, cultural development and meaningful professional learning (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2013).

Reflective teaching is teacher's thinking about what is happening in the classroom and is a tool that teachers can use to think and analyze their classroom performance. Through their experiences, teachers can find educational problems in the classroom and look for solutions to improve their teaching process (Kathleen, Bailey, Curtis & Nunnan, 2004).

Materials and methods

Research Methods

The present study used a descriptive case study method for the research. A case study concentrates on one unit to produce a comprehensive, rich and holistic description. Case studies provide an extensive description of one unit. The "unit" can be an individual, a group, a class, etc. Case studies can respond to descriptive questions (what happened) or try to explain why something happened by examining a process. Case studies can respond to descriptive questions (what happened) or try to explain why something happened by examining a process.

Participants

The participants of the present study were two English language novice teachers from two different private language institutes in Bandar Abbas teaching at elementary levels. Both teachers were female. The first participant, Zahra, was a novice teacher with six months of professional experience and had been employed shortly after graduation. The second participant, Nasrin, was a junior teacher with 3 months of work experience who had been employed after completing an undergraduate degree at the university.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants of this study. The selection of participants from English-Language teachers was limited to novices with less than a year of teaching experience. No participant had participated in a reflective education program prior to the present study.

Instrumentation

Firstly, this study adapted the reflective teaching scale developed by Akbari et al (2010). The model is composed of 6 components. In addition, the researcher added another element called "technology" for the purpose of this study. Hence, the **seven** elements of the model include *practical*, *affective*, *cognitive*, *metacognitive*, *moral*, *critical* along with the added element, *technical*. The components of Akbari et al's (2010) model are further explained below:

Practical element : elements that address tools and the real practice of reflection. include audio and video recordings, surveys and questionnaires, lesson reports, journal writing, observation, teaching portfolios, team discussions and critical incident analysis.

.Cognitive element: teachers' attempts to pursue professional development. Such as reading professional literature, attending lectures and workshops

Learner element (Affective): address a teacher's reflection on their students and how learners react, act emotionally or learn in their classes.

metacognitive element: This element deals with teachers and their reflections on their own personality and beliefs, their emotional makeup

Critical element: This element comprises elements of the socio-political situation of education and reflections on it .

Moral element: Items included issues that examine the teachers' ethical issues

Technical element: Teachers use methods to teach based on their teaching situations and use these specific methods in their classes. Because students have different abilities and talents, so the teachers chooses a specific methods according to student abilities to learn better

Teacher Diary

Diary was used as a tool to collect qualitative data. These diaries or journals contain teachers' written subjective data such as programs, descriptions, reactions and perceptions as well as interpretations of Classroom experiences that are recorded in the diary and also consist of critical reflection, careful analysis, evaluation, and short-term and long-term planning.

Procedure

First, initial information was gathered about the participants' demographic information including their employment information and educational credentials. Then, the researcher explained the aims and the process of reflective practice to the participants prior to the beginning of their instruction. The strategies to make diaries and record classroom events were thoroughly illustrated to the participants. Several formats and frameworks were also presented and explained to make them familiar with writing reflective journal or diary. The two teachers were then required to record and write their classroom practices, problems and solutions, feelings and reactions. Teachers wrote their teaching reports every session before teaching, while teaching and after teaching. Data was collected from the teachers' dairies. At first, the two teachers complained about not having time to write, but both of them sent reports to the researcher. The researcher asked the two novice teachers to describe all feelings, reactions, events and problems in detail. The whole process of data collection took 3 months to complete. At the end of the term of instruction, teacher diaries were collected and the data was subsequently described and analyzed.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the data was first classified according to Akbari's (2010). The model has six components; however, as part of the journal data could not be related to any of the six components of the above-mentioned model, the researcher added an additional component called the "technical" component. Teacher reflections were then investigated and the frequency and percentage of each component in each teacher's diary were identified and tabulated.

Additionally, the reflections were investigated and classified according to Farrell's (2015) and Schön's (1983) models to see whether the reflections occurred before teaching, during teaching or after teaching. The chronological types of reflection were tabulated for the two teachers separately.

In the third stage, to understand what changes could be observed in the teachers' reflective journal writing as they progressed towards the middle and end of the instruction, the researcher compared their initial and final reflections. Tracking such changes could then be used to decide whether these changes could be interpreted as growth and development.

Frequency of Reflective Components of Novice Teachers

Zahra was engaged in the **technical** component the most and the **Cognitive** component the least. Nasrin was engaged in the **Meta-cognitive** component the most and had no reflection for the critical component. She was engaged in the **Practical** component the least. Table 1 represents the frequency of reflective components of novice teachers.

Table 1: Frequency of Reflective Components of Novice Teachers.

component	Zahra		Nasrin	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Practical	6	11.32	2	3.44
Cognitive	2	3.78	6	10.34
Learner (Affective)	5	9.44	8	13.79
Meta-cognitive	7	13.20	25	43.11
critical	5	9.44	0	0
Moral	6	11.32	2	3.44
technical	22	41.50	15	25.86

Chronological types of reflection

According to the framework of Farrell (2015) and, Schön (1983), Zahra had the most reflection during the action and Nasrin had the most reflection before action.

Table 2: Chronological Types of Reflection

chronological type of reflection	Zahra	Nasrin
	percentage	percentage
Reflection before action	25.5	41.5
Reflection during action	43.5	36
Reflection after action	31	22.5

Comparison of the reflections during the semester, and teacher development

In this section, Zahra's reflections were compared during the semester. Table 3, 4,5 shows the comparisons.

Table 3: Interpretation of changes Early semester (Zahra)

Reflection Time	Reflections	Interpratation
Early semester	put the content in the simplest possible way. (meeting 1) giving more homework. (meeting 2)	paying more attention merely on the content
	formed a WhatsApp group to interact with pupils and parent. (meeting 3)	the teacher emphasizes on the learning of the learners and do not pay attention to other issues.

Table 4 : Interpretation of Changes Mid Semester (Zahra)

Mid semester	talk to them about the culture of the various countries, and respect the views of others. (meeting 5)	in addition to paying attention to the content, pays attention to the social issues.
	paying attention to stress of pupils, and, deciding to reduce their stress and raise their spirits. (meeting 5)	in addition to pay attention to the content, and social issues.

Reflective practice for growth : the case of two novice teachers

Mid semester		pay attention to emotional issues.
	grouping the students and ask them to write a conversation about the text of the lesson. It helps to improve their writing. (meeting 5) I used the brainstorming method. (meeting 6) playing an English poem to create more class focus and improve listening skills.(meeting 8)	in addition to the traditional methods of the book, the teacher selected alternative teaching methods that had better results.
	handed over the management of the class to a student. (meeting 7).	Making more variety
	Taking survey from pupils. (meeting 8) Thinking of energetic teacher. (meeting 8) Boosting motivation for class discussions by allowing learners to eat snacks in class and having food-related discussions. (meeting 12).	In addition to paying attention to students' behavior, lesson content, and social issues, the teacher also pays attention to herself and tendency to improve teaching.

Table 5 : Interpretation of Changes Late semester(Zahra)

Late semester	To reduce students' stress in answering the lesson, answering to question as a group, and announcing of good effect in reducing stress. (meeting 10)	trying to test solution
	Thinking of, not talking to pupils directly about their mistake and guide them (meeting 11). bring a snack or an object from home to class and discuss it verbally, to better learn and strengthen speaking, which made a special motivation and increased pupils learning. (meeting 12).	trying to better teaching and enhance learning of pupils
	dividing the student into four groups to enhance their speaking skills and focusing on each group, and making more excitement. testing this method, and seeing the outcome of this session. It is a long and time-consuming approach (meeting 14).	the teacher uses alternative teaching methods and makes conclusions, and find out, which this method is better and even mentions its disadvantages.

Comparison reflections during the semester, and Nasrin development

In this section, **Nasrin's** reflections were compared during the semester. Table 6,7,8 shows the Comparisons.

Table 6: Interpretation of Changes Early semester (Nasrin)

	Reflection Time	Reflections	Interpratation
1	Early semester	<p>Arranging the class in the simplest possible way talked to the students about having encouragement and admiration Meeting1</p> <p>In this session, I reviewed the second homework of the previous lesson and reviewed the previous year and asked the lesson that some students had problems in some parts of the lesson, and here I read the words with patience and calmness with them. I practiced with them till they finally learn.</p> <p>(Meeting2)</p> <p>Some students were more intelligent and had higher knowledge, but others had lower knowledge. Students with lower levels of learning slow down the classroom process.</p> <p>(Meeting2)</p> <p>not being sensitive to some issues and thinking of issue (Meeting3)</p>	<p>paying more attention to the classroom management, students' learning and the classroom atmosphere</p>
		<p>creating excitement while learning (Meeting 4)</p> <p>When I promise to give them an award, I will do so that students know that I am faithful to the covenant</p>	<p>in addition to pay attention to the classroom management pay attention to social and emotional issues.</p>

Reflective practice for growth : the case of two novice teachers

		and I indirectly teach their faithfulness to the covenant. (Meeting4) considers a reward for the students (Meeting 4) I am aware that creating competition among students increases their motivation. (Meeting 4)	Creating methods for more learning
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Table 7: Interpretation of Changes Mid Semester (Nasrin)

Mid semester	<p>identify verbs, nouns and pronouns, was difficult for students and told them to memorize and repeat the sentences. After memorizing the phrases, I realized that it was easier for them to learn names, verbs, etc. (Meeting 5)</p> <p>that they used the Persian language structure for English sentences and put the words in the same order in the English language, which I later realized that if I defined a formula for them, It is better. After defining the formula, I noticed that they were learning the sentence structure grew and they made fewer errors. (Meeting 5)</p> <p>I think the difficulty of the topics is directly related to the order in the classroom</p>	<p>Realize problems and trying to solve it</p> <p>trying to better teaching and enhance learning of pupils</p> <p>achieving a result to control the order</p>
	<p>I talked to them for the incentives to learn the language, because they were boys and would like to be soccer player in the future so that I said if you want to meet foreign clubs, you need to learn languages. (Meeting 6)</p> <p>learning of students by the way of speech increases more than the way of writing (Meeting 6)</p>	<p>increasing motivation and learning</p> <p>comparing teaching methods and thinks about best method</p>
	<p>I realized that my classroom is teacher-center and decided that the classroom should be teacher-center and student-center because when my classroom is teacher-centered, students become tired quickly. (Meeting 8)</p>	<p>deciding to change teaching</p>

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Table 8 : Interpretation of Changes Late Semester (Nasrin)

Late semester	Have repeated encouragement and put non-punitive and blame at work. (Meeting10)	thinking of more motivation, and more pupils encourages solve problem with other way better than previous session
	<p>I think to increase student self-confidence; I should improve Self-esteem. (Meeting10)</p> <p>I know a student with high stress will have less learning, and I need to reduce stress and increase motivation.(Meeting12)</p>	Looking deeper into the problems

Discussion

This study investigated the reflective practice of two novice teachers through the data obtained from teachers' written diaries. Firstly, the researcher found different reflective components in the two teachers' logs. Secondly, the descriptive analysis of the data revealed that the two teachers practiced their reflective activities at different times in their teaching. Thirdly, several changes could be observed in the reflective practice of the teachers. One of teachers paid more attention to learning at the beginning of the process and used a fixed number of textbook-based strategies. However, at the end of the reflection period, she tried to make use of various techniques and attended more to learners' behavior and their problems. Hence, she became more independent from the textbook and tried to employ more useful strategies in her classroom .

At the beginning of reflection, other teacher paid more attention to classroom management and tried to motivate students to learn and maintain class order. However, at the end of the semester, in addition to classroom management, she also paid attention to instructional materials and used more successful teaching techniques while abandoning unhelpful strategies. Also, she included more social and moral issues at the end of the semester, which were not discussed in the initial reports. In final reflections, more signs of progress could be observed in this teacher. The reason was that thinking and reflection make teachers more conscious of their teaching attitudes and practices.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that teachers can make use of diary writing to reflect on their teaching activities to gain a better understanding of their own teaching context. Reflective journals could help the participant teachers identify their challenges and think how to overcome the challenges and choose better solutions. Also, it was found that each teacher can reflect in his/her unique way and at a different time. This is because teachers have formed a repertoire of attitudes, assumptions and practices in their path to become teachers and therefore the classroom issues they attend to can be completely different from those of other teachers. The results of study showed that the more teachers are left on their own to reflect on what they do in their classrooms, the more beneficial can be their formal teacher training courses. In fact, dairy writing made teachers assume more responsibility of their classroom activities through a process of self-evaluation and by planning to find solutions for classroom problems.

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