Towards an Effective practice through Reflective Teaching

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Abstract :

There is a shift of focus in language teaching methodology from learning to teaching. Teaching is no more seen as the transmission of knowledge; rather, it is all what teachers do in the classrooms to bring about learning. Teachers' beliefs are very influential in what they teach and how they teach. Effective teachers have developed the capacity to reflect on their thoughts and actions in order to make them in accordance with their belief system. However, not all teachers are aware of the conflict between what they believe in and what they really did in their classrooms. Reflective teachers are interested in finding answers to the following questions: what did happen in their classrooms? Why did it happen? And how to make it better in future? The reflective teaching cycle helps teachers to bridge the gap between their theories and actions for effective teaching practice.

الملخّص:

تحول التركيز في منهجية تدريس اللغة من التعلم إلى التعليم. التعليم لم يعد يعتبر نقل المعرفة؛ بل هو كل ما يفعله الأساتذة في الأقسام الدراسية لإحداث التعلم . لمعتقدات الأساتذة دور مؤثر في ما يدرسونه وكيف يدرسونه . طور الأساتذة الفعالين القدرة على التفكر في أفكارهم وأفعالهم لجعلها وفقا لنظام اعتقادهم. ومع ذلك ليس جميع الأساتذة على بينة من الصراع بين ما يعتقدونه وما يفعلونه حقا في أقسامهم.. يهتم الأساتذة المفكرين بإيجاد أجوبة للأسئلة التالية: ماذا حدث في افسامهم ؟ لماذا حدث ذلك؟ و كيف يمكن تحسينه في المستقبل؟ دورة التعليم التفكري تساعد الأساتذة على سد الفجوة بين النظرية والتطبيق من أجل تدريس فعال.

Introduction

Teaching refers to the activities that stimulate language learning. It includes teachers' beliefs about themselves, their learners and their practice. Language teaching has been influenced by Dewey's and SchÖn's studies in the field of reflection and reflective practice respectively. Reflective teaching refers to teachers' deep consideration of their knowledge, skills and actions. It deals with the reconstruction of knowledge that results from the awareness-raising attitudes that teachers are keen on developing about their practice. However, the process of reflective practice is not automatic; it needs time to develop. The questions to be asked are: what is teaching? What is reflective teaching? Who is the reflective teacher? Who is the effective teacher? And how to develop reflective teaching practice in our classrooms?

1.Teaching

According to Ho & Giblin (1996), teaching is a cognitive and behavioural activity that is concerned with knowledge, awareness, beliefs and skills. Cowan (2006, p. 100) sees teaching as the purposeful creation of situations from which motivated learners should not escape without learning or developing. Moran & Dallat (1995, p. 24) explain that teaching is a highly complex and active process that involves considerable interchange between thought and action.

Williams & Burden see teaching similar to learning, "Teaching, like learning, must be concerned with teachers making sense of, or meaning from, the situations in which they find themselves"(1997, p. 51). Bartlett (1997, p. 204) perceive teaching as an interactive process that needs to develop shared understandings in a community of knowledge users and developers. He advocates that teaching becomes pedagogy when teachers involve learners in learning inside and outside the classroom. Tudor (1996) highlights that in a pedagogy emphasizing learner centredness, students' roles cannot be redefined without a parallel redefinition of teachers' role.

Moreover, Hyatt & Beigy (1999) draw attention to the impact of teaching and the teacher on the learning process. Indeed, Stern (2001, p. 21) explains that a theory of language teaching always implies concepts of language learning. He admits that a good language teaching theory would meet learners' conditions and needs in the best possible way. For Arnold, "Learning is a goal; teaching is but a

tool"(1999, p. 25). Robles clarifies," Fostering our students' awareness of the learning process is clearly in their own interest; however, making them more active, responsible, autonomous and positive has to be in the teacher's interest, too" (1998, p. 46).

2.Teachers' Beliefs

Williams & Burden(1997, p. 56) recognize teacher's beliefs as central in the construction of reflective teachers; "…teachers are highly influenced by their beliefs, which in turn are closely linked to their values, to their views of the world and to their conceptions of their place within it". They advocate that beliefs are more influential than knowledge in how teachers organize and define tasks and problem. They advocate that teachers' beliefs include beliefs about learners, learning and themselves. First, teacher's beliefs about learners refer to teacher-learner power relationship, awareness of learners' differences and motivation strength. Second, teachers' beliefs about learning refer to learning as a means to an end, to pass examinations or as a life-long process. They advance; "We can only be really effective teachers if we are clear in our minds what we mean by learning because only then we can know what kinds of learning outcomes we want our learners to achieve" (ibid, p. 60). Finally, teachers' beliefs about themselves consider teacher's conception of themselves as persons and what kind of social interaction they believe is the most appropriate for their learners. It deals with what the teacher as a person brings to the classroom concerning teacher-learner relationship. They further clarify,

- In every teaching act teachers define themselves as persons and teachers, and their views of teaching mirror their view of themselves and their teaching behaviour reflect their essence as persons.
- Teaching is an expression of values and attitudes, not just information or knowledge.
- Teachers must recognize that they themselves are constantly involved in a lifelong process of learning and change.

Therefore, teachers should be aware that there is no progress if what they believe in is not reflected in what they do; besides they should be aware that the conscious effort is required to bring their behaviour into line with their current beliefs about teaching and learning (Woods, 1996).

3.Reflective Teaching

Farrell (2003) and Fatemipour (2007) see that reflective practice is becoming a dominant paradigm in ESL/EFL teacher education programs. Subsequently, the concept of reflection has had an influence on teacher education throughout the twentieth century. Farrell (2003) distinguishes between routine action and reflective action. The first refers to the unconscious practice that is carried out as an unanalyzed chunk, teachers may not be aware of a particular behaviour which has been previously internalized. The second can benefit ESL/EFL teachers in getting rid of the routine behaviour allowing them to act in a more intentional way and develop awareness of their own teaching practice.

According to Ferraro (2000), SchÖn (1983) has introduced the concept of reflective practice as a critical process in refining one's practices in a specific discipline. Merickel (1998) clarifies that reflection begins with the recognition of the dilemma in addition to an affective response that represents a state of doubt and hesitation; this emotional awareness provides a bridge to critically analyze one's assumptions and beliefs about students, learning and one's practice. Knezevic & Scholl argue, "Reflection has the power to help the teacher connect experience and theoretical knowledge in order to use area of expertise more effectively" (1996, p. 79). In addition, reflective teaching is an approach to teaching and to teacher education which is based on the assumption that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences (Longman Dictionary). Hence, reflective teaching is the process of continual intellectual, experimental and attitudinal growth (Hedge & Whitney, 1996). Blàzquez (2007, p. 33) pinpoints reflection as a powerful instrument that brings about change in the classroom; it enables teachers to overcome the teacher-centered style of teaching, personal traits, and the experiences by allowing teachers to give their students appropriate control over their learning. Consequently, reflective practice is an important concept in the literature on teaching and learning in Higher Education.

4.Benefits of Reflective Teaching

Kwo (1996) advances that the structure of the current teaching practice saves little time and encouragement for reflection. However, Farrell (2003) reveals that reflective teaching frees teachers from impulse and routine actions; it allows teachers to act in an intentional

manner; "Reflection enables teachers to experience and enjoy a new level of self-articulated professionalism" (Farrell, 2003, p. 14). Brockbank & McGill point out that reflective practice is a core attribute to reflective learning (2007, p. 88). Ferraro (2000) and Batstidas (1996) find reflective action as an effective technique for professional development.

Moreover, Lange (1997) shows that reflective practice allows teachers to examine their relations with their learners, beliefs, capabilities, successes and failure in their teaching practice. Indeed, Gebhard (1992) sees that an awareness of these aspects benefits teachers in understanding the effect of their teaching practice on their learners, "The more aware they become of the consequences of their teaching, the more control they have over how to teach" (1992, p. 5). Reed & Koliba (2000) recognize that the depth of reflection determines the quality of attitudes and the subsequent actions. Furthermore, Boud & Walker (1998, p. 199) show that reflection and the promotion of reflective practice often lead to more effective learning. They pinpoint that in establishing conditions for reflection, teachers need to consider themselves and what they are able to do or not; their learners with building trust and creating situations in which learners are able to work their own meaning rather than have it imposed on them; the local context in which they work in relation to the process they use and the expected outcome.

In addition, Scales highlights that reflective teachers are more likely to develop reflective learners, " if we practice reflection we can more effectively encourage learners to reflect on, analyse, evaluate and improve their own learning" (2008, p. 14). In fact, Sprenger reveals, "there is a consensus that reflection can be and must be taught" (2005, p. 47). Lyons (2010, p. 118) pinpoints that reflective teachers ask questions rather than give answers; questions will develop learners' critical thinking- considering their strengths and their future plan for improvement. Hence, developing learners' questioning minds is part of teacher's effective teaching.

6.The Reflective Teaching Cycle

Bartlett (1997) suggests five phases involved in the cycle of reflection: mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting. First, mapping is represented by the following question: "What do I do as a teacher?" "It involves the observation and the collection of information about one's own teaching. It can be through audio/visual means or journal/diary writing. Second, informing refers to "what is

the meaning of my teaching?" "What did I intend?" It deals with the consideration of the first record in order to make meaning of it. Informing may occur after a teaching sequence or a lesson; besides, it can be accomplished individually or in discussion with others. This offers the possibility of extending one's insight about oneself as a teacher and a member of a larger community. The outcome of this phase of informing is the distinction between teaching as a routine and teaching as reflection which searches for the best possible solution based on informed choice.

Third, contesting deals with "how did I come to be this way?" " How was it possible for my present view of teaching to have emerged?" This phase considers the ideas and the reasons that uncover one's teaching assumptions. The phases of mapping and informing consider one's theories about teaching, while the contesting phase confronts the reasons for one's teaching actions; "Contestation involves a search for inconsistencies and contradictions in what we do and how we think"(ibid, p. 212). Fourth, appraisal deals with "how might I teach differently?" or "what would be the consequences to learning if I changed…?" This phase leads to a search for alternative paths of action, in which a link is established between the thinking dimension of reflection and the search for teaching ways with one's new understanding.

Acting, the last phase in the cycle deals with "what and how shall I now teach?" There is continuity between the preceding phases and the phase of putting in action new ideas about one's teaching. This cycle, as Bartlett advances, offers a regular approach to the process of making committed choice as the basis of effective teaching. This cycle helps the teacher to move from the unconscious incompetence to the conscious competence. Scales (2008) points out that successful teaching requires teachers to constantly challenge and develop their practice by regular reflection and review.

7. The Reflective Teacher

From the early eighties, a great deal of discussion has been concerned with the reflective practitioner. Freeman & Richards (1996, p. 1) view that in order to better understand language teaching, it is necessary to know more about language teachers: what they do, how they think, what they know and how they learn. SchÖn (1983), the pioneer of the idea of "the reflective practitioner", argued that the most effective method of developing autonomous professional practice is through the ability to reflect on one's professional practice

as 'a reflective practitioner'. Reflective teachers are pro-active rather than reactive (Wallace, 1996); they are continually engaged in developing their professional expertise via solving problems, deepening their understanding of their subject-matters, of themselves as teachers and of the nature of their teaching (SchÖn, 1983). A reflective teacher knows the art and the craft of teaching (Lange, 1997, p. 247).

Hinett (2002) points out that to bring change and model good reflective practice for students, teachers need to engage in and model the ideas, practices and processes that are conducive to such learning. She pinpoints that in order to be effective, the teacher has to be reflective; "Understanding how we learn as teachers and recognizing the influence of colleagues around us helps to support students in their learning and interaction with others" (2002, p. 50). Similarly, Edge & Wharton (1999, p. 296/7) see reflective practice as a key element for teacher development. It encompasses teacher's examination of what they do and what they need to enhance. It implies certain attitudes from the teacher that includes critical thinking, the desire to continue to learn and to be open to new possibilities.

For Fatemipour (2007), reflective teaching can only occur when teachers are willing to endure the trouble of searching; however, some teachers are impatient and may choose the first given solution; other's may avoid the state of doubt by stopping reflection, and for others this state is a sign of their mental inferiority. He asserts, "one can think reflectively only when one is willing to endure suspense and undergo the trouble of searching (2007, p. 40). He also highlights two pitfalls associated with reflection; certain teachers follow reflective practice but do not take any action, whereas others consider reflection as a process through which an observed problem is solved but they are not interested in finding out the underlying reasons causing the observed problem. Stanley (1999) formulates the following guiding questions to reflective teaching: What happened (As much as possible)? Why did it happen so (in that way)? How to make it better on the bases of why? Similarly, Bartlett (1997, p. 205) points out that reflective practice engages the teacher in asking questions 'what' and 'why' with respect to their instructions and management techniques as part of a larger educational purpose, providing the possibility of changing classroom realities.

8. The Effective Teacher

Reflective learning cannot be promoted without reflective teaching, and this last cannot be achieved without being an effective teacher. Effective teaching can only be achieved if certain aspects are considered by the facilitator teacher in the classrooms. Scales (2008) highlights reflection as an important component of an effective lifelong teaching. Harris states that a high correlation had been found between students' achievement scores and teaching behaviour or skills (1998, p. 170). He sees that effective teaching includes three important elements: knowledge (about the subject matter, curriculum, methods, one's influence on teaching and learning), decision-making- (thinking and decision making before, during and after a lesson to achieve the intended educational outcomes), and actions (teacher's overt behaviour for fostering learning). He adds that effective teaching requires teacher's commitment to be effective and to foster such commitment in schools. For Kuiper (2011, p. 2), good teachers are also good learners because they are not just interested in what they teach but also in how they teach.

Bailey, Bergthald, Braunstein, Fleischman, Holbrook, Truman & Zambo (1996) pinpoint that the teaching style could evolve on the basis of selecting the traits of effective teachers. For Ancker (1992, p. 48), effective teaching includes three main categories: class-management, teacher-learner relation and personal traits. Class-management includes the following elements: using the target language as the only language of communication, speaking at the students' level, stating the lesson's objectives at the beginning of each lesson and giving clear instructions. The second category, teacher-learners relationship, involves motivating the students especially in the first few minutes of each class and giving positive feedback. The third category refers to personal traits that the teacher should display mainly being organized, punctual, cheerful and energetic. He emphasizes that knowledge of theses fundamentals in addition to experience in practicing them are what make a good teacher. Hence, the effective teacher should reflect constantly on all the elements involved in their teaching/learning environment.

9. Towards The Reflective Teaching Practice

The move from teaching subject content to facilitating reflective dialogue with learners, is not straightforward. The transition from transmitting content to attending to learners' needs may be unfamiliar or difficult for both teachers and learners (Brockbank & McGill, 2007,

p. 209). Facilitation is intentional in the sense that the teachers are conscious of what they are doing and why. They may also wish to declare explicitly their purpose and how they intend to achieve it with colleagues and/or students. Such explicit articulation enables the facilitators to be clear about what they are doing and whether it is appropriate. Subsequently, the move towards facilitation has encouraged teachers in higher education to invite students to contribute, while holding the power over what is to be learned and control how it is to be learned.

How can a traditional teacher begin the journey towards incorporating facilitative methods into her/his existing practice? Brockbank & McGill (2007) refer to two points. First, the facilitator should establish a relationship which is conducive to learning. Second, s/he should create the conditions for transformatory or reflective learning. Students cannot begin to accept responsibility for their own learning and development unless the teacher relinquishes some of what has been traditionally her/his responsibility. Teacher will need to do less telling and more listening. For instance, the professional development is the matter of self-initiated growth that can be promoted through reflective practice.

Cowan (2006, p. 117) views that the reflective approach should be carefully planned involving the following three main features: 1) A challenge or an activity which is intrinsically motivating. 2) A very carefully planned task which is simply, clearly and adequately explained, and 3) Equally well-considered facilitation as the teacher seeks to support learning and development by pushing learners into their ZPD. Moreover, Zwozdiak-Myers (2011, pp. 27 -37) suggests nine dimensions of reflective practice:

1. Study their teaching for personal improvement.
2. Systematically evaluate their teaching through classroom research procedures.
3. Link theory with their practice.
4. Question their personal theories and beliefs.
5. Consider alternative perspectives and possibilities.
6. Try out new strategies and ideas.
7. Maximise the learning potential of all their students.
8. Enhance the quality of their teaching.
9. Continue to improve their teaching.

Kennedy (1996) highlights that the aim of reflective teaching is not only to acquire effective teaching skills, but also to develop

professional autonomy through the analysis of one's teaching experience. Ur (1998) and Davis & Pears (2000) argue that teacher development options can be grouped into three main categories: 1) self-development through constant reflection, diary writing and reading); 2) co-operative development via sharing with colleagues, peer-observation and teachers' associations;   and 3) formal development through training programs, conferences and seminars.

For an effective reflection on one's practice, certain tools are of great help such as: action research, questionnaire, diary/journal, experimental study and classroom observation. Besides, Harmer refers to modern communication technology like the virtual community to keep teachers in touch with a larger teacher community; "One of the best ways of reflecting upon our teaching practice is to become learners ourselves" (2001, p. 350). Moreover, He highlights that teachers who seek to develop themselves and their practice will benefit both their students and themselves far more than those who by constant and unthinking repetition gradually become less and less engaged with the task of language teaching (2001, p. 244).

9.Reflection Questions

We suggest some questions that can guide teachers' reflection on their practice and beliefs. They are as follows:
- o   Can we, teachers, clearly articulate what is teaching?
- o   Can we clearly articulate what is learning?
- o   Are we aware of our impact on our learners?
- o   Are we aware of our strengths and weaknesses?
- o   Are we effective teachers?
- o   Do we, teachers, know who our learners are?
- o   Are we aware of our learners' needs? If yes? How?
- o   Is our practice in the classroom in accordance with our theory about teaching and learning?.
- o   Do we question our personal theories and beliefs?
- o   Do we try out new ideas and strategies in our classrooms?
- o   Do we provide opportunities for our learners to develop their knowledge and skills?
- o   Are we- teachers- keen on developing our professional development? If yes, How?
- o   Do we systematically evaluate our teaching? If yes, how?
- o   Do we keep searching ways to improve our teaching?
- o   Whenever we face a dilemma in our classrooms, do we ignore

- o it? Try to find solutions? Reflect about the reasons behind this problem?
- o Are we keen on developing reflective learners?
- o Are we keen on using the 'wait-time' technique to let our learners think? Or are we always in a hurry to answer our own questions?
- o Do we reflect on our teaching practice? If yes, how?
- o Is there an evidence of our reflection?
- o Are we involving ourselves in a lifelong learning? If yes, how?
- o Have we tried to change the actual learning situation in the Algerian University and develop more autonomous learners?
- o Do we believe that reflecting on our practice is the key of effective teaching?

<u>Conclusion</u>

Teaching is no more regarded as transmission of knowledge; nevertheless, it is the art of facilitating the learning process. For an effective teaching practice, teachers should be keen on observing, analyzing, experimenting and making a theory out of their teaching/learning contexts. Teaching is no more about the methods teachers apply; however, the focus is on the teachers themselves. Besides, teachers' beliefs are of great effect on their teaching since it includes their beliefs about learning, learners and themselves as persons. But are teachers aware of the beliefs behind their teaching practice? Is their practice in parallel with their theory? Is their teaching guarantee their desired learning outcome? Reflecting on one's practice provides the appropriate answers. In fact, reflecting on one's practice is the corner stone of effective teaching. Reflective teachers enroll themselves in a lifelong learning process. Whenever they feel confused or uncertain during their sessions, they begin their investigations, find the source of this state and solve it for a better teaching and learning situation in their classrooms. Reflective teaching is time consuming but it is very rewarding for both teachers and learners.

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