

EFL TEACHERS ENGAGEMENT IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

What tools do EFL teachers utilize to reflect their teaching?

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Abstract

As lifelong learners, teachers should not stop learning and evaluating their teaching. One of the ways to “evaluate” teacher’s teaching is by conducting reflective practice. Reflective practice or sometimes called reflective teaching is not a new concept. It has long been applied in the field of education as a means to develop teacher professionalism. This study was aimed at reviewing some reflective practice tools utilized by EFL teachers in reflecting their classroom *performance* as an attempt to improve their teaching. 4 English teachers with teaching experience ranging from 7-24 years were involved in this study. Data were collected through interview and questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed by using interactive model data analysis by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014). The result of data analysis informed some individual differences among EFL teacher’s preference in doing reflection over their teaching. Basically, there were 5 tools utilized by respondents to evaluate their teaching; learning journal, students’ feedback, peer observation, action research and audio/video recording. The finding indicated the role of reflective practice in teacher development was very vital since it was related to the improvement teaching quality and learning outcomes.

Keywords: reflective practice, reflective practice tools, teacher professional development

Introduction

Reflective practice as a tool for teacher professional development has long been practiced in the field of teacher education. Reflective practice is expected to improve teacher performance in the classroom which later on will affect students’ learning and learning outcomes. As lifelong learners, teachers should continue learning and make evaluation towards their teaching to create a meaningful learning for their students. Today, people need to evaluate “readily available, often contradictory and constantly changing information” (Dyke, 2006, p. 105) to engage with their social world. In that sense, reflection is a key component in becoming more aware of the concept of ‘self’ through tacit conceptualizations (Farrell, 2015). Related to this situation, reflective teachers need to pay more attention to “reflective practice” activity. Reflective practice is considered as an effective tool for teachers’ professional development because it triggers teachers to reflect or investigate their teaching by

looking at several aspect, such as teaching and learning materials, classroom activities, classroom management, etc. In other words, reflective practice is beneficial for teachers as Farrell (2012) argues reflective practice helps teachers make critical reflection to all aspects of their work, so they can make an informed decision for betterment of their work performance. While, Richards & Farrell (2005) say teachers need to get involved in reflective practice to keep up-to-date with curriculum trends, second language acquisition research, and assessment. Farrell (1999) opines reflective practice predominantly helps teachers develop a more profound and richer understanding of their own teaching style, methods and techniques; and how effectively they actually teach.

Dewey (1933) as cited in Dewey (2007) defines reflection as an “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads” (p. 6).

Schön (1983) adopts this concept of reflection and attempts to make it more applicable within the understanding of a professional practice by categorizing it into two types: reflection-on-action, the retrospective analysis of past experiences, and reflection-in-action, the almost spontaneous analysis of active thought (cited in Schon, 2016). Following the criticisms on Schön's models which is thought to be incomplete, van Manen (1991) adds the third dimension to Schön's model: reflection-for-action, a prospective type of reflection that focuses on the future of action, with possible alternatives and an action plan in mind (in Van Mannen, 2016).

Farrell (2004, p. 7) depicts reflective practice "requires teachers examine the values and beliefs about learning". Further, he builds up some reasons why teachers need to engage in reflective practice, those are; finding help when teachers feel helpless about their teaching, taking control over teachers working lives, and being empowered decision maker. Valli as cited in Farrell (2004), identifies that through reflective practice teachers can look back and make judgement about their teaching, and thereby they can find solution for teaching problems.

The use of reflective practice in educational field has been widely recognized worldwide. Farrell (2012) believes that the use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the belief that teachers can improve their teaching by consistently and systematically make some reflections on their teaching. In order to apply reflective practice, teachers can select the appropriate existing tools with their needs. They could be teaching journal, peer observation, peer coaching, students' feedback, audio recording/video recording, or action research (Lee, 2007; Fatemipour, 2013; Soisangwarn & Wongwanich, 2014, and Susoy, 2015). The result of the study conducted by Fatemipour (2013) more specifically reveals 4 most effective tools of

reflective practice employed by teachers in conducting reflection.

The problem investigated in this current study is the engagement of EFL teachers in reflective practice. More specifically, it looks at some tools of reflective practice utilized by EFL teachers in doing reflection over their teaching. Regarding the aforementioned research problem, the goal of this study is to find out some tools utilized by EFL teachers in conducting reflective practice.

Methodology

This research falls under the category of qualitative study in the form of case study. There were 4 female English teachers with teaching experience ranging from 8-27 years involved in this study. To get the data, a set of questionnaire followed by in depth interview were employed. The questionnaire was used to see some tools of reflective practice used by the participating teachers, and then interview was conducted to understand the case better. Later on, data gathered through questionnaire and interview were analyzed by using interactive model analysis for qualitative data by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), it involves data condensation, data display, and verifying conclusion.

Findings and Discussion

The following table shows some tools utilized by EFL teachers in doing reflection on their teaching. Basically, there are 5 tools employed by the participants in reflective practice, those are teaching journal, peer observation, students' feedback, action research, and audio/video recording. There is no peer coaching session conducted by the participants, because to do this activity, they need support and funding from school. To make it clear, the percentage is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Summary of reflective practice tools utilized by EFL teachers

No	Tools Utilized	Percentage
1	Teaching journal	100 %

2	Peer observation	100 %
3	Students' feedback	100 %
4	Audio/video recording	25 %
5	Action research	50 %

From the table, it is seen teaching journal, peer observation, and students' feedback are the most common tools utilized by the respondents. Teachers admit they get some benefits from doing reflection through writing a teaching journal. As stated by **Teacher 1** in our interview:

“ I regularly write my classroom activities in my teaching journal. It is just like my diary. It records my day. Through writing a journal, I can evaluate my teaching. By looking back at my classroom I make some improvements for my next teaching. I really find it beneficial”

Peer observation is another common medium to reflect teachers' teaching. The respondent of the study elaborate in doing peer observation, they usually come to the classroom with certain observation sheet.

“through peer observation, I learn how to overcome classroom problems from other peers. I also learn about new teaching techniques. When we did peer observation we come to the classroom with an observation form. It is about teaching and learning process. The purpose is not to judge, but more to learn together by evaluating the practice which is not run well” (An interview with **Teacher 3**)

The next strategy applied by respondents to evaluate their teaching is by asking for students' feedback. They usually do it at the beginning of semester and by the end of each subtopic.

“ I always include my students in decision making. At the beginning of the semester, We always discuss some rules in our class. We also talk about their expectation toward learning English. Instead, I also ask for their feedback regularly. After completing 1 chapter, I evaluate my teaching and learning process by asking their opinion about my classroom. I usually spread questionnaire to evaluate my teaching. I am very welcome for any comments

related to my teaching” (An interview with **Teacher 4**)

From the table, it also can be seen that recording teaching is only done by one teacher. **Teacher 2** says recording lesson can help teacher looks deeper at their teaching

“I think, we need to record our teaching every time, if we really want to be a professional teacher. There are many things we can learn from the recording. There might be some activities we neglect during teaching process, by recording it, we can watch it later and then make decision to improve our future performance which will affect students' learning and learning outcomes”

Another finding, 2 participants also conduct action research as a form of reflective practice. But, unfortunately, it is not done seriously due to factors.

“I did a collaborative action research last year. I know it is very important to develop our critical thinking and writing ability through action research. But, I find it is really challenging. I teach 28 hours a week, and I also have additional duty from principal” (**Teacher 2** in our interview)

“I did action research several months ago. But I am stuck in chapter 3. I dont know how to finish it. I think, lack of support from school leads teacher to be lazy. There is no such reward for those who conduct research. And also lack of knowledge makes the condition worse” (**Teacher 1**)

From the finding of the study it is found 5 tools utilized by EFL teachers in doing reflection. The result of the study yields quite similar result to study by Fatemipour (2013). In his study, Fatemipour examines some tools of reflective practice utilized by teachers. As the result, he finds four most effective tools in teacher reflective practice namely; teaching journal, peer observation, students' feedback , and audio/video recording. Another point, this current study also finds some impediments for teachers to be reflective practioners, to mention, lack of training, lack of support

from institution , and heavy workload are some of them .

Conclusion

Based on the above finding and discussion, there are some conclusions drawn from this study:

1. There are 5 tools of reflective practice utilized by EFL teachers in doing reflection, with teaching journal, peer observation, and students' feedback as the most common reflective practice tools applied in participants' daily reflection.
2. Teachers encountered several problems when conducting reflection, such as lack of training, lack of support from institution , and heavy workload.
3. It is suggested to other researchers to conduct study on reflective practice with a wider sample, so we can be well informed about reflective practice among EFL teachers and its benefits

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