

The Effect of Application of Language Teachers' Reflective Practices on Teaching Strategies

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- Reflection
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Abstract

The present study examines the present state of the English language teachers' reflective teaching strategies and its effect on language teaching and learning at secondary level. For the achievement of more authentic results both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools are used. A total number of 302 male and female English language teachers participated in the study. Multiple regression analysis has been applied to the data point out relationship between dependent and independent variables. The findings based on stated methodology, revealed that language teachers' reflective practices have a significant effect on their teaching strategies. It is found that, following reflective strategies, proper training and awareness related to reflective teaching may lead to successful and effective teaching methodologies and may lead to teachers' professional growth and effective language teaching skills.

1. Introduction

The study aims to investigate the effect of language teachers' reflective practices on teaching strategies at the secondary level of Islamabad. Reflective practices are a core part of teachers' professional development. They provide an insight to analyze the effectiveness of teachers' individual progress in classroom. Reflective practices play a significant role in

the teaching of English language and in helping the teachers to develop their professional skills (Greenwood, 1998; Bulman & Schutz, 2004; Pedro, 2005). Reflective teachers take the responsibilities of the classroom experiences (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; McGregor & Cartwright, 2011) as reflective teachers are effective decision makers (Zeichner, 2004; Ghaye, 2011; Roadman, 2010; Anita, 2011). It is, therefore, assumed if teachers are introduced to reflective practices, there are possibilities that teaching learning of English will become more effective and may lead to the attainment of goals of specified course.

The role of a teacher in any language classroom is pivotal. At secondary stage English is compulsory subject along with Urdu in school curriculum (Shami, 2005). Despite its official and academic importance, English language teaching in Pakistan has not received the attention of ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers. An ESL teacher plays the role of an evaluator, observer and a judge, to reflect on his/ her methodologies and strategies whether he/she is successful or not in achieving specified objectives. Therefore, a reflective teacher is the one who critically examines his/ her classroom teaching practices, comes up with some new ideas as how to improve one's performance to enhance learners' learning and puts those ideas into practice, which in Schon (1983)'s words is the cycle of appreciation, action and re-appreciation. Through reflections, teachers take the responsibility of their own learning and become critical to their own beliefs and teaching (Hamlin, 2004). It implies an active focus on the aims and objectives, as well as resources and technical competency.

The current research is an attempt to investigate the process of English language teaching with a focus on reflective practices of ESL teachers. Its aim is to investigate the effect of language teachers' reflective practices on teaching strategies at secondary level. ESL teachers' reflective practices play a significant role in the process of English language teaching and learning; these practices are rare in public sector schools in Islamabad. As a result, the teachers' performance remains unsatisfactory due to lack of reflective practices in language classrooms. Moreover, this area of research has not yet been explored systematically to address the issue at secondary school level. The present study is an effort to explore reflective practices of English language teachers, and its level of application in their teaching.

2. Literature Review

Reflection is one of the basic elements of reflective teaching. In the view of Tom (1985), a teacher's inquiry-oriented habit is the center of reflective teaching in order to become reflective, self-monitoring and adaptive. Cruickshank (1987) views reflection as a teacher's deliberation of his teaching and ways of achieving the desired goals and becoming 'watchful and attentive teachers of teaching'. Similarly, Posner (1989) refers reflection in teaching as a practice that helps teachers to plan and create new ways of teaching rather than being a victim to traditional way of teaching, and to infer new understandings from a new and up-to-date viewpoint". Moreover, conceptually, Calderhead (1989) considers two basic practices of reflective teaching through school experiences. The first one is 'reflection-in-action'. In his view previous experience and discussions with peers and colleagues play an important role in developing this skill. The second suggests that new teachers develop critical teaching skills with respect to contextual requirements. Reflective teaching according to Bartlett (1990) is moving beyond a primary concern with teaching

techniques and “how to” question and inquiring “why” and “what” questions for extensive academic purposes. In addition, Liston and Zeichner (1987) think of reflective teaching as a “process of discussion” which supports and helps teachers “recognize and select proper courses of action”. According to them there are three levels of reflection which can be achieved by practical teachers. These three levels of reflection according to them are: emphasizing instructive, educational and curriculum means to get academic goals and objectives, considering underlying assumptions for instructive reasons, and asking the moral implications of didactic actions and the structure of schooling. Ferguson (2011) asserts that teachers who examine their own classroom experiences and critically reflect over framework of their responsibilities, have zeal to improve teaching practices. Similarly, Jasper (2003) on the benefits of reflection, states, that habit of reflection enables teachers to exploit opportunities to a maximum level to handle all the challenges. Similarly, different educationists have put forward multiple techniques and strategies for language teachers through which they may investigate their classroom experiences. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994, p. 6) teacher’s journals, self-monitoring or lesson reports, audio and video recording, action research, survey and questionnaires are the techniques and strategies by which language teachers can record their reflections. From this perspective reflection can be linked to the professional development of teachers which is an ongoing process. Further, Richards and Farrell (2005) add teaching portfolio, analysis of critical events and case analysis to the list. Peer observation may also be one of the strategies by the language teachers to reflect upon their teaching practices.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Keeping objectives of the study in mind, mixed-method approach was followed which allows for the merging of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). The quantitative data was collected through questionnaire and the qualitative data was collected through interviews from language teachers.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the study were English language teachers from secondary schools in Pakistan. The population of the study comprises male and female ESL teachers in the federal public sector secondary schools and is generalized to the English language teaching community of the public sector schools in Pakistan. The population consisted of the schools operational both in the urban and federal areas.

3.3 Sample

The sample of this study consisted of the language teachers who were teaching English at secondary level. The total number of respondents was 350 English teachers. The questionnaires were distributed among 350 English language teachers and out of them 316 English teachers responded to the questionnaires. Moreover, after screening the data, the total number of respondents left, were 302. The researcher selected 28 institutions where male and female English language teachers were teaching and were randomly selected

where every individual teacher had an equal chance to be selected as a participant of this study. Out of the total number of institutions, 16 were taken from male institutions and 12 from female institutions. Further, 172 out of the total sample size consist of male language teachers and 130 respondents were taken from female language teachers.

3.4 Data Collection

As nature of the study demanded, the data was collected in two phases. In the first phase of data collection the researcher visited 28 different schools. The schools included both male and female schools. Additionally, the data was collected from the schools operational both in city and urban areas. In the second phase of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted from 20 English language teachers. Both male and female language teachers were interviewed to analyze the effect of reflective practices on language teachers’ teaching strategies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the effect on the application of reflective practices through strategies used by teacher for implementing the reflective practices in classrooms. For this purpose, the dependent variable was application (i.e. application of reflective practices) and the independent variable was strategies (i.e. strategies used by teachers for reflective practices) as shown in table 1. A significant variation was found ($F(1,300) = 181.561, p < .000$), with an R^2 of .377. Participants predicted value was equal to $1.765 + .598 = 2.363$ as shown in table below. The value reveals that strategies employed by language teachers have a significant effect on teachers’ application of reflective practices.

Table 1

Variables Entered/Removed^b

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Strategies ^a		. Enter

a. All requested variables entered

b. Dependent Variable: Application

Table 2

Model Summary

Model	Change Statistics								
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
dimension0 1	.614 ^a	.377	.375	.43387	.377	181.561	1	300	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategies

Table 3

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.177	1	34.177	181.561	.000 ^a
	Residual	56.473	300	.188		
	Total	90.650	301			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategies

b. Dependent Variable: Application

Table 4

Co-efficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	1.765	.169		10.454	.000
	Strategies	.598	.044	.614 13.474	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Application

On the other hand, the study also conducted interviews regarding the use of strategies for reflective practices. The two main strategies used by these language teachers were oral and written tests and follow up discussions with them. Some of them rated tests and discussions as a proper way to reflect upon teachers' classroom practices for improving their teaching methodologies. One of the respondents expressed "Only the way I can judge myself that is taking test because we are working on the previous teaching methods so that's only way that I can take test from the students that I may check myself."

One of the benefits of diary writing revealed through interviews that the teachers are able to note down their weaknesses and then to discuss them with their seniors. A teacher expressed “sometimes I also write diaries that what sort of activity I did in the classroom and whether they are effective or ineffective.” “...and I write the weaknesses of my students in my diary to evaluate myself.” Regarding diary writing as a reflective technique a teacher expressed in detail “... I analyze whether the answer is according to what I taught to the students then I note those things in my dairy. Then I show dairy to my senior teachers and ask them to see whether whatever I have taught in the class was good or not. Whether they would be better in future or should I bring some changes. Through diary and discussion that with my seniors I think that it is good for me and for my students. I regularly note each and very thing in my diary.”

Some of the teachers also reflected that students’ feedback on teaching provides them help to reflect on their teaching methodology. Feedback according to teachers differs in two respects: feedback by students and feedback by administration. One of the respondents viewed, “For analyzing whatever I teach in the class I ask questions from the students and note answers of the students. I analyze whether the answer is according to what I taught to the students, then I note those things in my dairy.” Another respondent replied “I set activities and I just definitely prefer interactive teaching methodology and whenever I discuss something, so I usually get feedback from the students’ responses. One method that I repeatedly use in my classroom is to get feedback from my students.” Another respondent expressed, “In my institution the coordinator and the head they come into my classroom and they take the observation and they take the points. The things which I am lacking or the things which I am doing well they do tell me, they give the report after that and sometimes I ask students if they are satisfied or not. And I write the weaknesses of my students in my diary to evaluate myself.” Moreover, teachers consider feedback to reform their teaching practices.

The interviews from the language teachers revealed that a few teachers used diary writing as the way to reflect on their language teaching problems. A majority of the respondents expressed that they did not use diary during their teaching practices. These teachers showed concerns regarding diary writing as “... and we have started diary writing which is not in the sense of reflective teaching, and it is only for record keeping and administrative compulsion. I don’t write what my students do, what I feel to write, I never write, I just feel to write to remember things”.

4.2. Discussion

The study was aimed to investigate the effect of reflective practices on teachers’ application of strategies. For this purpose, regression analysis was conducted to analyze the effect. The analysis revealed a significant effect on teachers’ application of reflective practices. When teachers prepare strategies to overcome class problems, it is reflected in their application in classroom. From this it can inferred that teachers’ strategies support them to reflect on their practices and to improve their teaching practices. The results of the study are partially in line with the research by Hamlin (2004), which concludes that teachers’ reflections enable to become critical about one’s teaching and beliefs. The results of the study also suggest that to improve reflective practices, it is important to focus on teachers’ teaching strategies.

The qualitative study by language teachers revealed that, teachers who are involved in reflective practices, use diary writing as a tool of reflection. Moreover, their reflection helps them to improve their teaching practices by getting feedback from students, and by critically examining their practices by discussing with their senior colleagues. On the other hand, a number of teachers only write diaries as an administrative compulsion and do not use it as a source of their reflection or improvement. The results of the study are partially in line with Rarieya (2005)'s study which reports that teachers who are familiar to it are unable to practice it effectively because of the lack of teachers' reflective training in Pakistan (Rarieya, 2005).

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that reflective teaching has a significant effect on teachers' application of classroom practices. The quantitative study reveals that teachers' reflective practices have a significant effect on their classroom practices. On the other hand, the qualitative study concludes that teachers use different ways to improve their teaching. The most common of them are diary writing, feedback from students and discussion with senior teachers. However, a number of teachers write diary but do not use it as a tool of reflection and improvement of the teaching.

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