



The Role of Reflective Teaching Practice on EFL Teacher's Professional Development: Insight from a West Nusa Tenggara Language Centre

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Abstract

Reflective teaching is an essential foundation to enhance teachers' professional development as it helps teachers to critically reflect and evaluate their own pedagogical practices. This study aims to investigate how reflective teaching has been implemented and how these practices have developed teachers' professionalism in providing ELT services. This study was conducted at a Language Centre in West Nusa Tenggara. The participants of the study include five teachers who teach different classes. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the participants of the study. Being qualitative in nature, the data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the teachers implemented reflective teaching by gathering information about their teaching practices through peer and student feedback, which was then analyzed and evaluated to improve their future teaching. The result also found that the teachers' reflections have improved teachers' teaching practice in providing engaging and communicative material and activities for students with different learning styles.

Keywords: *Reflective Teaching Practice; EFL Teacher; Professional Development*

Introduction

Practitioners are no longer hesitant with uncertainty in classroom setting once they discover the value of conducting reflective practice. Reflective practice involves critically assessing the theoretical principals and practical values that guide daily action (Bolton 2010). It enables us to find out what we know, what we do not know, how we think and value something and how the solution we take can meet the targeted objectives. As EFL teachers — practitioners in English Language Teaching field, providing engaging and communicative teaching and learning process is essential yet challenging. Therefore, we need reflective teaching practice, a foundation to allow us critically reflect and evaluate our pedagogical practice (Ghaye 2010). As suggested by (Schön 1983), reflective teaching practice requires continuity and thoughtful consideration in implementing the lesson learned from one's previous experience.

In teaching and learning process, teachers are positions as facilitator, problem solver, decision maker, observer and researcher (Orgoványi-Gajdos 2016). In order to fulfill those roles, a reflective practice is highly needed to achieve what is called professionalism. Mathew, Mathew, and Peechattu

(2017) stated that it is also an essential process in promoting teacher's professional development. Teachers who consistently carry out reflective practice will develop professionalism in themselves. Jasper (1999) mentioned that teaching and learning process that always includes reflective practice will produce qualified and independent professionals. The process of acquiring reflective ability, according to Yang (2017), is not born naturally in all teachers, but requires plentiful time, efforts and considerable experiences. Therefore, this reflective practice is a skill that must be provided to all teachers so that they can survive and professionally develop in their respective field.

The term reflection has extensively been integrated with the concept of professionalism as it is considered excessively principal both for pre-service and in-service teachers (Farrell 2014). In order to become a professional, a person needs to discover his reflective thinking – pertinent ways of thinking so that a relevant decision can be made. John Dewey's work (Dewey 1933) on reflective thinking has included 5 stages: defining the problem, analyzing the problem, suggesting a possible solution, developing proposed solution and verifying or testing the solution.

Reflective teaching practice can be done through several ways; reflective journal, diary, peer assessment, self assessment and video recording (Dheressa 2022). Teachers in language centers mostly reflect on their teaching by combining two ways, for example self assessment and peer assessment or self assessment and reflective journal. Self assessment is chosen by the majority of the teacher because they believe that teachers have conceptual tools in their repertoire knowledge (Ibrahim 2022) where reflective skill is embedded in their understanding. Therefore, teachers do not need a specific instrument to do self reflection because not all reflective practices are to be done in a systematic manner (Tovey and Skolits 2022). Many researchers have conducted studies regarding the role of reflective teaching practices towards teachers' professional development from primary to higher education level (Yunita and Hermayanti, 2022; Retnaningrum et al., 2022; Sibahi 2016; Gheith and Aljaberi 2018) but few are studying reflective practice in a diverse setting classroom such as language center. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct this study since language center has diverse students in terms of gender, age gap, educational background, professions and learning motivation.

Method

This qualitative case study aims at investigating how reflective teaching has been implemented and how these practices have developed teachers' professionalism in providing ELT services. This study was conducted at a language Centre in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The participants of the study include five teachers who teach different classes with different levels. The chosen participants were purposively selected based on the length of their teaching. Purposeful qualitative sampling was used to help researcher obtaining more detailed information and understanding of a certain phenomenon and will be very useful to voice out unspoken thought (Creswell 2012). The language centre divides the classes into five different levels, namely, English for Young Learners (EYL), Basic, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate and Intermediate. The classes are regularly conducted three times a week with approximately 75-80 students in total.

Being qualitative in nature, the data were collected through in-depth interview, a way to interpret the existing experience and its values (Seidman 2006). A series of questions were directed to the teachers and classroom observations conducted in 12 meeting sessions. The semi-structured interviewed was employed to obtain more comprehensive discussion about the research topic. The teachers were asked a number of questions regarding their teaching experience, the reflective teaching they did, the method they used, the challenges and the proposed solutions to tackle them.

The interview sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed. The sessions were lasted nearly in 60-90 minutes. This approach aims at acquiring information on teachers' perspectives about reflective teaching practice, the application of this practice, the role of it towards teachers' professional

development. Meanwhile, observations were employed to investigate how reflective teaching practice implemented by the teachers in their EFL classroom. Having collecting the data, it was then analysed by utilizing content analysis. This method enables the researcher to get a big overview of the topic, investigate, code and interpret the data (Leavy 2022).

Results and Discussion

Of all the teachers interviewed, there was only one who was familiar with the term reflective practice and how to apply it. However, almost all teachers assumed that reflective practice is an independent learning process, and reflective practice cannot be separated from experience. Based on the research findings, the reflective cycle proposed by Dewey is the most common-use cycle utilized by the EFL teachers at the language centre. The teachers also conducted a four-lens critical reflection as stated by (Brookfield 2017) namely students' point of view, colleagues' perceptions, personal experience and theory. This research found that teachers use Dewey's reflective cycle which was classified into 5 steps; defining the problem, analyzing the problem, suggesting a possible solution, developing proposed solution and verifying or testing the solution.

1. Defining Problem

EFL classroom is very dynamic (Inderawati 2017), and a great teacher is the one who can address dynamic situation. Language center, which provides English teaching and learning in a diverse setting, also face challenging problems regarding the classroom management. For example, when the class does not run as it was planned; teachers in this case should reflect on their teaching process and identify the problems they encountered.

A considerate teacher is capable of defining the problems even in the very beginning of the teaching and learning process. He or she will also try to dive into the dilemmas that arise and figures out a reasonable solution (Zeichner and Liston 2013). In the first five minute of learning process, for example. If the students look sleepy, unmotivated, less interested, and does not pay attention to the teacher in front of the class, a teacher can do an instant reflection and change the strategy which is different from what has been planned. During the interview session, teacher A shared her experience, she mentioned that:

“One day, I experienced such a challenging situation. I just came to the class and greeted my students. I was going to continue to deliver the material, but some of my students looked so unmotivated and busy with their own activities. From that moment, I assumed that I just got a problem.”

All of the teachers in the language centre share the same thoughts that they conduct reflective practice on every layer of the teaching and learning process. They also believed that the earlier the problems defined, the better reflection can be made. Therefore, a smooth and engaging teacher-student interaction can be achieved.

2. Analysing the Problem

Problems found in the teaching and learning process can be in the form of students' attitude, teaching media and material, teaching technique, classroom management and ambience. When teachers find one of the problems mentioned above, they will begin to analyze what went wrong during the material delivery process, and the analysis is usually done after completing the learning process. They do this analysis in the form of self-assessment and peer assessment. Teacher C mentioned that:

“Doing reflection is such a personal calling. It's not about the institution, but I feel better when I teach better.”

The rest of the teachers had the same thought that conducting reflective teaching practice was more about personal encouragement or internal factor. Moreover, they believed that a good performing teacher will provide a broader career opportunity. In a diverse classroom setting, a significant gap of the students' level of competence is commonly found as a problematic ambience in administering lesson. The smart will dominate and do the task faster than the slow. The teacher noticed that both won't enjoy the class since the faster might bored waiting for the slow and the slow might be in rush and missing the lesson.

3. Suggesting a Possible Solution

After analyzing the problems appeared in the class, teachers suggest a possible solution to overcome them. They create scenario in a way that helps students obtain better learning experiences. At this stage, the teacher can launch questions related to the possible solutions. For example, can this solution make learning more efficient? Can this solution create a balance that addresses diverse learning style? Will this solution require additional learning techniques and teaching media? When the teachers were asked about how they deal with the existing problem in the class, Teacher A answered that”

“When I knew what the problem was, I usually will ask myself first and find the solution. Sometimes, I watch Youtube video to find the reference or ask my peer or friends their experience when they got the same problems.”

The ideas are sometimes coming from students perspective, which later executed by teacher in a more attractive manner. In teacher A’s class, for example, she said that:

“I ask my some of my students to become my assistances. Students who have higher academic performance will assist me in guiding the lower performance students.”

From what Teacher A mentioned, by getting the high performance students to help, a significant gap of the students' level of competence might not be a problem anymore. Moreover, the students will have no time to busy working on their own activities, however, they will engage more in the classroom activity. According to Teacher A, since this solution applied, the problem is always solved.

4. Developing Proposed Solution

The results of the reflection carried out by the teacher can be done by re-designing the material, methods and learning media. In its application, not everything works; some even do not change anything at all. However, Teacher E said a remarkable statement motivates other teachers to keep going that:

“There is always an encouragement to improve your teaching and learning, therefore you need to reflect. And reflection helps to drag us to a more reasonable solution. So, never stop reflecting and learning.”

Teacher D also agreed with Teacher E’s statement by saying that:

“I don’t want to glue myself on the chair. I need to see what’s going on in my class and pay attention to my students. I will...hmm...modify and adjust the assignment, instruction and media when necessary.”

In the process of developing this solution, teachers usually do their own research and ask for recommendations from fellow teachers, because teacher sometimes shares similar problems that have been experienced by other teachers in different classes. All five teachers shared the same idea that reflective activity is not necessarily conducted in a systematic way. Teacher E said that:

“Well... I don’t use a specific instrument when I do self-reflection. I believe that we...teachers have a conceptual tool in our knowledge. So, I personally love to have interaction with my peer, have sharing session and sometimes collaborate in finding solutions.”

Teachers at the language centre also have tight teaching schedule which affect their opportunity to have a documented or written reflection. Teacher B said:

“I don’t use diary or journals because it’s too much work.”

Mann and Walsh (2013) proposed that reflection activities do not always have to be recorded in written form but can focus more on discussions with colleagues with a collaborative approach. This idea is supported by Houde (2022) who stated that reflection activities through dialogue or interaction between fellow teachers will provide opportunities in acquiring solutions. This can also deal with situations of limited time and opportunities for teachers to carry out self-reflection on a regular basis. This reflection activity in the form of oral discussion has also been proven to make a significant contribution to the professional development of teachers.

5. Verifying the Solution

The final stage is verifying or testing the solution. Teachers sometimes experience success as well as failure, but that is perfectly normal. Teacher C said that he faced ups and downs during his teaching experience. And he added:

“I faced a lot of failures after applying plans I have set on my previous reflection. But, that’s totally fine. Teachers are also learners. So, I need to learn from mistakes and make improvements.”

If the planned solution does not achieve the desired outcomes, then teachers will have to re-reflect on their teaching. However, if the solution is successful, then it can be used as a foundation for the next learning cycle. Reflective practice also helps teachers to be the best version at their teaching career. Teacher E mentioned that:

“If I’m not reflecting on my teaching, I would not be the position where I am now.”

Teachers at the language center claimed that reflective teaching practice is remarkably effective in addressing the problems and improving their teaching skills. It can be said that, reflective teaching practice is in fact has promoted to their professional development.

Conclusion

The result of the study shows that teachers have implemented the Dewey’s reflective thinking cycle in providing ELT service. They capable of analyzing the problems arose during and after carrying out the teaching and learning process. Other than that, teachers are able to evaluate and find possible situations that can be applied on the next teaching cycle. Since the study only employed small sample size participants, it is suggested that a future study should be carried and have more substantial sample size so that the validity of the study can be improved.

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