REVIEW ARTICLE

Promoting Professional Development in Language Teaching through Reflective Practice

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ABSTRACT
Teachers' reflection on the teaching-learning process is valuable in stimulating successful lesson delivery and maximize students' engagement in their learning. In a broader sense, reflective practice is one of the lifelong learning skills, which takes a pivotal role in teacher professional development. However, teachers often encounter challenges in conducting reflective practice activities due to the lack of systemized understanding of reflective practice. Based on that, this paper aims at providing a succinct review of reflective practice in terms of definitions, effectiveness, types, models of reflective practice, and concerns in language teaching through research-based evidence. Furthermore, some suggestions are made for both teachers and educators to encourage varied reflective practice formats, which would promote teacher professional development.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Bush (2007), professional development is a multilateral aspect of any professional life. In language teaching, it involves teachers' development in professional, personal, experiential, intellectual, and emotional aspects in their career path (Nguyen, 2021). Teachers' professional development has received attention recently with the hope to ensure teachers' adequate performance following the school reform in many countries (Han, 2017). Many training programs have been organized to equip teachers with lifelong learning skills (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016). However, teachers, especially language teachers, as with many other professionals, encounter challenges of applying lifelong learning to enhance the quality of teaching (Zeng, 2020), which promotes their professional development and construct their identity (Beveren et al., 2018; Yuan & Mak, 2018).

The appearance of reflective practice is considered a strategic solution to practise lifelong learning skills. Reflective practice is understood as the process of learning through and from experience to have a deeper understanding of self and/or practice (Boud et al., 1996). Practitioners are required to examine assumptions in every practice, which promotes their self-awareness and critical evaluations for better method application in the future. Thanks to that, they learn day by day, which is also a part of lifelong learning (Finlay, 2008). However, due to a lack of understanding of reflective practice, teachers are likely to apply it in plain, mechanical and uncritical ways. Therefore, the investigation into reflective practice theory is worthy.

Although the concept of reflection has been noted for a long time (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2015), the systematic theories of it in TESOL have been well-established in recent decades (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Farrell, 2015). In practice and research, the conceptual ambiguity of reflection has prevented teachers from becoming critical practitioners (Jay & Johnson, 2002). The popularity of reflective practice in numerous activities has been confirmed in various empirical studies (Akiba et al., 2019; Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014; Wopereis et al., 2010; Yuan & Mak, 2018). For instance, in Vietnam, though the application of reflective practice in language teaching has been adopted

under many formats such as peer-observation (Cao, 2019), narrative inquiry (Mai, 2018), etc., the systemized literature on reflective practice in language teaching is still far from accessible by teachers. Hence, this paper intends to pinpoint research contributions regarding the understanding of reflective practice and its models for application in language teaching. To achieve this aim, two research questions were raised as follows:

(1) What impacts does reflective practice have on language teaching?

(2) How can language teachers employ reflective practice to promote their professional development?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions of reflective practice

The term "reflection" or "reflective thinking" which has been in transit from philosophy and psychology to education has been collected in teaching practice (Silcock, 1994). The vital role of reflection in language learning and teaching processes has been confirmed for decades (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987). Research related to teacher reflections has proliferated in teacher education over the last decades (Yuan & Mak, 2018). Up to present, reflective practice is identified with the contribution of mentoring, peer involvement, and critical reflection upon experience (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016). Hence, reflective practice has been broadly implemented in teacher professional development programs including pre-service education, in-service training, graduate education, and research on teaching (Cruickshank, 1985). Reflection has been emphasized in the training programs of developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016; Beveren et al., 2018).

Reflection is an approach that stimulates the conversion of ready-structured experience into the newly structured actions called professional practice (Silcock, 1994). Reflection or reflective teaching is considered a ubiquitous and cognitive process. It aims at connecting tacit knowledge into skills; moreover, it also provides teachers a tool to link social and knowledge context.

The understanding of reflective practice is diverse and contradictory. However, some basic similarities can be found in its definition as a process of learning based on continuous experience towards opening a new vision in self and/or practice (Finlay, 2008). Daily practices including learning through and from experience, evidence-based observations, and examination of incidents (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019) would be examined, which have to include individual practitioners in being self-aware and giving a critical evaluation of their own responses to their practice cases. In this way, the individual can have an insight into their actions, examine them, and mature in their further application (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016; Finlay, 2008). Teachers' reflection is not only a logical and rational process of thinking, analyzing, evaluating, and predicting, but they also involve intuition and emotions, emerging from their active engagement with their surroundings in the work setting (Farrell, 2015; Yuan & Mak, 2018).

Not only in past experiences, present practice, but the impacts of reflection would also be meaningful in teachers' future teaching and continuing professional development (Farrell, 2015; Kleinknecht & Schneider, 2013). It is also called a part of the life-long learning process (Beveren et al., 2018); therefore, reflective practice is considered as "the bedrock of professional identity" (Finlay, 2008, p. 3). Walkington (2005) emphasized "Reflections on actions assists in the development of the functional role of a teacher, and also provides strategies to nurture the ongoing development of a teacher identity that has been shaped, and will continue to be shaped over a long period of time" (p. 59). It can be understood that during the reflection process, teacher identity construct and transformation are also made as for both reflective practitioners and adaptive experts (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007).

2.2. Types of reflective practice

Based on the seminal theories of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1987), a variety of notions of reflection in different disciplines have been developed. Especially in teacher education, notions of reflection have been coined, which leads to the requirements of making a distinction between types and levels of reflection, from technical and practical to more critical forms of reflection (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Hatton & Smith, 1995 as cited in Beveren et al., 2018).

According to Larrivee (2008), from the ecological approach, reflective practice can be divided into three levels: surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. At the lowest stage, the focus is placed on methodology to achieve lesson goals. At a higher level, the understanding of instructional theories and approaches, especially the connection between what teachers know and what they do in reality is concerned. The most valuable one should be critical reflection regarding long-term goals in teaching and learning. As for broader evaluation, more moral and ethical implications of teaching practice on students and teachers as lifelong learners have been proposed

(Farrell, 2015), which includes a full examination of personal and professional belief systems and educational practices. Only at this stage, the transformation or reconstruction of teacher identity can be made as teachers would be provided with more chances to challenge what they think, what they know, and what they actually do to solve teaching issues, exerting a huge impact on teachers' thinking of their teaching process.

In relation to reflection category, Finlay (2008) introduced the valuable contribution of the work of Schön (1987) with the identification of two types of reflection: reflection-on-action, the thinking process happening after the event, and reflection-in-action which is thinking while doing. For the former, practitioners will keep reviewing, describing, analyzing, and assessing their past practice with the search for a deep insight and further better application. The latter is a way to examine teachers' experiences and responses as they occur. The similarities share in both types are the link between their feelings and related theories. The practitioner tries to establish new engagement or thoughts which promote quicker reactions to teaching scenarios. However, in a review of reflective practice noted by Cirocki and Widodo (2019), they added one more common category of reflection, reflection-for-action, which focuses on future responses to improve current practice (Farrell, 2013).

In a suggestion of reflective practice in steps, Cirocki and Widodo (2019) proposed a four-component typology of reflection, in relation to a continuous process of reviewing teaching and learning through experiences, including reflection-before-lesson, reflection-during-lesson, reflection-after-lesson, and reflection-beyond-lesson.

The first one, reflection-before-lesson, is a fundamental step, which is usually neglected in the literature. In this stage, insiders or teachers have to pay attention to lesson aims, learning outcomes, teaching approaches and methods, materials, activities, and classroom management. Thanks to that, practice challenges and students' needs take up more roles in lesson construction. The second, reflection-during-lesson, corresponds to Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action. In the teaching process, "positive and negative surprises" happen which stimulate actions of teachers with knowledge and flexibilities (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017, p. 9). Reflection-after-lesson is considered retrospective and summative which is equivalent to reflection-on-action of Schön (1987). This type is especially emphasized since it promotes teachers' self-evaluation on how theories exercise in their teaching situations by observations and justifications for better application in the future. The last type, reflection-beyond-lesson, which is complex in structure, associates with the concept of beyond practice of Farrell (2015). Accordingly, it encourages teachers to explore "the moral, political and social issues" impacts on their practice (Farrell, 2015, p. 30). Thanks to that, the interrelation between what the teachers practice and its impacts on societal issues can be drawn by the insiders themselves. To reach this stage, reflective practitioners should be skillful at both three preceding types, which supports their sharing in the form of narratives with other practitioners or school administrators to stimulate collaborative reflection, which may lead to a mindset shift in the profession (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019).

Even though the agreement of types of reflection has not been reached due to various distinctive models, the necessity of implementing reflection or reflective practice in teaching for professional development is highlighted. Moreover, under any format, the reflective practice would lead to transformational learning based on the process of investing in critical self-reflection regarding assumptions, values, and beliefs (Beveren et al., 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Document analysis was employed in this study which requires a process of reviewing and assessing materials in a systematic ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study chose items purposefully, which is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). Based on the research questions of this paper focusing on the impacts of reflective practice in the domain of language teaching and the models of reflective practice for teachers' application to promote their professional development, the collected papers were evaluated in relation to the foci of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Research results

4.1.1. The impacts of reflective practice on language teaching

Critical reflection plays an important role in professional development of pre-and in-service English language teachers, which inspires more studies related to reflective practice, the relationship between reflective practice and

teachers' continuing professional development, and how each leads to improved learning and teaching (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). In the studies of Farrell (2013) and Lee (2010), the findings indicated that reflective practice provides chances for teachers to dedicate themselves to active and meaningful problem identification, evaluation, and innovation. Consequently, their transformation in identity can be developed.

The values reflective practice brings to teachers can be examined through sharing thinking in informal groups or professional communities (Curtis et al., 2013; Farrell, 2013). By articulating teachers' teaching beliefs, analyzing problems, finding out information, and making recommendations, they gradually construct a social identity as effective members of the teaching profession with professional confidence improvement and a sense of commitment. The study of Yuan and Mak (2018) confirms the relationship between teacher reflection and identities in practice, discourse, and activities. The exploration of teachers' reflective learning and identity construction through social and linguistic practices in complex institutional and socio-cultural settings is made.

The effectiveness of reflective practice represents the metaphor picture of a bridge connecting teachers with their own past and possible futures. Silcock (1994) also emphasized the term "perspectives" with the combination of a viewpoint and purposes for action transformation which the practitioners get. The ubiquitous power of reflection is proved thanks to the fact that teachers can fracture or fix their own thoughts and experiences for new goals based on typical teaching situations (Silcock, 1994).

Beveren et al. (2018) suggested the impacts of reflective practice are confirmed in three levels, i.e. personal, interpersonal and socio-structure levels, which is in agreement with Cirocki & Farrell (2017). In terms of personal level, the enhancement in professional development in terms of competencies, skills, and professional identity would be assured. As in the argument of Schön (1987), the professional practice involves complexity, unpredictability, and mess in its phenomenon. Therefore, the flexibility of professionals would be effective in solving teaching dilemmas by their reflection instead of following set procedures. Moreover, regarding awareness of individuals, reflection would allow practitioners to have practical experience depending on their ethnic, racial, socio-economic, historical, spiritual, linguistic, and professional background. Thus, the understanding of the power of practitioners could be deeply collected. As for another aspect of transformation in learning, reflective activities both in action or on action would promote insiders' changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which boost teachers' intuition and creativity (Finlay, 2008).

In the broader domain, the maturity of teaching could be confirmed in the practice of teachers through their ability to monitor and adapt their practice simultaneously and intuitively (Finlay, 2008). These changes may connect with their perspectives as well as build the ground for whole new belief systems. With individuals, the impact of reflection related to autonomy and responsibility increase is also focused.

At a higher level, interpersonal one, practical knowledge would allow insiders to have complete solutions to realistic situations, which support teachers in identifying instructional practices for specific learning needs. As a result, critical reflection is attributed to a transformative function in person and society. Regarding education, it affects the (re)construction of teacher identity in the 21st century (Beveren et al., 2018). Especially in TESOL, the ultimate goal of teacher education is preparing teachers to become reflective practitioners who are not "technicians" or "curriculum transmitters" of a "banking" model of education (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019, p. 17).

The effectiveness of reflective practice has been confirmed in numerous studies for decades. However, one of the most important benefits teachers can get from those studies is choosing appropriate formats of reflective practice for their deployment to enhance teaching performance.

4.1.2. Models of reflective practice

There are varied platforms encouraging teachers' reflective practice. The most common models implemented in Indonesian context include writing reflective journals/ diaries, peer observation of teaching, lesson study, action research, and reflecting with digital technologies (e.g., blogging and photovoicing) (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). They are all presented as follows.

In terms of reflection journals or teaching diaries as the first suggestions, they provide "a place for teachers to experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions" (Bailey, 1990, p. 218 as cited in Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). As a result, teachers would have much engagement in their classrooms' teaching-learning processes as well as evaluate strong and weak points of their performance (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Yuan & Mak, 2018). Additionally, this approach would stimulate teachers' social activities through building educational discourse that is shared and employed by others (Mai, 2018). These reflective teaching journals can be saved online or offline.

The second recommendation is peer observation. It can be considered a joint partnership or instructional collaboration between a group of practitioners who observe members' teaching, provide constructive feedback on teaching performance and make collaborative reflection (Bell, 2005; Silcock, 1994). This platform provides more dialogic space to reflect and enhance teaching competency. Following the increase in virtual professional forums, more practices and activities are shared to promote teaching commitment; develop self-efficacy; and stimulate a critical awareness of student experiences.

Another strategy considered is lesson study. This is a model supplied by a professional teacher with a structured or systemic cycle of planning, teaching, and reflecting upon a lesson. Accordingly, learners' opportunities and achievements can be maximized, which meets the requirement of studying curriculum, teaching, and student learning (Akiba et al., 2019; Cao, 2019). In conducting the process, a group of teachers or researchers is required to identify problems in class, design lesson plans addressing the problem, deliver the lesson, and reflect on it to evaluate its success. Hence, reflective practice is an essential step in this approach.

At a higher level, teachers are advised to do action research in relation to critical reflection. It is under a structured and interactive process that supports teachers' teaching outcomes in terms of effectiveness. This kind of reflection would require insiders' curiosity regarding problem identification and issue solving. To conduct action research, teachers should follow a 4-phase process, i.e. planning, acting, developing, and reflecting with clear steps in the study of Cirocki and Widodo (2019).

Moreover, the development of technological application in education would have definite impacts on the ways teachers choose to reflect, which has urged the establishment of an electronic portfolio and weblogs (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014; Wopereis et al., 2010). Blogging is one of the most popular ones in which authors as practitioners can create digital communities to share teaching experience, stimulate their own reflections as well as colleague's and respond to others' feedback. This ensures digital technologies to yield better support for teachers' rethinking process based on a dialogic, critical, and visual or video-based platform (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). Especially, in 2013, Kleinknecht and Schneider studied the application of videos of teaching in promoting teachers' reflective learning. The finding points out that the implementation of teaching videos would support the teachers' cognitive reasoning such as assessing teaching effectiveness based on background knowledge and making predictions about optional actions and cultivate different emotional ranges, which ultimately activate an increase in teachers' awareness of students and complex teaching contexts.

4.2. Discussion

The effectiveness of reflective practice has been confirmed; however, some limitations in a mechanical and uncritical application should be considered. Firstly, regarding ethical concerns, the obligation of reflective practice would discourage both teachers and students. With the same ethical concerns of Finlay (2008), Finefter-Rosenbluh (2016) found out that formal professional development and its inflexible procedures might provoke trainers to mistreat or lie to their colleagues, neglect students' needs, discourage students' learning process. Secondly, in relation to professional concerns, if reflective practice process is conducted uncritically without time-investment, it may make teachers' value unrecognized. In fact, supporting good practice becomes a matter for the individual rather than the organization (Finlay, 2008). Finefter-Rosenbluh (2016) stated that teachers' professional development following education reform has been paid attention to with the hope to support students' learning and success. Take the US as an example, there are various acts or programs related to boosting the quality of teachers such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and The Race to the Top (2015). As a result, numerous educational policies have been introduced to emphasize professional development, helping educators participate actively in the programs of enhancing "one's personal growth and job skills, and improve one's job performance to contribute to outstanding educational results for students" (see National Education Association, Providing Ongoing Professional Development, 2015 as cited in Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2016).

4.3. Recommendations

For teachers: For teachers who mainly focus on solving teaching problems, firstly, they should have a profound understanding of reflective practice. Furthermore, it is recommended that they should be provided with adequate time, resources, opportunities, and reflection methods. To become practitioners, it is necessary for teachers to develop critical thinking skills and to select teaching situations for reflection practice (Finlay, 2008). Moreover, teachers, as fundamental elements in the teaching process, are strongly encouraged to join professional communities where they

can discuss and share best practices, give solutions to classroom management issues, prepare detailed lesson plans and sometimes organize a workshop with the participation of teacher educators. Thus, members' teaching could be fully supported by colleagues and professionals, which promotes teachers to refine their teaching to ensure its effectiveness and construct teacher identity (Cirocki & Widodo 2019).

For educators: The values of reflective teaching are also meaningful to staff development specialists who make effort to enhance teaching quality as they offer more practice matters in in-service training programs and enable more supportive micro-context (Finlay, 2008) which supports teachers to get a different approach to their pedagogical understanding instead of their traditional belief. Effective reflective practice application would satisfy the practical demands of both in-service teaching staff and management groups (Cruickshank, 1985). Take Indonesia as an example, to encourage the transformation of in-service EFL teachers into reflective practitioners, Indonesian policies focus on encouraging teachers to conduct classroom action research, engage in lesson study endeavors and writing journals, which contributes to the improvement of teaching competency of teaching staff (Widodo, 2016).

5. CONCLUSION

The benefits of reflective practice in language teaching have been confirmed in various studies. However, in teaching practice, the limited access to theoretical background could prevent teachers from becoming reflection practitioners to promote their teaching development and construct their teacher identity. This review of reflective practice focusing on the concept and models of reflective practice is hoped to fill the gap in teachers' and educators' theoretical understanding of this approach. Moreover, some recommendations for both practitioners and educational leaders should be recognized for better application of reflective practice in educational institutions. However, some limitations related to ethical and professional concerns should be taken into consideration to avoid mechanical employment of reflective practice and achieve long-term goals in boosting the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

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