

Investigating the Role of Experience in Reflective Practice of Iranian Language Teachers

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Abstract—The emergence of reflective thinking in humanities touched the field of language teaching deeply. Language teaching in EFL contexts was not far from this effect, where reflection on teaching has gained a lot of attention and research in the last decade. To bring to light the different dimensions of reflective thinking in language teaching, the current study was an attempt to examine the effects of years of professional experience on practicing reflective teaching in Iranian context. To this aim, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was adopted including 29 items investigating five different dimensions of reflective teaching including practical, cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive, and critical dimensions. As our subjects, 62 EFL teachers participated in this study with 1 to 26 years of professional experience who were classified in 5 different experience groups. The results of the study showed no significant difference among 5 experience groups of teachers in their commitment to reflective practice in language classrooms.

Index Terms—English teaching, EFL context, experience, reflective teaching, thinking

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings have been involved in thinking, learning and teaching in all their lives. In this way science improved and societies developed. As a result, different schools of thought came on the scene and attracted a lot of attentions. Not unlike other fields of science, thinking and need for learning gave birth to new methods and approaches in the world of language teaching and language learning. However, nearly one hundred years ago the American author John Dewey (1859-1952) put forward reflective thinking which progressively was maneuvered by later scholars. In his famous books about mind and thinking (1933), Dewey criticized current approaches of teaching and introduced reflective teaching as an alternative. His animadversion (Schon, 1983) was toward mechanical skill learning processes in which there was no sound for the philosophy of teaching. The repetitive daily and routine style of teaching had made classrooms too mechanical and static. Considering the pendulum effect of methods and approaches towards language teaching, an appropriate remedy was reflective thinking through which teacher could enjoy their experiences and numerous reflective practices to make teaching advantageous and profitable. Therefore, the teacher's performance could be improved and consequently students' achievement could be increased. This is the same as what Schon (1983) refers to as appreciation, action, and re-appreciation. Avoiding bigotry and loyalty to critical thinking is a vital prerequisite to reflective teaching method. Critical thinking, a dimension of reflection, can affect all teachers' job. It can prepare pre-service teachers for entering educational environment and also helps in-service teachers to improve their teaching practice and care for actual outcomes. In the same line of the research, Griffiths (2000) demonstrated that reflection is in contrast with impulsive action as well as routine one in which the teacher acts based on trial and error or tradition and authority. Also, Dewey describes reflection as an activity which is based on "the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it tends." (1933, p. 9). However, reflection can be interpreted and classified into different types. Schon (1983) made a distinction between two types of reflection: reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection in action, according to this scholar, involves doing the activity and after finishing the job looking back at the work to analyze the process of doing and the outcome. Through evaluation after the work, the job can be promoted for the next time. In other words, reflection on action can be done after each session or after the educational semester. Besides, reflection in action involves delving into the action and simultaneously thinking about how to do it and how to improve the process and the outcome. Schon (1983) believes that the start-point of reflection is some phenomenon which sounds like a problem or something interesting or puzzling that a person is trying to deal with and make sense of it. In this sense,

when individuals try to make sense of the phenomenon, simultaneously they reflect on understandings which are hidden in their own future action. Schon's notion of reflecting on understanding seems the same as what Dewey refers to as critical thinking. Killian and Todnem (1991) proposed another classification that is reflection for action. It is planning that one predicts for his/her future practice. Generally, we can say that reflection for action is a professional appellation for lesson plan that teachers are behooved to provide for their daily classroom teaching. According to Harwood and his co-workers (2006), Farrel (2007) and Tedick (2005), teachers' years of experience can be assumed as an effective factor in determining ones' viewpoint towards reflective teaching as well as strategies and philosophy of teaching.

According to Fuller (1970) and Korthagen and Lagerwerf (1996), as cited in Akbari (2010), there exist a model in which there are three stages for teacher development and taking reflective viewpoint towards teaching. Based on this model, a pre-service teacher who is supposed to enter educational system, goes through stage one in which a self-image is created with ideal features. He/she wants to be loved by students and is highly under the influence of images of an ideal teacher in his/her mind. In stage two, according to this model, the teacher considers managing the classroom in which integrates into educational environment takes place. Harwood, Hanson, and Lotter (2006) argue that teacher's practice is absolutely under the influence of beliefs. It's in stage three that teacher provides with enough confidence to deal with classroom effectiveness and enhances the expected outcome i.e. students' learning. In this way, the teacher is able to determine strategies and philosophy of his/her teaching. Furthermore, according to this model, teacher development is a process that is implemented in respected stages. As the time passes, the teacher goes through next levels of experience and shapes his/her method of teaching. It can be concluded that introducing reflective teaching as well as experience to novice teachers must be done with caution and in proper time. In other words, introducing them in early stages may not be constructive and even it may lead to negative outcomes. Although knowing reflective teaching method and its tools can be advantageous for teachers, early exposure may be defective. This paper tries to find out whether teachers with different years of professional experience know reflective teaching method and how much they use it in their teaching practice? Also, if there was a difference, the researcher probes the group who believe in reflective thinking while teaching.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' years of professional experience and their attitude toward reflective teaching. Therefore, in this part of the study, theoretical background of the study is reviewed. Also, this part reviews the related studies that were conducted in this area of the science. Farrel (2007) believes that the necessity of renewing teachers' knowledge in educational environment and teaching and learning activities has been felt. The widespread popularity of such an idea made the importance of teacher reflection more clear. Not unlike Farrel is Tedick (2005) who argues that training teachers to practice reflection, first was exercised for pre-service teachers and gradually became a part of teacher education programs. In training pre-service teachers, however, the theories are taught and it is needed to bridge them with practice. Besides, Pollard (2008) puts forward that reflecting on personal experiences provide such opportunities to practice reflection in real context. Therefore, unbalanced repertoire of experience between novice and experienced teachers may make a difference in practicing reflection. In the following lines, we refer to some practical studies that evaluate the effects of experience on practicing reflective teaching. Moradian and Ahamdi (2015) studied the role of experience in teachers' reflectivity and self-efficacy. They distributed a reflective teaching questionnaire adopted from Ghadampour, Moradian, & Shokri (2014) which included 27 five-point Likert items to 135 EFL teachers in Khoramabad, Lorestan province, in Iran. The teachers were used to teach in different private institutes with different years of professional experience in teaching and unequal proficiency levels. Also, the level of students' proficiency was different ranging from beginner to advanced level. The heterogeneity of sample continued in factors such as gender and academic degree. The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between practicing reflective teaching and sense of self-efficacy in the group of experienced teachers. On the other hand, such a relationship was not significant in the second group of EFL teachers who were novice. In another study, Ansarian, Farrokhi, & Rahmani (2015) carried out a research to explore the effects of experience on reflection level of Iranian EFL teachers. 100 male and female teachers with different academic degrees from BA to PhD and with teaching experience of 1 to 22 participated in the study. A five-point Likert scale including 53 items developed by Larrivee (2008) was used. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between years of professional experience and pedagogical and critical reflection. Also, Ode, Kurt, & Atamturk (2010) studied the relationship between experience, gender, and level of education with application of reflective teaching among ESL teachers. The researchers themselves provided a five-point Likert scale which included 30 items. 9 male and 51 female ESL teachers participated in this study whose academic degrees BA and MA. The results of the study showed that all variables of the research including experience were not significantly differentiating among teachers who practice reflective teaching. Hence, in another study, Ghaslani (2015) examined demographic variables including gender and experience on the level of teachers' reflectivity. She used a five-point Likert scale developed by Akbari, Behzafpour, & Dadvand (2010) which was made of 29 items. 125 EFL teachers from both genders and aged between 20 and 47 were selected from 7 private institutes in Hamadan and Kurdistan provinces, Iran, through cluster sampling procedure. The participants were experienced between 1 and 24 years that were classified in three groups with 8 years

of distance. Regarding age and experience with reflectivity, the results showed no significant differences among teachers. Zafer Unal & Aslihan Unal (2012) examined the effects of instructor's years of professional experience on classroom management. They studied 268 primary school teachers a quarter of whom were female with ages between 22 to 49 years. Regarding their teaching experience, they were classified in five experience groups namely 1-5 as the first group, 6-10 the second group, 11-15 the third one, 16-20 the fourth one, and the fifth group was the teachers with 21 years of experience or more. BIMS inventory developed by Martin & Sass (2010) was translated into Turkish and then was used by the researchers. The results of the study showed that more experienced teachers had significantly different attitudes toward classroom management than less experienced individuals.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to investigate the effects of years of professional experience in EFL teaching on practicing reflective teaching among Iranian EFL teachers. To answer the research question, the researcher used an adopted questionnaire which distributed among the participant and the results reported descriptively.

Participants

62 EFL teachers in Chabahar and Konarak, Sistan-Va-Baluchistan province in Iran were selected through simple convenient sampling. They were 39 male teachers and 23 female ones whose native languages were Farsi and Baluchi. 6 of them had MA in TEFL, 42 of them had BA in TEFL or English language and literature, 12 of them had MA in TEFL, and 1 of them had PhD in TEFL. According to their years of experience in teaching, 22 participants enjoyed 1 to 5 years of experience, 19 participants 6 to 10 years of experience, 10 participants 11 to 15 years of experience, 6 participants 16 to 20 years of experience, and 5 of them enjoyed 21 to 30 years of experience. The least experienced teacher has just taught for one educational year and the most experienced one has taught for 26 years. Their ages were ranged between 22 and 53 years old.

Instrumentation

This study used a Likert scale questionnaire developed by Akbari et al (2010) including 29 items which covered different dimensions of reflective teaching. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was already considered by the authors. Five dimensions of reflective teaching on which the questionnaire shed light would be explained respectively. Questions 1 to 6 of the questionnaire dealt with practical dimension in which tools and actual practices of reflection such as teacher's diary and observation are investigated. Besides, questions 7 to 12 dealt with cognitive dimension that surveys teacher's cognitive efforts for reflection such as conducting action research and delving into scientific articles, magazines, and books. Questions 13 to 15 dealt with affective dimension in which the teacher works on psychological aspect of students' behavior. Questions 16 to 22 deal with meta-cognitive dimension that the teacher reflects on his/her own beliefs and emotions. And finally, the last 7 questions dealt with critical dimension that investigates socio-political issues of teaching.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed among participants who were asked to check appropriate boxes of the Likert scale questionnaire, ranged from never to always. Then, the results were gathered and reported descriptively in frequencies and percentages. The results were reported descriptively then.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As it was stated above, our questionnaire was made up of 5 different dimensions of reflective teaching; therefore we had 5 different outputs respectively. Also, the participants were classified in 5 groups of experience and their answers were stipulated independently. Using descriptive statistics and frequency of each question, the data were analyzed.

Familiarity with Practical Dimension of Reflective Teaching

Practical dimension is concerned with the instruments teachers put to use for reflection practice. Several instruments such as 'portfolios', 'journals', 'audio and video recording', 'observation' can be employed for reflective practices. The results of this section for the first group (1-5 years of experience) brought to light the fact that 12 percent of this group of teachers has a file where they keep their accounts of teaching for reviewing purposes. Besides, only 10 percent of them talk about their classroom experiences with their colleagues and seek their advice/feedback. In addition, 16 percent of these teachers write about the accomplishments/failures of the lesson or talk about the lesson to a colleague, after each lesson. Besides, 24 percent of teachers discuss practical/theoretical issues with their colleagues. Furthermore, 11 percent of teachers observe other teacher's classrooms to learn about their efficient practices. And finally, 8 percent of teachers like their colleagues to observe their teaching and comment on their performance. Also, the results of this table shows that the second group (6-10) marked differently and 9 percent of this group of teachers have a file where they keep their accounts of teaching for reviewing purposes. Besides, 6 percent of them talk about their classroom experiences with their colleagues and seek their advice/feedback. In addition, 11 percent of these teachers write about the accomplishments/failures of the lesson or talk about the lesson to a colleague, after each lesson. Too, 14 percent of teachers discuss practical/theoretical issues with their colleagues. Furthermore, only 7 percent of teachers observe other teacher's classrooms to learn about their efficient practices. And finally, 5 percent of teachers like their colleagues to observe their teaching and comment on their performance. However, the results obtained from the third group (11-15)

indicated that 5 percent of this group of teachers has a file where they keep their accounts of teaching for reviewing purposes. Besides, 18 percent of them talk about their classroom experiences with their colleagues and seek their advice/feedback. In addition, 8 percent of these teachers write about the accomplishments/failures of the lesson or talk about the lesson to a colleague, after each lesson. Too, 14 percent of teachers discuss practical/theoretical issues with their colleagues. Furthermore, 4 percent of teachers observe other teacher's classrooms to learn about their efficient practices. And finally, 19 percent of teachers like their colleagues to observe their teaching and comment on their performance. The results of this section for the fourth group (16-20) shed light on the fact that only 16 percent of this group of teachers has a file where they keep their accounts of teaching for reviewing purposes. Besides, 6 percent of them talk about their classroom experiences with their colleagues and seek their advice/feedback. In addition, 8 percent of these teachers write about the accomplishments/failures of the lesson or talk about the lesson to a colleague, after each lesson. Too, 13 percent of teachers discuss practical/theoretical issues with their colleagues. Furthermore, 6 percent of teachers observe other teacher's classrooms to learn about their efficient practices. And finally, 27 percent of teachers like their colleagues to observe their teaching and comment on their performance. And finally, the results of this dimension for the last group (21-30) brought to light that 20 percent of this group of teachers has a file where they keep their accounts of teaching for reviewing purposes. Besides, only 11 percent of them talk about their classroom experiences with their colleagues and seek their advice/feedback. In addition, 5 percent of these teachers write about the accomplishments/failures of the lesson or talk about the lesson to a colleague, after each lesson. Too, 40 percent of teachers discuss practical/theoretical issues with their colleagues. Furthermore, 3 percent of teachers observe other teacher's classrooms to learn about their efficient practices. And finally, 29 percent of teachers like their colleagues to observe their teaching and comment on their performance.

No level of significant was less than .05 indicating that there was no significant difference among different groups of experienced teachers in practical dimension of reflective teaching. The results of the study are in line with Ansarian et al. (2015) who maintained years of professional experience will not significantly differentiate reflective teachers in their familiarity and commitment to reflective practice. These finding, however, stood firm against those by Zafer Unal & Aslihan Uhan (2012) who found significant differences between experienced teachers' attitude toward behavioral and instructional management of the classroom.

Familiarity with Cognitive Dimension of Reflective Teaching

The second dimension we dealt with in the questionnaire was cognitive aspect of reflective teaching which investigated issues including reading books or articles on language teaching, participation in workshops and conferences, carrying out research activities and so on. The results of this part for the first group of experienced teachers (1-5) showed that that 17 percent of teachers read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve their classroom performance. Furthermore, 14 percent of these teachers participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues. Besides, only 17 percent of them think of writing articles based on their classroom experience. Too, 26 percent of teachers look at journal articles or search the internet to what the recent developments in teaching profession are. In addition, 11 percent of them carry out small scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. Finally, 40 percent of teachers think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them. The second group of experienced teachers (6-10) selected the items in the way that 21 percent of teachers read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve their classroom performance. In addition, 13 percent of these teachers participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues. Too, only 42 percent of them think of writing articles based on their classroom experience. Besides, 28 percent of teachers look at journal articles or search the internet to what the recent developments in teaching profession are. Furthermore, 10 percent of them carry out small scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. Finally, 42 percent of teachers think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them. For the third group (11-15), however, the results showed that 19 percent of teachers read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve their classroom performance. Furthermore, 9 percent of these teachers participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues. Besides, only 8 percent of them think of writing articles based on their classroom experience. Too, 11 percent of teachers look at journal articles or search the internet to what the recent developments in teaching profession are. In addition, 7 percent of them carry out small scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. Finally, only 33 percent of teachers think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them. Also, the results of this section for the fourth group (16-20) brought to light the fact that 6 percent of the teachers read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve their classroom performance. Too, 8 percent of these teachers participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues. Furthermore, only 9 percent of them think of writing articles based on their classroom experience. Besides, 7 percent of teachers look at journal articles or search the internet to what the recent developments in teaching profession are. In addition, 6 percent of them carry out small scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. Finally, 29 percent of teachers think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them. Finally, the results of cognitive dimension showed that the fifth group of teachers (21-30) filled in the blanks with 5 percent of them reading books/articles related to effective teaching to improve their classroom performance. In addition, 6 percent of these

teachers participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues. Too, only 11 percent of them think of writing articles based on their classroom experience. Besides, 10 percent of teachers look at journal articles or search the internet to what the recent developments in teaching profession are. Furthermore, only 6 percent of them carry out small scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. Finally, 28 percent of teachers think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them. The statistical analysis showed no significant difference among these 5 experience groups of teachers in practicing cognitive dimension of reflective teaching. The results of the study are contrary to Mahmoudi & Ozkan (2015) who found out that novice and experienced teachers differed in their preferences of development activities including factors touched in the above-studied dimension.

Familiarity with Affective Dimension of Reflective Teaching

The next dimension studied in this research was affective dimension. In this dimension the teacher searches through student's beliefs, cognitions, and personal styles of learning and backgrounds of their social living which may affect teaching method as well as its outcomes. The results showed that in the first group (1-5) of participants, 39 percent of the teachers talk to their students to learn about their learning styles and preferences. Also, 29 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities. However, only 20 percent of these teachers ask their students whether they like a teaching task or not.

In addition, 19 percent of the second group of teachers (6-10) talk to their students to learn about their learning styles and preferences. Also, 26 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities. Besides, only 17 percent of teachers ask their students whether they like a teaching task or not. Also, 19 percents of the teachers in the next group (11-15) talk to their students to learn about their learning styles and preferences. Too, 22 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities. And again, 14 percent of these teachers ask their students whether they like a teaching task or not. The fourth group (16-20) answered differently to the items in the questionnaire with 83 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their learning styles and preferences. Furthermore, 22 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities. Besides, 18 percent of these teachers ask their students whether they like a teaching task or not. In the last experience group (21-30) however, 13 percents of teachers talked to their students to learn about their learning styles and preferences. Also, 29 percent of them talk to their students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests, and abilities. And last but not the least, only 12 percent of these teachers ask their students whether they like a teaching task or not. Again, the level of significant was not met by comparing 5 experience group of teachers in the third dimension of reflective teaching. These finding are not in congruence with Moradian & Ahamdi (2015) who argue that a positive relationship exists between years of professional experience and practicing reflective teaching as well as sense of self efficacy.

Familiarity with Meta-cognitive Dimension of Reflective Teaching

The fourth dimension of reflective teaching touched in the present questionnaire was meta-cognitive dimension including ideas such as philosophy of teaching, significance of teaching practice and finding out weaknesses and strengths of teaching by the teacher himself. Again, the same groups of experienced teachers were compared and the following details were obtained. In the first group (1-5), 35 percent of teachers think about their teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting their carrier. Too, 33 percent of them think of the ways their biography or their background affects the way they define themselves as a teacher. Besides, 55 percent of these teachers think of the meaning or significance of their job as a teacher. Furthermore, 43 percent of teachers try to find out which aspects of their teaching provide them with a sense of satisfaction. However, 31 percent of them think about their strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. In addition, 49 percent of teachers think of the positive/negative role they have had as a student and the way they have affected them in their practice. Finally, 28 percent of teachers think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in their classroom practice.

Also, 29 percent of the second group (6-10) think about their teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting their teaching. Too, 32 percent of them think of the ways their biography or their background affects the way they define themselves as a teacher. Besides, 48 percent of these teachers think of the meaning or significance of their job as a teacher. Furthermore, 50 percent of teachers try to find out which aspects of their teaching provide them with a sense of satisfaction. Also, 38 percent of them think about their strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. In addition, 42 percent of teachers think of the positive/negative role they have had as a student and the way they have affected them in their practice. Finally, only 29 percent of teachers think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in their classroom practice.

In the third group (11-15) of experience these result were 25, 29, 49, 48, 36, 41 and 24 percents respectively while these results in the fourth group were 27, 28, 49, 42, 39, 39 and 19 and in the last group were 26, 31, 45, 46 and 18, 27, 45, 39, 35, 32 and 17 respectively. The results, once more, showed no significant differences between groups of experience teachers in meta-cognitive dimension of reflective teaching. The results of the research are in line with Ghaslani (2015) who suggested that experience do not differentiate significantly the level of teachers' reflectivity.

Familiarity with Critical Dimension of Reflective Teaching

The last dimension of reflective teaching that was considered in the questionnaire was critical element including factors and variables such as finding out and discussing social injustice in the class, encouraging students to change the

surrounding environments and fighting against discriminating viewpoints, affecting aspects of teaching on students' political views, and so on. The results of this section for the first group (1-5) showed that 8 percent of teachers think about instances of social injustice in their own surroundings and try to discuss them in their classes. Besides, 8 percent of teachers think of ways to enable students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias. Furthermore, 12 percent of teachers include less discussed topics such as old age, AIDS, discrimination against women and minorities, and poverty in their teaching. In addition, only 8 percent of them think about the political aspects of their teaching and the way they may affect their students' political views. Too, 13 percent of them think of ways through which they can promote tolerance and democracy in their classes and in the society in general. Also, 10 percent of teachers think about the ways gender, social class, and race influence their students' achievements. Finally, only 31 percent of them think of outside social events that can influence their teaching inside the class. These results for other groups of teachers based on experience were pretty similar indicating unfamiliarity of Iranian teachers with this dimension of reflective thinking. The results of statistical analysis showed that there was no significant difference among different groups of experienced teachers in practicing critical dimension of reflective teaching. The findings are in sharp contrast with King Rice (2010) who argued that the impact of experience is higher at the beginning and start of teaching in educational environment and the ideology behind education.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to explore whether having different years of professional experience affects the level of reflection among Iranian EFL teachers. The results of this study brought to light two important facts. First, Iranian teachers are little familiar with different dimensions of reflective practice in their own carrier, if at all. Second, experience of teachers does not affect reflectivity among Iranian language teachers, although less experienced teachers; due to more recent in-service and pre-service training courses and educational content show more tendency and potential for doing reflective practice. The results of this study have implications for Language teachers, researchers and teacher trainers in Iran and abroad.

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