

Chapter 44

Prospective Teachers as Reflective Practitioners: Integrating Reflective Practices into Practice–Teaching Experiences of Pre–Service EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the process in which practice teaching experiences of prospective teachers were supported by reflective practice elements during their practicum. The participants included five pre-service Turkish EFL teachers in the fourth year of the program. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the process, reflective reports written after practice teachings, video-recordings of teachings (two class-hours for each participant) and scaffolded feedback sessions based on these recordings. All the obtained data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that reflective practice integrated into the practice teaching experiences in the pre-service level improved the prospective teachers' awareness of their own teaching skills, critical thinking regarding their practices, recognition of school context and perception towards professional development.

INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, reflective practice elements have been effective tools in teachers' professional development. The integration of such elements into teacher training and education programs has been the focus of research in various contexts. Though research studies blossomed in this period focusing on the effectiveness of such practices, it is still important to conduct research focusing on the integration of reflective elements especially into teacher education programs so as to explore their potential on prospective teachers from different contexts and to operationalize the findings of previous research. For

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this reason, following a reflection-on-action approach, this study aims to investigate how the integration of reflective practice components into practice teaching experience of five Turkish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student-teachers in their final year in the program contributed to their professional development as teacher candidates. The following research questions were addressed throughout the study:

1. Do the student teachers benefit from the reflective elements integrated into their practice teaching experience?
2. In what aspects do the reflective elements contribute to the professional development of the participants as teacher candidates?
3. What are the perceptions of the participants towards reflective practice at the end of the process?

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

The notion of reflection as a form of development has gained more importance in the field of language teacher education for the last two decades with the emergence of the post-method era (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) which has begun to give more value and voice to teachers, their knowledge and professional development. In fact, the use of reflection as a critical term in education has a longer history, going back to the first half of the twentieth century. Dewey (1933) was the first to put forward the term reflection and to define it as “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 further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). In his conceptualization, reflective action differs from impulsive and routine actions since it requires experiencing a difficulty, evaluating it by stepping back, solving it and coming up with an outcome whereas the other two are based largely on trial-error and a passive way of thinking (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Another important scholar in the discussion of reflective practice is Schon (1983) who draws a clear-cut distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In the former one, “professionals are faced with a situation which they experience as unique or containing an element of surprise. Rather than applying theory or past experience in a direct way, professionals draw on their repertoire of examples to reframe the situation and find new solutions” (Griffiths, 2000, p. 542). On the other hand, teachers engage in reflection-on-action through the evaluation of events upon the completion of them and a meaning-making process based on this. Akbari (2007) points out that reflection-on-action is the most common form of reflection encouraged in education settings and “unlike reflection-in-action, which is an individual activity, reflection-on-action is normally exercised collectively and in groups” (p. 164). Both forms of reflection start with a problem and include one’s retrospective evaluation of the past practices with a purpose of further better practices.

The integration of reflective practice into teacher education has accelerated towards the end of 90s with the emergence of reflective model. Thought to be a compensation for the weaknesses of previous models in teacher education (Wallace, 1991), the Reflective Model (Figure 1) encouraged language teachers to learn the profession through reflecting on their own practices by considering and evaluating the reasons behind them within a wider perspective including social and contextual elements. With all its features prioritizing teachers’ professional development through reflective elements, the model has been quite prevailing among the ones that have been integrated in teacher training and education programs.

For the last few decades, research has considerably focused on the integration of reflective practice into teacher education programs and numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the effective-

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