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**MA Thesis in TEFL**

**Iranian English Language Teachers' Perceptions of  
Reflective Teaching**

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**February 2013**



**Iranian English Language Teachers' Perceptions of  
Reflective Teaching**

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**A thesis submitted to the office of the Post-Graduate, in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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**February 2013**

*Dedicated to*

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**First Name: Mohsen****Last Name: Poor Tarkarooni****Degree: MA****Field of Study: TEFL****Supervisor: Dr M. J. Jabbari****Defense Date:****Iranian English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Teaching****Abstract**

The aims of the present study were to investigate the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward reflective teaching and to explore whether any hindrances exist in the way of Iranian EFL teachers to know about the concept of reflective teaching and its practice. The design of the study was a mixed one in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The participants were 205 EFL teachers from Lorestan and Kuhgiluieh & Boyerahmad provinces selected through convenient sampling. Two instruments were used in the current study. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire developed by Akbari, et al. (2010) was adopted and adapted in order to investigate the attitudes of the teachers toward reflective teaching and an open-ended interview was used to explore the obstacles in the way of teachers to know about reflective teaching and its practice. Descriptive data analysis including percentage was used for analyzing the gathered data through questionnaire and t-test was run to know the attitudes of the teachers. Content analysis also was used to analyze the data collected from interviews. The results of the study showed that Iranian EFL teachers have positive attitudes toward five dimensions of reflective teaching: practical, cognitive, Affective/ learner, meta-cognitive and critical. Moreover, the results demonstrated that structural and personal obstacles exist in the way of the teachers to know and practice teaching. Structural obstacles included teachers' workload, in-service programs, conventional views toward teaching and the environment of the school. Personal obstacles included lack of time for reflection, teachers' past experiences, lack of awareness on importance or worth of reflection, teachers' attitude toward the role of the students, lack of writing skills and teachers' affective obstacles.

**Key words:** Reflection, Reflective teaching, Teacher development.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **General Background**

The quality of teacher development and growth has become a significant concern in recent years and reflective teaching has a unique role in this development and growth. In the past decades, the term "reflective teaching" has become popularized in the literature on teacher education in both pre-service and in-service programs. Reflective teaching plays a vital role in the preparation of many new teachers. As Johnson (2006) puts forward, engagement in constant professional development activities is prominent for change to happen because they give rise to self-directed, collaborative, inquiry based learning that is closely associated with teachers' classroom lives. According to Richards and Nunan (1990), experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, so experience coupled with reflection is a much more powerful force for development. Reflective teaching practice permits teachers to question what the origins of educational theories and practices are, what the social, political, and psychological dimensions of these theories and practices are. Teachers can look at current structures and determine which ones maintain and foster the educational society, providing security and a sense of belonging, and which structures are unfair to individuals, and to the society at large. Language teachers cannot consider themselves as passive agents in the field. Rather, teachers should be genuinely involved in the practice; the single way for teachers to fulfil this is taking time to think and reflect on their actions because it can promote more effective learning in their students. Noffke (1988) argues that reflective teaching in its different forms can be seen as a movement to imply practices as a means of changing assumptions

of teaching and teacher training and to resist the narrow notion of the teaching role. Dewey's definition of reflective action is often used as the basis for the use of "reflective teaching". Dewey (1933) holds that reflection "is the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or a form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions which intends" (p. 7). Dewey states that reflective thinking is closely related to critical thinking; it is the turning over of a subject in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration. Dewey believes that reflection is not only a rational intellectual act but also it is an act that involves the whole person, including his or her emotions. Dewey identified the following three characteristics of reflective practitioners: open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness. Whereas Dewey was interested in monologic asocial reflective process, Habermas (1970) suggests that reflective practice has a social as well as psychological foundation that does not stop at the individual, but rather may be dialogic. In addition, Habermas believes that reflective practice is neither educationally nor politically neutral..

Schön (1988) contributes to our understanding of reflective practice by emphasizing various temporal moments. Reflection on one's teaching occurs before, after, and in the middle of one's teaching. A systematic and intentional inquiry takes each of these reflective moments into consideration. Schön advances the idea that teachers, like other practitioners, reflect both in and on action. Reflection-in-action indicates how teachers reflectively formulate and resolve problems immediately while teaching students. This reflective process is not only a reflection on the problem itself, but on one's spontaneous ways of thinking and actions in the middle of teaching that leading one to take special actions. Schön's reflection-in-action discusses a reflective practice depending on an experience of surprise or innovation. 'Surprise' has positive connotation the Deweyan 'problem' or 'difficulty.' The reflective reaction made can be very rapid or offered only with rapid pause. Reflection-on-action is the reflective activity that happening before or after an action. This reflection can span mere minutes to hours, days, weeks, and months. The initial 'surprise' or dilemma can lead to an extensive reflection. This is not merely a rational practice, but one which re-informs our practice and total action as teachers .

Kemmis (1999) presents five points about the critical and political nature of reflection that indicate not only what it includes but also show us that reflective teacher education can be a complex, unattainable approach:

1- Reflection is not "mere thought", it expresses an orientation toward action and is about the association between thought and action in a social context. The complexities of the contemporary world require that educators engage in praxis, which according to Freire (1970), is "the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 66).

2- reflection is not an individualistic matter it presupposes and shapes social relations.

3- It is not neutral and value free; it expresses and serves actual social, cultural and political interests. As John Dewey (1933) pointed out, no education is neutral; all education is value-laden. The values come from the society, especially the dominant society, the community, the teachers themselves, and the students.

4- Reflection is not passive toward social orders, and it does not extend accepted values of society; it transforms the ideologies which protect social orders.

5- Reflection is not an automatic process or a purely creative exercise to construct new ideas. It is an action that expresses our ability to reconstruct social life through participation in communicative actions, decision making processes, and social praxis. Greene (1978) highlights that praxis is a joint experience which requires a transformative component. Praxis involves critical reflection—and action upon—a situation to some degree shared by people with joint interests and common needs. Of equal moment is the fact that praxis involves a transformation of the situation to put an end to oppressiveness and domination. There must be shared self-reflection.

Zeichner (1983) mentions four paradigms dominate in the discourse of debate in teacher education. "Behaviouristic" paradigm emphasizes specific and observable teaching skills;"personalistic" concentrates on the development of the psychological growth of the teacher; "traditional-craft, "put emphasis on the accumulated wisdom of experimented practitioner; and "inquiry"(reflective) underlies the matter of priority of some educational goals without ignoring the technical skills needed to achieve these goals. Zeichner (1983) distinguishes

"inquiry-oriented" approach to teacher education from others by mentioning two dimensions: the first dimension is related to specification of curriculum .In inquiry-oriented paradigm curriculum is not determined in advance and prospective teachers will play an active role in the construction of curriculum(reflexive).Second dimension is related to fostering a problematic attitude on the part of prospective teachers toward existing institutional arrangements. Zeichner argues that the teacher education programs are responsible to develop would be teachers' capacities for reflective action and to help them evaluate the moral, ethical and political issues of the teaching.

Stanley (1999) refers to some benefits of implementing reflective practice in adult ESL. The first one is "flexibility", because reflective practice originates from the needs and concerns of students, it can response to the variety that existing in learning context, learners, resources, etc. The second benefit is "practicality", because reflective teaching requires teachers to make a connection between what is happening in a specific context and their broader beliefs; it can be useful to those who move from one place to another in order to teach different contexts. "Professionalism" is another advantages of reflective practice in which teachers develop their capability to react and respond as they are teaching, evaluate, revise, and apply approaches and activities spontaneously. The last one is "Sustainability", meaning that ESL practitioners have to persistently change and develop in their career. Reflective teaching is fixated on development that eventually will be a constant element of effective teaching .

Farrell (2007) points out that reflective teaching requires teachers to evaluate their values and beliefs about teaching and learning in order to be more responsible for their practices in the classroom. He suggests that reflection should move beyond pure thinking and contemplation about teaching that based on reflection on attitudes, assumptions and beliefs to a systematic and methodological reflective process critical reflective decision should be revised. He also argues that this type of systematic reflection is necessary because so many teachers are not aware of what happens in their classroom or what they do while teaching. According to Lester (1998), teachers who think reflectively about their own teaching are better equipped to be permanent learners; they are also in a more

favourable condition to commence changes in their existing practice through personal understanding of their classroom and its culture.

Moreover, reflective teaching is based on constructive approach not transmission- oriented approach. In constructive approach, student teachers focus on what they know and bring their own experiences and knowledge to new learning situations while in transmission oriented approach, the teacher educators transmit the knowledge, and methods of teaching to their students. The students do not play an active role in the process of education; they are passive and mere recipient of knowledge (Cochran et al, 2001). Zeichner & Liston (1987) argue that conventional teacher education programs provide teachers with an apprenticeship model, these programs provide teachers with pedagogical skills, techniques and pre-packaged methods deriving from pre-existing body of knowledge. This approach prevents self \_directed growth of teachers because as mentioned above it is based on transmission oriented approach; therefore cannot lead to full professional development of teachers. Akbari (2010) discusses that the realm of teacher education has been deeply influenced by the disappearance of the concept of method. The previous methods helped novice teachers to commence their teaching career; now in post method era the pedagogical/socio-political demands of the classroom should be responded by alternative approaches, and it seems that there is a consensus over the field of reflective teaching. Akbari (2007) elaborates more on the influence of post-method on reflection teaching. In the method era, academic circles and specialists formulated methods of teaching and the teachers implement them in the classroom regardless of the needs of the classroom. The post method era toppled the top- down approach of the teacher education and proposed the bottom-up approach; it gives give more voice and value to teachers and their knowledge.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Reflective teaching will enable teachers to analyse, and evaluate their practices, school, classroom relationships between students teachers, context of learning and they make their decisions based on those analysis and evaluation and plan for future actions in the classroom and this could lead school, students ,learning and



teacher himself/herself to improvement. According to Kyriaco (1994) it is an orientation towards one's own practice which is based on inquiry and problem solving so the teachers will provide solutions to encountered problems. Reflective teaching helps teachers to be autonomous and being on the way of constant becoming that will lead to self-actualization in the personality of the teachers, progress and development. Despite being an integral part of both pre-service and in-service teacher education in many countries around the world and its importance as an approach to teaching in general and English teaching in particular, it is not known to what extent Iranian English language teachers are familiar with reflective teaching concept. Moreover, it has not been investigated whether Iranian English teachers have positive attitudes toward reflective approach. Thus, since this salient issue has been far less investigated in Iranian context, this study was set up to delve into it. Additionally, an attempt is made to explore the obstacles in the way of putting reflective teaching into practice in Iranian context.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is two-fold: the first aim of this study is to delve into the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward reflective teaching. The second aim of the current study is to explore whether any hindrances exist in the way of Iranian EFL teachers to know about the concept of reflective teaching and to put it into practice. More specifically, to meet the objectives of the study, the following questions were addressed

- 1-Do Iranian EFL teachers show positive attitudes toward reflective teaching?
- 2-What are the main obstacles in the way of Iranian EFL teachers to know about and put reflective teaching into practice?

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The current study is the first study focusing on measuring Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward reflective teaching. This study explores Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward reflective teaching in order to help them to become reflective teachers since reflection will lead them to new comprehensions of purposes, subject matters, students, teaching and self and consolidate new understandings of learning (Schulman, 1987). Akbari (2007) argues that reflection will bring about a stronger sense of autonomy and creativity to teachers, they make decisions for themselves instead of waiting for prescriptions from top agents to tell them what should be done. The results of this study will be useful to Iranian EFL teachers and will help them to be aware of reflection and reflective teaching. Moreover, educational administrators who are in charge of holding pre-service and in-service programs can benefit from the results of this study in order to accommodate this concept to their programs to train teachers and student- teachers. Schools and students can also benefit from this research because engaging teachers in reflection and reflective practice will bring about change and development in their professional and personal characters that in turn might affect students learning .

### **1.5. Definitions of Key Terms and Phrases**

Reflection: Richards (2002) defines reflection as the process of thinking back on and considering experiences, in order to understand the significance of such experiences. Reflection is thought to be important and is often a focus of teacher development activities. Korthagen (1993) suggests that the concept of reflection in teaching referred to that teachers learning subject their own values, beliefs of teaching and learning to a critical analysis and with this critical process they will be more responsible for events and their consequences of their teaching.

Reflective teaching: reflective teaching is a model in which thought and action with the reflection as a tool are integrated. In this approach to teaching and teacher education which is conducted with the intention of understanding the teaching the teacher thinks about actions, analyse them critically with the aim of professional change and development. Richards & Lockhart( 1994) define reflective teaching as an approach in which current and prospective teachers collect data about

teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, values, and teaching practices and use the information as a foundation for critical reflection about circumstances in language courses. They propose five fundamental assumptions:

1. A knowledgeable teacher has a vast knowledge about teaching.
2. Self-inquiry can help teachers to learn much more about teaching.
3. Teachers are not aware of much of what happens in the classroom.
4. Continuing development is not just dependent on experiences, in other words experience the necessary factor but not enough one.
5. A deeper understanding of teaching can be achieved through critical reflection. (pp. 3-4)

Teacher development: As teachers gain more knowledge and experience and examine and evaluate their teaching and experiences of their profession they will reach a professional growth, become competent and participate in decision-makings. Pennington (1995) defines development as a system context-interactive change which is met stable and includes a constant cycle of innovative behaviour and adaptation to events. Wallace (1991) puts a distinction between training or education and development. He argues that education or training can be presented or managed by "others "; whereas development can be done and for oneself. Lange (1990) defines it as a process in which attitudes, experiments and intellect of teachers grows constantly and the teachers in the utilization and application of their craft will evolve. At the heart of TD is "empowerment" of the teachers that will make the more autonomous and better decision makers.

## **1.6. Structure of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one includes a short introduction on reflective teaching, the statement of problem, the significance of study, the objectives and the questions of the study, the definitions of the key terms, and the structure of the study. In chapter two, review of literature related to the research is discussed that including theoretical and practical researches on reflective teaching and some ways to promote and develop reflection and reflective teaching. In chapter three, the methodology of research is discussed that

contains the participants of the study, instruments, data analysis, the procedures of the study and limitations of the study. In chapter four, the results of both quantitative and qualitative data will be presented, followed with the discussion. Finally, chapter five provides the summary, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research.