ENHANCING SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH REFLECTIVE TEACHING: A PANACEA FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

There is a broad consensus that teaching effectively requires a reflective approach. Teaching and learning are complex and there is not one right approach. Reflecting on different approaches to teaching and reshaping the understanding of past and current experiences will lead to improvement in teaching practices. This paper focuses on enhancing second language teachers' professional development through reflective teaching. Since Teachers are one of the crucial factors for educational development and reform. This paper explores the contents, process and specific operational methods of reflective teaching and its role in second Language Teacher's Professional development. This paper also illustrates the effect and significance of reflective teaching.

Nigeria is multi-lingual in nature and has a large number of language learners including first languages and second languages. It's language teaching reform has always been a hot issue in educational reform, the effect of which also becomes a significant and heart-tugging focus. Nevertheless, for a long time, the academic research in language education has mainly been focusing on the theories and techniques of language education, such as teaching approaches, learning strategies, textbook compilation, curriculum revision etc.

Researchers are keen to study teaching contents (what to teach), teaching methods (how to teach), but few consider the teaching subject (who teaches). Language teaching education and teachers' professional development have drawn unprecedented attention, the research of which has been gradually deepened, from the construction of language teaching theory and the training of teaching skills to the study of teachers' prior knowledge structure, thinking pattern and their acquisition of teaching capability, namely, the research on teaching capability, namely, the research on thinking (Gan, 2000). As a way of learning to teach, reflective thinking supplies a flow of fresh water for the professional development of language teachers.

Cruickshank and Applegate (2004) defined reflective teaching as "the teacher's thinking about what happens in classroom lessons and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals or aims". It is a means for teachers to think, analyze and objectively judge their classroom action. Based on their teaching experience, teachers find problems in real practice, then seek strategies and solutions to solve the problems through thorough going consideration and observation in order to improve their teaching.

Reflective teaching and teachers' professional development have become the focus of language research. Language teachers collect specific contents in their teaching and classroom activity, analyze and think about them so that they can check upon their teaching attitude, beliefs, judgment and teaching practice and finally reflect rationally on their activity, adjust their beliefs and revise their teaching methods. Teachers benefit from this process in that they develop their competence by making efforts, making themselves live up to the hopes of the society and successfully dealing with the challenges from test institutions, course setting and teaching methods.

The Practical Implementation of Reflective Teaching
A.   Objects of Reflection

Second language teachers have a wide range of objects to reflect on, which are interrelated and can be simply classified into teachers' beliefs and teachers' practice. To be specific, teachers can carry out reflection in the following four aspects.

(1) **The Students**: As second language learners, students' cognition and acquisition of second language deserve teachers' reflection and study. Teachers should find out students interest, need, cognition, learning strategies etc. reflect on them based on their teaching practice.

(2) **Teaching Beliefs**: Different teachers hold different beliefs due to their various learning experiences and teaching experience. Reflection on teaching beliefs doesn't mean to change their prior teaching beliefs, but to reflect from both subjective and objective perspectives in order to make clear the positive and negative factors in their belief.

(3) **Teaching Practice**: Teachers are not only knowledge transmitters but also analyzers of students' need, researchers of learning activities, guides for students, classroom managers, organizers and participants. All these roles provide rich contents for teachers' reflection.

(4) **Methods and Process of Making Decisions:** Making decision is the prelude to teaching practice. According to Charles (2006) the process of making decision consists of three stages, namely planning decision, interactive decision, evaluative decision, which correspond with the three stages of teaching namely, preparation, implementation and summary.

B.   Process of Reflective Teaching

Experts have different ideas on the general process of reflective teaching. Eby (1999) believes that reflective teaching consists of eight phases, namely, observing the class, raising questions, collecting data, analyzing data, making judgments, considering alternative strategies and implementing plans. Pollard (2006) believes that reflective teaching contains seven phases, which are, reflection, planning, preparation, action, data collection, data analysis and evaluation. The author of this paper divides the process of reflective teaching into the following four phases: Identification of a problem, observation and analysis, re-generalization and actual verification.

In a nutshell, in the process of reflective teaching, teachers should construct initiatively based on their prior knowledge and teaching, take in new skills, techniques and theories. While reflecting on their own teaching behaviours comprehensively, teachers will gain experience from the teaching subject, teaching objectives and teaching aids, as well as from the pre-teaching, while-teaching and post-teaching sectors to mature themselves. In the process of transforming teaching, thoughts and values into teaching behaviours, teachers experience cyclic reflection to become conscious and effective reflectors, thereby promoting their professional growth.

C.   Strategies of Reflective Teaching

(1)   Teaching Journal: Teaching experience is the main content of the journal. Richards and Lockhart, (1996) suggested that teachers record their feelings about what happened in class, describe things that are significant to teaching, take down the problems worth investigation and the solutions in the teaching journal. For instance, while the teacher is reviewing classroom teaching, he/she can reflect on the following questions: Did the use of second language take up the whole class? Is it beneficial to the students? In which case should I correct students' mistakes etc. Jarvis (1992) pointed out that inferior journals are those which supply list of what happened in class and those which generally summarize the whole teaching process. Those which are favourable for solving problems, seeing new teaching ideas and legitimizing own practice are regarded as remarkable journals. Writing journals can stir teachers' insight into teaching and expose the problems in teaching, providing favourable preparation for making plan of

improvement. However, teachers differ in their ability of reflection, so it is very necessary to offer training to develop their effective ability.

(2)   Observation: Teachers can observe each other's class and mutually analyze their teaching practice. To be specific, they can learn how their colleagues arrange their teaching procedures, how they manage their class, how they teach students, how they tackle sudden matters to ensure that the class can continue smoothly, how the students react to the teacher, how is the relation between teacher and students. They may also pay attention to the frequencies of the teacher's and students' classroom behaviours: Students' frequency of using mother tongue, the teacher's frequency of using target language, students' frequency of answering teacher's questions voluntarily etc. such observation is different from traditional ones, in that the latter's only purpose is to check on the quality   of teaching, it is merely a form of teacher assessment, while the former is a means of collecting information or data. While observing the class, the teacher takes down the problems they find out, discuss them with their colleagues after class, propose measures for improvement and eventually get self-development.

(3)   Teacher Assessment: teacher assessment is similar to observation. It does not focus on the 'right' or wrong in the teaching, but it requires the observer to pay attention to the teacher's teaching throughout the class, helping the teacher to improve his/her teaching through a cycle of observing, analyzing, evaluating, improving and practicing.

(4)   Questionnaire: Second language teachers can design questionnaires in a planned way and with particular purposes. The contents can be concerned with teachers (Such as teaching approaches) or students' attitudes, affections, learning strategies and linguistic knowledge. The subjects can be some students or a whole class of students, the whole grade or even the teacher's colleagues. The interval between questionnaires is decided by the teaching progress.

(5)   **Micro-Teaching:** Teachers can record a certain process or aspect of teaching chosen by themselves as the object of reflection and then observe and analyze the recording as an observer as to work out countermeasures to the problems. Such a vivid material can provide a detailed feedback of the whole classroom teaching, stimulate teachers' reflective thinking, encourage them to sum up the success and failure in their teaching.

(6)   **Action Research:** Action research is related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and the teacher as researcher! It involves taking a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to exploring teacher's own teaching contexts and intervening in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and even better improvements in practice (Burns, 2011). It typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research, namely, planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 1988). The first cycle may become a continuing, or interactive, spiral of cycles which recur till the action researcher has achieved a satisfactory outcome and feels it is time to stop.

Significance of Reflective Teaching
Reflection is a significant basis for teachers' professional development. For second language teachers, reflective teaching is not only the basis for them to make teaching plans and decisions for actions, but also beneficial for them to strengthen their exploration ability, to raise their ability of supervising teaching, to improve their awareness of self-reflection and to construct new teaching beliefs and concepts.

(1)   Reflective teaching makes teachers re-identify their roles. With the constant development of society and education teachers' roles are taking on a tendency of transforming from knowledge transmitters to teachers with multi-roles. Second language teachers should play nine different roles according to

different teaching situations: Controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, resource – provider, facilitator, guide and researcher (Wang, 2000).

(2) Reflective teaching helps teachers achieve the transformation of teaching beliefs. Teaching beliefs are influenced by one's learning experience, knowledge structure, teaching context and teaching experience and they in turn influence teacher's judgement on a certain problem and further influence his/her decision in classroom teaching, teaching procedures, teaching behaviour, assessment, error correction and almost all the aspects concerning language teaching.

(3) Reflective teaching promotes the combination of theory and practice. By reflecting on not only their teaching beliefs, interest; motivation and morale, but also their teaching methods, materials and media, teachers either query or evaluate their teaching effect then correct the inappropriate teaching action according to the result of reflection.

(4) Reflective teaching improves teaching and research skills. Teaching is a complicated process in which teachers apprehend teaching context and reflect on their own cognitive process. They analyze and evaluate their teaching plans, teaching behaviour, and their influence on students. They explore and ponder over the teaching phenomena which seem ordinary to others.

Conclusions

Efficient second language teaching is both a science and a professional pursuit. To achieve self-development and improve professional competence, second language teachers must have diversified and open thought, correct and innovative educational beliefs, critical spirit, perseverance and strong affection for students.

As the main researchers and practitioners, second language teachers should base their research on classroom teaching, reflect it on their teaching beliefs, making cognition scientific, teaching process communicative and teaching methods dynamic and promoting their constant professional development via recording lessons, publication reading, teacher mediation questionnaire, case study, diary writing, teaching assessment, in-service training programs, conferences, seminars and short courses.

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