

THE EFFECT OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE ON 'FIELD EXPERIENCE' IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop insight into pre-service language teachers' experiences of reflective practice in 'field experience'. It is assumed that pre-service teachers form habits of reflective practice once they have learnt how to carry it out in their teaching. Hence, this research tries to investigate how well student teachers can apply reflective practice in their field experience and to what extent it is beneficial. The study was conducted at a large state university with pre-service English language teachers. The participants were 30 prospective teachers. The participants were asked to write reflection reports and fill in peer observation forms every week during one term in an academic year. The data was collected with a questionnaire designed by Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk's (2010). The questionnaire guided the pre-service teachers to reflect on their weekly guided reflection reports and peer observation forms. The study provided insight into the prospective teachers' tendency to display "reflection-in-action" versus "reflection-on-action" practices in the classroom. The analysis of the questionnaire yielded frequencies. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers are less capable of making decisions about their teaching context during classroom practice. However, when guided effectively, participants are found to reflect on their teaching practices after the class and assess the effectiveness of their moves in the classroom after their field practice.

Keywords: Reflection, Reflection-in-Action, Reflection-on-Action, Pre-service Language Teachers, Practicum.

Hizmet Öncesi Eğitimde Yansıtımlı Eğitim Deneyiminin Öğretmenlik Uygulamasına Etkisi

Öz

Bu çalışma öğretmen adaylarının yansıtımlı öğretmenlik uygulamasına yönelik algılarını geliştirmeyi hedeflemiştir. Hizmet öncesi öğretmen adaylarının alanlarında nasıl uygulayacaklarını öğrendiklerinde yansıtımlı öğretmenliği alışkanlık haline getirdikleri varsayılmaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının yansıtımlı öğretmenliği kendi alanlarında ne kadar başarılı uyguladıklarını ve yansıtımlı öğretmenliğin ne kadar yararlı olduğunu araştırmaktadır. Çalışma bir devlet üniversitesinde İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören 30 öğretmen adaylarıyla yürütülmüştür. Katılımcılardan akademik yılın bir dönemi boyunca alan uygulamasından

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sonra yansıtımlı öğretmenlikle ilgili rapor göndermeleri ve akran gözlem formlarını doldurmaları istenmiştir. Veriler, Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk (2010) tarafından hazırlanan bir anket aracıyla toplanmıştır. Anket, katılımcıların haftalık yazdıkları yansıtımlı öğretmenlik uygulamasına yönelik raporları ve akran gözlem raporlarını değerlendirmesine rehberlik etmektedir. Çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının ‘sınıf içi uygulama sırasında yansıtma’ ya da ‘uygulama sonrası yansıtma’ yapabilme eğilimlerini göstermektedir. Veri analizi, katılımcıların ankette yer alan maddelerdeki eylemleri yapabilme sıklıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Çalışma sonuçları öğretmen adaylarının sınıf içi uygulaması sırasında karşılaştıkları durumlarla ilgili karar vermede zorlandıklarını göstermektedir. Fakat, etkili bir şekilde yönlendirildiklerinde, katılımcıların ders sonrası öğretmenlik uygulamasıyla ilgili yansıtma yapabildiklerini ve sınıf içi performanslarını değerlendirebildiklerini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yansıtma, Sınıf-İçi-Yansıtma, Ders Sonrası Yansıtma, Hizmet-Öncesi Yabancı Dil Öğretmenleri, Staj.

Introduction

Pre-service teachers gain experience in the assigned schools within teacher education programs. Throughout this experience, the teacher candidates work with cooperating teachers at schools and their supervisors at the faculty. These prospective teachers carry out observations in the first term of an academic year; plan and teach lessons in the second term of the same academic year.

Compared to teacher training, teacher development is a long-term process within aims at advancing the growth of the teacher’s general understanding of teaching and of himself/herself as a teacher (Göker, 2006; cited in Gönen, 2012). Gönen (2012) also claims that throughout this process, teachers can both improve their teaching skills and acquire new knowledge by reflecting on their own learning. McAlpine and Weston (2000) suggest that reflection fosters professional growth. Moreover, to achieve professional improvement and development in the quality of teaching, reflective practice is considered as a primary condition (Weshah, 2007).

What is Reflective Practice?

Dewey is the key originator of this concept and he (1933) defines reflection as “an active cognitive process, which leads to the critical analysis of existing beliefs and knowledge so as to address the problems.” According to Schön (1983), reflection is “deliberate inquiry into practice, which requires dealing with the problems encountered, evaluating actions and modifying them when necessary as a result.” Hubball, Collins and Pratt (2005) define reflective practice as ‘ the thoughtful consideration and questioning of what we do, what works and what doesn’t, and what premises and rationales underlie our teaching and that of others’ (p.60).

Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk (2010) state reflective teaching includes examining one's teaching practice critically, accepting the experiences in classroom open to inquiry, adapting one's teaching styles to meet students' needs and sharing experiences with colleagues.

Below is given a comprehensive definition by Jay and Johnson (2002)

Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. One evaluates insights gained from that process with reference to: (1) additional perspectives, (2) one's own values, experiences, and beliefs, and (3) the larger context within which the questions are raised. Through reflection one reaches newfound clarity on which one bases changes in action or disposition. New questions naturally arise, and the process spirals onward (cited in Hasanbaşıoğlu, 2007, p.14).

Dewey (1993) puts emphasis on the three qualities a reflective teacher must have: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility. Parsons and Stephenson (2005) define open-mindedness as the ability to remain open to alternative ideas. Zeichner and Liston (1996) consider the teachers who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their practice as open-minded. Furthermore, being open-minded allows one to take the criticisms professionally rather than personally (cited in Hasanbaşıoğlu, 2007). Wholeheartedness can be defined as the commitment to reflection. Valli (1993) states that wholehearted teachers are willing to learn new insights through reflection. Reflection is an ongoing process which entails responsibility (cited in Hasanbaşıoğlu, 2007). Moreover, Zeichner and Liston (1996) acknowledge 'responsibility' as reflection carefully about the consequences of their actions.

Schön (1987) specifies three types of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action indicating that teachers reflect both during and after actions to improve practice.

- a. Reflection-in-action happens while teaching. It deals with on-the-spot professional problems as they occur, and it refers to the importance of teachers' being aware of their decisions as they work and it enables the teacher to take the necessary steps towards his/her following actions.
- b. Reflection-on-action occurs after action has been completed, and it engages the teacher with reviewing, analysing and evaluating the situation which enhance professional growth. In simple terms, it is reflecting on our reflecting-in-action.
- c. Reflection-for-action: It is proactive thinking in order to guide future action (Farrel, 1998, p.11). Gönen (2012) reports that it refers to using the information gathered

by the first two types (reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action) as a guide for future planning and action (p.23).

In order to engage in any type of reflective action, the skill of reflective thinking need to be developed (Gönen, 2012, p.23). Hasanbaşoğlu (2007) summarizes the benefits of reflective teaching as follows;

- to develop critical thinking skills
- to enlarge our repertoire of techniques, strategies and options
- to expand our understanding of the teaching/learning process and our teaching style
- to enhance learning opportunities for our students
- to promote a positive learning environment in the classroom
- to improve and renew the institutions and their policies and practices
- to gain an interdisciplinary perspective

Currently, together with the rapidly developing information technology, various methods, such as digital video tools, and web-based, electronic portfolios, were developed using advanced technology in order to promote practitioners to engage in reflection (Abrams & Middleton, 2004; Bush, 1998; Cunningham & Benedetto, 2006). It has been accepted that the student profile of the 21st century can learn better with teachers who are responsive and reflective (Gönen, 2012).

It is vital to note YOK's (1998) suggestion about practicum teaching. According to YOK, The field experience or practicum teaching is carried out in cooperation between faculty coordinators, the departmental coordinators at the faculties of education, the supervisor from university, the cooperating teachers at schools of ministry of Education and the practicum school coordinators at the field experience schools. However, there is no reference to student teacher-student teacher interaction within this framework. There have been a few studies that highlight the lack of reflective practice in pre-service education programs. Gönen (2012) and Erginel's (2006) studies have shed light onto this issue. Gönen (2012) has studied the effects of reciprocal peer coaching in field experience and Erginel (2006) have carried out a study on perception and improvement of reflective practice in pre-service teacher education.

Similarly, this study intends to focus on reflective practice in teacher education at pre-service level, and it investigates the prospective teachers' attitudes towards reflective practice and the effects of reflection on their teaching.

Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk's (2010) investigation shows that universities do not attach enough importance to reflective teaching while preparing teachers for their jobs. Furthermore, it has been revealed that the awareness of reflective practice is not enough; therefore there should be a strong link between theory and practice. In other words, how to be a reflective teacher could be taught in pre-service teacher education.

The related literature about reflection reveals that nearly all studies have been conducted with practicing teachers. Therefore, the present study is valuable as it involves pre-service teachers. The present study aims to explore whether pre-service teachers can apply reflection-in-action while teaching and whether they can form a habit of reflection-on-action during their field experience to improve their reflectivity. The paper also attempts to show what strategies and skills the participants need to improve their understanding of reflective practice. The following research questions have guided this study:

1. Do pre-service teachers reflect while teaching (reflection-in-action)?
2. Do pre-service teachers reflect on their observed and lived experiences (reflection-on-action)?
3. Can teacher trainers help student teachers acquire the reflective understanding in their teaching?
4. Do the pre-service teachers find the reflective practicum course beneficial?
5. What skills and strategies do they need to improve their understanding of reflective practice?

Method

Design

In this study, the survey research design is used to reveal and investigate the attitudes of prospective teachers who have carried out a reflective practice in their practicum teaching experience.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 5 male and 20 female student teachers studying at Faculty of Education, ELT department at Gazi University. This gender ratio is common in English Language Teaching departments. The ages of the participants ranged between 21-24.

Data Collection

The pre-service teachers filled in weekly guided reflection reports and peer observation forms throughout the term. Guided questions for reflection reports and peer observation forms have been presented in Appendix 2 and 3. Finally, Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk's (2010) questionnaire has been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of the study. The questionnaire guided the pre-service teachers to reflect on their weekly guided reflection reports and peer observation forms. Thus the study provided insight into the prospective teachers' tendency to display "reflection-in-action" versus "reflection-on-action" practices in the classroom.

It is important to note that in Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk's study, the questionnaire was applied to instructors who had been teaching for a while. However, the target group

in this study is the pre-service teachers who study at the final grade at ELT department. Therefore, the term ‘colleague’ in the 1st and 3rd statements has been replaced by ‘peer’. There are 30 items that reflect how frequently student teachers have practiced each item (never, rarely, sometimes, often, usually). In their study, Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk (2010) state that the questionnaire has been found to be reliable (Alpha=0, 862) (p.4). In this study frequency for each item in the questionnaire has been figured out by the program SPSS.

Results and Discussion

The table below shows pre-service teachers’ practices about “reflection-in-action”. The moves of the participants are displayed in frequencies and numbers. The findings will be discussed in line with the research questions.

Table 1. Pre-service Teachers’ Practices about “Reflection-in-Action”

No	Statements	f	Percent %
18	I’m aware of the general atmosphere in the classroom. (sleepy, tired, bored, active, angry, smiley, excited.....students)	sometimes	1 3.3
		often	5 16.7
		usually	24 80.0
29	I’m aware of what went well and what did not go well during the lesson.	sometimes	1 3.3
		often	7 23.3
		usually	22 73.3
25	I deviate from the plan if I receive clues from the students that they do not understand.	rarely	4 13.3
		sometimes	9 30.0
		often	8 26.7
		usually	9 30.0
20	I adapt the activity or come up with a new activity if the original activity is too hard for the students.	never	1 3.3
		rarely	2 6.7
		sometimes	9 30.0
		often	11 36.7
		usually	7 23.3
23	I plan what I need to do next class hour to ensure that the students learn the unclear content.	sometimes	3 10.0
		often	11 36.7
		usually	16 53.3
26	I think about possible consequences or reactions that my actions or words might invoke.	sometimes	6 20.0
		often	18 60.0
		usually	6 20.0

6	I try to find proofs of the students' learning.	sometimes	4	13.3
		often	16	53.3
		usually	10	33.3
19	I search for reasons why some tasks are too difficult for some students.	rarely	1	3.3
		sometimes	8	26.7
		often	12	40.0
12	I think whether the students got the essential learning from the lesson.	usually	9	30.0
		sometimes	2	6.7
		often	15	50.0
16	I try to find reasons for positive and negative classroom occurrences.	usually	13	43.3
		often	20	66.7
		usually	10	33.3
21	I ask the students to express their feelings and explain reasons for their feelings.	never	1	3.3
		rarely	4	13.3
		sometimes	8	26.7
15	I learn new things about my class while teaching.	often	10	33.3
		usually	19	63.3
		rarely	1	3.3
24	I assess the difficulty level of every activity that students work on.	sometimes	4	13.3
		often	12	40.0
		usually	13	43.3
11	I learn new things about individual students while teaching.	sometimes	1	3.3
		often	14	46.7
		usually	15	50.0
17	I assess everything I do or say in the classroom and know why I do or say these things.	rarely	1	3.3
		sometimes	2	6.7
		often	17	56.7
14	I reach conclusions by the end of the lesson that direct my future teaching practices.	usually	10	33.3
		never	1	3.3
		rarely	1	3.3
		sometimes	4	13.3
		often	13	43.3
		usually	11	36.7

As it is seen from Table 1, most of the respondents were usually aware of the general atmosphere in the classroom. It is also clear that the vast majority of the respondents were aware what went well and what did not go well.

It was difficult for some respondents to deviate from the lesson plan when they received clues from the students that they did not understand. 30 % of the participants sometimes e from the plan, 13.3 % of the participants rarely deviated from the plan in case of students' not understanding. The next result is consistent with the previous one because student teachers had difficulty to adapt the activity when the difficulty level was beyond the students' level. 30 % of the participants sometimes and 6,7% of the participants rarely adapted the activity. During the class, student teachers made a big effort to find reasons for positive and negative classroom occurrences. However, some participants had difficulty in finding reasons why some tasks were too difficult for some students. Student teachers were aware of their actions during the class. They knew why they did or said things. They were able to assess the difficulty levels of activities that students worked on. During the lesson, they tried to find proofs of students' learning.

The results show that most of the students formed a habit to find proofs about their students' learning and they were able to evaluate their lessons as a whole. This might stem from the guided questions in the reflection report. There are questions in the reflection report such as 'How do you understand that your lesson went well? What needs improvement in your lesson? What is your evidence for this?' Writing the weekly reflection reports might have formed a habit for this critical thinking during the lessons. On the other hand, it is concluded that prospective teachers might have been trained in reflecting on students' behavior as they could assess the difficulty levels of the task but they found it difficult to adapt the task according to students' level. Furthermore, the participants had difficulty in deviating from the lesson plan when they got clues that students did not understand. It can be concluded that throughout their field experience they formed a habit of reflecting on their own and students' behavior, action and attitudes; however, they need more practice on modifying the lesson plan or adapting the tasks according to students' level while teaching.

Table 2: Pre-service Teachers' Practices about "Reflection-on-Action"

No	Statements		f	Percent %
9	I talk to my peers about problematic issues in my classroom in order to have their new ideas.	sometimes	3	10.0
		often	12	40.0
		usually	15	50.0
		rarely	4	13.3
30	I discuss educational issues with my peers .	sometimes	9	30.0
		often	8	26.7
		usually	9	30.0
27	After the lesson, I consider every student's engagement and participation during the lesson.	sometimes	2	6.7
		often	15	50.0
		usually	13	43.3
22	After the lesson, I think about what I wanted to happen during the lesson.	rarely	1	3.3
		often	13	43.3
		usually	16	53.3

2	I consider how my practice might change after having new understandings.	sometimes	1	3.3
		often	15	50.0
		usually	14	46.7
5	I explore possible meanings and implications of classroom events.	sometimes	3	10.0
		often	15	50.0
		usually	12	40.0
10	After the lesson, I ask myself (what could I have done differently?)	sometimes	3	10.0
		often	14	46.7
		usually	13	43.3
7	I search on the Internet for possible alternatives for my current teaching practices.	rarely	3	10.0
		sometimes	12	40.0
		often	10	33.3
4	I get helpful feedback that can improve my teaching from observers (peers, mentor teacher and supervisor)	usually	5	16.7
		sometimes	7	23.3
		often	7	23.3
3	Colleagues, teacher trainees or administrators observe my lessons.	usually	16	53.3
		usually	30	100.0
		never	1	3.3
28	I keep reflection reports in which I collect proofs of my learning as a teacher over a specified time.	rarely	1	3.3
		sometimes	2	6.7
		often	8	26.7
1	I observe my peers' lessons.	usually	18	60.0
		often	14	46.7
		usually	16	53.3
13	I keep a journal describing incidents in the classroom why things happen in the classroom, and a plan for future action.	never	1	3.3
		rarely	3	10.0
		sometimes	4	13.3
8	I fill a formal reflection form for every lesson I teach.	often	11	36.7
		usually	11	36.7
		never	1	3.3
8	I fill a formal reflection form for every lesson I teach.	rarely	3	10.0
		sometimes	4	13.3
		often	8	26.7
		usually	14	46.7

Of the 25 pre-service teachers, 50% of the participants *usually* and 40% of the participants *often* talked about problematic issues in their classrooms in order to get inspired from each other. This result might stem from students' actions such observing

each other, filling in peer observation forms and then giving feedback to each other about their performances. While they have a tendency to discuss the problematic issues in their own classrooms, half of the respondents do not often discuss educational issues with their peers. It is also remarkable that nearly all of the participants had a tendency to question whether they could have done things in a different way. The results show that after having written the reflection reports, they reached conclusions that would direct their future teaching practices. After the lesson, they all evaluated what they aimed to happen in the lesson and what they had, and they evaluated every student's engagement and participation during the lesson. The results demonstrate that the participants frequently searched on the Internet for possible alternatives for their current teaching practices when compared to the results of the other items.

Research Question 1: Do pre-service teachers reflect while teaching (reflection-in-action)?

The first research question investigates pre-service teachers' capability to reflect while teaching. Schön (1987) defines three types of reflection: reflection in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for action. This study has focused on the first and the second type of reflection. Reflection-in-action happens during on the spot of teaching and teachers are aware of their decisions as they teach and reflection-in-action helps them to take the necessary steps his/her following steps. In other words, it serves as a basis for reflection-for-action. The results have shown that the majority of pre-service teachers are aware of the contexts where they teach, and the variables of these contexts include; however, they sometimes have difficulty in making decisions according to students' needs on the spot of teaching. Likewise, they sometimes have difficulty in adapting materials accordingly during the lesson.

Research Question 2: Do pre-service teachers reflect on their observed and lived experiences (reflection-on-action)?

The second level of reflection is reflection-on-action. As defined by Schön (1987) it occurs after action has been taken. The teacher reviews, analyses and evaluates the situation which enhance professional growth. The second research question investigates students' capability to reflect on their teaching. The participants were found to reflect-on-action more than reflection-in-action. Odeh, Kurt and Atamtürk (2010) reported that this level of reflection can be achieved by recalling experiences, testing our existing beliefs and questioning decisions and their results. This can be expressed in writing reflective journals, audio journals, action research, keeping professional portfolios (p.12). Similarly, in this research participants used weekly reflection reports, peer learning for 12 weeks which have helped them to form a habit of reflective practice.

Research Question 3: Can teacher trainers help student teachers acquire the reflective understanding in their teaching?

It is still uncertain whether teachers can be taught how to become reflective practitioners. As Zeichner and Liston (1996) state, 'reflection is not a procedure that can be taught but rather a holistic orientation to teaching that can be helped to acquire' (cited in Odeh, Kurt, and Atamtürk, 2010, p.12). In the study of mentioned writers, a group of

instructors working at a preparatory school have been delivered a questionnaire and the instructors have been found in the same superficial level of reflection regardless of their level of education or training. Furthermore, they have reached the conclusion that teacher preparation programs could not help teachers develop a reflectively holistic orientation to teaching. Nevertheless, the results of this study have been a sign of hope for teacher education programs and teacher trainers can help student teachers acquire a holistic orientation to reflective teaching.

Research Question 4: *Do the pre-service teachers find the reflective practicum course beneficial?*

The open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire helped to find an answer to the 4th research question. It is seen that prospective teachers have developed a positive attitude towards reflective teaching. They agree that the reflective practice (writing, weekly reflection papers, peer observation and feedback from the supervisor) have helped them grow as a teacher. Moreover, they have observed an improvement in their teaching comparing the first reflections and the last ones.

Research Question 5: *What skills and strategies do they need to improve their understanding of reflective practice?*

It appears that pre-service teachers have started to form a reflective habit, and they have reflected on their actions and evaluated the effectiveness of the teaching in their class. At this point, the guided reflection reports are considered to be helpful as reflection-on-action is a deeper level of reflection and the researcher has found it necessary to demonstrate how to carry it out after teaching. On the other hand, pre-service teachers have been found successful in evaluating the context they have taught or developing an awareness of what is going on in the class. However, the researcher have drawn the conclusion that they might need training on making decisions according to students' understanding during the lesson such as deviating from the plan or adapting a task according to the students' level.

Conclusion

It is concluded in the study that reflective practice can be acquired as a holistic orientation to teaching. Pre-service teachers have 'field-experience' during the second term before they graduate from the Faculty of Education. In this 'field-experience' they have the opportunity to link their theoretical knowledge and practice. The motive behind this study was to make the 'field-experience' a base for reflective practice as it was assumed that pre-service teachers needed to learn how to become reflective teachers. What is more, this knowledge was assumed to help teachers to reflect on their teaching practices during their professional life.

Pre-service teachers were found to be hesitant to make decisions during their in-classroom practices, which displays their incompetency in 'reflection-in-action'. This bears the necessity of providing the prospective teachers with useful strategies they can use while reflecting-in-action such as modification and adaptation of tasks and materials during the lesson. However, the participants could reflect on their actions and assess

the effectiveness of their decisions they had made in the classroom, which shows their competency in ‘reflection-on-action’. This shows the effectiveness of the tools such as weekly reflection reports and peer observation forms. In other words, through the trainer’s guidance, prospective teachers can develop a habit of reflection-on-action.

To sum up, it would be a good idea to integrate the subject matter into methodology courses at pre-service teacher education and help them grasp the significance of reflective practice. The implication of this subject matter can be adapted into ‘practicum’ at pre-service teachers’ final year at the faculty to help them learn how to use it in their professional life.

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