



THE ROLE OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK- BASED JOURNAL WRITING ON EFL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Teachers' answers to such major questions as 'who am I?', 'what kind of teacher do I want to be?', and 'how do I see my role as a teacher?' (Korthagen, 2004) constitute their professional identity, growing over career stages and in light of educational, cultural, and political contexts (Flores and Day, 2006). Furthermore, teaching strategies, reflectivity and affectivity build up it. However, these issues have rarely been accommodated integrally, which motivated this study to address them through lengthy journal writing stages each followed by professional constructive feedback. So, the research question covering the continuum of development from teaching in general to reflectivity were addressed. To do so, a sample of 30 Iranian MA EFL teachers attempted RTI of Akbari et al (2010) prior to and after the experiment run through guided journal writings during a ten-session course. Each journal was analyzed based on the PPP approach and necessary constructive feedback was explicitly given in written. The data analyzed based on mixed research paradigms revealed promising results and proved the feasibility of the PID. Parametric statistical analyses revealed moderate effects of the given feedback on the PID, but significant effects on the reflectivity. Qualitatively, a remarkable trend of developments in all three PPPs indicated a trend of shift from teacher-centeredness to learner autonomy and strategic teaching.

Key Words: Constructive feedback, Reflective teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Language teachers' professional development happens in the course of history through experiences and further trainings. However, constructive feedback to their own personal classroom reports on the form of journal writing, a new and intact area studied very rarely, is rationalized to be experimentally studied. On the other hand, their styles of teaching have also been rarely integrated into experimental investigations through journal writing and constructive feedback paradigm. Furthermore, reflective teaching is also, taken as an intact area for research as it is less clear what factors and to what extent can affect it.

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between teacher's journal writing in the classroom and his reflection in teaching. It means that journal writing as a tool was supported to have significant effects on the way a teacher teaches because in the light of journal writing, teacher can find opportunities to revisit, monitor, plan for, evaluate, and modify his own professional identity and academic conduct both through the experiences he/she receives in the process of teaching as well as the feedback he/she is provided with



gradually be the moderator or supervisor following reading the developed journals and giving his suggestions and moderations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Constructive Feedback

Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, and Monegan (2009) state that educators face ongoing pressure to improve student outcomes, especially with regard to academic achievement and social behavior. One viable strategy for supporting and improving instructional practices is to conduct classroom observations and provide performance feedback. Researchers have shown performance feedback to be effective in the workplace, institutions, and educational settings. The present case study on a high school teacher provides preliminary promising information of the relevance and effectiveness of the combination of a classroom observation and a performance feedback process that focused on the relations among 3 key variables: classroom instructional settings, instructional practice, and classroom student behavior. The authors used a process based on the observational data that identified when students were off task and pinpointed the corresponding setting categories and the teacher's instructional actions. The authors provided performance feedback to the teacher on the basis of these findings. Then, the teacher made changes in the identified setting categories and teacher actions, resulting in substantial gains in class engagement and a reduction in problem behaviors.

Bee and Bee (1996, p.3) defend that feedback is constructive when "there are agreed standards of behavior and performance, and two-way communication about what has gone right as well as what has gone wrong" and when it "supplies information about behavior and performance against objective standards in such a way that recipients keep a positive attitude towards themselves and their work". Meanwhile, according to Irons (2008, p.55) constructive feedback "should be proper to the formative evaluation and to the student learning process".

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), different types of CF have been identified including explicit, metalinguistic, elicitation, repetition, recast, translation, and clarification requests.

Reflective Journal Writing

According to Esbenshade (2002), reflective journal, diary, or log writing is an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching, usually in the form of a notebook, book, or electronic mode, which serves as a source of discussion, reflection or evaluation. The journal may be used as a record of incidents, problems, and insights that occur during lessons. Journal writing can be in the form of computer word processing (individual), electronic mail (group), and even through 'talk'- by speaking journal entries into a record for later analysis.

According to Brock et.al (1992), journal writing enables a teacher to keep a record of classroom events and observations, without such records, the teacher often has no substantial recollection of what happened during a lesson and cannot use the experience of successful teaching as a source for further learning .Moreover, according to McDonough (1994), it seems that adult educators write journals for many different reasons prompted by many different purposes. We may want to capture an experience, record an event, explore our feelings, or make sense of what we know. We may want to narrate something of importance so that others can see what we saw in it. Sometimes we write primarily for ourselves, sometimes for others. Journal writing is as varied as those who engage in it.

Farrell (2007) believes that journal writing can be viewed through many different perspectives: as a form of self-expression, a record of events, or a form of therapy. It can be an amalgamation of these and other purposes. Journal writing can be used to energize what we do and how we do it. As a vehicle for learning, it can be used in formal courses, our professional practice, or any aspect of informal learning. Writing reflective journals is considered to be one of the main procedures for stimulating critical reflection skills of teachers. According to Cole et.al (1998) many different topics from classroom experiences can be explored through journal writing, for example:



- Personal reactions to things that happen in the classroom.
- Questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching.
- Descriptions of significant aspects of lessons or events.
- Ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action.

Given these specifications, the researchers see journal writing as a process of recoding ideas, classroom experiences, one's personal reactions, questions and observations about the events, description of events or classroom aspects all for the purpose of responding reflectively and responsively to these issues.

Feed back to Teachers

It seems that provision of feedback to teacher which is one dimension of the present study can also lead to better and effective education and instructional objectives. Bear on the issue, Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004) believe that teacher preparation programs are under scrutiny for their role in the troubled American educational system. Thus, teacher educators must encourage teachers to use effective teaching practices. One technique for increasing use of effective practices is providing feedback to teachers on both newly acquired and ingrained teaching behaviors. To determine attributes of effective performance feedback, a systematic search for empirical literature was completed. Analysis of the ten identified studies indicates attributes of feedback that have been studied fall into categories of (a) nature of feedback, (b) temporal dimensions of feedback, and (c) who gives feedback. Through this review, attributes of feedback were classified as either promising or effective practice in changing specific teaching behaviors. They found that only immediate feedback was identified as an effective attribute. Promising practices for feedback to teachers included feedback that was specific, positive, and/or corrective. These findings, recommendations and directions for additional research in feedback and teacher preparation are discussed.

Wragg(1971) explored on four groups of student teachers taught short lessons to small classes of children. They then retaught a similar lesson approximately one hour later to a comparable but different group of children. In the intervening one-hour period they received various kinds of feedback about the first lesson they had given. Analysis of the second lessons showed that the students who had both seen videotapes of their first lesson and been given information about their interaction with the class were likely to lecture less, elicit more spontaneous talk by the children and be rated higher by them.

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METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were twenty two male and female EFL teachers holding either BA or MA in TEFL teaching at secondary high school and educational centers affiliated to the University of Applied.

Instrumentation

To conduct the study, three main instruments were employed including:

1. Reflective Teaching Inventory (teacher reflectivity questionnaire used in this study was developed by Akbari, Behzadpour and Dadvand (forthcoming))
2. Journal Developed by the Participants

Procedure

Having selected the participants, the researcher sought their participation in the study. They first received the questionnaires to measure their perceptions of language teaching and teaching styles. Simultaneous with the first step, they were asked to develop a journal each session on the main issues of the teaching-learning situation following the PPP model, classroom management, error correction, on the spot decisions, etc.

Their journals used to be collected every session; examined by the researcher and the advisor of this study (a PhD holder in TEFL). Necessary constructive feedback in the form of recommendations and comments would be offered as to each journal in written. This process continued for at least ten sessions.

The last steps focused on the repetition of, in fact, the first step since they were exposed to the existed instruments in order to collect data following the process of journal writing.

Data analysis

As stated, both qualitative and quantitative measures were employed as to the data collected through the questionnaires. Furthermore, developments in journal quality were also being investigated qualitatively in the form of an assessment trend to explore possible developments and changes in the light of the comments and teaching experiences.

Reliability

The Cronbach Alpha reliability indices of the tests employed in this study are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Indices

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Pre-Reflection	.84	29
Post-Reflection	.86	29

Construct Validity

A factor analysis through the Varimax rotation is carried out to probe the underlying constructs of the tests employed in this study. The SPSS extracted two factors which account for 67.27 percent of the total variance.

Table 2: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.538	42.300	42.300	2.538	42.300	42.300	2.197	36.613	36.613
2	1.499	24.977	67.277	1.499	24.977	67.277	1.840	30.665	67.277
3	.803	13.386	80.663						
4	.561	9.342	90.006						
5	.473	7.889	97.894						
6	.126	2.106	100.000						

The factor loadings are displayed in Table 3. The posttests (reflection) loads on the first factor while their pretests load on the second factor. It can be concluded that the treatment administered, i.e. constructive

feedback-based journal writing has changed the nature of the reflection from pretest phase to posttest. Table 3: Factor Loadings

	Component	
	1	2
Post-Reflective	.924	
Pre-Reflective		.768

Quantitative Analysis

Normality Measure

Four assumptions should be met before one decides to run parametric tests; 1) the data should be measured on an interval scale; 2) the subjects should be independent that is to say their performance on the test is not affected by the performance of other students, 3) the data should enjoy normal distribution and 4) the groups should have homogeneous variances (Field; 2009). The data were measured on an interval scale and none of the subjects' performed independently on the tests. The assumption of normality was also met. As displayed in Table 4 the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are within the ranges of +/- 1.96, hence normality of the data collected during this study.

Table 4: Normality Tests

	N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
PreReflective	22	.325	.491	0.662	-.389	.953	-0.408
PreSubjectMatter	22	-.152	.491	-0.310	.368	.953	0.386
PreDidactical	22	-.756	.491	-1.540	.267	.953	0.280
PrePedagogical	22	.226	.491	0.460	.080	.953	0.084
PostReflective	22	.007	.491	0.014	-.085	.953	-0.089
PostSubjectMatter	22	-.216	.491	-0.440	-1.435	.953	-1.506
PostDidactical	22	-.928	.491	-1.890	.704	.953	0.739
PostPedagogical	22	-.587	.491	-1.196	.513	.953	0.538

The assumption of homogeneity of variances needed not be checked here because there is only one group under study.

Research Question

In order to tackle the research question as "Does constructive feedback-based journal writing have any significant effect on enhancing EFL teacher's reflection?", a paired-samples t-test was run to probe the effect of constructive feedback-based journal writing enhancing EFL teacher's reflection. On the average the teachers show a little higher mean score on posttest of reflection ($M = 16.65$, $SD = 2.56$) compared with the pretest ($M = 16.61$, $SD = 2.53$).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics Pretest and Posttest of Reflection

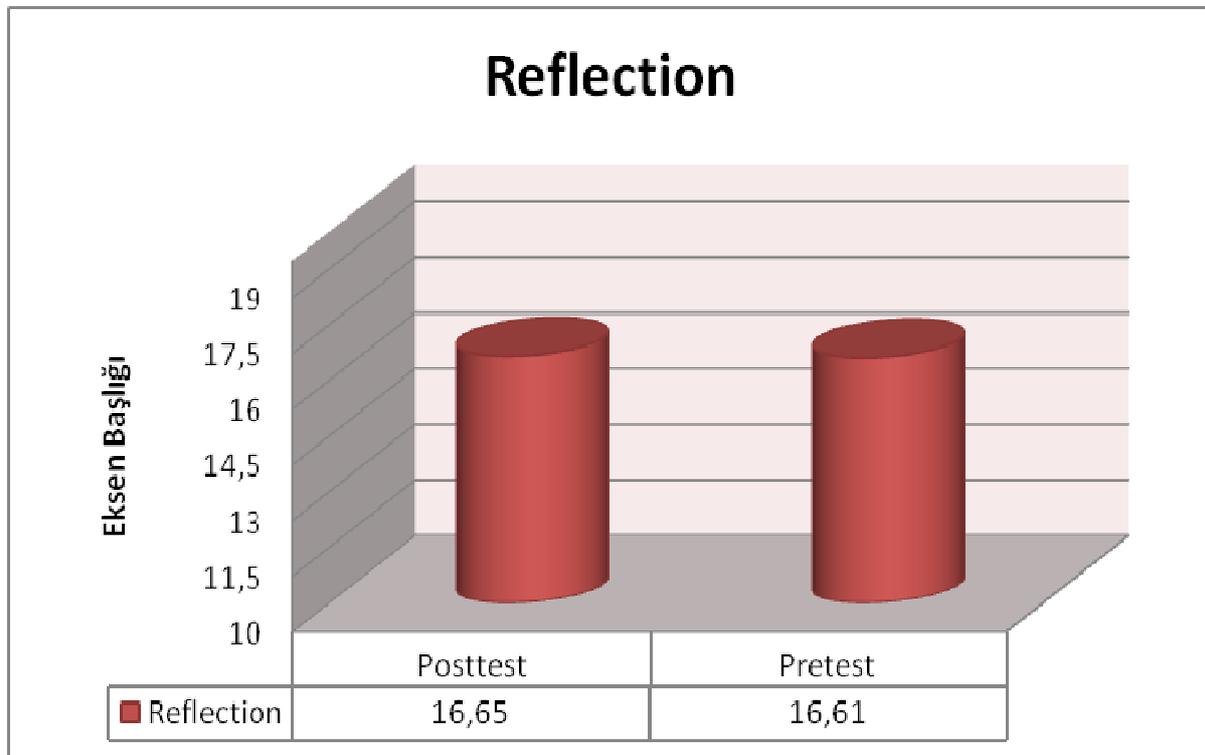
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reflection	Posttest	16.65	22	2.564	.547
	Pretest	16.61	22	2.537	.541

The results of the paired-samples t-test ($t(21) = .061$, $P = .952 > .05$; $r = .01$ it represents a weak effect size) indicate that again there is not any significant difference between the means of the teachers on the pretest and posttest of reflection. Thus the null-hypothesis as constructive feedback-based journal writing does not have any significant effect on enhancing EFL teacher's reflection could not be again rejected.

Table 6: Paired-Samples t-test Pretest and Posttest of Reflection

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
.040	3.100	.661	-1.335	1.415	.061	21	.952

Graph 1 supports the data reported in table 6, indicating insignificant difference in reflection in the light of treatment.



Graph 1: Pretest and Posttest of Reflection

Qualitative Data Analysis

The format of journals adapted in the context of present study equates with the PPP model which comprises of three parts including presentation, procedure and production. The teachers employed in this trend from the point of departure present how they open the mainstream of teaching and prioritize the respective prefabricated activities sequentially. In addition, they encourage the students to become cognizant throughout the process via their various instruments they employed. It should be pointed out that for both the researcher and teachers the teaching points have been to a great extent of value in nature. In the second section, teachers undergo a through representation of their standards via variant medium of instructions which range from traditional methodologies to communicatively oriented activities. Last but not least, the production section which reverberates the outcomes of this big enterprise. It provides a through report of their activities in the light of student's achievements and their predefined objectives.

Based on the qualitative interpretation, the researcher deems fit to address the following issues worth discussing. Basically speaking, presentation section deals with how the teachers open and set the scenario of classroom context. It is seen that majority of activities energize friendly atmosphere in general and equate with



warm up, brain storm, ask and answering, data elicitation, presentation, discussion, explanation, demonstration, visualization, self-favorite talks, self autonomous activities, encouragement, motivation and consciousness raising activities in particular. It is also worth mentioning that given the nature of journals, it can be seen that the teachers start their tasks basically from warm up activity to motivate the students to indulge in real life language usage in the light of friendly atmosphere.

In the practice section, the teachers were anticipated to sustain the flow of procedural activities they employed and also mention the howness and whyness of their works in more operational and meaningful ways. Their activities generally pertain to explanation, encouraging activity, elaboration, oral practices, pair work, conversational activities, and creativity, clarification, self-esteem enhancement, task-based activities, exemplification, Consciousness raising activity, suggestopedic principles, self autonomy, productivity, real life language usage, computer-based instruction, functional teaching. Likewise, it seems to be of paramount importance to indicate that this step is the most significant part of teacher's potentials to render preferred methods and strategies and it is seen that they basically explain their objectives and direct the students to carry out group tasks activities to arrive at deeper understanding of functional usage of language.

In the production section, they were anticipated to mirror the outcomes and objectives of their overall activities actualized in the classrooms. The outcomes and consequential reports extracted from the journals also support the idea behind the skeleton of this study too. The gist of outcome activities include focus on autonomous activity, group discussion, oral practice, discussion, task based activities, self confidence enhancement, self description, self explanation, self talks, real life tasks functionality, independency, idea generation, input output enhancement.

DISCUSSION

Investigating the research question and hypotheses posed above, the researcher deems preferable to address some issues and pertinent works which may somehow to a great extent match the works cited in the literature to that of respective findings of the data.

Relatively speaking, according to Farrell, (2007) journal writing can be viewed through many different perspectives: as a form of self-expression, a record of events, or a form of therapy. It can be an amalgamation of these and other purposes. Journal writing can be used to energize what we do and how we do it. As a vehicle for learning, it can be used in formal courses, our professional practice, or any aspect of informal learning. Bearing on Ferrel (2007)'s idea, it is seen that at this stage the first hypothesis indicating the impact of journal writing does not stand in harmony even with taking diverse journals in to account on the side of teachers' improvement on what and how we do in the classroom.

The data reported in this research question matches with the work of Dewey's (1933) terms, in which it is said reflection is thought to be a purposive attempt which resolves intricate classroom dilemmas into educative experiences which lead to energize student and even teacher growth and learning.

The overall finding of the above mentioned study propose that reflective practice aids to free teachers from impulsive and ordinary behavior. It aids teachers to generate their daily experiences, allows them to act in a decisive critical and intentional style, and elevates their consciousness about teaching, enables deeper understanding and encourages positive change (Farrell, 2003). It can be more referred to self- effective teachers are far more likely to design more effective lessons, take more responsibility for student achievement, and endure when students encounter challenges and search extensively for appropriate strategies and materials to develop student achievement. In addition, they are more likely to stay committed to their work and want to overcome situations that contest their ability to teach. They are more positive and take personal responsibility for their failures and successes. On the contrary, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to **charge irrelevant** sources for their failures (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007).

From the data extracted in this section, it is seen that no significant impact is seen on teacher's reflection practically; however, it is worth indicative to address Farrell (2007) definition on writing journals in that he says



writing reflective journals is considered to be one of the main procedures for stimulating critical reflection skills of teachers. The researcher sees journal writing here as a process of recoding ideas, classroom experiences, one's personal reactions, questions and observations about the events, description of events or classroom aspects all for the purpose of responding reflectively and responsively to these issues.

More to say, for practicing teachers to be able to reflect on their work, time is a very important consideration. Time is important for teacher self-development. Golby and Appleby (1995, p.158) point out that "teachers do not readily confront their problems with a reflective approach." Elbaz (1988, p.173) claims that that teachers "have a common concern to reduce the complexity of the situation, to accept neat and obvious accounts of the causes of the problems. Analytical reflection, therefore, takes time and only progresses at, a rate which individual teachers are ready to reflect critically."

CONCLUSION

Conclusion of this study is pervasive in orientation and can be of threefold in nature, i.e. teacher personality, feedback provision, and teacher selves inventory enhancement. This study has partially improved the understanding of how language teachers' selves are constructed in the context of journal writing.

It can be further concluded that greater efforts to value whole teacher selves and not only fragmented teacher selves that engage language teachers in reflection should be made in order to make teachers understand the potentials they have to transform and amplify not only their teacher selves, but also their practical traits within the realm of educational context.

Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogical implication of this study can be of threefold. From the point of departure, teachers were given some journals to fill in periodically. The purpose underlying this step was to become acquainted with their belief systems within the time of classroom participation. The shared information they reflected can have a significant positive outcomes for other instructors in that they can benefit the divergent ideas generated by some neighboring teacher mates. Utilizing divergent ideas and notions can also bring about innovative methodologies and some practicable techniques, too.

Another implication pertains to reflectivity or being a reflective teacher. It can be said that reflective teachers approach to teaching involves changes in the way we usually perceive teaching. As the above examples illustrate, teachers who explore their own teaching through critical reflection develop changes in attitudes and awareness which they believe can benefit their professional growth as teachers, as well as improve the kind of support they provide their students. Like other forms of self-inquiry, reflective teaching is not without its risks, since journal writing, self-reporting or making recordings of lessons can be time-consuming. However teachers engaged in reflective analysis of their own teaching report that it is a valuable tool for self-evaluation and professional growth. Reflective teaching suggests that experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher development.

The study also suggests that the combination of emotions, values and subjectivity emerged as an important process which can determine the extent to which language teachers are able to transform their selves and strengthen their agentive capacities. Greater efforts to value whole teacher selves (i.e. professional and student-teacher identities) that engage language teachers in reflection should be made in order to make teachers realize the potentials they have to transform and empower not only their teacher selves, but their learning lives of their students.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, this study could be one more contribution for TESOL empirical research that uses journal-based instruction. The results highlighted the importance of paying attention not only to language teachers' selves, but also to values they hold and their emotions. Vakili (2010) says these three elements function in close relationship to one another and are a central factor that specifies empowerment or capitulation, change or stagnation, commitment or disengagement, and success or failure in learning. It is hoped that this thesis



project may enable professionals to uncover the field's political and ideological underpinnings and rework them towards more progressive ends.

Suggestions for Further Research

The following suggestions are made for further pertinent research.

Since the participants of this study were males and females, similar study can be conducted on either males or females thereby arriving at a logical comparison too.

1. Another study can be to maintain a relationship between constructive feedback-based journal writing and EFL teacher's reflection.
2. The study was conducted in the University of Applied Science; similar study can be run in educational settings.

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