

**A NEW APPROACH TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH REFLECTIVE  
TEACHING ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNERS' CAPACITIES ENHANCEMENT  
AT NATIONAL ACADEMY OF EDUCATION MANAGEMENT**

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**Abstract.** Reflective Teaching and its relation as well roles in lecturers' professional development has received special interest from international education researchers and scientists and become a popular trend, especially in foreign language teaching. In this article, the author studies some concepts of reflection, reflection modal including components of reflective teaching and other relevant issues of international experts. Then, some measures to enhance reflective activities of English language lecturers with a view to improve English language teaching towards learners' competence development.

**Keywords:** *Reflection, reflective teaching, lecturers, English, learners' competence, quality.*

## **1. Introduction**

Entering the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution 4.0 which is the era of digital technology and Internet of Things, global connection; education and training sector is also immersing deeper into that common trend. National Academy of Education Management identifies the output standardization of foreign language and informatics competences among graduates, post-graduate learners and non-degree program trainees as well as foreign language training for teachers and managers as one of priorities to gradually improve educational quality of human resources for the educational sector in particular and labor market in general.

Facing that demand, Foreign Languages Faculty under National Academy of Education Management has actively innovated English language teaching methods to improve English language teaching quality such as changing curriculum, textbooks from Face to Face into Life which is based on online teaching platform in combination with textbooks, enabling teaching method innovation, self-study, self-research among students and learners; application of information technology and communication in teaching and learning English; transformation from knowledge based approach into learners' competence development based approach. Thanks to efforts in innovating teaching and learning methods, English teaching and learning quality at NAEM has been remarkably improved, partially meeting the required needs.

However, together with the new trends in teaching method innovation in general and English teaching method innovation in particular, in this article, the author studies and presents a new

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Received August 16, 2018. Accepted October 25, 2018.

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approach in teaching English, Reflective Teaching, its components as well as roles in professional development for instructors of English.

Reflective teaching, its relation and roles in teachers' professional development has gained special attention and become a popular trend in teaching and learning foreign languages (Dewey, 1933; Schon 1983; Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Moon, 2001; Klentschy, 2005; Larivee & Cooper, 2006). Professional standards of OECD countries view reflective teaching as a needed teaching competence of instructors and an efficient tool with a view to supporting training and teachers' professional development.

In Vietnam, it seems that education policy makers, education managers and even teachers have not fully aware of the nature, roles and effectiveness of reflective teaching in teachers' professional development. In particular, standards for lower-secondary and upper-secondary education teachers issued by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2009 has no clause stating this competence. Hence, in the context of basic and fundamental innovation in the spirit of Resolution 29, Reflective Teaching, especially in teaching foreign languages, should be further studied.

## **2. Contents**

### **2.1. The definition of “Reflection”**

Reflection has been mentioned when describing pedagogical education approaches. There is a variety of definitions of reflection mentioned by scientists. Reid (1993) defines reflection as “a reviewing process of practical experience for description, analysis, evaluation and drawing lessons from the work”.

On the other hand, Dewey (1993) considers reflection as a special means to solve the problem, a way of thinking to deal with a situation relating to a series of activities. From his point of view, reflection is a complex and tight work which requires thinking and emotion and in order to have a good reflection, it is necessary to spend much time. Reflective thinking helps clarify practical issues and enables to create questioning prior to finding an appropriate solution.

According to Pavlovich (2007), reflection is “self-control and engagement process in relating practical activities to certain theoretical background”. It is common among scholars that they all view reflection as a process involving in self-reflecting, self-analyzing, evaluating and re-considering activities done in order to draw lessons and experience as well as improving the process. Reflection is an activity which requires critical thinking competence built on the basis of active motivation.

### **2.2. Reflective teaching and some relevant issues**

In accordance with viewpoints of methodologists, reflective teaching is seen as a competence, a needed and obligatory attribute of lecturers. Moran và Dallat (1995) reaffirmed that “learn how to teach relating to learning to reflect on teaching activities in a systematical way”. Farrell (2008) supposed that applying reflection in professional development is based on the belief that lecturers can improve their teaching by actively and systematically reflecting on their practical teaching activities. It is said that, reflection is a chance for lecturers to explore “awareness development” process for improvement.

Over the last few years, the concept of reflection has not been fully and accurately understood, preventing effective reflection. Firstly, that instructors do not usually stick reflection to their teaching bring about some issues. While teaching mainly deals with the nearest present and immediate action, reflection is viewed as a more academic activity (McNamara, 1990).

Secondly, time and development opportunity are necessary conditions for increasing the effectiveness of reflection. Teachers who have a concrete knowledge background may visualize what reflective activities will be like so as to apply more sophisticated approaches in their teaching. Thirdly, requirements for instructors' reflection should be stated so that instructors could talk to themselves and become constructive friends of their peers (McNamara, 1990).

Finally, to enable reflective activities, it should not only be included in a part of pedagogical education curriculum but also be present within the structure and ideology of the whole curriculum. A critical reflective approach requires the pedagogical ideology to be totally different from the traditional one and focuses on best competences and teaching models. There should be a change in setting the focus and creating opportunities for the conduction of different reflection forms.

### **2.3. Reflective teaching model of Brookfield**

Reflective teaching is a process which requires instructors to invest their working time, high awareness and regular practice. In order to implement reflective teaching activities, it is necessary for instructors to raise their awareness in researches on their own teaching activities for quality improvement; to identify merits and drawbacks of their teaching by equipped theoretical framework. Reflective teaching helps better understanding about the teaching, control professional development and enjoy achievements thanks for personal efforts for better teaching quality.

There is a number of ways to promote reflective activities, in this study, the author presents reflection model of Brookfield. According to Brookfield, by gathering and analyzing information in a critical thinking approach, the instructor can reflect their own teaching activities as well as learners' experiments and this process can be done through four lens: (1) Self-lens, (2) Student lens, (3) Peer lens, and (4) Theory lens.

Reflection via self-lens is the foundation of the reflective process. Instructors base on their available experience, take notes of their teaching process for evaluation and self-review. Student lens and peer lens means by getting feedbacks from students and peers, instructors identify shortcomings of their pedagogical methods to improve. Self reflection in combination with feedbacks and suggestions from students allow instructors clarify some teaching habits to justify for the benefits of students or to keep applying for more extensive impact.

While good instructors often mobilize two first lens, excellent instructors call for sharing, instructions and suggestions from their peers in addition to utilizing two first lens. Peers may help figure out teaching routines that instructors are not able to recognize during teaching process and offer creative solutions to deal with difficult situations faced by the instructor. Moreover, the instructor could feel confident when sharing with other peers who may also face the typically common mistakes in the same classroom settings " (Brookfield, 1995, p.36).

Theory lens mainly refer to higher education pedagogical knowledge. The first background that instructors could base is pedagogical methodology knowledge framework learned at education

universities. The next one is the ability to do researches, self-study and accumulate pedagogical knowledge, update new theories in teaching foreign languages in general and English language in particular. Brookfield emphasizes that reflection by theory lens provides instructors with theoretical background to construe teaching purposes, strategies and efficiency as well as belief and factors of settings for career formation. Specifically, when scaffolded by theoretical background, instructors are confident to explain how the lesson progresses and why a specific solution is a relevant answer for the challenge encountered.

#### **2.4. Instructors' application of reflection in teaching English**

When studying the concept of reflective teaching as well as its characteristics, nature and reference of some reflective teaching models including Brookfield's, the most outstanding feature to notice is forming and maintaining the critical reflection routine, vital requirement for instructors in promoting reflection quality. These routines help instructors avoid teaching innocently. Besides, it is necessary to apply some measures with a view to promoting reflective competence to serve teaching purposes. In this article, on the basis of Brookfield's reflection model, the author suggests solutions in alignment to those typical components of the model:

#### **2.5. Solution via self-lens**

Writing teaching review: is done by the instructor after each teaching session or teaching class or teaching activities. Depending on the lesson contents or tasks design for each English class, instructors take notes and reports details and developments of the teaching class. Teaching review is actually the teaching portfolio of the instructor including information about students, summary of the curriculum, developments of teaching activities... in writings, audio and video files, handouts and teaching aids...

In the teaching review, there should be one part for "thoughts about the teaching class" in which the instructor recalls the effectiveness of teaching methods, teaching strategies and ideas for improvement or changes (if any). By preparing the teaching review and regular updates, thinking about written notes, there creates room for the instructor to reflect on their professional work and identify strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching routines. It is such reflection and thought that enable instructors to orient what should be improved or innovated for better facilitating students.

Teaching review is considered as the "evidence for reflective thinking" and shows instructors' care for self-perfecting the lesson on the basis of analyzing evidences collected, then seriously reflect for personal improvement. It is also considered as the archive of pedagogical feelings and the window linking the past and opening for the future.

#### **2.6. Solution via student lens**

This solution refers to collecting information, feedbacks of students on the instructor's teaching activity. What is important is the tool and how information collection is carried out. Brookfield (1995, page 35) confirms that when the instructors reflect their own lesson via student lens, they will better react to students' needs. As a result, students become the center of class and benefits most from education.

There is a various number of tools for selecting feedbacks from students, for example via subject evaluation, student group survey, CIQ, one-minute paper, Know-Want-Learn Chart, ... These tools are different from each other in terms of frequency of application and conduction time. Among these, CIQ and OMP allow instructors to gather immediate feedbacks from students on certain time during the lesson.

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution 4.0 boom, affecting all aspects of the economy including education, the application of information technology and communication has magnificently contributed to improving teaching quality. Instructors may use social networks such as setting up facebook fanpage or zalo groups for discussion, getting feedbacks and reviews from students. These are very effective tools which help save time and enhance interaction with students and allow gathering multidimensional and intensive views to serve the purpose of instructors' reflection.

### **2.7. Solution via peer lens**

Teaching is a pedagogical activity which requires interaction and observation. Observation in reflective teaching hereby mentioned means two directions: observing peers and being observed by peers. Thanks to this activity, instructors may have reliable feedbacks and information and receive suggestions about their own teaching activities then learn experience.

In teaching English language at National Academy of Education Management, to promote reflection quality through interaction with peers, first and foremost, instructors may agree on establishing Communities of Practice - CoPs. These are groups, the members of which are enthusiastic, passionate and highly committed to innovating teaching methods and teaching quality improvement. CoP is the foundation for sharing, observation and suggestion to be accepted, open and trusted among members for further proceeding other activities.

Specifically, peers observe classes of each other, mutually review lesson plans and curriculum, professional meetings for analyzing feedbacks and plan for teaching quality improvement. Peers may also organize team-teaching and reflect on classes together. Instructors make lesson plans, review and identify contents and activities to reflect on. Afterwards, lesson plans and notes are sent to a peer. This review process is confidential, meaning the information about the persons who makes lesson plans and feedback provider is kept secret. The feedback provider is requested to suggest comments on the basis of specific teaching contexts. The feedback provider should be honest, constructive and concentrated on dealing with notes stated by the lesson plan maker instead of showing off personal competence or professional level.

In addition, CoP is a forum which enables instructors to discuss their classes to make deeper insights into important teaching activities along with sharing from peers or critizers.

### **2.8. Solution via theory lens**

Through solutions via self lens, student lens and peer lens, instructors of English language may gather information resource for their reflection and thinking. Theory is the lens which allows English instructors to look at to make comparison, review. Theory is a lens that helps faculty screen them to collate and verify sources of information before making a change. In particular, when supported by theoretical and theoretical backgrounds, instructors can confidently explain

why such hours are happening, and why a certain solution is the answer. It is suitable for the challenge they have just experienced.

The theoretical lens for the lecturer is to record relevant content from articles, research or book chapters, and keep these notes in the curriculum for regular review and reference. In addition, faculty members should actively participate in seminars, forums, scientific conferences, scientific researches to expand knowledge, strengthen expertise, innovate pedagogy.

However, the measure through this lens prism is most difficult to apply compared to the measures proposed above, in part because teachers need to spend a lot of time reading and really understand the theory they are reading, partly because recording is relatively time consuming. In addition, teachers may find it difficult to look at the source of their interest, or find the text but the text is confusing and the content is less intimate.

### 3. Conclusion

Reflection is part of the pedagogical activity of the instructor, demonstrating the faculty's ability to feedback, self-criticize, and research. In this study, the author has consulted and cited a number of opinions of experts and researchers around the world around the concept of contemplative teaching, basic features and introduction of Brookfield's reflective teaching.

The paper also proposes some measures to promote the interpersonal experience of teachers in general and English language teachers in particular on the basis of four interventions provided by Brookfield: collect feedback from learners, exchange expertise with peers and lens theory. The value of reflective teaching is that teachers have the opportunity to learn from their own teaching practice. It is a continuous learning process, a process of screening each lesson, each activity before, during and after the lecture.

The most important thing is not to consider teaching as a "trend" in teaching English. Instead, management levels and the faculty themselves should recognize this as a process of self-learning and self-development of the faculty's professional competence, undertaken in a self-conscious and meaningful way to improve quality. English teaching in the direction of the capacity of the learner.

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