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**TEACHERS AS REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS: A
SURVEY ON IRANIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS'
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

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Abstract

Reflective teaching, which has gained the status of an integral element of teacher pedagogy, is still an elusive concept, probably because it is merely attainable when teachers are provided with opportunities for building professional knowledge and for showing reflective teaching practices. The present study aimed at examining the English language teachers' perception of their level of reflection and the way their perceptions were realized in practice. Adopting a multi-method design, the study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data were elicited from 60 EFL teachers using a questionnaire (Akbari, Behzadpoor & Dadvand, 2010). In the second phase, six teachers were randomly selected from among the surveyed teachers and their teaching practices were observed. The record of the observations was, then, analyzed using the seating chart technique to find patterns in the observed teachers' questioning practice as a sign of their degree of reflectivity. The results revealed a relatively low level of reflection with the teachers under study tending to rely more on their own rationality in teaching. It is argued that for teachers to develop desirable levels of pedagogic integrity, they should involve themselves more in exploring their students' learning styles and critical aspects of the teaching context.

Keywords: reflective teaching, seating chart, reflective teaching questionnaire, Iranian English language teachers

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1. Introduction

As an established domain of inquiry, Language Teacher Education (LTE) has been recognized as essential in academic and non-academic studies at various levels. As summarized in a recent review (Borg, 2011), LTE has been characterized by six main and three by-product/minor themes including (1) teacher cognition, (2) teacher knowledge base, (3) teacher knowledge of language (4) teacher reflective practice, (5) the practicum, (6) teacher researcher, (7) teacher educator development, (8) novice teachers, and (9) teacher expertise. Accordingly, many attempts have recently been made to incorporate the following under-developed themes into the field's research agenda worldwide (e.g., Bigelow & Ranney, 2005; Farrell, 2011; Gebhard, 2009; Giaimo-Ballard, 2010; Yuan & Lee, 2014 to name a few). However, as Borg (2011) notes, "LTE still lags behind language learning and language teaching as a core areas of research interest" (p. 217).

Along these lines of inquiry, in this paper we examine reflective practice, as the most widely promoted characteristic in LTE literature (Kullman, 1998), by gauging the perceptions Iranian language teachers hold of their level of reflection and the way their perceptions are materialized in practice. The emphasis on studying reflective teaching in this study is motivated by the fact that reflection, as Burton (2009) asserts, has been shown to be an essential tool in teachers' professional development. Moreover, studies have also shown that reflective teaching has a beneficial effect on teachers' knowledge and attitudes (Kabilan, 2007). It is also the case that the issues of how reflective teaching actually contributes to better quality language teaching performance and what processes are required to make learning beneficial are still in need of further studies (Thiessen, 2000; Akbari, 2007).

The importance of reflective teaching is further stressed by the fact that teacher education researchers have shown growing research interest in a wide range of reflective practice issues such as teachers' professional role identities and their reflective practice (Farrell, 2011); reflective teaching constraints, challenges, and experiences (Kuit & Reay, 2001; Wolfensberger et al, 2010); developing English language teaching reflection inventory (Akbari, Behzadpoor, & Dadvand, 2010); case studies on reflective practice

in an educational program (Liou, 2001); recruiting different instruments in reflective practices such as journal writing, peer videoing, research journal and action research protocols (Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad & Ghanbari, 2013; Harford & MacRuairc, 2008); and awareness-raising on being reflective teachers (Kabilan, 2007).

In reflective teaching discourse, while much attention has been paid to the what of teachers' reflective practice and to its how in terms of methodological principles and guidelines, language teachers' perception of their level of reflection has remained relatively unexplored. In particular, there is a paucity of research on the issue of the way teachers' perception of their level of reflection is realized in practice. Accordingly, there is a pressing need to gain insights into the actual classroom practices adopted by the teachers, and the belief systems and theories which underlie such practices. These insights, as Borg (2009) maintains, contribute to our understanding of teachers' cognition and beliefs or as Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson (2005) maintain to our understanding of teachers' claimed or assigned professional, cultural, political, and individual identities. Moreover, given the fact that each teaching situation is unique (Brosh, 1996), and the insight that teachers' perceptions and beliefs play a vital role in their own cognition and professional development (Borg, 2006), a study on teachers' perceptions of their level of reflection and their reflective performance is warranted. Accordingly, the present study was an attempt to probe the teachers' perceptions of their level of reflection and the way their levels of reflection might be related to their practice of asking questions from their students. In specific, the following research questions guided the present study:

1. What level of reflection can be inferred from the teachers' responses to the items of the reflection inventory?
2. How is the teachers' level of reflection realized in their teaching performance?

2. Literature Review

In the last few decades, a solid body of research has been accumulated in the field of reflective teaching practice inspired by the works of Dewey (1933)

and Schön (1983). Both of these pioneering reflective teacher educators asserted that learning is dependent on the integration of experience with reflection and of theory with practice (Humphreys & Susak, 2000). Reflection, as John Dewey (1933) asserted, could turn people into critical and scientific thinkers. He defined reflection as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends" (p.9). In the early 1980s, Donald Schön revitalized the concept of reflection. In his works, Schön introduced the notion of "practitioner-generated" problems by which he referred to the practitioners' engagement with a process of problem-setting rather than problem-solving (Farrell, 2007; Giaimo-Ballard, 2010).

Implied in this definition is the proactive role of reflective teachers as compared with the passive role of teachers in traditional teaching practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). In traditional teaching, the students sit in rows and the teacher stands in front of the class. The students are obliged to remain silent while the instruction is going on. In such an environment, it is less likely that teachers can pose problems. The possibility is that instruction would move on until a problem crops up. The teacher would then have no choice other than react to the problem. Moreover, the teacher's sole duty in this model is to go to class, provide information and, at the end, check learners' understanding of the information provided. In comparison, the reflective teacher's main aim is to change the learners' behavior and performance with the aim of making them active class participants.

The recent literature on reflective teaching has underscored teachers' practices, and the experiences they gain from such practices, as well as constraints they often encounter in real classrooms. The results have clearly shown the beneficial effect of engagement in reflective teaching practice. To begin with, Liou (2001) described pre-service teachers' reflective practice by investigating student teachers' performance and found out that the participants who talked about topics related to practice issues were more critical than descriptive in their reports of reflection in practice. He also presented some reflective instructional implications intended to trigger the development of reflective practice. Smith, Gray, Raymond, Catling-Paull, &

Homer (2012) evaluated a unit of study as a necessary theoretical subject in an Australian university entitled '*Becoming a Reflective Practitioner*'. Authentic practice-based simulated scenarios were introduced to improve student learning as an innovative approach to teaching reflective practice. Their findings confirmed that the participants held positive attitudes about reflective practice. These two studies suggest that reflective practice gives the practitioners a sense of autonomy and authority to make informed decisions in their classrooms.

Similarly, several studies have shown that reflective teaching often improves teachers' reflective thinking, self-awareness and self-concepts. For example, Farrell (1998) investigated the ways through which group discussion can lead to reflective thinking. The study posed three questions including what the teachers talked about in group discussions; whether the level of reflection was descriptive or critical; and whether this reflection developed over time or not. The group discussions were audiotaped and coded according to the topics that the teachers had talked about as indicators of critical reflectivity. The findings revealed that: (1) the teachers talked about their personal theories of teaching and the problems they faced in their teaching; (2) all three teachers were reflective, to a certain extent, in their orientation to teaching; and (3) their level of reflection was descriptive rather than critical. The conclusion was that, although the group was not very critically reflective, the descriptive level of reflection as a pre-requisite for critical reflection provided enriching opportunities for the teachers to develop into professional educators. In a Malaysian context, Kabilan (2007) examined the practice of reflecting on reflections by future English language teachers. In this study, the teachers self-examined their practices by writing their own reflections and reading others' critiques of their practices, and examined others' practices with the aim of critiquing them and providing suggestions. The findings revealed that these activities had triggered the future teachers' awareness of their own development and of current professional knowledge. Also, participants were able to identify the changes they needed to make to become more reflective teachers. In these two studies, teachers were empowered to internalize reflective knowledge and practice that were useful to them to become reflective teachers.

Another goal followed in research on reflective teaching is concerned with using different instructional instruments (e.g., teacher diary, peer observation, journal writing, audio recording and students' feedback) to promote reflective practice among teachers. For example, Harford and MacRuairc (2008) examined the use of peer-videoing embedded in a community of practice as a tool to promote reflective practice among student teachers. Their research provided evidence showing that "students' engagement with the peer-videoing process helped them to develop their reflective skills, which in turn had an impact on their classroom practice, thus bridging to a significant degree the gap between reflection and practice" (p. 1888).

Sowa (2009) examined the ways through which action research projects could be used to socialize teachers to the teaching of English language learners (ELLs) as well as help these teachers develop reflective practice. Drawing on survey techniques and action research conducted with ELLs, the study explored the teachers' statements about the impact of the course work and the projects on their teaching and their beliefs about teaching ELLs. Students stated that they felt they had grown as teachers, were more reflective, and more confident about teaching in general, and teaching ELLs in particular.

In Farrell's (2011) research on reflective practice the purpose was to examine the role observation protocols could play in helping teachers to know more about themselves and their teaching practice. The results revealed that teachers had become more aware of what happened in class and this had elevated their critical thinking and acting. Abednia et al. (2013) reported that writing journals had contributed to the teachers' self-awareness, understanding of issues related to ELT, reasoning skills, and dialog with the teacher educator. As can be inferred from the aforementioned studies, each instrument has advantages and disadvantages and some of them, according to Richards and Lockhart (1996), are more practical for examining certain aspects of teachers' practice than others. Thus, it is contingent upon teachers who have to decide which instruments are applicable and for what reasons.

As a line of research in the area of reflective teaching, the investigation of teachers' perception of their level of reflection has not received due research attention. This can be attributed to the difficulty of developing and validating reflective teaching inventories. A pioneer study in this line of research is Stout's (1989) which aimed at examining elementary school teachers' perceptions of the degree to which they were encouraged to use reflective thinking and teaching skills during their student teaching using a 29-item questionnaire. The results revealed that the participant teachers maintained positive attitudes toward reflectivity and had the view that the environment was generally conducive to reflection on their teaching practices and their effects on students.

The present study is an attempt in the same line of inquiry with the aim of relating language teachers' perception of their level of reflection to their practice of asking question from their students. Our assumption is that perusing this line of inquiry is of prime importance as it can contribute to the literature of the domain of reflective practice in foreign language teacher education. Informed by a multi-method design and relying on data elicited through a validated inventory (Akbari et al., 2010) and through classroom observation, this study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of their level of reflection and the way it was realized in asking questions as an important aspect of teaching practice in English language private institutes. The contribution of the present study to this line of research might help in raising awareness of language teachers of the importance of reflection in effective language teaching in the EFL context. In particular, it might raise awareness among teachers with regard to their professional development through reflecting on those aspects of their instruction which are directly related to effective teaching. It might also shed light on teachers' understanding of professional accountability issues that underpin language teaching practice and decision making (Kabilan, 2007).

3. Method

The present study was designed as a survey in the first phase and as a multiple case study in the second phase. In the first phase, the variable of interest was the teachers' perception of their level of reflection and in the

second phase, the study intended to examine the teachers' questioning practice in relation to their self-reported level of reflection.

3.1 Participants

Sixty teachers from four English Institutes participated in the first phase of the present study. They were selected based on availability and based on their consent to participate in the study. In the consent form they were asked to confirm whether they would be willing to be observed while teaching. From the sixty teachers, almost 68% were female and 32% male. Their qualifications were as follows: 20% MA in English, 47% BA in English and 33% had BAs in fields other than English. The mean of the participants' teaching experience was 6 years. The participants were ranked based on their questionnaire scores and divided into three groups. This was done to locate the relative position of the cases who were selected to be observed from among the rest of the participants. Six teachers (three males and three females) were selected randomly from among the teachers who had agreed to be observed. It should be noted that 56 teachers out of 60 had agreed to be observed. It happened that three of the selected teachers came from the bottom group, two from the middle group and one from the top group. The Institutes where the participant teachers were teaching ran all levels from Beginner to Advanced according to the "General Level Global Scale".

3.2 Instruments

In the first phase, a 29-item questionnaire with a Likert Scale ranging from 1= never to 5= always (Akbari et al., 2010) was adopted (See Appendix 1) and used with sixty teachers. The questionnaire items covered five different categories: Practical, Cognitive, Learner, Meta-Cognitive and Critical. Akbari et al. (2010) validated the questionnaire on a sample of 300 teachers using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The validation process enabled them to reduce the original 42 items into 29. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.91. A modified version of Akbari et al. (2010) was utilized in this paper by the authors. The reliability of the modified version was measured and enjoys a high reliability index of 0.82 according to Cronbach alpha.

The 29 items in the reduced version were divided into five sections as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The questionnaire items categorized into five sections

Components	Questions	Definition
Practical	1-6	Actual act of reflection by using different tools, such as keeping journals, talking to colleagues
Cognitive	7-12	Conscious efforts for professional development by attending conferences and reading professional books and journals
Learner	13-15	Deals with knowledge of learners and their affective/ cognitive states
Meta-Cognitive	16-22	Deals with teachers' knowledge of their personality, their definition of learning and teaching, their view of their profession
Critical	23-29	Deals with socio-political dimension of teaching

In the second phase of the study, the data were collected through observing one session of six teachers using a seating chart. The six teachers were randomly selected from among the sixty teachers who had already answered the questionnaire items. The sessions were also audio and video recorded. The audio and video records of the lessons were used as supplementary tools for double checking and annotating the drawn up seating charts. The instrument used in the second phase was a seating chart observation record or SCORE chart. SCORE chart is an observation instrument that codes the communication flow in the classroom normally while the lesson is proceeding. It is a quite flexible tool with the capacity to cover different aspects of classroom communication. SCORE chart was used by Farrell (2011) as a tool for helping a novice teacher gain more awareness of her teaching practice and thereby improve her instruction. In the present study, it was used as an observation instrument with the aim of evaluating the observed teachers' classroom practice.

3.3 Coding categories

The categories used to code the communication flow were as follows:

- The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher
- The number of students who answered the whole class questions

- The number of individual questions asked by the teacher
- The number of students who answered the individual questions
- The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as follow-up to the answers provided by the students
- The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student

In addition to the above categories, the ratio of student questions to teacher questions was also calculated. The assumption underlying the choice of these coding categories is that a more balanced distribution of questions and a more balanced two-way flow of communication are more likely to occur in a classroom where the teacher enjoys higher levels of reflection.

3.4 Procedure

After the Institutes were selected, one of the researchers made arrangements with the teachers to go to the Institutes and hand in the questionnaire. The teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire in the Institute. In the second phase of the study, the selected teachers were contacted for observation. They were told that one session from their weekly sessions would be video- and audio-recorded. The arrangements were made and one session from each teacher was audio and video- recorded.

3.5 Data analysis

The collected questionnaires were coded and made ready for analysis using measures of descriptive statistics. In the second phase of the study, the observational data collected from the six randomly selected teachers were made ready for analysis. A profile for each teacher was drawn including his/her personal details along with a seating chart depicting the distribution of the teacher questions using the categories described above.

4. Results

4.1 Phase 1

The mean and standars deviation of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items in each section are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The mean and standard deviation of questionnaire items

Component	Item No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Practical	1	I have a file where I keep my accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes.	3.46	1.03
	2	I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice/feedback.	3.76	.90
	3	After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lesson to a colleague.	3.05	1.08
	4	I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.	3.36	.95
	5	I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices.	3.13	.93
	6	I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance.	2.66	1.05
Total			3.23	0.99
Cognitive	7	I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance.	4.11	.95
	8	I participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues.	3.38	1.36
	9	I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences.	2.81	1.19
	10	I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are.	3.28	1.13
	11	I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes.	3.16	1.11
	12	I think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them.	3.49	1.01
Total			3.37	1.12
Learner	13	I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences.	3.65	1.02
	14	I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities.	3.60	1.22
	15	I ask my students whether they like a teaching task or not.	3.11	1.05

Component	Item No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total			3.45	1.09
Metacognitive	16	As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching.	4.01	.99
	17	I think of the ways my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher.	3.40	1.25
	18	I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher.	3.98	1.09
	19	I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction.	4.31	.81
	20	I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.	4.68	.56
	21	I think of the positive/negative role models I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice.	4.01	.82
	22	I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice.	3.68	.82
	Total			4.10
	23	I think about instances of social injustice in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes.	2.70	.96
	24	I think of ways to enable my students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias.	2.86	1.32
	25	In my teaching, I include less-discussed topics, such as old age, AIDS, discrimination against women and minorities, and poverty.	2.77	.85
	26	I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way I may affect my students' political views.	2.13	1.01
	27	I think of ways through which I can promote tolerance and democracy in my classes and in the society in general.	3.23	1.22
	28	I think about the ways gender, social class, and race influence my students' achievements.	3.01	1.04
	29	I think of outside social events that can influence my teaching inside the class.	3.05	1.16
Total			3.25	1.08

As can be seen from total rows in Table 2, the total means of the questionnaire components are ranked as: metacognitive > learner > cognitive > critical > practical. There is a big difference between the metacognitive component and the rest of the components (0.65). The range of the differences among the rest of the components is very small (0.22), that is, almost one third of the former difference. If we consider the meaning of the components in Table 1, we can conclude that teachers who participated in the present study are more reliant on their own personality and views on learning, teaching and the profession. In other words, they are less aware of or sensitive to their students' affective and cognitive needs; they are less actively engaged in reflection and as a result less conscious of their need for professional development; and finally they are less aware of the ethical dimension of the teaching profession.

4.2 Phase 2

In phase 2, first the participants were rank-ordered based on the mean of their responses to the questionnaire items and then divided into three groups. The mean of the top group was 3.79, the middle group 3.41 and the bottom group 2.80. The six participants who were selected randomly from among the 56 participants who had agreed to be observed had their places in the three groups as follows: one in the top group, two in the middle group and two in bottom groups. The seating charts of the participants along with the field notes and the transcription of relevant excerpts of the audio and video-recorded lesson were used as the basis for developing the profiles of the observed teachers. The profiles are presented one by one followed by a description of the similarities and differences with the aim of identifying relationships between the teachers' perception of their reflective behaviour and their actual behaviour in the classroom.

4.2.1 Case Profiles

Parham

Both the teacher and students were males and the teacher had a BA in English with 7 years of teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. Parham had his place in the top group with the questionnaire

mean of 4.03. The seating chart of this teacher shows an unbalanced distribution of questions. The questions answered by students 2 and 4 constitute 45% of the total questions.

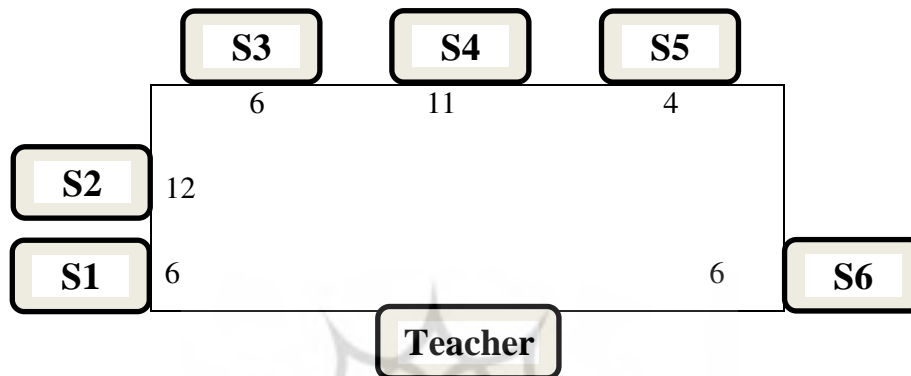


Figure 2. Seating chart for Parham's class

The total questions the teacher asked were 51 and the students asked 17 questions from their peers. The teacher tried to expand the questions 18 times. The percentage of the expanded questions was 35.29%.

Table 3. Total number of questions asked or expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	27
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	6 out of 6
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	24
The number of students who answered the individual questions	5 out of 6
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	18
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t, s-s

Melika

Both the teacher and students were female and the teacher had a BA in English with 8 years teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. Melika had her place in the middle group with a questionnaire mean of 3.41. The seating chart of this teacher shows a more balanced distribution of

questions though student 5 answered almost three times as many questions as answered by student 4.

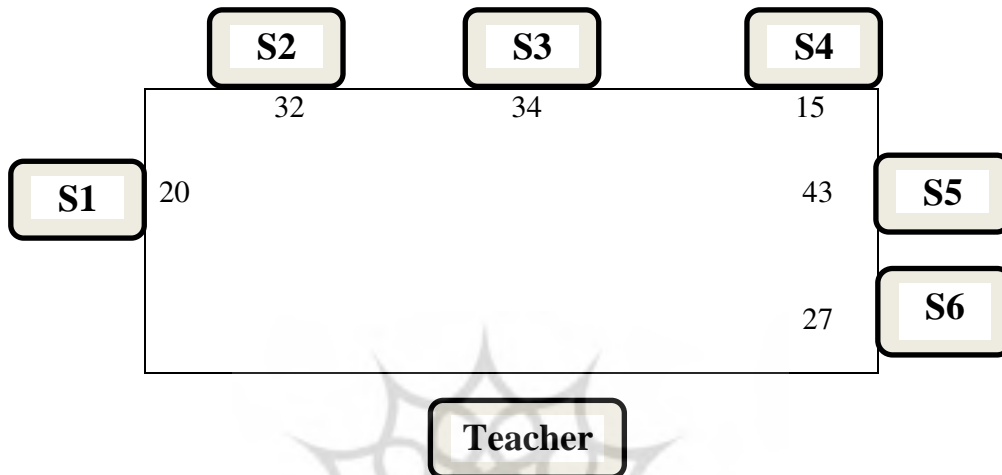


Figure 3. Seating chart for Melika's class

The total open questions were 79 which the teacher asked from the whole class. The distribution was not equal among the 6 students and S5 answered most of the questions. The total number of questions the teacher asked was 198 and the students asked 21 questions from their teacher. The teacher tried to expand the questions 31 times. The percentage of the expanded questions was 15.65%.

Table 4. Total number of questions asked or expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	79
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	6 out of 6
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	116
The number of students who answered the individual questions	6 out of 6
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	31
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t

Shahab

Both the teacher and students were males and the teacher had a BA in English with 3 years teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. Shahab had his place in middle group with the questionnaire mean of 3.41. The seating chart of this teacher shows an unbalanced distribution of questions. Student 9 answered 31 questions; while on average the rest of the students answered only 5.5 questions.

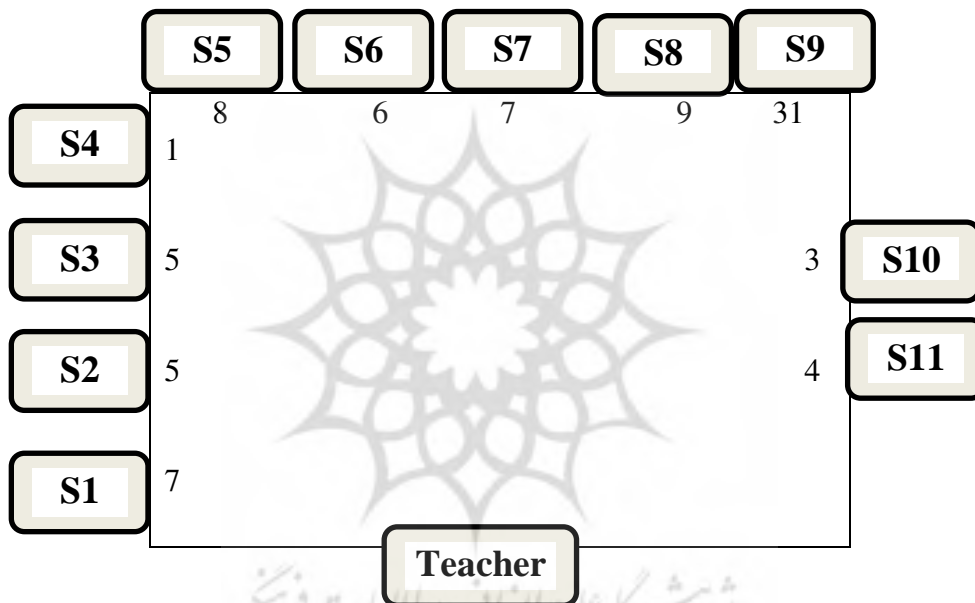


Figure 4. Seating chart for Shahab's class

The total open questions were 77 which the teacher asked from the whole class. The distribution was not equal among the 11 students and as can be seen, S9 answered most of the questions. The teacher did not try to focus on a specific student and let students to answer voluntarily. The total number of questions the teacher asked was 114 and the students asked 13 questions from their teacher or other students. The teacher tried to expand 9 questions. The percentage of expanded questions was 7.89.

Table 5. Total number of questions asked or expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	77
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	11 out of 11
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	37
The number of students who answered the individual questions	9 out of 11
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	9
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t

Nima

Both the teacher and students were males and the teacher had a BA in English with 7 years teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. Nima had his place in the bottom group with the questionnaire mean of 3.03. The seating chart of this teacher shows an unbalanced distribution of questions. Three students out of 13 answered almost 45% of the questions.

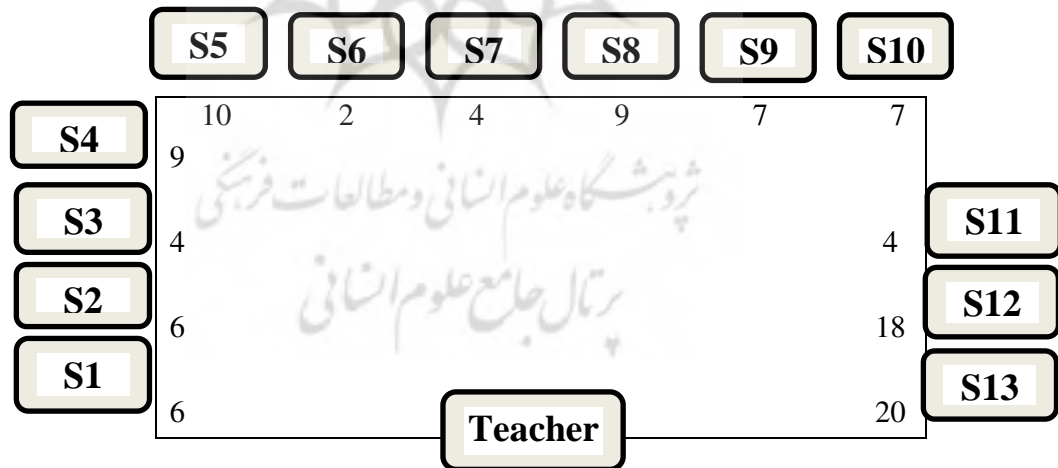


Figure 5. Seating chart for Nima's class

The total questions the teacher asked were 142 and the students asked 4 questions from their teacher. The teacher tried to expand the questions 11 times by asking questions from other students.

Table 6. Total Number of Questions asked or Expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	91
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	12 out of 13
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	51
The number of students who answered the individual questions	11 out of 13
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	11
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t

Mandana

Both the teacher and students were female and the teacher had an MA in English with 8 years teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. Mandana had her place in the bottom group. Her seating chart shows an unbalanced distribution of questions. Student 4 answered almost 6 times as many questions as answered by student 5.

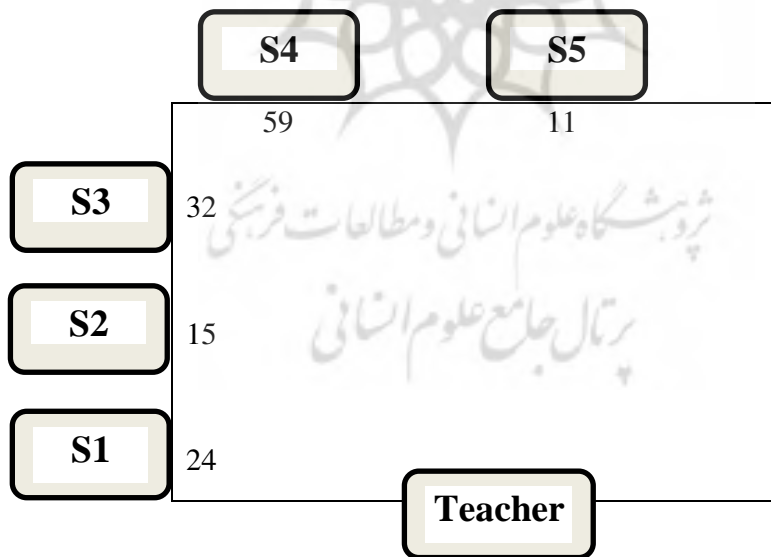


Figure 6. Seating chart for Mandana's class

The total number of questions the teacher asked was 141 and the students asked questions from their teacher 39 times. The teacher tried to expand 15 questions. The percentage of expanded questions was 8.77.

Table 7. Total Number of Questions asked or Expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	102
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	5 out of 5
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	68
The number of students who answered the individual questions	5 out of 5
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	15
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t

Bahar

Both the teacher and students were female and the teacher had an MA in English with 4 years teaching experience. The level taught was intermediate. With a questionnaire mean of 2.41, Bahar had her place in the bottom group. Her seating chart shows a somewhat balanced distribution of questions, though the number of questions answered by student 2 was almost two and half times more than the number of questions answered by student 1.

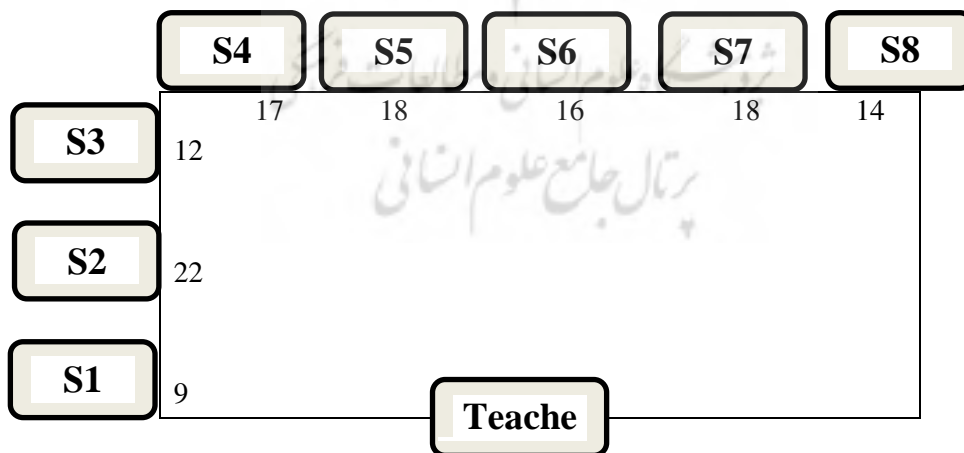


Figure 7. Seating chart for Bahar's class

The total number of questions the teacher asked was 126 and the questions students asked from their teacher were 22. The teacher tried to expand the questions 22 times. The percentage of the expanded questions was 14.96%.

Table 8. Total number of questions asked or expanded

The number of whole class questions asked by the teacher	48
The number of students who answered the whole class questions	8 out of 8
The number of individual questions asked by the teacher	98
The number of students who answered the individual questions	8 out of 8
The number of questions which were expanded by the teacher as a follow-up to the answers provided by the students	22
The direction of the questions, that is, teacher-student, student-teacher or student-student	t-s, s-t

Comparing the profiles of the six teachers, we can make the following conclusions: First, the observed teachers seemed not to follow a systematic plan in asking questions. The shotgun approach they adopted engaged the very few volunteers and left the rest observers of classroom interaction. Second, the percentage of expanded questions ranged from 7.74% to 35.29% with an average of 15.05. Overall the percentage of followed up questions is low for these teachers. This exacerbate the teachers' shotgun approach in asking questions from the students as it suggests that most of the questions asked were either close questions which required no expansion or they were test questions answered by volunteer students. If such questions are not answered correctly by the first volunteer student they are shifted to other volunteers or answered by the teacher himself/herself. Third, the ratio of students' questions to teacher's questions ranged from 0.10 to 0.33 with an average of 15.5. This figure does not suggest a proactive role for the students. The fact that the majority of questions asked by students were student-student questions and not student-teacher questions sketches an almost teacher-dominated one-way type of interaction.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire data showed a clear gap between the metacognitive component and the other components of the questionnaire. This was an indication of the teachers' lack of enough awareness of their need for professional development, for making teaching more effective through paying due attention to learners' cognitive states and for taking into consideration the demands of the wider context of education. The gap was confirmed by observation data. The teachers' relatively low sensitivity to the students' learning needs was confirmed by the seating charts showing an unbalanced distribution of questions and the teachers' primary reliance on volunteer students in answering questions. This result was reiterated by the relatively low percentage of questions expanded through followed up answers and the low percentage of students' questions. The participant teachers were more reliant on the routine procedure of asking questions to test students' understanding and waiting for volunteers to answer. The procedure was less conducive to discussion. It is in classroom discussion that opportunities arise for followed up answers and for students' pro-active participation through making comments and asking questions.

In order to explain the results of the present study, we would better first sketch the cycle of reflection. Reflective practice, as conceptualized by its forerunners (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987), implies that the practitioner assumes a proactive frame of mind as different from the impulsive, habitual one with the intention of changing practice. The process involves the acquisition of certain cognitive skills and attitudes which enable the practitioner to describe a situation in terms of its distinctive elements, to analyze it with the aim of identifying relationships, causes and effects, and to compare the current situation with similar situations experienced in the past with an eye on alternative ways of doing things. It is through this reflective process that the practitioner can ultimately evaluate the situation and comes to certain conclusions which will be the basis for changes in practice (see Farrell, 2004).

The implication of the reflective practice cycle, as described above, is the consideration of context from social, pedagogic and moral perspectives. This means that the practitioner's conception of the reality of the teaching

situation and his/her predicted consequences of the pedagogic act for the learners and their learning determines to a large extent the evaluative decisions as the hall mark of reflective practice. The cycle of reflection, as described above, is less likely to have been instantiated in the context of the present study where the surveyed teachers tended to rely on routine practices which are less susceptible to sensitivity toward the students' cognitive and emotional needs.

The process of reflecting on daily classroom events is the basis for professional development (Ur, 1999). To account for the evolutionary nature of development through reflection, Farrell (2004) proposed different levels of reflection. His proposed model constitutes the action, conceptual and ethical levels. The first level of reflection involves practitioners in focusing on their actions and behaviors in the classroom. They start examining their beliefs and theories of teaching with regard to their classroom action in the second level. It is at the third level that they can contextualize their classroom teaching through relating it to the wider society considering its ethical and moral dimensions. Farrell's three levels of reflection are similar to Jay and Johnson's (2002) three types of reflection, that is, descriptive, comparative and critical reflection. Interpreting the results of the present study in terms of these classifications, we can argue that the participant teachers were more like practitioners who are mostly focused on their own actions not that much ready to examine their beliefs and theories and to contextualize their actions in the wider context.

An important element of reflection is Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987) defined as teachers' interpretations and transformations of subject-matter knowledge in the context of facilitating student learning. The implication is that PCK is developed through learning in context. But it should be noted that it is not just "learning by doing". It involves engagement in richly contextualized activities which require reflection before, after and while a teaching strategy is implemented. The reason why teachers often quit the use of newly introduced teaching strategies and revert to the old ones is that reflection as a necessary element for making sense of the new strategy in context is not supported. The participant teachers' practices are reflected through the survey data and

classroom observation suggest rather superficial engagement with contextualized activities. This can be an indication of the lack of support for reflective practice in the context of the present study.

The majority of the teachers who participated in the present study had their background in English language, literature, and translation. This means that they possessed a relatively stable subject-matter knowledge base. But, within the framework of the current practice of teacher recruitment in language institutes in Iran, it is highly unlikely that the teachers had been provided with opportunities to develop their pedagogical content knowledge. The curriculum is often imposed on teachers. Upon recruitment, they undergo a very short teacher training course whose aim is to provide them with recipes for classroom instruction followed by classroom observation inspecting them to make sure they are sticking to the recipes. There is no systematic working relationship among the teachers working in the same institute and therefore the formation of “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998) which can support teachers’ reflection is missing. Under the current circumstances, it is more likely that teachers view their teaching practice more as “learning by doing” or habit formation than learning through engagement in exploratory reflective practice.

6. Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to gauge the participant teachers’ self-reported level of engagement in reflection and to examine the way their self-reported level of reflectivity realized in practice. The descriptors of reflection were limited to the distribution of questions, their expansion through follow-ups and the students’ level of participation in classroom discussion through comments and questions. The results revealed a level of reflection relatively equivalent to the level of “description” (Jay & Johnson, 2002) or “action” (Farrell, 2004) which is considered the lowest level of reflection. The low level of reflection was attributed to the absence of a support structure for reflective practice in language institutes.

The major outcome of the study is that the current institutional arrangements do not enhance reflection. The implication is that, for institutes to provide an environment supportive of reflection, they should

undergo a number of modifications. First, the curriculum should provide more space for teachers' decision making at all levels including curriculum renewal, selection of teaching materials and classroom procedures. Second, the current practice of didactic inspection of teachers' classroom instruction should change into a negotiable one in which teachers are trusted and supported in their efforts to develop professionally. Third, teachers should be encouraged to develop communities of practice through engaging in a process of collective learning using shared resources and collaborative activities.

Due to the limitations of the design of the study, a number of caveats should be observed regarding the reported results. First, questionnaires are notoriously inaccurate and unreliable. Replications of the survey study are in order to provide more confidence in the reported results. The results may make more sense if they are triangulated with other sources of data such as interview data or more qualitative observation data. Second, the observation was limited to only three descriptors of reflection which can by no means show the complexity of reflective practice. It is suggested that future studies include more descriptors of reflective practice.

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Appendix I. The reflective teaching instrument

Name:	Gender:	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	Teaching Experience (years):
Degree:	<input type="checkbox"/> No Degree	<input type="checkbox"/> BA in English	<input type="checkbox"/> MA in English	<input type="checkbox"/> PhD in English
	<input type="checkbox"/> Degree in Other Fields of Study (please specify):			

Dear respondent

This questionnaire is devised with the aim of looking into your actual teaching practices as a professional teacher. To that end, your careful completion of the questionnaire will definitely contribute to obtaining real data which is crucial for more accurate findings. Therefore, please check the box which best describes your actual teaching practices. The information will be kept confidential and will be used just for research purposes. Thank you very much in advance for your time and cooperation.

1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Sometimes 4: Often 5: Always

Items	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always
1. I have a file where I keep my accounts of my teaching for reviewing purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
2. I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice/feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
3. After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lesson to a colleague.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
4. I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
5. I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
6. I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
7. I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Items	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always
performance.					
8. I participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
9. I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
10. I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
11. I carry out small scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
12. I think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
13. I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
14. I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
15. I ask my students whether they like a teaching task or not.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
16. As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
17. I think of the ways my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
18. I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
19. I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
20. I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
21. I think of the positive/negative role models I have had as a student and the way	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Items	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always
they have affected me in my practice.					
22. I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
23. I think about instances of social injustice in my own surroundings and try to discuss them in my classes.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
24. I think of ways to enable my students to change their social lives in fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender bias.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
25. In my teaching, I include less-discussed topics, such as old age, AIDS, discrimination against women and minorities, and poverty.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
26. I think about the political aspects of my teaching and the way I may affect my students' political views.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
27. I think of ways through which I can promote tolerance and democracy in my classes and in the society in general.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
28. I think about the ways gender, social class, and race influence my students' achievements.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
29. I think of outside social events that can influence my teaching inside the class.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5