

## A Study in the Dissemination of Reflective Practice Among English Language Instructors at Tertiary Level

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to bring reflective teaching to the attention of practising language instructors at tertiary level. With four English instructors a reflective development program was implemented, interviews were held, and action research studies were conducted. The data findings show that instructors' attitudes towards teaching mostly changed as they began to consider their own teaching much more critically. Results of the interviews reveal that these instructors gained more awareness of such issues as increasing motivation, lesson planning, making adaptations to courses, doing classroom research, reflecting on the lesson, and collaborating with colleagues. In action research studies the instructors specifically focused on motivating the learners, updating their own English knowledge, considering students' language level, and using the target language in classes. The results of action research studies indicate that English language teachers need to reflect in/on teaching in order to get advanced professionally. This study can set an example for other educational institutions to organize a similar programme for their language teachers' continuing professional development.

**Key Words:** *Reflective teaching, action research, continuing professional development, English as a foreign language*

## Üniversitelerde Görevli İngilizce Öğretmenleri Arasında Yansıtıcı Öğretimin Yaygınlaştırılması Üzerine Bir Çalışma

### Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı yansıtıcı öğretimi yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin mesleki gelişimlerinin bir parçası haline getirerek yüksek öğretimde mesleki gelişim uygulamalarının yaygınlaşmasını sağlamaktır. Çalışmada veri toplama yöntemi olarak yansıtıcı öğretim programı geliştirilmiş ve İngilizce öğretmenleri ile yüz yüze görüşmeler ve eylem araştırması yapılmıştır. Çalışmada yer alan öğretmenlerin eylem araştırmalarında öğretimlerinde karşılaştıkları sorunlara çözüm bulmada büyük bir uğraşı içerisine girdikleri ve çalışma sonucunda öğretim süreçlerini daha eleştirel bir açıdan ele almaları ile öğretime olan bakış açıları ve uygulamalarının değiştiği görülmüştür. Eylem araştırmalarında öğretmenler kendi öğretimlerini içeren öğrenci isteklendirmesinin artırılması, öğretmenlerin kendi dil kullanımlarının geliştirilmesi, anadilin (Türkçe) kullanımının en aza indirilmesi ve hedef dilin (İngilizce) yaygın olarak kullanımı gibi konularda eylem araştırması yapmışlardır. Bu sonuçlar öğretmenlerin mesleki başarıları için kendi öğretimlerine eleştirel yaklaşımları ve yansıtıcı eğitim uygulamalarında daha çok yer almaları gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırmada uygulanan yöntemi, diğer benzeri kurumlar kendi elemanları için benimseyip uygulayabilirler.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Yansıtıcı öğretim, eylem araştırması, sürekli mesleki gelişim, İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi*

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## Introduction

High demand for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) necessitates provision of competent and highly professionalized EFL teachers in foreign language programs in Turkey and worldwide. It is a requisite that EFL teachers must acquire sound English knowledge and good language skills to teach English effectively. Moreover, these teachers need to gain new perspectives in the profession and have access to further means of ongoing learning for continual success in their professional lives. It is therefore important to disseminate professional development activities in educational institutions and involve teachers in reflective practice as part of their professional development.

The concept reflective teaching has an important role in continuing teacher development since reflection as a key component encourages teachers not only to think critically about their own teaching but it also impacts their attitude. Reflection as a way of bringing something to the level of awareness includes a critical perspective during the teaching process (Burton, 2005; Freeman, 1989; Moore, 1996) since becoming reflective forces us to adopt a critical attitude to ourselves as individual foreign language teachers in order to challenge our personal beliefs about teaching. Reflective teaching is important because teaching is a changeable process that requires teachers to think and revise their work. To such an end, Burton (2009, p.298) highlights reflective teaching as part of "teachers' lifelong professional development, enabling them to critique teaching and make better-informed teaching decisions" while Noffke and Brennan (2005, p. 61) discuss that reflection as term "labels both what is relevant and what is seen to be irrelevant to an analysis of teaching and knowledge generally." For Bailey et al. (2001, p.36), reflective teaching therefore incorporates "a recognition, and examination over the implications of one's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values as well as the opportunities and constraints provided by the social conditions in which the teacher works.

Reflective teaching is seen as a process through which the capacity to make such professional judgments can be developed and maintained

and it requires competence and continuous planning, provision, acting, data collection, analyzing, evaluating, and reflecting (Pollard, 1997). As there is a process for reflection, it is essential to ask some basic questions to ourselves in order to examine such a situation; namely, "What do I do as a teacher?, What's the meaning of my teaching?, How did I come to be this way?, How might I teach differently?, and What and how shall I now teach?" (Rearick and Feldman, 1999, p.338). In this way, the English teacher can easily find his/her own strengths and weak points, paving the way for the teacher to find solutions to the problems that occur in their teaching process.

It is also essential to put emphasis on what the reflective teachers are expected to do before, during and after teaching. According to Schon (1983, 1987) while 'reflection-in-action' is concerned with thinking about what we are doing in the classroom while we are doing it, 'reflection-on-action' refers to "thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our thinking-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (Schon, 1987, p.26). That is, we can say that reflective practice assists teachers in looking critically at their work, assessing their own and their students' progress, and attempting modifications of behavior and strategies to bring the class as a whole closer to their overall vision of successful learning (Zeichner, 1994; Mills, 2007). The teacher should give appropriate decisions for the benefit of his/her learners prior to teaching while the teacher has to make on the spot decisions not planned during the lesson (Boostrom, 1992). These kinds of decisions are known as 'interactive decisions' in which teachers have to continuously make decisions that are appropriate to the specific points of the lesson they are teaching (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). In addition, teachers should make decisions about the effectiveness of the lesson after they have introduced the lesson known as 'evaluative decisions' (Boostrom, 1992).

A reflective teacher should also be a researcher in the classroom to investigate what actually happens inside the classroom (Kincheloe, 2003): how teachers respond to learners'



program, general interviews and post-lesson interviews were held with four instructors, and also action research studies with the same participants were carried out. Information on reflection, reflective teaching, and the means of reflective teaching was given during both general interviews and post-lesson interviews and its practical application was realized through action research study.

## Procedures

### *Reflective Professional Development Program*

As the essential part of the study, a special reflective professional development program for the purpose of giving instructors detailed information and practice in reflective teaching was designed. The program included three parts: The first part was related to giving theoretical information about *reflection, reflective teaching, reflective teacher, critical thinking, reflective thinking and critical reflective teacher*. Then, *general characteristics of a reflective teacher* and the required behaviors they should do *before, during and after the teaching process* were emphasized. Furthermore, the participants were introduced to being critical in English language teaching. At this point, the aim was to make them have a critical view about their teaching. The second part identified the issues to reflect in teaching English language. The issues included *teacher talk, interaction between the teacher and the learners, curriculum and syllabus design, materials, testing, learner behavior, receptivity in language classrooms, anxiety in language learning, competitiveness in classroom, language learning, self-esteem, motivation and reinforcement*. In the third part of the program were included the means of doing research in English language teaching such as *action research, collaborative work, diary keeping* and how to make use of these methods in practice. All such information was given to the instructors during the general interviews and post-lesson interviews.

### *General Interviews*

At the outset of the study, a general interview was conducted in order to determine what the instructors thought about teaching English language professionally, how critical or reflective they were in teaching, and whether they were willing to be reflective,

professionally advanced teachers or not. The aim of conducting interviews was to find out whether there was reflective practice or not among English language instructors. In order to investigate the issue, four participant English language instructors agreed to participate in the study because they thought that they needed to improve themselves by having information on reflection and they also believed that the findings would bring solutions to the problems.

Interviews started by explaining to the instructors that the purpose in doing this general interview was to find out their ideas about what features make a successful English language teacher and how they find solutions to the problems that occur in their classrooms. These interviews had the specific purposes to determine what the instructors thought about teaching English language professionally, how they were critical or reflective in their teaching, and whether they were willing to be reflective, professionally advanced teachers or not. The general interview questions included three open-ended questions: a) *What are the main features of a successful English teacher for you?*; b) *What do you believe affects your teaching English in the classroom?*; and c) *How do you solve the problems that occur while you are teaching?* Having conducted the general interviews, as part of the study, each instructor received information and handouts about *reflection, reflective teaching, reflective teacher and the characteristics of a reflective teacher*. The participant instructors were required to study the handouts again and be ready for the next meeting by answering the abovementioned questions regarding *before, during, and after teaching* one of their courses with a purpose to critically review their practice.

### *Post-Lesson Interviews*

The next stage of the program involved a post-lesson interview with each instructor. The purpose of conducting the 'Post-Lesson Interview' was to explore the participants' understanding and use of reflection. The 'Post-Lesson Interview' had three different parts. The first part regarding *before teaching* included such questions as *'What did you teach? and Did you teach according to the lesson plan (institutional plan, book's syllabus, experience, your own plan)?'* The second part consisted

of questions relating to *during* teaching; namely, 'What is the relationship between the plan you draw up before class and what actually happens in class? During the lesson, did you ever change tactics mid-stream? If so, in what ways and why?' Finally the third part *after teaching* included the following questions: 'Were some parts in teaching successful or not? Why? What would have made the teaching a better learning experience? and After teaching do you ever think back of how you would have taught the course better?'

After a week of the first meeting, another meeting was held to have a discussion on reflective teaching and critical review of their practice. In the second meeting, the discussion was centered on the role of being reflective and critical in teaching English. During the meeting the participants were more interested in reflection and they talked much more about the features of a reflective teacher. In the second phase, some time later the participants answered the same interview questions *after they had a lecture*. That is, the same interview questions were asked, but the participant instructors knew the meaning of *reflection* in teaching English language better. In addition to this, they were aware of what features make a reflective teacher and what it means to be reflective in teaching. Furthermore, the participant instructors had information about critical thinking, which provided them with not only being critical but also how to reflect on their own teaching critically. At last, we evaluated participants' responses in interviews carried out before and after teaching. Thus, the results gave us an opportunity to examine English language instructors' thoughts on reflective teaching and possible changes they believed to be implemented in teaching English language. All the participants were then ready to start a detailed research study concerning their professional practice.

#### *Action Research Studies*

Having introduced the instructors to the idea of reflective teaching, action research studies, constituting the research part of the program, were carried out with the same four participant instructors with specific purposes to see whether they could reflect in/on their teaching or not, to find solutions to problems related to their teaching,

and also to investigate what changes the participants were able to make in their teaching. Action research studies also aimed at changing English language instructors to become independent researchers in their own classrooms. Action research would be appealing to the instructors since "It can have a specific and immediate outcome which can be directly related to practice in the teacher's own context" (Johnson, 1995, pp.100; Burns, 2009).

Action research studies started after the instructors received information on how to carry out action research in their classrooms. Each instructor conducted the research study in collaboration with the researchers. During the study, the researchers and the participants came together in order to discuss and learn about how they would follow the steps of action research suggested by Richards and Lockhart (1994, pp.12-13) as "*Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection*" (Burns, 2005; Grushka, et al. 2005; Mills, 2007). The instructors and the researchers convened regularly and exchanged ideas with each other about and after each step during the course of action research studies.

In the first step or the first meeting of action research studies, '*planning*', each instructor determined a problem or a question concerning their teaching, on which they would conduct classroom research. Having identified the problematic point, each instructor in collaboration with the researchers gained more information about the problem by referring to related literature and discussing that information with the researchers in the following meeting. The second step named as '*action*' necessitated efforts on the part of each instructor and the researchers to make a plan considering what had been chosen in the '*planning*' part. The instructors tried to apply what they had learned into practice in order to improve the problematic point as to their teaching. The effects of the action plan were determined through classroom '*observations*'. The instructors were asked to observe the effect of whatever they had applied to overcome the stated problem. '*Reflection*' ended the process by providing the instructors with a chance to critically reflect on what had happened in the previous phases.

Along the process of action research study, each instructor kept a 'diary' as part of action research. Through diaries each instructor had an opportunity to have the researcher read the extracts and they together tried to identify the points that needed to be observed and improved. The subjects were asked to inform about their observations and teaching experiences. The participants were asked to write entries in their diaries emphasizing the reasons for doing action research on a specific subject-matter and how they planned to do action research as well as their feelings and reflections about the changes they made through doing action research in their classroom.

### Data Analysis

In this study, a qualitative analysis was carried out on the reports or records from the interviews and also on the reports from the action research studies. Results of interviews and action research studies were presented in two different sections; namely, Analysis of Interviews and Analysis of Action Research Studies. The interview data were analyzed in terms of common themes in order to find out the similarities and differences in their responses before and after working on reflective teaching and each action research study was analyzed separately in terms of its contribution to teachers' professional practice with reference to what they reported on each step of the action research cycle.

### Findings

Data analysis here concerns presentation of common themes that emerged in the interviews and also findings of the actions research studies.

#### Analysis of interviews

The participants in their responses to the general interview questions clarified that a successful English teacher should be ready for the lesson; that is, he/she should plan his/her teaching. In response to the question; *what are the main features of a successful English teacher for you?*, interviewee A claimed by saying; *"A successful English teacher is the one who is able to share his/her experience with his/her colleagues"*. For the second question of the general interview which was *'what do you believe affects your teaching English in*

*the classroom?'* all the interviewees similarly agreed that the level of students, the books and the time of the lessons affect teaching in the classroom. In common, they added that the materials being used during the lessons also had an important role in the effectiveness of teaching English. On the other hand, for the last question in the general interview, *'how do you solve the problems that occur while you are teaching?'* the participants all prefer to solve the problems by talking to the students either after the lesson or in the room privately.

Analyses of the Post-Lesson Interviews may also indicate that the instructors all felt the need to be reflective to develop professionally in English language teaching, which can be presented under the following themes:

#### A. Feeling Ready

Undoubtedly, it is important for an English language teacher to be prepared for the lesson. To do so, feeling ready would only be possible by planning what to do and searching for various supplementary materials about the subject. However, the participant instructors mostly reported that during the lessons those exercises in the materials were not enough in the practice part of the lesson as there was much time to finish the lesson but there were not enough materials to work with for practice. After trying to think like a reflective teacher, the participants pointed out that the problems they had during the lessons disappeared. In other words, they felt more secure, relaxed and were ready for the lesson by means of getting the habit of finding out different materials apart from the course books for all the lessons they introduced. For example participant D said: *"As far as I know, one of the features of a reflective teacher is to be well prepared for the lesson before teaching. ... To me, the teacher can feel ready if she/he made a preparation by using different materials."* Similarly participant C said, *"After this experience, I begin to prepare much more external sources and activities related to the teaching point"* It was clear that the more importance the teacher gave to working with different external sources, the better the students learned and practiced the subject points.

#### B. Making Changes Freely

In the interviews, one of the questions was,

"During the lesson, did you ever change tactics mid-stream? If so, in what ways and why?" One of the striking features of a reflective teacher is to make changes about the lesson when and where necessary. Besides, a reflective teacher should prepare himself/herself for all sorts of changes; namely, he/she should know how to make changes according to students' needs and expectations. Generally, all the subjects taking part in this study had similar feelings about changes while teaching. For instance, they usually had the fear of not completing the unit or the grammatical point on time but after this study, they would pay more attention to their students' needs, motivation and level. Participant B said, "I criticize myself. I feel more comfortable about making changes during the lesson. I had a fear of not completing the unit or the grammatical point on time but after this study I give more importance to my students' needs, motivation".

Moreover, especially participant D after studying on reflection in teaching English feels much freer for changes in the plan before the lesson and for changing tactics during the lesson. She said, "I do not mind ending the chapter". That is, while teaching any point she always thought of her students' needs. In short, participant D admitted the fact by saying, "I mostly avoided making important changes particularly during the lesson; however, I am now more careful and comfortable in altering ways in teaching according to the needs or other features of my learners". We might easily conclude from the responses in the interviews that English language instructors began to question their teaching and got rid of the fear of making changes especially during the lesson. Importantly, they were gradually becoming reflective English language teachers.

#### C. Increasing Motivation

The participants' responses to the interview questions helped clarify what changes they had after studying reflective teaching. Replies taken from the participants indicated that they changed their ideas about motivation after the study of reflective teaching. Having learned what a reflective teacher does before teaching, participant A's ideas about motivation changed. In the post-lesson interview she said: "Especially, I used to

emphasize on how to finish the subject in the expected time but this time I feel that their needs are more important". Participant A said that she would always think about how to motivate the learners before beginning to teach. We can understand it by her words as: "Now I always try to find something to motivate my students to the lesson. Before teaching, I think about how to motivate them". The explanation of participant D is worth emphasizing because of the outstanding difference between a class with and without students who are unmotivated. Participant D explained the importance he gave to motivation in teaching: "I believe that if you attempt to teach a class full of unmotivated learners, it will become a situation in which a teacher is trying to tell something not to the learners but to the desks and the walls."

#### D. Thinking Back After the Lesson

The interviews included questions regarding what happened after teaching. In fact, the aim in asking these questions was to investigate whether the participants reflected on their teaching or not. Before having the information on reflection, interviewee A believed that thinking about the lesson after teaching was unnecessary. She thought that only if something was wrong with the lesson then it was necessary to think about the completed lesson in order to improve for the next time. Furthermore, after she had learnt what reflective teaching and thinking is, she realized that she began to think about the lesson after teaching whether a problem occurred or not. In the past, the sole factor that made her to think back after the lesson was to have a specific problem. Here, it would be possible for us to see the change by referring to her responses: "In fact, if I believe that there is no problem, I do not think back but after I learnt what reflective teaching and thinking is, I realized that I began to think about the lesson whether there is a problem or not". And she went on by saying, "I mean I think back on the course in order to find ways to make it better for the next time".

Interviewee D like interviewee A believed that if everything about the lesson was well, then she did not use to think back. However if there was a lacking point, she thought back on how to find a solution to the problem. She said,

"... I feel like a reflective teacher after this study because I begin to think back on what I had done, whether there occurs a problem or not. I review the objectives that I plan." The responses demonstrated that the participants believed in the necessity of thinking back on what they had done after the lesson and began to review the objectives planned before the lesson.

#### *E. Collaboration with Colleagues*

Apparently, it is inevitable for a reflective teacher to learn from other colleagues. By sharing experiences, they will most probably be able to find solutions to the problems. Besides, they will be able to receive information about the new methods and techniques in teaching English language. Regarding exchanging ideas with colleagues, it was essential to look through participants' opinions during the interviews. On one account, participant C believed that it was really important and useful to have collaboration and dialogue with colleagues. He sometimes avoided co-operating with other colleagues but after this study, he created opportunities to exchange ideas with his colleagues to develop himself and learned to listen to the others' experiences. He said, "Now, I believe that it is really important and useful to have collaboration and dialogue with colleagues" and added, "I sometimes refrain from co-operating but now I create opportunities to co-operate with my colleagues in order to benefit from their teaching experiences".

#### *F. Being like a Researcher*

Since one of the most well-known characteristics of a reflective teacher is the necessity to become a researcher, it was unquestionable that some of the participant teachers in the study were affected by the idea. The participants declared that having the information about reflective teaching and thinking in English language teaching paved the way for them to think like a researcher and after having learnt who is a reflective teacher, they came to terms that teaching itself required doing research continuously for the purpose of being the most efficient one.

About this issue participant B's opinion was clear: "After this study I tend to behave more like a researcher and I have the tendency to learn more about teaching English language. In fact, this study urged me to think much more about

my teaching process." Here, the necessity of doing research for the English language teacher was accepted. This was an important aspect because of the fact that doing research and professional development were strongly related to each other in order to be a reflective teacher. Reflection took on a personal meaning for them as they strived to become better teachers. The instructors looked at the reflective process from a different perspective as they began to make personal connections and recognized its value in terms of being professionals. As for participant C, "It is really important for me to find new ways in English language teaching. I like doing research looking for different sources and finding useful activities for my students but after learning its characteristics I realize that I should search for more things than I did before."

#### *Analysis of Action Research Studies*

As has already been indicated, four action research studies were carried out in the light of the Reflective Professional Development Program with the same four English language instructors. In each action research study, as earlier highlighted, the instructors followed the steps proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1994, pp.12-13); namely, 'Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection.' In these studies the focus was on a problem or question reported by each instructor as a problematic point. It was considered that those problematic points in teaching were to be found out and improved.

As action research relied on observation and behavioral data, the instructors commented that they learned how to reflect on their teaching by means of doing research. During those meetings held along the course of action research studies, the instructors stated that they began to think about their own teaching and also it became clear that they felt the advantages of doing research in their classrooms. Actually, the participant English language instructors reported that they had the chance of gaining a critical reflective view of their teaching during the action research studies. Hence, what follows is the presentation of how each action research study was conducted and also how each study contributed to instructors' professional practice.

*A. Action Research Study – I: Motivating the Learners*

Motivation as one of the most important points in teaching may be ignored because mostly the subject to be taught often has more importance for the teachers. In participant A's situation, we would clearly realize the value of motivating the learners. Participant A commented as the problem that students usually lost their concentration in the last fifteen minutes of the lessons, which, to the instructor, meant that the students could not maintain their motivation in the lesson. After realizing this problem, the instructor decided to make a plan in order to find a remedy to the problem. At this point, we tried to help the participant to find useful ways to make the students concentrate on the lessons. We exchanged ideas together and came to a conclusion that as the lessons continued for one and half an hour time, it was too difficult for the students to pay attention for such a long time. As a result of this situation, most of them were losing concentration. As a solution to this motivation problem, different activities such as games, word games, role-plays were provided and the participant instructor began to conduct those activities after introducing the subject matter. That is, they started doing some different and also enjoyable activities in the last minutes of the lessons. Thus, the lesson itself, which was previously found dull and boring, became much more interesting for the learners. For example the game called "Who's who" made the learners enjoy the lesson. The participant instructor went on writing his experiences and thoughts after every lesson he had. In one of his writings in the diary, he said, *'In today's lessons I conducted a competition activity in which the students are grouped and required to explain the meanings of given words to the other group. I observed that this activity livened up the students and I have not had such an enjoyable lesson before. Unlike the previous lessons, they did not even want to leave the lesson.'* Introduction of different activities made the teaching process much more effective. The participant said, *'From now on I will give more importance to different activities such as listening to songs, translations of the songs, word games, role-play games, etc. After this experience I had, I decided to plan my lessons including such enjoyable and*

*informative activities in order not to encounter any motivation problems in my class.'*

It might be inferred from participant A's words that he succeeded in having a critical view of his own teaching. At the end, the participant was successful in his research because he achieved to make the students motivated in the lesson. Participant A said: *"It is the first time I thought about my own teaching. I believe that we, as English language teachers, should criticize ourselves in terms of the ways we make use of in teaching process"*. Thus, the instructor A was glad to find a solution to his problem. This happened because he possibly learnt how to think reflectively about his own teaching.

*B. Action Research Study – II: Updating English Knowledge*

This time the English language instructor felt the need to do action research in order to improve her own English she used while teaching English. The participant stated that she had difficulty in giving effective and adequate example sentences during the lessons. In particular, she felt inadequate about forming new sentences spontaneously. We advised the participant to take notes about which specific points and what types of words he had difficulty in expanding the sentences. The participant started to take notes whenever she felt inadequate in introducing any issue effectively. It took two weeks to collect information. This problematic situation was either related to the participant's difficulty in concentrating on the subject matter or to poor lesson planning before teaching. Hence, she decided to examine this issue in more detail. She realized that during the courses she was not so good at making sample sentences in which the new words or the new grammatical structures were used. It was certain from the data gathered and the answers given to the questions on reflection in teaching that the participant used to ignore preparation before teaching the lesson. Having identified the problem we advised her to read more in English to improve her English. As the time passed, the participant started to share the changes she had in teaching with me. One of the most striking observations the participant made about herself could be given by the following words: *'Since I have begun to read much more than before, I noticed that it became*

*easier for me to introduce the new subjects and words with my own various example sentences. Apart from this, I started to read newspapers such as Daily News and the Guardian. Thus, I was able to inform the learners with lots of new words and we together, could do word study activities'.*

The second participant felt the need to make some important changes in the way she taught in the name of being ineffective to her learners. Through the study of action research she investigated that she did not do anything to improve her English language teaching. She said, *"Once I began to read more in English, I realized the positive changes while teaching the class"*. As a result of this action research study, it might be inferred that the participant instructor became happy with the changes she made herself. She was able to solve the problem she had identified with the help of the researchers.

#### *C. Action Research Study – III: Considering the Level of Students*

Participant C was concerned about "Teacher Talk". First she pointed out that she was already looking for a solution to the issue that she felt problematic; that's, since her instructions were not completely understood by the students and whenever an activity was conducted, it appeared that the students mostly misunderstood her. For this reason, the participant instructor had to explain everything from the beginning. Then, the participant and we researchers together discussed what might be the reason for the problem. The participant was giving lectures to intermediate and pre-intermediate level students. At this point, the researchers encouraged the participant to learn more about the learners' needs and characteristics. For this purpose, the participant instructor informed us that she decided to prepare a questionnaire in order to find out the learners' aim in learning English and investigate their previous language education.

After an analysis of the questionnaire, the participant instructor came to the conclusion that most of the students did not even have an English lesson in High School. In other words, even though they were in pre-intermediate or intermediate classes; their level was lower than

expected. On the other hand, the participant was informed about the importance of "Teacher Talk" by the researcher. Afterwards, in one of the conservations we had, the instructor admitted that she mostly preferred to use formal English style in her speech in the classroom. After realizing this fact about her own teaching, the participant tried to simplify her talk especially while giving instructions. She aimed to see what changes might have occurred this time. She said, *"I have realized that when I began to use more simple sentences while explaining the instructions about the subject matter, the learners were more likely to do the activities correctly"*. For Participant C, the issue was about the effective use of speech while teaching the class and action research study was a solution to the problem.

#### *D. Action Research Study – IV: Using the Target Language in the Classroom*

Participant D expressed that she had been complaining about the limited use of English among students. In a broader sense, participant D got her students not to speak Turkish during the lesson. If they spoke Turkish, they would pay a fine. In her observations, participant D explained that some of the students gave importance to speaking English, yet most of the learners would not speak English during the lessons. That is, this problem – solution method that participant D had carried out did not actually work.

In the following days, participant D informed that she had planned another problem solution method. She said that she stopped answering the learners' questions if they used Turkish words in their sentences. In spite of its encouragement to students, this attitude did not seem to be as effective as it could be. In particular, the learners began to focus on using English in their speech and many mistakes occurred that they found themselves trying to correct those mistakes this time. With these experiences we advised the instructor to plan extra "speaking" courses to teach the learners how to use English in everyday conservations. The learners were all encouraged to use English without having the fear of making grammatical mistakes. During the process, participant D had observed that the learners were speaking English much more freely and conveniently and enjoyed communicating via

English. Again the success was partly due to the action research study.

### **Discussion**

Important contributions of reflective teaching and doing classroom research to teachers' professional development cannot be ignored. Particularly when English language teachers' professionalism is concerned, such a practice receives primary interest to provide teachers with essential knowledge and skills that will enable them to adopt a critical view of their professional knowledge and performance. We can understand that searching in English language teaching is a never ending process. When we looked through the participants' answers from the angle of being a researcher it would be true to assert that these English language teachers were likely to be teacher-researchers. By all means, the study of *reflective teaching and action research* made noteworthy changes in English language teachers' professional practice in many ways. Therefore, they realized that development refers to change and for fruitful change it is a must to learn the role of reflection in teaching English language. It is believed that trying to find out new ways to be more effective in teaching makes a qualified English language teacher.

The results of interviews and action research studies in this particular study may reveal that language instructors can benefit fully from the idea of reflective teaching for more effective professional practice. Throughout the action research studies, instructors pointed out that they started to evaluate their teaching process with a critical perspective once they became involved in reflective practice. The four participant English language instructors conducted research on points problematic for them and looked for solutions to such problems. It became certain that each participant made a great effort to find solutions in order to make necessary changes in their teaching. That the instructors achieved to find solutions to the problems related to their teaching made the participant English language instructors accept the importance of thinking like a researcher and thinking critically as well, thereby empowering them in their professions.

It was apparent that action research studies provided each instructor with the encouragement to think like a researcher. The results of the study reveal the fact that the instructors considered the contribution of action research studies to becoming a teacher researcher and turning out to be more effective in their profession. Sahinkarakas et al. (2009) also point out the contribution of action research studies to Turkish teachers of English as teachers through action research studies gain the ability to improve their professional practice once they perform the cycles of action research themselves rather than merely follow what is suggested by the theory. Our study also supports such findings since the instructors investigated their professional practice first and then applied theory to find solutions to such problems. It appeared that the instructors in our study were able to reflect on their teaching as they managed to make some crucial changes in the way they taught and thought. In addition, the instructors raised self-awareness about the problematic points in their professional practice by referring to expert opinions and holding discussions with the researchers. Accordingly we can come to a conclusion that English language instructors may be so willing to develop professionally that they look for opportunities to meet their professional development needs.

While practicing teachers gained a number of benefits after having involved in reflective practice in our research study; namely, gaining awareness of specific classroom related issues such as increasing motivation, lesson planning, using the target language in classes, and making adaptations to courses and also such broader issues as doing classroom research, reflecting on the lesson, and collaborating with colleagues, Curtis and Szesztay (2005, p.1) report a number of similar themes that emerged as a result of a teacher development program designed in the USA, including "Renewed enthusiasm for teaching. Looking at teaching with "fresh eyes"; Shifts in understanding teaching; Becoming more reflective and aware as teachers; Enhancing the quality of student learning; Building professional communities".

We can also come to the point that English language teachers can be reflective as long

as they are aware of the ways to do research in their classrooms. In this particular study the English language instructors used such methods as *keeping diaries, doing classroom research studies, holding discussions, and conducting classroom observations* and reported very positive views about such practices. While in our study, keeping diaries as part of action research studies gave instructors chances to reflect on their professional practice, in Murray's (2010) study, a variety of collaborative teacher development practices such as keeping journals, joining study groups, or attending conferences and workshops also empowered Senegalese English teachers' ongoing professional development. Similarly, Bully and Onguko (2005) report that Kenyan teachers employed 'reflection diary' as part of School-based Teacher Development program and such a practice contributed to teachers' professional development immensely.

Before this particular study none of the four instructors adopted reflective teaching as part of their professional practice. However, having learned about reflective teaching and the means of doing classroom research, these instructors showed that any other teacher could also be reflective in their teaching once they are conversant with such a practice and the means of doing research. It can therefore be implied that instructors may be eager to commit themselves to improving their professional practice once given the chance.

In addition, our research findings strongly suggest an emergent need to disseminate reflective teaching among English language teachers in Foreign Languages Department nationwide. In her study Atay (2008) suggests schools and universities launch research-oriented programs for teachers' professional development and also encourage their teachers to become teacher-researchers with a purpose to challenge and change their professional practice. Data gathered from the interviews and action research studies in our research also display the fact that teachers can identify and investigate any drawbacks that occur in their teaching more effectively. To this end, doing action research studies strengthens language teachers' professional lives and helps them adopt a critical view of their professional practice.

## Conclusion

Being a language teacher necessitates developing professionally and teaching itself requires being fully equipped with all the knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching. With guidance and support teachers can begin to look at their practice at more than a technical level and learn to reflect on their practice as professionals. It can therefore be suggested that English language teachers willing to develop professionally may achieve their purposes in the light of ideas and suggestions given throughout this study. Meanwhile, the outcomes obtained in this study can help language teachers find what is essential for their future professional development studies. Ideas contained in reflective teaching and the means applied for reflective practice in this study can also give English language teachers opportunities to learn and apply new ways of being reflective and thus becoming effective in language teaching.

Language teachers need to evaluate and improve themselves and also learn about the means of becoming reflective teaching to this end. This study enhances the responsibilities of teachers to care about their professional growth in order to empower themselves in their future teaching practices. Since teachers of tomorrow need to be reflective of their professional practice, action research or classroom research will be one of the most powerful tools to achieve such an end.

It appears that reflective teaching is important for English language teachers, so it becomes necessary to disseminate reflective teaching among English language instructors at tertiary level or in any other educational institution. With a purpose to disseminate reflective practice, educational institutions can organize similar programs to ours in order to enhance the professional development of their teachers. So, language teachers can be involved in a kind of special training program in which *reflective teaching, critical thinking, features of a reflective teacher, and the means* are presented theoretically and practically. To such an end, *action research* projects would give teachers chances to apply whatever they learnt into practice.

We should note that what is missing from the knowledge base of research is the voice of teachers themselves: the questions teachers ask, and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their classrooms. Any further research similar to ours would

provide teachers with an opportunity to increase their voice about their professional lives and researchers with deeper insights into teachers' professional practice.

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## Özet

### Giriş

Eğitim ve öğretime yansıtıcı bir bakış açısı getirme bir öğretmenin mesleki gelişiminde sürekliliği sağlamada önemli bir unsur olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı yansıtıcı öğretimin yabancı dil öğretim elemanları arasında yaygın hale getirilmesi ile mesleki gelişimde sürekliliğin sağlanması ve eğitim öğretimde niteliğin artırılmasıdır. Bu amaçla bu çalışmada bir grup İngilizce eğitmenine yansıtıcı eğitim programı kapsamında yansıtıcı eğitim ile ilgili bilgi verilmiş ve bu eğitmenler ile istedikleri konularda eylem araştırmaları yapılmıştır. Yapılan yüz yüze görüşmelerle ise çalışmada yer alan eğitmenlerin yansıtıcı öğretime olan bakış açıları ve böyle bir uygulamanın onlar üzerindeki etki ve sonuçları belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışmada veri toplama yöntemi olarak İngilizce eğitmenlerine yönelik yansıtıcı öğretim programı geliştirilmiş ve dört İngilizce eğitmeni ile yüz yüze görüşmeler ve eylem araştırmaları yapılmıştır. Uygulanan yansıtıcı eğitim programı doğrultusunda eğitmenlere yansıtıcı eğitimle ilgili bilgiler sunulmuş, eğitmenlerin etkin bir dil öğretiminden beklentileri ve yansıtıcı eğitime karşı tutumları sorgulanmış ve gerekli alt yapı hazırlandıktan sonra kendilerine eylem araştırması yapmaları için destek sunulmuştur. Uygulanan program üç ana kısımdan oluşmuştur: Birinci kısımda *yansıtıcı öğretim nedir ve eleştirel yansıtıcı öğretim* üzerine kuramsal bilgi verilmiştir. İkinci kısımda ise daha çok *yansıtıcı öğretmenin genel özellikleri* üzerine bilgi verilmiştir. Bu kısımda özellikle yansıtıcı bir öğretmenin ders öncesi, *ders esnası ve ders sonrasında* yapması gerekenler ve kendisinden beklentiler üzerinde durulmuştur. Son kısımda ise eğitmenlere kendi öğretimlerine eleştirel ve yansıtıcı bir bakış açısı geliştirmelerini sağlamak amacıyla *İngilizce öğretiminde yansıtıcı olma* konusu sunulmuştur. Bu kısım özellikle *öğretmenin sınıf içi konuşması, öğretmen ve öğrenciler arası iletişim, program yapma, ders malzemelerinin hazırlanması, sınav yapma, öğrenci davranışları, dil sınıflarında alırlık (receptivity), dil öğretiminde kaygı, isteklendirme* gibi İngilizce öğretimini ilgilendiren ve eğitmenlerin çalışabilecekleri konular oluşturmuştur. Bu kısmın sonunda eğitmenlerin araştırma yapmalarını sağlamak için *eylem araştırması, işbirliğine dayalı çalışma ve günlük tutma* gibi yöntemlerin

nasıl yapılacağı ile ilgili bilgi verilmiştir. Bu programdan sonra eğitmenlerin yansıtıcı eğitime karşı düşüncelerini almak için *yüz yüze görüşmeler* yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın son kısmını oluşturan *eylem araştırmalarında* ise eğitmenlerden kendi öğretimlerini ilgilendiren herhangi bir konuda araştırma yapmaları istenmiştir.

### Bulgular

Çalışmada yer alan eğitmenlerin yansıtıcı eğitim ile ilgili fazla bilgilerinin olmadığı fakat uygulanan programdan sonra böyle bir eğitime hazır oldukları görülmüştür. Yapılan çalışma sonucunda eğitmenlerin öğretim süreçlerini daha eleştirel bir açıdan ele almaları ile öğretime olan bakış açıları ve uygulamalarının değiştiği görülmüştür. Yüz yüze görüşmeler sonucu ortaya çıkan önemli konuları şu başlıklar altında toplayabiliriz: a) *eğitmenin derse hazırlıklı olması*; b) *öğrenci istekliğinin artırılması*; c) *dersten sonra geri dönük düşünme*; d) *meslektaşlar ile işbirliği içerisinde bulunma*; e) *bir araştırmacı olmak*. Bunlara benzer olarak eğitmenlerle ayrıca yapılan eylem araştırmaları da göstermektedir ki, eğitmenlerin mesleki uygulamalarına yansıtıcı bir bakış açısı getirmeleri ve mesleki yaşantılarını ilgilendiren konularda araştırma yapmaları kendi eksikliklerini ve yapabileceklerini görmeleri açısından son derece önemlidir. Dört eğitmen ile yapılan eylem araştırmalarında şu konular üzerinde çalışılmıştır: 1) *Öğrencileri isteklendirme (motivasyon)*; 2) *Eğitmenin kendi dil becerisinin geliştirilmesi*; 3) *Öğrencilerin dil seviyelerinin göz önünde tutulması ve 4) Sınıf içinde anadilin (Türkçe) kullanımının en aza indirgenip, hedef dilin (İngilizce) kullanımının artırılması*.

### Tartışma

Dört İngilizce eğitmeni ile yüz yüze görüşmeler ve eylem araştırması yöntemi kullanılarak yapılan çalışmalar sonucunda eğitmenlerin mesleki uygulamalarını daha eleştirel bir açıdan ele almaları ile eğitim-öğretime olan bakış açıları değişmiştir. Uygulanan program ve eylem araştırması öncesi yöntem ve bulgularda bahsedilen konular hakkında çok fazla farkında lığı ve deneyimi olmayan eğitmenlerin, araştırmacıların gözetiminde yaptıkları yansıtıcı öğretim bilgilendirme programı ve eylem araştırmaları ile bu konularda bilgi ve beceri sahibi olup bakış açılarını ve uygulamalarını tamamen değiştirdikleri görülmüştür. Bu sonuçlar

eğitmenlerin mesleki başarıları için kendi öğretimlerine eleştirel yaklaşımları gerektiğini ve yansıtıcı eğitim uygulamalarında daha çok yer almaları gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırma benzeri çalışmalar için bir örnek teşkil etmesi açısından son derece önemli olup, bu çalışmada uygulanan yansıtıcı eğitim programı ve eylem araştırması mesleki başarıyı yakalamaları amacı ile tüm eğitim kurumlarında görevli dil öğretmenlere yönelik benimsenip uygulanabilir.