THE ROLES OF REFLECTION IN INTERPRETING FORM TWO STANDARD BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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Abstract: The Standard Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) is a part of the curriculum reform which has been embraced by Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) in an effort to promote better English language proficiency among pupils. Although English Language teachers (ELT) have been adopting reflection writing in their daily lesson plan, its roles and effectiveness remain vague among the ELT in interpreting the SBELC. Thus, the aim of this paper is to identify roles of reflection which can be manipulated to assist ELT in interpreting the SBELC. The discussion commences with the refinement of the complexity in executing a curriculum reform which leads to the establishment of the roles of reflection in interpreting a curriculum. A document analysis method is adopted which steers the discussion to the inferences of three roles of reflection. Accordingly, this study finds that there are three roles of reflection; (1) reflection indicates professional competency, (2) reflection provides assistance in identifying problematic areas (3) reflection mobilises change. By defining the roles of reflection, this will guide the curriculum stakeholders in devising ELTs’ professional development approach.

Keywords: ELT; SBELC; curriculum reform; curriculum interpretation; reflection

INTRODUCTION

How to reflect, what do we reflect and can we say teachers practice adequate reflection in interpreting a curriculum. Interpreting a curriculum is a complex process where it does not involve mere reading of a curriculum document and enact it. The enacting process requires teachers to interpret it where teachers’ beliefs, thoughts, perceptions and other variables may give enormous impact on an individual teacher. Professional development approach has been suggested by various educational researchers in guiding teachers to interpret a curriculum. In exploring new designs for professional development, Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, (2011) suggest strategies should be formulated to reflect teachers’ questions and concerns. According to them, teachers should be provided with a rationale in adopting a curriculum and the teacher training and evaluation must promote continuous evaluation which must “value true and honest reflection practice”.

In Malaysia, Standard Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) is a new curriculum executed under the latest Malaysian Language Education Policy, known in Malay language as ‘Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris’ (MBMMBI) or its English translation reads ‘To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and To Strengthen the English Language’. This language policy has been introduced as a reform effort executed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in a constructive measure to equip Malaysian school children from primary to secondary levels to acquire a good grasp of the English language proficiency which is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013) has stipulated that the education system is committed in its endeavour to establish Malaysia as a “nation of people who are at least operationally
proficient in more than one language.” Meanwhile, CEFR has defined operational proficiency as the ‘linguistic fluency required to participate fully in professional and academic life’.

Subsequently, this study concerns with English language teachers’ (ELT) reflection practices in serving the curriculum interpretation. Curriculum is the ‘heart’ of any education system or reform. According to Porter & Smithson (2001), the enacted curriculum refers to “the actual curriculum content that students engage in the classroom”. Meanwhile, the learned, assessed or intended curriculum are described by the research as vital components of the educational delivery system, however, the sole principal of any curriculum indicator system is the enacted curriculum. This definition correlates with the current study which interprets curriculum interpretation serves as a ‘tool’ to complete the execution of enacting a curriculum. Therefore, establishing a profound relationship between ELTs’ reflection practices and curriculum interpretation is inadequate without identifying the roles of reflection in completing the task. Therefore, this paper is trying to identify three roles of reflection acts.

**THE COMPLEXITY IN EXECUTING A CURRICULUM REFORM**

This study encapsulates the dynamic of curriculum reform effort through the execution of the enacted curriculum which transcribes the intended curriculum. Teachers are positioned as the key implementers at the classroom level have the discretion to interpret the intended curriculum in an act to attain the curriculum goals. However, achieving the curriculum reform objectives has proven to be challenging and often encounter the less desirable results. Various countries which opt for curriculum reform encounter unexpected hurdles associated with troublesome execution by teachers at the classroom level because according to Tan & Tee Ng (2012), “teachers are not the passive recipients of language policy”. This is inclined with what Popa & Bucur (2015) cite in their study about the unfavourable opinion donned by the Romanian primary school teachers on the National Curriculum which affect the country’s curriculum implementation.

Other than that, Haruthaithanasan (2017) discovers evident conflicts between Thai and western cultures in an effort to embrace curriculum reform. Traditional Thai school teachers feel that it is both hard and challenging for them because they are not in favour of initiating change to assimilate the foreign western cultures and practices. This further emphasises an integral role of reflection in eliciting teachers’ responses to a new curriculum. It is important to note that the failure to reflect on the process of curriculum interpretation by teachers can deter its purposive accomplishment.

Various studies confirm curriculum reform encounters multiple obstacles in the process of initiating change for an education system as described by (Borg, Clifford, & Htut, 2018; Sanitah, Dalila Syazana, & Abdul Rahim, 2017; Nor Haslynda A.Rahman, 2014). According to Stabback (2016), curriculum vital role is in providing a “bridge” between education and development, where its competencies is measured with its ability to promote “lifelong learning” which adheres and aligns to the development prerequisites and needs. Therefore this study believes that curriculum cannot be regarded as a single or separate entity from development in a country’s journey to embrace success. It posits as an influential partner in realising a country’s current and future mission and vision. Therefore, it serves as a loyal compliance in steering the country’s human capital as a working unit for a country’s accomplishment.

Thus, the failure to embrace a curriculum reform signifies the failure of a country’s education system. It can thwart the country’s economic development and hinder its prosperity which may result in disastrous economic equilibrium and the failure to eradicate poverty and promote unity.
DEFINITIONS OF CURRICULUM AND REFLECTION

Curriculum definition varies where academia have developed various definitions according to the scope and dimensions of their studies and existing empirical evidences. In respect to that, this section ponders definitions of curriculum as portrayed in the literature. Morales (2017) proposes that the intended curriculum incorporates interpretations and “teachers’ decisions” to project and plan for instruction which are established in the process of “drawing on the designated curriculum”.

CIE (2017) defined curriculum in four spectrums in regard to the school curriculum, subject curriculum, co-curricular curriculum and experienced curriculum. The school curriculum is defined as the “combinations of subjects studied within the school year”. The subject curriculum refers to “the contents and skills incorporated in a syllabus” whereas the co-curricular curriculum cites “valued educational activities that support learning beyond the perimeter of the school curriculum”. Finally the experienced curriculum refers to “the learning which students receive a result of the entire education experience”.

Pinar, known for his work in the area of curriculum theory, in (Pinar, 1975) introduced the lived experience of the curriculum. Interestingly, he termed ‘currere’. By introducing the term currere, it challenged the traditional way researchers observing curriculum. Instead of describing curriculum as a noun or object, Pinar suggested that curriculum should be viewed as a process that is learned by a learner.

In respect to Malaysia experience, this paper includes the definition of curriculum as stipulated by the National Curriculum charter. (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017) cites curriculum as “an education programme that includes curriculum and co-curricular activities which encompasses all knowledge, skills, norms, values, cultural elements and beliefs to help develop a pupil fully with respect to the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects as well as to inculcate and develop desirable moral values and to transmit knowledge”.

Meanwhile, various definitions of reflections have been proposed by various scholars. Dewey who is the proprietor of the concept of reflection in education described in Dewey J (1933) five phases of reflective thought. The states of thinking involves (1) suggestions, where the mind engages in future possible solution; (2) incorporating intellectualisation property in solving perplexity; (3) encompassing suggestions to serve as leading ideas, or hypothesis in initiating and navigating observations in gathering evidences; and (5) testing the hypothesis in an overt manner.

Another researcher, Yinghui, (2016) advocates curriculum in its general term as “what is taught in school” where it is referred as an official document issued by government to include comprehensive goals, objectives, content, teaching techniques, evaluation, assessment and resources” are incorporated to form a solitude document.

Based on the definitions provided by literature, this study implies that the act of interpreting a curriculum as a complex process which requires constructive reflection to compliment the act.

REFLECTION CONCEPT

Reflection is a metacognitive process that creates greater understanding of both the self and the situation. There is a growing emphasis on the utilisation and manipulation of reflection in education area. An understanding of the educational benefits and implications of reflection commands an appreciation of theoretical and practical aspects (Sandars, 2009). He explains further, the word reflection is extensively utilised and commonly referred in multiple contexts, but all “remain truth to its Latin origin: ‘to bend’ or ‘to turn back’. Apart from that, in the education context, reflection is viewed as a process in which thoughts are ‘turned back’ in an attempt to be interpreted and analysed. An event or a situation may evoke the process and will result in an increase level of awareness or understanding. This ‘insight’ can be applied in the future where similar or identical event or situation may trigger or raise alarm to a person’s awareness.
In another study, Lim, Tondeur, Nastiti, and Pagram, (2014) explore the impact of professional development programme on the teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and practice, this study further reinforces the reflection concept to elicit continuous inquiry of the teachers’ practices.

Schon, another pioneer in reflective practice proposed reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. According to Schon, surprising incidents occur because people adopt for knowledge-in-action which refers to the knowledge which previously acquired in other/or identical situations. This leads to inappropriate approach to navigate the current situation. Therefore, in order to overcome this potential error or deficiency, reflection practices will lead the person to decide on what is the best ‘reaction’ that should be adopted for that unique event or incident. Schon further explains that reflection practice will ‘deter’ an individual from being trapped in the “preconceived ideas” in determining the course of action which should be adopted by an individual. Schon implies that when we “reflect on action”, it involves the process of thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our “knowing in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome or result” (Larrivee, 2000). Therefore, this study believes that reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action may serve as a powerful guiding tool in a quest to initiate education and curriculum change, transformation or reform.

In 1946, Lewin(1946) developed an action research and described a cycle with three facets which involves planning; action and fact finding which deals with result of the finding. Lewin emphasises on the dire need for fact finding. Interestingly, “he contrasted this to the military operation which resulted in modifying the overall plan” which was executed based on reflective act.

There is no standardised concept of reflection but literature studies have confirmed its primary importance in various disciplines.

ASSOCIATING THE ROLE OF REFLECTION ON CURRICULUM INTERPRETATION

In order to ensure the attainment of any education reform, successful curriculum interpretation executed by teachers at the classroom level is the primary ingredient which must be identified. Any issues pertaining to complexities in the area of curriculum interpretation command vast and authentic investigations. Hence, reflection is one of the key elements which literatures have implied as having an astounding impact in accelerating and enriching teachers’ ability to interpret a curriculum. Therefore, this provides a strong proponent for this concept paper.

The role of reflection is widely mentioned in education literature. Wessels, (2018) employs professional noticing in the context of reflection on learners’ mathematical reasoning and sense making where professional noticing echoes vibrantly with the attainments of the lesson study. Meanwhile, in another study, Yinghui (2016) posits that reflection to the outside world is what constituted belief. These opinions mirror reflection as a flexible property where various elements can be associated with its practice. Thus, identifies it as a supreme component in facilitating ELT to interpret a curriculum.

Another study about teachers’ professional identities highlights practicing reflection as one of the professional dimensions of a professional teacher (Huzaina Abdul Halim, 2016). Meanwhile, in a study conducted by Richardson(2016), beliefs are perceived to act as a significant driving force to nurture actions, however experiences and reflection on action may direct to transformations in and/or additions to beliefs. These studies further support reflection as a basis for better curriculum interpretation among ELT where it not only yields better professional practice but can influence teachers’ beliefs. As postulated by in studies by Hermawati, Mas, Hermawati, & Mas, (2017); Rashid, Rahman, & Yunus,(2017); Tanja, (2011) and Coenders, Terlouw and Dijkstra, (2008), teachers’ reflection practice enables teachers to embrace any education reform as it directs teachers’ change and serves as a foundation for teachers’ development.

Other than that, a study conducted by Keshavarzi and Fumani, (2015) in investigating the impact of teachers’ reflectivity and gender on their use of intellectual excitement and
interpersonal rapport teaching styles in English Foreign Language context suggest reflectivity and teaching style are interrelated. The study also proves that teacher reflectivity and intellectual excitement are entwined. Interestingly, this study confirms the finding made by Zalipour (2015) which suggests reflection and practice compliments each other in multiple ways in the teaching context. This adds the importance of reflection as a tool which can be manoeuvred to interpret the SBELC curriculum by ELT in interpreting the form two SBELC.

Therefore, the role of reflection in assisting teachers to interpret a curriculum is substantially justified by the literatures, thus making it a significant construct for ELT in interpreting the SBELC.

**Reflection indicates professional competency**

Professional competency is what every system strives to achieve including in the area of curriculum reform. Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major (2014) define six components of great teaching which include content or pedagogical knowledge, quality of instruction, classroom climate, classroom management, teacher’s beliefs and professional behavior. The study suggests the act of ‘reflecting on’ signifies professional behavior. Similarly, Collin, Karsenti, & Komis, n.d. (2013) affirm that reflection practice signifies professional competency and plays a crucial role in teacher training programmes. Schön(1983) has identified that the role of reflection practice as the principal context in teacher professional development area.

In incorporating excellent STEM teachers produce excellence in STEM education, Shwartz and Dori, (2016) focus on facilitating the process of learning about pedagogical and classroom learning best strategies and practices. The study found out that reflection and feedback have been engaged as a measure to assist novice teachers. Meanwhile, Ivanova and Skara-MincLne, (2016) identify how professional identity for pre-service teachers in Latvia can be developed by facilitating guided reflection. Apart from that, Marzano, R. J., Waters and McNulty (2016) present that reflection, inquiry and dialogue constitute collaborative teaching community, which forms part of the professional development approach.

**Reflection provides assistance in identifying problematic areas**

One of the most crucial roles played by reflection practice is enhanced by its impressive property to armour teachers with the abilities to identify problems or potential problems. Interpreting a curriculum definitely requires ELT to possess at least a considerable amount of reflective practice, where Schon’s reflection-in-action and reflection-on action can be utilised in order to guide the reflection process in identifying difficulties. In a study pertaining to Canada physical education curricula executed by Kilborn, Lorusso and Francis (2016), they have proposed the future directions for Canadian schools’ physical education curricula. The curricula requires “considerable reflective and reflective thought” after they identify the problematic regions within the curricula, where it will be of utmost importance to learn and improvise from the identified problems and this should serve as a guidance and influencing the curriculum development process decisions.

Meanwhile, the form two SBELC is a new language curriculum which starts to commence in year 2018, thus by engaging ELT in the reflective process is one of the methods to find any issues or problems in the areas of its interpretation because in year 2019, SBELC will be endorsed to cover the form three syllabus.

**Reflection mobilises change**

The ability to change is one of the true essences of a good teacher in an effort to embrace any curriculum reform.

Professional development alone cannot initiate change. Teacher change is described as a complicated process and cannot be deducted to a simple logic model or one set of components. Critical self-reflection should be integrated for the purpose of teachers’ improvement (Jeffrey, 2018). Meanwhile, Jenert T., Wagner D. Gommers L. and Brahm T. (2018) describe the failure
to reflect results in the incapability to change and attracting criticism to the way business schools are equipping new students as future managers.

Accordingly, Nor Haslynda, (2014) points out that changes in attitudes, pedagogic practice and levels of confidence among teachers can be obtained by developing critical reflection, a role which can be played by peers, mentors or trainers where consistent monitoring and support are engaged. Teachers who adopt reflective practices can improve their current teaching practice, thus will direct them to various learning opportunities (Malatji & Wadesango, 2014). Therefore, it is interesting to note that improvement is a clear indicator to change is a commodity traded under the reflection notion.

In discussing the rationale of engaging ELT in the reflective act to accommodate the curriculum interpretation of SBELC, it is important to highlight the need for ELT to change in accommodating the attainment of new curriculum goals. Sticking to old practices and beliefs will affect the act of interpreting a curriculum.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, identifying the roles of reflection is equally important to engaging in the reflection practice itself. By classifying various roles of reflection, the findings of this paper will provide professional development coordinators with specific field to focus apart from supplying the teachers’ learning area with improvised teaching approaches. Reflection promotes ‘training’ and subsequently ‘familiarising’ ELT with the art of reacting ‘properly’ and constructively to any impromptu or future decision making issue. By establishing the roles of reflection in indicating professional competency, providing assistance in identifying problematic areas and mobilising change, they capture the gist of curriculum interpretation.
REFERENCES


