Post-Class Reflections of English Language Lecturers Working at a Kazakhstani University

Dinara Karimova
English Language and Culture, School of Humanities
Philosophical Faculty, University of Eastern Finland
Joensuu, Finland

Abstract
This study describes post-class reflections of 10 English language lecturers working at a university located in Almaty, Kazakhstan in order to learn more about their perceptions of reflection in education and different ways they engage with teacher reflections after conducting their English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. The research design utilized multiple semi-structured, recorded interviews. The participants' responses were grouped and analyzed through a reflection framework comprised by Hatton and Smith (1995), which discusses four types of reflections: technical, descriptive, dialogic, and critical. The findings revealed that most participants understood the concept of reflection in education similarly rather than differently. Second, the results showed that the most frequently produced single reflection type was descriptive, followed by technical, dialogic and critical. Overall, all 10 participants produced different single as well as hybrid reflection types, which was a rather important finding of this study as hybrid reflections have not yet been thoroughly explored in the research literature. The use of hybrid reflections also indicated that reflective thinking is not a linear process that can be easily categorized based on a certain reflection type. Third, the study describes a few characteristics of highly and less reflective participants. The main teaching implication entails a need for the organization of seminars focused on introducing and exploring the impact of different types of reflections on EFL teaching in higher education.

Introduction

Reflection and reflective thinking constitute the initial steps toward establishing and sustaining a reflective teaching practice, which is one of the ultimate goals for teachers willing to develop professionally. Since there is no research on how English language faculty members working at universities in Kazakhstan understand the concept of reflection in education and what kinds of reflection they engage in, the researcher of this study decided to explore these essential questions. Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection was adopted as a working term in this study, for it is widely accepted by different educators from around the world. Dewey (1933) views reflection as "an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future considerations to which it tends" (as cited in Yost et al., 2000, p. 39). Thus, this study is focused on exploring how the English language lecturers working in Kazakhstan understand and engage in reflection after teaching. More specifically, the research questions are:

1. How is the concept of "reflection" perceived by English language university lecturers working in Kazakhstan?
2. What are the different types of reflection that English language university lecturers engage in when reflecting on their teaching?
3. What common patterns emerge in the reflective comments of English language university lecturers working in Kazakhstan?

Literature Review

Although Dewey (1933) was the first to define reflection, it did not receive much attention until the 1970s and only in the 1980s did reflection become a guiding principle for teacher development in Western countries (Markham, 1999). It then continued to flourish in higher education instruction in the 1990s (Biggs, 1999; Brookfield, 1995; McAlpine et al., 1999). In general, reflection in education is understood differently in diverse academic settings. As Markham (1999) notes, it can mean "anything from general discussion of one's methods and motivations, to rigidly prescribed analysis of the formal aspects of one's lecturing technique, to nuanced discussions of the larger ethical and social goals of education (p. 55). Campbell-Jones and Campbell-Jones (2002) describe reflection as an "inner dialogue with oneself whereby a person calls forth experiences, beliefs and perceptions" (p. 134). For Kreber (2005), reflection is a visible and focused process that preferably produces valid knowledge and results into improved practice. Reflection and reflective practice in teaching still gain a lot of attention at present because through reflecting upon one's own teaching, "educators achieve a higher level of awareness of how and why they teach and of the value and consequences of particular instructional decisions they make" (Richards, 2001, p. 1). Overall, reflective educators tend to develop more reflective, autonomous students who are focused on individual, responsible and continuous analysis of their own learning (Scales, 2012).

Indeed, those educators who engage in reflection demonstrate their ability to think reflectively and their effort to become reflective teachers. Reflective teachers can link theory to practice based on multiple sources of information, scrutinize one's own practice as well as institution's policies resulting into better teaching, appraise issues from various perspectives and apply new evidence to reevaluate decisions (Valli, 1997). Taggart (2005) identifies reflective thinking as "the process of making informed and logical decisions on educational matters, then assessing the consequences

of those decisions" (p. 1). Such reflective thinking encourages teachers to move from being reactive, or responding only to the occurred consequences of an action, to being active, or dealing with situations on the spot, or even proactive, by preventing or foreseeing probable events and behaviors. Reflection calls on teachers to be honest with themselves and aware of both their successes and challenges. Undeniably, reflective teachers learn lessons each time they teach, evaluate what they do and use their self-critical reflections to adjust what they prepare and implement next time (Scales, 2012).

Reflection is an integral part of reflective teaching practice**.** But reflection is not an end in itself; it is the starting point for a teacher to ultimately engage in reflective practice, which is based on self-observation and self-evaluation generated through reflective thinking. Reflective practice helps teachers to introduce necessary changes into teaching and learning processes that will most likely result in better learning outcomes in the classroom and other work-related tasks (Scales, 2012). In Schön's (1987) opinion, reflective practice is "a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful" (p. 31). Later, he conceptualizes reflective practice as a critical process during which a person refines his artistry or craft in a particular discipline (Schön, 1996). Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) consider reflective practice as "a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development" (p. 2).

Methods

This qualitative study was implemented at a private, mid-sized university located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. English is used as a main language of instruction at this university that offers its educational services to a multicultural student population represented by over 20 different countries. The participants were 10 English language lecturers who work in the same language center at this university and teach various courses in the foundation and academic English programs. Six of them are local Kazakhstani faculty who speak either Kazakh or Russian as their native language and the other four are foreign educators with English, Greek or Russian as their native language. The two male and eight female participants were between 30 and 65 years of age. Their English language teaching experience ranges between 5 and 35 years. Two lecturers hold doctoral degrees, three – master's and five – bachelor degrees. Since this research explores several qualitative questions, there was no intention to test how these independent variables may possibly affect the ways the faculty members reflect on their teaching. The data was collected in 2012-2013 through a series of semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews in which the questions allowed for a lot of flexibility for personal teaching reflections. Every participant shared their teacher reflections during two or three 20-30-minute interviews totaling to an average of 60 minutes per person. The interview questions invited the participants to reflect upon different aspects of their teaching during two or three particular lessons, and on the students' responses to their teaching.

As for the data coding and analysis, the researcher of this study first elicited similarities and differences in the participants' understandings of reflection so as to generate a better picture of how the English language faculty, who work at a Kazakhstani university, perceived reflection in teaching. Although people construct their own knowledge, nevertheless, the participants' understandings of reflection were reviewed in light of Dewey's (1933) definition in order to see how far or close these understandings were compared with his widely accepted definition of

reflection. Second, the interview data was analyzed based on the reflection framework comprised by Hatton and Smith (1995) because it is one of the seminal studies in the field, which was then followed by the research of Kane et al. (2004) and Ward (2011). On the basis of this framework, it became possible to examine whether participants focused on some particular reflection type in their teaching or used a combination of them. The technical type included teachers' reflections on decision-making about immediate behaviors or skills and was focused on the practical skills of teaching. In addition, it involved considering how to select and implement preset lessons with simple, non-problematic objectives and outcomes. The descriptive type was characterized by Hatton and Smith (1995) as the analysis of a teacher's performance based on certain reasons for their actions. The dialogic reflection involved "hearing one's own voice exploring alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation" and critical reflection was "thinking about the effects upon others of one's actions, taking account of social, political and/or cultural forces" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 45). Third, the data was analyzed in terms of common reflection patterns, which revealed several characteristics of highly and less reflective participants. Member checking was then initiated by emailing the coded reflections back to the participants for their review and approval; this procedure helped to ensure the accuracy of the results.

Results and Discussion
Participants' perceptions of the concept of reflection in education
The first research question was focused on how the English university lecturers working in Kazakhstan understood the concept of "reflection". In brief, the participants' understandings of reflection pointed to a few similarities with Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection, which is "an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future considerations to which it tends" (p. 9). One similarity was that half of the participants stated that reflection is a persistent process and includes careful consideration of the reasons and goals of teaching decisions and actions. Another one was that all participants shared that through reflection they tended to analyze the effects of their teaching on student learning. Next, most of the participants included an exploration of alternative teaching practices seen as necessary future considerations resulting from their personal reflective comments.

There were a few common aspects in how the participants understood the concept of "reflection". First, while most of the participants mentioned that reflection often takes place after some activity has happened, participants P7, P8 and P10 also noted that reflection could be a fairly broad and abstract term unless it is applied to something specific. In addition, participants P1, P3, P4, P6, and P8 were positive that reflection is an ongoing process that can happen at any time. Second, when reflecting back on something, the participants tended to explore the reasons and goals of their actions and decisions, e.g., participants P2, P6, P7 and P10. Third, all 10 participants indicated that through reflection they usually analyze what effects their teaching and tasks have on students, whether their needs are met and whether they learn something beneficial for themselves. Interestingly enough, P7 commented that engaging in only analytical reflection is not enough in teaching; educators need to reflect on the appearance of things and take into account the so-called "feel good" factor (personal communication, 2013). In other words, an important component in teaching is to observe whether students feel good about the subject that they are learning and that the teacher helps them develop a long-term feeling of a love for the subject. Fourth, eight

participants discussed an exploration of alternatives to either teacher habitual practices or current teaching practices that could lead even to better student development and learning. Several participants distinguished different ways of reflecting on past actions, e.g., P7, P8 and P10 noted that there could be self-reflection and P4, P7 and P10 referred to peer-reflection as well. P9 also noted that there could be reflection with a supervisor, whereas P4 and P6 added than students' responses to instructor's feedback and reflections on completed tasks can also be used to analyze whether some learning took place. Overall, all 10 participants were not only familiar with the concept of reflection in education, they mentioned that reflections helped them analyze their teaching and students' learning. Moreover, most of them highlighted that reflections helped them explore better alternatives to current practices.

Participants' reflective comments arranged by specific reflection types and frequency of usage

Figure 1 depicts the participants' frequency of using different single types of reflection in their post-class reviews and reflections. Overall, the largest number of reflective comments for any single participant was 11 (P1, P2, P8 and P9), the smallest number of provided reflections was five (P6); the average number of reflective units during an hour-long interview per participant was nine reflections.
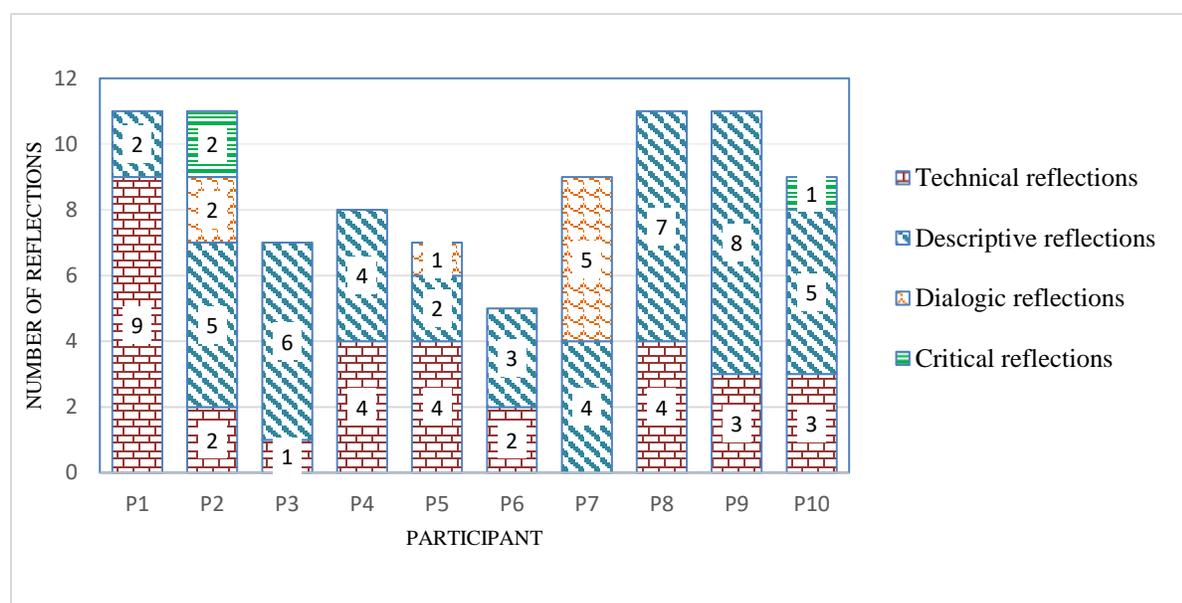

Figure 1. Frequency of participants' reflective comments by single type of reflection

The results from the analysis of transcribed interviews demonstrate evidence that all 10 English language lecturers engage in different types of reflection after their classes. The largest proportion of coded units (52%) was descriptive reflection, which turned out to be the most common type of reflection, followed by technical (36%), dialogic (9%), and critical (3%). Based on the results of the study, it became evident that most participants were mainly engaged with descriptive and technical types of reflection. This indicates that quite a few participants tended to analyze their own performance and give reasons for their actions, which also corresponds with their understandings of reflection where analysis of own teaching is part of reflection.

During the coding process, the researcher of this study also noticed that some participants' reflective comments represented some sort of a mixture of different reflection types. These were categorized under different hybrid types of reflection, e.g., technical/descriptive, descriptive/dialogic, dialogic/critical or another type, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency of participants' reflective comments by hybrid types of reflection*[*]

Participant	Hybrid type of reflection	Total
P1	De/T/C	1
P2	T/De, T/C, De/Di(4), De/C, Di/C(2)	9
P3	T/De	1
P4	De/Di	1
P5	De/Di	1
P6	None	0
P7	T/De(3), T/De/Di, De/Di(3), Di/C(2)	9
P8	T/De(3), T/Di, De/C(2)	6
P9	T/De(2), De/Di(3), De/C	6
P10	T/De	1
Total		35

* T: Technical; De: Descriptive; Di: Dialogic; C: Critical.

The total sum of the participants' reflective comments arranged by the single and hybrid types of reflection revealed more accurate results in terms of participant reflectivity. The more reflective educators were P2 (20 comments), P7 (18 comments), P8 (17 comments) and P9 (17 comments). Among these participants, three were foreign and one was a local faculty member. The average level of the produced reflections was demonstrated by P1 (12 comments), P10 (10 comments) and P4 (9 comments). The least reflective participants turned out to be P3 (8 comments), P5 (8 comments) and P6 (5 comments).

Having considered both single and hybrid reflection types, it transpired that all participants demonstrated frequent engagement in technical reflection (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In other words, they examined their "use of essential skills or generic competencies as often applied in controlled, small scale settings" that are based on some research or theory, "but always interpreted in light of personal worries and previous experience" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 45). However, the participants did not just simply direct their actions toward a straightforward implementation of tasks that are based on some externally imposed criteria. In other words, the participants, both local and foreign educators, did not use some prescriptive way to teach, as might be assumed and expected from technical reflectors (Valli, 1997). Indeed, although the participants followed the course syllabus objectives, their actions and decisions were not rigorously determined by either the syllabus criteria or other educational policies. For instance, P4 asserted that "if I need more time to spend on one aspect of learning the language, I will definitely spend the time to let the student do it regardless of time limits set in the course syllabus or other documents" (personal communication, 2013). Thus, they exercised enough academic freedom to decide how they can help learners develop the outcomes outlined in the syllabi, why they want to teach some particular

skill or piece of knowledge, select appropriate materials and means to achieve the course and their objectives and then, after review and reflection, undertake necessary follow-up actions in terms of their teaching and student learning.

As for dialogic and critical reflections, only some participants demonstrated their use during the interview processes. For example, the most reflective educators in terms of dialogic type of reflection were P2 and P7 (see Figure 1) who often stepped back from their actions, began their discussion with self, explored experiences and events in detail and employed or at least suggested possible solutions to some problematic situations that had either arisen in the classroom or were related to teaching and learning during some particular academic period. Other participants, particularly P4 and P5, occasionally reflected dialogically (see Figure 1 and Table 1). As for the use of critical reflection, only P2 and P7 and sometimes P1, P8 and P9 thought about the effects of their teaching on student learning within broader contexts, e.g., the students' use of developed academic skills in their current or future cross-disciplinary studies as well as future careers and personal lives in general (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Characteristics of highly and less reflective participants

A few interesting patterns characterizing highly and less reflective participants have emerged during the analysis procedure. One characteristic of the former was that they used more than one reflection type simultaneously in the same context, so these hybrid reflective comments were placed separately from Hatton and Smith's (1995) four-type reflection classification framework. Indeed, some participants sometimes reflected on some task, both technically and descriptively, descriptively and dialogically, or in some other combination. For example, P8 focused on the analysis of practical skills of teaching and the best possible practice for the learners in light of personal worries and previous experience when reflecting on decision-making, grading and student learning:

> Well, I didn't make any big resolutions or decisions, the class was succeeding well reinforcing the idea that I like teaching academic speaking and I like teaching academic debate… By the way, this was the final today, but notice that the students were not nervous because we've built gradually towards this you know the goal of doing a full debate. And we don't emphasize the grading, so the motivation becomes more intrinsic and I think that works really well. I've been deemphasizing grading and emphasizing process, sort of self-mastery and also intellectual challenge and I think that works better than saying this is 2.7 of your final grade, which doesn't mean anything. So saying to the student this is a really interesting topic that has been debated by philosophers and psychologists, and now you are part of this debate you know, so sort of appealing to them more intellectually rather than this is a grade that's worth a fraction of this fraction of that fraction of your time, the total grade point average, which does not appeal to the adult learners (P8, personal communication, April 26, 2013)

P7 demonstrated the use of technical, descriptive and dialogic types of reflections when s/he speculated about alternative ways of presenting a task to the students (seeking the best possible practice) based on discovery learning, which was drawn from previous research and their own teaching experience in the past. This reflection emphasized P7's realistic teaching goals and

student learning that occurred in the classroom. It also showed reflective considerations on how the practiced task can be done alternatively to achieve even better learning outcomes and immediate reaction to this reflection, which was redesigning the task the same day and saving changes for use in subsequent courses.

Some other highly reflective participants began their reflections with some description and then developed them into dialogic reflections. It turned out that the descriptive part often served to establish the situational context and was the basis for the exploration of further issues, alternative reasons and solutions. For instance, P2 first analyzed the reason for undertaking some specific role in the classroom and then elaborated on alternative reasons for teaching decisions and actions illustrated with an example of how the lecturer had coped with a particular situation. The simultaneous combined use of descriptive and dialogic reflection types was also found in the responses of P9, where the lecturer described and explained an in-class problem and engaged in an internal dialogue regarding what happened in the classroom, the outcomes of that action and further considerations and solutions to the problem.

One similarity found in the reflections of less reflective participants was the presence of undeveloped reflections, which were not included in the results because the lecturers did not elaborate on their observations, intentions and actions. For example, P6 did not explain why and how she tried to make the students understand that they were responsible for their learning and whether there was some specific evidence that this understanding actually took place. In addition to P4's coded reflections, she also demonstrated potential for other reflections, but did not actually develop them. Once P4 did not elaborate on why she thought that her task was "to make them think and to make them speak"; P4 just stated this and described personal actions and students' performance in the classroom without trying to explore it from a teacher's reflective perspective. Similarly, when P1 commented, "Well, I liked this mode [reflecting on her own teaching]. I tend to resent long lectures, which are unavoidable sometimes, but I do enjoy the classes where the students get you know involved," it was not coded as reflective because there was no full analysis and explanation of why P1 tried to avoid lecturing for a long time and why she likes classes with student involvement (personal communication, July 26, 2012).

Another observation about less reflective participants was that they often referred to their general methodology without linking it to some particular classroom situation and then reflecting upon them. The researcher of this study had to carefully distinguish those excerpts when the participants were talking about their methodology, teaching intentions and general teaching practices from those that had reflective thoughts on some particular situations or had both general principles and their specific applications in action. Learning about the participants' methodological principles and generalities was interesting because the researcher also shared most of the participants' teaching views; however, these comments were not examples of reflection. For example, by talking about general teaching goals and methods to meet the students' needs in the best possible way, P1 provided very interesting, descriptive methodological comments, which did include further specific illustrations and reflections on some specific cases. Similarly, P6 showed much concern about students' learning and explained how she always enquired about their comprehension of different tasks, but this educator did not link her explanation with a specific example. In general, P6 commented that this enquiry helped to realize what was done and what

should be revised for future lessons. Indeed, those were valuable remarks, but they were not coded as reflective because of their focus on general teaching methods and lack of connection with some particular situation.

Conclusion and Teaching Implications

In general, the study did explore and locate some interesting findings in response to its three research questions. First, it shed more light on how English language lecturers working at a Kazakhstani university perceived the concept of "reflection" in teaching: reflection helped the participants of this study to analyze the effects of their teaching on student learning and to explore alternative teaching practices. All participants were aware of the importance of using reflection in their teaching and, in fact, demonstrated personal engagement with reflection during the interviews.

Second, following Hatton and Smith's (1995) reflection framework, the researcher found that the most frequently used single reflection type was descriptive meaning that the participants often analyzed their performance in the professional role and gave reasons for implemented actions. The technical reflection type was also quite common as the participants were often concerned about their immediate behaviors or skills related to some practical skills of teaching and often referred to their past experience and/or some existing theory in order to make a teaching decision. As for the dialogic and critical reflection types, they were used least frequently and only by a few participants. Moreover, several participants mixed different reflections when talking about the same situation, so such reflective comments were categorized as different hybrid types of reflection, e.g., technical/descriptive, descriptive/dialogic, dialogic/critical or another type. An interesting finding was that although some participants did not engage in some single reflection type, they actually did an even better job when reflecting on the same situation from different reflection perspectives, e.g., exploring its reasons and then considering various alternative ways to solve or improve something in their teaching in order to obtain better learning outcomes. So, this study actually confirms the general statement that thinking is a complex process, it is not linear and cannot be straightforwardly broken into several specific categories.

Third, several patterns were located in the reflections and interviews of highly and less reflective participants. The former used more complex, hybrid reflection types in the same context and often used descriptive reflections as a basis for more challenging problem-solving dialogic reflections. The latter had some undeveloped or potentially-reflective comments meaning that the participants did not analyze some specific part of their teaching in detail, but just mentioned a task and their teaching actions. In addition, less reflective participants referred to and described their general methodology, which is certainly a crucial part of teaching, but they neither linked it to some particular classroom situation, nor reflected on it.

As for the teaching implications, this research has demonstrated that English language university lecturers are aware of the importance of incorporating reflection into their teaching and students' learning, but they reflect differently in terms of frequency, types and/or levels of reflection. Moreover, since most participants did not mention any specific reflection type, there is some uncertainty as to whether they are aware of them and realize how such awareness and the ability to differentiate personal reflections can help them to explore their teaching from different

reflective perspectives, even more purposefully and confidently. Based on this, language centers, academic departments and lecturers themselves might consider initiating seminars to explore the concept of reflection in detail including its meaning, manifold types of reflection and their impact on teaching and learning. Such exchanges of understandings and perceptions of various reflection levels will most likely enhance educators' awareness of the diverse nature of reflections, and their understanding of their own reflections. Furthermore, such seminars could focus educators' attention towards engaging more in dialogical, critical reflections, and hybrid reflection types for different professional purposes. Hopefully, more educators will be placing reflection at the center of their teaching, reconciling necessary dimensions of their teaching and establishing professional excellence because indeed "the way in which the participants think about and understand their own practice through purposeful reflection…has led to their development of excellence" (Kane et al., 2004, p. 304).

Overall, this pilot study not only answered the research questions in terms of existing knowledge about English lecturers' reflections in teaching, but added some new findings such as the use of hybrid reflections and its insufficient exploration in current research and several characteristics of highly and less reflective educators. Conducting similar future studies with larger participant groups in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries will reveal a more general picture of how other English language lecturers working at local universities engage in reflection after their classes. Furthermore, future research might focus on exploring the use of educators' hybrid reflections and their effects on their teaching and learning of the English language.

About the author: Dinara Karimova is currently pursuing a PhD degree in the English Language and Culture department at the University of Eastern Finland, located in Joensuu, Finland. She has taught various English courses at KIMEP University, located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Her research interests include EFL teaching and learning as well as sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

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