

Exploratory Practice and Child Learner's Motivation

تأثير الممارسة الاستكشافية داخل القسم على تحفيز الطفل المتعلم

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Corresponding author: Dr. IBRAHIM Cherallah, mrbrahim10@gmail.com**المخلص:**

يهدف المقال الحالي إلى تشخيص وتحليل المتغيرات المؤثرة في اكتساب مهارات التعليم والتعلم اللغوية -اللغة الانجليزية- لدى الطفل. لذلك تم التطرق إلى الموضوع من بعد ممارسة البحث في التعليم. حيث يتجلى هذا المفهوم في تطوير الكفاءة التعليمية- التعليمية.

في هذا النسق تم استكشاف النظريات التي اهتمت وعينت بممارسة البحث في التعليم. حيث بينت وأثبتت هذه النظريات أن البحث يمتاز بجانب نظري وآخر تطبيقي. لهذا وجب التركيز على الجانبين بتطوير واستحداث الأفكار المتعلقة بالتعليم مما يسمح بالممارسة الجيدة والإبداع.

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فقد أبرزت الدراسات أن إدراج البحث ولو بصفة جزئية في عملية التعليم يساهم في زيادة الوعي فيما يتعلق بمجريات القسم وتطوير المهارات المهنية على المدى الطويل.

ويعتبر تخصيص مجال معتبر لممارسة البحث وتنظيم دورات تكوينية لاكتساب استراتيجيات وتقنيات حديثة في التعليم من أبرز الأهداف الجوهرية في تفعيل العملية التعليمية-التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

ممارسة استكشافية، البحث الإجرائي، الطفل المتعلم، التحفيز، التكوين.

Abstract:

The present article investigates EFL teachers' difficulties in teaching when facing their students. Secondary education' English teachers are examples. Despite, the emergence of several teaching methods and approaches, many teaching problems persist in recurring within teachers' practices. Thus, this work tried to change this situation by introducing to secondary school English teachers to a relatively new concept in educational research; exploratory practice. The latter is commonly believed to have a positive impact on the development of professional classroom practitioners, and in so doing they trigger the learners' development. It must be noted that one possible way of introducing exploratory practice in the second language classroom is to encourage teachers to be critical thinkers while doing their job.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice; Action Research; Child Learner; Motivation; Training.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Foreign language teaching, arguably more than any other social or human discipline, undergoes continuous evolution in reformulating teaching methodologies and generating novel teaching techniques. These changes are primarily driven by researchers' desire to align with the evolving emphasis on what learners are expected to acquire.

Through knowledge gained, literature and personal experience, it appears that many EFL teachers have difficulties in facing their students in secondary school setting especially for the first time. These difficulties appear to be not only in understanding and students' achievement but also in other aspects in educational setting.

Scholars seem to agree that based on the fact that teaching is a mental and a practical work, teachers should activate both sides by embarking on some form of classroom exploration and testing new ideas of teaching.

Statement of the problem:

The study's main problem is to examine the extent to which Exploratory Practice, as defined by Allwright and Miller, enhances teachers' Professional Development is applicable in the secondary school setting of teaching English. To this end, an attempt is made to examine whether teachers are exploring their professional setting. In the meantime, we shall look at their readiness to start the ongoing classroom investigation and the difficulties encountered in doing research.

The concept of exploratory is the main focus in the article. More importantly, the trend which teachers are prompted to undertake otherwise the current educational and learning problems remain to be effectively handled and eventually resolved.

The major issue in this research is to what extent the exploratory practice enterprise as a problem-solving movement is applicable in the context of teaching English. At first, it seems to be so appealing because it has proved so in a variety of EFL or ESL contexts elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, the work of Allwright which has been chiefly meant to develop such concept.

In this sense, the present work attempts to investigate the class research, that is to say, how teachers can practise the scientific steps to understand the class environment with different dimensions. More precisely, the correlation between teaching and research should be done by teachers to be good practitioners, and to have in the same time a general overview about the class.

In fact, understanding the teaching process needs to know the core details and features of the class.

In other words, this study tries to examine to what extent teachers explore their setting, and hence are self-directed in their pursuit.

2. The advantages of collaborative teaching:

The advantages of collaborative teaching stated by Nunan (1998) are as follow: It Allows teachers to leverage their individual strengths in lesson planning and interacting with students, (2) collaborative teaching fosters creativity as educators are compelled to cater not only to their students but also to their peers, (3) collaborative educators facilitate personalized instruction, (4) enhancing the organization and timing of instructional components as multiple team members validate each other's insights, and (5) fostering the development of sustained educational programs over time.

Teacher research is teachers' growing awareness about classroom's events and activities. The relationship between teacher research and classroom awareness has been tightly established by academic researchers. For instance, Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) state that "the central reason to explore is to gain awareness of teaching beliefs and practices". Allwright and Bailey (1991) point out that the aim of teachers' exploration is to grow alive with what happens in the classroom. After all, Teacher research is a kind of self-study research.

3. Exploratory Practice:

The concept of exploratory practice takes a great part in the present work. This was for the reason that it constitutes the core concept of this research work. Thus, it will be dealt in details throughout this section.

The concept of teacher doing research has been named in different ways. The famous term is teacher research. Another so-often used term for teacher research is action research. However, there emerged another term to denote the process of exploration undertaken by the classroom teachers, exploratory practice. The term was developed mainly if not exclusively by Allwright in the late eighties and more prominently in the early nineties. Exploratory practice can be seen as a notional alternative of teacher research.

However, Allwright stresses that there exists a difference between teacher research and exploratory practice. In 1993, he claims that exploratory practice has come into being to overcome the problems associated with teacher research. It must be noted that he first used the term "*exploratory teaching*" and later revised it to "*exploratory practice*". As the term "*exploratory teaching*" suggests, the teacher is teaching and exploring while teaching.

Allwright (1997) thinks that teachers must follow the exploratory practice approach because action research can pose some tremendous difficulties for them. He argues that exploratory practice as a research attempt has been developed to provide for the particular characteristics of the teaching situation. Given that teachers are deeply involved in their work, they may find it too discouraging to engage in the action research process. He regards exploratory teaching as a potentially effective method for combining research and pedagogy (Allwright, 1997). He argues that research must not be added to the work of the teacher; rather, it must be integrated, and the best way in which this could be done is through exploratory teaching.

The integration of research in classroom pedagogy may mean that research becomes teacher-oriented and teaching becomes research-oriented. Freeman (1998) also states that research needs to be redefined in the teacher research practice. Arguably, teachers cannot manage completely the prior responsibilities of teaching when doing research in their classrooms. After all, both teacher research and exploratory practice aim at encouraging the reflective thinking of the practitioners.

In addition, Allwright (1993) claims that exploratory practice is more practical for the classroom teachers than teacher research and hence he indeed tends to favour its implementation to teacher research. This does not imply that exploratory practice is easy to undertake. It may sometimes pose some difficulties for the classroom teachers.

However, it could be argued that exploratory practice can be so interesting to the teachers partly because it pushes them to investigate what is familiar rather than what is new. Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) point out that teacher research is in fact an exploration of a familiar place, the classroom. Exploratory practice, as defined by Allwright, aims among things at making safe the transition of the role of the teachers from simple classroom teachers to teacher researchers in the classrooms.

4. Principles to Facilitate the Integration of Research and Pedagogy:

Allwright (1993) suggests that there are at least seven principles that aim at facilitating the integrating of research and pedagogy.

- **Relevance:** Exploratory practice must reflect the concerns of the classroom teachers. Also, it must respond to the concerns of the language learners. That meant learners have to take an active part in the research activities undertaken by the teachers.

- **Reflection:** One of the important goals which the integration of research and teaching sets itself the task to is to promote the reflective thinking of both the teachers and the learners.
- **Continuity:** The integration of research and teaching should not be short-lived; rather, it must be continuous. In other words, teachers cannot benefit or learn so much from the research experience if it is too short.
- **Collegiality:** Teachers often work in isolation. They usually do what they are required to do by syllabus designers. Teacher research encourages teachers to share their professional experiences with their colleagues. Teachers must work as partners who share common interests.
- **Learner development:** Teachers have as their prime goal that of developing students' learning. In other words, reflection upon practice is the driving force for teacher development as it is for learner development.
- **Teacher development:** Exploratory practice runs the risk of looking meaningless in the minds of the classroom teachers unless it proves to be a motivation for their development. Indeed, teacher development should constitute a motive for the teachers to undertake research in their classrooms. The more teachers are motivated, the better integration of teaching and research will be.
- **Theory-building:** Understanding the classroom is one of the aims of teacher research (Prioritise understanding over problem-solving.). It is best achieved when teachers and learners work together under the umbrella of exploratory practice.

5. Aim of Exploratory Practice:

The aim of exploratory practice is to prioritise the quality of life of our learning-teaching environment above any concern for instructional efficiency. Also, it aims to develop our understandings of the quality of learning-teaching life instead of simply searching for ever 'improved' teaching techniques. In addition, it recognises the fundamentally social nature of the mutual quest for understanding, in which both learners and teachers can develop. (Allwright, 1997).

Thus, Allwright argues that there are steps which exploratory practice stands upon. These steps include the following:

✓ Identifying a classroom problem:

Crucial to any piece of research is finding a problem to investigate. Allwright gives another reason to back up his somehow radical position on this issue. Hence, he would say that exploratory practice need not be based exclusively on investigating failures or difficulties. It can well be founded on investigating the good aspects of teaching and the successes which may be the result of those aspects.

The following quoted passage attests to the importance of going step by step in the exploratory practice enterprise.

"Exploratory Practice is a sustainable way of carrying out classroom investigations that provides language teachers (and potentially the learners also) with a systematic framework within which to define the areas of language teaching and learning that they wish to explore, to refine their thinking about them, and to investigate them further using familiar classroom activities, rather than 'academic' research techniques, as the investigative tools." (Allwright: 1997: 73)

This passage also reveals that teachers employ familiar classroom activities to investigate the classroom. The point about this passage is that teachers must refine their thinking before investigating deeply the issues under consideration. Refining one's thinking about the problem is prior to its thorough investigation.

✓ Select a particular Topic to focus on:

Teachers at his/her first sight may not be clear about the issues to investigate. As their research progresses, they gain a more profound idea of what to do in the exploratory practice enterprise. Allwright (1993) argues that teachers may give up the exploratory practice approach given the complexities they face in the second stage. This obstacle must be exceeded by the teachers so as to move to the third stage.

Allwright advises the teachers to focus on the topics which are practically useful for them. The selection of the research topic must be done for the sake of solving a practical problem. The more teachers explore their classrooms the more they grow aware of the real practical needs and the more their attention will be focused on those needs.

✓ Find appropriate Classroom Procedures to explore it:

Allwright undertook some research to see what the teachers considered to be part of the classroom activities that on the one hand could be used as pedagogic and on the other as exploratory. He came to the following conclusion. In fact, he listed a set of

activities used in the classroom for the sake of achieving both the teaching and the research purposes. Mainly are stated as follow: Group work discussions, pair work discussion, surveys, interviews, simulations, role-plays, role-exchanging, diaries, dialogue journal writing, projects, poster sessions, and learner to learner correspondence. These activities can be used for exploratory goals. By using these classroom activities, the teachers can teach and explore simultaneously.

✓ **Use Exploratory Activities in Class:**

This stage is so important because it puts teachers at the front of exploratory practice. In this stage, the teachers face truly the practical problems of doing research. Allwright indeed recognises this huge problem when he reflects on the idea that this stage appears to be relatively straightforward, yet he remains skeptical about whether educational researchers have adequately addressed the task of assisting teachers in developing the monitoring skills necessary to effectively utilize activities for both their pedagogical value and as a means of collecting essential data." (1999).

Allwright expresses his doubt that researchers have done the satisfactory job that the teachers will be able to manage to do research and practise teaching at the same time. More importantly, teachers have been principally prepared to teach and they have been hardly trained to do research, but this must not be a good reason not to do research in the classroom. One can well argue that "if there is a will there is way".

✓ **Interpret the Outcomes:**

Research is not only a data collection procedure. It is also an interpretation of the results. Nunan (1992) defines research as an activity which consists of three main steps: (1) identification of a problem or formulation of a hypothesis; (2) data collection; and (3) data analysis. Allwright (1993) states, that this stage is as problematic as the second one that of refining thinking, because it involves the way to handle the outcomes. Even though the teachers' interpretation of the same classroom event can vary from one teacher to another, this variation must not be uncontrolled. Certainly, the same event can be open to different interpretations by different people, but their interpretations must be well founded in the sense that they have to be validated with evidence.

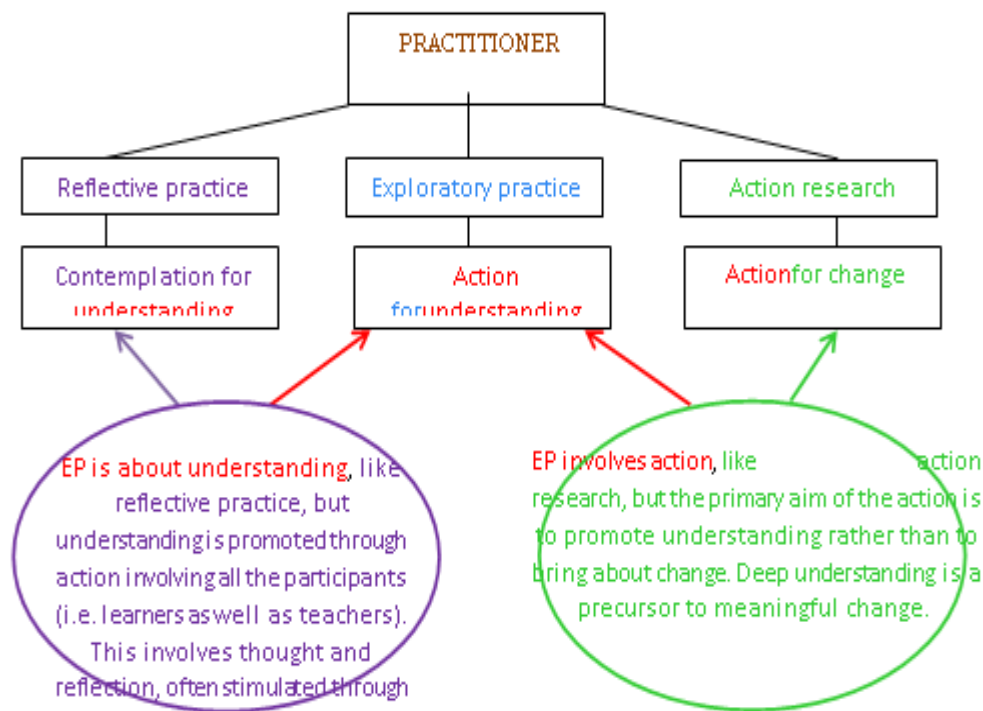


Figure 01: How does EP relate to other approaches to classroom research and reflective practice?

(Sections 1 to 6 adapted from Allwright and Miller, 1998.)

6. Reflective Practice:

Reflection entails a process of self-examination and self-assessment that proficient educators routinely undertake to enhance their professional methods.

In essence, proficient practitioners follow four key steps:

- They meticulously contemplate the occurrences within a specific situation.
- They discern the various available options.
- They reflect on their professional values and assess their willingness to act in accordance with those values.
- They deliberately choose how to act in order to effect change.

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In short, effective teachers demonstrate reflectiveness by meticulously scrutinizing both their own practices and those of others, aiming to enhance the quality and effectiveness of their work.

Engaging in reflective practice is advantageous for teacher professional development. The main advantage lies in teachers gaining a deeper insight into their teaching approach, leading to increased effectiveness. John Dewey supported this notion, highlighting reflection as crucial in learning from experience. He emphasized the significance of reflecting on practices and incorporating observations into the formation of teaching and learning theories. Dewey argued that this process enables teachers to actively contribute to and benefit from the knowledge surrounding educational practices.

Based on Dewey's ideas, Donald Schon refers to educators who are engaged in a developmental process as "reflective practitioners." In his book, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), Schon (1987) explains that reflective practitioners use the knowledge they gain through continual inquiry and analysis to refine instruction.

Practitioners should continually study their practices. They need to concentrate on developing those practices that help them deliver their best work.

"It's never too early to learn to become a reflective teacher," writes Peter Frank in his article, "Mission Possible: Becoming a Reflective Teacher" (1999). Teachers should start by writing a mission statement. Then, Frank writes, they can develop a plan of action, maintain and monitor the plan, and evaluate the plan. Develop a mission statement and action plan — in writing a personal mission statement, educators determine where they are going. The mission statement, Frank points out, should be based on prior knowledge and experience. Educators can then set long- and short-term goals, and assign realistic time frames to complete the tasks.

In the area of language education, the teaching experience is a key factor for teacher learning. However, experience can be backed up by reflection. As far as the relationship between experience and reflection is concerned, Keogh and Walker (1985) define reflection as a broad term encompassing intellectual and emotional endeavors through which individuals delve into their experiences to cultivate fresh insights and appreciations.

So, reflection, according to Keogh and Walker, is not only a cognitive activity, it is also an affective process. More often than not, reflective thinking has the connotation of the objective analysis of the professional setting. However, teachers have to evaluate their classroom settings and their evaluations can be totally independent of the teachers' prejudices.

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In fact, Schon (1983) assumes that learning from experience can take place through reflective practice. There is really basic connection between teacher inquiry and reflective teaching. The reflective practitioner is the one who learns through his or her own professional experience. So, the teacher triggers his professional learning in the reflective practice approach. Moreover, by learning from his own experience he develops the classroom learning, and which is a peripheral concern of the reflective teacher. Thus, the change must affect the two levels of teaching, according to Freeman (2001), the hidden side and the practical one.

In the reflective approach, the development of the practices of the classroom teachers must go hand in hand with the development of their own beliefs and principles of their job. Indeed, Donald Schon (1983) thinks that research on the professional settings undertaken by the practitioners is the best indication of reflection. He states that teachers, for instance, cannot become reflective practitioners unless they explore systematically their classrooms. The classroom is the professional setting of the teachers, though they can learn how to teach from teacher training programmes.

7. Teacher Self-Development:

The concept of autonomy and taking full responsibility for one's own learning has recently spread to the area of teacher education. The growth of the teacher as an autonomous agent has so much to do with the concept of teachers' self-directed professional development (Nunan, 1989; Nunan & Lamb, 1996). The best way in which teachers take self-directed paths towards their professional growth is to rely on the classroom-based classroom inquiries.

The more teachers do research in their classroom settings the more they learn from their professional experiences. Teacher research promotes reflective practice which in turn paves the way for the development of the professional competencies of the classroom teachers.

Thus, exploratory practice and reflective practice are commonly used terms to describe the process of teachers' professional development because they are cited as effective tools for the improvement of the quality of classroom instruction and teacher-learner interaction.

As stressed by Richards (1999: preface) that teaching encompasses both thought and action, with the interplay between the two forming the central focus of contemporary approaches to teacher development. In this regard, teaching should not be seen in one-sided angle; rather, it consists of two aspects, the overt aspects and the covert aspects of teaching. The full professional development of the teachers cannot take place unless both sides develop simultaneously.

8. CONCLUSION

The present work has mainly tackled the key concepts of the main topic. It has dealt in details with the exploratory practice by citing its definition, steps, principles, and its impact on teacher's self-development. In addition, it dealt with other related concepts manifested in teaching and research, action research, teacher research, and reflective practice.

English teaching in secondary school should take place according to the needs of the English language curriculum. This latter includes mainly the activities which attempt to reach goals of teaching English. Consequently, teachers can find this study to be of practical value because it informs them about the importance of carrying out classroom inquiry and including it in their job. It is said that teaching without classroom inquiry and reflection cannot be of any practical benefit for the learners. So, the majority of the subjects in this inquiry have been teaching for a long time without resorting to either teacher-research or effective reflection on the classroom events.

This work has revealed that second language teachers cannot be really considered classroom researchers. This situation can be changed if teachers start looking at their job from a different perspective. It may not be so easy to explore the classroom setting, but it is still an appealing choice that teachers have to make, otherwise their professional growth will not be stimulated further. Certainly, they can rely on their experiences to develop professionally. Still, their learning from their professional experiences can be stimulated by research and reflection on those experiences.

Not often teachers discuss the pedagogic problems their learners are confronted with in their meetings. Teachers rarely discuss problems of the classroom life collaboratively, they tend to believe that it has become beyond their power to improve the classroom situation. Teacher can well be agents of change in the sense that she/he must improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. It must be stressed however that teachers can improve their practices by taking from the literature on second language education research or attending seminars presented by experts on didactics. So teacher research is not the only means of the development of more effective professional practices. In this study, a focus has been on teacher inquiry as a problem-solving technique.

In short, this research attempts an explanation of the ways in which reflective practice and teacher research can be applied in the classroom. To achieve this goal, teachers are asked "to wear the research cap" by the use of such techniques as diary writing and teacher-learning discussion. But the research work is by no means at the expense of the teachers' prior tasks.

We can conclude that teachers have the ability to do research. The most important point about teacher research is that teachers to be more systematic in their approach to develop professionally.

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