Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Results of Experimental Teaching Self-Reflection while Speaking

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Abstract

Search for optimization and improvement of the quality of higher education has encouraged scholars to turn to self-reflection as a practice aimed at self-development and self-analysis. Further assimilation of self-reflection into the educational process prompted teachers to introduce reflective practices into classes of English as a second language, which allowed to both improve students' speaking skills and their awareness of reflection. Thus, the methodology of reflection-based teaching of speaking skills was devised and implemented. The next step was to assess the extent to which the above-mentioned methodology prompted self-reflection development. To realize this goal it was necessary to undertake experimental learning and analyze its results from the standpoint of a complex of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In the article this complex is described in detail with a particular emphasis on the method of case study as the central qualitative research method. Moreover, the shift in the students' ability to reflect on their speech is described.

Keywords: Case study, self-reflection, speaking skills.

Introduction

At the age of rapidly changing technological advancements and ever-increasing pace of life university graduates are required to be capable of self-development, marking the route of further education and career

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as well as taking the responsibility for the results of their actions. One of the ways of achieving all the above-mentioned goals could be self-reflection or introspection that is view as a tool for improved metacognitive practices to effectively enhance overall academic motivation and performance (Cavilla, 2017).

Nowadays, according to the official documents, contemporary teachers are supposed to encourage pupils to be reflective practitioners, a task which is impossible without the teachers themselves being able to reflect on their actions and basing on the results of this reflection take further actions.

Another aspect, which is highly relevant nowadays, is the search for methodologies that would aim at raising efficiency of studying for will-be ESL teachers. One of them could be promoting self-reflection while studying a second language (Meritan & Mroz, 2019). This will allow university graduates to become independent, responsible individuals capable of critical thinking and at the same time reflective practitioners and skillful professionals (Asyari, Muhdhar & Susilo, 2016).

According to the Federal state educational standard school-leavers are expected to use reflection in their education (2010), thus it would be logical to assume that first-year students of teacher-training universities are aware of reflective practices and know how to implement at least some of them. However, our observation during ten years of teaching first-year students and the results of several questionnaires allowed us to arrive at the conclusion that the majority of first-year students are either incapable of reflecting on their actions or their level of self-reflection is insufficient for the purposes of higher education.

Another challenge of present-day higher education is as follows. Nowadays teacher-training universities are expected to be providing all necessary conditions for their students to become highly reflective practitioners capable of encouraging reflection in their pupils. Despite this, the methodology of promoting self-reflection while teaching a second language has not been completely devised. What is more, research methods of assessing qualitative changes in students' ability to reflect have not been identified.

Our research shows that although the issue of teaching speaking skills in a second language has been thoroughly studied by various scholars, there is no methodology of teaching speech production that is based on self-reflection despite the fact that it is beneficial for both students' communicative competence and their ability to reflect on their actions.

All the above-mentioned factors encouraged us to create reflection-based methodology of developing speaking skills (Frolikova, 2014). The methodology has five stages during which both reflection and speaking skills are developed side-by-side. The cognitive basis for the mental action of self-reflection is the knowledge of discourse characteristics that are also considered the objects of reflection.

While there are no obvious difficulties in implementing the above-mentioned methodology, questions arise during assessing students' progress in terms of self-reflection. Do the students become reflective practitioners as a result of applying the methodology? What are the most effective methods that should be used to check the students' progress in terms of self-reflection? How can their progress be measured? How do the objects of reflection promote reflective practice?

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this research is to check whether reflection-based methodology of developing speaking skills promotes self-reflection in regard to speech production skills.
For the implementation of this goal the following tasks are to be solved:

⁻ to select adequate methods of checking the changes in students' ability to reflect in regard to speech production;

⁻ to analyze students' answers to the questions by applying a complex of quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to gain understanding of the shift in their ability to reflect;

⁻ to analyze the results of the tests before and after experimental learning in order to assess students' level of self-reflection;

⁻ to determine the directions for development of students' ability to reflect.

Literature review

Self-reflection has been considered as a means of raising self-awareness and solving problematic issues that may arise in the educational process (Simonyan, Prokhorova & Frolikova, 2020). The key role of self-reflection in education is personality development (Frizen, 2017, Kostenko & Leontiev, 2018).

Many educators have underlined the significance of reflection for successful studying. J. Dewey was among the first of those who opposed reflective practice to routine one, which is random and unsystematic, while reflection enables a person to control their activity taking into account the desired result; to act

consciously according to one's intentions. The scholar's ideas were developed by D. Schon (1983), who studied the significance of reflection for educational process, defining the teacher as a reflective practitioner who constantly learns by their own experience with the help of reflection. This idea has been widely supported ever since (Olteanu, 2017, Bubnys, 2019, Szűcs, 2018).

D. Schon (1983) singled out reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action. This classification is essential for the current research as it is applied to practice while teaching speaking skills contributing to their improvement. While speaking the students are supposed to apply reflection-in-action as it allows them to analyze and control the speech while speaking. Reflection-on-action is vital for analyzing strengths and weaknesses of one's speaking skills, dwelling upon the mistakes that have been made and finding out their reason; or determining the strong aspects of one's utterance. Reflection-for-action encourages the speaker to consider and forecast their further speech basing on the conclusions that were made as a result of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Frolikova, 2014).

Methodology

Taking into account the complexity of assessing qualitative changes in students' attitudes and skills a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was applied in order to check the efficiency of the reflection-based methodology of developing speaking skills. Such a complex was determined by the fact that quantitative methods are not enough to assess the level of reflection; qualitative and quantitative research methods can be combined to offset the weakness of one method with the strength of another (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). First and foremost, quantitative methods do not allow the researcher to analyze the gained data and their reasons in detail. Secondly, they cannot touch upon students' attitudes to their actions, their real ability and readiness to implement reflection while speaking (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Thus, we also applied qualitative research methods, which treat the results of experiment from the students' point of view (Chauvette, Schick-Makaroff & Molzahn, 2019) and allow to conduct in-depth research and gain trustworthy data that provide extensive explanation of the issues.

The following research methods were introduced in order to achieve the aim of the study:

  1. Quantitative research methods:
  - questionnaires;
  - examination of the transcripts of students' utterances;
  - analysis of students' self-assessment papers.
  2. Qualitative research methods:

- observation;

- case-study;

- semi-structured and unstructured interviews;

- focus groups.

Results

The main experimental basis for the research was a group of first-year students (12 people in total), trained in the Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University, "Teacher Education" department. The experiment was conducted during two terms (from September to May) during the classes of oral and written speech practice. It involved 6 hours of classroom sessions of speech practice per week (in total - 204 hours).

Three students with different levels of speech-production skills participated in the case-study: one student (Maria) had a high level of monologue speech skills, the second (Svetlana) – medium, and the third one (Natalia) had a low level of monologue speech skills (the students' names have been changed for ethical reasons). Such a selection of the case-study participants is justified by the fact that the results of the research will allow to understand the principles of monologue speech development relying on reflection for students with high, medium and low levels of speaking skills.

During the pre-experimental test quantitative research methods were applied in order to determine the level of reflection. A questionnaire was conducted, with the help of which the researcher received information about the level of awareness of reflection and about the kinds and objects of reflection that students highlight and use in the process of speaking. Having analyzed the answers to the questionnaire, we can conclude that the students do not understand the essence of the concept of self-reflection as comprehension of their own actions, beliefs for further self-development and self-improvement, and therefore they will not use it to solve problematic situations in learning and in their life. Furthermore, in terms of monologue speech, the students view mainly lexical-grammatical correctness as an object of reflection. In other words, the essence of reflection in monologue speech is understood by them as a kind of control over its linguistic accuracy, whereas students, as a rule, do not pay due attention to the contents and communicative aspects of speech, which is caused by the lack of a clear understanding of the objects of reflection when speaking (that are also criteria for assessing monologue speech). What is more, during the survey, a tendency towards incorrect self-assessment was revealed: several people with a sufficiently high level of speaking skills were (unjustly) critical of themselves, while the majority of students with a low level of these skills

did not show proper self-criticism.

As a result of the questionnaire, we were able to identify three ways of developing reflection in the context of monologue speech: 1) raising students' awareness of the essence of reflection and its role in the process of speech production; 2) exteriorization of objects of reflection when producing monologue statements to improve the quality of speech; 3) correction of students' self-esteem by using forms for self-assessment, which also provide columns for the teacher, who can agree/disagree with the student.

The development of reflection was realized in the course of experimental training that was based on the reflection-based methodology of developing speaking skills. To identify the dynamics of the development of self-reflection in the tasks of the post-experimental section, the questionnaire method was used, which provided the researcher with data on the students' understanding of reflection and its use in the process of speech.

Relying on the analyzed data it can be concluded that the majority of students (75%) comprehend reflection as a psychological ability to understand actions and knowledge for further self-improvement; 25% of students consider reflection only to be applicable to monologue speech. All students, when reflecting on their speech, highlight linguistic correctness and the variety of connectors/linking words as its objects; 75% add the structure of the statement, its coherence and integrity to this list; 67% of students also distinguish the targeting and contextuality of the statement as objects of reflection.

The analysis of the responses allowed us to conclude, that one student out of twelve was not capable of performing the task on the reflection of his utterance. Of the remaining eleven students, practically everyone completed the reflection-on-action tasks (nine people were completely successful and two students coped with the task partially). Seven students fully realized reflection-for-action and reflection-in-action; and four students were able to partially complete reflection-for-action and reflection-in-action tasks. For clarity, we summarize the results obtained in Figure 1.
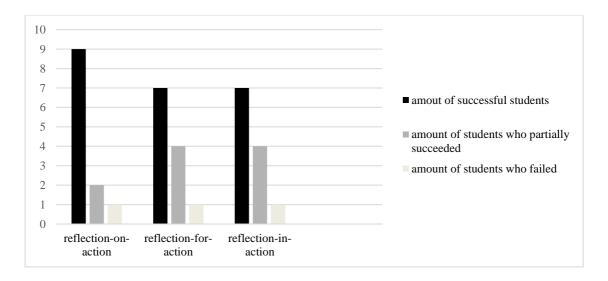
Figure 01. The level of self-reflection at the final stage of the experimental learning

As it was mentioned above, not only quantitative research methods were used to trace the dynamics of reflection. Qualitative research methods were applied as well. In the article we present the results of the analysis of the case-study "Svetlana" that will allow to look more closely at the shift in self-reflection of the students with the medium level of the foreign language. At this stage of the experiment, we have to point out that according to the rules of qualitative data analysis, the exact words of the participants are preserved – they are not changed in any way, so that to retain the peculiar features of oral conversation and give the researcher a visual representation of the speaker's way of thinking.

First of all, it should be noted that Svetlana is a very diligent, responsible and responsive student who answers questions willingly and enthusiastically. During the first interview, it was clear, that the student was trying hard to give logical and complete answers, but she failed to do it, so she repeated the same ideas in different words. The reason for this according to Svetlana herself, was that she "*understands what reflection and monologue speech are when taken separately, but does not understand, how they can be combined."*

Prior to the experimental learning Svetlana equated the concept of self-reflection and future activity planning: "*Reflection for me is contemplating on my future actions, something that will happen if I do this, and if I do not do this".*

In the production of the monologue speech Svetlana limits the function of self-reflection to the control of

linguistic aspects of her speech and its compliance with the topic: "*In general, reflection helps me to plan my speech so that to avoid wrong words or tenses, e.g. grammar mistakes. Also, reflection helps me to set myself up for the speech, to understand what exactly I want to say.*"

From Svetlana's previous answer, it becomes clear, that she uses reflection-for-action to plan her utterance, but the student has not developed either reflection-in-action or reflection-on-action at all: "*I find it difficult to speak; I do not have time to think over every word, to contemplate whether I used the word or grammar construction correctly or not. But after the speech, when I'm trying to remember where I was corrected by the teacher or when the teacher tells me about my mistakes, I get very upset and I cannot analyze the flaws. There are so many of them that I do not know where to start.*"

Svetlana's answers make it clear that she is trying to carry out some reflection before speaking, which is an important indicator of the level of her psychological development. However, we cannot deny some disappointing facts: Svetlana misunderstands the very essence of reflection-for-action as planning her own activity (rather than foreseeing and restructuring the activity, relying on the previous experience). This type of reflection does not bring the desired result since it is not supported by reflections-in/on-action (in other words reflection does not lead to self-control and self-regulation). What is more it is obvious that Svetlana has no clear understanding of the objects of reflection, i.e. what it is necessary to focus on: the student notes only linguistic correctness of the statement and the correspondence of the content to the topic. Nevertheless, Svetlana's desire to understand and master the mechanisms of reflection for the development of monologue speech allowed us to predict the success of this activity.

After the first interview, Svetlana, like the rest of the group participated in experimental training, some tasks of which involved the implementation of reflection in loud speech. In order to follow the changes Svetlana had in comprehending the concept of reflection we will analyze one comment she made during the experiential learning.

After a rather self-critical reflection on a spoken utterance that students performed in writing Svetlana notes: "*But despite all the bad things that I have written above I would like to mention a small positive sign I have noticed. This monologue was better than the one recorded at the beginning of September. This time I felt more free; not so tense. Also, I had at least an occasional eye contact with my partner, and this proves that I have learnt to find the necessary words and phrases a little faster (even though there was still too much of the "eh" sound). While recording this monologue, I was not catastrophically at a loss, so we can say that there is a tiny improvement.*"

Reading Svetlana's opinion about her level of speaking skills one cannot help being convinced of the quality of the reflection process and the student's self-criticism. Svetlana carefully reflects not only on her monologue, but also on the reason she was able to improve some points, the fact she has grasped a better knowledge of the language. All this determines a high level of Svetlana's reflection; she had the foundation of it prior to the experimental learning; she just did not have the necessary knowledge (what reflection is necessary for, what its objects in terms of the monologue utterances are, and so on). As soon as the student mastered this knowledge, she began to apply it efficiently and carefully since she had a very serious attitude towards learning. The researcher can judge it by emotional words used by Svetlana - *a small positive sign, a tiny improvement, not catastrophic*, - all these words have emotive connotations that tell the researcher that the student regards herself self-critically and responsibly performs tasks, understanding the difficulty of compliance with the selected reflection objects.

At the end of the experimental learning the case study involved conducting an interview that is going to be analyzed. In this interview the student defines reflection as follows: "*As I see it, reflection is a kind of self-study/self-examination on certain points, criteria, with the help of which a person can later improve what he/she does*".

Regarding the role of reflection in the process of speaking, Svetlana says: "*Well, it seems to me that reflection helps to control the process itself. I mean, I look at myself, how much I have improved my speech. Because I used to ponder what I would say just before the speech, but I almost never contemplated on it after as it got on my nerves because you know all your mistakes and do not know what to do with all of them. Now I have already learned to control the grammar. To be honest controlling my speech while speaking has become easier for me. Reflection no longer distracts me from the topic of speaking."* As you can see from Svetlana's comments, she has learned to carry out reflection-in-action. Here is how she reveals it: "*In the process of speaking, while I am still speaking, I already think about the form I want to use, what should come after, the sequence of tenses. I am perfectly aware of how to structure my speech: how to start, how to finish, how to contact the person. I keep the structure of the statements in mind; it is not what it used to be at school – when you start from the end then go to the beginning, then switch to the middle and you have a mess in the end."* Judging by Svetlana's words it becomes clear that in the course of her speech she takes into account and controls all objects of reflection that have been identified in relation to the monologue speech. The results of the observation and the fact that the student herself corrects mistakes and inaccuracies during the speech are the direct evidence of it.

During the experimental learning Svetlana constantly stated that she had never liked or known how to reflect after the speech as she had always done it in an unproductive way and was far too emotional: "*I was caught up in it and the next time I spoke I was very nervous, I remembered I had failed, and I thought that this time it would not work either* ". However, by the end of the training the student stated, that she had learned to carry out reflection-on-action: "*Now I just think over all my mistakes, try to remember them and next time try not to make them*". Svetlana also notes that reflection-for-action helps her implement the conclusions she arrives at in reflection-on-action*: "I recall what problems I had before speaking: for example, there was no sequence of tenses or I talked about the past and switched to the present. And that's what I concentrate on when I speak. "*

Svetlana has an interesting attitude to reflection-for-action: being a very responsible person she admits she "*used to find it strange to go outside – I was scared to go out, because I [Svetlana] imagined all that could happen to me from an accident to ...* ". However, now according to the student reflection-for-action helps her "*tune myself to the positive, using self-attunement*". As you can see from Svetlana's words, she finds application of reflection-for-action not only to speaking ("*it helps you to calm down, collect your thoughts, take into account your past shortcomings and mistakes*"), but also to everyday life.

Discussions

Thus, judging by the analysis of Svetlana's responses to the questions of the semi-structured interview conducted after the experimental learning we can witness and state qualitative changes that have occurred in the student's understanding of reflection in general and the role of reflection in relation to the production of monologue speech in particular. Obviously, it was the selected objects of reflection that helped the student improve her psychological state and emotional background as without them Svetlana did not know "*what she had to do with them [mistakes] all*". The student learns to perform reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action during and after her monologue speech which is proven by the fact, that Svetlana corrects many mistakes and inaccuracies in the process of speaking and conducts self-examination after the speech. In addition, the student has learnt to correctly carry out reflection-for-action basing on the results of reflection-on-action.

The case-study allowed us to see the changes in Svetlana's attitude to the reflection process: first, the student did not carry out reflection-on-action because of the fact that her results were disappointing and confusing. However now, realizing the essence of the work on the monologue speech, the student performs reflection after every utterance. The same can be said about reflection-in-action, the essence of which was

incomprehensible to Svetlana before the experimental training, but after the training the student began to actively use this type of reflection for self-control and self-regulation.

Relying on the results of the experimental learning it can be stated that the change in Svetlana's self-reflection level positively influenced her ability to perform monologue speech.

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that the results of qualitative research methods correlate with quantitative data, supplementing them. Thanks to the complex usage of these methods, we have arrived at the following conclusions: the selected objects of reflection allowed students to complete tasks for all types of reflection which was expressed in the correction of a number of mistakes by students in speech and in the correct understanding of reflection in relation to monologue speech.

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