Discourse and sociolinguistic teaching perspectives

Perspectivas de enseñanza discursiva y sociolingüística

Discurso e perspectivas de ensino sociolinguístico

Evelyn Carolina Macias-Silva [I]
maciasevelyn@hotmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7593-6952

Marco Antonio Aquino-Rojas [II]
marcoaquino111@hotmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2252-8397

Correspondencia: maciasevelyn@hotmail.com

I. Magíster en Pedagogía para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, Docente ocasional Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo, Riobamba, Ecuador.
II. Magíster en Enseñanza del Inglés como Idioma Extranjero, Docente en la Modalidad Extensión de La Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo, Riobamba, Ecuador.

Resumen

El discurso y la reflexión en el proceso de enseñanza son herramientas que buscan el crecimiento continuo tanto de los profesores como de los estudiantes, para ello es necesario que el docente conozca la situación de sus alumnos, tanto escolar como social, y el impacto que tienen las acciones que toma mediante un enfoque reflexivo y al mismo tiempo crítico, de esta manera se obtiene una evaluación integral propia con la cual es posible planificar estrategias que ayuden a corregir problemáticas en la enseñanza por parte del profesor o en el aprendizaje por parte del alumno, buscando al mismo tiempo dejar de lado el modelo en el cual solo el docente puede impartir conocimientos y el alumno únicamente debe someterse a aprender. Si bien la implementación de la reflexión en los programas de estudios puede traer varios beneficios para los involucrados en este proceso, es necesario que primero los profesores se capaciten sobre la reflexión enfocada en la práctica docente, ya que para su ejecución se requiere conocer factores como la metodología de cómo aplicarla, sus fases, los cuatro tipos de conocimiento que implica y sus alcances y limitaciones en la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: Discurso, enseñanza, reflexiva, enseñanza reflexiva.

Abstract

The discourse and reflection in the teaching process are tools that seek the continuous growth of both teachers and students, for this it is necessary that the teacher knows the situation of their students, both school and social, and the impact of the actions taken through a reflective approach and at the same time critical, In this way, a comprehensive evaluation is obtained, with which it is possible to plan strategies that help to correct problems in teaching on the part of the teacher or in learning on the part of the student, seeking at the same time to leave aside the model in which only the teacher can impart knowledge and the student must only submit to learning. Although the implementation of reflection in the curricula can bring several benefits for those involved in this process, it is necessary that teachers are first trained on reflection focused on teaching practice, since its implementation requires knowing factors such as the methodology of how to apply it, its phases, the four types of knowledge it implies and its scope and limitations in teaching.

Keywords: Discourse, teaching, reflective, reflective teaching**.**

Resumo

O discurso e a reflexão no processo de ensino são ferramentas que procuram o crescimento contínuo tanto de professores como de alunos, para isso é necessário que o professor conheça a situação dos seus alunos, tanto escolástica como social, e o impacto das acções que eles empreendem através de uma abordagem reflexiva e crítica ao mesmo tempo, Desta forma, obtém-se uma avaliação abrangente, com a qual é possível planear estratégias que ajudam a corrigir problemas no ensino por parte do professor ou na aprendizagem por parte do aluno, procurando ao mesmo tempo deixar de lado o modelo em que só o professor pode transmitir conhecimentos e o aluno só deve submeter-se à aprendizagem. Embora a implementação da reflexão nos currículos possa trazer vários benefícios para os envolvidos neste processo, é necessário que os professores sejam primeiro formados em reflexão centrada na prática pedagógica, uma vez que a sua implementação requer o conhecimento de factores como a metodologia de aplicação, as suas fases, os quatro tipos de conhecimentos envolvidos e o seu alcance e limitações no ensino.

Palavras-chave: Discurso, ensino, reflexivo, ensino reflexivo.

Introduction

In general, in Latin America, despite the efforts of local governments, the teaching and learning of at least one language other than Spanish is still a challenge in professional training, either due to difficulties or lack of tools for its incorporation into the curricula, preventing graduates from having a command of a foreign language (Hernández Pedro, 2012).

In Ecuador, regulations have been issued to improve the competence not only of teachers but also of students and in the curriculum. The government declared that evaluation should be holistic and an ongoing process (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a), and attempts have been made to implement tools to promote new structures in English language teaching, but due to a lack of continuity or follow-up, these tools have not been evaluated to verify their impact. Despite this, efforts to provide more training to teachers in the education system to improve their language skills is a fundamental step in the search for progress in the process of teaching English (Peña Ledesma, 2019).

As for teachers, the government conducted the TOEFL test in 2012. The results reported that a high percentage were at a level that needed to be improved. Since then, the government signed

agreements with universities and international organizations to initiate an exchange program. Teachers who could access those programs had to pass a test provided by the education authorities. Through that program, 826 received training not only in pedagogical practices, but also in improving their competence, the goal was to prepare 5,000 teachers. In 2015, there were 500 teachers registered to take the TOEFL exam, the passing score set by the authorities was 87 (Ministerio de Educación, 2015). Another measure taken was the establishment of standards for teachers (Ministerio de Educación, 2012b) which are similar to those promoted by the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 2020).

As for the students, no tests have been applied to know the level of the students, however, there are International Baccalaureate (IB) programs in which both (teachers and students) are tested annually. The national education authorities set a schedule that includes English from the second grade of the basic year, it started in 2016 in the highlands. The expected level of students upon graduation is B1 and to meet that offer there should be 7000 teachers (Ministerio de Educación, 2015).

On the other hand, for higher education in April 2016, the Council of Higher Education (CES) in the Academic Regime Regulations, established that students in third-level, undergraduate degree courses must achieve a B2 level, which is considered upper-intermediate (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2016). The standards set for teachers also include standards to be achieved as part of lessons, and as for students, these are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2008). The requirement of this level in the foreign language for higher education is given because it is expected that graduates have the ability to understand complex texts related to their area of specialization and a certain degree of fluency when expressing themselves in English, so it must be guaranteed within the curriculum a percentage of hours for the foreign language which must be of quality. (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2005).

Another component that has been revised and improved has been the English as a Foreign Language (EFL; Ministerio de Educación, 2015) curriculum, now including elements of Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The purpose is that students have meaningful activities to increase their competence, however, including foreign language as a subject within the curriculum has not been a total solution to the problem since the study of foreign language being limited to only a few hours, or the implementation of language

schools or voluntary courses over the years have proven to be insufficient measures (Chávez Zambrano, M.X., Saltos Vivas, M. A. & Saltos Dueñas, C.M., 2017).

Methodology

This research has a bibliographic approach, it is based on the search, compilation, analysis, critique and interpretation of information from secondary printed or digital sources. What was sought is to know and clearly define the discourse and reflective teaching, the current situation in the country, the importance and probable consequences for those involved in the educational process through the review of bibliographic sources, raising concerns in order to guide the collection of information in a way that contributes significantly both to the development of the research and to the personal opinion of each author on the research topic.

Results and Discussion

Despite all these changes and improvements, the level of student proficiency remains low, as reported by Education First (2019), Ecuador's level is very low, this raises the question what is missing in the Ecuadorian curriculum? Or what can teachers do to improve their teaching practices? Knowing that there have been no studies that collate the current curriculum with teaching practices.

For the first question, there may be nothing missing, the problem may be rooted in other circumstances such as poor nutrition, limited access to resources, or community and family situations that require attention. Nutrition has been identified as a major problem by UNESCO as its impact on education is undeniable. Resources vary in form and origin, can be digital or physical, and serve to enrich lessons. On the other hand, community problems can be about drugs, sexual harassment or alcohol, the same problems can be found in families added to physical or psychological abuse (UNESCO, 2015), these problems have been aggravated due to the pandemic and quarantine that the population is currently living (UNESCO, 2020).

In order to reduce the impact of the pandemic in 2020, a course called "Teaching English in times of Covid-19. Modality and tools" in which more than 200 English teachers participated with speakers of great experience in teaching. The objective of the course was to strengthen foreign language instruction in teachers through presentations focused on the technological tools that are

used in times of pandemic, the same that allow the effective application of English reinforcement at the levels of General Basic Education and High School (Ministerio de Educación, 2020).

Regarding the second question, what can teachers do to improve their classes? First you should know that learning the mother tongue or a second language is a procedure full of difficulties that takes time, this can cause several problems in the student as anxiety and frustration since the objective of communication is to transmit information correctly, effectively and appropriately (Macias, 2017). In addition to these problems certain students may suffer from speech or learning disorders such as dyslexia, scolalia, dysprosody, among others, which directly affect both writing and speaking of the language whether native or foreign (Cevallos Vélez, K. G., Palma Cedeño, M. A, Cevallos Vélez, K. M. & Baqueza Ponce, G.V., 2020), for cases like these is that teachers should have sufficient skills to handle these situations.

Powell and Kusuma-Powell (2011) recommended getting to know their students and stated that it can be a difficult and challenging task, moreover, the process is compounded if students have problems with school work. They added that teachers should know information such as circles of friends and family background and argued that researchers are paying attention to this issue. This should be a necessity in Ecuador because it is a megadiverse country with various communities, each of them have their own customs, beliefs and sometimes their second language (L2) is Spanish and they will study English as a third language. Because there are differences between the regions (coast, highlands, amazon and islands) teachers should also know that context to better adapt to each community, this in the case of teachers working in a place where they were not born or raised.

Another recommendation will be to reflect on their lessons which means that after the lesson they should reflect on what they could do differently, or what worked and what didn't work, and perhaps list possible causes for the failure of the plan, however, this process of reflection and critique takes time. The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020) defines reflection as "a sign of the outcome of something" and as "serious and careful thought". Singh et al. (2019) reported a review of the concept of reflection and summarised that the focus of other researchers is on the "relationship between research theory/knowledge and practice" (p. 455), this was taken from research conducted from 1976 to 2019, however, the concept dates back to 1904 (Dewey, cited in Gore, 1987).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, cited in Singh et al., 2019) considered four types of knowledge to reflect on: practical wisdom, technical knowledge, critical reflection and reflexivity. Most teachers

seek knowledge by interacting with others at conferences, workshops or even chatting over lunchtime, they combine knowledge for practices with technical or instrumental knowledge gleaned from research and can use these to improve their teaching practices. The authors believe that teachers convert research into checklists, strategies or tips to apply directly to their lesson design, they further concluded that there is a belief that knowing more makes lessons effective (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999 cited in Singh et al., 2019).

On the other hand, practical wisdom can be considered as the method created by the teacher in practice, it is said to have been transmitted orally from teachers to teachers. This type of knowledge usually involves the elaboration of material so the authors stated "Teachers invent knowledge in action and make this knowledge explicit to others through deliberation and discussion...as mere anecdote, lunchtime stories, or coffee conversations." (Singh et al., 2019, p. 456).

For Gore (1987), the term reflective teaching "is used to convey different meanings and for different purposes." (p. 33). This author noted that reflection must be present if teachers are aligned with continuous growth. Gore used Dewey's definition of reflection which focuses on inquiry, attitudes, and skills, he further noted that some prerequisites to action are open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeness. He added that, in teaching, the concept can involve ethical, moral and political principles.

Another important element in teaching is sociolinguistics, which studies the relationship between language and society including language variation and learners' attitudes towards language (Hudson, 1996). The same author indicated that it may refer to the effect of culture on language, or even the way people use that language during social exchanges. The social components that may be considered are: class, age, gender and ethnicity; during social contexts, the study may be extended to cultural norms, behavioural expectations and the utterances people use in particular situations.

There is also the discourse, which in the classroom should be the product of consensus, of the flow of the other, but not of the imposition of rules. This avoids the position that one member is superior, but that there is equality among all participants, that is, there must be consideration on the part of the teacher towards the other to whom he/she addresses, giving value to the discourse and thus having an education in which everyone possesses knowledge, thus avoiding the idea that education is the donation of knowledge, with this relationship not only the students are the ones who learn but also the teacher. Therefore, it is understood that the discourse that should be promoted should be

dialogue in order to leave behind the culture of silence which has been imposed because the teacher is seen as the only valid subject of knowledge (Herrera Díaz, T., 2008).

To find out teachers' perspectives on the topic of reflection and interpret their social interaction in two different Whatsapp groups, two questions were sent to two groups of teachers, these belong to one Whatsapp group. There were a total of 55 Ecuadorian teachers of English working in institutions from primary school to higher level institutions, all with experience in teaching EFL.

The questions were: (1) is there time for reflection after class? (2) Will the teacher's reflection be useful in a class he/she has taught and will not repeat later? The results indicated that out of the total 55, only four responded to the first question. Two of them reported that they sometimes reflected and sometimes did not. One reported that he did not do so because of lack of time. The other did not mention the reason, but added that it depends on the level of competence of the learners and the topic. Three of them considered reflection as a learner activity. One of them mentioned that it does not encourage reflection. Another said that it has to be a planned activity according to the topic. The last one said that it can be a good warm-up task. One of them mentioned that she did reflect after class to improve in future sessions.

Considering the teachers' views and the concepts provided by Singh et al. (2019), it can be inferred that they refer to reflection as the concept of practical wisdom. This may be due to lack of time or more follow-up questions, furthermore, none of them reported matching their practices in light of theory or the use of research in designing their lessons nor in reflection after class. The teachers' responses may also coincide with Gore's assumption that the term reflective teaching can be viewed from different perspectives and for different purposes (1987).

This can be a starting point for modifying curricula and adding reflection in teacher training programs to motivate reflection on the four types of knowledge involved in teaching as mentioned in Singh et al. (2019) and in Gore (1987), the latter not only referring to the practical uses of reflection but also to the moral valuation it implies. However, it should be noted that in Ecuador there is a lack of research regarding the use of reflection to improve teaching practice, the methodology to apply it, training on how to do it, the analysis of teachers' reflections, the phases it can include and its implications in teaching

Authors such as Kolb (1984) considered reflection as a way for learners to communicate learned material, this author pointed out that it can move from a concrete experience to a conceptual one. Mezirow (2009) contributed to this theme by adding the concept of non-reflective tasks, for this author it is "any habitual or thoughtful human action without reflection" (p. 104). He classified reflection into direct and critical. The former being a kind of self-evaluation, the latter combines the evaluation of the nature and consequence of any person's actions, as well as the context of the action.

A study conducted in Iran (Avarzamani & Farahian, 2019) concluded that reflective writing is a higher order thinking task and that EFL learners did not reflect in the expected way, but merely reported daily actions and basic understanding of the topic being reflected upon. Students indicated that the main reason for this practice was their low level of proficiency. The authors also interviewed the teachers to determine the reasons for the students' poor reflection, agreed with the students regarding low competence, and added that the students needed more training and feedback.

Reflective teaching will contribute to the teacher's professional development, the reflective and critical approach, which is based on the exploration of the teaching process, will allow the follow-up in the construction of didactic theories taking as a starting point the available knowledge, skills and experiences (Richards and Lockhart, 1998). As for the learner, one has that the benefits of reflection can be of two types: firstly, it will help learners to be more critical of their actions, secondly, it can improve students' writing, which is a difficult skill to master as most teachers focus on the product and not the process. Authors such as Harmer (2007) suggest following the process of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

Conclusions

In general, reflection seeks to understand both the beliefs and thoughts that underlie the decisions of teachers, they should objectively analyze the efficiency, validity and quality of their own work and thus reflect critically on what is concluded, all with the sole purpose of making corrections that they consider relevant or implement initiatives when these are necessary through previously planned strategies. In addition, the evaluation should not be only towards them but also measuring the effect that their teaching generates in the students so that the impact of the actions to be implemented covers the problems of all those involved in the teaching process.

Since the government has made many efforts to improve EFL in Ecuador, and the results are still low, including reflection in the curriculum of undergraduate programs for pre-service and in-service teachers may be an option to improve proficiency and meet the standards. If teachers are trained to reflect, they can apply reflection as a strategy to improve student writing. However, they should be cautious because of the level of the students.

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