

# THE IMPACT OF NEUROLINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING ON EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE TEACHING

By

HAMID MARASHI \*

MARZIEH ABEDI \*\*

\* Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran, Iran.

\*\* MA in TEFL, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran, Iran.

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' reflective teaching. In order to do this, 30 Iranian female EFL teachers were selected. The group filled out a reflective teaching questionnaire as the pretest at the outset of the study and subsequently attended an NLP workshop. Following the end of the workshop, the teachers went back to their routine teaching program for 20 sessions and the researchers administered the same reflective teaching questionnaire as the posttest to the 30 teachers after those 20 sessions. In order to test the null hypothesis, that is to check any significant difference in the degree of the reflective teaching of the group prior to and after the treatment, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the scores of the group at the pretest and posttest level ( $t = -6.976, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ) meaning that NLP does significantly improve EFL teachers' reflective teaching.

Keywords: ELT, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Reflective Teaching.

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since its emergence within human civilization, the theory and practice of education has consistently been the scene of change in the quest for the betterment of results. One such recent trend of change introduced over the past couple of decades is reflective teaching. In simple terms, reflective teaching is stepping back and thinking about one's actions or thoughts in the classroom (Akbari, 2007) and a critical process in refining one's craft in a specific discipline (Schon, 1996).

Albeit a perhaps novel terminology, reflective teaching is of course founded upon a well-rooted conceptualization, i.e. reflection (Freeman & Richards, 1996; Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Shrum & Glisan, 2000; Stanley, 1998). Pioneers in the field of modern education such as John Dewey were engaged with elucidating the construct of reflection where he noted, reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends"

(Dewey, 1933, p.9). More recent definitions are also provided accordingly such as reflection being "the process of mirroring the environment non-judgmentally or critically for the purpose of decision-making" (Millroad, 2004, p.29).

According to Schon (1996), reflection is the way in which people deal with problems during practice. Also, it is permitting oneself to think carefully about some potential problems during presentation and finding out responses. He further differentiates between reflection in action and reflection on action. The former occurs within the process of teaching, analyzing, describing, and producing answers while the latter after the process of teaching which permits mental and physical reformation of the events and actions. Reflection somehow is a kind of self-examination to judge if they have been done in a suitable and logical way. Furthermore, it is a kind of involvement in an activity and self-criticism within the teaching practices.

Habermas (as cited in Moon, 2004, p. 2) focused on the way in which "humans process ideas and construct them into knowledge with reflection playing a role in this process".

He further notes that, "The differences in approach are accounted for largely by different focuses – either on the process of reflection, on the purpose for it or the outcomes of reflection – in effect, how it is used" (p. 4).

Reflective practice is a way for novice teachers to have discipline and coordination with their individual practices and other experienced teachers. As defined by Schon (1996), reflective practice is somehow a careful consideration of applying one's own knowledge and experiences to practice while being led by professionals in the discipline.

Schon (1996) recommended reflective practice as a way for beginners in a discipline to recognize consonance between their own individual practices and those of successful practitioners. He further defines reflective practice as involving thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline-

According to Akbari (2007, p. 4), "Although there is little, if any, empirical research investigating the link between this construct and student achievement outcomes, numerous professionals in the field have explored, mostly at the theoretical level, the benefits of reflective practices for teacher effectiveness". Akbari further quotes scholars that, "The construct is widely recognized as one of the most important schooling factors influencing student achievement gains".

The very manner in which people "capture their reflections is largely dependent on (a) their own learning style; (b) their discipline – whether they are in a predominantly written-oriented, performance- oriented or oral discipline; and (c) what resources they happen to have at hand at the time" (Ako, 2012, p. 16).

As stated earlier, education is one arena of the constant introduction of new concepts and trends. Henceforth, one other construct which just like reflective teaching has been a rather recent development in education is Neuro-Linguistic programming (NLP) serving as one of the resources to enhance effectiveness of language instruction (Hardingham, 1998). Originating in the late 1960s/ early 1970s, NLP drew attention since its emergence within the framework of humanistic psychology (Millroad,

2004). The term NLP refers to "(Neuro) the human nervous system including the brain and the five senses, (Linguistic) the verbal and nonverbal languages with which we communicate, and (Programming) the ability to structure our neurological and linguistic systems to achieve desired results" (Smart, 2006, p. 5).

NLP claims to help achieve "excellence of performance in Language, Teaching and Learning, improve classroom communication, optimize learner attitudes and motivation, raise self-esteem, facilitate personal growth in students, and even change their attitude to life" (Thornbury, 2001, p. 394).

Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 125) define NLP as "a training philosophy and a set of training techniques" while Antic (2006) introduces NLP as a kind of teaching method that is made up of a set of techniques for better language teaching and also persuading people that they have enough power to control their minds and lives and also others' lives for better result. NLP is frequently used in business to help people build better relationships, develop leadership skills, and overcome thinking which hampers their professional development, but in recent years it has gained momentum in the sphere of education due to its effectiveness in helping students gain a better understanding of the way they learn.

Bostic St. Clair and Grinder (2001) assert that, the underlying principle of NLP is that an individual represents a mind-body system involving a continuous structured connection between the following facets: 1-neurological processes, 2-linguistic competence, and 3-behavioral strategies. According to Gordon and Dawes (2005), NLP is based on some presuppositions, as determining outcomes, building rapport, modeling the learner, creating a learner filter, pacing with the learner, leading the learner, elicitation with learner, re-framing the approach, and collapsing an anchor.

According to Smart (2006, p. 5), "One of the most profound ideas of NLP is that, if one person can do something, it should be possible to find out what they're doing and replicate it". He further continues, "NLP modeling is a unique approach for identifying and replicating the unconscious skills of excellent performers" (p. 5). Smart

further describes the fundamentals of NLP as: "1. Know what you want (Outcome/ Direction); 2. Get the attention of the unconscious mind (Rapport); 3. Know whether you're getting what you want (Sensory Acuity); and 4. Adjust what you're doing accordingly (Behavioral Flexibility)" (pp. 5-6).

In line with what has been discussed so far, the purpose of this study was to find out if using NLP techniques among EFL teachers bears any significant impact on their reflective teaching. Accordingly, the following research question was posed:

*Q: Does Neuro-Linguistic programming have a significant effect on EFL teachers' reflective teaching?*

## 1. Method

### 1.1 Participants

The participants of this study included 30 Iranian female EFL teachers who expressed their willingness to participate in this study. Table 1 below provides some demographic data regarding the sample of 30 teachers.

### 1.2 Instrumentations and Materials

In line with the purpose of the study, two questionnaires were used: one for assessment and one for teaching. Both are detailed below.

Category	Subcategory	Frequency
Age	20-25	2
	26-30	6
	31-35	8
	36-40	7
	41-50	6
	Over 50	1
Years of Experience	2-5	5
	6-10	8
	11-15	8
	16-20	9
Academic Degree	Bachelor's degree	10
	Graduate student	7
	Master's degree	10
	Postgraduate student	3
Field of Study	English and related	20
	Humanities	5
	Science	3
	Medical Sciences	2

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

### 1.2.1 Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire

The teacher reflectivity questionnaire used in this study was developed by Akbari, Behzadpour, and Dadvand (2010). The questionnaire includes 29 items on a five-point Likert format ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always. The instrument was used as a pretest and a posttest. The Cronbach alpha estimates for the indicators of Practical, Affective, Critical, Meta-Cognitive, Moral, and Cognitive were calculated and turned out to be 0.73, 0.78, 0.84, 0.82, 0.67, and 0.83, respectively, and also the Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.91 with cut-off values of above 0.9 (Akbari et al., 2010).

All the loadings between the indicators and the latent factors as well as the covariance among the aforesaid five-factor mode were significant at the 0.001 level (Akbari et al., 2010). The approximate time needed to complete the questionnaire is 20 minutes.

### 1.2.2 NLP Techniques Questionnaire

The researchers used the NLP Techniques Questionnaire which consists of 38 items in the five-scale Likert type varying from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (Pishghadam, Shayesteh, & Shapoori, 2011) in a one-day workshop lasting eight hours to familiarize the teachers with NLP techniques. These items comprise 12 constructs (teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism) which was used during the workshop.

### 1.3 Procedure

To achieve the purpose of study, the following procedure was conducted. First, the reflective teaching questionnaire was administered to the 30 teachers as a pretest to have a clear assessment of where they stood regarding this construct at the outset of the study. Following the above administration, the following eight NLP techniques were introduced to the participants: flexibility, anchoring, elicitation, modeling, individual differences, leading, establishing a rapport, emotional, and cognitive boosters. Next, examples were provided for each technique with pertinent audiovisual materials.

All of the participants were asked to think about their classroom context in groups of three and make notes if they knew those techniques or whether they used them subconsciously in their classroom. Subsequently, all the groups started to discuss whether they used the techniques or not and, if they did, how they felt about them: Was it successful? Was it enjoyable? Do these techniques help them to improve their classroom engagement and motivation? Some of the groups had used some of these techniques without knowing their names while others had not because they were not familiar with them.

Next, the participants were shown some audiovisual materials of using NLP methods around the world in different fields, such as Nursing, Business, Psychology, Sports, and also Teaching and Learning. This was followed by a discussion among the participants about those materials and also some references about using those methods among different schools and classrooms. Then the participants realized how interesting and useful they were. Finally, the participants found out that using those techniques would help them manage and monitor their classrooms more effectively and also engage their students more intensively.

Following the end of the workshop, the teachers went back to their routine teaching program for 20 sessions and the researchers administered the reflectivity questionnaire as the posttest to the 30 teachers after those 20 sessions.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest

As discussed earlier, the reflective teaching questionnaire was administered to the group of teachers once at the outset prior to the treatment. Table 2 below includes the

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
Teachers	30	65	125	100.83	14.159	-0.672	0.427
Valid N (listwise)	30						

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Reflective Teaching Pretest

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
Teachers	30	70	129	105.27	13.799	-0.601	0.427
Valid N (listwise)	30						

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Reflective Teaching Posttest

descriptive statistics of this administration. As is clear from the table, the mean and standard deviation of the scores of the group of teachers on the pretest stood at 100.83 and 14.16, respectively.

As is seen, the scores also enjoyed normalcy ( $-0.672/0.427 = -1.580$  falling within  $\pm 1.96$ ). Furthermore, the reliability of the scores in this administration stood at 0.80.

### 2.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Posttest

Again as discussed thoroughly before, the same questionnaire was administered to the group of teachers at the end of the treatment. Table 3 below includes the descriptive statistics of this administration.

As is clear from the table, the mean and standard deviation of the scores of the group on the posttest stood at 105.27 and 13.80, respectively. Again, the scores enjoyed normalcy ( $-0.601/0.427 = -1.41$  falling within  $\pm 1.96$ ). Furthermore, the reliability of the scores in this administration was 0.79.

### 2.3 Testing the Hypothesis

In order to test the null hypothesis, that is to check any significant difference in the degree of the reflective teaching of the group prior and after the treatment, a paired samples t-test was conducted. As the scores resembled normalcy, running this parametric test was legitimized. Paired Samples Correlation result is shown in Table 4.

Table 5 demonstrates that, there was a significant difference between the scores of the group at the pretest and posttest level ( $t = -6.976$ ,  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ) meaning that the null hypothesis was rejected.

Following the rejection of the null hypothesis, the

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Reflective Teaching Pretest & Reflective Teaching Posttest	30	.969	.000

**Table 4. Paired Samples Correlations**

researchers were interested to know how much of the obtained difference could be explained by the variation of the independent variable. To determine the strength of the findings of the research, that is, to evaluate the stability of the research findings across samples, effect size was also estimated to be 1.03. According to Cohen (1988, p. 22), "a value exceeding 0.8 is generally considered a large effect size". Therefore, the findings of the study could be considered strong enough for the purpose of generalization.

### 3. Discussion

The results of the statistical analysis indicated that NLP had a significant impact on the reflective teaching of the participants. These results corroborate the conclusion reached by a study conducted by Pishgahdam, Shapoori, and Shayesteh (2011), namely, NLP is positively correlated with teacher's success. As NLP is concerned with monitoring, modeling, rapport, empathy, and giving feedback, it follows that those instructors who make more frequent use of NLP techniques would be more successful compared to those who do not employ such techniques.

Moreover, the findings of the current study provided evidence confirming Millroad's (2004) study on the positive role of NLP in L2 instruction in that teacher discourse can be viewed as a success or failure tool by creating congruence via NLP strategies. Also, Legall and Dondon (2006) raised the issue concerning the learners' evolution of behavior, putting emphasis on NLP as a tool to encourage learners and to enrich the relationship between instructor and learners.

The results of the present study can possibly be justified on the grounds that NLP refers to the perspective that an individual is a whole mind-body system. Therefore, it may

well be that it is this very essence of the NLP techniques used in this study that contributed to an improvement in the reflective level of the participating teachers. NLP has also been referred to as the investigation of the structure of subjective experience (McWhirter, 1992) which clearly bears relevance to the concept of reflection upon classroom practices by teachers.

### Conclusion

Nowadays psychological factors have been established to have an important role in Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. One of the major and important psychological fields of studies in English Language Teaching (ELT) is NLP which is an argumentative approach to communication and personal development. NLP can be closely related to reflective teaching and the applications of NLP techniques have benefits for both teachers and learners. Since, when teachers become more reflective as a consequence of NLP techniques, the learners will also be able to learn more smoothly and efficiently.

Familiarity with NLP techniques and properly exploiting them could be beneficial in all teaching domains. Therefore, teachers could become aware that familiarity with NLP techniques and their use may help them become more reflective. Understanding these techniques can help foster teachers' inferential abilities and enhance their deep understanding of teaching. Therefore, EFL teachers are encouraged to try to get familiar with psychological concepts particularly NLP techniques which may have an effect on their level of reflectivity. This may assist teachers in developing a more solid framework based on which they can make more informed decisions concerning the Teaching-Learning Process. In fact, teachers as reflective practitioners are advised to explore the different dimensions of their practice and cognition to get more in-depth views concerning the profession.

		Paired Differences						Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t		df
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Reflective Teaching Pretest & Reflective Teaching Posttest	-4.433	3.481	.636	-5.733	-3.134	-6.976	29	.000

**Table 5. Paired Samples Test**

The findings of the present study may help material developers and syllabus designers in considering the role of NLP techniques in learning a foreign language. Different materials could be provided for teachers as well as learners in which the usefulness of NLP techniques is highlighted. In doing so, material developers are encouraged to include content in course materials so, that the teachers and learners get familiar with the concept of NLP in an efficient and effective way through reading and listening materials. This, in the long run, is likely to help EFL teachers become more reflective practitioners as a result of which more learning will take place on the side of learners.

To conclude, the researchers suggest the following issues for further studies in line with NLP and reflective teaching:

- The participants of the present study were 30 female Iranian EFL teachers. A similar study can be conducted with male teachers to investigate the role of gender in terms of the variables under study.
- Age, years of experience, academic degree, and field of study were not the focus of the current study. Similar studies can be carried out investigating the role of these variables on the possible effect of NLP techniques on reflective teaching.
- Many different variables such as cultural background, social environment, attitude, and beliefs may have affected the results of this study; hence, further studies could take these factors into account.
- In the present study, the perspectives of the teachers were not explored. Adopting a mixed-methods design, other researchers can take the attitudes of the teachers into account concerning the effectiveness of NLP techniques.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Hamid Marashi is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Islamic Azad University at Central Tehran and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Language and Translation*. He currently teaches graduate and postgraduate courses with his main areas of research interest, including Learner/Teacher Variables, Cooperative Learning, and TBLT. He has published in International academic Journals and also presented in International Conferences.



Marzieh Abedi holds an MA in TEFL from Islamic Azad University at Central Tehran. She has been teaching English at different language schools in Tehran and is currently a supervisor and teacher trainer in one of these schools. Her main area of research interest is Teacher Education.

