

**TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS ON CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN EFL CLASSROOM:
KOTEBE METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY IN FOCUS**

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' critical incidents of their classroom lives. Theoretically, the study is underpinned by insights from reflective practice, and experiential and transformative learning, and embraced a narrative enquiry that falls within the qualitative approach of interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected using participants' reflective journals from four EFL teachers who recorded written descriptions of critical incidents. Convenient sampling was used to select the participants in this research. Themes were selected based on their representativeness of ideas, uniqueness of thought and clarity of the information. Results have indicated that teachers have worst experience during a lesson. The results have also showed that such self-reflections of teachers upon their critical incidents appeared to be helpful to them to analyze and evaluate their teaching process. Based on the findings, a need for guiding EFL teachers' professional awareness as part of their reflection practices was identified.*

KEYWORDS: critical incidents, foreign language, teacher's reflection

INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, a country in the horn of Africa, English serves as a medium of instruction starting from grade 7 and is given as a subject on its own starting from preprimary education. There are also about 45 public universities in the country most of which, among others, have English Language Departments through which they train students to serve as English Language Teachers in the country's school system at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Kotebe Metropolitan University is one of the higher education institutes that is believed to be a pioneer in teacher education for over 70 years. In this University, The Department of English under the Faculty of Languages and Humanities offers trainings for young students who, among others are, expected to be teachers in junior and even senior secondary schools. In order to arm

these young students with the necessary pedagogic skills, the university always attempts to give its staff trainings on continuous professional development through the Higher Diploma program that lasts for almost a year. One of the central points of this training is on how to enable teachers to be reflective practitioners.

Barkunzen (2013), and Brookfield (1990) argue that for university professors to breathe life and relevance on to their professional careers they must engage in lifelong learning. Spalding and Wilson (2002) argue the pivotal role which continuous reflective practice is believed to play, and Farrell (2008) considers reflective practice as the hall mark of professional competence for teachers. Reflection has been studied through different angles by different scholars. As an instance, a study by Permatasari (2018) about critical incidents in Action focuses on microteaching, which comprised of five sections: topic, planning, action, observation and reflection.

Moreover, the action research was made before and after conducting each mini teaching. Twelve Action Research Teaching Journals were collected from four student-teachers who had taken the Microteaching course. The analysis of the data shows that there were four prominent themes that emerged from this study: course delivery problems, students' participation, language proficiency problems, and course preparation. The paper ends with some recommendations for improvements in Microteaching course.

Another researcher from University of Delhi, Khandelwal (2009), has conducted research on critical incidents. The research was conducted in University of Delhi with sixty participants and resulted in 237 critical incidents which were sorted into six categories. Those "six categories were rapport with students, course preparation and delivery, encouragement, fairness, time spent with students outside of class, and control".

In addition, Mohammed (2016) conducted a 'self-reflection' approach in which he examined how the critical incidents helped him to develop his professional judgments and practices and found out that there were mismatch between the educator's expectations, research, and the reality which happened in the teaching environment. Some studies have addressed the nature of reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Some have probed into the relationship between reflection and students' achievement (Soodmand & Donyaie, 2019); still others have been concerned with the reflection on improving teaching quality (Farrell, 2010; Fatemipour & Hosseingholi Khani, 2014).

The effects reflection might have on individuals' beliefs (Farrell, 1999, 2006; Sykes, 2011) have also been examined. Finally, some studies have targeted reflection instruction and its effects on

promoting reflective practice (Russell,2005; Wach and Mickiewicz, 2015). It is in the last category that studies on critical incidents mostly fall. However, the positive role of reflective practice instruction, specifically the use of critical incident, has mainly remained at the level of speculation, and few empirical studies in EFL teacher training have targeted the use of ‘bumpy moments’ to use the expression of Romano (2006) as a stimulus for capturing reflection as university instructors experience problematic episodes and are asked to recall their reflections on those moments. The researcher feels that this review of previously conducted research works on critical incident offers a synopsis of the current knowledge on the topic.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching is a dynamic profession that always calls for the role of the teacher to be also a learner. Such dynamism requires teacher trainers or educators to be lifelong learners for which engaging in reflection is quite critical. When teachers step into the classroom, they are met with an array of challenges and complexities of practice (Calandra, Brantley-Dias & McNeal, 2007).

As pointed out above, one of the varied roles of teacher trainers or teacher educators is to produce would be teachers who are armed with all the necessary knowledge , experience and all the necessary sophistications that would enable them to become “the best kinds of teachers” (Underhill, 1986). From this one can infer that contemporary teaching is not a mere transmission of knowledge in which the teacher is regarded to be a superior vantage from whom knowledge emanates. Rather it includes equipping novice teachers with experiences that will help them become reflective teachers for the rest of their careers. In this respect, thus, according to Lengeling (2010), uncovering critical incidents can be one of the many ways to facilitate teachers to become more reflective and analytical. Yet, in many educational contexts of our country, Ethiopia, this seems to have been an issue left scantily researched. It is this rift in empirical investigation on critical incidents as a stepping stone to reflective teaching practice and professional development that prompted this study. Therefore, the researcher aimed at identifying and analyzing EFL teachers’ critical incidents and their reflections on their professional experience. Thus, this study attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. What are some of the prominent critical incidents that EFL teachers mostly come across?
2. What are their reflections on these critical incidents?
3. What are the surrounding conditions and emotional responses that accompanied their reflections regarding their worst lesson experience?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study derives its theoretical assumptions for its literature review and the methods and analysis of it from two theoretical underpinnings known as experiential and transformative learning frames.

I am of a view that experiential learning is suitable for this particular study for it assumes learning from problem and inquiry perspectives. According to Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, (2016) experiential learning whose roots are from the works of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Korb lays emphasis on reflective practice based on one's lived experiences and knowledge that is constructed thereof. The implication here is that experiential learning takes the ability to reflect on experiences as a means of shifting, confirming, creating and rejecting previously held assumptions as its core target. Substantiating this claim Girvan et al (2016:30) state that experiential learning facilitates professional development as it is an approach that "can motivate teachers to try new practices and make desired changes to the curriculum a practical reality". This implies that the proponents of experiential learning consider it as a transformative strategy in which teachers engage in reflective practice based on their classroom related experiences to construct and co-construct knowledge with their colleagues concerning their high and low performances (Marlow & McLain, 2011).

The other theoretical orientation which this research has adopted as its theoretical framework is transformative learning. According to Darling Hammond (2008:95) it is a theoretical orientation which believes that professional development has its roots in experience which in turn allows the teacher to "practice...question, analyze and [accept] criticism." This shows that transformative learning includes range of things from knowledge construction based on existing dilemmas to making revisions and giving solutions to the problems identified. Transformative learning has its theoretical foundations in the epistemology of constructivism whose core argument is that problems are solved when one is enabled to have access to multiple ways of resolution rooted in the context in which it prevails. Further augmenting this claim Mezirow (2013:14) defines transformative learning as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative context". From the whole argument it can be concluded that genuine transformation happens when teachers are able to construct knowledge from experiences that become real as a result of their reflective engagement on their action and it is based on this fact that I held transformative learning as suitable theoretical framework for this particular research.

PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Reflective teaching applied in the classroom is an imperative interpretation of how language education may improve. Reflective teaching or becoming critical of oneself has gained importance in the professional practice of English language teachers as a result of the benefits it can have on teaching practices and on teachers' professional life. Dewey introduced the term reflective teaching in 1933; he considered it to be

an active and deliberative cognitive process that involves sequences of interconnected ideas that takes into account underlying beliefs and knowledge. School's actions became routine and needed to change. Reflection is considered as a thinking process, resulting in creating alternatives of teaching. He further stated that teachers who are unreflecting about their teaching often uncritically accept this everyday reality in their schools and concentrate their efforts on finding the most effective and efficient means to solve problems. (As cited in Pedro, 2006:30)

The idea here is that teachers need reflection not only to change their everyday routines within a classroom, but also to realize what problems are arising and become the current beliefs of language teachers. It is common to recognize that teachers tend to implement routinized teaching methods, perhaps because of their teaching beliefs or lack of professional development.

Dewey's theory would allow us to understand that this process of reflection is not an easy one. Being reflective requires an understanding of why certain actions appear in the way teachers teach, where knowledge-based foundations come from, their language skills, and the will to change. It means that reflection should involve more than a simple reflective session or training. It is suggested that teachers be able to accept and consider other current teaching ideas which can be found by reading recent research reports or by participating in any professional development program. Zalipour (2015:4) writes:

Reflective practice for teaching is for those teachers who are disposed to think about their teaching practices, and are willing to put reflective practice into action. Reflective practice challenges teachers who have unquestioned assumptions about good teaching, and encourages them to examine themselves and their practices in the interest of continuous improvement.

This implies teachers' commitment to study their teaching practices, to make changes based on weaknesses and develop action plans and as a result to improve the quality of their instruction. Bringing this idea fully on board Impedovo and Khatoun Malik (2016:102) stated that

To be a reflective practitioner, a teacher can implement different strategies. They could, for example, analyze and question happenings within the teaching-learning context; show consideration for feelings and behaviors; keep a regular or daily record of significant

events; share stories about students' learning; ask colleagues and students' families for their insights; or read professional literature to learn more about changing the environment and materials to support students' learning.

Zalipour (2015) and Impedovo and Khatoon Malik (2016) agree that reflection is a process of rethinking and analyzing certain actions in class so students and teachers reach their teaching and learning objectives. These contributions are similar to Dewey's definition.

Additionally, MacKinnon's reflective cycle, which consisted of three phases: initial problem setting, reframing, and resolution (as cited in Tairab, 2003:3), was derived from Schön's (1987) conception of reflection: framing and reframing. The previous contributions on reflective teaching enable teachers to analyze their actions in the sense of providing outcomes. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2010:42) argued: "for reflection on teaching and learning to be effective, it has to be systematic and public (making one's teaching and work accessible for critical peer review and use)". It means the incorporation of reflection has to be a daily process, a vital part of the English language teaching profession to see effective changes in the classroom. Further, Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi stated that "trainers have the important task of educating themselves in depth about reflection and reflective teaching, which should have positive implications for their trainees' performance" .

In the Ethiopian context reflective teaching appears as the ability to think about the teaching performance in the classroom. Trujillo (2015:29) contends that it is not only to reflect about the everyday doing as a teacher that helps professionalism, but rather when a teacher makes a decision and implements the same that lays the foundation for improvement in teaching and a promotion in students' learning. At this point, it is necessary to add that reflection has been contemplated in the national context as a way to create a learning environment to motivate teachers not only to examine their classroom performance, but also to foster their research practices. In addition to this, supporting teachers by professional development programs is an open door for the improvement of English language teaching and learning in Ethiopia. Reflective teaching, by international researchers, has been considered as an essential component of teaching and learning a language. According to Ahmad et al. (2013:73), "reflectivity is one of the characteristics of effective teachers". In that sense, reflection encourages language teachers to be more competent because they develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that play a vital role in the effectiveness of language education.

WHAT IS CRITICAL INCIDENT?

Flanagan (1954) is said to be a pioneer in coining the term critical incident in his research on aviation psychology. Critical incidents are found in diverse disciplines such as psychology,

management, medicine, social work, communication, and education, to name a few. In ELT, they can be found in cultural studies (Stakhnevich, 2002), language learning (Finch, 2010), teacher education (Farrell, 2008, 2013; Johnson, 2003) and teacher training (Farrell, 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2005)

This keyword, critical incident, has been defined by different scholars from different perspectives. According to Measor's (1985:61-62) critical incidents are "key events in an individual's life, and around which pivotal decisions revolve". These events trigger the practitioner to take note of their relations and find a means to determine their implications to classroom practice in shaping their identity. Underhill (1986) posits that such moments can impact the practitioner positively or negatively which in turn might trigger a change or further reflection.

From ELT's perspective Farrell (2008:3) regards critical incident as "any unplanned event that occurs during class ...if teachers formally reflect on these critical incidents, it may be possible for them to uncover new understandings of the teaching learning process .“The implication is that critical incidents can be summarized as the unplanned events happening in the classroom that require the teachers to alter the lesson plans in order to cope with the incidents and make the learning practices work. This argument clearly indicates that though critical incidents are not always intentional, they can lead to reflection which, in turn, results in the construction of understanding and meaning.

Nowadays it has become a point of focus how noticing past critical incidents is useful for learners to recognize the important role of reflection on past events in the due course of the learning process. In this respect there are several research based evidences by scholars like Farrell (2008) whose reports on a study carried out in Singapore and how the critical incidents of 18 novice teachers in a teacher education program were analyzed. In several contemporary literatures such as Farrell (2015) Richards & Farrell (2005), one can find several evidences on how to employ critical incidents as means for professional development and teacher training.

ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE NATURE, CAUSES AND MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The crucial role critical incidents play in teachers' professional development has been documented in several literatures (Farrell 2015, Richards & Farrell 2005). However, these writers equally note that if such analysis of one's performance based on critical incidents is to bear fruit in making an improvement on his/her teaching practice, understanding the nature of critical incidents, their root causes and the way they should be managed is to be given due prominence.

According to Impedovo and Khatoun Malik (2016:102), the most common root causes underlying critical incidents in most EFL classroom situations are related to classroom management issues, students' errors related to knowledge or task verification and execution and issues related to student's and teacher's behaviors. This argument entails the need to manage such incidents through effective reflection that binds theory with practice. As an instance, Banoobhai (2012) Goodell,(2006); Kilgoure, Northcote, & Herman (2015) have argued that one key element that teachers should adopt in drawing a lesson and help themselves solve the problems they have identified is through such an integration of theory and practice. The implication here is that if at all teachers are to develop professionally, identifying causes for their low and high performances in their classroom engagements through self reflection that integrates theory with practice are quite crucial.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted a narrative enquiry that falls within the qualitative approach. The reason was that the study's focus was on the lived experiences of teachers in their academic, and mainly in their classroom lives. Substantiating this argument Clandinin and Connelly (2000:20) write, "narrative enquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus." Webster and Metrova (2007:13-14) are also of the view that:

Narrative enquiry is human centered and it captures and analyses life stories .In so doing it has the ability to document critical life events in illuminating detail, and yet also reveal holistic views, qualities that give valuable potential for research. Stories are reflections of the fact that experience is a matter of growth, and that understandings are continually developed, reshaped and retold, often informally.

From Webster's argument, one can adduce evidence that narrative enquiry has a relationship to critical incidents due to how these "life events" relate to professional growth and meaning making events. It is because of such a fit for purpose of the narrative enquiry that Webster and Metrova (2007:10) strongly recommend the use of narrative enquiry calling it "...it is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning."

The whole argument here implies that critical incident is a tool for the teachers to perform self-reflection effort and narrative enquiry is a means of uncovering it.

Participants

Data were collected from journals of four participants; all of them were Assistant professors and above with over a decade of teaching experience at different levels. By the time this study was being conducted, all of them were teaching English at Kotebe Metropolitan University. The selection criterion for these professors was their being volunteers to participate in the study and to share their critical incidents from their diaries. These four participants were three males and one female.

Data gathering Instruments

Writing is important in different authors' view such as Vygotsky as to whom a written speech is a self reviewing structure of thought (Vygotsky, 1962). Jalongo (1991) also argues that the stories of individuals recorded in a self reviewing way are more than interesting anecdotes, but rather reflections of professional perspectives, priorities and practices.

The research participants were asked to write reflective journals concerning their reflections of different aspects of teaching such as their high and low incidents in their classroom teaching performance, their relationship with their students and as a whole their classroom lives. These prompts were given by the researcher at the beginning of the semester as suggestions but the participants were also told that they could write about other topics if they wanted to. During the due course other topics were brought up as entries for journals.

The participants wrote one journal entry per week during a semester, thus resulting in six entries in English. The researcher collected the journals in the middle and at the end of the semester. From the journal entries a number of critical incidents were identified as well as critical reflections concerning those critical incidents.

The participants presented for the researcher to use their journals and number coding were used in order to protect the participant's identities.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once the researcher identified the critical incidents from the journal entries, he went on coding and analyzing the teachers' responses using constant comparative method following (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The participating teachers, for the sake of anonymity, have been coded as Teacher 001...Teacher 002 etc.

In making the narrative analysis the researcher employed paradigmatic cognition which according to Polkinhorne (1995:9) is "classifying a particular instance as belonging to a

category or concept.”I looked for similarities in data to determine the characteristics of their most concerned memories of their most teaching experiences to date and their perceptions of their reasons behind these problematic moments. These responses formed the basis for coding into categories and themes. Part of this process involved analyzing the responses to the point where individual ‘stand alone’ incidents could be identified and placed in to themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, using this method provides findings that both describe the critical incidents and help to explain them which align with the research intention and the research questions raised here in this study. Furthermore, the description of the constant comparative method described by Tylor and Bogdan (1984:126) indicates the value of this approach to this particular study:

.....in the constant comparative method, the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data in order to develop concepts ;by continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties ,explores their relationships to one another , and integrates them into coherent explanatory model.

Within this section, four major categories emerged from the journal data and they are: (1) teacher’s no man’s land position (2) differences between teachers’ and teaching materials intentions and learner’s expectations (3) problems associated with grouping students (4) dealing with ill disciplined students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of the findings under the themes identified in the journals.

TEACHER’S NO MAN’S LAND POSITION

It is documented in different literature that teachers have to deal with many aspects when entering classes and one of them is accommodating learners as per their unique features (Wallace, 1991; Kumaravadivelu,2001; Akbari,2007).A few of the research participants explained how they found themselves in ambivalent conditions while teaching a group of students in which learners with disabilities constituted the vast majority of the class. In the following excerpt Teacher 001 narrates how such an EFL classroom left him puzzled as to what to do. He narrated the whole story as is quoted below:

It was almost in the same year I was employed in university for teaching English literature. It was tough because I was assigned to teach sign language students. I knew the hell I was, if I didn't. While I was striding to class, I was thinking so what

I had to do- a little bit immersed in situations like how to address the lesson. It was like waking up from my day dream, when I was almost close to the classroom. I had been trying to catch up on some points before getting into class. Something left unanswered, the "delivery". So, I mumbled a rather unenthusiastic and returned to my department's coordinator in media res. I said to him, "Hello! where is the interpreter?" to which I was wondered with a chirpy, he told me, "The interpreter is on the process of recruitment". He was not even sure about how to help the students. I decided and went back at least to see the students. I entered class and some of the students gazed at me, and some others turned at the other side of a window- where there was a noisy disturbance. I said, "good morning" in a modest attempt. Only few students from a total of 25 or 26 students replied to my chilly morning greetings. Those were visually impaired students. I asked those students how to help those stayed behind. They informed me that I had to write on the black board. The rest students were with other form of disabilities. I wrote, "Good morning" twisting to my left side. I saw hands tagged to shoulders. Here was the climax point of my confusion. I wrote again, "I will be back with my interpreter". I saw hands waving. That was to me good bye and I left the class. Later I learnt waving of the hands was clapping or like cheering up with me, and I departed with my false smiling face. Lastly, I knew I had to walk every step with the interpreter. I enjoyed the class and it looked good.

From the above narrative, one can safely say that this teacher (teacher 001) noticed a huge aspect of the challenges of foreign language teaching which he may never have had the opportunity to observe in a different situation. The participant here felt that the activities or the topics of the lessons that he had already prepared would interest the students. However, no matter how the lesson might be as interesting as anything, unless the mode of delivery is so much inclusive of the heterogeneity of students the whole endeavor would remain to be a futile exercise. Of course there are many aspects which make the students seem not to be interested in the course. As stated by Fu, Yang, and Xuesong (2012:155) there are “many factors related to the student’s participation in the classroom such as the classroom’s situation, students’ motivation, student’s interest, hunger, conduciveness of *the mode of delivery for all types of students* etc”(Italics added). It is this lack of conducive and inclusive mode of delivery coupled with some of the unpredictable situations in the classroom that affected everything the teachers had prepared before.

In a class of heterogeneity unless the teacher knows how to accommodate learners with varied interests, abilities and physical makeup, the teacher might end up in creating downright hostility on those marginalized groups in one way or the other (Wallace 1991). The following

excerpt from T002 further substantiates this claim.

It was in 2018/19 Academic year. I was assigned to teach a writing course called Advanced Writing Skills for third year Extension students. It was a large class of 80 students. There were roughly, though I do not remember the exact number, about 12-15 students who were either deaf or blind. As a teacher, frankly speaking, I did not give the due attention to them nor my other colleagues did so as the students later told me. In the final exam it was almost these students who scored an "F" grade. Later on, I realized that what we committed was a heinous crime against humanity in that, my colleagues, myself and the university did not do anything to help these students by at least exerting the minimum effort expected of us. That incident gave me a window of opportunity to look in to my practice and to improve a lot on my classroom behavior over such issues in pedagogy.

This evidence might give us instance the extent to which most teachers lack the skill to accommodate heterogeneity as a result of which our students with diverse needs and wants are cursed to suffer. Nonetheless, the excerpt also equally verifies the role of critical incidents in redressing deficiencies by analyzing prior performances.

As early as early 1970s, authors like Brooke (2014) pointed out that the foreign language problem was as much a problem of pedagogy as it was a learning difficulty. In recent years, teaching a foreign language to students with language learning disabilities has been called the "ultimate foreign language challenge" (DiFino and Lombardino, 2004). The reason has to do with the ways in which instruction of second language learners and of children with language learning difficulties are handled in schools. Although alternative multi-sensory approaches such as the Orton Gillingham method, from Alpha to Omega, the Hickey method, and the LCDH all relate to teaching learning-disabled students how to decode, and research has shown that students with learning disabilities learn how to decode by using a multi-sensory approaches (Goulandris, 2003), learning disability experts are rarely prepared to teach foreign language and foreign language instructors are rarely prepared to address the problems that are associated with learning disabilities. Hence, according to this respondent (Teacher001) foreign language instructors often have difficulty teaching those learning-disabled students who are in their classrooms. As DiFino and Lombardino, (2004:391) write, "an enormous void exists in this area particularly with respect to the development of alternative methodologies for facilitating the success of students with learning disabilities in learning an L2."

In his narration this teacher pointed out that this opportunity gave him an advantage of understanding the fact that to effectively conduct teaching learning in a class having knowledge and skill about the language is not satisfactory on its own right. As to him this critical moment gave him an opportunity to understand the fact that in present day English classrooms where heterogeneity is their main feature, a teacher has to arm himself with all the necessary pedagogical skills to be the champion of a trainer of English as a Foreign Language. It is equally indicative of the fact that in contemporary English classrooms where learners with physical disabilities exist, the need for EFL teachers to work hand in glove with other subject area specialists such as Special Needs Educators is quite vital.

DISPARITIES BETWEEN TEACHERS AND TEACHING MATERIALS INTENTIONS AND LEARNER'S INTERPRETATIONS

Contemporary writers such as Kumaravadelevu (2004) assert that one of the danger signals which EFL teachers should usually be careful about is that the presence of a disparity between learner's intentions and teachers' and materials' expectations. If such malignancy is not identified by the teachers, according to Kumaravadelevu, it will lead them to downright hostility and lose of sight as to the objective of the lesson. The excerpt below shows a critical incident of a teacher who is coded as T004:

The very first time, the course I was assigned to teach was College English which was a text came in to use just for the first time after written by a panel of English Language Education experts. That text was mainly designed on a theoretical assumption that tertiary level students if at all they have to cope with the challenges of the academics, they need to be very much independent learners in which they have to take their own lecture notes in their class of lecture, they have to make their own notes from their further readings to supplement further what they have been taught.....The puzzle, however, was that the English text books with which the freshmen students learnt the language in their high school were abundantly grammar based lessons including the then ESLCE, English exam which the students had to take as an entrance examination to a university. Thus, my colleagues and I who were almost fresh graduates of a university ourselves had to confront this challenge.

In the above excerpt these teacher 004 mentions: 'I remember that there was role confusion between what I was expected to do and what my students were supposed to do'. This teacher thanks to this very critical moment, he claims' that he learnt a lot on how to handle students from a different context. As to him, this incident gave him an opportunity to read a lot on roles of students and teachers in EFL classrooms in different approaches which finally resulted in picking

the same topic for conducting a full-fledged research on the roles of students and teachers in Communicative Language Teaching Approach in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

This short excerpt taken from T003 also substantiates the foregone claim of T004. He laments:

When I was assigned to teach a course called College English II for freshman students, the first thing I asked them was to tell me as to how they found their previous course called College English I which was a prerequisite to take this second course. Both books were designed based on the principle of Communicative Approach in which Grammar was not the center as it used to be but rather a vehicle. The responses of the majority of the students to my question was a bit shocking in that they all complained on their previous course instructor calling her “incapable for she failed to teach them Grammar like their good high school teachers.” The surprising thing was that the teacher was an acclaimed one for her ability as English Language teacher in the department with, by then, over a decade of teaching experience at tertiary level.

This and so many other unrecorded stories of English language teachers are interesting anecdotes that imply the daunting challenges that EFL teachers undergo through on their daily classroom routines. This same teacher drawing his own conclusion out of this critical moment says that the incident gave him a window of opportunity to understand the need for being in the same boat at first with the students by dealing effectively with the objective of the course and the objectives of each section of the material at hand. The argument of this teacher correlates fairly well with what Trip (1993:45) calls it “setting the agenda of the lesson and building mutual understanding over the objectives of it including what to do?, how to do it? and why?.

TEACHER’S CRITICAL INCIDENT ABOUT GROUPING STUDENTS

Group work can be an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning, and develop key critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills. But without careful planning and facilitation, group work can frustrate students and instructors and feel like a waste of time. (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 2006).

Silberman (1996) posits that for some group tasks, the diversity within a group (e.g., gender, ethnicity, level of preparation) is especially important, and a teacher might want to assign students to group themselves before class. In this respect this author advises that a teacher has to collect a data card from each student on the first day of class to glean important information about their backgrounds, knowledge, and interests. Alternately, he suggests that a teacher can

also ask students to express a preference (e.g., list three students with whom they would most like to work or two topics they would most like to study), and keep their preferences in mind as he/she assigns them in groups.

The critical incident which one of the female teachers describes below seems to have emanated from lack of such a theoretical foundation, for she was a fresh teacher assigned to teach English language in high school as a fresh graduate.

The first critical episode occurred while I was a fresh English teacher twelve years ago. I asked the students to group themselves in order for us to undertake the required classroom activities. It was a medium size class. If I remember correct, I think there were 40 students in the classroom. I asked them to group them in to six. The students grouped themselves in to eight and one student was sitting alone. I asked why they were grouping themselves in such a way and why one of the students did not join any one of the groups. The students answered "there is no one from my village. I do not know them and they do not know me. Hence, they refused to let me in their group." I was shocked. I asked each member of the group and they came from the same area. The shocking part of the story was that all of these students came from the same ethnic group- Amhara and the same district Gojjam. The students were splitting themselves and reducing their identity down to the levels of villages. (Teacher, 002).

According to this teacher's view, this episode, she writes, gave her an opportunity in opening her eyes to go beyond the classroom and take in to account other demographic features of learners as this might be one source of challenge in impacting group formation. The following excerpt from this same teacher seems to have brought the whole idea fully on board.

I was challenged and I lectured about diversity and how diverse our country is. I tried to convince the students that they should allow diversified groups in to their lives and be part of the plural society in the world. I managed to get the students from groups that includes students from all the villages and mixed them up. (Teacher 002).

At first this teacher did not have a clear picture as to what to do and as she herself mentioned even it was shocking. However, the incident itself gave her a window of opportunity to read more on the challenges of group work one of which emanates from the beliefs of the student about group work. As she finally confirmed, this episode was much helpful in giving her an opportunity to become considerate of managing diversity as the following excerpt from her

journal indicates “I was able to convince the students to welcome diversity of ethnic groups, sex and age which was available. I was able to handle the mixed group throughout the semester.”

Teacher 003 does not remember when it happened, but he remembers that it was after he received his MA degree. By then this teacher had to deal with a student with flamboyant behavior.

It is documented in several contemporary literature that one of the mounting challenges of teachers in contemporary classrooms is managing students’ behavior (Brookfield, 1990; James 2001; Measor, 1985). Such ups and downs in calming the talkative and encouraging the dormant seem to have taken the lion’s share of teachers’ time of reflection (Finch, 2010; Farrell, 2015)

I was offering a course ‘Theories of Communication’ for extension degree students. There were about three students who would often come to class very late. One day I asked one of them why he often came late. He told me that he was a member of parliament and he was usually busy. Apart from coming late the student began to be absent from class despite my cautionary advice. He even began calling me that he was missing classes for he had to attend class at the prime minister’s office. I felt I was harassed. I collected assignments, marked and gave feedback. His name was not in any of the groups. Even in another occasion I caught the student with a plagiarized paper and this gave me even further legal ground to give him an F.

From the aforementioned incident, one can refer to the thinking about what could have happened instead of what did happen. The students act of harassment (as the teacher felt) made the teacher to assess why the students were frequently absent from the class. In the media res, one of the students shows that he boosted up so that he could get a better view of his teacher.

As Hillier (2005) cited in Beijgi (2016) states sometimes when students are asked questions related to their undesired classroom behavior, there is a possibility that students’ answer might not be in regard to the issue. In this case, alternative way of understanding students’ problem is crucial. To this effect, the teacher used assessment as a means to identify the learning difficulty of the students. It seems that the teacher could have advised the student or given any remedial assistance but he claims that this incident, in his words, taught him the need to have integrity in one’s profession no matter how dreary and life threatening situations might seem.

CONCLUSIONS

From the whole discussions, it could be inferred that each individual teacher has a different and yet fascinating stories to reflect. Almost all the teachers have said that their reflections on their

experiences and critical incidents have played a magnificent role in shaping their perceptions and attitudes at a given time in their classroom lives or otherwise.

Based on what have been learnt from this research and from my experience, I can recommend the use of critical incidents to teacher educators, perhaps by showing what critical incidents are to be followed as elicitation of experiences that students may have had as teachers or people.

From conducting this small scale research, I have come to be convinced of the use of critical incidents within our teacher training program apart from making part and parcel of our own daily practice as teachers. Such outstanding moments can give us spaces for reflection and make the necessary response to mounting problems as they may be appearing on our path toward teacher development.

The implications one can draw from the whole findings is that as teachers who faced critical incidents, teachers' development can be gained through "individual, one-to-one, group-based or institutional" activities (Richards and Farrell, 2005:14). It is a process interconnected with the past and the present. However, one area that the researcher identified still as a gap having carried out this research is that after teachers experienced critical incidents, they mostly do not share their experience to the others so that other teachers can learn from them. The absence of such a practice retards professional development. Thus, studying the reasons behind for such a failure on the part of teachers seems to be highly important.

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