

Full Length Research Paper

Reflective Practice: A Strategy for Improving the Teaching of Economics in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

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Abstract

Reflective practice is a vital component of any teacher education programme. Unfortunately, in Ghana, relatively little attention is devoted to the training of Economics teachers on how to engage in reflective practice. The paper therefore proposes strategies that are aimed at improving the teaching of Economics through reflective practice. The paper starts by looking at the conceptual perspectives of reflective practice. The nature of any subject determines its pedagogical approaches and strategies. The paper reviews the nature of Economics and how it is taught. Again, three rubrics, namely the Economics teachers' professional knowledge, values and skills which are reflected in the teachers' cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains have been discussed. The paper proposes that, the Economics teacher should periodically reflect on selected indicators in each of these three rubrics as a way of improving the teaching of Economics in the Senior High Schools of Ghana. The paper further recommends that periodic engagement in action research could foster reflective practices among Economics teachers in Ghana

Key Words: Reflective practice, Economics teacher, Strategies, Senior High Schools

Introduction

There seems to be a consensus among researchers that the idea of reflective practice was first mooted by Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983). The conceptualization of reflective practice can, however, be attributed to the popular dictum of Socrates, which states that an unexamined life is not worth living. The most rudimentary interpretation of this dictum is that people who occasionally examine their lives, who think about where they have been, how they got there, and where they are going, are much happier and fulfilled than those who do not examine their lives. An examination of one's life entails critical thinking (*reflection*) in respect of past and present experiences and the possible need for adjustment. The idea of reflective practice is as old as creation. Dewey and Schon crystalized the philosophical view of Socrates, stimulating further discourse and research on reflective practice. Larrivee (2008) identifies four levels of reflection:

- Pre-reflection: represents the 'zero' level of reflection, in which teachers react to students and

classroom situations automatically, without conscious consideration of alternatives

- Surface reflection: teachers' reflections focus on strategies used to reach predetermined goals
- Pedagogical reflection: teachers reflect on educational goals, theories and underlying approaches and connections between theoretical principles and practice
- Critical reflection: teachers reflect on moral and ethical implications and consequences

Indeed, reflective practice is a way of looking back on an experience and making sense of it and to identify what to do in the future (Drew & Bingham, 2001; Farrell, 2007). Impliedly, the processes have to take place before, during and after the professional action (Vloet, 2009). Reflective practice is now considered as a core rubric of teachers' professional identity and competence (Richardson, 1990; Yidana & Lawal, 2015). It has now become a dominant paradigm in teacher education discourse (Zeichner, 1983).

Learning to teach, undoubtedly, involves the mastery of reflective practice in which teaching performance is integrated with thinking about teaching. Stated differently,

effective teaching is partly dependent on reflective practice (Dallat, 1995). Reflection, according to Dewey (1933), limits the impulsive nature of teaching and enables the teacher to act with intention and deliberation. Similarly, Larrivee (2000) argues that reflection is a continuous process of learning from experience. Teachers who engage in reflective practice tend to be life-long learners throughout their careers. Reflective practice is also helpful for teachers in identifying their weaknesses and strengths, thereby improving on their practice (Ahmed & Al-Khalili, 2013). Teachers who are able to use critical reflections to improve instruction are termed reflective practitioners (Impedovo & Malik, 2016).

Economics is taught in secondary schools throughout the world (Walstad, 1994). It is rarely taught in primary schools as a separate subject (Saunders, 1994). Even though Economic courses are offered in colleges and universities, many students end their formal education after secondary school (Hinshaw & Siegfried, 1991). Thus, the best opportunity for the Economic education of the youth of a nation occurs in secondary schools (Caropreso & Haggerty, 2000; Walstad, 2001). The teaching of Economics varies across countries. These differences occur because of history, the structure of the education system, and other factors such as culture (Walstad, 1994). But content is a common element in Economics education programmes in many countries (Kyung-Keun, 1994).

The civic and intellectual values associated with the teaching of Economics, was the motivating factor which influenced its introduction and acceptance into the Ghanaian school curriculum. At its budding stages in Ghana, the teaching of Economics was confined to only the sixth-forms ('A'-Level) of selected secondary schools. Currently, the subject is taught in almost all second cycle and tertiary educational institutions. In Ghana, the lecture, exposition and discussion techniques of imparting knowledge are predominantly used by Economics teachers to deliver their lessons. As opined by Dare (1995), instead of strictly adhering to the specifications of the syllabus, most of the Economics teachers select and teach content that enable their students to earn good grades in the final exams. The constructivist mode of instruction such as problem-based teaching, inquiry/discovery learning, collaborative learning, and inductive/deductive techniques, which foster critical thinking and reflection among Economics teachers and students, are often relegated to the background (Yidana, 2014; Lartey, 2016).

Several studies have been conducted with the Ghanaian educational system to explore the teaching or learning of Economics at the Senior High School level. Studies that focus on improving the teaching aspect mostly focus on issues such as effective teaching, instructional techniques and strategies, teacher efficacy, teacher competence, assessment practices, students' rating of Economics teachers', the Economics curriculum among many others. Conspicuously missing in such studies is the issue of reflective practice of the Economics teacher (Yidana, 2014). For example, Amosah (2016) investigated senior high school Economics students'

perception of the competency indicators of their teachers. She identified reflective practice as a limitation of her studies due to difficulties in measuring that construct in teachers. Ametepe (2015) examined the relationship between teacher related factors and students' performance in Economics, in selected senior high schools in the Ho Municipality of Ghana. In his catalogue of teacher related factors, Ametepe apparently overlooked the influence of teachers' reflective practice on students' performance in Economics, thereby omitting that variable. Quartey (2016) investigated the effectiveness of pre-service Economics teacher education programme of the university of Cape Coast in Ghana. He concludes that efforts be made to cultivate the habit of reflective practice in Economics teacher trainees. By implication, the current programme seems to give less attention to reflective practice.

Yaghr (2016) analysed the assessment and grading practices of senior high school Economics teachers in the Ashanti region of Ghana. As part of his recommendations, Yaghr proposed a number of strategies aimed at improving the Economics teachers' competence in test administration. However, he appeared to have downplayed the potential of reflective practice as a viable strategy that can tremendously improve test administration in Economics. Yeboah (2015) examined Economics teachers' perception of teaching as a profession. His conceptual framework of teacher professionalism was completely devoid of reflective practice and therefore lopsided. Further to this, in a survey of senior high schools in the central region of Ghana, Acquah (2010) investigated students' rating of Economics teachers' effectiveness. His rating scale equally ignored the issue of teachers' reflective practice as an indicator of effectiveness. Probably this was due to students' inability to gauge their Economics teachers' reflective practice. At least from the background account of the teaching, learning and research on Economics education in Ghana, it is quite evident that there is paucity of research interest in reflective practice. This paper is not only aimed at filling gaps in knowledge, but to also stimulate intellectual discourse among Economics teachers and teacher educators on the subject matter; *reflective practice*. Reflective practice is now considered as the *sine qua non* of teachers' professional development.

The paper therefore takes a look at the nature of Economics, its attributes and dimensions. It briefly reviews the concept of reflective practice and the educational benefits associated with it. Proposed strategies of reflective practice in the teaching of Economics are discussed. These strategies are segmented into three parts, namely the professional knowledge, values and skills aspects of the Economics teachers' competencies. The paper ends the discourse with recommendations on how to foster reflective practice among Economics teachers in Ghana.

The Nature of Economics

Economics is a social science that is concerned with the efficient use of limited resources to achieve the maximum satisfaction of human material wants. The scientific image includes being objective in contrast to subjective and dealing with facts in contrast to values. This desire to be scientific has resulted in the distinction between “positive” and “normative” Economics (Leightner, 1991). Positive Economics, supposedly, deals with the facts and what “is”, whereas normative Economics deals with values, morals, and “what ought to be” Positive and normative Economics complement each other.

Economics is an academic rather than a vocational subject but knowledge of it is valuable to business executives, consumers and workers (McConnell & Brue, 1998). Economic laws are conditional and are associated with a number of assumptions. These assumptions are often contained in the phrase; “other things remaining the same” or *ceteris paribus* which is often attached to every law and theory of Economics.

Economics is both descriptive and analytical. It is descriptive in the sense that the Economic structure of a country can be described, for example, its capital and labour markets, financial institutions, fiscal and monetary policies and so on. Economic performance can also be analyzed by breaking down the various sectors of the economy into various components so as to ascertain the contribution of each sector to the entire economy.

Associated with Economics are the inductive and deductive techniques of reasoning. In inductive reasoning, accumulated facts are arranged systematically and analyzed to derive the underlying principle. Once this principle is established, it is possible to make an informed prediction in respect of the behaviour of certain Economic variables. In other words, it creates principles from factual observations or goes from the particular to the general. Deductive reasoning, on the other hand, involves the formulation and testing of a hypothesis as well as a test for its validity. It normally starts with a premise from which deductions are made. Economic concepts are abstract in nature and it uses jargons unique to it (Munanga, 2013). Further, knowledge in Economics is cumulative and its concepts are standardized and highly inter-related. For example, if a student is not taught the individual demand, he or she might not readily understand the market demand and its relationship with the individual demand.

Economics is a model building science (Henderson, 1975). An Economic model is a simplified description of reality, designed to yield hypotheses about Economic behaviour that can be tested. An important feature of an Economic model is that it is necessarily subjective in design due to the fact that there are no subjective measures of Economic outcomes. Different Economist might make different judgement about what is needed to explain their interpretations of reality (Ouliaris, 2011). Economic modeling is at the heart of Economic theory. It provides a logical abstract template to help organize the analyst’s thoughts.

The multidimensional nature and attributes of Economics as a teaching subject, proposes certain pedagogical responses. The obvious response is the idea of reflective practice. Reflective practice entails the integration of theory and practice, as well as thought and action. When practitioners engage in reflective teaching, they demonstrate a capacity (or disposition) to analyze the process of what they are doing, reconstruct their professional and personal knowledge schemes, while simultaneously making judgement to adapt their practice so that it best matches the needs of students (Amakyi & Ampah-Mensah, 2014).

The Concept of Reflective Practice

Teaching is a complex and dilemma ridden endeavour, necessitating ongoing learning as well as the capacity to be reflective (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). Reflective practice is an active and careful consideration of the basic assumption and conclusion one holds in a direct experience that informs future actions (Whitton, Sinclair, Barker, Nanlohy & Nosworthy, 2004). The purpose of reflection is to improve future decision making in subsequent teaching practice (Titilayo & Uwameiye, 2012). This assertion is in tune with the opinion of Diezmann and Watters (2006) who claim that reflective practice is a means of ascertaining the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The aim of reflective practice is to think critically about oneself, one’s assumptions and one’s teaching choices and actions (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Many scholars view the development of reflective practice as the foundation for the highest professional competence (Jay, 2003; Osterman & Kottkamps, 2004). Teachers who become reflective about their work, come to know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what will happen as a result of what they do (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). Reflection should have the cycle of reflect, analyze, evaluate, learn and change (Scales, 2008). Reflective practice is valued in professional growth and successful teaching (Schon, 1987; Dewey, 1993). With respect to its importance, Brookfield (1995) highlights that reflective practice:

- allows us to consciously develop our own repertoire of strategies and techniques to draw upon in our teaching, which are relevant to our particular context and discipline,
- helps us take informed actions that can be justified and explained to others and that which we can use to generate answers to teaching problems,
- allows us to adjust and respond to issues and problems. For instance, rather than being devastated by a poor teaching evaluation, it allows us to investigate and understand what underlies these evaluations and to take appropriate actions, which might be adopted to adjust our teaching,
- helps to become aware of our underlying beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching so

we understand why we do what we do and what might need to change,

- helps to promote a positive learning environment. Through reflection, our teaching becomes responsive to student feedback and needs. This can help to build trust in students when they see that their feedback is valued and taken seriously through changes to teaching,
- helps us to locate our teaching in the broader institutional, social, and political context and to appreciate the many factors that influence student learning. In this way, reflection helps us to keep our perspectives and to avoid blaming ourselves for every problem that arises in our classrooms (Brookfield, 1995).

Proposed Strategies of Reflective Practice in the Teaching of Economics

Reflective teaching practices promote greater student achievement and success in the classroom. Other benefits from reflective teaching include; increases in confidence, autonomy, and self-efficacy for teachers (Lowery, 2002). Reflective teaching is an essential skill for teachers and is a powerful component of successful teaching (Goodell, 2000; Mewborn, 2002).

Research indicates that teacher reflection is a key aspect for obtaining teacher knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. There exists a stage in which teachers look back on the teaching and learning that has occurred as a means of making sense of their actions and learning from their experiences (Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987).

Wright (1992) is of the view that developing reflection as a feature of teachers' professional practice is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a means by which teachers can continue to review and adjust their pedagogical practices for their learners, so that their learners could attain positive learning outcomes. Secondly for teachers to critically examine ideas and practices in a wider educational sense, to judge their value. As Lewis (2010) rightly observes, "in a profession as challenging as teaching, honest self-reflection is key. This suggests that teachers need to regularly examine what has worked and has not in the classroom, despite how painful it can sometimes be to look in the mirror" (p.5). Thirdly, these reflective practices and processes are evaluative in a positive way, because they suggest openness and a professional duty in respect of the role of the teacher, rather than the role of the personal self, particularly, when as teachers, it can be difficult to separate the two. Finally, because 'teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural realities (Howard, 2003; p.195).

Reflection on Aspects of Economics Teachers' Professional Knowledge: Cognitive Competencies

Reflection is seen as a process of reconstructing classroom enactments, including both cognitive and

affective dimensions that involve a developmental progression through stages (Lowery, 2003). Lawal (2006, 2011) is of the opinion that ideally, teachers, irrespective of their subject specialization, should reflect on their cognitive, affective and psychomotor competencies. Through reflective practice, Economics teachers could acquire skills in determining the value of instructional strategies, in assessing students' Economic understanding, and in developing curricular knowledge (Yidana, 2014). Consequently, this paper discusses aspects of these competencies in which the Senior High School Economics teacher could periodically reflect on, as a strategy of improving the teaching of the subject.

Professional Economics teachers could periodically reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the content knowledge of the subjects they teach. In the opinion of Shulman (1987), teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. He claims that this kind of understanding provides a foundation for pedagogical content knowledge that enables teachers to make ideas accessible to others. These include reviewing, reconstructing, reenacting and critically analyzing one's own teaching abilities and then grouping these reflected explanations into evidence of changes that need to be made to become a better teacher.

Walkington (2005) posits that the formation of teacher identity is assisted by the process of 'reflection on action'. Reflective teaching demands that teachers are subject conscious as well as standard conscious because it promotes the individual as responsible for identifying subject content deficiencies and, through the act of reflection and being autonomous, take steps to address such deficiencies (Minott, 2006). Economics teachers who reflect on their strengths and weaknesses become aware of and control their teaching by actively assessing what they already know, what they need to know and how to bridge that gap.

Professional Economics teachers ought to occasionally reflect on their knowledge of the weaknesses, strengths and interests of students put under their care. Teachers should be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different learners and must have the knowledge to work with their students who have specific learning disabilities or needs (Shulman, 1992; Turner-Bisset, 1999). The outcome of teachers' informal diagnoses of students' strengths and weaknesses give direction to the choice of appropriate instructional techniques and strategies that will enhance learning. For example, the theory of consumer behaviour is generally perceived by most students as too abstract and complex (Yidana, 2007). This reflects students' weakness in assimilating knowledge associated with this particular topic. Therefore teacher reflection on his knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of learning certain aspects of Economic content should help in addressing deficiencies associated with instructional delivery or pacing.

Quality teaching has been considered as teaching that maximizes learning for all students. By implication quality Economics teachers should not only master the basic skills of teaching the subject, but should periodically reflect

on their knowledge of students' strengths, weaknesses and interest thereby making the necessary adjustment to facilitate maximum learning by all students.

Professional teaching principles require that the Economics teacher should occasionally reflect on his or her knowledge of psychological factors such as motivation that influence students' learning of the subject. The Economics teacher is also required to periodically reflect on his knowledge of the principles of teaching and learning as they relate to Economics. Students have different levels of motivation, different attitudes towards teaching and learning, and different responses to specific classroom environment and instructional practices. The more thoroughly teachers understand the differences, the better chance they have of meeting the diverse learning needs of all their students (Felder & Brent, 2005).

The Economics teacher could periodically reflect on their knowledge of current trends and developments in the teaching and learning of the subject. The current trends associated with the teaching of Economics are the learner-centered approaches. A learner-centered environment is derived from a theory of learning called constructivism. The Economics teacher should, therefore, reflect on his/her knowledge of instructional approaches that fall within the purview of the constructivist model of teaching the subject. Becker and Watts (1995) recommend games and simulation, experimental Economics and classroom activities, writing assignments and Economics in literature and drama as some of the approaches to be adopted. Abdulla (2006) is of the view that a changing world requires a changing mode of education. Therefore, the Economics teachers' approach to teaching should reflect current trends and developments in teaching the subject.

The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to teach Economics is another student-centered innovation which is consistent with the constructivist model of instruction. ICT's are exerting impacts on pedagogical approaches in the classrooms. Their contribution to changes in teaching practices, school innovation, and community services is considerable (Mikre, 2011). ICT in this context refers to the computer and internet connections used to handle and communicate information for learning purposes. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999) are of the view that the use of ICTs in teaching contributes to a more constructivist learning and an increase in activity and greater responsibility of students. This limits the role of the teacher to supporting, advising and coaching students rather than merely transmitting knowledge (Mikre, 2011).

Developed nations are using ICT in their education systems. For instance, in the United Kingdom, improved techniques of teaching and learning have become intertwined with the use of ICT's (Watson, 2001). The efficiency of technology holds out the prospect of improved Economic education as students gain access to almost unlimited sources of data. Teachers who are not sure of their Economic knowledge are able to almost instantly find answers to questions. Most important, when time is scarce, teachers will have access to lesson plans

without having to leaf through a number separate sources of information (Nelson, 1997). Teacher reflection on his/her knowledge of these technological developments which facilitate the teaching of Economics along the constructivist model will enable him/her to determine teaching effectiveness and possible areas of modifications.

Educating the public about Economic issues is an integral part of citizenship education (Nelson, 1997). Economic education fosters a better understanding of how certain policies impact the Economy. Basic knowledge of Economics helps consumers to better understand government policy actions and how changes in policy ultimately affect their own lives. Economics education helps people to develop the skills needed to meet their financial and personal objectives, including savings and financial stability. Improved Economic education will result in more productive, fulfilling lives for individuals and families, and in turn, more vibrant, economically stable neighborhoods and communities (Santomero, 2003).

The Economics teachers' reflection on their knowledge of these roles, which Economics education plays in society, is important for a number of reasons. One way of demystifying the abstraction of Economic principles and applications is to give practical illustrations of its roles to society during instructional sessions. Teacher reflection will enable the Economics teacher situate Economic topics within the context of their functional relevance to individuals and society in general. Again, if Economics teachers occasionally reflect on the changing roles of Economic education to society, instructional aims and objectives will be tailored towards imbuing students with the requisite knowledge, skills and values to enable them perform such roles.

Reflection on Aspects of Economics Teachers' Professional Values: Affective Competencies

Teachers with positive professional dispositions tend to act in ways that elevate the profession of teaching in the eyes of others (Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). One way of sustaining the Economics teachers' positive attitude and disposition towards the teaching of the subject is through periodic reflection. Reflections can be used to enhance teachers' development of dispositions (Whitley, 2007). Through such periodic reflections, the Economics teacher can easily identify shortfalls in his attitude and dispositions towards the teaching of the subject. This might necessitate certain adjustments or improvement in disposition and attitude. Reflective teachers think critically about all their teaching practices and accept that what happens in their classrooms should be questioned and, if necessary, changed. This does not mean that reflection is concerned just with teaching techniques. It means that all aspects of teaching, including the teacher's attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and perceptions should be open to review (Killen, 1995).

Economics teachers need to periodically reflect on their sense of efficacy. They need to take conscious steps to increase their sense of efficacy such as raising their

awareness of the link between teacher efficacy and student learning, sharing their learning with other teachers, applying new skills and learning in their classrooms (Jie-ying, 2011). Reflection on self-efficacy leads to advances in teacher intellectualism, practitioner self-management, an increase in practitioner ability to remain current in the field, and constructivist paradigm of life-long learning (Nolan & Huebner, 1989). Researchers claim that teacher reflection on their self-efficacy may improve students' achievement (Good & Brophy, 2008). The Economics teachers' honest reflection on his/her ability to influence students' achievement in the subject could reveal shortcomings in elements of professional knowledge, values and skills. These shortcomings could be addressed through in-service training or similar professional development schemes.

Work relationships are a major component of every successful business (Yokum, 2012). Being professional is an important part of ingraining one's self into any corporate or work environment. Being professional presupposes conducting one's self in a manner that reflects professional standards. One needs to remain calm under any circumstance (Belcher, 2012). The Economics teachers' role in creating and building an environment which is conducive for the teaching and learning of the subject demands that he/she adopts a positive working relationship with colleagues and auxiliary staff of the school. Economics teachers need to, periodically, reflect on their working relationship with colleagues and auxiliary staff of the school to determine the extent to which they are positive or the need for any adjustment if possible.

Teachers' attitude towards their students in school must be favourable enough to carry students along (Olatunde, 2009). The teacher-student relationship is one of the most powerful elements within the teaching/learning environment (Liberante, 2012). A major factor affecting students' development, school engagement and academic motivation, is teacher-student relationships which form the basis of the social context in which learning takes place (Hughes & Chen, 2011; Split, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). A supportive and positive relationship between teachers and students ultimately promote a "sense of school belonging" and encourage students to "participate cooperatively in classroom activities" (Hughes & Chen, 2011: p.432).

Lavric (2011) studied teachers' reflection on their attitude towards their students and made these observations. He concludes that reflection could help teachers become aware of their attitude towards students and adjust it if necessary. That paying attention to their attitude towards students will enable teachers to achieve better results. He opines that if teachers are aware of their critical and flexible communication, this could pave the way for a successful and quality teacher communication. Lavric is of the view that by recognizing their own way of communication and that of their partner in a conversation, teachers could gain control over their communication, learn to adjust to the students and respond to them in the most appropriate manner.

To a large extent, effective teaching depends on the teachers' attitude towards professional development.

Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection and continuous professional growth (Harris, 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching Economics. The Economics teachers' reflection on his/her attitude towards professional development is to foster the need for periodic improvement in professional knowledge, skills and values, all of which are required for effective instruction in the subject (Schon, 1987). Besides, positive changes that emanate from reflective practice is a form of professional development that benefits the teacher.

The effective teaching of Economics requires that the teacher demonstrates a high level of commitment towards the teaching of the subject. To sustain this level of commitment, Economics teachers need to periodically reflect on their commitment towards teaching the subject. Commitment is a sense of fidelity and adherence. It is the psychological identification of the individual teacher to the school and the subject matter or goals, and the intention of that teacher to maintain organizational membership and become involved in the job, well beyond personal interest (Asares, 2011). In addition, effective teaching requires a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter. Effective teachers are enthusiastic about their content and convey that enthusiasm to their students (Collins, Selinger & Pratt, 2003). Teacher's commitment is a significant predictor of school's effectiveness. This opinion is informed by the arguments claiming that student achievement is intertwined with teacher's commitment to their work, their school and students (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988).

Reflection on Aspects of Economics Teachers' Professional Skills: Psychomotor Competencies

The Economics teachers' periodic reflection on his/her scheme of work is to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of reflection is to improve and enhance teaching practices. The teachers' reflection on the scheme of work will suggest possible teaching and learning activities for each instructional session. In addition, reflection on the scheme of work might reveal the extent to which instructional time and resources have been optimally used. The scheme could be adjusted to the instructional needs of the Economics teacher and students.

Lesson planning requires a skillful approach. It involves outlining a process geared towards achieving set instructional goals or objectives (Minott, 2006). It is a process that involves identifying the means, resources and actions necessary to accomplish such goals or objectives (Bailey, 2005). On his part, Barry (1982) reports that out of the several factors that influence teachers' lesson planning, teachers' beliefs ranked high among those considered very potent. The Economics teacher could therefore reflect on his/her beliefs and all other factors that affect lesson planning. Reflection occurs before and after the implementation of the lesson plan.

For instance, prior to the design of any instructional plan, the Economics teacher needs to reflect on his knowledge of the students for whom the lesson plan is designed, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their diversity and special needs. As part of the planning process for the lesson, the Economics teacher is required to reflect on what to teach, and why he/she wants to teach that aspect (Chung, Mak & Sze, 1995).

The Economics teacher should also reflect on the choice of teaching techniques and the learning theory that supports the considered approaches to teaching. In order to promote a successful instructional session, the Economics teacher should reflect on challenges associated with a particular lesson, the culture of the class, as well as teacher/student relationship. After the implementation, the Economics teacher could reflect on the extent to which the plan was followed, students' responses to the lesson, difficulties encountered in the implementation, what worked well and what to do differently next time.

When objectives are determined at the beginning of a course, they provide direction to the teacher for selecting the activities that promote achievement of the desired behaviours (Gronlund, 2004). This implies that at periodic intervals, Economics teachers should reflect on the relationship between teaching/learning activities and instructional objectives. As a matter of principle, there must be perfect congruence between the two (Adentwi, 2005). A critical assessment of these learning/teaching activities and their relationship with instructional objectives could reveal discrepancies which may call for a review of such elements, thereby making the instructional activities relevant to the objectives (Ramsden, 2003).

In much the same way, Economics teachers need to occasionally reflect on the appropriateness of their improvised teaching materials in respect of the instructional objectives. The appropriateness of any improvised material largely depends on the skills of the teacher. Instructional objectives guide the selection of teaching/learning materials, whether "ready-made" or improvised. The "ready-made" or standard materials are often tailored towards certain instructional objectives. Improvisation can be described as a substitute for "standard" ready-made teaching/learning materials. Osho (2011) posits that to be able to improvise requires being resourceful and creative. Creativity in this context implies aligning the improvised teaching materials with specific instructional objectives. Teacher reflection on improvised teaching/learning materials is designed to make them relevant, or as it were, possess the same relevance like that of the ready-made ones.

In line with best professional practices, the Economics teacher should occasionally reflect on his/her selection and use of instructional skills and techniques that ensure the active participation of students in the teaching/learning process. Active learning techniques are those activities that an instructor incorporates into the classroom to foster active student learning (Faust & Paulson, 1998). Active learning is any learning activity other than listening passively to an instructor's delivery. Wieland (n.d.) cites

the following as essential elements of active learning techniques in Economics courses: brainstorming, debates, experiments, case studies, problem-based learning and class games. The importance of teacher reflection on these techniques is to critically examine their relevance to specific instructional objectives. Stated differently, teacher reflection on these techniques is to determine their validity in terms of specific predetermined learning outcomes in Economics. Effective teaching is not a set of generic practices, but instead a set of context-driven decisions about teaching. Effective teachers do not use the same set of practices for every lesson. Instead, what effective teachers do is to constantly reflect on their work (including their techniques of instruction), observe whether students are learning or not, and, then adjust their practice accordingly (Glickman, 1991). The Economics teachers' critical reflection on these instructional techniques could result in adjustment, thereby enhancing the quality of teaching.

Assessment is the process of gathering information on student learning. The accuracy of information gathered in respect of students' learning will depend on the appropriateness of the technique of assessment used. One technique of assessment might not be able to gather information on different learning outcomes in Economics. This suggests the need for the Economics teacher to periodically reflect on his/her selection and use of the various techniques of assessment. One of the most compelling reasons for teaching Economics, irrespective of the level, is to foster critical thinking skills in students (Greenlaw & Deloach, 2003; Siriopoulos & Pamaris, 2010). This implies that assessment of students' learning in Economics should elicit in-depth understanding, analysis and application of Economic principles.

If students perceive assessment as primarily examining content knowledge, they will tend to do little more than rote learning; they are likely to display poor levels of overall understanding (Morgan & O'Reilly, 1999). Classroom assessment provides Economics teachers the opportunity to reflect on their teaching and to make informed changes in instruction. Assessment means making judgement on the work of others. It also means learning about your own teaching (Baume, 1998).

Feedback is an essential component in the learning process, and explains the gaps in knowledge and understanding, thereby suggesting the need for reflection. Feedback at its best, is pivotal in the learning and assessment process (Orrell, 2006). "Feedback may operate both to improve learning of individual students and to improve teaching" (Biggs, 2003 p.141). Students generally find timely feedback more useful than delayed comments (Ramsden, 2003). According to Gibbs and Simpson (2004), good teacher feedback should focus on what students have achieved and what they need to do next. It should be timely, so ideally, it should be available when students are 'stuck,' when it will have maximum impact, and in time to improve subsequent assignments. Considering the importance associated with the timely provision of feedback to students, Economics teachers

need to periodically reflect on the timing of their feedback to students.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The following tools and approaches are recommended to further foster reflective practice among Economics teachers in Ghana.

- *Engaging in Action Research Projects:* Action research in this context is a process in which teachers examine their own instructional practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. The goals of action research, just like reflective practice, are change and improvement. It enables teachers to know whether or not they are accomplishing what they set out to accomplish. The secret of success in the teaching profession is to continually grow and learn. Action research is a way by which one can grow and learn by making use of one's own experiences.
- *Writing in Teaching Journals:* Economics teachers should be encouraged and given in-service training on how to use reflective journals. A journal is a record of one's thoughts about learning within a course or professional setting. In journals we describe events, experiences and issues associated with our professional duties. The 'journaling' process allows one to examine experiences, and to pose questions and solutions for reflection and improvement. Reflective journals allow the writer to note experiences, to reflect on these experiences for the purpose of analysis and reassessment. In writing regularly, the Economics teacher could therefore discover new perspectives of particular experiences and begin to create ideas about what actions could be taken. One of the most effective means for reflecting on one's experiences is through journal writing (Finkle, 2000).
- *Mentoring of Novice Economics Teachers:* Pairing a more experienced Economics teacher with a novice Economics teacher could be another approach to foster reflective practice. Mentoring, when utilized successfully, promotes professional dialogue and reflection for both the mentor and the teacher who is being mentored (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). The mentor can support the reflective process by using a variety of techniques such as questioning, listening, challenging assumptions, describing behaviour based on observations and offering insights (Dallat, 1995).

In order to sustain quality teaching at all times, reflective practice should as a matter of principle, become an integral aspect of the Economics teachers' instructional practice. Reflective practice is the fourth rubric that describes the professional identity of an ideal Economics teacher. Professional competence is directly linked to reflective practice. Reflective practice generates new

knowledge and skills, promotes self-awareness and deep learning. Economics teachers who engage in reflective practice could develop a broader understanding of their teaching, examine their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in their teaching. Open-mindedness, responsibility, wholeheartedness, and ability to engage in self-assessment appear to be prerequisites towards the development of reflective practice.

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