

A Study of Teachers' Reflections on their Teaching

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Abstract

Reflection plays an important role in the professional development of teachers. This study is analyzing the role of reflective practices in teaching practicum teachers. Reflection helps in learning from experience and taking corrective actions to change behavior positively. Objectives of this study include; the effect of reflective practices on the professional development of prospective teachers and exploring the effect of reflection on pedagogical strategies and instructional techniques of students. To explore teacher's perceptions and experiences qualitative research design is used. Interview schedules helped in analyzing the narratives of teachers. The findings show that teachers were ecstatic about using reflection to enhance their teaching practices and encourage students' learning but due to time shortages and extended curriculum in schools, they were confined and bound.

Keywords: Experiences, instructional strategies, professional growth, reflective practice.

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Introduction

Education is the process of getting knowledge and information for the development of student's mental capacities and improving living standards. Getting the right kind of education is a phenomenon. It is the basic right of children to get an education up to standards for empowering them to learn new skills, attitudes, knowledge, and values. This would help them to fulfil their socio-economic needs and attain sustainable measures for the development of personality and society. However, only having access to education is insufficient; quality is equally important. In a 2013 UNESCO report, it is said that "Every child deserves the right to a quality education" and that "Millions of children in schools are failing to learn basic, reading, writing, and numeracy skills." The calibre of the teachers has a significant impact on the quality of education. Because of this, acquiring high-quality education across boundaries is considered to be an important component of teachers' professional growth.

A system of education is only as good as its teachers, to put it succinctly. Numerous learning crises have been caused by low learning quality. By allowing teachers to reflect on their classroom practices, helps them redefine their professional abilities, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes to address the crisis in learning quality. The processes of teaching and learning are dynamic. New academic trends and pedagogical approaches are emerging with time and are changing the way that education is provided (Bawaneh & Moumene, 2020). To meet the new needs and problems of the future, it is essential to modernize and change the educational system. According to Gheith and Aljaberi (2018), current educational trends place a strong emphasis on lifelong learners who can contribute to societal progress. This is feasible if instruction goes beyond conventional paradigms. In addition to lifelong learners and teachers, the 21st century places a strong emphasis on learning skills. As a result, the emphasis on teacher training programs has evolved away from academic knowledge and toward analytical and introspective abilities (Filippello et al., 2020).

Reflective teachers work to find better answers, but they also try to increase their awareness of both themselves and the nature of the problems related to other experiences and concepts that they have learned about. Indeed, reflective practice's benefits have consistently been demonstrated (Arslan, 2019). According to the literature, reflective practice is a crucial component that leads to transformation in two important areas that are quality of teaching and teacher identity and personality. The phrase refers to a teacher's combined personal and professional facets. Pre-service teachers in particular need to develop a good sense of who they are and how they fit into the larger environment since these things have an impact on how well they can teach. Reflective practice is essential to advancing this comprehension (Beaucham, 2015).

Reflection is the key to effective teaching and learning techniques. The majority of studies in this field demonstrate that reflection can improve instructors' capacity to impart knowledge, have better teacher-student interactions, and hone their classroom management abilities. Teachers' practice of reflecting also attempts to foster critical reflection, dialogue, and meaningful knowledge storage. The standards for teacher competence in Pakistan include reflection on teaching practice. To enhance the quality of teaching and learning, it is highly advised that reflection be based on instructors' teaching and learning materials, including student test results, and that classroom action research be carried out. When practitioner shows concerns about being "reflective" they have to concentrate on a particular aspect of their instruction and view that aspect from a different perspective, in which the goal is to act based on an exhaustive and reflective understanding of events, alternatives, and ethics, they engage in dialogue with their peers, use techniques of reframing and reflective listening, and explore various perspectives to diversify different thoughts and ideas within their current perspective (Rodger, 2020).

Descriptive reflection in the classroom refers to "what is happening". It includes all the aspects and situations of that event happening in the classroom. The thing to be kept in mind is that reflection is not stating the truth about events or explaining facts only, it includes deep analysis of events, vent, reconceptualising them, and making possible changes for betterment in the future. Applying various frames to a situation to gain new insights or deeper comprehension is what comparative reflection, often known as a "frame experiment," implies. This approach calls for openness of mind and wholeheartedness and seeks to understand other people's perspectives.

There is a lot of difference in the educational quality of Pakistan and international academia. For the betterment of our nation, we have to start by changing the whole educational infrastructure with a smart education system along with trained and reflective teachers, and a revised syllabus that will be able to enhance or improve the skills and creativity among students. The education aims to inspire and motivate students, and to prepare innovative and conscious citizens. For this purpose, reflection must be assured to increase the mental abilities and capacities of both students and teachers. The reflective practice among teachers is becoming increasingly important in Pakistan as there is a growing recognition of the potential of such practices to improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Reflective practice refers to the process of critically examining one's teaching practices and experiences to identify areas for improvement and to develop strategies for enhancing teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Teachers who want to improve future instruction and teaching methodologies involve themselves in reflective practice carefully. They document their teaching methods so that they can later perform an in-depth analysis and evaluation of their experiences. (Farrell, 2016a; Mathew et al., 2017). Additionally, it is a process for creating meaning that helps teachers in learning advanced measures, strategies, and techniques (Rodgers, 2020). Reflective teachers are eager to explore more about themselves. They use the answers they have found and form a conjunction between these ideas and other experiences and ideas. All this while, they aim to find better solutions.

According to the research, reflective practice is a crucial element in bringing about change in two important facets of teachers' professional lives: teacher identity and teacher quality. The concept of "teacher identity" describes how educators see themselves to be educators (Mockler, 2011). The word encompasses a teacher's both personal and professional facets. To improve their teaching quality, pre-service teachers in particular need to develop a strong sense of who they are and how they fit into the external world. The key to fostering this insight is reflective practice (Beauchamp, 2015).

Reflective practice gives teachers a chance to challenge and improve their feelings, convictions, and individual teaching philosophies. For instance, Slade et al. (2019) looked into how a teacher candidate's perspective on her students' academic performance changed after keeping a reflective journal for roughly one semester. They discovered that the teacher changed her perspective after realizing that her students were struggling with a poor financial situation, which was the reason behind their lagging behind in academics and disturbing classroom behaviour. This research supports Korthagen's (2017) claim that reflective practice helps new teachers figure out what's going on inside their heads. For this reason, fresh perspectives from contemplation can inspire inventive and successful educational strategies.

Lysberg (2023) worked on teachers' reflections to know the processes of collaborative inquiry in teamwork. Prospective teachers critically reflected on teaching and learning by exploring problems, sharing these, and collecting suggestions for possible situations. The findings of the study reveal that collaborative learning through teamwork not only enhances their knowledge but also makes them capable of their own pedagogical ge.

Donald Schon (1983) an American philosopher, claimed that teachers usually encounter vague, multifaceted problems (swampy lowlands) without satisfactory solutions. They use predetermined remedies to address these problems. When they are unable to accomplish this, they use introspective strategies to come up with answers.

Schon (1988) has described reflective behaviour in a variety of ways, such as reflection in action and reflection on action. Prospective teachers agreed, to varied degrees, that reflective activities may transform their teaching from surface to deep and from descriptive to interpretative. Reflective practices as a catalyst in the setting of action research.

The current study is to analyse prospective teachers' reflective practices and to forecast their professional progress. Reflective practice has gained popularity over the years, even though the collective dimension or interactional features of RPs have been generally disregarded (Fathi & Behzadpour, 2011). There is a requirement to elaborate on the social aspect of reflective practice. There has been a scarcity of studies on the connotation of reflective activities since 1987. Many studies found that engaging teachers in reflective practices influenced their professional practices and aided them in professional development.

Getting quality education is a very important factor. But for this purpose, we have to make sure that we have quality educators. We know education is away learning process, in daily life teachers learn new strategies or possibilities during teaching. For making the teaching and learning process effective, reflection has to be made assured. Teachers carefully gather data about their teaching practice as part of reflective practice, which is often regarded as a sort of cyclical and systematic inquiry, to analyze, interpret, and evaluate them to improve their instruction in the future (Farrell, 2018).

Reflective techniques help teachers make better decisions. Reflective teachers are constantly accountable for their behaviours (McGregor & Cartwright, 2011). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in Pakistan by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), has transformed the pre-service teacher education programs in the country to prepare prospective teachers with professionally skilled, communicative, concerned, and critically reflective practitioners (GoP, 2023). According to National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan, prospective teachers must participate in reflective practices (GoP, 2009). The use of reflective practices is seen as a key ability that should be acquired among potential teachers during teacher education. Practice teaching in a classroom provides potential teachers with professional immersion opportunities to improve their teaching skills.

One of the most common techniques of reflective practices among teachers in Pakistan is to engage in peer observation and feedback. This involves teachers observing each other's classes and providing constructive feedback on teaching practices. This process allows teachers to learn from each other and to identify areas for improvement in their practice (Ghaye, 2011). But sadly, in Pakistan, most of the teachers do not include reflective practices while teaching. They have a traditional way of teaching due to they

do not understand the importance of practicing reflection. Due to the constant urge for appraisals, sometimes teachers are not honest with their opinions, suggestions, and feedback. Some teachers are not comfortable inviting another guest to class as they feel threatened. Another common reflective practice that can be used is to keep a reflective journal. Teachers use this journal to record their thoughts and reflections on their teaching practices and experiences. This practice helps teachers to identify patterns in their teaching and to consider how they can improve their teaching practices. Teachers are maintaining records and information might help them in the future.

In addition to these practices, many teachers in Pakistan attend professional development workshops and engage in ongoing professional learning. This helps teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest teaching practices and research and to continue to develop their teaching skills and knowledge. Overall, reflective practices are becoming increasingly important for teaching in Pakistan as teachers strive to improve their practices and enhance student learning outcomes.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Exploring the use of reflective practices by prospective teachers during teaching practice.
2. Determine the significance of reflective teaching practices for experienced teachers' professional development.
3. Examine the role of reflective practices in the development of teachers' pedagogical skills.

Research Questions of the study

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How often do prospective teachers engage in reflective practices during their teaching?
2. To what extent do prospective teachers exhibit behaviors that indicate their participation in reflective practices?
3. What are prospective teachers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of reflective practices?
4. How do reflective practices influence prospective teachers' pedagogical skills, lesson planning, and lesson implementation?

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative by nature as it involves the sentiments, perceptions, behaviours, and feelings of teachers in contributing to reflective thinking during teaching practice. Narrative research design is used to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions of reflective teaching practices that can affect their teaching methodology. The research is small-scale research as a research project. The target population for the research consists of teachers from different schools in the private sector. The nine participants were selected from secondary school teachers of a private school through convenience sampling. After reviewing literature from several studies, although research by (Iqbal, 2015) was of great assistance in creating the instrument. The instrument was developed as a semi-structured interview questionnaire consisting of nine probing questions that played an important role in exploring themes for this research. The instrument was developed by the researcher, and the validity and reliability were assured by experts' opinions. The interview was conducted and was recorded with their consent. Collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The right to privacy of respondents was assured before interviews were conducted.

Findings and Results

For effective teaching, educators must routinely engage in reflection to perform self-examination and self-evaluation that would enhance their skills and practices for teaching, for this purpose this research was conducted. Table 1 shows the themes and findings for this research.

Table 1
Statements and themes of the Instrument

Statements	Themes	Findings
1. How do you think reflection is perceived?	Perceptions of teachers of reflection	All teachers had a clear perception of reflective practices and reflection.
2. How do you encourage reflection in the classroom?	Teachers' attitudes to reflection	90% of teachers had a positive attitude towards encouraging reflection.
3. How do you encourage reflection among your students in the classroom or daily life?	Students' engagement in reflection	70% of teachers ensured reflective practices while 30% were bound to follow the rules of the school.
4. How do students who engage in reflective practices respond in the classroom?	Student's attitude about reflection.	80% of teachers assured students' engagement in reflection while 20% faced issues because of students' readiness
5. Do you discover any connections between reflective practices and your students' social attitudes?	Social taboo	90% of teachers were assured that reflection helped students in gaining positivity and enhancing social interactions
6. During reflective practices, to what extent do you display behaviors that suggest an emotional connection with students?	Reflecting emotional involvement of teachers	90% of teachers agreed on having an emotional bond and connection with students.
7. How closely do teachers' statements and their actions during their teaching practicum match up?	What they say and what they do	70% wanted to ensure reflective practices while 30% were bound due to timings and curriculum.
8. How much do you use reflective techniques when giving instructions?	Techniques for instructions	85% of teachers used reflective techniques while giving instructions
9. What are the variables, that affect aspiring teachers' participation in reflective practices?	Factors influencing reflective practice	Each teacher had different factors and attributes that affected their reflective practices

For conducting this research, teachers were asked questions about their reflective practices. Different themes and findings were explored through interviews which is shown in Table 1. The findings of the themes that were generated are given below. Themes 1 and 2 answer the research question 1, themes 3 and 4 answer the research question 2, themes 5 and 6 answer the research question 3, whereas themes 7, 8 and 9 answer the research question 4.

Theme 1: Perceptions of teachers of reflection

For evaluating teachers' reflective practices, it was very necessary to analyze their perceptions and understanding of reflection. Teachers need to plan their strategies and methodology of teaching by analysing the mental situations and capacities of students. Reflection can play a very important role for this purpose. The answers of the participants are listed below. A participant's view,

“Reflection is a kind of evaluation that can help in planning and designing strategies for the next lectures”

Reflection plays a key role in altering actions with the help of experiences. Another participant responded in this way,

“Reflection is generally viewed as a positive activity that can help individuals gain insight into themselves and their actions. It is often seen as a way to process experiences and emotions, and to learn from past mistakes.”

Another participant was of the view that,

“Many people believe that regular reflection can lead to personal growth and self-improvement.”

All of the teachers have a very clear understanding and views about reflection.

Theme 2: Teachers attitudes about reflection In teaching practice, the attitude and behavior of the teacher play a vital role. Teaching can be successful only if teachers have a positive attitude towards the process of learning and giving knowledge to the students. With the help of reflection, teachers can analyze the positive and negative aspects of the situation. In the classroom, reflection is all about examining the situation carefully and critically to assure positive outcomes. The participant replied:

“By asking questions, so that at every stage of a lesson I can evaluate the overall response of students and this includes below average students as well.”

This helped her in changing her strategies for the students who were finding difficulties in understanding and learning. She was of the view that questions helped her in getting reflections from students about what they were able to understand, this helped her in ensuring that knowledge was transferred to every student in class.

Another participant was of the view that

“Observations play a key role in it. Otherwise, fun activities can also help a lot”

As per her point of view observations helped her in judging students' gestures through which she got to know that students are lacking interests or are super excited. She also claimed that fun activities also helped her get a reflection from students.

The same question was asked by participant 3, she narrated that during class, and teachers are bound by time. But she tried to spare 5 min before class to make sure her bond with her students was stronger by discussing general topics which also helped her in getting reflection from students. She stated;

“For me, reflection is not for education purposes only, when I enter my class, I try to make time for telling my stories and experiences to the students. This helps them to open up and tell their experiences, then we try to discover learning, solutions from those experiences.”

One of the participants gave the example of a strategy that she uses for reflection,

“I give kids reflection questions to think about before, during, or after class, such as thumbs-up and thumbs-down or play cards with the words yes or no.”

This helped her in getting reflection from students.

Theme 3: Students engagement in reflection

Reflection helps in clarifying the thought process of students. Teachers must include reflection during lectures. Assuring Reflective practices can help students in learning critically, they will be able to solve problems on their own, and reflection can enhance their effectiveness and efficiency. Thinking is the process of using the information after processing and analysing the situation. Teachers must incorporate thinking in students, this will help in the development of their capabilities. Reflection assures Thinking. As one of the teachers replied,

“As a teacher, it is my job to involve my students in reflective thinking for this purpose, I often ask them some questions that involve logical thinking. This plays an important role.”

This practice helped her in teaching her students to find logic and reasoning.

One of the teachers explained that she sometimes asks questions that can be related to the environment or surroundings this enables students and teachers to discuss “*what is happening and what should happen*”.

Theme 4: Students attitude about reflection

As discussed above reflection plays a critical role for both teachers and students in fact for everyone. It enhances capabilities to understand scenarios more efficiently and effectively. It should be obligatory for teachers and schools to teach reflection to students, this can help them in acting according to the situation. Reflection can help them in alter positively altering their behavior and attitude asking the following question.

The teacher responded in the following way:

“Some students may be resistant to reflective practices and may find it difficult to engage in self-reflection. They struggle to express their thoughts and feelings in writing or may be unwilling to share their reflections with the class.”

Some students find it difficult to express themselves or their feelings. Sometimes they feel shy and sometimes they feel that their feeling might be of not that much worth. Practicing reflection can help such students in boosting up their confidence in their thoughts and feelings. Another participant claimed that his students feel very energetic because they get the chance to express themselves and their capabilities during tasks and activities designed to reflect their understanding.

Theme 5: Social Taboo

With the passage of time approach towards teaching has changed a lot. Now most of the time questions are encouraged and answered. But this is still a taboo in our culture. Some people especially students have the wrong perception that vocalizing issues in learning means is equal to having a dull brain. But that’s not the truth. When students involve themselves in the process of thinking, they want to find logic and reasoning in every possible situation. This is when they face issues when they are not answered correctly. They get confused and consider themselves slow learners. Reflective practices by teacher and student both can ensure that “*no student is a dull student*”. Each student has a different way of learning and reflecting, this must be encouraged by teachers so that they can add more and more schemas to their brain. While discussing one participant gave the following point,

“Some students do ask questions to clarify the concepts of the lesson, but most of them stay quiet and remain silent as this is considered a social taboo. If you ask questions and students reply that they were unable to understand this point, they would be considered as failure or a goon.”

This helps in understanding, that now it's time to change our approach towards Teaching and learning. As the new approach is student-centered approach, this encourages students to think, analyze, ask, process, synthesize, and reflect.

Theme 6: Effect of reflective practices aids in social interactions

Reflective practices help both students and teachers in social interactions. Reflection and learning go side by side. There is always a quite evident difference between teachers' first day on the job and practices after some experiences. Learning is a continuous process, during class teachers learn from their experiences and choose corrective actions accordingly. For this research question regarding reflective practices for helping in social interactions was asked, to which one participant responded in this way;

“Reflective activities can improve students' emotional intelligence, communication, and teamwork abilities as well as their self-awareness and point of view, which can all have a good impact on their social attitudes.”

Teachers shared that during lectures and activities, they encouraged their students to reflect on their thoughts and feelings.

Theme 7: Reflecting emotional involvement of teachers

Teachers are building blocks and create leaning environment of the classroom. The atmosphere and environment of the class depends upon the practices shown by teachers. If teachers act like robots with no emotional involvement learning can never be ensured. For conducting this research this question was asked;

“To what extent do you exhibit behaviors that indicate their emotional involvement with students while reflective practices?”

One participant responded in this way,

“A respectful behavior and regard for capacities for every student. Give them the opportunities for reflective practices either in group settings or individually.”

Hence after conducting interviews, the conclusion was made that when a teacher takes care of the needs and emotions of students, students automatically direct their interests in learning. When the teacher provides ease and a comfortable atmosphere in class students never hesitate in showing reflection of their thoughts.

Theme 8: What they say and what they do

Practicing reflection is easy to claim but difficult to practice. Thinking about how we act in certain situations and how should we act, what are the learning experiences from that certain situation, these points are very necessary for practicing reflection. For analyzing this question was asked,

“How similar are what prospective teachers say and what they do during their teaching practicum?”

The participant shared her experience in the following way,

“Prospective teachers always set goals for their lessons, they keep in mind certain time frames, expectations about students, response especially in formal assessments but during teaching practicum sometimes expectations are not met to the fullest.”

Teachers are often bound to follow a set of instructions and periods. Some teachers claim that there is a lot more they want to do for the development of students but due to certain limitations, they are often unable to practice. Another respondent shared her point of view,

“I always try to involve my average and below average students while employing the reflective strategies.”

There are different students with different mental capabilities and capacities in a class. It is upon the teacher how to cater to all of these students effectively and productively. Prospective teachers ensure that by practicing reflection they ensure the development and growth of all students.

Sub Theme: Factors influencing reflective practices Reflection on the whole is very vast and subjective by nature. Each practices reflection in their respective way. Concerning question regarding the factors that can affect reflective practises was asked to which respondents replied

“Environment, student background, resources, and age”

Another respondent shared

“Vast curriculum and limited time”

One participant explained that,

“Support, guidance, experiences, professional development opportunities, and personal interest.”

These factors were explored that affected the reflective practices of prospective teachers. Sometimes due to these factors, prospective teachers feel that they do not have enough liberty to express their reflective practice in class.

Discussion

Research shows that reflective practice significantly impacts teachers' self-awareness and effectiveness. Slade et al. (2019) found that reflective practice fosters innovative educational approaches and professional development. Encouraging teachers to engage in reflective practices positively impacts their behavior and growth. Collin and Karsenti (2011) found that interactions between students and professors significantly enhanced both parties' professional development. To adapt their teaching methods to the changing requirements of their students, teachers can discover areas for improvement with the aid of reflective practice. Reflective strategies support prospective teachers in making or selecting better choices (Roadman, 2010; Zeichner, 2009). Reflective teachers regularly hold themselves responsible for their activities (McGregor & Cartwright, 2011). Reflective practitioners allow educators to advance throughout their careers while also meeting the demands of their students' learning (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006; Zengaro & Nejad, 2007). So reflective practice by teachers plays an important role in the development of teachers professionally and it also helps them build positive connections with their students.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this study complement those of several other studies conducted in both national and international contexts. Studies have shown that teachers who practiced reflection were more concentrated on their actions and they were concerned about the performance of their class. They used reflective practices to enable them to adopt student-centered methods and that they could see how their methods improved the students' academic performance. Reflective practices influenced their decisions regarding how to present content and how to choose instructional tactics. The current study's findings showed a connection between classroom momentum and teachers' participation in reflection in action. The current study's findings also showed that the majority of teacher educators and aspiring educators engaged in action reflection, reflection on action, and reflection through students. Due to some limitations, they were unable to practice it to a fuller extent. Teachers require leverage in authority, time, and space when it comes to the development of student's social and emotional quotient.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations:

- Training may be given regarding reflective practices that would play a vital role in lesson planning and delivering lectures.
- Skills may be taught to students from grade V to enhance their performance by practicing reflection.
- Since teachers tend to be restricted by factors like time constraints and limited resources, the management and administration of the school may address the difficulties that teachers face.
- Teachers may be allowed to critically analyze curriculum and teaching methodologies. This would help in enhancing and assuring reflection.

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