

## Prospective Teachers' Conceptions of Reflective Teaching: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract



*Reflective teaching is believed to stimulate critical thinking and inquiry among teachers while improving teacher effectiveness and student learning. As a result, teacher training programs have begun to include courses on reflective teaching in their curricula. The purpose of this study is to explore the conceptions of prospective teachers about reflective teaching after attending a semester-long course on reflective teaching. This study used a hermeneutic phenomenological research design and semi-structured interviews to access the participants' lived experience and their interpretations. Purposive sampling was used to select ten prospective teachers enrolled in the MPhil Educational Leadership and Management Program of a private university. The data analysis revealed that teachers need to be aware of reflective teaching for their professional development. It has revealed an area of policy implementation regarding prospective teachers' conceptions of reflective teaching and ascertained that the course of reflective teaching should be offered at the initial level of teacher training programs.*

**Keywords:** Reflection; Reflective teaching practice; Professional development; Phenomenology; Qualitative.

### Introduction

A teacher can improve their teaching in many ways. One of the most effective ways is the reflective teaching practice. Reflective teaching is a professional teaching method (Pirzada, Muhammad, & Ahmed, 2021). Reflection can stimulate critical thinking and inquiry among instructors while improving teacher effectiveness and student learning. It can enable teachers to analyze their teaching, employ research methodologies and develop their knowledge of teachings that increase students' learning (Saif, Muhammad, & Safdar, 2021). Knowledge development begins in the classroom. It is a process that includes critical thinking that enables one to reflect on their teaching methods, examine their students' success, and bring changes according to their needs (Naseer, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020). The main objective of education is to enable learners to understand themselves as individuals. This can be achieved only when the teacher creates a situation in which such inquiry is possible, and learners are equipped with such skills. If teachers are not involved in such inquiries to understand themselves, they cannot help their students. Therefore, this method revolves around how teachers can learn to understand themselves (Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017).

Teacher training programs have begun to include the concept of reflection in teacher education into their curricula in the last two decades to meet the demands of changing social needs and overcome their application gaps (Erginel, 2006). It was adopted rapidly at several levels and in different specializations, spanning from language teacher education to sports teacher education and from preservice teacher training to training coaches. Various approaches have been developed employing advanced technology and fast-developing information technologies such as computerized video instruments and online electronic portfolios to encourage practitioners to engage in reflection (Erginel, 2006).

While literature about reflection learning discusses the relevance of reflective teaching practice and its advantages, there is little research that shows how teachers reflect in a classroom or how thoughtful professionals can grow. In Pakistan, there is no unanimity on how reflective teaching practices are defined and practiced, and its education system did not fully adopt reflective teaching.

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This research focuses on a teacher education course offered at a private university to potential teachers for developing reflective teaching in the postgraduate program in Educational Leadership and Management. The purpose of this study is to explore the conceptions of prospective teachers about reflective teaching after attending a semester-long course on reflective teaching. The detailed account of their experiences can shed light on how teachers think about and participate in reflective teaching. It gives insight into prospective teachers' conceptions of becoming reflective practitioners and examines the content of their thinking. Professional development that includes reflection in the teaching process could significantly impact a teacher's ability to instruct. As a result, gaining insight into prospective teachers' experiences can help them develop techniques to promote their ongoing development through reflective teaching.

**Theoretical Framework**

For this study, the theoretical framework of exploration of the ideas of prospective teachers on reflective teaching was based on the constructivist approach that depicts adult learners. Constructivism has had an enormous impact on teacher formation. This notion regards knowledge as socially generated, and specialists in its creation are dynamic (Putnam & Borko, 2000). The main criterion for learning is that information, individual measures, knowledge strategies, and public information collections are created. Richardson (2005) stresses that constructivist teacher education enables novice teachers to learn their own teaching understandings and link them to their behavior. For example, preservice instructors build meaning through interplaying prior and new teaching. In this context, reflecting on learning assists potential instructors by permitting them to explore and evaluate their experiences in the shadow of the theoretical and social contexts. Teachers can become self-directed learners through reflective teaching practices while conducting education research, applying different tactics, and recording their experiences for future action (Sagor, 2011).

Kagan (1992) points out the complexities of teaching: "Classroom teaching appears to be a rare type of self-expression in which the artist, the subject, and the medium are one." Kagan underlines the standard of teacher training programs that do not adequately train teachers for this multidimensional vocation. He determined that prospective teachers needed to think about their behaviors, values, and attitudes as instructors. Teacher education programs that equip teachers to be reflective practitioners will be critical in meeting the needs of tomorrow's societies in this regard. In addition, teachers can use reflective teaching practice to identify their strengths and areas for improvement based on their teaching practice. As a result, this method can lead to a more individualized structure that encourages deep learning and growing capability through self-directed learning (Korthagen, 2001). The capacity to reflect on one's experience can assist a teacher in developing a library of techniques and skills that may be used as needed.

**Methods**

In this qualitative study, a hermeneutic phenomenological research design was used (Langdrige, 2007; Vagle, 2018). The study was conducted at the University of Management and Technology. A criterion sampling technique (Patton, 2015) was used in this study, and all participants that met a particular set of criteria were picked for further study and consideration. The following criteria were used to decide the inclusion of participants in this study:

- (1) The participant was enrolled in MPhil Educational Leadership and Management program and had successfully passed the course titled, *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner*.
- (2) The participant had experiences as a reflective practitioner.
- (3) The participants were willing to share their conceptions and experiences voluntarily.
- (4) All participants approved of recording their interviews for transcription.

**Table 1: Demographic information of the participants**

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Teaching Experience (Years)</b> |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| Participant 1      | Female        | 24         | 3                                  |
| Participant 2      | Female        | 24         | 2                                  |
| Participant 3      | Female        | 24         | 1                                  |
| Participant 4      | Female        | 24         | 0                                  |
| Participant 5      | Female        | 28         | 1                                  |
| Participant 6      | Male          | 41         | 18                                 |
| Participant 7      | Male          | 43         | 15                                 |

|                |        |    |    |
|----------------|--------|----|----|
| Participant 8  | Male   | 38 | 15 |
| Participant 9  | Female | 34 | 10 |
| Participant 10 | Female | 26 | 2  |

Semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018) were conducted to collect data. The interview guide consisted of 23 questions with some probing questions to acquire detailed data. It was divided into four parts to cover study dimensions. The first included demographic questions like name, gender, age, academic qualification, professional qualification, and teaching experience. The second included general questions to get the knowledge of participants about the study. The third part included some questions to know the personal values of participants. The fourth part dealt with the questions related to teachers' professional development and their classroom experiences related to their learning.

Participants were individually interviewed through an online Zoom meeting. Before starting the interview, they were explained the purpose of the study. With the permission of the participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020), the Zoom recording feature was used as a digital audio recording device to record the interviews. All recordings were transcribed and translated into English. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic framework analysis (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

**Results**

This section addresses the interview data from ten participants uncovering themes.

**Significance of reflective practice**

Participants were asked to talk about their viewpoints and thoughts related to reflective practice. Moreover, they were asked about the importance of reflective practice in developing prospective teachers. Only a few participants had a good understanding of reflective practice before attending this course, and it was not a new concept for them. Most participants reported that they did not know about the term “reflective practice,” but after completing a course on becoming a reflective practitioner, they developed their understanding of reflective practice as a process of looking back on past experiences, learning from them, and using them in future action planning. For example, a participant stated:

*Reflective practice is a very useful process that we all must use as a teacher. We all must use it because this practice enables us to improve our teaching style and performance as a teacher. And more importantly, I think it improves our human capacity, whatever profession it may be. So, to me, reflective practice is looking back or looking forward and, at the same time, improving the current scenario. (Participant 6)*

On the other hand, some participants responded that reflective practice is a continuous process of learning, and it can be done with the help of a mentor or even without a mentor. For example, two participants stated:

*As a result of reflecting on one's activities, one can engage in a continuous learning process through reflective practice. Reflective practice can be defined as critical attention to the values and ideas that inform everyday acts through analyzing practice. (Participant 3)*

*Reflective practice is basically of two types. In one case, you have a mentor under whose supervision you are working, and you are exchanging notes. And he also requires you to write down your reflection. And another case, you don't have a mentor, but you keep recording all your classroom experiences; from those experiences, you gain knowledge and a way forward. They perform much better next time. (Participant 7)*

Few participants believed that reflective teaching is very much important in the current context of Pakistan. To meet global standards, Pakistan needs to develop more competencies. Most participants believed that education standards in Pakistan could be enhanced through reflective teaching because reflective teaching enables the student to develop critical thinking and helps the teacher develop teaching skills. As one participant stated:

*Reflective teaching is very important in the current context of Pakistan, but becoming a reflective practitioner, I think, is equally important in every era and context. We need to reflect on our teaching because if we talk about reflective teaching, it involves*

*our beliefs about teaching and learning. So, we need to review our teaching beliefs for the sake of judgment and improvement in every era. If we talk about Pakistan and compare it to the international level, we need a lot of reflective teaching to come up with new knowledge, strategies, and technology. We need to compile our strategies with our practical classroom. (Participant 9)*

On the other hand, one participant responded that the concept of reflective teaching is not popular in Pakistan, as the participant stated:

*In my view, there is no concept of reflective teaching in Pakistan. I am a postgraduate student, and I had never heard about reflective practice or reflective teaching, and I think my other colleagues and friends also did not know about it. Most of the teaching population is not directly using it; they may learn from their experiences, but I think they don't know the specific term "reflective teaching. (Participant 4)*

### **Role of reflection in developing prospective teachers**

Most participants believed that reflection has a vital role in the development of prospective teachers. They described that reflective teachers are more likely to develop reflective students, and reflection leads teachers toward success. For example, a participant stated:

*The role of reflection in the development of prospective teachers can be defined as reflective teachers are more likely to generate reflective students. In reflecting on teaching, they may better motivate students to reflect on their learning, analyze it, assess it, and develop their own. These are crucial abilities to transform them into more independent students. As for teachers, reflective teaching practice enables teachers to develop and explore new possibilities and techniques to maximize their achievement. (Participant 1)*

Participants believed that reflective practice has a very important role in developing prospective teachers, and teachers should be trained to adopt the habit of reflective practice from the start of their careers. As one participant:

*I think this is very important. I have worked as a trainer. I am from that side, and I can tell that teachers don't like to be taught after a specific time. A lot of teachers, there are very few who will still be willing to learn something new. Otherwise, we have our practices fixed, and we believe we have a very strong hand towards everything. Our perceptions are set in life at a younger age or at the start of a career. This practice will be more beneficial than telling people or after a specific time to start reflecting on your experience. I think young teachers, amateur teachers, or prospective teachers who will start their career learning this practice will be lifelong learning for them, helping them throughout their careers. (Participant 6)*

### **The course of 'becoming a reflective practitioner' in Pakistan can contribute to prospective teachers' professional development**

Most prospective teachers were not aware of reflective teaching practice, but after learning a complete course, they understood it well. They believed that reflective practice is a very important tool to enhance prospective teachers' performance and practices. As a participant stated:

*I strongly believe that professional development is your improvement or everyone's development once we have taken up a profession. Prospective teachers have decided that this is what they will be working in the profession. So, it becomes more important for them. Before starting the profession, they should learn tools, techniques, and methods of learning improvement, self-enhancement and performance enhancement, and reflective practice, which I believe is a very strong area and a very strong tool to enhance their practices, performance, and teaching aptitude. So, it is more beneficial for prospective teachers. (Participant 1)*

In contrast, one participant said that the course "Becoming a Reflective Practitioner" is more important for the head of an organization rather than teachers, as he stated:

*Maybe, I am wrong, but instead of prospective teachers, we should focus on the institutes' heads, the ones running the institutes. If they are familiar with the importance of reflective practice, that is more fruitful than the teachers because teachers are the followers. (Participant 8)*

**Thoughts about the concept of becoming a reflective practitioner within the teaching context**

Teachers were asked to share their thoughts about becoming reflective practitioners within the teaching context. Most of the participants believed that teachers' personal and professional growth is incomplete without being reflective practitioners, and they also said that teacher is leaders and guide their students to become reflective practitioners. As a participant stated:

*Reflective teaching and the course of becoming a reflective practitioner are very close. This course is very important for the professional development of teachers. And I think we can perform better if we study this course. And I think students' achievement belongs to teachers' achievement. If a teacher performs well so automatically, his students also perform well. (Participant 10)*

On the other hand, one participant believed that the importance of becoming a reflective practitioner within a teaching context varies according to a person's thoughts. For example, the participant stated:

*The one who has a strong concept and a strong belief that this thing can help them will adopt the reflective practices in their teaching, and those who think that it is a waste of time and an additional duty. Definitely, they will avoid and will not include it in their teaching context and their practices. (Participant 8)*

**Reflective practice should be taught explicitly to prospective teachers**

Interviewed teachers were enquired about their thoughts on teaching reflective practice explicitly to prospective teachers. Most of the teachers agreed that reflective practice should be taught explicitly to prospective teachers because they believed that reflective practice allows teachers to implement theories into practice. As one participant stated:

*Yes, it is very important for prospective teachers because it is the initial stage of their professional growth. If they learn reflection, they can easily enhance their teaching competencies and professional development. (Participant 2)*

On the other hand, a few participants believed that it was not necessary to teach a complete course of reflective practice. For example, a participant stated:

*In my opinion, reflective teaching should not be taught explicitly to prospective teachers. Giving them some basic concepts at this level can be enough; it is unnecessary to teach it as a complete course. (Participant 3)*

**Reflective teaching is important for the professional development of teachers**

Interviewed prospective teachers were enquired about the importance of reflective teaching for their professional development. Finding from the interview data concerning the importance of reflective teaching for the professional development of experienced teachers suggested that most of the participants believed that experienced teachers and prospective teachers both need to learn about reflective teaching. For example, a participant stated:

*Reflective teaching is necessary at any stage, whether you are experienced or a novice; there is always scope for improvement. It not only improves teaching but also brings innovation to your teaching. (Participant 2)*

On the other hand, few participants believed that experienced teachers have much need to learn about reflective teaching. As one participant stated:

*I think experienced teachers need it very much because they think that what we say is just the last word. But I can't generalize it, not everyone is necessarily like that, but the ones I've encountered were like that. I wish those who have taught us would have read this subject. (Participant 10)*

Findings related to the necessity of becoming a reflective practitioner for professional growth suggested that all participants believed that professional growth is incomplete without being a reflective practitioner. They stated that the teacher's professional development has an influence on the success of an organization as well as learners. For example, two participants stated:

*Yes, it is necessary to become a reflective practitioner for a teacher's professional development. Reflection is significant; it is a method for teachers to compile, document, and evaluate all of the events that happened throughout the lecture. Becoming a reflective practitioner enables teachers to make improvements from experiencing to comprehending. But if they don't actively think about what their*

*experiences signify, they won't be able to ask themselves about what they signify.*  
(Participant 1)

When participants were enquired about evaluating their teaching methods while teaching in the classroom, most teachers believed that evaluation is impossible without reflection and that every field requires evaluation for improvement. Most teachers were using *Reflection-in-action*. As two participants stated:

*Yes, in this modern era, there are a lot of ways to evaluate your teaching. I do it in the form of students' feedback. If their feedback is satisfied, then I move on, and if there is any discrepancy I find, I stop and review it.* (Participant 9)

Finding from enquired teachers about their self-assessment of teaching methods suggested that most of the teachers usually asked themselves about their teaching methods. Because they think that evaluation is the need of the present-day and attitude determines your altitude as one participant stated:

*Definitely, whenever I have a workshop, I think about its effectiveness and how much it was effective after the workshop. And then, I review my practice and analyze the different aspects of the training.* (Participant 8)

On the other hand, only one participant said: "I never ask myself about my teaching methods the question of what I like to improve and why. As a participant stated: No, I never asked myself about the improvement of my teaching methods" (Participant 5).

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the prospective teachers' conceptions of reflective teaching. The findings revolve around three themes: the significance of the reflective practice, knowledge about reflective teaching, and teachers' professional development.

The findings suggest that prospective teachers were not aware of reflective teaching practice, but after learning a complete course, they understood it well. There is a need to enable prospective teachers to enhance the capacity of their reflection to widen the grounds for reflective practices. Reflective teaching has a substantial impact on the development of teaching skills. Existing literature supports this assertion. A study conducted in India by Vijaya Kumari and Naik (2016) also concluded that teacher trainees form their understanding of reflective teaching after completing their training. In Pakistan, a study by Akram and Hasan (2018) was conducted at GC university of Lahore, and it found how a teacher's career progressed from beginner to expert over time. Good teachers highlight the changes in themselves, share their experiences with their students, and emphasize the value of reflection for professional growth. In addition, reflective teaching allows teachers to assess their teaching approaches and take necessary steps toward improvement (Iqbal, 2017).

The focus of this study was on investigating conceptions of prospective teachers regarding reflective teaching and the related objectives. Although researchers emphasize the relevance of reflective teaching practice, there are few studies on how experienced and novice teachers use reflective teaching to improve their teaching. This study discovered that experienced teachers had more need to learn about reflective teaching for their professional growth. But the literature doesn't support this argument because a study conducted in Pakistan by Hajira and Shamsa (2012) showed that experienced teachers are well aware of reflective practice, keeping records, and writing diaries or journals.

Teachers recognized a connection between their teaching effectiveness and students' increased learning regarding reflective teaching. Prospective or experienced teachers will be able to grasp this notion if they engage in reflective practices, as professional growth is incomplete without reflective teaching.

Teachers need to be aware of reflective teaching for the development of a reflective generation. Most of the participants believed that reflection has a very important role in the development of prospective teachers. They believed that reflective practice allows teachers to plan their teaching according to the needs of students. According to some participants, prospective teachers should be trained to adopt the habit of reflection from the beginning of their careers because reflective teachers are more likely to develop a reflective generation. Literature also supports this assertion, a study was conducted in a private school in Pakistan by Ahmed, Muhammad, and Anis (2020), and the findings revealed that Reflective Teaching is advantageous to analytical abilities because it allows

them to assess results and evaluate how to improve in the future. Furthermore, they believed that it could aid in the development of the analytical skills of students.

After the course, prospective teachers had a more precise goal for their teaching. When participants enquired about using reflective practice in their teaching, most agreed that they used reflective practices in their teaching, which was very helpful. Most shared their teaching experiences and described how reflective practice enhances their teaching practices and guides them to adopt different methodologies in different situations. In literature, this assertion has been proved in a study conducted at Lahore college for women by Zahid and Khanam (2019), which showed that teachers' abilities and performance were improved following training as they changed and updated their teaching tactics through reflective practice. In their practicum, however, they could not put all of the reflective skills into effect way. Another study conducted in Chitral by Ahmad et al. (2013) suggests that teachers who have received reflective training found that their teaching skills are significantly different. The tested teachers can now arrange their lessons daily.

Another significant finding is that the course of reflective teaching should be offered at the initial levels of the teacher training program, and the duration of the practicum should be increased. Participants mentioned that this course enables teachers to familiarize themselves with the profession of teaching. Participants shared their experiences with this course, and they believed that this course allows teachers to implement the theories they learned before into their practices. Existing literature highlighted this problem in a study conducted at Çukurova University, Turkey, by Tuncer and Özkan (2018), which showed that most of the participants' reflectivity was at the first level of reflectivity (Recall Level). The higher levels of reflection have been reported to be less than the reminder level, showing that these reflection practices require a longer period to establish the habit of thinking. The significance of journals in improving critical reflection was also emphasized by most participants.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that although most participants had not been aware of the reflective practice, they developed a good understanding of it after learning a complete course. They found a great need for reflective teaching in Pakistan to enhance education standards, as it enables teachers to plan according to student needs. Reflective practice is the most important practice in allowing teachers to develop the best teaching methodologies. Participants believed that reflective teaching is a process that allows teachers to assess their teaching approaches and make improvements because of their observations. The essential teaching principle is to justify teaching practices, so reflective teaching is critical. Moreover, most of the participants considered that both experienced and non-experienced teachers needed to learn about reflective teaching for their professional growth. Prospective or experienced teachers will be able to grasp this notion if they engage in reflective practices. Participants felt that professional growth is incomplete without the presence of reflective teaching.

It is hoped that the participants' detailed descriptions in this study will guide policymaking. Moreover, it is hoped that it will prove helpful for policymakers to understand that they should include the concept of reflective practice in teacher's development programs.

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