

## **Reflective Practices and Teacher Educators: An Exploratory Study**

By

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### **Abstract**

*Reflective practice is a technique through which teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom. It is a proof of self observation as it can be helpful for the teachers for a deeper understanding of their teaching style and for ensuring the effectiveness as a teacher. The basic objective of the study was to study the current situation regarding reflective practices at university level. The population of the study consisted of all the teachers of education department/faculty of Public and Private sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. An opinionnaire was administered to collect the data. The responses of 42 faculty members were received in total. The results of the study showed that teachers normally write the diary, encouraged towards the instructional management, observe the practice of keeping and managing students' records, get feedback from other colleagues, evaluate themselves and had good coordination with their colleagues and students. On the basis of the results of the study it was recommended that for the professional development of teachers, reflective practice may be upgraded, & a professional development programs may be conducted. It is also recommended that reflective practice should be introduced as a course in teacher training programs and practical approach of reflective practice be embedded in in-service teacher training programs.*

**Keywords:** *Reflective practice, Teacher education, University teachers*

### **1. Introduction**

The concept of "Reflective practice" is one of latest strategies employed for the professional development of the teachers. It is different from the traditional professional development where usually teacher has a central position, which focuses on single concept without any discussion with students or colleagues. On the other hand, reflective oriented professional development of teachers includes getting feedback from colleagues, sharing experiences and critical reflection in which they question and examine their own ideas and assumptions about teaching. It allows teachers thinking back over and then critically commenting on what happened. On the basis of that critical thinking they use these new learning to improve future activities.

#### ***Definition of Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice concept was introduced by Donald Schon in 1987 as a critical process in refining one's abilities in specific disciplines, he defined that reflective practice involves full concentration of one's own experiences in applying knowledge and introducing new techniques for professional development (Schon, 1996).

Epstein and Hundert, (2002) defined reflection as daily practice for the benefit of individuals and communities being served while Duffy (2007) believes that reflective practice is an active deliberate process of critically examining practice, where an individual is challenged and enabled to undertake the process of self-enquiry to empower the practitioner to realize desirable and effective practice within a

reflexive spiral of personal transformation. Thus reflection in teaching is not only an ability to look back to all the situations and make sense of what happened and what have been learned from daily experiences but according to Epstein and Hundert (2002) it is an ability to look forward to anticipate what is coming up and what teachers need to do for the professional development.

### ***Forms of Reflective Practice***

Westberg and Jason, (2001) defined three forms of reflective practices as Before an experience reflection is called “anticipatory reflection”, During an experience “reflection in action” and works following experience is known “reflection on action

### ***Reflection and Teachers***

Effective teachers are likely to be those who reflect on their teaching, update their skills and think of teaching from the perspective of its teaching on learners rather than the perspective of covering content. Reflective practice is a process of nourishing the minds of the students and this process can be effective if the person who is going to take the responsibility of making the minds of individuals is professionally trained. There are several teaching practices for grooming the teachers as micro teaching, team teaching etc and at present time the most famous term is called “reflective practice”. It is a powerful approach to professional development as it always focuses on behavioral change and self improvement. It is also based on the belief that any organizational change can be possible if the behaviors of the workers are changed. Farrell (2007) was of the opinion that people could not develop themselves professionally unless they are willing to bring change into their field same is true for teachers and teacher educators as in any educational organization teachers are responsible to create change and examine their own behaviors carefully (Rashid, M 2000)

Development of teachers in teaching profession is very important because effective learning of students is based upon the effective teaching. As Larrivee (2000) argues, Reflective Practice moves teachers from their knowledge base skills to a stage in their careers where they are able to modify their skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to invent new strategies.

Reflective practices provide feedback to the teachers for future planning as they make judgments on the past events and plan for the further. In this process of reflection teacher always try to learn from the past experiences and make new strategies to overcome the professional weaknesses. When teachers reflect they used to notice all within and outside the class activities. It did not only mean to evaluate student’s performance but also examining one’s own performance. (Boghani, A.A.2008)

### ***Strategies for Reflection***

Reflective writing involve following steps (1) Look back to the event, (2) Think why it happened (3) Find out causes (4) Find out suitable strategies

Airasian & Gullickson (2006) enlists eight general strategies which can be used to supplement and enhance reflection i.e. use of Self-reflection tools, Media recording and analysis, Students’ feedback, Teacher portfolios, Student performance data, External peer observation, Collegial dialogue/experience sharing/joint problem solving and writing teacher diary

### ***Activities involved in Reflective Practice Process***

The activities involved in reflective practices process are gathering data by the teachers about their practice, writing teacher diary and relationships with teaching colleagues

### ***Research on Reflection and Teachers***

Wildman and Niles (1987) presented a study on teacher reflection in the Virginia public schools, assert that it is necessary to systematically taught reflective teaching skills and then nurtured over a period of

time. During their study, they worked with 20 experienced teachers, helping them to become more reflective. These teachers then became mentors to promote reflective behavior on the part of inexperienced colleagues. At the end of 2 years, they found that teachers used to apply reflective teaching practices in their classrooms.

Ojanen (1993) conducted a research to identify role of the students while developing abilities that are very important in reflective teaching, the researcher highlighted the duties of the teacher as a guide and study was aimed to analyze teacher's performance as a guide. The study showed that teacher educators performed their teaching duties effectively by coaching student teachers in teaching practice by using students' personal records, dialogue journals, sharing their experiences with colleagues and basic purpose of guidance was to prepare them for future development. The research highlighted the concept, levels, techniques for, and benefits of reflective practice.

Kettle and Sellars (1996) presented their study that revolved around those students who were using reflective practices into their studies. For this purpose, they took interviews from those students as well as examined them to analyze their performance and to explore the effects of reflective practices into their development. Reflective practices were not only used by in service teachers but also by the student teachers.

## 2. Methodology

Better teaching standards always required teachers to reflect on themselves and share their experiences for improvement. The present study therefore explored reflective practices adopted by the university teachers. All the public and private universities having faculty or Department of Education were included in the study. The sample comprised of 42 faculty members. A five point Likert scale, having options strongly agreed, agreed, undecided, disagree and strongly disagreed was developed to measure the extent to which the university teachers were using reflective practices in their teaching. The number of the items included in the opinionnaire was 60 at the first stage. All the teachers of Education department of International Islamic University Islamabad were selected for pilot test and they were not included in the actual sample of the study. Ten items were dropped as a result of judgmental validity of experts and reliability score. Thus the final form of the opinionnaire had 50 statements. After pilot test the reliability of the instrument was calculated by (Cronbach alpha) for 60 statements and it was 0.733, however after deleting or refreshing some items/statements reliability was increased up to 0.783. After collecting the entire data, reliability was measured which was .876.

## 3. Findings

After analyzing the data the following are the findings of the study:

**Table 1. Item statistic for teacher diary**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Writing teacher diary is a time consuming activity.	42	3.29
Write your teaching experiences on a diary	42	3.14
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.21</b>

The overall mean value of 3.21 as in table 1 shows that teachers normally write the diary.

**Table 2: Item statistic for Instructional management**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Modify your teaching according to their needs	42	4.43
Lead the class to a purposeful end	42	4.24
Teacher's interest toward lesson is important than students	42	4.17
Emphasis on completing of syllabus	42	3.26
Easily change your lesson plan	42	3.26
Create effective learning environment and holds that	42	4.40
Readiness of the students is necessary for shifting towards next phase of teaching	42	4.40
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>4.02</b>

The overall mean value 4.02, shows that teacher are very much encouraged towards the instructional management aspect of reflective practices

**Table 3: Item statistic for record keeping:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Keep student's achievements record	42	4.19
There is a proper system of evaluating the student's record by the university	42	3.81
The facility of recording lesson is available during the class	42	2.26
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.42</b>

The mean weight of 3.42 clearly represents that most of the teachers observe the practice of record keeping and managing students' records; for students as well as for themselves

**Table 4: Item statistic for readiness to learn:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
You have readiness to learn from students	42	4.24
Allow anyone/colleagues to suggest ways for your zteaching.	42	4.19
Its not necessary to learn from students	42	3.48
Get feedback from student's opinions	42	3.95
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.96</b>

Results in table 4 shows the willingness of teachers in doing group work as well as the norms to get feedback from other colleagues. The overall mean value 3.96 shows that teachers appear to be fully motivated towards the collaborative work and that they want to learn from one another.

**Table 5: Item statistic for self evaluation:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Assess your teaching by yourselves.	42	3.40
Easily evaluate student's performance in individual tasks	42	3.76
Students are completely involved in your lessen.	42	3.00
Clarity of concepts are important than completing the syllabus	42	4.36
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.63</b>

Results in the table .5 are all about the self evaluation of the teachers by themselves. The overall mean value of table 3.63 shows that university teachers evaluate themselves after receiving the output from students' performance. According to the mean value it is clear that individual evaluation of the students is commonly adopt by the teachers.

**Table 6: Item statistic for providing guidance:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Always available for the students	42	4.36
Ready to help the students outside the class	42	4.40
Believe in the group work of the students	42	3.96
Not consider the personal problems of the students	42	3.31
Students share problems regarding learning with you	42	3.90
Revise and correct students mistakes at the end of the class	42	3.95
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.98</b>

Table 6 pertains to whether teachers were there to provide guidance to the students in the class room as well as beyond classroom setting. The overall mean value of 3.98 shows that teachers were most of the time consider the problems of the students as well as students had an easy access to teachers to share problems in the learning process.

**Table 7: Item statistic for peer observation:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
know all the co-curricular activities of the students	42	3.50
Aware about the class environment during teaching	42	4.45
Teacher's first priority is to observe students during class time	42	4.33
Students feel comfortable in doing group assignments	42	3.12
Group work of the students is often problematic for you	42	2.60
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.6</b>

Results in the table 7 are about teacher's observation of the students. The mean value of 3.6 indicate that university teacher commonly observe students to a reasonable extent.

**Table 8: Item statistic for critical incident:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Decide the aims of the task during class	42	4.21
Supportive of any problem encountered	42	3.81
Discuss performance of the students with your colleagues	42	2.71
Get help from colleagues in critical incident	42	3.76
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.62</b>

Results presented above are about the teachers' attention towards the problem encountered by the students and collaboration with other colleagues while discussing student's problems. The overall mean value of table 3.62 shows that most of the university teachers do decide the aims of the task and also get help from their colleagues in critical incidents.

**Table 9: Item statistic for use of Audio Visual Aids:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Use of A.v.aid facilitate the teaching learning process	<b>42</b>	<b>4.38</b>
Demonstrate new ideas and ways of teachings	<b>42</b>	<b>4.17</b>
Proper A.v.aid are available to assist your lesson	<b>42</b>	<b>3.67</b>
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>4.07</b>

The overall mean value of 4.07 shows that all university teachers facilitated their teaching with available audio visual aids. Use of audio visual aids is considered imperative for supplementing reflective practices.

**Table 10; Item statistic for sharing of experiences:**

Statement	N	Mean weight
Allow your colleagues to observe you during the Session	42	3.71
You have good coordination with students	42	4.12
Share your experiences with your colleagues	42	4.14
Receive feedback from the colleague's opinions	42	3.81
<b>Over all mean</b>		<b>3.94</b>

The overall mean value of table 3.94 shows that almost all of the university teachers had good coordination with their colleagues and students.

**Table 11: Item statistic for teacher's self observation:**

Statement No	Statement	N	Mean weight
2	Your academic activities move around teaching	42	.952
3	Establish aims and parameters of your task	42	1.042
6	Know all the co-curricular activities of the students	42	1.452
40	There is no liking and disliking for students	42	.803
14	Visit library for enhancing your knowledge	42	1.064
21	You are committed to your work	42	.697
<b>Overall mean</b>			<b>4.06</b>

The overall mean value of 4.06 makes it clear that teacher's self evaluation is adopted by all the university teachers.

**Table 12: Item statistic for professional satisfaction:**

Statement NO	Statement	N	Mean weight
1	Present teaching methodology at university level is enough to fulfill students' need	42	2.81
8	Satisfied with the present status of teaching	42	4.17
<b>Overall mean</b>			<b>3.49</b>

The overall mean value of 3.49 represents that most of the teachers at university level are satisfied regarding their profession

#### 4. Findings and Conclusions

1. The result of the study shows the overall mean value of 3.21 in perspective of using teacher diary by university teachers. It can be concluded that whether they are using teacher diary at satisfactory level but sometimes they considered it a time consuming and bore activity.
2. Instructional management is very important to keep students on right path and here results shows that teachers are giving importance to instructional management aspect of reflective practices during teaching. This can be concluded that teachers are highly motivated towards managing instructions during class at university level.

3. Results shows that teachers are having skills of record keeping of their learners for future development. This reflective activity can be done to keep them informed regarding their achievements.
4. Readiness to learn from other's experiences is very important for future development of teachers. The result of the study regarding the attribute of readiness to learn shows that teachers are fully motivated towards the cooperative work with colleagues and that they want to learn from one another.
5. The results of the study regarding self evaluation consist shows that university teachers do self evaluation after receiving the output from students' performance.
6. The result of the study shows mean value of 3.98 regarding teacher's guidance for the students in the classroom or outside the classroom. This can be concluded that teachers are providing guidance to the students in their problems.
7. Results obtained show that students' individual work/ assessment are considered more suitable by teachers as compare to their group work /performance.
8. Results of the study on critical incidents sharing with colleague with mean value of 3.62 shows that most of the university teachers like to get help from their colleagues in different areas like sharing student's achievement, classroom experiences, getting feedback in solving critical incidents etc.
9. The results of the study indicated that use of audio visual aids is considered beneficial activity in reflective practices not for the teachers but also for learners.
10. Sharing of experiences is also very important in reflective practices and here the result of the study shows mean value 3.94.
11. All the university teachers adopt self evaluation; the overall mean value of 4.06 makes it clear.
12. The overall mean value of 3.49.represents that most of the teachers at university level are satisfied with their profession

## 5. Discussion

Study showed that reflective practices are very important for teachers to develop professionally. These findings are also supported in the research conducted by Kettle and Sellars (1996). Many respondents were of the opinion that reflective practices was a best technique for the professional development of the teachers and teaching profession..

Another major finding of the study was that teacher educators performed their duties effectively by giving guidance to student teachers in reflective practices with the help of students' personal records, sharing their experiences and performance with their colleagues to help them. These findings were also supported by the work done by Ojanen in (1993) in which he stated that educators performed their teaching duties effectively by coaching student teachers in reflective practice with the help of students' personal records, dialogue journals, sharing their experiences with colleagues about their performance to help students reflect upon and improve their practices.

## 6. Recommendations

Keeping in view the findings, following recommendations are given:

1. Reflective practice has a powerful influence on teacher's performance at university level so it is also necessary that teachers should have awareness about the reflective practices and its effect on

the academic performance of their students. The study recommended that the teacher may be given an orientation on the use of reflective practices.

2. It is also recommended that reflective practice should be introduced as a course in teacher education programs so that teachers get awareness about reflective practices for their professional development.
3. There is a need of introducing the practical approach of reflective practice embedded in in-service teacher training programs. Professional development programs may be conducted periodically by focusing on different aspects of reflective practices.
4. There is a strong need for creating cooperation between universities and Higher Education Commission regarding quality check based on various parameters of reflective practices.

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