

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICES: A JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY

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### Abstract

*Reflection refers to the analysis and judgment of one's personal thoughts and actions. It is a systematic collection of information about classroom happenings to analyze and evaluate this information to make changes and improvements in current practice (Farrell, 2007). This study was conducted to find out the impact of reflective practices that enabled prospective teachers to report their all activities and demonstrate their level of competency level as a professional teacher, including personal development, daily class activities and reflective discussions in the form of portfolio. The study was aimed to; (i) analyze the role of portfolio construction to enhance student teachers' reflection on practice and (ii) know the abilities and skills they enhanced during this activity. Qualitative interpretations of this study explored how prospective teachers discovered the meaning of reflective practice and practiced through portfolios development. Data from open ended questionnaire and students' written reflection depicted that portfolios are beneficial for students because of provision of enough opportunities for reflecting upon their practice. The reflective practices and portfolio development provided*

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*resources to mention the hidden curriculum. The results of the study reveal the challenges faced by the prospective teachers in development and effective implementation of the portfolio and shared their learned lessons along the way. The findings of the study suggested that the prospective teachers learned to reflect through various opportunities, in different contexts and developed many skills. This study has significant implications to provide insight for teacher educators who provide the scenarios of reflection to their prospective teachers to become efficient reflective practitioners.*

**Keywords:** *Reflection, Reflective Practice, Prospective Teachers, Portfolio*

## 1. Introduction

Teacher preparation programs are very important for the professional development of teachers and reflective practice is one of the significant techniques to make them effective that develops knowledge and understanding in the practice setting. Reflective practice is a process to recognize the needs, problems and concerns that are really important. According to Dewey (1933) facing the situation and ask yourself what needs to be considered when beginning to a complex situation is reflective practice. This concept was developed in the 1980s and since then the development of reflective practice has been widely adopted in a range of higher education and training, health sciences and lead best practices in professional settings.

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) defined the concept of reflective practices 20 years ago as a new point of view or understanding that features individual and his or her experiences and considered it as a learning process. Critical reflection is a way of understanding and resolving the contradiction of one's actual and desirable practice within the context of any live experience (John, 2000). According to Boud and Fales (1983), reflection is a key element for effective learning. Critically thinking about and

experience, reviewing and analyzing from various aspects to get new insight is critical reflection.

Keeping in view the importance of reflective practices its application is very much important in the field of teacher education. Teachers' professional development is a continuous process of improvement in skills and competencies of teachers. Through reflective practices teachers might be able to think critically and reflectively to point out their weaker areas that need improvement. It would be very beneficial for teachers to improve their teaching and updating courses through application of reflective practices. Teachers can make their students to think critically and improve their various skills for personality and career development.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to;

1. analyze the effect of portfolio construction to enhance student teachers' reflection on practice
2. find out the skills and competencies prospective teachers developed through reflective practices

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How the process of reflective practices enhance prospective teachers' reflection on practice through portfolio construction?
2. What sort of abilities and skills perspective teachers developed during this activity?

## **2. Literature Review**

The application of reflective practice in teaching and learning situation means to investigate what actually happened in classroom and the reasons behind it, to related beliefs and values about teaching and classroom practices. Classroom teachers systematically collect information about the events and then evaluate after in-depth analysis to enhance the information to improve their fundamental beliefs and assumption in teaching process (Farrell, 2007) not only in classroom but outside the classroom to grasp the impact of their teaching on the community or society, or vice versa.

Reflection is the process of investigation one's personal thought, feelings and actions to obtain a flawless picture which help the

practitioners themselves to understand these situations in order to take appropriate future action built on existing strengths. According to Schon (1983) basic forms of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action for practitioners to develop their personal and professional competences. Reflection-on-action involves carefully reflecting the action that occurred in the past to identify strengths, weaknesses and more effective strategies for future actions. Reflection-in-action means during a situation examining your own behaviour and that of others (Schon, 1987). Critical reflection is another concept commonly mentioned in the literature on reflection involves uncovering some of the assumptions, beliefs and values that underlie the construction of our maps. Critical incident analysis offers useful tools to facilitate critical reflection.

Teachers need to know why some classes seem to go well and others not so well, and how they define what well means. This investigation is called evidence based reflective practice. As such, teachers need to compile solid data about what is really happening in their classrooms rather than what they think is happening. Reflective practice is important because it helps teachers make more informed decisions about their teaching decisions that are based on concrete evidence systematically collected over a period of time. There are four major principles of reflective practice: 1) reflective practice is evidence based; 2) involves dialogue; 3) explores beliefs and practices; and 4) it is a way of life (Farrell, 2012).

Various reflective practice strategies can be adopted by teachers in the classrooms such as: The learning log and reflective journals to keep a record of reflections; Portfolios; feedback both verbal and non-verbal; what have I learnt? A positive approach to processing information in a constructive way of dealing with an upsetting event; valuing personal strengths; viewing experiences objectively and empathy (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). In process of teaching and learning, reflective practices act as a key to enhance the quality of education. It involves the professional competencies of teachers, reflection and discourse knowledge. Thus, it enables the comprehension of professional knowledge theory and develops

constructivism approach for knowledge adaptation and its implementation.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study investigates and reveals the skills and competencies which the prospective teachers had developed through reflective practices. This study was conducted to find out the impact of reflective practices that enabled prospective teachers for documentation of all of their demonstration and activities, their development of competence as a professional teacher, including personal development, daily class activities and reflective discussions in a form of portfolio and to find out the skills and competencies prospective teachers had developed through reflective practices.

#### **3.1 Research design**

Keeping in view the nature of the variables and in-depth analysis, experimental research design was selected and data were analyzed through qualitative approach.

#### **3.2 Population & Sample**

Population of the study comprised of all the students of Masters Level program at Department of Education of International Islamic University Islamabad. Thirty (30) students from M.A Education program, Department of Education, International Islamic University Islamabad were taken as the sample of the study.

#### **3.3 Procedure of the Study**

The International Islamic University Islamabad, Department of Education offered a course entitled “Teaching Learning Strategies and Reflective Practices” for prospective teachers in masters of education program. The aim of the course was to develop pedagogical competency in students; to develop critical skills and capabilities through providing diverse learning experiences and to develop reflective thinking skills in prospective teachers to make them effective practitioner. In practice-based course there was involvement of interactive activities e.g. group discussions, collaborative activities, peer observed methods, group assignments, peer observed teaching, practicum based projects and portfolio. All methods of reflective

practices were implemented to encourage student’s experiences and quality teaching.

Following is the instructional plan that was developed for course and according to that plan, reflective practice activities were implemented;

| <b>Table 1. Instructional Plan</b>   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Course Title:</b> Teaching Learning Strategies and Reflective Practices |   |   |  |
| <b>Class:</b> M.A Education  |   |   |  |
| <b>Timings</b>   | <b>3 hrs</b>  | <b>Objectives</b>   | <b>Reflection activity</b>   |
| Topics   | Unit 1: Teacher and teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept of Teaching</li> <li>• Concept for effective teaching.</li> <li>• Teaching principles</li> <li>• Personal and professional characteristics of effective teacher.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make prospective teachers familiar with the basic concept, definition, principles and characteristics of teaching and teachers.</li> <li>• To differentiate between the teachers’ personal and professional characteristics for their effective teaching.</li> <li>• To explore ways to become an effective teacher.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce participants about the concept of teaching, learning.</li> <li>• To enable the participants to be more aware about self-thinking skills, guidance about reflective strategies and to describe role of teacher as role model.</li> <li>• Write preliminary (descriptive) reflective statements by using suitable trigger questions and scaffolds.</li> </ul> |

|        |  |   |  |
|--------|--|---|--|
|        |  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct participants about strategies on how to provide and collect feedback.</li> <li>• Participants learn how to assess critically and mention on peer's reflection.</li> <li>• To maintain reflective journal</li> </ul>  |
| Topics | Unit 2:Teaching Learning process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature and meaning of learning.</li> <li>• Element of learning</li> <li>• Principles and levels of learning</li> <li>• Domains of learning</li> <li>• Process of learning</li> <li>• Process of teaching and learning</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the foremost characteristics, levels and principles of learning.</li> <li>• To distinguish between the nature and meaning of learning.</li> <li>• To demonstrate the different domains of learning.</li> <li>• To make them aware map out the process of teaching and learning.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange activity of levels of learning to encourage and construct their practices and demonstrate for the enhancement of the excellence of their teaching and students' learning.</li> <li>• Participants learn to comment critically about peer's reflection.</li> </ul> |
| Topics | Unit 3:Method and Techniques of Teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept of techniques and method</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the fundamental concept of techniques and methods of teaching.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange and design activities for each method</li> <li>• Teach a lesson through role play</li> </ul>  |

|        |   |   |  |
|--------|---|---|--|
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture method</li> <li>• Discussion based method,</li> <li>• Group strategies.</li> <li>• Demonstration method</li> <li>• problem solving,</li> <li>• Inquiry, discovery method</li> <li>• Assignment method,</li> <li>• Project method</li> <li>• Teaching Techniques</li> <li>• Micro Teaching,</li> <li>• Team Teaching,</li> <li>• Simulation,</li> <li>• Programmed instruction</li> <li>CAI, ISD</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To distinguish between the different pedagogies of teaching (lecture method, classroom method, discussion methods, demonstration method, inquiry, problem solving, discovery method, assignment and project method) and their implementation in teaching.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom Demonstrations for each method</li> <li>• Group discussions and brain storming sessions</li> <li>• Use a range of tools and techniques to develop analytical and evaluative reflection</li> <li>• Effective use of feedback from a variety of sources to update and enhance practice.</li> <li>• Micro-teaching</li> <li>• Maintain reflective journal</li> </ul> |
| Topics | <p>Unit 4:<br/>Reflective Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning and nature of reflection.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the basic concept of reflection</li> <li>• To apply various techniques and methods of</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence participants about the concept of reflective teaching log (as effective learning tool)</li> </ul>  |

|               |   |   |  |
|---------------|---|---|--|
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core strategies and techniques of reflection.</li> <li>• Critical incident analysis of keeping reflective journals.</li> <li>• Peer coaching</li> <li>• Action research.</li> <li>• Systematic reflection skills throughout the teaching-learning process</li> </ul> | <p>reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maintain learning logs and reflective journal.</li> <li>• To develop reflective practice skills</li> <li>• To understand the importance of reflective practices in teaching learning process and skills development.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants critique and comment on peer's reflection and to utilize feedback from a variety of sources to inform and enhance practice.</li> <li>• Practice a variety of reflective practices.</li> <li>• Brain storming sessions, group discussions and</li> <li>• Maintain reflective journal</li> </ul> |
| Final project |   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compilation and submission of a portfolio</li> </ul>  |

#### 4. Data Collection

An open ended Questionnaire and the assessment of portfolio in which students documented their personal developments, daily class activities and reflective discussions were used to collect data. Qualitative interpretations were executed to evaluate the effectiveness of reflective practices and compilation of portfolios.

#### 5. Data Analysis and Findings

The findings of this study are based on the data collected from questionnaire and students reflective journal. Majority of the participants never experienced reflective activities before and experienced it very first time. One participant shared her personal

experience of reflection and said “*sometimes I write diary when I have bad experience*”. That shows that in formal setting majority do not have any experience of reflective activities and portfolio development. One participant shared that she had to face many difficulties during portfolio development because of no experience “*the reason on these difficulties that I am facing during portfolio development is that I have never experienced it before, now in the next course hopefully, it will be less difficult*”

Students considered writing daily reflection activity as the most interesting part of the portfolio construction. Writing positive and negative views about daily class activities and developed critical thinking in students so they can see things from all aspects. They also found portfolio development as a creative activity that can develop creative and critical thinking in students. It can also help to revise daily class lecture to develop a link with next lecture and keeps a record of all the activities done in the class that would be a memorable task for them in future. Decorating portfolio was also an interesting activity for students that enhanced creativity

Students considered writing daily reflection as the most difficult part of the project. Students were a bit confused about how to write or express views regarding lecture. Arranging and organizing all activities in sequence were also found difficult because being organized at first could be difficult but it would help in the long run. Reflective discussion activity was also difficult for students at the beginning because mostly they were not encouraged by teachers to discuss and express their own thoughts in front of the whole class. Some students found it tiring because it was their first experience. Some found nothing difficult in it and some students were of the view that time management was difficult for portfolio development because they had to keep record on daily bases and found it time consuming.

Students learned through portfolio project how to manage things in a complete form, how to arrange things that would be helpful for them in future. One student said “*Being a future teacher it is very important for me to learning how to organize things in a proper form*”. Students also learned to participate, present activities, build

confidence and creative writing skills. They learned how to maintain a portfolio and benefits of making it, expressing thoughts and organization of work according to requirement, improve physical, intellectual and cognitive abilities. They learned strategies to be disciplined and ways to maintain things effectively in life, collection, accumulation and saving all the data which is beneficial for them. In this project there are different sort of activities that students did not experience before. It helped to recall their lecture on daily basis. Punctuality, management, English language skills and way of expression were also improved. One student said “in our project one topic is “can I be a role model”*I judge many qualities which exists in me*”. *It also enhanced problem solving ability in me*”. Daily reflection enhanced all 4 skills reading, writing, listening, speaking and psychomotor domain are also involved in this project. Decorating Portfolio was very creative and interesting part that developed aesthetics and arts skills of students.

Daily reflection added thoughts and ideas through self-reflection in students and they found this project was different because it provided diverse learning experiences with no restriction, free and creative writing activities that promoted students original work. Students found compilation of activities in a form of portfolio very useful because it would keep all record safe, remembered and recognized. Different sort of activities were included that also helped to recall of lectures on daily bases. Students had to be more attentive in the classroom because they had to maintain the reflective journal, record of whole semester and class activities. Students observed their gradual progress and all the activities were related to the daily life and daily problems that enabled them to think critically as a problem solver.

The best part of portfolio project was class presentations and daily reflections. Portfolio construction developed a habit to maintain and manage things. Keeping record of all activities and material in a form of portfolio was convenient to search relevant material and makes them feel proud of, in which activities they have participated. Daily reflection enabled them to judge daily learning and writing

opinion about daily lecture that what they have learned and what not. It was found helpful for exam preparation, enhanced confidence, vocabulary and maintained a report of students' progress throughout semester.

The weakest part of this portfolio project was that sometimes students take it as a burden and consider it a very time consuming activity. They also felt difficulty in writing reflection on daily basis. Because of poor time management some students just focused on completing the tasks to get checked by teacher and not for the creativity.

Respondents suggested variety of ways to make this project better for example, by writing what they have learned from the class activities, sharing reflection by students in every class to enhance reading and listening skills, by involving more and more activities, adding some art work, decorating portfolio by using colorful art paper, writing more details in reflection, writing correct information about lecture, using different methods and viewpoints.

After completion of the reflective activities and portfolio development, respondents analyzed their gradual progress in confidence building, organization and management skills and portfolio development skills. They also developed in-depth understanding about the purpose of activities, improvement in English language, knowledge, experience, speaking, writing skills and courage to take risks and trying new things that they never did before. Participants enjoyed almost all the reflection activities i.e. reflective discussion, class demonstrations, role play, chart decoration, expression of ideas and thoughts through self-reflection.

Majority of the students responded that all activities were beneficial and interesting but class demonstrations and discussions were least enjoyable for some students because of lack of understanding, confidence and confusion. Reflective practices were exiting and fruitful learning experience for students and they felt proud of keeping evidence of all those activities in which they have participated. Some students were unable to express their thoughts due to the lack of confidence, but after presenting their views in front of

class makes them feel proud and confident. A student said “*we are the future teachers and reflecting our thoughts was very energizing experience for us*”

Time management, conducting creative activities, presentations, daily reflection, lack of information and resources were some of the challenges students had faced during these activities. Students overcome these challenges by getting help from teacher and class fellows, working on daily basis, proper time management, thinking and reflecting, working in library and use of previous knowledge and experiences.

Students achieved variety of skills, attitudes and knowledge during this activity. i.e. file management, confidence, learn to manage and present ideas, writing skills, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, creativity, critical thinking skills, knowledge, discipline, time management skills, awareness of self-reliance, teacher as good leader, teachers as a manger, maximum class participation, tolerance, pronunciation, motivation.

The students wanted to achieve their goals through reflective practices were, time management and thoughts presentations, building confidence, thinking and writing skills, peer group interaction, effective communication strategies, build and enhance confidence, command on core subjects, class participation and English language skills, and team work.

Areas in which students need improvement were: writing self-reflection, writing and speaking skills, communication skills, confidence, time management, Reading skills, speaking writing skills, problem solving ability, vocabulary, creative thinking, punctuality, self-realization, recalling and developed in-depth understanding.

Daily reflection activity was found to be very helpful for students and they got many benefits i.e. lecture revision, improvement in writing skills, ability to comment, providing suggestions for better teaching and problem solving skill.

## **6. Discussion**

Literature shows the importance and various types of reflective practices that can be used for a range of effective approach for

professional development (McAlpine & Weston, 2000; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Hung, 2008) equipped opportunities to explore, and represent their own ideas and knowledge'. According to Kvernbekk (2001) majority of teachers are not trained and apply Reflective practices. He revealed it as a gap between theory and practice.

Incorporating the concept of reflection into teacher education programs, prepares teachers for a lifetime of reflecting on best practices that impact student achievement. According to studies conducted in Albany State University by Lupinski et.al (2012) reflective practices can be successfully implemented in teacher education programs and works well with the course objectives and concepts, and provides a great example of reflection being used in the teacher education program at University level by incorporating reflective practices into classes. The professional development of in-service teachers through reflective practice is also reflected by various studies (Mpedovo & Khaton, 2016), specifically through reflective journals, lesson plans, self and peer reflections (Gungor, 2016).

Findings in this study support the results of Yeşilbursa (2011) in writing reflective diaries as and evaluating their own teaching practices for their academic, social and personal developments (Dewey, 1933). According to Chien (2014), teachers could evaluate their teaching strengths and weaknesses specifically on classroom management, giving instruction, and materials design and activity preparation that increased personal awareness about the teaching process.

## **7. Conclusion & Recommendations**

This study describes the impact of reflective practices and development of a Portfolio that enabled prospective teachers to document, enlist their multiple activities and demonstration of their development of competence as a professional teacher. Data collected from open ended questionnaire, students' written reflections and portfolio assessment designated that students found all activities and methods beneficial for them; principally because of provision of opportunities of reflection they provided opportunities for reflection.

The study reflects on the challenges which they faced during the development and implementation of the reflective practices and shared the lessons they have learned along the way. These lessons include confidence building skills, enhancement of writing, reading, listening, speaking and skills, critical and creative thinking skills, time management strategies, increase in vocabulary, effective communication skills, group strategies and team work skills, problem solving skills, in-depth understanding, mastery of subject and the most important thing is self-realization.

It is recommended that reflection activities may be a part of all subject areas and incorporated at all levels because it is very beneficent for skills development. Teachers may keep the record of each student to identify their strengths and weaknesses, design remedial programs, discuss with parents, teachers and head. Teachers may provide trainings to implement reflective practices in classrooms as a part of curriculum. All teacher training programs may include a course on reflective practices to train teachers about its various techniques its importance and ways. Every teacher and student may write a reflective journal at the end of every course to make it a constant practice. Learning communities of teachers and students can be established to exchange and reflect ideas and experiences for present and future practice.

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