

Views of Prospective Teachers about the Use of Reflective Practices in Teaching Practice (A Study of Teaching Skills through Reflection)

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Abstract

Reflection is one of the key aspects of teacher training programs that has long been recognized as an important and valuable cognitive process, and it continually resurface in conceptualizing the practice setting. Many teacher education programs have incorporated views of reflection into their course structures, but the effectiveness and forms of adoption may well be limited by the largely traditional nature of the programs to begin with. Hence, reflection may too often be a subject that has been created rather than a subject to be created by the learners. This paper was designed to investigate the views of student teachers on practical training of reflective practice in their teaching practice and also address how reflection enhance their teaching skills. Qualitative research was conducted for this purpose. The paper attempts to establish that through reflective practice training teachers were enhance their teaching skills in an effective way and develop their professional development.

Key Words: Prospective teachers, Reflective Practice, Teaching Practice, Teaching Skills.

Introduction

Teachers are the strongest pillar of any education system. They stand in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, values and skills. Teacher education plays a vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. Training of teachers has emerging global trends in education and the overall needs and aspirations of the people. The Quality of education depends on the quality teachers and teaching. The way teachers are trained is an important aspect to improve quality.

Now a day's teacher training program aimed is to fill the slits in practice and theory. Previously teacher training programs just focused on preparation and presentation of the instructions. These were use as the basic skills for prospective teachers. During this contemporary epoch, the activities of teaching become more composite, demanding, goal specific and competitive. Specific teaching strategies are appropriate for different discipline. In this respect, job of teacher has become diverse with respect to using different pedagogical techniques, creating conducive learning environment, formulation and distribution of assessment tools, mixing technology and seizing students' interest. "Only reflective teachers are able to refine and modify their practices for improved learning. Nothing gives pause like reflection. The act of reflecting is unparalleled in its ability to surface consciousness and bring awareness. Our reflections may surprise, enlighten, challenge, or confound us. Reflection is, in fact, a critical element in any form of learning. Reflection is one way of processing human experience and can turn experience into learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985/2015). Reflection, in and of itself, is an effective pedagogy. Reflection has added significance for teachers, as the ability to make meaning is essential for adult learning to occur (Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). When reflecting on their teaching, faculty function as expert exploring what different choices they might make. They are able to accommodate diverse learning styles of students and contribute to quality teaching-learning process" (Afghani & Ferdeowsi, 2015, p 20). Akbari (2008, p 28) said that "reflective practice is diverse way of pacing back and following one's own thoughts/actions, that occur in a routine. Reflective practice is a recent phenomenon in teacher education and it has been steadily changing the conventional teacher training concept".

Azeem (2011) argues that teacher education institutes do not train prospective teachers properly about their first classroom experience. Most of the PT's are unaware about Reflective Teaching Practices and unable to reflect effectively on their teaching before, during and after teaching. Institutions running these programs do not follow HEC instructions by letter and spirit.

Training programs need to stimulate PT's regarding modern benchmark of teaching and assessing their own effectiveness. Reflection is the art of teaching. It requires both feeling and thinking about classroom happenings in a more worthwhile manner and to make it more operative. Reflective teachers need to reconnoiter ways to attend and integrate their emotion and finding about their teaching methodology (Zeicher & Liston, 2014).

Methodology

Methodology the study used a qualitative enquiry for the research and data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The participants were 15 prospective teachers enrolled in four years B.Ed Secondary programme at Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan and who had opted mathematics method as their option subject. The student teachers completed the questionnaire about their experience of reflection on the activities conducted in the mathematics classroom. The researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of the responses of the questionnaire. Also, they analyzed the reflective journal maintained by each student.

During reflective practice training performance of the PT's on following aspects were assessed: reading skills, writing skills, journal writing skills and lesson planning skills. After 10 weeks of training researcher started assessing PT's regarding above mentioned skills.

Reading Skills

PT's were assessed for their skills once in a week. There was total 6 assessments of every prospective teacher of control and experimental groups (once in a week). Reading skills were assessed through following content.

1. Literary Text: Poetry, Novel, Story
2. Informative Text: Argumentative, Persuasive, Expository

All these 6 assessments of every PT's were checked assigned marks. Each assessment is of 10 marks. So, there were total 60 marks for 6 assessments. Mean score of experimental groups were 25.8 while control groups were 19.2 which showed that reading skills of experimental group is better than control group because experimental groups were engaged in reading practice during training.

Writing Skills

Prospective teachers were assessed for writing skills after 10 weeks of training. Every PT was assessed three time for following aspects of writing.

1. Persuasive
2. Argumentative
3. Narrative

Mean score of experimental groups were 21.75 and control were 15.24. Performance of experimental groups is better as compare to control groups

Lesson Planning and Teaching Skills

During training, prospective teachers of experimental groups were trained for lesson planning skill. Prospective teachers were assigned topics to prepare lesson plans on format included in the module. Researcher evaluated the lesson as per standards of format. Performance of experimental groups were better in selecting appropriate strategies for teaching as compare to control groups. Rest of the aspects are same in groups.

The teaching skills of all prospective teachers increased gradually from one teaching presentation to another. This is indicated by the scores gained by each participant as depicted in the following table.

Table: Scores of Prospective Teachers for Presentations

No	The Teaching Components	1 st Presentation	2 nd Presentation	3 rd Presentation
1	Teaching Technique	64.52	71.82	78.70
2	Instructional Materials	69.31	73.72	79.91
3	Teaching Media	63.57	72.22	76.45
4	Classroom Management	64	72.46	75.27
5	English Use	66.07	71	73.5
6	Language Assessment	68.15	71.43	73.39

Journal writing skills

PT's were assigned topics to teach in front of their peers after lesson planning. After teaching they were asked to reflect on their teaching and write journal. Their journals were judged on the following criteria.

1. Ability to write in correct language
2. Ability to identify weakness in their teaching
3. Suggestions to overcome mistake next time.

It was found that PT's in experimental groups were better in identification of their mistakes and suggesting remedies there off. Surprisingly Groups were equal in first aspect (Ability to write in correct language).

Data Analysis

After teaching practice prospective teachers of experimental groups were asked to answer following open ended questions.

Q1: What is your perception about reflective practice training and teaching practice?

Q2: How much your general understanding and awareness of reflective thinking enhanced as a result of this course?

Q3: What did you gain in training session about the interactive relationship with your students?

Q 4: Do you think these activities are beneficial for you as a reflective being?

Question wise analysis of the responses

Prospective teachers' responses of above mentioned were thoroughly read by researcher and accumulate their perception in a following section.

What is your perception about reflective practice training?

Majority of the PT's said that it was a wonderful and new experience for us. It is through the development of knowledge and understanding of the practice setting and the ability to recognize

and respond to such knowledge that the reflective practitioner becomes truly responsive to the needs, issues, and concerns that are so important in shaping practice.

Participant shared her thoughts that

.....there should be a certain logicity and continuity in performance of the teacher, it would be good to do so in the future as well, but certain actions need improvement through reflection. Reflective practice training would be beneficial for future also.

Another participant said that

I felt a personal need to improve in order to become a clear, consistent, and logical teacher

It can be concluded that prospective teacher needs to develop his /her pedagogical skills a process of reflection on the practical situations in which a personal need for learning was created. The emphasis should be shifts towards inquiry-oriented activities, interaction amongst learners, and the development of reflective skills. During the learning processes involved, the teacher educator has an important role, although completely different from the traditional role of the lecturer. The kind of support that he or she should offer (including theory!) has to be very much adjusted to the specific problems the PT's are having. Therefore, an important issue raised through this view is the positioning of the PT,s as a learner during reflective practice training while later on getting a real experiences through teaching practice. Reflection is eminently sensible and reasonable in developing one's understanding of the practice setting.

How much your general understanding and awareness of reflective thinking enhanced as a result of this course

The respondents or prospective teachers in this study highlighted the fact that they built knowledge or understanding as a result of this training and through the various opportunities provided in the training to use elements of reflective teaching; for example, critical thinking or reflective thinking. PT's highlighted that they were encouraged to give careful consideration or thought to various issues and aspects of the training.one of the participants said that

This training has helped me to better understand the happenings of a classroom and has made me more equipped to deal with situations that may arise. One prospective teacher stated that she had developed a questioning disposition as a result of doing the course, with the expressed aim of improving her knowledge. She wrote:

I now realized that I ask more questions and desire to find the answer to them whether it's by doing personal research or asking family or workmates. As a reflective thinker, I seek for new ways to better myself educationally, and I try to implement what I have learnt, in the classroom, and share with workmates.

One student teacher spoke of growing in various types of knowledge: I have gathered immense information on reflective teaching and have really grown in this area. I am now a far

more reflective person than I was a few months ago, prior to my engagement in this course. I have grown in knowledge as a reflective person. I have gained knowledge of self, passion, emotion, technical knowledge and practical knowledge.

What did you gain in training session about the interactive and respectful relationship with your students?

Most of prospective teachers emphasized on strong interactive relationship with their students. The effects of teacher-student relationships have been researched extensively, and points to how positive relationships can have good social and academic outcomes. If there is lack of trust and respect between teacher and student, it is difficult to teach. One of the participants said that

I have learned through this training that interaction and affection with students is important aspect of effective teaching. If a person is not affectionate, he/she cannot be a good teacher. Some PT's mention that some time it creates discipline problem from students. One of the participants stated that I had experienced some moments in which I encountered a difficult situation but still I believed teacher should treat students politely.

Another participant said that

“Training improved my interpersonal relationship skills. Training strengthened my belief that improving students and teacher relationships has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students' academic and social development”

The majority of PT's respond positively that how training helped them to develop positive relationship with students. Prospective Teachers explained that training reinforced the importance of trustworthy and respectful relationship with students

Do you think these activities are beneficial for you as a reflective being?

Most of the trainee's pointed out that reflective practice is an important technique in practice based professional settings where people learn from their own classroom experiences, rather than from formal learning or knowledge transfer. It is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement. It is also an important way to bring together theory and practice; through reflection. One of the participants said that

“As a result of training activities, I decided to do something in a different way, or you can say just decide to do in the best way. I think being a teacher one needs to reflect on the experiences or activities one is doing for one's growth”

It can be deduced from the perceptions of prospective teachers that they believed that by consciously and systematically reflecting upon their experience e's, novice teachers can improve understanding of their own teaching. One of the participants view:

“Training of reflective practice enabled me to identify my strengths and weaknesses and can improve my teaching skills”

In short, by developing knowledge of situation and understanding setting of practice and the ability to identify and react to the problems the prospective teachers can become skill full teachers.

Discussion Conclusion:

In the light of above results, it is concluded that reflective practices training has great impact on prospective teachers teaching during their teaching practicum. Majority of prospective teachers report that during teaching practices reflective skills, like reading skills, writing skills and lesson planning skills were enhance their teaching skills. John Dewey (1933) also reports that learning from experience is enriched by reflecting on experience and Donald A. Schön (1987) theorized that reflective practice represents an important factor to improve professional activity. Jack Mezirow (1991, 2000) gives reflection a central role in learning because through it we become aware of the ways in which we interpret reality and give meaning to actions and behavior. Selmo, Orsenigo (2014) in his study state that using reflective practice during teaching improve their pedagogy in the classroom and explore that there is strong relationship between reflection and teacher performance. So, it is concluded that reflection engages prospective teachers in thoughtful recollection that leads to heightened understanding of learning and relevant transfer of learning and skills during their teaching practices.

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