

## Primary School In-Service Teachers' Perceptions about Reflective Teaching Practice

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the reflective practice as a process of continuing professional development (CPD) implemented in different parts of the government primary schools of Pakistan recently. Case study design was adopted for a single school as it aims to understand the perceptions of primary school teachers about reflective teaching practice with the help of enriched data using semi structured interview. For data analysis content analysis method was applied and analysis was presented thematically for clarity and vividness. It was revealed that most teachers perceived reflective teaching as a helpful tool in improving professional capacity, valuable to share reflective practice with colleagues, constructive in receiving guidance in professional development and useful for assessing self-skills and considered its role in identifying developmental needs of their skills and prospective training. It is suggested that primary school teachers should engage in reflective practice on regular basis and should be provided internet facilities at school to strengthen their knowledge of using creative applications of reflective practice.*

**Key Words:** Teacher Education, Reflective Practice, Self-Assessment

## Introduction

In today's educational world the complexity of teaching requires teachers to inquire their teaching practices to improve their teaching skills and to boost learner's performance. For this purpose, reflective teaching gains the attention of the people as a powerful movement in teacher education (Taale, 2012). Reflections play a key role in teaching improvement. Because the nature of practice is such that improvement can only be brought depending on how the practitioner understand the self-concept and the nature of the practice (Calderhead, 1987). Reflection enables teachers to understand their experiences and to form a practice of continually learning from those experiences and analyze those practices to reframe in broader perspective (Kayapinar, 2013). In this way teachers may engage in reflective practices, using a reflective attitude to their practice as a means of continuous professional growth (Reis-Jorge, 2007).

In order to improve the quality of teaching at primary level schools, provincial Elementary & Secondary Education Departments of Pakistan, with the joint efforts of Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-GIZ) implemented a model program of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in different parts of the country. Similarly, the CPD Program was implemented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in the year 2010-2012 under the title "Integrated In-Service Teachers' Training & Supervision" in 176 schools of district Abbott bad and Peshawar. The program results revealed improvements in teacher performance and student's success. The outcomes of this implemented program were fruitful (PITE).

After planning department of Elementary & Secondary Education KPK established a CPD unit at PITE in Oct, 2015, and support it at all levels to implement the program. In late 2015 this unit started work and implemented CPD

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in the district of Mardan. CPD is now a regular part of the department and implemented every year to 2-new districts. In 2017 in the program of CPD the districts of Malakand and Karak were also included. (PITE).

### **Aims of the CPD Program are**

To update teacher's skills for effective teaching and to promote students' learning through: Increasing teachers' understanding of 2006 curriculum and its pedagogical beliefs, preparing teachers to enhance their skills through regular self-reflective practice and peer learning as well Supporting teachers' professional development with the help of external supervisor (PITE)

### **Literature Review**

The concept of reflective practice in teacher education was introduced by Dewey. Who was a notable master theorist of reflective thinking (Lyons, 2010)? Dewey (1933) originally defined reflection as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" Dewey distinguished reflective thought from random 'stream of consciousness' which is thought that we experience on an continuing basis (Cimer, et al., 2013). For Dewey (1933) the function of reflective thought was to transform the condition of obscurity, doubt, conflict, and disturbance into a clear, coherent, settled, and harmonious one (Lyons, 2010). For Schon (1983) Educators constantly need to inquire their classroom activities to find the gaps existing between theory and practice and to explore the prospects for skill growth. Reflective practice comprises recounting, telling, studying and assessing one's own views, principles, norms, philosophies, movements and practices (Iqbal, 2015). Similarly, Usage of reflective practices realized teachers to implement styles based on student centered teaching approaches and mainly concentrate on the feedbacks of their actions. Reflective practices change the teacher's choices for selecting teaching strategy and teaching materials in line with the subjects. This practice enables the teachers to present the content in segments for easy learning and understanding of the students Moreover, this practice motivates teachers to be well prepared as they have to teach to so many students (Roadman, 2010).

The most powerful, durable and effective agents of educational change are actually the teachers' proficient skills in self-developing and reflective practice (Sellars, 2012). Teaching and reflection are practices that need regular revision (Pearson, 2012) and for this reason both are considered to go hand in hand. These statements make a sense that reflection play a vital role in teachers' efficiency, and to improve student performance (Alger, 2006; Pearson, 2012) This views of teachers calling for a continually reflective approach to their profession, to renew their teaching styles constantly (Ghaye, 2011). The changing needs and tasks placed on teachers require them to be reflective in order to respond properly to their varying positions (Killen, 2007). Similarly, Essuman (2015) recommended that workshops on reflective teaching, learning and writing should be integrated into pre- and in-service teachers' training courses. Guidance should be provided to the teachers for developing skills in reflective writing, and learning and in-service teachers should be introduced with the need to establish the culture of reflection in their regular practice.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study was to know about the perceptions of government primary in-service school teachers about reflective practice as implemented in primary level schools as a program of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) for in-service teachers' professional development in different parts of Pakistan.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study is based on interpretive paradigm with qualitative case study design of the research because my aim was to understand the phenomena of reflective teaching practice at primary level school teachers' context, that how this practice of reflective teaching is understood by teachers at primary level schools in Pakistan and how this practice is perceived by primary school teachers.

### **Participants**

I choose one school as the CPD was implemented partially from time to time in different districts of Pakistan by the Provincial Elementary & Secondary Education, and this is why I selected 1 Government girl's primary school Khan Garhi situated in Malakand district at KPK. At provincial level all the government primary schools are restricted to

follow the same rules and regulations implemented by the head authority so choosing of 1 primary school for conducting of this study is sufficient to understand the process of reflective practice running as a program of CPD in different parts of the country. The participants of this study included teachers from grade 1 to grade 5 of this school. There are approximately 250 students in this school and teaching staffs are 6 in numbers including 1 Head teacher and 1 assigned external supervisor.

### **Instruments**

In order to investigate in-depth interpretations of reflective teaching practice I used semi structured interview as an instrument for data collection regarding primary school in-service teachers' perceptions about reflective teaching practice.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis content analysis method was applied in order to create smooth flows of interpretations of the gathered information under thematic analysis. I used to interpret the interpretations of teacher participants in order to depict a complete picture of teacher perceptions of reflective teaching practice.

### **Defining Reflective Practice**

After analyzing data of government primary school in-service teachers' interview, It is revealed that all the government primary school in-service teacher' participants from grade- 1 to grade - 5 defined reflective practice positively and considered its role as the evaluation of activities which take place in teaching learning process, the teacher participant conceptualized reflective teaching practice as an instrument for assessment of teaching skills to be updated and to develop the teaching learning process. Moreover, the teacher participants considered reflective practice essential for skill advancement.

#### **Teacher grade-1**

"Reflective practice is a means to assess your teaching skills and identify developmental needs that must be met, "Reflective practice can enable the teachers to identify how to be improve and get better outcomes."

#### **Teacher grade-2**

"Reflective practice is a tool for evaluating one's practice in order to see if one achieves the goals and targets one sets every day. Reflective practice actually gives your ideas about your teaching that what has achieved and what needs to be achieved."

#### **Teacher grade-3**

"Reflective practice is to look back at what you do in the classroom and to evaluate it in order to get to know its results. It is very important for professional development; this practice helps the teachers to know whether their teaching leads to effective learning."

#### **Teacher grade-4**

"For teachers, reflective practice means actually the assessment of the situation of teaching learning in order to improve their teaching skills so therefore reflective practice is essential for professional development, because reflective practice gives you feedback on how to polish your teaching skills.

#### **Teacher grade-5**

"Reflective practice is a tool to make our skills effective for teaching learning process. I do reflective practice either by myself or with colleagues." This subsection comprised findings regarding primary school in-service teachers' understanding of reflective teaching. It is revealed that all the government primary school in-service teacher participants from grade- 1 to grade- 5 defined reflective practice in their own way but their interpretations develop

a same concept of reflective teaching as a process of assessing teaching skills. It is exposed that the primary school teachers are clearly aware of the concept of reflective practice and considers reflective practice essential for professional development, which proves that primary school teachers have given proper knowledge by the head authority about utilizing reflective practice for professional development. Furthermore it is indicated that the primary school in-service teachers considers reflective practice useful and beneficial that may be done individually or with colleagues in the light of these arguments, it is found that they believe in sharing reflective practice with colleagues.

### **Reflective Practice with Colleagues**

Analysis of interview data show that the government primary school in-service teachers give value to their collaborators helps in reflection as a source of beneficial guidance and knowledge. The interpretations of teacher participants consider the colleagues views whether junior or senior as significant in reflective teaching. It is revealed that primary school in-service teachers give importance to the colleagues' suggestions for professional development.

#### **Teacher grade-1**

"I do not know everything so I always try to learn a lot from colleagues." The above statement shows that primary school teachers believe in learning from others and are receptive to get ideas of others in self-development. Similarly it is revealed while analyzing interview data that primary school teachers give value to learn from colleagues they may junior or senior, it seems this is the result of the well qualification of the junior teachers, as the junior teachers are more qualified than the senior teachers this phenomenon revealed by teacher of grade- 2, her statement is below:

#### **Teacher grade-2**

"Other colleagues, whether junior or senior can give you useful suggestions." Joint reflective practice was also given value by the newly appointed primary school in-service teachers, it seems the reason that the new teachers have no experience even though they are more qualified but they have no practical experience of teaching this is why they believe in learning through joint reflective teaching with colleagues, this issue was revealed by the statement of teacher of grade- 3 as below:

#### **Teacher grade-3**

"It is important to reflect on practice with other colleagues because I am newly appointed and hence, I can learn..." Joint reflective practice is more beneficial than alone self-reflective practice; this concept was appeared while analyzing interpretation of teacher of grade- 4. As presented below:

#### **Teacher grade- 4**

"I think reflective practice with colleagues is as far better than self- reflective practice because the colleagues observe our skills and can give better feedbacks."

The above statement shows the importance of colleague's contribution in reflective teaching practice. It is indicated that the primary school teachers believe in self-analysis through outer lens means through the feedbacks given by colleagues while observing their performance lively. Similar view was appeared while analyzing interpretation of teacher of grade -5 who give importance to colleagues' feedbacks in joint reflective practice, moreover she is looking selective while engaging in reflective practice as her statement revealed that for joint reflective practice is necessary that colleagues maybe of sincere and trustworthy. The statement of teacher of grade-5 is below:

#### **Teacher grade- 5**

"It is useful to practice with colleagues whom we trust because the colleagues not only observe our skills but can also give us suggestions to improve teaching learning process." In this subsection it is revealed that all of the primary school in-service teacher participants believe in collaborative reflective teaching practice and cooperation with colleagues and supposed this practice as beneficial for professional development which are easily available in schools and which is not implemented or enforced by any official authority. It is revealed that this practice promotes the advancement of teaching strategies by the use of the critical study of teachers' skills.

## **Guidance in Reflection**

While analyzing primary school in-service teachers' interview data, guidance appeared to have a central role in this process of reflection. It is revealed that the primary school in-service teachers give value to the comments that given in teachers' reflective dairies from both head teacher and external supervisor during supervision and they supposed this guidance as being fruitful in their professional growth.

### **Teacher grade -1**

"Guidance plays a vital role in reflective practice for the teachers because it helps the teacher to point out their strengths and weaknesses." In reflective practice the guidance provided by the head teacher or supervisor play considerable role in teachers' skill development. Because the feedbacks of the head authority are taken seriously by the teachers, In this case some participant teachers' responses are presented below:

### **Teacher grade-2**

"In teachers' reflection guidance play significant role because it's direct feedback helps the teachers to aware of their weaknesses and strengthens, so I do care for my head teacher and supervisor feedbacks on my practice."

### **Teacher grade-3**

"Guidance provide help us that how to reflect our practice to develop professionally. I believe to follow what my supervisor or head teacher said and implement in the class whatever promotes effective learning"

Experimentations with the feedbacks and guidelines imposed by the head authority are considered significant by government primary school in-service teachers to promote quality education, In this case teacher of grade- 4 stated:

### **Teacher grade-4**

"Through guidance we create new ideas to reflect our skills and get better results. I do believe we should experiment with what is imposed. Then do reflection that whether it promotes effective learning." In this subsection it is described that the primary school in-service teachers consider guidance in reflective practice very helpful in building teaching capacity. The primary school teachers receive guidance from the external supervisor and school head teacher in order to develop their pedagogical skills, it is revealed that guidance help in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses for effective learning process. Furthermore, it is shown that they consider what their supervisor or head teachers imposed, and they reflect on it to see its results for effective learning process and implement in the class where and when needed. So, it is explained that guidance plays a very significant role in primary school teachers learning and improvement of their teaching skills. The interpretations of participant teachers revealed immense value of the guidance provided by external supervisor and the school head teacher and that the teachers take seriously what is said or taught from the head teacher or supervisor.

## **Self-Awareness**

Two concepts were revealed while analyzing interview data of the primary school in-service teachers regarding self-analysis, one that primary school teachers identified self-skills and self-professional growth through engaging in reflective practice, and second their practice of different experiences enabled them to examine self-strategies and directed them to know about the fruitful development in their views of teaching and of themselves. Reflective teaching practice promote self-analysis and identify the strong and weak aspects of teacher skills, this appears the reason that why primary school in-service teachers found this practice beneficial for professional development. In this case some teacher participant responses are below:

### **Teacher grade- 1**

"I observe my daily activities as a teacher and then evaluate quality of work. I found this practice very unique for professional development."

## Teacher grade- 2

“Reflective teaching help me to analyze my skills that where I am good and where needs improvement.”

## Teacher grade- 3

“we observe ourselves as if we’re teachers” that this practical action facilitated us to realize a genuine purpose in what I am.” Reflective teaching practice for a teacher of grade-4 is a source of knowing the change which occurred in teaching situation and in teacher skill. Her response is presented below:

## Teacher grade- 4

“Engaging in this practice create awareness among us about changes in teaching and our skills.” This subsection comprised findings which indicated about primary school in-service teachers’ self-analysis through reflective practice. It is revealed that primary school in-service teachers found reflective teaching practice as a source of self-discovery and of understanding the change occurring in their skills. Moreover, it is exposed that primary school teachers believe in importance of reflective practice for skill advancement. So, it is deduced that primary school teachers have motivational feelings for this practice and are considering its importance for skill polishing and improvement.

## Discussion

The interpretations of primary school in-service teachers perceived positively reflective teaching, and considered reflective practice as a significant strategy for evaluating self-skills for professional development and for learning new ideas of skill improvement. The teacher participants interpret that reflective teaching helps teachers in understanding of student needs that how to create an effective learning environment for the students. It is revealed that teachers have a positive attitude towards reflective practice, either on their own or with colleagues, which shown that primary school teachers promote collaborative reflective practice to have better results, and stressed that trust is essential for effective collaborative reflective teaching practice. They further explained that guidance plays a fundamental role in teachers’ reflective practice because the feedbacks from the head teacher or from supervisor provide significant help in reflective teaching practice. The primary school in-service teachers found this reflective practice helpful in self-analysis in order to develop professionally. So, it can be said that the interpretations of government primary school teachers revealed enough knowledge of reflective teaching practice and this practice is perceived as effective means for skill development and improvement. The interpretations of primary school teachers clearly revealed the importance of reflective practice for improving teaching practices at primary level schools. Almost all the teacher participant responses indicated positive attitude towards reflective practice and considered its role in skills improvement and in identifying the gaps between theory and practice.

## Conclusion

I would like to conclude the aspects that had been found after the analysis. There are four conclusions can be described in this study. They are as follows:

- Regarding the primary school teachers’ interpretations of reflective practice, it can be concluded that all the primary school in-service teacher participants perceived reflective teaching as a helpful tool in improving professional capacity and building of new insights in their practices.
- Regarding reflective practice with colleagues it can be concluded from data analysis that the primary school in-service teachers give value to share reflective practice with colleagues and considered this practice more effective than alone practice of reflection. They promote joint reflective practice.
- Regarding guidance the interpretations of teacher participants concluded that the primary school teachers give immense value to the guidelines received from the head authority i.e. from the head teacher and from the supervisor, and considered its constructive role in teachers’ professional development. The teachers implement the ideas of the head authority whenever and wherever they need it.
- Regarding self-analysis the interpretations of teacher participants concluded that the primary school in-service teachers found reflective practice useful for assessing self-skills and considered its role in identifying

developmental needs of their skills. The teachers get deep insights about their practice and outcomes because of reflective practice.

### **Recommendations**

- I would like to suggest that all primary school in-service teachers of Pakistan who have ever practiced reflective teaching to do it continuously, not only as implemented officially but should adopt reflective teaching strategies continuously in their career in order to keep update self-skills.
- Primary school teachers in Pakistan should be able to utilize the results and follow-up supervision to encourage active, creative, and innovative learning and to keep update self-skills.
- Video recording is the best tool for self-analysis in this way it is recommended that primary school teachers in Pakistan should use to record self-practice in order to identify more easily the needs to be improved.
- Media is the best source of sensitizing and creating awareness among teachers about reflective teaching techniques for professional development. It is suggested that education department should highlight the importance of reflective teaching through electric and print media. The teachers should be sensitized through different means. Once this practice is fully initiated, the teachers of all levels will develop a strong approach towards self-reflective practice which will no doubt positively affect the teaching learning process in school.
- It is suggested that internet facility should be provided to the primary school teachers in Pakistan because this will enhance teacher's knowledge through learning of new reflective applications available on different websites.
- It is recommended that primary school teachers of Pakistan may be provided opportunities to engage in reflective practice with the efficient foreign primary school teachers of the developed countries like America and Europe to be updated and qualified like them.

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