

Reflection in Teacher Education Programmes in Pakistan and the UK: A Comparison

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Reflection is a well-established teacher education concept in different parts of the developed world such as Europe, the USA, Canada and Australian. The concept, however, is relatively new in the teacher education arena in developing countries including Pakistan. Further, the concept has been diversely defined by researchers and practitioners. This paper reports on selected findings from two case studies conducted subsequently in the United Kingdom (UK) and Pakistan and compares the perceptions of student teachers and university teachers involved in initial teacher education programmes. Findings reveal that reflection has been well-integrated in the programme in the UK and a majority of both university teachers and student teachers had good level of awareness about the notion. The concept, however, was by and large unfamiliar to participants (both student teachers and university teachers) from the Pakistani university. This presents a case for a comprehensive incorporation of this important teacher education concept in the teacher education programme in the Pakistani university and other similar programmes in Pakistan.

Key Words: *Reflective Practice, Reflection, Teacher Education, Pakistan, UK*

Introduction and Background

Reflection as a concept in the educational milieu has its origin in the philosophy of John Dewey, a highly influential twentieth century educationist who made a distinction between a 'routine' action driven by tradition, habit, and authority and 'reflective' action which 'involves a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development' (Pollard and Tann, 1987, p.4) (For an extended account of the concept see also Harrison and Lee, 2011; Denton, 2011). According to Dewey (1933) as cited by (Grant and Zeichner, 1984, p.4) reflection is that 'behaviour which involves active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the grounds that support it and further consequences to which it leads'. The term 'reflection' as used in this context carries a special connotation and should not be taken as a typical dictionary word which means simple thinking or deliberation (Eryama, 2007). It is a specific 'behaviour', 'frame of mind' and 'attitude' of an individual or an organisation which requires 'the development of several attitudes and abilities, such as introspection, open-mindedness, and

willingness to accept responsibility for their (the reflective practitioners') decisions and action' (Ross, 1989, p.22). Reflection or reflective practice thus is a highly sophisticated educational construct and consists of complex processes, and theoretical and practical components (Khan, 2012).

The concept has been explored and presented by researchers in various ways. One way in which it has been described is the various layers or levels of reflection. Van Manen (1977), for instance, has put forward three levels of reflection: technical, interpretive and critical. El-Dib (2007, p.3), describing Van Manen's levels argues that at the technical level teachers using reflection are 'primarily concerned with applying knowledge in order to achieve predetermined educational objectives'. The implication is that at the 'technical' level reflection is concerned with the teaching method and the way the teaching-learning process is carried out in practical terms (See also Denton, 2011). Further the focus of reflection at this level is seldom the consideration to evaluate educational objectives and the broader aims of the educational process. According to Van Manen (1977, p.226) 'On this level the practical refers to

the technical application of educational knowledge and of basic curriculum principles for the purpose of attaining a given end.' In other words the focus of reflection at this level is the application of means for the accomplishment of ends in the teaching learning process.

The second level of reflection, that is, 'interpretive' reflection goes beyond the scrutiny of the application of means and examines the efficacy of means towards the achievement of goals and ends. As Van Manen (1977, pp. 226-227) puts it, 'At this level of the practical the focus is on an interpretive understanding both of the nature and quality of the educational experience and of making practical choices.' The third level of reflection also termed as critical reflection, besides considering the first two concerns takes into account the moral, ethical and political criteria and examines practices for justice, equity and morality (Hatton & Smith, 1995, Gore and Zeichner, 1991, Adler, 1991). According to El-Dib (2007, p.26), at this highest level of reflection 'the teacher is not simply concerned with the goals, activities and assumptions behind them but he [/she] is rather reflecting upon the larger context where all education exists. He [/she] is incorporating moral and ethical questions into his [/her] line of thinking'. Van Manen (1977, p. 227) associating the highest level of reflection with a concern for the 'worth' of educational goals and experiences says, 'On this level the practical addresses itself reflectively to the question of the worth of knowledge and to the nature of the social conditions necessary for raising the question of worthwhileness in the first place'.

Reflection at the critical level or 'critical reflection' is 'a process of becoming aware of one's context, of the influence of societal and ideological constraints on previously taken-for-granted practices, and gaining control over the direction of these influences' (Calderhead, 1989, p.44, Calderhead and Gates, 1993). Zeichner and Liston (1987) building on Van Manen's ideas, associates terms such as teacher as a 'technician' when his primary concern is accomplishment of ends decided by others, as 'craftsperson' when he associates classroom actions with educational goals and as 'moral craftsperson' who is able to show concern for moral and ethical implications of the educational process. Reflection thus comes out as an intricate educational concept with multiple conceptualizations and levels.

The aim, however, is the application for the thinking process for teachers and practitioners to understand the process of teaching and learning at various levels and in various situations. The reflective practitioner/teacher, therefore, can be argued to be someone who constantly thinks and experiments on both the means and ends of the educational process. A reflective teacher is one who exhibits qualities of deliberate thinking, can look through things and events in perspective. Further the reflective teacher is open to new ideas and multiple possibilities, sometimes even contradictory to his or her own beliefs and values, and tends to welcome reality no matter how bitter the taste might be to them as individuals or as part of an organisational, social or political group. Besides, the reflective practitioner accepts full responsibility for the 'what and how' of their actions.

A reflective and hence 'liberated' teacher is someone who is 'free from unwarranted control of beliefs, unsupportable attitudes, and the paucity of abilities which can prevent that person from completely taking charge of his or her life' Siegel (1980, quoted in Zeichner and Liston, 1987, pp.23-24). In fact such a teacher has the ability to make independent decisions, to provide leadership both in terms of curriculum development and implementation besides being actively involved in the process of the social, moral and political transformation of a society. The process of education with an emphasis on reflective practice is thus not a mere passive process of dissemination of 'factual knowledge' and curriculum handed over by the policy makers and bureaucrats but that of the creation and reformation of new vistas of knowledge. This understanding of the concept should be of special significance for educational practitioners and teachers in Pakistan where teachers do not seem to be enjoying the kind of independence in terms of curricular and classroom decision making. Teachers instead teachers are expected to disseminate knowledge in a centralised educational structure (Khan, 2012). Such a structure is likely to be particular a hindrance when it comes to an expectation of reflection at the critical level from teachers in Pakistan.

Literature review further shows that reflective practice helps in making the educational process more comprehensive by taking its concerns ranging from means and technical efficiency to its aims and objectives (Pollard and Tann, 1987; Denton, 2011). Pollard and Tann (1987) further associate teaching based on reflective practice with

the development of the attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness (Dewey, 1933). The authors argue that reflective practice is 'applied in a cyclical or spiralling process, in which teacher continually monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice' and the process is guided both by the teachers' self-reflection on the process and by their knowledge of the educational theory (Pollard and Tann, 1987, p. 4-5).

Teacher preparation programmes have traditionally been based on technicism i.e. preparation of teachers as technicians by providing them 'practices' in certain ready-made techniques of teaching. During the 1980s, however in Europe, Australia and in the USA a new approach to teacher education emerged, as a result of the growing concern about the utility of the old traditional system based on the positivist-behaviourist paradigms of professional training. This approach is characterised by the concept called reflective teaching methods. As a result teacher preparation got frequently associated with reflective practices such as action research by the student teachers, journal writing, seminars, reflective dialogues and discussions and other inquiry oriented teaching techniques. This meant greater independence on the part of the student teacher and lesser routine and controlled approaches to teacher preparation programmes. The outcome according to Korthagen and Russell (1995) was an emphasis on the individual and contextual professional development of a teacher rather than on general theories about good teaching. Preparation of reflective or thoughtful and independent teachers as opposed to teachers driven by tradition and authority has since been promoted as a most important goal of the teacher education programmes in many countries (Cruickshank, 1987, Shon, 1983, 1987).

In Pakistan like many other developing countries the concepts of reflective teaching and reflective teacher education are not very well established where still the traditional models of 'technical rationality' and 'teacher-as-a technician' are in vogue. Teacher education programmes are highly centralized and apprenticeship oriented. Consequently 'many practicing teachers are still not aware of reflection or reflective practice' (Ashraf & Rarieya, 2008, p.269). The traditional 'transmission' model of teaching where student teachers are reduced to the status of passive learners who are there to receive packages of 'facts' and 'techniques' are predominant in many

teacher education programmes in Pakistan. Student teachers often find these training courses out of context and unrelated to the demands of practical teaching once they join formal teaching in schools. Such programmes usually fail to prepare teachers capable of critical thinking, independent inquiry, and reflective context-based educational decision making. It would, therefore, be unrealistic to expect teachers prepared in this way to inculcate such values in their students if they themselves do not have exposure to such modern concepts in their training and professional development programmes.

1. Research Method

Case study (Bassey, 1999, Yin, 2003, Merriam, 1988) was adopted as a research design for this study. Data were collected from teacher educators and student teachers in one university each in Pakistan and the UK. Data from the UK case was part of a larger study and the comparison with the Pakistani case was done subsequently. The data included in this paper comprise of the perceptions of 10 participants each from the Pakistani and UK universities. The participants included university tutors and student teachers. The UK programme was a one year postgraduate teacher education certificate in education (PGCE). Participants from the Pakistani case study were selected from the fifth semester of an eight semester, B.Ed (Hons) programme. Both are programmes of initial teacher training. The B.Ed (Hons) programme in Pakistan is a programme of initial teacher training introduced under the pre-service teacher education programme of the USAID project (2008-2013). Participants were selected using purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques (Cohen et al., 2007). Purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques are frequently used qualitative data sampling techniques and help in the process of collecting data that are consistent with the emerging structure and purpose of qualitative research.

Semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007); focus group interview and semi-structured questionnaires were used as data collection tools. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the questionnaires were communicated through emails. Data thus collected were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke for data analysis include familiarisation with the data obtained, coding of data, searching and identifying themes, defining and naming themes, reviewing

themes and writing and producing the report were followed during the data analysis process. The process was repeated both for within-case and cross-case analysis of the data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

2. Findings and Discussion

Data included for this paper was analysed in terms of two main themes: the connotation and implementation of reflection/reflective practice in the two teacher education programmes mentioned above. The following sections revolve around the presentation and discussion of these themes.

3.1. The Meaning of Reflection

Questions were asked regarding the meaning and definition of reflection/reflective practice from participants from Pakistan and the UK. Analysis of responses from the Pakistani participants revealed that both the student teachers and the teacher educators had a very rudimentary understanding of the concept. Most participants from the Pakistani university reported that they have not read any theories about the concept of reflection. None of the participants could identify any authors, books or literature linked with reflection. As one teacher educator said, 'I don't know about the theories behind reflective practice, what we know about it is that it is a form of practical self-evaluation of their teaching and lessons by student teachers'.

Student teachers too didn't seem to have any theoretical understanding regarding the background, or aims and objectives of reflective practice. When student teachers were asked during a focus group about reflection during their theory classes and practical teaching, most of them had little idea of what the concept was and what were its aims and objectives. Some of the student teachers, however, at a later stage found some link between their portfolio development and reflection. One student teacher for instance responded with some enthusiasm 'Oh yes, I think our university teacher asked us to give lesson plans and to then write reflection about what we did, how we did and how can we improve'.

Overall, it seemed reflection/reflective practice was not very well-established as an educational construct in the Pakistani university. This was evident from the fact that most participants, both student teachers and teacher educators couldn't define reflection/reflective practice in its theoretical context. Most participants from the Pakistan case seemed to think of it as a mere process of developing a portfolio by the

student teachers during the course, something that they took in a very practical sense. Further, none of the participants could identify the types or forms of reflection in the absence of a theoretical background and understanding of the concept. Consequently what most participants seemed to know was that reflection is a practical activity that student teachers do at the end of the lesson they deliver to know about the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching during practicum.

Most participants from the UK University, both teacher educators and student teachers, had a much broader and more comprehensive understanding of reflection as a teacher education concept. Although there was a good deal of variation in the level of understanding regarding the concept, university tutors' appreciation of the concept was more sophisticated. Most teacher educators could relate the concept to its theoretical, historical and philosophical context (Dewey, 1933, Shon, 1983, 1987, Zeichner and Liston, 1996, Khan, 2012). Further, most participants from this case were able to link the philosophical underpinnings of the concept to its practical utility at the classroom level. Reflection as defined by participants could be identified as 'dialogic' and 'monologic' reflection (Khan, 2012). As a dialogic reflection the concept was presented as a long term, consistent and complex process of inquiry and improvement of teaching theory and practice. At this level it was also associated with thinking about issues beyond the classroom and with the ability to link classroom teaching with broader socio-theoretical contexts.

Participants associated reflection with social, moral and cultural development of the student teachers and their ability to link the process of education to the needs and structures of the society. In monologic terms, the process was defined as a more inward looking process 'thinking about one's teaching process' during and after teaching or reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schon, 1983). Emphasis on the more mundane, practical role of reflection was also evident in significant terms. Student teachers' understanding of reflection varied from complex and theoretical to its common sense, practice oriented connotation (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Those who defined reflection in more complex terms argued that the focus of the classroom teachers' reflection went beyond the immediate technical issues to matters such as the aims of the curriculum, the socio-economic background of

students and the teacher's role as an agent of change.

A clear majority from the student teachers group, however, had their focus on more technical and practical connotations of reflection (Valli, 1997). Improvement of the technical skills of teaching, classroom management, lesson planning and delivery, and dealing with behavioural issues on a day-to-day basis were some of the main issues that student teachers presented as the sources and focus of their reflection. A number of student teachers defined reflection as the ability to think about the complexities of practical teaching, classroom management, pastoral work and interaction with students and parents. Others linked reflection with improvement of classroom practices, questioning one's own teaching skills to develop them and on a broader level to become good educators. Those who defined reflection beyond the immediate practical levels presented a more wholesome view of education where it encompassed broader attitudes of the teacher towards the process of education. On this level reflection was associated with being open-minded and having a wholesome understanding of the broader beyond the school implications of the educational process.

2.2. Implementation Of Reflection

Implementation of reflection in educational programmes has been associated with various strategies and practices. These include practices such as journal writing, discussions, action research and development of portfolios, to mention a few (Zeichner and Liston, 1996, Hatton and Smith, 1995, Kaminiski, 2003, Clarke, 2004). Implementation of reflection in the current study was associated with the various practices and strategies that participants identified as 'reflective' practices and strategies in the teacher education programmes included in this study. As pointed out in the previous section, most participants from the Pakistani case indicated either a very basic or in some cases not adequate understanding in terms of defining the concept. This seemed to have impact on their understanding of reflection in implementation terms too. Both student teachers and teacher educators from the Pakistani case were not able to identify most of these practices, however, some of the participants seemed to relate lesson evaluation sheets that student teachers filled at the end of the lesson they delivered and the development of portfolios with the development of reflectivity.

Participants (both teacher educators and student teachers) from the UK case, however, were able to associate a broader range of practices and strategies for the development of reflection among student teachers. Implementation of reflection was predominantly associated with classroom discussions and questioning both between the teacher and students and among students. Most student teachers identified more practical activities as useful reflective practices. Interestingly, although most university teachers identified strategies such as filling of evaluation forms, writing of journals and assignments as helpful in developing reflection among student teachers, student teachers didn't share this view entirely. A number of student teachers argued that many of these 'reflective practices' in the form of written assignments and filling forms are quite mundane and take more time and energy than they are actually useful. There were also diverse views regarding the form and type of reflective strategy or practice in terms of its usefulness. Overall, however, most participants from the UK case had a deeper and broader understanding of the various strategies and practices that are deemed to implement reflection in the teacher education programme.

Further, most participants from the UK case seemed convinced about the importance of reflection in the teacher education programmes and asserted that it is important to have reflection as a significant part of such programmes. This, however, didn't seem to be the case in the Pakistani teacher education programme where both student teachers and university teachers seemed to lack awareness regarding the importance of reflection/reflective practice. This seems understandable keeping in view the relatively lesser exposure of these participants to this concept in the Pakistani context. Reflection still has to familiarise in the Pakistani milieu (Rarieya, 2005, Rahman, 2007, Khan, 2012).

3. Conclusion and implications

Reflection/reflective practice is an important teacher education concept. The concept has been well-established in many countries in the developed world; however, it still has to get recognition in developing countries such as Pakistan. The study reveals that although there is some variation in terms of their comparative understanding of reflection, teacher educators and student teachers from the UK in general have a much deeper understanding of reflection in terms

of its connotation and implementation. This is understandable keeping in view the overall advancement and sophistication of education in the western milieu on the one hand and on the other their exposure and access to current sources of research and knowledge. One more reason could be their longer experience of the ideational evolution in the field of teacher education. The implication of this study for developing countries such as Pakistan in terms of developing this important concept is to have greater exposure to models of reflection in the Western context. This will be potentially helpful in bringing their teacher education programmes at par with those in the developed countries.

Incorporation of complex but useful concepts such as reflection will likely result in a more sophisticated understanding of the process of education among educators and researchers in developing countries such as Pakistan. Although intervention in the initial teacher education programmes under the USAID Teacher Education Project (TEP, 2008-2013) have brought important changes and concepts such as reflection/reflective practice have been introduced at some level in the newly developed curricula, there is need for a more overt and elaborate incorporation of such concepts (Khan, 2012) in these programmes. That means incorporation of reflection in terms of what it is, how it is enacted in practical teaching learning situations and why it is important to include it in educational /teacher education programmes (Khan, 2012). Khan (2012) provides one such comprehensive framework of reflection in teacher education programmes which might be considered as a useful model for a more sophisticated understanding of the concept by teacher educators and student teachers in Pakistan.

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