

# REFLECTIVE PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

*The reflective practice recalls our past experiences, reveals reality, and realizes the strengths and weaknesses of the practitioner while changing its abstract idea into practical action. In a similar line, this paper explored the concept of reflective practices and its implications in the classroom. The main purpose of this study was to investigate ways of reflective practices applied by language teachers in their profession reviewing various perspectives on its practices. The information of this study was generated through secondary sources and interviews of research participants; three English teachers of public schools from different parts of Nepal. The result of this study indicated that practice enables teachers to make more informed decisions about their teaching and, as a result, their reflective students receive the best possible opportunities for their learning. Hence, the study's findings will guide pre-service and in-service English language teachers to grow their careers, especially in the teaching field.*

**Keywords:** *Reflective Practices, Reflective Teaching, Student Teachers, Teacher development*

## Introduction

I believe, reflection often begins when we pause to 'think back' after something unexpected or out of the ordinary has happened. We re-play the happenings, and incident in our head, and, in thinking about it more, it begins to change from a sequence of chronological events into a series of questioning thoughts such as 'What happened?', 'When?' and 'How?' These initial thoughts can be purposeless and just idle musings. They become more purposeful and constructive when thinking is directed to consider questions such as: 'Why did it happen that way?' and 'How could I have behaved or done things differently?' 'How could I have responded differently to the disruptive boy/girl at the end of the lesson of my class?' led to thoughts about how to improve specific situations. Reflecting determinedly to improve something requires effort and sustained, focused thinking centered on a particular issue or concern we might have about our development as a teacher or educator. Standing in front of the mirror is not new to all of us which we regularly do, we do our makeup, prepare for something better if things are not appropriate in

the face, and make ourselves perfect. Reflective practice is much like standing in front of the mirror and doing our makeup to be perfectly well. The only difference is that we ponder our activities and make the necessary corrections in the reflective practice.

Accordingly, while linking with my experience when I was a novice teacher and used to think about what the successful and failed parts of my work were, how could I teach differently, did my students understand the lesson properly?, how I took comments and feedback from the students, how did I take feedback and appreciation from my supervisor and colleagues were some of the pertinent issues that I used to keep reflecting whenever I think of reflective practices in teaching and learning. I believe that the way I had kept the ways of looking back to myself, after having my class over or completing my lessons, had changed the way I do things with perfection. My reflections on my work were the best mentors for me during the struggling period in teaching.

Furthermore, relating to perspectives on reflective practice, it is a recalling process of past experiences (as cited in Pandey, 2020). Reflective practice is the process of self-observation, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation of the activity, progress, and achievement. It has been valued in teacher education and development as a vehicle for professional and personal development (Biggs & Tang, 2007). A teacher must think, plan, meditate, act, assess, and evaluate himself or herself in the teaching-learning process. Dewey, (1933) on the other hand, mentions open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness play an important role in reflective practice. This further indicates that both teacher and learner have an open mind to reflect their perspectives on learning. For this, they must be responsible for performing an activity. They need to give their body and soul to substantiate their teaching and learning. Reflective teachers become critical and creative to accomplish the objectives. Schon (1983) asserts reflective practice is done in three phases. They are reflection for action, reflection in action, and reflection on action. This idea can be linked with pre-action, while action and post-action reflection. In the past, I have experienced reflective practice as the process of planning, preparing, asking questions, critical thinking, and evaluation of one's and other's preparation, performance, and progress (as cited in Pandey, 2020). Therefore, being reflective means having all these qualities.

### **Making the Case**

I would like to add my experience of reflective practice in my teacher education course. Being students of the education program we had to complete the teaching practice course. But before sending us in school, our educators had to give us some

demonstration and modeling classes. After that, we had to follow the process of micro-teaching for conducting artificial classes in front of teachers and students' teachers. On the first day, I made a lesson plan of fifteen minutes on teaching grammar (simple present tense) and went ahead with teaching. I was so nervous and hardly delivered the content based on the lesson plan and received a lot of feedback from teachers and friends, and I felt that my lesson did not go as well as I had planned and expected to happen. I returned home could not get sound sleep and started thinking why did I not run the class properly? Why did my student teacher could not get my teaching content? I thought all over the night and had a road map of doing something better and I concluded that with the effective use of teaching materials, I could do better. I applied a reflective cycle in my behavior and my thought transferred into practice and I did it well. It was a wonderful feeling for me of a small achievement. The whole night's reflection on doing something better had really transformed me into a very good teacher, ultimately completing both the micro teaching and teaching internship in a secondary school. So, I believe that reflective practice makes a teacher analytical, think over different practices for giving better learning outcomes. So, it is necessary to follow the reflective cycle; describe the situation in first step(description), what did you feel after that situation in second step (feel), why did not go so well, what was the positive about this situation in third step (evaluation), What skill do you need to develop so that you can handle the situation in forth step( conclusion) an finally in last stage we need to come up with a plan(action) so that we can make these changes ( Oviawe,2020).

So, when teachers engage in reflective practice, they could examine their relations with students, their values, their abilities, and their successes and failures in a realistic context. Teachers who engage in reflective practice can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in their teaching. So, we must also be realistic with reflective practice in terms of who can do it and when, and so reflective practice takes place along a continuum of opportunity, where teachers will vary in the opportunity to reflect given their context and their own personal psychological makeup. In other words, some contexts may make it impossible for teachers to organize together to reflect on their practices and, as such, individual teachers may only be able to reflect on their own individual practices and conceptions of their teaching. As a result, it may be unreasonable to expect all teachers to engage in reflection at every moment or stage of their teaching. However, certain activities can help teachers with their reflections at various stages of their careers and these are outlined in the section that follows.

## **Literature Review**

Language teachers can choose several activities to foster their reflective actions throughout their professional careers. Various ways that language teachers can choose when reflecting are outlined below, and some of these can be used alone or in combination with peers, depending on each teacher's level of comfort sharing their ideas, issues, and concerns. Thus, language teachers can choose to reflect with and through teaching journals, critical friends, teacher development groups, classroom observations, and action research (Liontas, 2018).

### **Reflective Journal**

Teaching journals provide teachers with a written record of various aspects of their practice, such as classroom events, and enable them to step back for a moment to reflect on their work. When teachers write regularly in a teaching journal, they can accumulate information that on later review, interpretation, and reflection can assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their work (Liontas, 2018). So research indicates that writing regularly in a teaching journal can help teachers clarify their thinking, explore their own beliefs and practices, become more aware of their teaching styles, and be better able to monitor their own practices. In the TESOL field, several scholars drew more attention to reflective journals for reflection-in-action to be aware of phenomena and problems in the actual classroom and to restructure strategies of action (Watanabe, 2016). While teachers engage in the act of teaching, they may encounter unexpected situations, and experience thoughts, feelings, and internal dialogue. They often recognize incoherency and inconsistency between their beliefs and actions and negotiate and generate their answers and solutions in actual classroom situations through reflective journals and overall reflective practices. A TESOL writing scholar noted that a dialogue journal with a supervising instructor and a mentor teacher can help novice teachers work through difficulties in teaching and shape their attitudes, opinions and practices. (Watanabe, 2016).

### **Critical Friends**

Critical friends are teachers who collaborate in a two-way mode that encourages discussion and reflection to improve the quality of language teaching and learning (Boynar & Irena, 2017). Critical friendship could be established in face-to-face communication after finished lessons, as well as by using online applications. Conducting distant, critical friendship on web-based forums is particularly convenient during this situation. Critical friendship is where another person reflects with a teacher and gives advice as a trusted friend rather than a consultant

to develop awareness of classroom events as well as the reflective abilities of the teacher who is conducting his or her own reflections. According to Lontas,(2018), such critical friends can give voice to a teacher's thinking like looking into a mirror, while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way. Teachers who are reflecting can also be challenged by critical friends so that the teachers can have a deeper understanding of their teaching. This type of reflection promotes collegiality and shared observations, but teachers should constantly remember that the focus is on the friend and not the critical in a trusting relationship.

### **Teacher Development Groups**

Farrell (2014) suggests that language teachers come together in teacher development groups to reflect so that they can complement each other's strengths and compensate for each other's limitations. A group of teachers working together can achieve outcomes that may not be possible for an individual teacher working alone, because the group can generate more ideas about classroom issues than any individual. Teacher development groups: peer groups within a school, teacher groups that operate outside the school and within a school district, and virtual groups that can be formed anywhere for face-to-face discussion on online groups through the internet. For example, in programs for adult English language learners, practitioners might meet within a program, across programs, or throughout the province/state/region either in person or online.

### **Collaborative learning**

Brookfield (1995) maintains the importance of continual dialogue with peers about teaching in a mutually cooperative environment rather than a competitive one. Collaboration with peer members increases the probability that student's teachers will be successfully reflective and more confident in their professional development. While discussing their experience with their peers, they can describe their own experiences and check, reframe, and broaden their own theories of practice. In the twenty-first century social networking can play the role of collaborative learning. Teacher can create a group in their familiar applications such as Messenger; Facebook; Skype; Viber and Twitter for reflective practice where teacher can post the confused issue for getting solution. Different members could have different views, but they can support an agenda.

When I was a teacher, I used to meet to peers, I had been working with the team for about a year. We had established a good working relationship and felt comfortable with each other which afforded me the opportunity to gain access to thinking. Each week we collaborate each other and planned a lesson and would teach that week.

After observing each of the teach we all met to reflect on classroom event. Nowadays I realized that we had very good practice of collaborative teaching and learning.

### **Recording Lessons**

Video or audio recordings of lessons can provide very useful information for reflection. Through watching their own or other peer members' audio and video recordings, student teachers can develop their awareness of teaching (McGregor & Cartright 2011). A classroom video can vividly picture the whole process of teaching. It can trigger teachers' reflective thinking, reflect on their weaknesses, and help them get some inspiration and ideas for their teaching improvement. The recording can be audio or video. Audio recordings can be useful for considering aspects of teacher talk. How much do you talk? About what? Are instructions and explanations clear? How much time do you allocate to student talk? How do you respond to student talk? Video recordings can be useful in showing the aspects of a teacher's behavior. Where do you stand? Who do you speak to? How do you approach the students?

### **Classroom Observations**

Classroom is a such busy place; many different activities happen at the same time. But, happening of most part may not be known to teacher. So, classroom observations can help language teachers develop more of an awareness of what is really happening and what decisions they make and then why they make them. (McGregor & Cartright, 2011). Classroom observation can be carried out alone, in pairs or in small groups. Self-monitoring can be carried out through journal writing, self-reports, recording (audio and video) lessons. By later reviewing what was written, or what is heard and seen on the tapes, aspects of teaching that may not have been obvious during the class may become clearer to the teacher (Farrell, 2007).

### **Action Research**

Action research is also a kind of reflective practices. It is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving led by teachers to understand their practice and improve the way they address issues and solve problems. It helps student teachers to become aware of what is happening in the classroom by identifying common problems and hypothesizing about possible causes and solutions and attempting to apply an action plan. Once the student teacher has some information recorded about what goes on in their classroom, they must think, talk, read, and ask about the information they have collected. They can identify the patterns occurring in

their teaching through the observation. Then, he/she should find out the ways to overcome it. In this research study, the student teachers adopted all the strategies and reflected on their practices. The researchers could find a significant change in the behavior of the student teachers. Action research comes under the umbrella of reflective practice and it involves investigation of some problem a teacher may be experiencing with a particular class, student, curriculum, teaching method and so on, and it usually generates some practical knowledge for the teacher that is immediate and directly applicable to practice. (Farrell, 2007)

### **Teacher Role Identity**

Teacher role identity includes teacher beliefs, values, and emotions about many aspects of teaching and being a teacher. Teachers' conceptualizations of their self-image and the various roles they play are usually held at the tacit level of awareness. As such, "reflection" is seen as a key component associated with understanding the concept of "self" because it brings these tacit conceptualizations to a level of awareness (McGregor & Cartright, 2011). Reflecting on teacher role identity allows teachers a useful lens into "who" they are as teachers and how they construct and reconstruct their views of their roles as language teachers and themselves about their peers and their context (Farrell, 2011). By reflecting on their teacher identity roles, and how they have been shaped over time and by whom, language teachers can then consider how these roles need to be nurtured during their career.

### **Methodology**

In this research, I used the narrative inquiry as it has helped me to get the participants' experiences and stories. Mainly, it was about the profession of English language teacher and the application of reflective practice while teaching in the classroom. The participants in the study were English language teachers, teaching in different parts of Nepal in public schools. I selected them purposively observing their experience of using reflective practice in the language classroom. I was fully informed about the purpose of the research. Similarly, I took consent of them regarding exploring their stories. Finally, I employed the interview tool to collect data.

I presented the experience of my research participants in this part. I selected three participants, namely; Ms. Ekata, Mr. Binay, and Mr. Chandra, and used their pseudonyms in the data analysis process. I developed themes based on their narratives, which are minutely observed to explore their reflective practices. The experiences, they gained from their practice, are associated with their professional achievements and success.

## Results and Discussion

### Practices of Reflective Practice

Reflection means a flashback of the teacher's daily classroom activities, practices, and experiences for his/her professional growth. The first and most important basis for professional progress is simply the teachers' reflection on daily classroom events (Budha, 2011). In the same line, Ms. Ekata added her experiences and said that she has been engaged as an English teacher for 3 years in a community school. She often gives project work, classwork, and different tasks in her English language classroom. She pointed out that *'when I observe working activities of my students, some looks so active and accomplish everything very nicely but some children unable to work.'* In that case, she immediately tries to find out why they are not doing it. What is the main problem? What kinds of problems they are facing? She tries to find out their problem and change the teaching method, especially for those children who cannot complete their work properly. She added *"I never use only one teaching method to all, according to my student's level of learning"*. She applies different methods.

Observing the responses of my participant, I found that she applies action research as a reflective practice in her classroom. She always tries to change her teaching techniques for the better learning of the students. She innovatively applies the method of self-observation by recording her voice of pronunciation and reflects the audio to correct her pronunciation and improve the teaching activities though the school does not have a system of giving feedback for the development to her teacher career. Agustin (2019), mentioned that the easiest and most practical way that teachers can do to promote their professional development is by doing reflection. Reflection can be done at any time, particularly after the teaching and learning process to increase the efficiency of teacher performance regarding teaching learning activities. So, reflective practice is an act of thinking and giving a close look at works that teachers performed in the field of teaching-learning.

My next participant is Mr Binay. has been teaching for 13 years. In the beginning, he was a novice, he would apply the traditional method (teaching vocabulary; word meaning, teaching grammar) and teacher-centered method in English language teaching. After a few months, he did not get the expected results and changes in the English language classroom. Again, he added his view and told that *'I wanted to create a learning environment in the classroom. I tried to shift his teaching paradigm from the traditional teaching method to the communicative method.* Similarly, his narratives stated that he started making a teaching journal because he had to take five to six classes in a day and mandatorily, he had to reflect on the activities of the



whole day because he said that ‘*one day I found myself doing wrong practice in the classroom basically in pronunciation, word meaning, and explanation.*’ But, he stated that his reflective journal gave him opportunity of correcting it himself again. Reflective journals seem to help them take behavioral and emotional control. The role of reflective journals to control emotions also requires further investigation (Yamauchi et.al., 2019). But nowadays it does not happen because he is very aware about it and he has started using a teacher’s guide, and online apps for language teaching. He again added that *we have teacher support group in Messenger where we do practice of sharing and supporting to teachers on problematic area and get lots of suggestion and feedback for making my profession better.* In response to his experience, it can be summed up that because of his reflective practices he shifted traditional teaching methods to communicative teaching. His journal writing supported him and gave the opportunity to correct himself and develop his teaching. The reflective journal is crucial in professional development for beginners and in-service teachers. Kabilan(2007), mentioned that reflective journals prepare teachers for professional development. Reflective journals are crucial for teachers to create an educational discourse reflective journal create a situation for discussion among teachers for clarification about doubts that they have while teaching students. profession. They have been providing and getting support from support groups when they encounter problems and face challenges in the context of English.

In addition, Mr. Chandra is also a teacher in public school for the last 12 years. He said that at *the beginning of my teaching profession, I did not have much experience. So, I used to spend more time preparing for the class of forty-five minutes. First day of my teaching profession, I entered in the classroom. But, when I started the class, but I was able to speak for only 20 minutes.* He felt nervous because he did not have different skills for utilizing time. But he revealed his experience and said that by *making myself critical and creative, I started thinking about making lesson plans, and teaching notes.* Finally, he could manage time easily in the allocated time of the schedule. But nowadays, he has good teaching skill so that sometimes his friends request him to observe their class. He states that ‘*I observe their classes and provide constructive feedback*’. Similarly, they have created a group for an informal discussion about some difficulties on the subject matter of teaching. When a primary English teacher feels a problem on delivering the teaching sessions, in that case, he/she take support from senior teachers.

I have observed that he has applied action research, classroom observation and feedback, informal teacher support groups, and peer support for making reflective teaching. Peer observation is a way that helps teachers do a collaborative reflection

on pedagogical practice as a cooperative venture among practitioners. They observe each other's instruction, offer helpful criticism, and reflect together. Working two-way discussions encourages teachers to improve instructional practices, enhance commitment to teaching, and develop confidence. They get clarity between talk and action or apply theory to practice. (Hammersley-Fletche & Orsmond, 2006; Jones & Gallen, 2016; Sivan & Chan, 2009).

### **Reflective Practice and Professional Growth**

Teacher's professional growth is possible only if the reflect and analysis their actions and that will enable them to find other options for better teaching styles or behaviors (Whitton et.al.2004). Linking to this statement of my research participant. Ms. Ekata's experience revealed that she is still a novice so using the learning-by-doing approach in her teaching career and her own creative ideas are developing her profession. She added her feelings that *'from the beginning, I tried to be a good teacher by applying different teaching methods. So, other senior teachers started to appreciate my work of reflective practice.*

Similarly, I would like to add the experience of participant Mr. Binay and who told *'I always deal with new and various problems which occur suddenly in my classroom, but I can solve the problem with my innovative techniques and strategies.'* Consequently, the story of participant Mr. Chandra states that he is working as an expert of the English language in his working area because he believes that reflection is an important part of effective and meaningful teaching as it motivates the teachers to be more aware of their views or theories and tries to analysis them and restructure or generate new ideas or styles if possible, to do.

In short, when I analyzed the story of my participants, I came to the main crux that teachers can deal with the needs and different issues of the learners and demand of time. So, they have been reflecting on their daily teaching and learning activities for their professional growth. Rodgers (2002) stated that reflection is systematic, careful and focused way of thinking about a problem that work an approach like the scientific inquiry to get a solution.

### **Conclusion**

Reflecting on the narratives of participant I would like to conclude with some points. first, a beginner teacher applies different activities of reflective practices in his/her classrooms for personal growth and better learning of students. Reflective practices occur automatically when teachers face a problem in his/her classroom, and they shift to different methods because reflective practice helps teachers avoid burnout and routine approaches to their teaching and life in general because

reflection is a way of being or a state of mind. There are many ways, teachers can reflect on their work and all these methods have advantages and disadvantages. It is up to every teacher to decide which method would be most beneficial depending on the purposes of their reflections. Most of all, reflective practice enables teachers to make more informed decisions about their teaching and, as a result, their students receive the best possible opportunities for reaching success in their learning. Finally, reflection and reflective practice is more than a method, it is a way of life we evolve as teachers throughout our careers as we construct and reconstruct our practice.

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