



THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IN THE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between the concepts of reflection, reflexive practice, and reflective practice widely used in teacher education, and identifies their operational differences. The theoretical framework of the study draws on the views of John Dewey, Donald Schön, Thomas S. C. Farrell, Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart, Peter Hudson, Tracey Sempowicz, and other scholars of reflective pedagogy. The pedagogical practicum of pre-service English language teachers is considered a natural professional environment for developing reflective competence. Although the terms reflective and reflexive are often used in closely related ways in the international literature, the article proposes an operational distinction between them for the purposes of pedagogical research. Within this approach, reflective practice is understood as the concrete forms and tools used to organize reflection, including reflective journals, self-assessment, peer observation, mentoring, portfolios, video analysis, and reflective dialogue, whereas reflexive practice refers to the continuous process of consciously interpreting, analyzing, reconsidering, and transforming professional activity on the basis of these tools and the insights they generate. Consequently, reflection is conceptualized not as a formal reporting exercise, but as a mechanism for enhancing the quality of pedagogical decision-making and supporting continuous professional development.



Keywords: Reflection, reflexive practice, reflective practice, professional reflection, pedagogical practicum, pre-service English language teacher, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, mentoring, peer observation.

Introduction

One of the principal objectives of contemporary education is not merely to prepare teachers who possess subject knowledge, but to develop professionals who are capable of understanding their own practice, critically analyzing pedagogical situations, evaluating the consequences of their decisions, and independently improving their professional performance. This is particularly important for English language teachers, whose professional activity is characterized by the complexity of communicative situations, individual differences among learners, variations in language-learning motivation, the selection of interactive teaching methods, and the need to make immediate pedagogical decisions during lessons. Under such conditions, teachers' reflective competence becomes an essential component of professional expertise.

Pre-service English language teachers apply the theoretical knowledge acquired at university to real educational situations during their pedagogical practicum. They plan and conduct lessons, observe learners' activities, address emerging problems, and evaluate lesson outcomes. In this respect, the pedagogical practicum not only serves as a mechanism connecting theory and practice, but also constitutes an important environment for developing professional reflection. The sources reviewed in this study likewise emphasize the role of observation, self-assessment, analysis, post-lesson discussion, and reflective journaling in fostering reflection among pre-service teachers.

The relevance of the topic is further reinforced by the fact that the terms reflection, reflexive practice, reflective practice, and reflective approach are frequently used in pedagogical literature in closely related senses. As a result, studies may not always clearly distinguish between reflection itself, the tools used to organize it, and the professional changes that emerge as a consequence of reflection. Therefore, this article addresses the issue of operationally differentiating these concepts from the perspective of pedagogical practicum. The conceptual position of the study is that reflexive practice and reflective practice should not be regarded as two



mutually exclusive phenomena, but rather as different dimensions of a unified professional-reflexive system. In this framework, the term reflective is used operationally to denote the forms, methods, and tools through which reflection is organized, whereas reflexive refers to the continuous, conscious, critical, and change-oriented nature of this activity. This distinction is particularly important when working with pre-service teachers because maintaining a reflective journal or completing a lesson-observation form does not, in itself, demonstrate the development of reflective competence. Continuous reflexive practice emerges only when information obtained through reflective tools leads to changes in pedagogical decisions, experimentation with new strategies, and subsequent reassessment of their outcomes.

Although the idea of reflection can be traced back to ancient philosophical traditions, the works of John Dewey and Donald Schön are particularly significant for its modern pedagogical interpretation. Dewey conceptualized reflection not as ordinary thinking or introspection, but as a systematic and purposeful process of thought. From Dewey's perspective, reflection involves actively and carefully examining a belief or presumed knowledge in terms of the evidence supporting it and the consequences that follow from it. This approach makes questions such as "Why did I act in this way?", "What evidence supports my decision?", and "What consequences did this decision produce?" more important for teachers than simply asking, "What did I do?" The pedagogical significance of Dewey's position lies in the fact that reflection helps teachers move beyond routine and automatic decision-making. If educators do not regularly examine their own practice, established habits and stereotypes may restrict their ability to adapt to new situations. Reflection therefore functions as an internal mechanism of professional growth. Donald Schön established an even more direct connection between reflection and professional practice by introducing the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In the first case, professionals interpret a situation while engaged in activity and modify their actions when necessary. In the second case, completed activity is reconsidered afterwards, and conclusions are drawn to guide future action.

In the context of an English language lesson, reflection-in-action can be observed when a teacher recognizes that learners are not understanding the topic and changes



the planned explanation method during the lesson itself. Reflection-on-action, by contrast, involves analyzing the reasons for and effectiveness of this decision after the lesson and determining a new strategy for subsequent lessons. These two processes represent temporally distinct but interrelated forms of reflexive practice. Reflexive practice refers to the teacher's careful analysis of personal experience, the integration of theoretical knowledge with real-life situations, the reconsideration of pedagogical decisions, and the intention to improve subsequent practice. Drawing on Schön's perspective, reflexive practice can therefore be associated with thinking about practice while acting. A defining characteristic of reflexive practice is its continuity. It does not end with a one-time post-lesson report. Rather, every pedagogical situation generates new questions, while new conclusions modify subsequent pedagogical activity. Accordingly, reflexive practice can be represented as the following cycle: activity → observation → awareness → analysis → conclusion → decision → new activity → renewed reflection.

Reflexive practice should not be limited to cognitive analysis alone. Teachers' emotional states, self-confidence, relationships with learners, and cultural and organizational conditions can also influence pedagogical decisions. The reviewed literature likewise indicates the importance of considering emotional and cognitive factors as well as cultural, organizational, and temporal conditions when analyzing the context of reflexive practice. Therefore, a reflexive teacher asks not only, "Is my method appropriate?" but also questions such as "How did my pedagogical beliefs influence my choice of this method?", "Were learners' individual needs taken into account?", and "What was the emotional climate of the lesson?"

In this article, reflective practice is operationally interpreted as a set of specific pedagogical forms and tools for organizing reflection. Such tools activate the reflexive process, facilitate the collection of evidence, and enable teachers to view their practice from both external and internal perspectives. A reflective journal is one such tool. It enables a student teacher to record the course of a lesson, its successful and problematic aspects, learners' responses, their own pedagogical decisions, and plans for subsequent lessons. However, the value of a journal is determined not by the volume of writing but by the depth of analysis and the extent to which it informs subsequent practical decisions. Self-assessment enables pre-



service teachers to identify their professional strengths and weaknesses. Such assessment should preferably be based on clearly defined indicators, including the clarity of lesson objectives, time management, learner engagement, questioning techniques, feedback, the communicative environment, differentiation, and transparency of assessment. Peer observation enables teachers to view their own practice from another person's perspective. Rather than evaluating a lesson in general terms as "good" or "bad," the observer should collect evidence according to predetermined criteria. When this approach is based on mutual trust and collaboration, it can increase the critical depth of reflection. Mentoring is another important tool of reflective practice. The literature indicates that mentors' feedback can encourage reflective practice among student teachers and contribute to positive changes in their teaching. A mentor should not act merely as a supervisor who provides ready-made answers, but as a professional partner who helps the future teacher recognize problems independently and identify alternative solutions.

A portfolio makes it possible to examine reflective activity over time. It may include lesson plans, reflective journals, observation forms, self-assessment results, samples of learner work, and professional development plans. Such a portfolio helps the pre-service teacher move from the question "What do I know?" toward the more professionally meaningful question "How have I changed through practice?" The two approaches share several important characteristics.

First, both require teachers to engage consciously with their own professional activity. Both are grounded in self-awareness: teachers seek to recognize their beliefs, professional habits, strengths, and weaknesses.

Second, experience is considered an important source of knowledge in both approaches. Materials associated with Richards and Lockhart identify teachers' personal experience as an important source of information, while self-observation, self-assessment, and analysis of pedagogical beliefs are identified as key elements of reflective development.

Third, the ultimate objective of both approaches is professional development. Reflection is not an end in itself; rather, it serves to improve the quality of pedagogical activity, create more effective learning environments for students, and develop teachers' professional competence.



Within the framework of this study, the operational distinction between the terms can be formulated as follows. Reflective practice answers the question, “How do I organize reflection?” It is manifested through concrete tools such as journals, portfolios, self-assessment, peer observation, mentoring, video analysis, and professional dialogue. Reflexive practice, in contrast, answers the question, “What have I understood through this reflection, and what have I changed in my professional activity as a result?” Its central elements are the reconstruction of pedagogical activity, the adoption of new decisions, and the subsequent analysis of the effects of those changes. From this perspective, reflective practice can be regarded as a constituent mechanism of reflexive practice. For example, a student teacher writes a reflective journal; this constitutes the use of a reflective tool. If, on the basis of the journal, the student identifies the reasons for low learner engagement in speaking lessons, shifts to pair and small-group work in the following lesson, and compares the outcomes, this constitutes reflexive practice. Thus, the principal distinction lies in the relationship between tools and process: reflective practice organizes reflection, whereas reflexive practice transforms the outcomes of reflection into professional change.

Operational comparison of reflective practice and reflexive practice

Criterion	Reflective Practice	Reflexive Practice
Meaning	Forms and tools for organizing reflection	A continuous process of conscious interpretation, analysis, and transformation of professional activity
Core question	How do I carry out reflection?	What do I change on the basis of reflection?
Tools	Journals, portfolios, self-assessment, peer observation, mentoring	Analysis, decision-making, replanning, new activity, and reassessment
Time orientation	Often most visible in post-activity analysis	Continues before, during, and after activity
Outcome	Reflective data and conclusions	Professional decisions and practical change
Orientation	Methodological organization of reflection	Professional development and improvement of practice



The theoretical analysis yielded several important conclusions. First, reflection is not limited to simple self-observation or “thinking about a lesson.” It requires evidence-based, purposeful, and critical thinking. Second, Schön’s concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action make it possible to understand reflection during and after activity as parts of an integrated professional cycle. Third, reflective tools are necessary for organizing reflection, but their presence alone does not constitute the ultimate indicator of reflective competence. For example, keeping a journal may demonstrate the existence of reflective activity, but if the conclusions recorded in the journal do not lead to changes in the subsequent version of the lesson, reflexive practice has not been fully realized. Fourth, the effectiveness of reflexive practice increases when it is grounded in evidence. Video recordings, observation forms, learner work, lesson plans, mentor feedback, and self-assessment results enable teachers to gain a more accurate understanding of their practice. The reviewed literature also emphasizes the need to collect empirical data, including video, notes, lesson plans, and observation records, for research-based reflection.

Fifth, reflection can have a dialogic character. Mentoring and peer observation provide teachers with an opportunity to view their practice from an external perspective. Therefore, in systems for preparing pre-service teachers, it is important to create sufficient time and a psychologically safe environment for reflexive dialogue.

On this basis, three levels of criteria can be used to assess the professional reflection of pre-service English language teachers: a low level, characterized by episodic and descriptive reflection; an intermediate level, characterized by regular reflection but limited analytical depth; and a high level, characterized by systematic and critical analysis of practice and the application of conclusions to subsequent pedagogical activity. The reviewed literature presents a similar three-level diagnostic approach.

This distinction also provides methodological opportunities for assessing the professional reflection of pre-service English language teachers: the presence of reflective tools can be evaluated separately, while the pedagogical changes resulting from their use can be assessed as a separate indicator.



The findings of the study can be applied to the organization of pedagogical practicum in higher education institutions preparing future English language teachers. In particular, it is recommended that reflective journals, peer observation, mentoring conversations, video analysis, portfolios, and tasks involving the analysis of problematic situations be systematically incorporated into practicum programs.

It is also advisable to develop assessment criteria for reflective tasks. Such criteria may include the presence of description, causal analysis, use of evidence, consideration of alternative solutions, a plan for subsequent action, and verification of the outcomes of implemented changes.

The findings of the study make it possible to regard reflection, reflective practice, and reflexive practice as interconnected phenomena that can nevertheless be operationally distinguished for the purposes of pedagogical research. Reflection is the conscious, purposeful, and critical process of understanding one's own activity and experience; reflective practice comprises the specific pedagogical forms and tools through which this process is implemented; and reflexive practice represents the transformation of the results of reflection into a continuous process of professional growth and modification of practice.

This distinction has important methodological significance for the professional development of pre-service English language teachers. Pedagogical practicum should not be limited to teaching lessons and submitting reports; rather, it should be oriented toward interpreting experience, analyzing evidence, reconsidering pedagogical decisions, and experimenting with new forms of practice.

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