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THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN THE TEACHING PRACTICUM OF PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Abstract. The study explores the significance of reflection in the teaching practicum of prospective English language teachers. It examines how structured reflective practices influence professional development, pedagogical competency, and adaptability in classroom settings. Additionally, it identifies challenges pre-service teachers face in developing reflective skills and investigates effective strategies for fostering meaningful reflection in teacher training programs. The research employs an analysis of psychological, pedagogical, and methodological literature on reflective practices in teacher education. It synthesizes existing research findings and draws on personal teaching experience to evaluate the effectiveness of structured reflection in pre-service teacher training. Pedagogical observation is used to assess how guided

self-reflection and peer feedback influence the development of professional competencies. This study contributes to the existing body of research by demonstrating the impact of structured reflection frameworks on the professional growth of pre-service teachers. It highlights the role of guided prompts, video-based self-assessment, and peer discussions in enhancing reflective practice. The research also underscores the importance of balancing self-criticism with constructive self-evaluation to ensure productive reflection. Findings indicate that structured reflection significantly influences the professional growth of pre-service teachers. Structured reflection facilitated the identification of instructional strengths and weaknesses, leading to more targeted professional development. However, challenges such as excessive self-criticism, insufficient scaffolding in teacher training programs, and time constraints hindered effective reflection. The study emphasizes the need for explicit training in reflective strategies and the incorporation of digital tools to support continuous self-assessment and pedagogical refinement. Integrating structured reflection into teacher training programs can enhance adaptability, instructional decision-making, and overall teaching efficacy among future English language educators.

Keywords: reflective practice; pre-service teacher training; professional development; pedagogical competency; structured reflection; self-assessment; teacher education

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РОЛЬ РЕФЛЕКСІЇ У ПРОЦЕСІ ПЕДАГОГІЧНОЇ ПРАКТИКИ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

Анотація. У статті розглянуто роль рефлексії у педагогічній практиці майбутніх учителів англійської мови. Проаналізовано вплив структурованих рефлексивних практик на професійний розвиток, педагогічну компетентність та адаптивність в освітньому середовищі. Виокремлено труднощі, з якими стикаються майбутні вчителі в процесі розвитку рефлексивних навичок та схарактеризовано ефективні стратегії сприяння змістовній рефлексії в програмах підготовки педагогів. Методологія дослідження включає аналіз психологічної, педагогічної та методичної літератури, присвяченої рефлексивним практикам у професійній підготовці вчителів. У роботі узагальнено результати досліджень фахівців педагогічної галузі та власний досвід викладання авторів для оцінки ефективності структурованої рефлексії у підготовці майбутніх учителів. За допомогою методу педагогічного спостереження оцінено вплив керованої саморефлексії та взаємного зворотного зв'язку на розвиток професійних компетентностей майбутніх учителів іноземних мов. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у деталізації впливу структурованих моделей рефлексії на професійний розвиток майбутніх учителів, при чому особливу увагу приділено ролі керованих запитань, відеоаналізу власного викладання та обговоренню в групі задля вдосконалення рефлексивної практики. Стаття також підкреслює важливість балансу між самокритикою та конструктивною самооцінкою для забезпечення продуктивної рефлексії. Результати свідчать, що структурована рефлексія суттєво впливає на професійне зростання майбутніх педагогів. Вона сприяє виявленню сильних і слабких сторін викладання, що дозволяє більш цілеспрямовано обирати траєкторію професійного розвитку. Водночас виявлено низку труднощів, зокрема надмірну самокритику, недостатню підтримку рефлексивних практик у програмах підготовки вчителів та обмеженість часу для рефлексії. Дослідження наголошує на необхідності цілеспрямованого навчання рефлексивним стратегіям та інтеграції цифрових інструментів для підтримки постійного самооцінювання та вдосконалення педагогічної майстерності. Впровадження структурованої рефлексії у програми підготовки майбутніх учителів англійської мови може

сприяти підвищенню рівня їх адаптивності, вдосконаленню процесу прийняття освітніх рішень та покращенню загальної професійної підготовки.

Ключові слова: рефлексивна практика; підготовка майбутніх учителів; професійний розвиток; педагогічна компетентність; структурована рефлексія; самооцінювання; педагогічна освіта

The growing complexity of modern education, influenced by technological advancements, diverse student populations, and evolving pedagogical approaches, places increased demands on teachers. Mere acquisition of theoretical knowledge is no longer sufficient; instead, teachers must possess the ability to critically assess their own instructional strategies, identify strengths and weaknesses, and refine their teaching practices accordingly. Reflection plays a central role in this process, fostering self-awareness, promoting continuous professional development, and encouraging adaptability in dynamic classroom environments.

The relevance of this study is that despite the clear benefits of reflective practice, many pre-service teachers struggle to engage in meaningful reflection during their teaching practicum. Often, their reflection remains superficial, focusing on general impressions rather than in-depth analysis of teaching strategies, student engagement, or learning outcomes. Additionally, teacher training programs do not always provide explicit guidelines or structured frameworks that support the development of reflective skills. As a result, many student teachers complete their practicum without fully utilizing the opportunities for professional growth that reflective practice offers.

Given these considerations, the role of reflection in the teaching practicum deserves closer attention. Understanding how structured reflection can be effectively integrated into teacher training programs and how it influences the development of pedagogical competency is essential for improving the overall quality of teacher education. Examining the challenges pre-service teachers face in developing reflective skills, as well as exploring methods to enhance reflective practice, will provide valuable insights into the professional preparation of future English language teachers.

A crucial role of reflection in the teaching practicum has been emphasized by Ukrainian and foreign scholars. Dmitrenko et al. (2022) and Kharlay et al. (2022) highlight the role of structured reflection through digital tools, mentorship, and peer discussions, focusing on the need to consider multilingual and cultural factors in reflective practice. The study by Wass & Rogers (2019) suggests that video-based self-assessment enhances self-awareness and adaptability, helping student teachers bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice.

American scholars focus on action research and technology-enhanced reflection, advocating for digital teaching portfolios and video recordings to improve self-assessment and peer feedback (Farrell, 2018; Baecher, 2019; Rodgers, 2020). Emotional engagement in reflection is also highlighted, as teachers who critically analyze their experiences tend to develop stronger resilience and classroom management skills. Additionally, Kelchtermans (2009) and Tonna et al. (2017) emphasize collaborative reflection and teacher autonomy, arguing that professional

learning communities and school-based mentoring support deeper pedagogical insights.

Taking into account the aforementioned findings, the aim of our article is to explore the role of reflection in the teaching practicum of prospective English language teachers, examining its impact on professional development, pedagogical competency, and adaptability in classroom settings. It seeks to identify the challenges pre-service teachers face in developing reflective skills and investigate effective strategies for fostering meaningful reflection in teacher training programs.

To achieve the research objectives, this study employs an analysis of scientific psychological, pedagogical, and methodological literature on reflective practices in teacher education, as well as synthesis and generalization of existing research findings. The study also relies on the analysis of personal teaching experience to evaluate the effectiveness of structured reflection in pre-service teacher training. Additionally, pedagogical observation is used to assess how guided self-reflection and peer feedback influence the development of professional competencies among future English teachers. These methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of structured reflection in enhancing teaching efficacy and adaptability.

An analysis of pre-service teachers' reflective journals, lesson recordings, and post-lesson discussions indicates that structured reflection significantly influences their professional growth. However, the depth of reflection varies based on the tools and frameworks used. In our work with student teachers, those who were provided with structured reflection prompts such as guided questions focusing on lesson objectives, student responses, and instructional challenges demonstrated more insightful reflections compared to those who engaged in free-form self-assessments. This aligns with the findings of Baecher (2019), who reported that when student teachers were guided through a structured self-assessment process using video recordings, their reflections transitioned from surface-level observations to critical analyses of their teaching strategies.

For instance, student teachers who initially described lessons in broad terms (e.g., «*The lesson went well*» or «*Students seemed engaged*») progressed to making specific observations such as «*My instructions were unclear in the second task, which led to student confusion*» or «*Some students lost interest during the listening activity, perhaps because I didn't provide enough pre-listening support*». These more refined reflections allowed them to develop a habit of setting precise goals for improvement, ultimately strengthening their teaching philosophy and classroom confidence.

However, one recurring challenge was the tendency of some pre-service teachers to focus excessively on negative aspects, leading to frustration rather than constructive development. This was also observed by Farrell (2018), who noted that without proper mentoring, reflective practice could become an exercise in self-criticism rather than professional growth. To address this, incorporating peer feedback sessions proved beneficial, as student teachers gained alternative perspectives on their teaching strengths and areas for improvement.

One of the most tangible benefits of reflective practice in the teaching practicum is its role in enhancing pedagogical competency. When student teachers engage in systematic self-evaluation, they develop the ability to critically assess their lesson planning, instructional methods, and student interactions. In our teaching practice, we have observed that those who reflect on their classroom management strategies tend to develop more effective approaches over time.

For example, in a recent practicum cohort from Kharkiv Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy, several student teachers initially struggled with maintaining student engagement in speaking activities. After reviewing video recordings of their lessons, they identified common issues such as insufficient wait time for student responses, limited scaffolding, and over-reliance on direct questioning. One student teacher noted:

«When I watched my lesson, I realized I was rushing students to answer instead of giving them time to think. In my next lesson, I consciously paused after each question, and I noticed students were more willing to respond».

This reflective adjustment aligns with Rodgers' (2020) findings that structured reflection enhances teachers' ability to refine questioning techniques and scaffold student participation effectively. Similarly, American studies on digital teaching portfolios (Farrell & Baecher, 2017) suggest that teachers who engage in video-based self-reflection become more aware of their non-verbal communication, leading to improvements in classroom presence and student engagement.

In contrast, student teachers who did not engage in systematic reflection often repeated the same instructional mistakes throughout their practicum. Some continued to rely on rigid lesson scripts rather than responding dynamically to students' needs. These findings highlight the necessity of embedding structured reflection frameworks within teacher training programs to ensure that reflective practice translates into pedagogical improvement.

Adaptability is a crucial skill for English language teachers, particularly in diverse classroom settings where student needs and learning styles vary. Our observations confirm that reflective teachers are more likely to adjust their instructional strategies based on real-time classroom feedback. For instance, one student teacher initially planned a reading comprehension lesson using a standard 'read-and-answer' format. However, after reflecting on student disengagement, she experimented with a jigsaw reading activity in her next lesson and reported significantly higher student participation.

This case reflects European research on adaptive teaching, where Kelchtermans (2009) emphasizes that reflection fosters a mindset of experimentation and flexibility. Similarly, Wass & Rogers (2019) found that pre-service teachers who engaged in structured reflective discussions with mentors were more likely to revise their lesson plans to accommodate different learning styles.

However, adaptability is not an inherent skill. It develops through continuous, purposeful reflection. In our experience, student teachers who engaged in spontaneous reflection without structured guidance often misattributed lesson challenges to external

factors rather than critically analyzing their teaching decisions. For instance, some would claim, «*The students weren't interested in the topic*», rather than recognizing that their lesson lacked engaging elements. This underscores the need for explicit training in reflective strategies, such as using reflective journals with targeted prompts or engaging in guided post-lesson discussions.

Despite the clear benefits of reflective practice, several challenges persist in its implementation. First, as mentioned earlier, many student teachers struggle with self-criticism, which can hinder productive reflection. To address this, integrating peer support mechanisms such as collaborative reflection groups has proven effective in fostering a balanced approach to self-assessment.

Second, not all teacher training programs provide sufficient scaffolding for reflection. While some institutions encourage journaling or lesson debriefings, the absence of explicit models for deep reflection often leads to superficial engagement. Dmitrenko and others (2022) suggest that digital reflection tools, such as online discussion forums or video analysis platforms, can provide structured yet flexible opportunities for reflective practice. Our own experience corroborates this; student teachers who used digital reflection logs – where they recorded and responded to guided reflection prompts – demonstrated more consistent engagement with reflective practice than those who relied solely on written self-reports.

Finally, time constraints remain a significant barrier. Student teachers often perceive reflection as an additional burden rather than an integral component of their professional growth. A practical solution, supported by Farrell (2018), is integrating reflection seamlessly into existing practicum activities, for example, by incorporating reflective discussions within lesson planning sessions or pairing student teachers with mentors for structured reflection dialogues.

Collaborative reflection is essential in fostering a reflective teaching culture. Studies by Kelchtermans (2009) and Zeichner & Liston (2013) indicate that when pre-service teachers engage in structured discussions with peers and mentors, they develop a more balanced and critical perspective on their teaching experiences.

In our work with pre-service teachers, we have found that those who participated in peer reflection groups where they analyzed each other's lessons and exchanged insights developed stronger reflective habits than those who reflected in isolation. For example, a student who struggled with lesson pacing initially assumed the issue was a result of slow student comprehension. However, after a peer pointed out that excessive teacher talk time contributed to pacing issues, the student was able to adjust accordingly.

Effective strategies for fostering collaborative reflection include:

- Reflection dyads or small groups, where student teachers discuss their lesson experiences, guided by structured prompts.
- Mentor-led reflective debriefing sessions, where experienced educators provide critical insights while encouraging student teachers to articulate their learning points.

- Online discussion forums, where student teachers can engage in asynchronous reflective conversations, particularly beneficial in remote teacher training settings.

Reflective journals have long been used in teacher training, but their effectiveness depends on how they are structured. Research by Rodgers (2020) suggests that journals with guided prompts lead to deeper reflection than open-ended writing exercises.

In our teaching practice, we have observed that pre-service teachers who responded to specific reflection prompts, such as «*Describe a moment in your lesson where student learning was evident*» or «*What teaching decisions did you make in response to student behaviour?*», produced more analytical and actionable insights. Conversely, students given free-choice journaling often defaulted to vague summaries of their lessons.

To enhance journal-based reflection, teacher educators can:

- Provide tiered reflection prompts that encourage deeper thinking (e.g., moving from describing what happened to analyzing why it happened).
- Incorporate dialogic reflection, where pre-service teachers respond to mentor comments in their journals, creating an interactive reflection process.
- Use digital reflection logs, such as Google Docs or learning management systems, to facilitate ongoing feedback and discussion.

One of the most effective ways to ensure sustained reflective practice is to integrate it into lesson planning and post-lesson assessments rather than treating it as an add-on. Studies by Farrell (2018) and Kharlay and others (2022) highlight that when student teachers anticipate reflective discussions as a standard component of their practicum, they engage in more purposeful planning and self-evaluation.

In our work with pre-service teachers, we have found that those required to complete pre-lesson reflective statements, where they articulate anticipated challenges and strategies, were better prepared to adjust their teaching in real-time. Likewise, post-lesson reflection rubrics, which prompt teachers to analyze what worked, what didn't, and what they would modify, create a habit of continuous improvement.

Practical approaches include:

- Lesson reflection templates that require student teachers to predict challenges and document real-time adjustments.
- Reflective self-assessments tied to practicum grading criteria, ensuring that reflection is valued as a professional competency.
- Microteaching sessions followed by structured reflection, allowing student teachers to refine their teaching strategies in a controlled setting.

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of structured reflection in the teaching practicum of pre-service English language teachers. The analysis confirms that guided reflection significantly enhances professional development, pedagogical competency, and adaptability in classroom settings. Student teachers who engaged in structured self-assessment, particularly through guided prompts and video-based

reflection, demonstrated deeper analytical skills and more refined instructional strategies. However, challenges such as superficial engagement, excessive self-criticism, and time constraints continue to hinder the full potential of reflective practice.

To ensure meaningful reflection, teacher training programs must provide explicit frameworks, mentorship opportunities, and digital tools that facilitate structured self-assessment. Collaborative reflection, particularly peer feedback and mentoring, has proven to be an effective strategy for overcoming self-doubt and promoting balanced self-evaluation. Further research should explore innovative digital platforms for reflection, the long-term impact of reflective practice on teaching effectiveness, and the role of cultural and multilingual factors in shaping reflective habits. By integrating structured reflection more effectively into teacher education, institutions can foster a new generation of educators who are not only skilled in instructional techniques but also capable of continuous professional growth and adaptation.

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