

## Reflective teaching as praxis: Examining the role of teacher reflection in transforming classroom practice

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### Abstract

This study explores reflective teaching as a form of transformative praxis within pre-service teacher education, grounded in critical pedagogy and experiential learning. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research focused on 18 pre-service teachers and three lecturers over 4 weeks in a South African university-based general teacher education program. Data were collected through reflective journals, peer-led discussion groups, and semi-structured interviews, and were thematically analyzed to capture emerging patterns in reflective growth. Findings indicate that ongoing engagement with reflection enabled pre-service teachers to challenge assumptions, rethink their approach to learner diversity, and adopt more inclusive, student-centered strategies. Lecturer modelling of reflection and dialogic peer feedback proved essential in shaping reflective depth. Participants demonstrated improved self-awareness in their teaching approaches. The study concludes that when embedded systematically into general teacher education programs, reflective practice functions not merely as an introspective tool but as a catalyst for curriculum transformation and professional development. Recommendations are made for institutionalizing reflection through curriculum integration, sustained mentoring, and professional learning communities that promote critical inquiry.

**Keywords:** reflective practice, pre-service teachers, teacher education, praxis, critical pedagogy, experiential learning

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, teacher education has increasingly emphasized the development of reflective practitioners who can navigate the complexity of modern classrooms with professional judgment, empathy, and critical insight. This pedagogical shift aligns with a broader understanding of teaching as a socially situated, ethical, and dialogic practice far more than the mechanical delivery of content (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Within this paradigm, reflective teaching emerges as a form of praxis, “action informed by theory and reflection” that allows educators to interrogate their beliefs, adjust their practices, and respond meaningfully to diverse learner needs (Freire, 1970; Schön, 1983).

For pre-service teachers, cultivating reflective capacity is crucial. As novices in the profession, they

often lack the experiential knowledge needed to make informed instructional decisions. Structured opportunities for reflection, such as journaling, collaborative dialogue, and critical feedback, support their professional identity formation, deepen pedagogical understanding, and foster adaptive expertise (Korthagen, 2017; Larrivee, 2000). Moreover, reflection enables them to critically engage with equity, inclusion, and learner diversity issues, especially pertinent in post-colonial and socioeconomically unequal contexts like South Africa (Gravett, 2012; Le Grange, 2016).

This paper investigates reflective teaching as praxis in a South African pre-service general teacher education program. It examines how lecturers intentionally embed reflection through guided journaling, peer collaboration, and mentorship. The paper explores the pedagogical strategies and institutional structures that foster

### Contribution to the literature

- The study extends existing research by investigating how structured reflection through journaling, peer collaboration, and lecturer mentorship can enhance pedagogical awareness and responsive classroom practice in university-based teacher education programs.
- The findings of this study call for reimagining teacher education that places reflective praxis at the center. By embedding reflection across curricula, equipping lecturers, clarifying assessment, and enshrining it in the policy, institutions can prepare future educators who are not only skilled but also thoughtful, responsive, and transformative in their practice.
- The findings of the study project pre-service teachers to begin to reimagine themselves as thoughtful, adaptive professionals capable of responding meaningfully to learners' needs, as shown in the developed conceptual framework by the author of this study, which reinforces his conceptualization of reflective teaching as praxis, showing how theory, practice, and reflection interact dynamically.

meaningful reflection through a qualitative case study approach. It seeks to offer practical and theoretical insights into how general teacher education can cultivate critically reflective, socially responsive, and professionally empowered educators. In this regard, the study is guided by the following research question: How does structured and scaffolded reflection within a general teacher education program support the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities and pedagogical responsiveness?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives: critical pedagogy and experiential learning theory (ELT). These theories provide a robust foundation for understanding reflective teaching such as praxis, thoughtfulness, social responsiveness, and theory-informed professional action.

### Critical Pedagogy

This was developed by Freire (1970) and conceptualizes education as a liberatory act that challenges oppression and promotes social transformation. Within this view, teachers are not mere transmitters of knowledge but co-learners and co-creators of meaning. Reflection, therefore, becomes a political and ethical act as an interrogation of one's assumptions, cultural norms, and power dynamics within the classroom (Giroux, 2011). Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientização*, thus, the development of critical consciousness, invites pre-service teachers to question whose voices are prioritized in the curriculum and how teaching can empower marginalized learners. In a particular classroom Scenario, a female pre-service teacher reflecting on a history lesson might recognize that the textbook presents colonial narratives without Indigenous perspectives. Through guided reflection, she revises her lesson to include oral histories and primary sources from local communities, thus aligning with the

emancipatory goals of critical pedagogy, something which is very important in the current situation where pre-service teachers are trained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, pre-service teachers need to internalize the teaching and learning of mathematics through reflection.

### Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) ELT offers a cyclical model involving four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This model positions reflection as the crucial bridge between doing and understanding. In general teacher education, ELT encourages pre-service teachers to systematically reflect on teaching experiences, identify challenges, construct pedagogical knowledge, and refine their instructional approaches in their training journey for teaching (Boud et al., 1985; Moon, 2013). For instance, after facilitating a group activity that failed to engage learners, a student-teacher reflects (observation), consults theories of collaborative learning (conceptualization), and redesigns the activity to include clearer roles and peer accountability (experimentation). Critical pedagogy and experiential learning provide a dynamic framework for this study's investigation into how reflective practices are intentionally cultivated in teacher education programs to promote socially responsive and professionally informed teaching.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will focus on the following areas.

### Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

Reflection is a foundational component of professional growth in teacher education. Dewey (1933) described reflection as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration" of beliefs and practices, setting the stage for understanding teaching as a thoughtful, intentional act. Schön (1983) later differentiated between "reflection-in-action," where decisions are made during the teaching process, and "reflection-on-action," which

involves post-lesson analysis, both of which are crucial for developing pedagogical agility.

Numerous empirical studies support the value of reflective practice in teacher preparation. Farrell (2015) found that structured reflection improves pre-service teachers' ability to link theory and practice, develop classroom management strategies, and address learner diversity. Similarly, Zeichner and Liston (2013) observed that teacher candidates who engaged regularly in reflective journaling and group discussion demonstrated improved self-efficacy and instructional adaptability.

Lecturers play a pivotal role in modelling and facilitating reflective processes. According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005), creating a "safe yet challenging learning environment" encourages deeper introspection among teacher candidates. In such environments, lecturers support students through guided reflection, formative feedback, and the co-construction of knowledge.

In practice, this might look like a microteaching session followed by a peer debrief, where students share how they adapted their lesson when a learner misunderstood a concept. For instance, in one observed session, a student teacher teaching fractions used a visual fraction bar but noticed confusion in the learners' faces. The student immediately paused and used a real orange to cut into slices, re-anchoring the abstract idea into a concrete representation. Reflecting later, the student recognized the importance of visual aids tailored to learner context, a realization deepened through structured journaling and peer feedback.

Larrivee (2000) proposes four levels of reflection: pre-reflective, surface, pedagogical, and critical. Most pre-service teachers begin at surface-level reflection (e.g., "My lesson went well") but, with structured support, can move toward deeper, critical reflection that interrogates beliefs, sociocultural factors, and power dynamics in the classroom (e.g., "How did my assumption about rural learners' background knowledge shape my lesson delivery?").

### Reflective Strategies in Teacher Preparation

Various strategies have been found effective in cultivating reflective habits in general teacher education. Reflective journals are widely used, offering pre-service teachers an outlet to articulate their emotions, assess instructional practices, and identify growth areas (Lee, 2005). Prompts such as "What challenged your assumptions today?" or "Which moment in your lesson revealed learner misunderstanding?" or "How do you know that your lesson went well?" can be integrated to enhance depth. Lecturers' feedback on these journals is essential in prompting deeper inquiry and offering support.

Another powerful approach is video-based reflection. Pre-service teachers must record their lessons

and watch them individually or in groups to identify missed cues, flaws, unintended teacher talk, or student engagement patterns (Tripp & Rich, 2012). For example, one student reviewing their video recorded noticed they had not asked any open-ended questions during a mathematics lesson. This prompted reflection on questioning techniques and subsequent practice in future lessons.

Peer collaboration, often in the form of critical friendship groups, enables students to reflect on others and share diverse perspectives. Cirocki and Farrell (2017) found that peer dialogue reduces feelings of isolation and normalizes challenges during practicum. It also fosters cooperative teaching and collective problem-solving, such as discussing alternative ways to support learners with limited language proficiency.

Mentorship from lecturers and experienced teachers is another key facilitator. Orland-Barak (2006) describes mentorship as a dialogic relationship where mentors use questions to elicit deeper thinking. For example, a mentor might ask, "What impact did your grouping strategy have on learner participation?" or "How might learners from different cultural backgrounds have experienced your example?" or "How did you feel when a sizable number of learners in your class couldn't solve the example you put across during teaching?" These questions guide pre-service teachers beyond technical reflections toward sociocultural awareness. Diagrams like Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle can also scaffold this process. Pre-service teachers are introduced to a six-stage cycle: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. This structure helps them systematically unpack teaching incidents and identify next steps.

### Challenges to Reflective Practice

Despite its importance, reflective practice is often inconsistently implemented. One challenge is the perception of reflection as a bureaucratic exercise, rather than a tool for growth. Pre-service teachers may submit superficial reflections without clear criteria or lecturer feedback to fulfil requirements (Beauchamp, 2015). This reduces the transformative potential of the process. Another barrier is time. Both pre-service teachers and lecturers often face intense workloads in their workplaces, limiting opportunities for deep engagement with reflective tasks (Husu et al., 2008).

Additionally, some lecturers may lack training in facilitating reflective pedagogy, leading to fragmented or poorly scaffolded reflective experiences (Zeichner, 2016). Institutional challenges also persist. In rigid curricula focused on compliance and performance metrics, there is little space for ambiguity or uncertainty, both of which are central to reflective inquiry (Brookfield, 2017).

To address these challenges, studies suggest integrating reflection into assessment frameworks, providing structured prompts, and offering reflective workshops for both lecturers and students where possible. Korthagen (2017) advocates for a “realistic approach” where reflection is grounded in the lived realities of teaching, rather than idealized visions. What is important about this study is that many pre-service teachers reflected on their lessons taught, and this helped them to make or set examples that were relevant to the content they taught, especially examples involving learners’ daily experiences, which made the lesson taught more meaningful to learners as opposed to abstract representations. Embedding reflection into coursework, portfolios, and teaching practice documentation ensures consistency and coherence. Empirical support for these solutions is growing. A study by Ryan and Ryan (2013) across Australian universities demonstrated that students showed significant growth in reflective depth over time when reflection was scaffolded and assessed using clear rubrics. Similarly, Smith and Hatton (2005) found that collaborative reflection within professional learning communities fostered both personal and professional development among teacher candidates.

This study contributes to this body of knowledge by examining how a reflective teaching module with structured journaling, peer dialogue, and lecturer mentorship enhances reflective capacity and professional identity among South African pre-service teachers.

## METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how reflective teaching contributes to professional growth and development among pre-service teachers. The study was conducted at a faculty of education within a South African university as a sample and focused on a semester-long reflective teaching module integrated into the final year of a Bachelor of Education program. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative case studies are appropriate for investigating complex, context-bound educational phenomena, particularly when the goal is to understand participants’ experiences deeply.

The participants included 18 final-year pre-service teachers; males = 9 and females = 9 enrolled in the module, and three teacher education lecturers; males = 2 and females = 1 responsible for facilitating and assessing the course. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants with rich information and relevant experiences in reflective practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical clearance was obtained from the university’s research ethics committee, and all participants were provided with written informed consent forms to sign in line with ethical research

standards to document their consent to participate in the study and answer all research questions. Interestingly, no one was exposed to any risk or excluded from any potential benefit as the study unfolded based on their race, gender, or any other criterion (Wood, 2019).

### Data Collection Methods

The data were gathered from three primary sources to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### *Reflective journals*

Each pre-service teacher completed weekly reflective journal entries documenting a brief account of any classroom observation/teaching practice experiences they have had with their learners and mentor teacher during practicum placements. Journals focused on critical incidents about the lesson/content taught and experience, reflection on lessons learned, instructional challenges, learner responses, future actions, and personal growth, aligning with established reflective frameworks (Gibbs, 1988; Larrivee, 2000). These were analyzed to identify emerging patterns in thought processes and pedagogical development.

#### *Focus group discussions*

Two semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted during one mid-semester and one at the end, with ten randomly selected student participants in each session. For instance, discussion questions like “What kind of teaching materials/aids do they integrate into their teaching and learning of mathematics?” “How do you reflect on your lesson?” These discussions allowed for a collective unpacking of reflective experiences, providing insights into shared tensions and transformative moments (Barbour, 2007).

#### *Lecturer observations and feedback*

Participating lecturers kept structured observation logs during seminars and microteaching sessions. For example, lecturers showed or commented on how pre-service teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of the content taught in their various lecture rooms through effective explanation of key concepts taught. They also checked how students engaged in learning, participated in group activities and reflected on their group discussion activities in class. They (lecturers) also provided written feedback on students’ journal entries, serving as a dialogic scaffold to guide deeper reflection (Orland-Barak, 2006).

Together, these data sources provided a rich, multi-layered understanding of how reflective teaching practices are enacted, experienced, and supported in a context for university teacher preparation.

## Ensuring Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were systematically applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation by collecting information from multiple sources (reflective journals, focus groups, and lecturer observations) to cross-verify emerging themes and ensure a fuller understanding of participants' experiences. Member checking was also conducted, whereby selected participants reviewed summaries of their journal entries and focus group transcripts to confirm the accuracy of interpretations (Birt et al., 2016).

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting the research process, data analysis decisions, and reflexive memos, providing transparency for future researchers to understand and potentially replicate the study process. Transferability was supported by providing rich, thick descriptions of the study context, participants, and teaching practices so that readers can judge the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure confirmability, the researchers engaged in reflexivity, acknowledging and bracketing personal biases that might influence interpretation. Peer debriefing sessions with fellow academics were also held to critically reflect on the coding process and interpretations of data (Shenton, 2004).

Although reliability in qualitative research does not imply replicability in the same way as in quantitative designs, the consistency of coding and theme development was strengthened through inter-coder agreement: a second researcher reviewed a subset of the journal entries to ensure coding accuracy and thematic alignment. These measures collectively enhanced the rigor and credibility of the study.

## Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) described to analyze the qualitative data drawn from reflective journals, focus group discussions, and lecturer observation notes. This approach was selected for its flexibility in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across diverse qualitative datasets. The analysis followed a six-phase iterative process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Data were first transcribed and organized using NVivo 12 software to manage coding and retrieval efficiently. The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading all transcripts and journal entries multiple times to gain a holistic understanding. An inductive coding process was adopted, meaning codes

and themes were derived directly from the data without imposing predetermined categories (Nowell et al., 2017). For example, recurring phrases such as "I didn't realize how learners felt" or "I saw things differently after discussing with my peers" informed themes such as *empathy development* and *peer-supported reflection*.

During the second cycle of coding, related codes were clustered into broader categories, leading to the emergence of key themes:

- (1) developing a reflective mindset,
- (2) connecting theory to practice,
- (3) navigating emotional challenges, and
- (4) lecturer support as catalyst.

The research team reviewed these themes collaboratively to ensure alignment with research questions and consistency across data sources.

Trustworthiness in data analysis was enhanced through data triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), comparing insights from journals, focus groups, and lecturers' feedback to cross-validate findings. Additionally, member checking was employed: selected participants were invited to review synthesized themes and verify that their experiences were accurately represented (Birt et al., 2016).

To improve the dependability and confirmability of the analysis, an audit trail was maintained documenting coding decisions and analytic reflections. Peer debriefing sessions were also conducted to critique and refine thematic interpretations. Combining systematic thematic analysis with strategies to ensure rigor generated credible and meaningful insights into how reflective teaching was experienced and facilitated in the teacher education program.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study, through thematic analysis of the data, uncovered the following three interrelated themes that illuminate the transformative potential of reflective teaching for pre-service teachers:

- (1) shifting teacher identities,
- (2) responsive pedagogy, and
- (3) lecturer-led scaffolding.

These themes affirm that structured reflection supports professional growth and responsive teaching when guided by knowledgeable mentors.

### Shifting Teacher Identities

Reflection provided pre-service teachers with a space to question and reconstruct their professional identities. Initially, many participants approached teaching as a transmission of content. However, through sustained journaling and peer discussions, they began to see themselves as facilitators of learning, co-constructing knowledge with their learners.

One participant noted:

"Once I realized I was focusing too much on content and not enough on how learners understand it."

Other participants had this to say:

"One important thing I did when I realized that my learners were quiet and not responding to some of questions to them was video recording of some of my lessons I taught in class and played them later at home with my peers to pinpoint the flaws we committed as well as the good things that we did, which help us to improve upon the subsequent lessons. This helped me to align my lesson plans with CAPS documents, which I will never forget in my lifetime." (participant 2).

"I have also learned that making examples that are relevant to the content when teaching, especially examples involving learners' daily experiences, makes learning a lot more meaningful to the learners, as opposed to making examples of situations that would most likely be experienced by learners from overseas. This is when I realized that developing learners' conceptual understanding was more important to me than procedural." (participant 9)

"The learners were very active and enjoyed lessons that involved movement, discussions, and when you show them things visually. For example, when I used pictures or short videos from YouTube, they would sit quietly and listen; they were more engaged compared to when we used the textbook, as I did not want to dwell more on the content than the pedagogical aspect." (participant 11)

This reorientation aligns with the work of Loughran (2002), who emphasizes that reflective teaching encourages deeper self-awareness and a shift from didactic instruction toward learner-centered practices. Similarly, Korthagen (2010) argues that reflection promotes a "core reflection" process that integrates personal beliefs, identity, and professional values, which is the key to helping pre-service teachers internalize more holistic views of teaching.

Consistent with theory, the findings indicate that teachers are not mere transmitters of knowledge but co-learners and co-creators of meaning. Reflection, therefore, becomes a political and ethical act as an interrogation of one's assumptions, cultural norms, and power dynamics within the classroom (Giroux, 2011). Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientização*, thus, the development of critical consciousness, invites pre-service teachers to question whose voices are prioritized

in the curriculum and how teaching can empower marginalized learners.

The discomfort and uncertainty experienced by participants when faced with contradictions between their assumptions and classroom realities is consistent with Mezirow's (1997) notion of transformative learning. If supported through dialogue and scaffolding, such disorienting dilemmas become catalysts for identity growth and pedagogical change.

### Responsive Pedagogy

Another significant theme was the development of responsive pedagogy, which is the ability to adjust instruction based on learners' needs, engagement, and feedback. Reflective journal prompts such as "*Who was included or excluded in my lesson today?*" encouraged participants to consider learner agency and inclusion.

A participant shared:

"I adjusted my group work after noticing that quieter students weren't participating. I assigned roles to encourage equal input."

Another participant had this to say:

"As for me, assigning roles to learners and dramatization during my teaching and learning was an excellent method of grasping learners' attention and full participation in class that leads to successful achievement of your lesson objectives, as learners were very attentive and willing to showcase their talents."

This comment reflects increased sensitivity to student dynamics and a growing commitment to equity in the classroom. Responsive pedagogy, as suggested by Gamlem et al. (2019), requires teachers to be aware of and responsive to the diverse social, emotional, and cultural needs of learners to strengthen students' feedback, self-regulated learning, self-efficacy and achievement in mathematics. Reflection equips future educators with this critical awareness by prompting them to examine their biases, assumptions, and teaching practices to support students' understanding.

Moreover, the iterative nature of reflection helped pre-service teachers understand that responsive teaching is not a one-time event but a continuous process of observing, adjusting, and refining instruction. This insight mirrors findings by Zeichner and Liston (2013), who maintain that effective teaching involves ongoing responsiveness rather than rigid adherence to lesson plans. The findings extend the theoretical framework by incorporating Kolb's (1984) ELT which positions reflection as the crucial bridge between doing and understanding whereby pre-service teachers systematically reflect on their teaching experiences, identify challenges, construct pedagogical knowledge,

and refine their instructional approaches in their training journey for teaching (Boud et al., 1985; Moon, 2013).

### Lecturer-Led Scaffolding

A recurring theme across the data was the importance of lecturer feedback and modelling in deepening reflective engagement. Participants consistently cited lecturer questions, written comments, and informal coaching as crucial to their learning.

For instance, participant 2 had this to say,

“My lecturer asked, ‘Why do you think that activity didn’t work?’ That made me reconsider how I structured the task.”

Another participant had this to say:

“My lecturer asked, ‘How did you reflect on your lesson taught?’ ‘And who was your target group?’ ‘Did you achieve your aim?’ ‘How?’ ‘That made me remember how I used real-life situation examples to make the lesson very real to them.’”

Such interactions provided not only accountability but also deeper conceptual insight to the advantage of the teacher and the learner as well. This supports Orland-Barak’s (2006) assertion that effective mentors guide reflection by modelling inquiry, posing critical questions, and making their pedagogical reasoning visible. In this study, lecturers did not merely assess reflection but co-constructed it with students, demonstrating the kind of reflective stance they hoped to cultivate in students for their future benefit.

In addition, this lecturer’s scaffolding helped bridge the often-noted theory-practice gap in teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006). When reflection was linked to feedback and connected to course content or learning theories, participants were more likely to internalize insights and apply them in real teaching contexts.

In a particular classroom scenario, a female pre-service teacher reflecting on a history lesson might recognize that the textbook presents colonial narratives without Indigenous perspectives. Through guided reflection, she revises her lesson to include oral histories and primary sources from local communities, thus aligning with the emancipatory goals of critical pedagogy. This is very important in the current situation where pre-service teachers are trained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, pre-service teachers need to internalize teaching and learning through reflection. The findings support the assumption that critical pedagogy and experiential learning provide a dynamic framework for this study’s investigation into how reflective practices are intentionally cultivated in teacher education programs to promote socially responsive and professionally informed teaching.

## DISCUSSION

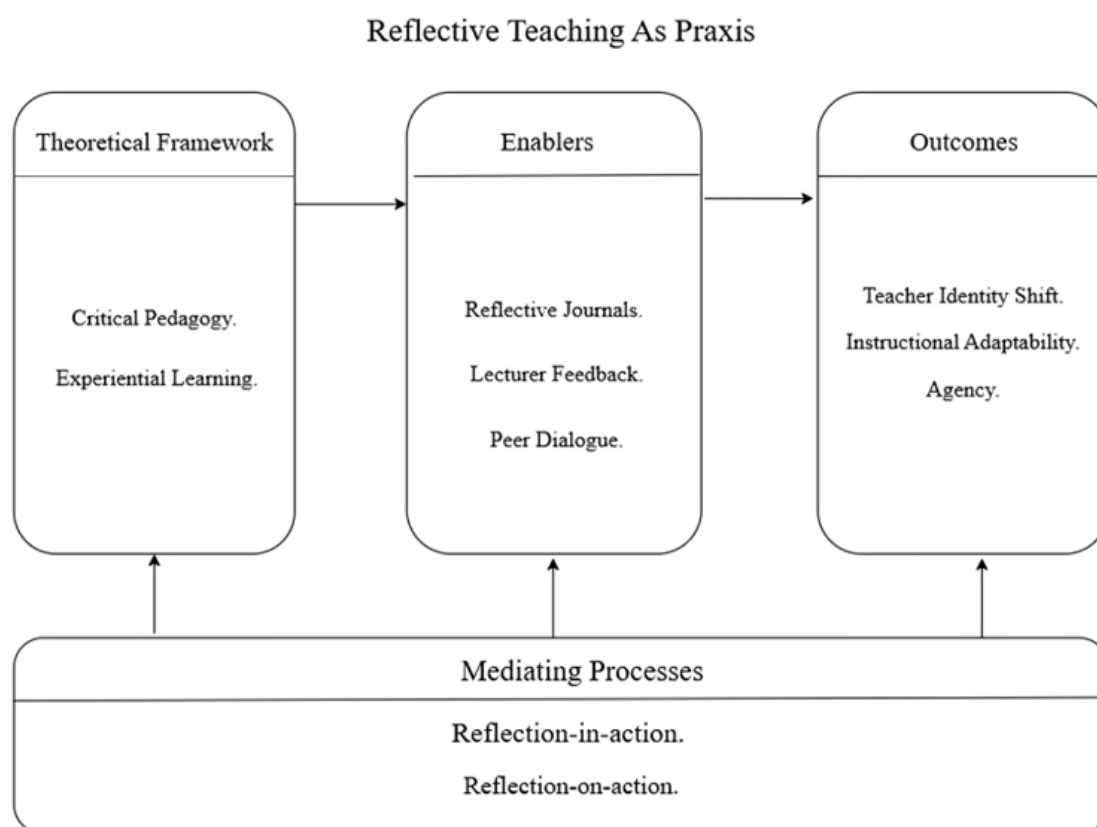
These findings confirm previous research highlighting structured reflection’s transformative potential (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Farrell, 2015). They also extend existing literature by illustrating how reflective growth is contingent on social and institutional support. Without scaffolding, reflection risks becoming superficial. With it, pre-service teachers begin to reimagine themselves as thoughtful, adaptive professionals capable of responding meaningfully to learners’ needs, as shown in the developed conceptual framework below, which reinforces my conceptualization of reflective teaching as praxis, showing how theory, practice, and reflection interact dynamically in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1** visually represents how reflective teaching functions as praxis within the teacher education context. The diagram integrates critical pedagogy and ELT elements (Kolb, 1984), showing the iterative relationship between classroom experience, structured reflection, and pedagogical transformation. It highlights the role of lecturer scaffolding, student agency, and contextual responsiveness in developing reflective practitioners in future, depicting the dynamic integration of theory, reflection, and action within pre-service teacher education. Grounded in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and ELT (Kolb, 1984), the model portrays reflection not as an isolated cognitive activity but as an iterative, socially mediated process that leads to pedagogical transformation.

At the core of the model is classroom experience, representing pre-service teachers’ engagement in teaching activities such as lesson planning, classroom interaction, assessment, and classroom management during coursework or practicum. These experiences provide the concrete situations that trigger reflection. In line with ELT (Kolb, 1984), experience serves as the starting point for meaning-making and professional growth in general teacher education.

Flowing from classroom experience is structured reflection, which includes reflective journaling, guided by questioning, peer dialogue, and lecturer feedback (critical incident analysis) as enablers of reflective practice leading to the proper outcome to be achieved. This component emphasizes that reflection is most effective when it is intentional and scaffolded rather than incidental. Through reflective activities, pre-service teachers can interrogate their assumptions, examine learner responses, and evaluate the effectiveness of their pedagogical choices. This stage aligns with Schön’s (1983) notions of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action as essential components of reflection.

Surrounding and supporting the reflective process is lecturer scaffolding—a critical mediating element in the model, in the sense that lecturers act as facilitators of reflection by modelling reflective thinking, posing



**Figure 1.** Proposed conceptual model illustrating reflective teaching as praxis in pre-service teacher education (Source: Author's own elaboration)

probing questions to students, providing formative feedback, and creating safe spaces for critical dialogue to take place for a successful outcome. This scaffolding supports pre-service teachers' movement from surface-level reflection toward deeper pedagogical and critical reflection (Larrivee, 2000). Without such guidance, reflection risks becoming descriptive rather than transformative in nature.

As reflection deepens, the model shows the emergence of student agency, where pre-service teachers increasingly take ownership of their learning and professional development. Agency is reflected in their growing capacity through teacher activities or actions to make informed pedagogical decisions, adapt instruction, and respond thoughtfully to diverse learner needs in class. This shift marks a transition from viewing teaching as technical execution to understanding it as an ethical and relational practice. The outcome of this iterative cycle is pedagogical transformation, represented in the model as changes in beliefs, instructional strategies, and professional identity. Pre-service teachers refined their teaching approaches, adopted more inclusive and responsive practices, and developed a reflective stance toward ongoing professional learning. Notably, the model emphasizes contextual responsiveness, highlighting that reflective praxis is shaped by sociocultural, institutional, and classroom contexts.

Overall, **Figure 1** conceptualizes reflective teaching as a continuous, cyclical process rather than a linear one. By linking experience, reflection, lecturer support, agency, and transformation, the model demonstrates how reflective teaching operates as praxis, enabling pre-service teachers to critically examine their practice and enact meaningful change in diverse educational contexts.

### Implications and Recommendations of the Study

This study underscores the vital role of structured reflection in transforming pre-service teachers' professional identities and pedagogical approaches. It offers the following key implications and recommendations for enhancing teacher education programs:

#### *Curriculum design*

Reflective teaching should not be treated as an optional or add-on component but rather embedded as a systematic thread throughout teacher education curricula. As Zeichner and Liston (2013) argue, sustained and scaffolded reflection is essential for developing thoughtful, responsive educators. Embedding reflective modules across semesters and linking them to practical experiences helps pre-service teachers make sense of theory through action and observation. For example, students can engage in

reflective journaling tied to specific practicum goals, promoting a cyclical process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983).

### *Lecturer training and support*

The findings highlight that reflection becomes more profound and more transformative when scaffolded by skilled lecturers. Therefore, ongoing professional development should be provided to teacher educators to model reflective thinking, pose critical questions, and use feedback constructively (Loughran, 2002). Professional learning communities can support lecturers in co-developing reflective prompts, sharing exemplars, and aligning feedback with program goals. Lecturer competence in this area is critical to shifting reflection from surface-level narration to deep inquiry.

### *Assessment of reflective practice*

Assessment remains a challenge in promoting genuine reflection. To avoid performative or superficial responses, institutions should adopt clear, research-informed rubrics that define reflective depth, self-awareness, integration of theory, and criticality (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). Providing exemplars of high-quality reflection helps students visualize expectations and reduce ambiguity, also ensuring reflection is recognized as a developmental tool and an assessable academic output.

### *Institutional and policy support*

At a broader level, institutional policies should acknowledge reflection as a core professional competency within teacher qualification standards. This includes allocating time for reflective activities within practicum schedules, integrating reflection into portfolios or capstone projects, and recognizing reflective competence in teacher certification frameworks (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Policy support can also enable cross-departmental initiatives that link reflection with other competencies, such as inclusive pedagogy, digital literacy, and sustainable development goals.

### *Summary*

Ultimately, this study calls for reimagining teacher education that places reflective praxis at the center. By embedding reflection across curricula, equipping lecturers, clarifying assessment, and enshrining it in policy, institutions can prepare future educators who are not only skilled but also thoughtful, responsive, and transformative in their practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

When conceptualized as praxis, reflective teaching transcends routine self-evaluation and becomes a

powerful means for developing critically conscious and pedagogically responsive educators. This study has demonstrated that reflection, when intentionally structured, scaffolded by knowledgeable lecturers, and grounded in authentic classroom experiences, enables pre-service teachers to reframe their roles, refine their practices, and reconceptualize their identities as facilitators of learning rather than mere transmitters of content.

The findings affirm that deep reflection does not occur in isolation; it requires a supportive ecosystem that includes well-trained mentors (lecturers), guided prompts, collaborative spaces, and institutional commitment. When these conditions are met, pre-service teachers thoroughly examine practice, identify inclusive strategies, and adapt instruction to serve diverse learners more effectively in schools.

In a global educational climate increasingly focused on equity, inclusion, and 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies, the institutionalization of reflective practice within teacher education is not optional but essential. Integrating reflection as a core pedagogical pillar equips future teachers with the habits of mind needed to navigate complex classroom realities and enact meaningful change. As this study shows, reflection fosters better teaching and a deeper commitment to continuous learning and educational justice in a global context.

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