

**Four Lenses of Reflection: Experiences of Teacher Educators**

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**Abstract**

This study was conducted to have an in-depth exploration of the experiences of teacher educators regarding the four lenses of reflection. The major research question of the current study was how teacher educators narrate their experiences about four lenses of reflection? The methodological approach chosen for this study was qualitative to have a deep and rich understanding of teacher educator's experiences about lenses of reflection and narrative research method was used by the researchers. Four teacher educators of well-known universities of the Punjab province were the participants of the study who were selected purposively. Data was collected through narrative interviews in the form of stories. Data analysis procedure of the current study had two phases, at first phase, stories of the participants about their experiences of the four lenses of reflection were formed. In the second phase, at the base of the content of the stories, the final themes were identified. The study found that teacher educators use four lenses of reflection in their professional lives and take great benefit out of it. They follow their favorite teachers, take feedback from students, share their experiences with colleagues in order to improve themselves as teacher educators, but as far as help from literature is concerned they narrate that they need to improve their study habits. Besides all the benefits of reflection, this study explored that reflection is a very productive process but if used only for the sake of positive intensions.

Key Words: Reflection, Reflective Practices, Four Lenses of Reflection, Narrative

**Introduction**

Reflection is the process through which teacher educators engage themselves in the practice of self-evaluation and self-examination in order to improve their professional practices (Shandomo, 2010). Here is an evidence from literature that reflection and reflective practices play a significant role in improving teaching (Dervant, 2015; Murray, 2015; Zahid & Khanam, 2019), guide teachers towards more conscious and mindful practices (Mortari, 2012), and have positive effect on our self-efficacy (Khan & Eilaghi, 2017).

Dewey's (1910) definition of reflection worked as a foundation of reflection in the field of education. Reflection is the heart of all interpretation and awareness of an individual about his/her own actions (Sahoo & Pany, 2020; Al Mahmud, 2013). Reflection is in fact the reconsidering of past experiences and non-stop evaluation of all previous experiences in order to refine future planning. Reflection demands from an individual to be critical in thinking and be self-evaluative. It actually heads-up professionals towards problem solving skills by making them self-aware and self-learners (Helyer, 2015). Reflective practice is considered as a vital substance in the process of toning new experiences with existing dogmas (Kumari, 2014).

It has been accepted that in teacher education, reflective practice is appreciated as a valuable source to stimulate professional development. Reflective practices of teacher educators

are considered as an advantageous source to promote deliberate action for improvement, allowing teacher educators to evaluate their deficiencies, making teacher educators broadminded to accept other perspectives and to think flexibly (Sezer, 2008). It is apparent from prevailing literature that reflective practice subsidizes self-evaluation and self-awareness (Akbari, 2007; Blank, 2009). Hence when teachers are engaged in reflection they learn to focus on things with multiple angles and are in a better position to work for quality teaching (Fatemipour, 2013).

When educators are involved in reflective teaching, they are investing their valuable time in the process. They are in the process of self-evaluation and consider student's and colleague's feedback. Finally, at the base of all these things try to improve and review their actions to improve teaching-learning activity. Requirements for this process are to gather information, to analyze that information and to make future plans in the light of it.

### **Literature Review**

Reflective teaching requires a teacher to examine their teaching critically. This critical analysis can be drawn from different sources. Brookfield (2017) identified four crucial sources that are student's lens, colleague's lens, personal experiences and theoretical lens.

Case studies of many teachers show that the way teachers teach is the result of their experiences and how they had learnt. They try to elude the things that they felt bad as learners and replicate the things that they liked about their teachers (Dollase, 1992). The insights that are drawn from direct experiences have long-lasting effects on one's life. Results of a study show when different teachers were asked about their adoption of certain methodologies of teaching, they replied as they liked these methods when they were students (Day, Denicolo, & Calderhead, 1993) Andresen's (1993) examined his own methodology and found that he used those pedagogies most frequently which he liked the most as a student. It is clear then that autobiographical experiences count a lot in styles of practice. Secondly, other dimension of autobiographical lens is that the teacher thinks about his own successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses of his/her teaching and finally plan for future (Brookfield, 2017).

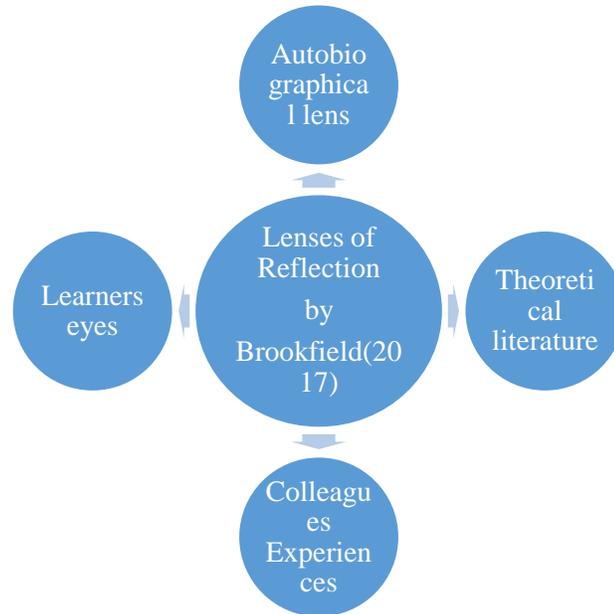
Being a teacher seeing yourself through the eyes of learners is surprisingly very interesting and beneficial as at the base of students' feedback teachers become aware of their strengths and weaknesses as teachers (Gobel, Wyss, Neuber & Raaflaub, 2021; Hajira & Shamsa 2012). Information obtained from learners helps teachers to monitor their success as a teacher as well as students, learning progress (William, 2020; Guskey, 2020; Guskey & Link, 2021).

Teachers share their experiences about teaching related problems and concerns with their colleagues and they work as critical mirrors for them. In this way teachers get useful suggestions in the light of the experiences of other teachers and they can reframe, evaluate, and broaden their ideas (Brookfield, 2017). It is evident from literature that peer's feedback and suggestions from administration are very crucial for reflective practice of teachers (Ross and Bruce, 2007; Coldwell, Simkins, Coldron and Smith, 2008; Kaser and Halbert, 2009; Fullan, 2009; O'Pry and Schmacher, 2012; Pitchler, 2012, Lamb, 2017). While discussing their concerns with each other, teachers are enabled to review their experiences and to think about multiple options (Williams, 2020; Sunra, Haryanto & Nur, 2020).

These lenses help teachers to identify literature-based evidence of how students learn, what are the evidence-based strategies to improve students learning, and so on. Literature can help to provide multiple perspectives to tackle different situations and problems. When we read the descriptions of other's failures, problems and dilemmas, it can help us to handle similar situations

in a better way (Isenberg, 1994). Another study proved that teachers can learn a lot from readings of the narratives of other teachers (Preskill and Jacobwitz, 2001).

Figure 1: Brookfield’s Lenses of Reflection



To use these lenses for the purpose of reflection instructors can use variety of tools. Different methods are suggested by researchers to practice reflective teaching for example to observe teachers in action for the purpose of enhancing one’s own teaching by noticing the strengths and weaknesses of others, secondly by audio/video taping of one’s own lectures for the purpose of self-evaluation, Another option is to take feedback from students in the form of surveys, interviews or in any other form, a final suggestion in this regard is to write reflective journals or to make portfolios to assess one’s own teaching success and failures (Farrell, 2011). These methods can be used formally or informally but the important point that should be considered is the improvement of future lessons (Mermelstein, 2018).

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study was an exploration of the teacher educators’ experiences about the four lenses of reflection. The methodological approach chosen for this study was qualitative in order to have deep and rich understanding of teacher educator’s experiences about lenses of reflection. As the methodological approach chosen for any study should be appropriate and driven by the topic being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). In the current study qualitative methodology was chosen as it focuses on the experience of the individual (Patton, 2002).

Specifically, Narrative inquiry was preferred for this study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narratives explore “the way humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Individuals love to share their life experiences through creating and sharing stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The prime goal of narrative researchers is to evaluate, interpret, and retell participant stories (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). So narrative inquiry was most suitable for this because

it allowed the researchers to explore how teacher educators use four lenses of reflection and what are their experiences about these lenses of reflection.

### **Participants of the Study**

Participants of the study were selected purposively. Four teacher educators were selected who were working in well-known universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Only those teacher educators were selected who after knowing the purpose of the study were happily willing to share their experiences. To ensure the confidentiality of data pseudonyms were used for the participants and names of the universities are not highlighted.

### **Brief Profiles of the Participants**

#### **Dr. Shabbana**

Dr Shabana is working in a well-known public sector university as an assistant professor of education, she started her career as an educator in school but being a hardworking and passionate lady, she continuously worked hard to enhance her qualification and did her Ph.D. in education and now working as assistant professor in the university. She has eighteen years of working experience as teacher educator.

#### **Dr. Shah**

Dr. Shah became a teacher educator by chance as he wanted to be an engineer or a doctor but could not, so he did his bachelors by opting education as a major subject and after doing his B.A he thought to continue his career in education as he found it an interesting subject and he got admission in master's in education. After doing his Ph.D. he joined a well-known public sector university. Currently he is working as a professor of education in his department and as a teacher educator for more than twenty years.

#### **Dr Saddaquat**

Dr Saddaquat is working as head of department of education in a public sector university of Punjab. Before that he worked as controller examination of the same university for three years. He also served as director of Under Graduate Studies for one and a half year. Moreover, he has worked with international and national NGOs for teacher training purposes. He has a rich experience of twenty-five years of working as teacher educator.

#### **Dr Faheem**

Dr. Faheem is working as lecturer in a well-known Public Sector University in the department of education. He has twelve years working experience in teacher education. His father was a schoolteacher, and he was the youngest member of the family, so he spent a lot of time with his father, who taught him many things. So, the first source of inspiration for him was his father. Secondly his teachers, who have inspired him a lot, from school level to the university level.

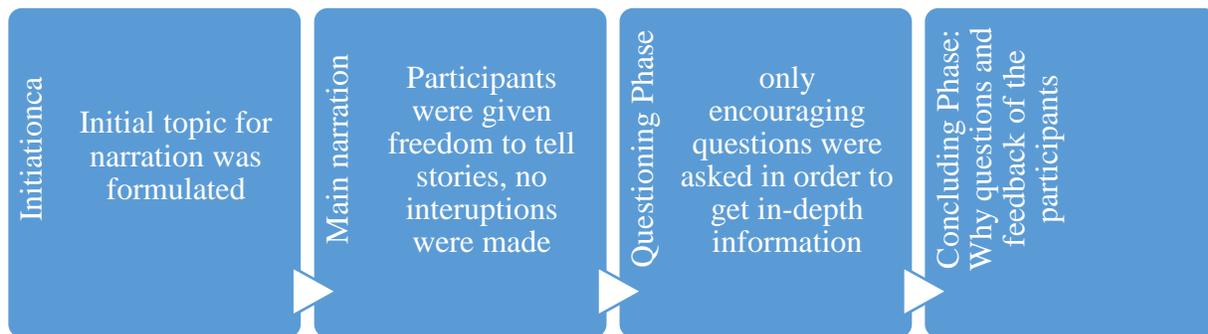
### **Data Collection**

We gathered the stories of professional life experiences of participants by using narrative interview as a technique of data collection as interview method allows the researcher to capture what is on the minds of the participants (Patton, 2002). Narrative interviews are different from traditional qualitative interviews; subjectivity and the participants position are major differences between traditional qualitative interviewing and narrative interviewing (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The plus point of the narrative data is that the narrator in his/her narrations not only gives

the answer but also gives the details of all relevant things in order to provide a more comprehensive and thick information about the experiences/phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative interviews in the current study consisted on the four lenses of reflection given by Brookfield (2017) that are *Autobiographical lens, Learner’s eye, Colleagues experiences, and Theoretical literature*. Farr (1982) and Schütze(1991) have given some phases of narrative interviews in which they mentioned the phases of narrative interviews that will be followed by the researcher in the proposed study to conduct narrative interviews and researcher will have a tryout/piloting of interview before final data collection.

The phases of narrative interviewing suggested by Farr (1982) and Schutze (1991) are; initiation, main narration, questioning phase, and concluding talk. I followed these steps.

Figure 2: Phases of Narrative Interviews



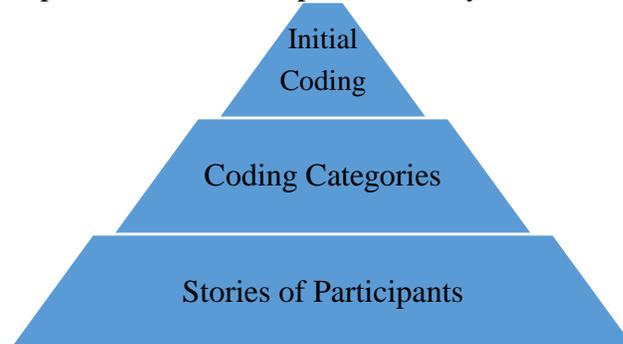
Prior to data collection and conducting interviews I ensured the following; took permission from participants, set time and venue of interview that was selected by keeping in view the ease and comfort of the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Narrative analysis has specific characteristic that makes it different which is restorying (Creswell, 2012), means after gathering stories of experiences of research participants, researchers analyze these stories for key points and then rewrite the stories.

The extensive data analysis procedure of the current study consisted of two phases, at first phase, after thorough reading and re-reading of transcripts initial codes were created. Then from emerging patterns, categories were formed. Reading through the transcripts again, we identified stories of the participants in relation to the importance of reflection in their professional lives, and their experiences about four lenses of reflection.

Figure 3: Visual presentation of first phase of analysis



After identification of the stories the second phase of data analysis was started. We focused on the content in the participants' stories and categorized it. Then identified the teacher educators' experiences about four lenses of reflection. Finally, we identified the themes emerging from the stories of the participants.

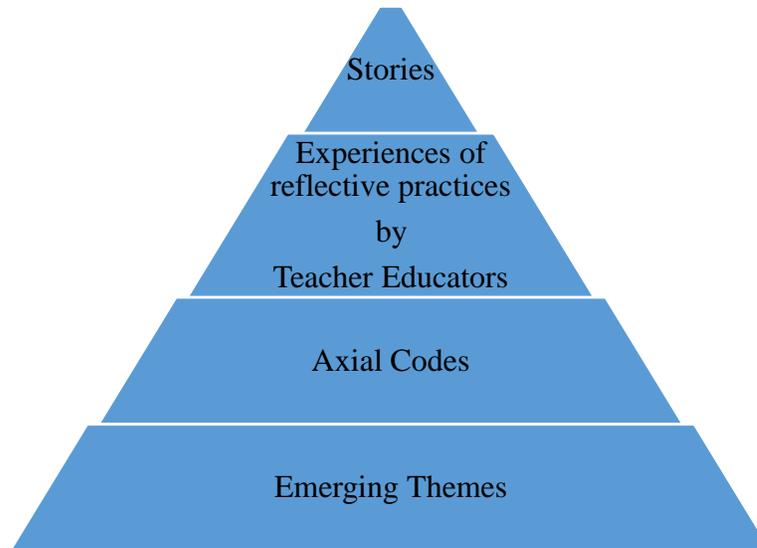


Figure 4 : Visual presentation of second phase of analysis

Besides all this triangulation process was ensured by using data from transcripts, field notes, and archival data.

Major themes revealed from the narratives of the teacher educators were based on the four lenses of reflection given by Brookfield (2017), so the major themes based upon the narrative data of the participants were; *Autobiographical lens of Reflection, Learner,s Eye, Colleagues Experiences,* and *Theoretical Literature*.

## Findings

Participants of the current study exposed and mapped out that how they use the autobiographical lens of reflection for their professional improvement.

- *“I always follow the teaching style of my teachers especially the things that I liked the most in his teaching style. For example, one of my teachers had a great effect on me, in my eight class I had a teacher who taught us very politely and like a mother, I was inspired from her. Secondly my self-evaluation helps me very much in my professional grooming” (Dr. Shabbana).*
- *I have learnt a lot from my teacher and luckily got a chance to work under her administration as well and secondly, I think teaching cannot be done without self-reflection or self-evaluation of the teachers. If these two things are not present in students then even that teacher cannot become a good teacher” (Dr. Shah).*
- *“I had a teacher, who has changed my whole life. I think today whoever I am, it is just because of my teacher. Secondly my own analysis of my strengths and weaknesses helped me to become a successful teacher educator” (Dr. Sadaquat).*

- *“Major source of inspiration for me were my teachers, I have learnt a lot from my teachers from school to university level. And second thing is of course my effort to find out my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher educator that helps me a lot to improve myself” (Dr. Faheem)*

As far as the second lens of reflection is concerned that is learner’s eye. Teacher educators shared their experiences about it and all four participants were very positive regarding the student’s feedback as a source of improvement for them. Participants exclaimed their experiences about this dimension of reflection very enthusiastically.

- *“I am not used to take feedback on my teaching from my students but informally I ask my students about my teaching very frequently and that really helps” (Dr. Shabbana).*
- *It is my habit that I always notice the problems of the students and try to solve those. I think it is the major characteristic of a good teacher to judge his students and teach accordingly” (Dr. Shah).*
- *“Yes, most of the times, sometimes in the form of question answers, sometimes I take feedback from CRs and GRs, and then I take that feedback seriously and change my strategy accordingly” (Dr. Sadaquat).*
- *“I ask my students to write down negative points of my teaching and they write but this can be happened very rarely due to time constraints” (Dr. Faheem).*

When participants of the study were asked to share their experiences about colleague’s feedback/peer feedback, they shared their experiences in their own way some were satisfied and felt good to take feedback from colleagues and the others were reluctant to do so due to some reasons.

- *The biggest drawback of this strategy is that you do not know that the person from whom you are getting feedback is your well-wisher or not. It might be possible that the other person can use that information for some negative intension (Dr. Faheem).*
- *I tried that many times, I think we should address some sort of the things regarding educational and environmental factors but I feel that we do not have a good culture of it” (Dr Sadaquat).*
- *Yes it is very frequently done by me, but it is necessary that you share your problem with that colleague who can understand you and the issue (Dr. Shah)*
- *Yes of course, I do it repeatedly, especially I discuss students, behavior related problems most of the times” (Dr. Shabbana).*

When participants of the study were asked to share their experiences regarding the theoretical lens of reflection and about their study habits specifically for the purpose of gaining knowledge about teaching, they exposed their experiences in the following way.

- *I use one strategy that wherever I go for my work, I always try to search for a good book shop and purchase good books from there. This is my experience that reading of good books improves you as a teacher (Dr. Sadaquat).*
- *“Whenever I face a problem in my teaching, I try to read books to find out the solutions, and I feel proud to share that I have changed myself gradually and all*

*these changes in my personality are due to my exploration of facts and evidences and book reading is a good strategy for it” (Dr. Shah).*

- *I am not habitual to study books but I think I should (Dr. Shabbana).*
- *I think if I could have good study habits, I could serve my students more passionately. So I think a teacher should have strong study habits and should read more and more (Dr. Faheem).*

## Results and Discussion

Participants’ expressions pinpointed that engaging in reflection through any lens helped them to raise awareness regarding different aspects of teaching and helped them to improve themselves as teacher educators. Participants realized that reflective practice is an effective tool for professional development (Fakazli & Kurugonen, 2017). This study revealed that autobiographical lens of reflection plays an effective role in professional life as by using this lens teachers try to opt good things of their own teachers and learn from their self-evaluation and improve themselves at the base of their reflections of self. Schon (1983) identified that most of the times our professional skills are the results of our everyday work life experiences and results of our actions are the best guide for us. It plays a vital role in professional development of teachers (Impedovo & Malik, 2016; Colognesi, Deprit, Coppe, Nieuvenhoven, Marz & Hanin, 2021).

It is evident in literature that case studies of many teachers show that teachers teach in the way is the result of their experiences and how they had learnt. They try to avoid the things that they felt bad as learners and replicate the things that they liked about their teachers (Dollase, 1992).

The current study also revealed that the students feedback/ learners’ lens of reflection is also helpful for teacher educators improvement. It is evident in the literature that students, feedback is the immediate source of teacher evaluation. Proper usage of students’ feedback may enable teacher to improve their teaching and learning environment (Burniske, & Meibaum, 2012). Results of another study revealed that university teachers made their self-evaluation after receiving the feedback from their students. University teachers attempt to understand the problems of their students and attempt to have good relations with their students (Hajira & Shamsa 2012). Information obtained from students helps teachers to monitor their success as a teacher as well as students’ learning progress (William, 2020 ; Guskey, 2020; Guskey & Link. 2021).

Various studies also shed light on the usefulness of peer feedback/ colleagues’ feedback for professional improvement. There is a consensus (Ross and Bruce, 2007; Coldwell, Simkins, Coldron and Smith, 2008; Kaser and Halbert, 2009; Fullan, 2009) that feedback from colleagues and senior management plays an important part in teachers’ reflective practice. Teachers utilize the feedback received from colleagues and senior management to reflect upon and improve their teaching practice (O’Pry and Schmacher, 2012; Pitchler, 2012, Lamb, 2017). When listening to other teachers’ concerns, teachers may come to think about their own experiences in other ways (Williams, 2020 ; Sunra, Haryanto & Nur, 2020). But very interestingly it is revealed through this study that teacher educators use peer’s feedback as reflective practice with hesitation as they narrated that is used by only few teacher educators as reflective practice. Even most of the teacher educators narrated that there is no concept and culture of it. But if we see in literature colleagues feedback as reflective practice is seemed to be very important and effective as colleagues who also do instruction, they might have additional insights based on their own classroom experiences and understanding of the craft of teaching (Booth, 2012; Goodsett, 2014). Teacher educators might be

reluctant as getting feedback from colleagues can be difficult (Booth, 2012). Importance of peer's feedback can-not be overlooked in professional development.

The current study found that participants of the study strongly believed on the effectiveness of literature/book reading but two of them narrated they are not habitual of that. But it is a proven fact that reading is the solution for many problems. Literature can help to provide multiple perspectives to tackle different situations and problems. When we read the descriptions of others failures, problems and dilemmas, it can help us to handle the similar situations in better way (Isenberg, 1994). Another study proved that teachers can learn a lot from readings of the narratives of other teachers (Preskill and Jacobwitz, 2001).

### Conclusions

The current study revealed that teacher educators considered reflection and reflective practices very crucial for professional grooming and development. As expertise in teaching is an outcome of a teachers' thinking processes, conceptualization, and beliefs about teaching events taking place in the classroom (Schön, 1983). As teachers possess the ability to think reflectively on their teaching practices, when teachers practice reflective thinking, they become more aware of classroom practices, thus more capable of analyzing and think critically (Gheith & Aljaberi, 2018). But the current study also revealed that teacher educators are sometimes reluctant to use reflective practices because of organizational culture and because of lack of mutual trust so there is need to train the administration and teachers regarding the use of reflective practices productively.

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