

EXPLORING MUSLIM PRESERVICE TEACHERS'
REFLEXIVE PRACTICE: A CRITICAL ACTION
RESEARCH IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

BY

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ABSTRACT

The reflexive practice is used in initial and pre-service teacher education to enhance teachers' capacity towards self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation. In this study, the notion of reflexivity is developed from a critical reflection which results in the transformation of knowledge. It is described as an active analysis of past situations, events, and products with inherent goals for critique and revisions aimed to achieve an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior (emancipation). Its purpose is to find strategies to question our own attitudes and determine how we make decisions, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions in an attempt to understand our complex roles in relation to others (teacher empowerment). This action research makes use critical action research to explore the reflexive practice of Muslim preservice teachers in Southern Thailand. The study was conducted in two cycles focusing on five pre-service teachers who were tasked to record, criticise, and question their reflexive practice during their teaching practicum. A further aim is to determine how reflexivity contributes to the improvement of the *Murabbi* who also possesses the elements of teacher empowerment as well as the emancipation of education. The qualitative data from this study were analyzed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is a linguistic approach to convey social issues and the power of social relation. The findings from this study have answered the research questions on the meaning of reflexive practice by questioning and criticizing, self-examination or introspection, mutual and cooperative force, and change and transformation. The participants were also able to process the reflexive practice in their teaching process evidently showed in examining their journal entries, classroom observation, and interview output. The results show that all of the three types of reflexivity, namely, epistemic, systematic, and hyper reflexivity, have played an important role in supporting the construction of critical pedagogical elements among preservice teachers which include enlightenment, empowerment, and emancipation, as well as accessing the criteria of a *Murabbi*. In the end, the study suggests the potential to enrich the development of teacher professionalism as well as the improvement of teacher training programs at the university level.

Keywords: reflexive practice, preservice teacher, teacher empowerment, emancipation.

خلاصة البحث

يستخدم التدريب الانعكاسي في تعليم المعلم المتدرب قبل الخدمة الرسمية؛ لتعزيز قدرته على الملاحظة والتحليل والتقييم الذاتي. ويوصف بأنه تحليل نشط للمواقف والأحداث الماضية ذات الأهداف المتأصلة للنقد والمراجعات التي تهدف إلى تحقيق فهم يمكن أن يؤدي إلى تغيير الفكر أو السلوك (التحرر). والغرض منه هو إيجاد استراتيجيات للتشكيك في مواقفنا وتحديد كيفية اتخاذ القرارات والتقييم والافتراضات والتحييزات والإجراءات المعتادة في محاولة لفهم أدوارنا المعقدة فيما يتعلق بالآخرين (تمكين المعلم). يفيد البحث الميداني لاستكشاف التدريب الانعكاسي لمعلمي المدارس الإسلامية في جنوب تايلاند. أجريت الدراسة على مرحلتين، ركزت على خمسة معلمين متدربين قبل الخدمة تم تكليفهم بتسجيل تدريباتهم الانعكاسية ونقدها وسؤالهم عنها أثناء التدريب العملي. والهدف الآخر هو تحديد كيف تسهم الانعكاسية في تحسين المربي الذي يمتلك عناصر تمكين المعلم وكذلك التحرر. تم تحليل البيانات النوعية من هذه الدراسة باستخدام تحليل الخطاب النقدي (CDA) وهو نهج لغوي لنقل القضايا الاجتماعية وقوة العلاقة الاجتماعية. ولقد أجابت نتائج الدراسة على أسئلة البحث حول معنى التدريب الانعكاسي عن طريق الاستجواب والنقد، والفحص الذاتي أو التأمل، والقوة المتبادلة والتعاونية، والتغيير والتحول. كان المشاركون أيضًا قادرين على معالجة الانعكاسية في تعليمهم عن طريق فحص إدخالات المجالات ومراقبة الفصل الدراسي ومخرجات المقابلة. وأظهرت النتائج أن جميع أنواع الانعكاسية الثلاثة، وهي المعرفية، المنعكسة، المفردة الانعكاسية، لعبت دورًا مهمًا في دعم بناء العناصر التربوية المهمة بين معلمي المواد المحفوظة، والتي تشمل التنوير والتمكين والتحرر، وكذلك الوصول إلى معايير المربي. واقترحت الدراسة إمكانية إثراء مناهج التدريس في المدارس الابتدائية والثانوية، وكذلك تحسين برامج تدريب المعلمين على المستوى الجامعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب الانعكاسي، المعلم المتدرب قبل الخدمة، تمكين المعلم، التحرر.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at the IIUM or other institutions.

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All praises to the Al-Mighty Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. The Beneficent, the Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we serve and Thee do we seek for help. May Thy blessing and peace be upon Thy final Messenger, his family and companions, and those who strive in the path whom Thou hast bestowed favors. Praise to Allah whose Mercy and Guidance have led me to complete this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA	Critical discourse analysis
GD	Group discussion
HOD	Head of Department
IE	Interview
IS	Interview and self-evaluation
FI	Post-course interview session
MOE	Ministry of Education
ONET	Ordinary National Educational Test
PI	Pre-course interview session
PSU	Prince of Songkla University
RA	Reflexive workshop
RJ	Teacher reflexive journal
RQ	Research question
RRA	Re-conducting reflexive workshop
TP	Teaching practicum: Classroom observation
ST	Student Teacher

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Reflexivity is used as an instrument for the development in teaching and teacher education program and it is viewed as a response in conjunction with the observation of teachers as technicians who simply do the things they have been told to do, and to top-down approaches to reform education that only involve teachers as passive participants. Implementing reflexive practice in teacher education program will reform the technocratic atmosphere and practice into a more practical and critical curriculum. The reflexive approach encourages the subjective level of understanding for the reality that serves as a starting point for critical thinking and an individual's values, assumptions, and its action on others. It is essential to educational managing teams as it aids teachers to understand how they as individuals and at the same time part of the system can represent their authenticity and uniqueness in relational ways and eventually how they can build up mutual and approachable means for managing education.

This chapter presents a thorough background of the research which contains the following information: (a) overview of the problem domain, (b) background of the study, (c) problem statement, (d) objectives of the study, (e) research questions, (f) significance of the study, (g) delimitations of the study, and (h) definitions of terms.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

In the field of educational administration, reflective methods have been identified as an area of interest for teachers and students. However, limited evidence has surfaced in the research area of reflexive practice. Nevertheless, one of the major standard factors of a reconstruction of its importance can be seen as the update and justification of existing university curriculums in accordance with the training they facilitate and suggest more critical reflective practice as an integrative theme. The emphasis is that the cognitive process should not be the only focus among teachers (how they reflect), but teachers should also monitor the content of their thinking process (what they reflect to), the end result of their thought (why they are reflecting), and in what ways their thought process is influencing their classroom teaching practice (what changes in learning they perceive). Hence, the study builds up to establish an implication for teacher education and teacher research.

These days, teacher efficiency is not just measured by the ability to teach but also in accordance to teachers' ability to reflect on which they are practicing professionally (Marzano, Boogren, Heflebower, Kanold-McIntyre & Pickering, 2012; Hickson, 2011; Izumi-Taylor, Lee, Moberly & Wang, 2010; McArdle & Norman, 2010). A teacher who is reflective in nature is the one who can properly reflect on his/her own professional experience and contribute to better practice among co-workers to cultivate professional progress for the learners. It is measured as a type of procedure for critical thinking which moves towards efficient classroom management with noteworthy performance upgrade among students. Therefore, the key goal of a particular teacher enhancement is to encourage the learning teacher to embed a critical reflective attitude in teaching.

On the other hand, improvement in teaching performance and student learning can be observed by the preservice teachers while using and learning reflective practices (Eby, 1998). Reflective thinking as a center of focus for learning among the preservice teachers starts with the early preparation for class which will distinguish the thriving attitude of the teacher, where the effectual teacher works on to reflect intensely on the key steps in their career path, their goals in education, environment of the classroom, their specialized skill, and others (Eby, 1998). Thus, in order to develop a substantial understanding, a realistic framework is desired from the perspective of action research to allow a critical reflective practice within an inquiry model. This professionally developed framework will result in reformed teaching practices with the help of joint inquiry and systematic reflection.

Whenever reflexivity is discussed in education, the authenticity of research and professional development is increased. In education, reflection is used by teachers as a process of professional development, where the teaching community uses both self-reflection and peer-reflection (Klomkul, 2010). The introduction and embrace of the notion of the reflexive practitioner is a step to overcome the expectations and technocratic beliefs of preservice teachers which they accompany along with them in the early teacher education. Teaching practicum experience is targeted by the use of more critical reflection. Therefore, it has become a prerequisite for a teacher education program that practitioners must engage in reflection on their actions. Schön (1987: 1) suggested to preservice students learning to teach that "...any reflective practicum [requires] that they plunge into the doing, and try to educate themselves before they know what it is they're trying to learn."

Desirable graduate attributes relate to their capability in understanding interpersonal skills, professional and personal ethics along with reflection on learning

achievement, for literacy, critical thinking, and self-reliance. These are the capabilities that a reflexive practice can promote. In order to engage students in the reflexive practice, such designs are essential and recommended for learning activities. In wide-ranging circumstances, reflection is encouraged and facilitated. A higher level of understanding and learning in-depth, which in parallel along with literacy and effective attribute development among graduates, can be observed. Hence, it is a considerable test that requires focus after observing the value of the reflexive practice. It is further an important asset when the time, energy and effort of the teachers or the preservice teachers are devoted. Rather than merely focusing on what a teacher does, the teacher training and teaching practicum program must focus on who the teacher is and how it weighs the teaching and learning process as well as provide understanding and activities that enable them to become critically reflexive and to transform knowledge into practice.

However, criticisms often arise when universities implement teacher education programmes that disconnect theory from real classroom practice (Unver, 2014; Levine, 2011; Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Fraser, 2007; Muğaloğlu & Doğanca, 2009). Similarly, Ronfeldt & Reiniger (2012) showed that it was not the length of the teaching practicum that was associated with preservice teacher' perceptions of instructional preparedness or their self-efficacy but the quality of perceived support. Thus, appropriate support mechanisms (Gurvitch & Metzler, 2009) during practical phases are essential for Student teacher' skill acquisition. In Thailand, teacher education programs do not prepare future teachers to develop their potential in critical and reflexive thinking in the teaching practice. Thai teachers have many problems transferring theoretical knowledge into practice since the teachers lacked of precise knowledge and comprehension in thinking process as well as technique of learning

management for developing the students' analytical thinking (Art-in, 2011; Kamanee, 2003). There is also a lack of recognition of a teacher's reflective practice, and the programs tend to rely primarily on top-down models of school reforms. Moreover, Chantana (2010) also found that the problem in Thailand's teacher education programs is the ambiguous direction and profound effect of business on education. The teacher will engage in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations unless they are involved in critical reflection and reflexivity.

The fact that Thai teacher education programmes are too technocratic and highly dependent on top-down models of the reformation in schools proves that they are not comprehensive enough for future teachers to develop their potential in critical and reflexive thinking in teaching (Art-in, 2015; Chantana, 2010). Such programs should not only focus on training skills but must also provide understanding and activities that enable future teachers to become critically reflexive and able to transform knowledge into practice. These are the fundamental characteristics of a Murabbi, the critical Islamic pedagogue that best exemplify an ideal teacher who personalizes knowledge.

The starting point for engagement with theory should be the knowledge, attitudes, and experiences that students bring, and that engagement must then make meaningful links between the taught and experiential aspects of the program. It is critical to build an attitude of willingness to learn from experience in changing circumstances and uncertainties (Costache, Becker, Staub, Mainhard, 2019; Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf & Wubbels, 2008). Another study by Kayaoğlu, Erbay & Sağlamel (2016) who conducted on novice teachers in Turkey towards reflective practice in English as a foreign-language also showed that reflective practice may be challenging in terms of emotions for a novice teacher as it

may be hard to confront an outsider's view. The results point to beneficial impact of the self-initiated reflection on the way to teachers' continuous professional development.

Self-inspection is a critical process in which an individual's biases, assumptions, ideological predispositions, and inclination consider the student-teachers as a component of the existing environment and community events they are working in, and acknowledge that they have a part to play in contributing to that setting, context, and phenomena. The term reflexivity, with its focus on dialogue and engagement, captures this process of critical self-inspection, action, and contribution (Ryan, 2019).

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Reflexivity guides teachers' approach to working with students in which they may use their own experience as an offset point to becoming teachers. This approach is enacted by creating new experiences designed to have students to question, reflect on, and restructure their preconceptions. Past experiences often need to be restructured and reflected upon with the aim of an improved response. Implicit in such an approach is a balance between safety and challenge, planning of experiences, strong relations with schools and centers, and integration of theory and practice (Korthagen et al., 2008). The link between theory and practice and having students reflect on their teaching and the links to teach components of the program would inform their actions, which in turn, develop understanding. It is an evidence-based cycle that is a powerful learning tool for students. Making sense of learning and refining practice becomes an active and meaningful process, particularly when embedded in a community of practice.

Moreover, reflexivity sets goals for evaluation and change to accomplish understanding through a dynamic analysis of past situations, events, and products that lead to change in thought or behaviors. In fact, it helps a teacher to become more aware of his/her knowledge limitations, of how organizational practices are affected by the behavior, of how his/her presence and perception control knowledge and actions, and why such practices might pay no attention to groups or ignore individuals (Marzano, Boogren, Heflebower, Kanold-McIntyre, & Pickering, 2012) . It allows an understanding of how a teacher relates to others and silhouette organizational realities, common practices, and ways of interaction. Thus, teachers should realize that they are the key in designing the environment, and should start to decisively consider the situation and relationships rather than just retorting to them, and assist in the evaluation of ethical ways for linking (Cunliffe, 2009).

When educators critically reflect and continue for reflexivity, it develops a strategy that emerges as an active practice and constructs transformative education (Freese, 1999; Hoban & Hastings, 2006; Kreber, 2005; Randle & Tilander, 2007; Watts & Lawson, 2009). According to Mezirow (1990), critical reflection is the principal purpose of adult education in which transformative learning can be achieved by studying assumptions and presupposition. He believed how transformation is the process of involving critically question how and why we developed certain presupposition, reformulating the understanding that contains discriminating, allow a person to make own decision and judgment and thus motivate us to better understand the meaning of their experience.

Unlike day-to-day reflection, reflexivity will include why particular pattern of thoughts and inquiring occur rather than only questioning how to teach. As a result, it can transform teachers' perception and conceptual codes, assumptions, beliefs,

attitudes, and the perceptual and conceptual codes that used to bound the thinking patterns (Ostorga, 2006). What is more important in this area of teachers' professional development is to allow teachers to critically analyze every interaction and assumption which is beyond the classroom setting as a means of their professional development.

To establish the basis for emancipatory practice based on a sociologically driven critical reflexive practice on traditional reflective practice, this study also employs the critical analysis of Neilson and Pascal (2012). According to them, an educator must include the concerns of anticipation or planning. These include reflection-for-practice, taking larger consideration of the process of meaning-making, going beyond individualism to appreciate the significance of the broader social context, incorporating a far better understanding of the critical role of power, being distinctive of the relationship between reflection and reflexivity, and finally, crucially reconstructing a critical approach. The said approach altogether must address interrelationships between the finest detailed aspects of criticality. Eventually, the current study focuses on the reflexive practice of preservice teachers and how its effect on their empowerment as well as the application of learned theories into teaching apprenticeship within the concept of transformative education.

1.3.1 Reflection, Critical Reflection, and Reflexive Practice

It is necessary to clarify what the terms reflection, critical reflection, and reflexive practice mean and how they differ from one another. These terms are frequently misunderstood and have been erroneously imagined to have the same meaning. Reflection is a thinking process to recall experience in order to construct knowledge about oneself and the world. Individuals reflect on their actions instantly (reflection-in-

action) or at an appropriate opportunity after the event (reflection-on-action). It thus becomes an informed practice that exceeds routine actions with lesser thought or analysis (Schön, 1974).

When individuals begin to analyze, reassess, and question their experiences generally with a wider perspective as the content of improvement, it is called the practice of critical reflection. Meanwhile, reflexivity involves introspection and dynamic analysis of the precedent situation and action events. It is further combined with intrinsic end results for critical review and revisions to expedite the level of understanding which could pilot to change on thought and behaviors (Ryan, 2019; 2005).

Reflexivity is affected because of the changing environment and varying participants (Marzano, Boogren, Heflebower, Kanold-McIntyre, & Pickering, 2012). Teachers examine their exchanges through introspection to determine whether they were reflexive. While going through the reflective mode, it occurs that the teachers reflect on feelings, thoughts, and verbal and nonverbal elements trailing to the actions. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) also add that the reflective process associates with normative states in social, economic, and political realms and concerns a vision of what ought to be.

Finlay and Gough (2003) find it easier to work on this idea as a scale. The two extreme ends consist of reflection or thinking about an event relating to something specific on one end and the other end positions reflexivity as an instant and active process where continuing self-awareness is involved, while in the central point lies the critical reflection (see Figure 1.1).