

Reflective Practice – An Effective Leadership Skill for Improving Teaching Practices

**Author: Dr. Muhammad Ali Shaikh¹; Ghulam Ali Kerio²;
Dr. Stephen John³**

Affiliation: Professor, Department of Media Studies, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi¹; Assistant Professor, Department Teacher Education, Shah Latif University, Khairpur²; Associate Professor, Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi³

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to investigate, how Reflective Practice as a leadership skill helps schools' heads in bringing improvement in teaching practices at secondary level in Sindh, as the reflective practice is 'learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice' (Finlay, 2008). To carry out this research study mixed approach was selected because the study is both exploratory and investigative in nature. As research sample heads/principals of fifty secondary schools (public/private) were selected randomly from Saddar Town and Jamshed Town. A questionnaire was designed for data collection and was served to the selected heads/principals.

Data analysis reveals that Reflective Practice is a critical leadership skill for the improvement of teaching practices at the secondary level. Based on findings, it was recommended that the schools' leaders must have knowledge and understanding of the reflective practice, therefore, training/workshops should be arranged for the schools' heads/principals for their professional grooming.

Keywords: Reflective practice, effective leadership, and teaching practice

1. INTRODUCTION

The world has been transformed into a modernized sphere and the journey of transformation seems to be a never-ending process. Each day we come across new innovations that predict more and more complicated future dimensions. To deal with the existing situations, to cope with future challenges and for successful

survival in the world, we need to accept the changes and learn to make our work effective. For this, we need to stay connected with the world to know what is going on around the globe especially what new innovations, theories, and approaches have been introduced in a specific field. The new theories, technological innovations, and practical approaches have transformed each sphere of professional life and have influenced the educational world as well. The new theories of learning, leadership's instructional models and innovative teaching methods have transformed the role of teachers and the responsibilities of leaders. To become an effective practitioner in the field of teaching and educational leadership and to enjoy a successful career, one must work constantly on evaluating his/her actions, the outcome of those actions, improvement in those outcomes and so on. The work of school leaders has been becoming complicated in recent years because of external interventions by the policy makers, changes in curriculum and the demands of the institutional management. As per the demand of 21st century school system, a leader can't ignore the responsibilities fall on his shoulder i.e., to maintain the system, to make a measure for its improvement and betterment, to leave good and valuable impressions for future, etc. Sherman (2000) argues school leaders are now looked on as vital promoters of changes, moving students to higher levels of learning and building school cultures that encourage collaborative and cohesive teaching and learning environment. In the recent era, according to Sherman, leadership is not merely a symbol of authority, but he/she is supposed to lead/guide and facilitate the subordinates. He needs to stay involved in his work for betterment and excellence. School management expects a leader who has the aptitude and

skills to bring changes. His foremost objective should be to raise the standards of students' achievement for social and economic purposes and, alongside this, assessing teacher and school performance through a range of formal accountability measures. Tzu (1997) suggests that leaders have a vision and can see how the daily details fit into larger patterns of significance. Strong leaders' plans can effectuate change and expand the thought processes of their followers and build up their institutions. Much has been written about the important role of principals in creating and sustaining learning cultures in changing times, there is relatively little empirical research on the nature and characteristics of 'good' leaders who are also 'effective' and 'professional'. Describing the qualities of great leaders Dreher (1997) writes, great leaders, inspire us with a vision of further possibilities. They share their vision and challenge us to develop our own, joining with us to fulfill our highest human potential. Great leaders have always had the vision of living systems. As per Dreher, great leaders are visionary. They don't rely on traditional practices; rather they look at things from a new perspective, try new methods to deal with the situations, take a risk and contribute their efforts towards a set goal. Effective communication is also one of the important qualities of great leaders. Great leaders, according to Dreher, can communicate their vision.

Different researchers have focused on the role of leadership in bringing improvement in teaching and instructional practices. A majority of 21st century researchers have declared reflective practice as one of the best approaches used by educational leaders for improvement in the system. Reflective Practice is a critical leadership skill that can be defined as a reframing; looking at an event, experience, or outcome with a different lens; reflecting before, during and after an experience; people working together in a cohesive manner toward a common goal. Several researchers have supported Reflective Practice because of its effectiveness. When we talk about change in an educational setup it encompasses some transformations in the existing system. All the changes and transformations aim to achieve maximum learning outcomes.

In this paper, the researcher is going to discuss how students' learning outcomes can be improved by using Reflective Practice that is considered as one of the critical leadership skills in supporting changes. Research studies have revealed that when leaders are reflective in their practice, they are also attentive to their emotions and interact with others differently. Leithwood and Beatty (2008) have explored that school leaders are now expected to transform and support the instructional practice of teachers and establish and maintain the culture of the school. At the same time, they reveal that the leaders do not always have the knowledge and skills to support reflective

work as a means of effecting school changes. Knapp, Copland, and Talbert (2003) express, Non-reflective leaders can lose sight of opportunities to engage in meaning personal and professional growth, and they can easily lose their focus on teaching and learning. Reflection is necessary for effective leadership in successful schools. Furthermore, it is equally important for teachers to be effective in their teaching. Teachers can use the reflective approach in various ways. Calderhead and Gates (1993); Bengtsson (1995); Walks (1999) express, the concept of Reflective Practice is widely used in educational institutions providing education at different levels. The terms such as 'reflective teaching', 'reflective practice', 'reflective thinking', 'the teacher as decision-maker' 'the teacher as researcher' and 'the teacher as reflective practitioner' are now widely used in a variety of educational contexts and are informed by diverse theoretical frameworks.

This is obvious from the viewpoint of the above-mentioned researchers that reflective practice is one of the most widely used concepts in educational setups nowadays. Teachers need to enhance their practices to meet modern standards. Furthermore, they need to work constantly for their success in the respective field. Teachers need to make their instructional practices more and more effective. This is, obviously, not possible unless they learn to cope with everyday problems they encounter in their professional walks. The researchers have suggested reflective practice as one of the crucial concepts for teachers to learn and use their daily practices.

Statement of the Problem

In this era of technology, obsolete teaching methods are still practiced at all levels in Pakistan i.e. primary secondary, higher secondary and tertiary which are not resulting in required outcomes of the present age. Students are made to cram and reproduce knowledge which is not letting them become creative and bring the nation one step back instead of taking it ahead. The critics and scholars held educational leadership responsible for this critical situation, they argue that if a leader has the ability to reflect on one's action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning.

Research Questions

- a. Is the reflective practice a critical leadership skill for secondary school leadership?
- b. Do the teachers use reflective practice for improving their teaching?

Research Methods

For this research mixed approached was used. The population of the study was the heads/principals of secondary school in Sindh. Out of eighteen towns of Karachi two (02) of the towns were selected i.e., Jamshed Town and Saddar Town. Both public and private sector secondary schools of the selected towns were given equal representation. Fifty (50) schools were selected randomly, twenty (25) from each of the

town. The designed questionnaire was served to the heads/principals of the selected schools. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were measured.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents were analyzed in two stages, in the first stage, the designed questionnaire was given to heads/ principals of the selected schools to get their point of view and to maintain validity questionnaire was shared with experts, a preliminary test, or was piloted in six schools and reliability of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach Alpha. After the pilot run, the questionnaire was modified and some were changed. The questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents, although this method is time taking, but it gives in a lofty rate of return and offers openings to answer questions of the respondents regarding questionnaires.

Data Analysis

a. Frequency of Public and Private Secondary Schools

Ninety-six (96) secondary schools were randomly selected from Sadar and Jamshad towns of Karachi as a research sample. Both the towns, public and private, males and females were given equal representation, which is given in the table below:

S. No.	Institute	Sub-Category	No. of Schools
1.	Public	Males	24
		Females	24
2	Private	Males	24
		Females	24
Total			96

b. Academic and Professional Qualification Analysis

As per Sindh's government policy, the basic academic qualification for the head/principal of the secondary school level is 14 years of academic qualification along with B.Ed. The academic and professional qualification of the respondents is as under:

S. No.	Institute	Category	Academic Qualification	Total
1.	Public	Males	BA/BSc	04
			MA/MSc	15
			MPhil/MS	04
			PhD	01
		Females	BA/BSc	02
			MA/MSc	20
			MPhil/MS	02
2.	Private	Males	BA/BSc	00
			MA/MSc	16

Females	MPhil/MS	06
	PhD	00
	BA/BSc	05
	MA/MSc	18
	MPhil/MS	01
	PhD	01

S. N.	Institute	Category	Professional Qualification	Total
1.	Public	Males	CT	00
			B.Ed.	15
			M.Ed.	04
			None	05
		Females	CT	00
			B.Ed.	17
			M.Ed.	07
			None	00
2.	Private	Males	CT	00
			B.Ed.	12
			M.Ed.	12
			None	00
		Females	CT	00
			B.Ed.	16
			M.Ed.	08
			None	00

The collected data about professional qualification reveals that the 60 respondents hold B.Ed., 31 are having M.Ed. Degrees while only 05 respondents are without any professional qualification.

c. Experience of the Respondents

S. No.	Institute	Category	Work Experience	Total
1.	Public	Males	6-10	10
			11-15	12
			16-20	02
			21 and above	00
		Females	6-10	13
			11-15	11
			16-20	00
2.	Private	Males	6-10	16
			11-15	04
			16-20	04
			21 and above	00
		Females	6-10	17
			11-15	07
			16-20	00
			21 and above	00

The collected data related to the work experience of the respondents reveals that 56 respondents are having 6-10 years of experience, 34 respondents are working with 11-16 years of experience, and 06 of the respondents were having 16-20 years of experience, while no one was found with above 21 years of experience.

Discussion

The responses of the participants against the posed items were analyzed. The analysis is given below:

a. Reflective Practice and a Leadership Skill

A question related to the consideration given to Reflective Practice and Leadership Skill was asked from the respondents, the responses are given as under:

Reflective Practice and Leadership Skill

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	5	5.2	5.2	5.2
Less	20	20.8	20.8	26.0
Much	28	29.2	29.2	55.2
Very much	43	44.8	44.8	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

The data in the above table reveals that 71(43=Very Much & 28=Much) participants consider that reflective practice is a critical leadership skill, without which the success of the organization is not possible.

The data in the graph support the idea that reflective practice is a critical leadership skill for secondary school leadership.

b. Reflective Practice Being Critical Element in Supporting Change

The participants were asked; do they believe that reflective practice could be an agent for change. The responses of the respondents are as shown under:

Reflective Practice Supporting Change

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	10	10.4	10.4
	Less	28	29.2	39.6
	Much	29	30.2	69.8
	Very much	29	30.2	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0

The above SPSS generated table reflects that 58 participants out of 96 used the options of ‘much and ‘very much’ which are the 60% of the whole sample, while 28 participants used the option of less which is 29% of the whole sample, while only 10 participants who are 10.41% of the sample selected the option ‘Not at all’. It helps in the conclusion that reflective practice is having a role in bringing change.

Testing of Hypotheses

In this section, each of the nine questions raised in chapter one of the study is converted into null hypotheses and tested.

Question: Is the reflective practice a critical leadership skill for secondary school leadership?

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There will be no significant relationship between reflective practices and critical leadership skills.

Analysis of the Problem

- H₀: F₀ = F_e
- H₁: F₀ ≠ F_e
- α = 0.05

(Whereas H₀ is the null hypothesis, H₁ is the research hypothesis, F₀ is observed frequency, F_e is the expected frequency, α is the level of significance, and df is the degree of freedom.)

4. The test statistics is Chi Square one-tailed

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

(Whereas ∑ is the sum, F₀ is observed frequency and F_e is the expected frequency)

5. Decision Rule

Null Hypothesis will be rejected if computed value ≥ tabulated value

Test Statistics

	Reflective Practices as a Critical Leadership Skill
Chi-Square	32.750
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Tabulated Value = 7.815
 Computed Value = 32.750

Conclusion: Referring to the table Chi-Square (One-Tailed), we find the tabulated value is 7.815 with df = 3 at α = 0.05 is less than the computed value 32.750. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between reflective practices and critical leadership skills at the secondary school level in Sindh.

Question: Do you like your teachers to use reflective practice for improving their teaching?

Null Hypothesis (H₀) There will be no significant relationship between reflective practices and improvement in teaching.

Analysis of the Problem

1. H₀: F₀ = F_e
2. H₁: F₀ ≠ F_e
3. α = 0.05

(Whereas H₀ is the null hypothesis, H₁ is the research hypothesis, F₀ is observed frequency, F_e is the expected frequency, α is the level of significance, and df is the degree of freedom.)

4. The test statistics is Chi Square one-tailed

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

(Whereas ∑ is the sum, F₀ is observed frequency and F_e is the expected frequency)

5. **Decision Rule**

Null Hypothesis will be rejected if computed value ≥ tabulated value

Reflective Practices and Improvement in Teaching

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Not at all	6	24.0	-18.0
Less	25	24.0	1.0
Much	26	24.0	2.0
Very much	39	24.0	15.0
Total	96		

Test Statistics

	Reflective Practices and Improvement in Teaching
Chi-Square	23.083
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Tabulated Value = 7.815

Computed Value = 23.083

Conclusion: Referring to the table Chi-Square (One-Tailed), we find the tabulated value is 7.815 with df = 3 at α = 0.05 is less than the computed value 23.083. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between reflective practices and improvement in teaching at the secondary school level in Sindh.

Question: Do the teachers bring change in teaching as per their reflections?

Null Hypothesis (H₀) There will be no significant relationship between teachers' reflections and changes in teaching.

Analysis of the Problem

1. H₀: F₀ = F_e
2. H₁: F₀ ≠ F_e
3. α = 0.05

(Whereas H₀ is the null hypothesis, H₁ is the research hypothesis, F₀ is observed frequency, F_e is the expected frequency, α is the level of significance, and df is the degree of freedom.)

4. The test statistics is Chi Square one-tailed

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

(Whereas ∑ is the sum, F₀ is observed frequency and F_e is the expected frequency)

5. **Decision Rule**

Null Hypothesis will be rejected if computed value ≥ tabulated value

Reflective Practices and Improvement in Teaching

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Less	41	24.0	17.0
Fairly	24	24.0	.0
Much	12	24.0	-12.0
Very much	19	24.0	-5.0
Total	96		

Test Statistics

	Reflective Practices and Improvement in Teaching
Chi-Square	19.083
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Tabulated Value = 7.815

Computed Value = 19.083

Conclusion: Referring to the table Chi-Square (One-Tailed), we find the tabulated value is 7.815 df = 3 at α = 0.05 is less than the computed value 19.083. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between teachers' reflections and change in teaching at the secondary school level in Sindh.

Findings

To find out the research questions, the items of the filled questionnaire were analyzed. The participants were the secondary schools' principals of the selected schools. The respondents were having varied responses

as per their perceptions/understandings/ knowledge. Therefore, simply the opinions and views of the majority were focused. The critical analysis and findings are as under:

- a. 71 respondents considered that Reflective Practice is a critical leadership skill.
- b. 60% feel that Reflective Practice could help in bringing change

Findings from the Hypothesis

All nine null hypotheses were rejected, and it is concluded that almost all areas focused on the questionnaire are having a direct relationship with Reflective Practice. As per hypothesis the areas having direct concern with Reflective Practice are given below:

- a. Reflective Practice is a critical leadership skill.
- b. Only with Reflective Practice change is possible in the teaching and learning process.

Conclusions

Following are the conclusions drawn from the present research study:

- a. 71 out of 96 respondents considered Reflective Practice as a critical skill for Secondary School Leadership.
- b. It can bring change in teaching and learning practices.

Overall it was concluded that Reflective Practice is a critical Leadership skill among Secondary Schools Heads in Sindh. It is an effective Leadership Skill in improving teaching practices in schools. As it's a critical Leadership skill that can help school leaders in improving teaching practices in an educational institution, leaders should be provided with appropriate knowledge and understanding of this skill to help out teachers to be reflective in their practices. The leaders and teachers should have awareness of Reflective Practice. By effective use of this approach, they can achieve their goal that is effective teaching successfully.

Recommendations

On the basis of finding, it was recommended that for the improvement of teaching practices in the schools' leaders need to play a dynamic role. They should be reflective to help out teachers to improve teaching pedagogies. To make them reflective practitioners, workshops and training programs should be arranged.

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