

## The Need for Introducing Reflective Teaching at Aden University: English Language Teacher Preparation Program

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**Abstract:** *Reflection improves teaching skills and enhances students' learning. This research used a questionnaire to investigate which types of self-reflection tools (formal and informal) student teachers used during their practice teaching in schools. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 graduates of Aden University, Colleges of Education (Aden and Saber), and English Department. It was found that the majority of the student teachers had relied mostly on informal means of reflection viz. chatting with students, sharing and discussing with colleagues. The majority of the student teachers stated they had not received any training in using teaching journals, lesson reports, survey and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research. In spite of that, it was found that most of the student teachers did use one or more of these tools during their practice teaching. In light of these findings, the following research recommends that for prospective teachers to fully and appropriately utilize the different self-reflection tools and develop professionally, a course on self-reflection needs to be introduced in the teacher preparation program at the Colleges of Education (Aden and Saber).*

**Key Term:** *reflection, student teacher, practice teaching Aden University*

### Introduction

Student teachers can continue professional development after graduation through different ways such as taking teacher-development courses, attending conferences, participating in workshops, sharing ideas with colleagues, reading and discussing published scholarship on pedagogical matters. An additional resource for teacher growth is self-reflection (Murphy, 2001). Reflection helps teachers gain a better insight of their teaching style and enhance their teaching skill (Ferraro, 2000). The primary goal of this research is to investigate whether graduates of the University of Aden, Colleges of Education (Aden and Saber), Department of English received any training in reflective teaching during their undergraduate studies, and whether or not they used any forms of self-reflection (formal and/or informal) during their practice teaching. Results obtained from this research can help better inform the teacher preparation program and curriculum at the Colleges of Education (Aden and Saber) at Aden University.

## Methodology

### Participants

Forty graduates of Aden University, College of Education, Department of English in two different cities (Aden and Saber) participated in this study. The participants were selected randomly. The questionnaires were sent to the graduates via email or handed in person. The researcher also requested from colleagues to help distribute questionnaires to any graduates they knew. Sixty questionnaires were distributed and only 40 were returned. All the participants involved in this study were graduates of the University of Aden and had spent one whole semester (around 4 months) during their fourth (senior) year at a school practice teaching.

### Data Collection and Analysis

A questionnaire with both close and open questions was designed by the researcher and used for data collection. The questionnaire aimed to identify which tools of reflection (formal and informal) the student teachers used during their practice teaching. The questions related to the use of formal forms of reflection were based on the list presented in Richards and Lockhart's (1994) *Reflective teaching in second language classroom*. The questions related to the informal means of reflection were adapted from an online questionnaire (Questionnaire-Self Evaluation). The questionnaire also asked the participants if they had received any training in ways of self-reflecting on their teaching process during their undergraduate program.

To ensure credibility of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was piloted to a group of teachers teaching at a private English language institute. The ambiguities that came up during the piloting phase were fixed before sending out the questionnaire to the participants. Results obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed manually by reporting the frequency of students' responses to the items on the questionnaire. Results are reported both in number (n) and percentage (%).

### Research Questions

1. Did the College of Education - Department of English (Aden University) graduates involved in this study use any forms of formal self-reflection during their practice teaching? If no, why not? If yes, which ones?
2. Did they use any forms of informal self-reflection during their practice teaching? If no, why not? If yes, which ones?
3. Had they received any training in reflecting on their own teaching during their undergraduate studies?

## Background to the Study

Reflection according to Jay (2003) means "thinking about what one is doing. It entails a process of contemplation with an openness to being changed, a willingness to learn, and a sense of responsibility for doing one's best" (p. 1). Richards (1991) defines reflection as an "activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose" (p. 4). Richards further explains that reflection, in this sense, is a conscious recall and examination of the past experience which is then used as a basis for "evaluation and decision making and a source for planning and action". The concept of reflection is not new. In 1933, John Dewey, an American educational theorist, was among the first to write on teachers as reflective practitioners and considered open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness as three key attitudes for teachers to be reflective. Despite the different definitions of reflection available in cognition literature, they build on the idea of self-awareness and self-observation (Bailey et al 2001).

Reflection can play a significant role in a teacher's professional development. On the importance of reflection, Zeichner and Liston state that "...Teaching is work that entails both thinking and feeling and those who can reflectively think and feel will find their work more rewarding and their efforts more successful" (cited in Bailey et al, 2001, p. 44). Reflection serves three purposes in teaching according to Murphy (2001): (1) it expands a teacher's understanding of the teaching and learning process, (2) it explores the language teacher's range of strategic options, (3) it enhances the quality of learning opportunities that the teacher is able to provide in his/her language classroom (pp 499 - 500).

Reflection becomes more purposeful and constructive when teachers' think back on a situation and consider questions such as "Why did it happen that way? and How could I have behaved or done things differently? "Would action x have been better than action y at the beginning of the lesson? or How could I have responded differently to the disruptive boy at the end of lesson". This helps teachers to focus better on and improve specific situations rather than asking general questions such as "What happened? When? and How?" (McGregor, 2011, p. 1). Asking the 'what' and 'why' questions gives teachers more power over their teaching (Barlett, 1990, p. 205).

The process of self-reflection starts by collecting information about teaching, then carefully examining, thinking, and analyzing the information to identify any concerns that teachers might have, and then making informed changes in their own teaching, however, slight that change may be. Richards and Lockhard (1994) provide and discuss procedures that teachers may use to investigate their classroom teaching viz. teaching journals, lesson reports, survey and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research. They explain that each of the procedures have advantages and limitations. It is up to the teacher to decide which of these procedures to use as some of them are more useful in exploring certain aspect of teaching than others (p. 6).

Reflection, however, poses a challenge to the reflective teachers who have to truly examine their own teaching looking for areas that need to be improved and the necessary measures they need to take toward improving their students' learning (Jay, 2003, p. 2). This means that teachers need to come up with an action plan and implement it in their classroom as a means to enhance their teaching and improve their students' learning. Reflective teaching is then all about quality teaching. Hence, the following research study sets out to investigate the role that self-reflection has or does not have in the teacher preparation program at the English department, *Table1*: College of Education (Aden and Saber), Aden University.

## Results and Discussion

### Question 1

*Did you use any formal means viz. teaching journals, lesson reports, survey and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research to self-reflect on your own teaching during your practice teaching?*

Yes	28 n	70 %
No	12 n	30 %

*Table1*

In response to question 1, 70% of the participants indicated that they had used some form of self-reflection during their practice teaching, whereas 30% said that they had not.

### Question 2

*If no, why?*

Those who answered a straight 'no' to this question expressed their complete lack of understanding of the concept of reflective teaching practice. Some pointed out they had not received any training in self-reflection during their undergraduate studies and were unaware of such procedures as teaching journals, lesson reports, survey and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research as tools to be used for self-reflection.

### Question 3

*If yes, read the following means of formal self-reflection. Which one(s) of these did you use during your practice teaching?*

#### Teaching journal or diary

The majority of the participants 52.5% said that they did not keep a written account of their teaching experience and/or recorded what happened after each lesson. 7.5% said that they rarely

did so, followed by 17.5% who said that they sometimes recorded their experience. Those who stated that they did record their teaching experience in a journal or a diary were 17.5% who said usually and 5% who stated always.

I kept a written account of my teaching experiences and recorded what happened after each lesson.	always	2 n	5 %
	usually	7 n	17.5 %
	sometimes	7 n	17.5 %
	rarely	3 n	7.5 %
	never	21 n	52.5 %

*Table 2: teaching journal or diary*

As seen in table 2, most of the participants did not use a teaching journal or a diary as a means to collect data about their practice teaching. Richards and Lockhart (1994) mention benefits of using journals as a reflection tool, for example student-teachers can write down in their journals their experience related to different topics such as personal observation to things and events, questions or observation about problems that come up during teaching, description of certain events, ideas for future reminders among others and use the information for later reflection.

### Lesson reports

Regarding the use of lesson reports, 35% of the participants did not maintain a structured list of elements that went well in their lesson or those that did not as a means for future reflection and 12.5% said that they rarely did so. 15% said that they sometimes kept a lesson report, 25% indicated that they usually kept lesson reports whereas 12.5% said that they always did.

I kept a structured inventory / list of the main features of my lesson. Through this I daily monitored what happened during the lesson, for example, how much time was spent during different parts of the lesson and how effective the lesson was.	always	5	12.5 %
	usually	10	25 %
	sometimes	6	15 %
	rarely	5	12.5 %
	never	14	35 %

*Table 3: lesson reports*

Table 3, shows that about half of the participants' responses indicated their use of lesson reports as a means for self-reflection although it varied from sometimes to usually to always. Lesson reports provide teachers with a quick procedure for monitoring their lesson on a regular basis, such as "what happened during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of a lesson, and how effective the lesson was" (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 9). Hence, if utilized well, lesson reports can provide teachers with valuable information about their teaching.

### Surveys

The majority of the participants 77.5% involved in this study had not administered a questionnaire or a survey to their students as a means to collect information about their teaching. Only 22.5% of the participants said that they did so.

I administered a questionnaire or a survey to students, designed to collect information on a particular aspect of my teaching or my students' learning.	Yes	9	22.5 %
	No	31	77.5 %

*Table 4: surveys*

As apparent in table 4, surveys were not used by the majority of the student-teachers. Surveys and questionnaires can provide insight into the affective aspects of teaching and learning such as students' beliefs, attitudes, motivation, preferences (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 10); obtaining such information may not be possible by using other means of self-reflection. Therefore, having an understanding of how and when to use surveys as an equipment for self-reflection can be beneficial for new teachers.

### Audio and Video Recording

95 % of the participants said that they never recorded their lesson either on audio or video. Only 5% said that they did so.

I audio recorded my lesson, or part of my lesson, to investigate some aspects of my teaching, for example, how much teacher talk there was, how clear the instructions were, etc.	Yes	2n	5 %
	No	38n	95 %
I video recorded my lesson, or part of my lesson to get a visual view of my classroom where I stood, who was speaking to whom, etc.	Yes	2n	5 %
	No	38n	95 %

*Table 5: audio / video recording*

Audio and video recording seemed to be the least used by the participants. Recordings may have the disadvantage of being disruptive, and shy student-teachers particularly may not want to hear or see themselves on tape/camera. However, recordings have advantages over other means of self-reflection such as keeping a journal or a lesson report; for example, recordings allow an opportunity to focus on an aspect of the teacher's choice--this could be either the teacher or students. Also, recordings can capture many details which can then be replayed and examined further. Replaying and analyzing recording can be time consuming and better be left applied only on special occasions (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 11). In today's digital era, the

availability of the equipment itself should not be a problem since many students own (smart) cell phones that can easily record a lesson.

### Peer Observation

Peer observation appeared to be the most favorite form of self-reflection as the majority (55%) indicated that they had peers come and observe their classes.

I asked a peer (another fellow teacher) to visit and observe my class, and take notes.	Yes	22n	55 %
	No	18n	45 %

*Table 6: peer observation*

Apparently, student-teachers seemed to be comfortable with peers come and observe them teaching and provide them with feedback on different aspects of their teaching. Richards and Lockhart (1994) explain that peer observation when used as a procedure for self-reflection should be limited to collecting information about different aspects of teaching rather than as a means of evaluating teaching,

### Action Research

Regarding action research, the majority of the participants (85%) stated that they did not use action research, and only 15% said that they did.

I identified an issue or concern in my class. I then implemented an action plan by collecting and analyzing information to help bring change in the classroom. Then, I subsequently monitored the effects of the action plan.	Yes	6	15 %
	No	34	85 %

*Table 7: action research*

Action research, like the audio and video recording, seemed to be the least favored by the participants. An action research goes through a number of phases which often occur in cycles: planning, action, observation, reflection (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). Implementation of this procedure needs practice; hence, student-teachers need to learn how to efficiently utilize action research as a means to enhance their teaching.

### Question 4

*Did you use any **informal means to reflect** on your own teaching during your practice teaching?*

### Feedback from students

Regarding chatting with students as means to get feedback on their teaching, 32.5% said that they never did so and 7.5% said that they rarely did so. On the other hand, 17.5% said that they sometimes chatted with their students, followed by 27.5% who said usually and then 15% who said always.

I chatted with my students in class about my course and got feedback on my teaching.	always	6 n	15.0 %
	usually	11 n	27.5 %
	sometimes	7 n	17.5 %
	rarely	3 n	7.5 %
	never	13 n	32.5 %

Table 8: feedback from students

Generally, about half of the participants used chatting with students as a means to learn more about their teaching style although the frequency varied between sometimes, usually, and always.

#### Sharing with colleagues

Sharing with colleagues about the positive and negative matters of their teaching was never practiced by 12.5% and rarely practiced by 12.5%. 17.5% stated that they sometimes practiced it, 27.5% said they usually did so, and 30% said that always did so.

I shared with colleagues the positive and/or negative experiences of my teaching	always	12	30.0 %
	usually	11	27.5 %
	sometimes	7	17.5 %
	rarely	5	12.5 %
	never	5	12.5 %

Table 9: sharing with colleagues

Sharing with colleagues seemed to be a procedure utilized by most of the student-teachers in comparison to other forms of self-reflection. Not surprisingly as most of the participants favored peer observation more than any other mode of reflection.

#### Question 5

*During your undergraduate studies at your college, did you receive any training in self-reflection using formal means?*

In response to question 5, the majority (80%) of the participants indicated that they had not received any training in reflective teaching.



Training in reflective teaching:	Yes	8	20 %
	No	32	80 %

*Table 10:*

Apparently, most of the participants indicated that they had not received any training in reflective teaching. It is unclear, however, why the 20% asserted that they had received training in reflective teaching.

If the majority of the student-teachers had not received formal training in implementing the above-mentioned self-reflection tools and were not taught how to fully utilize these tools, the question that arises is to what extent were these tools implemented appropriately by those who stated that they had used them? When peers observed one another, did they follow Richards and Lockhard's recommendation that the focus should be on taking notes and not on evaluating? Those who recorded themselves, how did they reflect on the information? Did the participants, for example, ask the right "What?" and "Why?" questions? Though the participants claimed to have used self-reflection tools, how they used them needs further investigation. With no formal training in the use of self-reflection it remains doubtful the extent to which these tools had been used effectively and efficiently by the participants.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the following research was to investigate whether graduates from Aden University, College of Education (Aden and Saber), Department of English had used any self reflection techniques during their practice teaching at their schools. It was found that 30% of student-teachers had no idea of what self-reflection in the teaching context meant and hence did not use any of the tools. 70% of participants however used one or more form of the self-reflection tools. Regarding as to whether they had received training in formal self-reflection, 20% gave a positive response training whereas the majority (80%) of the participants gave a negative answer thereby casting doubt over how efficiently these tools were utilized.

Though informal means of reflection that was used by the majority of the participants can help the teacher to think about their lesson, the formal procedures provide the student-teacher more focused direction about particular issues and concerns they encounter in their teaching. Therefore, if we wish our prospective teachers to engage in reflective practice, reflection as a practice should be nurtured in these young teachers early on. Student-teachers should be taught how to fully utilized these tools and get the maximum benefits from them. They need to have an understanding of which tools to use and when. They also have to learn to ask the right questions when engaging in self-reflection. In brief, student-teachers need training in self-reflection before they go to a school for practice teaching.

In the Adeni (Yemeni) context there is lack of opportunities for professional development, such as attending English language teaching conferences or workshops, or taking online courses; therefore, by instilling in the student-teachers the skill of self-reflection, educators can help them become life-long learners. Moreover, if these future teachers develop their own reflective thinking, it will not be an exaggeration to claim that they will also encourage their own students to think and reflect. Considering the benefits that self-reflection can provide to the future teachers, there is a need to include a reflective teaching course or even workshops in the teacher education program at the Colleges of Education (Aden and Saber) at Aden University.

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