

Teachers Criticize Themselves: Pros and Cons

Afra AL Hatmi¹, Hind AL Mahrouki², Mohammad Aslam³, Sumayya AL Kalbani⁴

Hilal AL-Shandudi⁵, and Younes Audeh⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri-Sultanate of Oman

Abstract

Rarely do teachers criticize themselves, but for those who do, there is no harm in light of pros and cons. Self-critique improves one's performance and normally leads to perfection. It really is a responsibility once teachers are the managers of the material and lessons given in class under their direct control and supervision. The question in this regard is: Why do some teachers avoid self-critiquing, while others welcome this idea? To fathom this issue, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among twenty male and female school teachers in AL Dhahirah Region –the Sultanate of Oman- to see what they think of this matter. Deep discussion, recommendations, and explanation will be highlighted in detail throughout this paper.

Keywords: criticism, critique, evaluation, performance, positive, teachers, vague, value,

Study Problem

This study aims to explain and highlight a serious academic issue that some teachers encounter: critiquing themselves. What effect does this matter have on teachers; academically and personally? Is this step a sign of healthy behavior?

Study Objectives

- Uncovering and exploring all sides of this issue and see whether it is common or not? Does it negatively, or positively, affect teachers' performance?
- Pinpointing the causes beyond this issue that some teachers face.
- Determining the limit up to which this issue affects students and teachers alike.
- Suggesting possible solutions resulting from self-critique.

Research Question

-Why do some teachers constantly keep critiquing themselves?

-Do social, economic, academic, and psychological factors help teachers critique themselves, personally and academically?

Introduction

“A critique is a formal analysis of a body of work, whether it's a performance, concept, argument, poetry, book, or research paper. Critiques examine and interpret the work and form conclusions based on the results” (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022, Para. 2).

In the field of academia, educational and intellectual domains, the art of critiquing oneself incurs significant necessity and unique importance. It does not only sift and refine one's skills and performance, but also contributes to the development and growth of knowledge. In the teaching environment, a self-critique highlights the abilities of teachers in pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses that either improve, or disprove teachers' performance. A good number of teachers do welcome critiquing themselves and consider it a way of enhancement and improvement of their work, and accept any objective opinions that help evaluate their performance. Some academic institutions urge their staff to hold self-critiquing sessions so as to see where they are heading—are they on the right or wrong track. This paper highlights the importance and effectiveness of self-critique at academic institutions.

Literature Review

There are some very real systemic issues in our schools that are leading educators to feel demoralized and burned out. Add in feelings of guilt and internal pressure, and it's almost unbearable. When we're better able to identify our inner critic at work, we can begin to deal with that pesky voice in adaptive ways (Fullerton, 2022, Para. 5).

It seems that teachers' self-critique has become phenomenal; they blame themselves for not doing their job perfectly, as they believe. Though they prepare their lessons according to what is planned, still, after class, they start saying bad things about themselves, and might consider students as victims. “You're a terrible teacher. You're

not doing enough for these kids. That was a bad lesson.” (Fullerton,2022, Para.2). However, there is a piece of good news in the educational field which asks teachers to concentrate on and highlight even small positive things in teachers’ minds. Explore all good things and forget what is considered as bad ones. This way, teachers can reduce feeling guilty of not reaching a perfect achievement.

Good news: While you’re identifying and rethinking your inner critic, you can simultaneously look for the small joys and positive moments in your life to counteract your negativity bias. They take longer to settle in our brain, but when they do, we can improve our happiness and satisfaction (Fullerton,2022, Para.15).

School life, teaching in particular, has brilliant sides; there are some hints that make teachers feel delighted by receiving words of thanks from their students on their great and successful accomplishment. It is encouraging.

In my view, the most powerful sign of teaching success is when students tell you that your course changed their lives in some way or when a former student contacts you to thank you for the class or for the information you taught them. These things will not happen unless you actively demonstrate the value of the course material (Lehmiller, 2014, Para. 11).

Honest teachers are still available around; they prepare their lessons ahead, deliver classes in a perfect way, but get shocked when they see that some students fail the exam. They start blaming themselves and ask about the reason (s) beyond that distressing failure. Is it the teacher? The student? Both, maybe? “Working hard at teaching the material in the classroom but ending up with high failure rates on an exam can be equally distressing” (Lehmiller, 2014, Para. 9).

Teaching is not enough to create a good teacher; self-care might be the most important item in the educational arena. Self-care helps promote many things from the side of teachers: personal, emotional, spiritual, etc. “Self-care is the skills and strategies used to maintain personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual needs while attending to the needs and demands of others. Without self-care, teachers are at risk of emotional exhaustion and/or professional burnout” (Palmer, 2022, Para. 5). Self-caring reduces self-critique to a considerable level.

I strongly believe that self-care should be easy to follow, at no cost, and shouldn't add time to our already busy career. To achieve this, I find incorporating "new tiny habits" such as walking daily, setting reasonable marking expectations, setting boundaries (e.g. no emails at night or weekends), spending time doing things I enjoy, connecting with people important to me, and setting Sunday as a no-work day are self-care practices that are easy to follow (Palmer, 2022, Para. 8).

Healthy environment is a requirement for perfect teaching with good results. This could be achieved when the relationship among all individuals is healthy: teachers, colleagues, administrators, and parents-- that leads to a positive and fruitful outcome which reduces teachers' self-critique. "Research suggests that learning happens best when both students and teachers are well. What's more, when teachers are well, their relationships with students, colleagues, and the overall school community become more positive" (Palmer, 2022, Para. 9).

Teachers should always be alert and evaluate their work. No harm if they critique themselves in light of performance and students' reaction. Doing so, leads to significant growth; academically and personally." To grow, teachers must be able to reflect critically on their own performance. Education is 'actuated' by teachers" (Heick, 2017, Para. 1).

Do teachers think who they are by asking themselves some questions, or uncovering some ways for evaluating the teaching method they are following? It is wise to think and consider some procedures in order to move forward in the teaching process before others interfere and might negatively affect their work.

What are you doing to get a full picture of who you are, how you're doing, and the kinds of corrections your craft as an educator demands? If we can't come up with a good answer for this, we shouldn't be surprised when other people (purposefully vague) come in and do it for us, stop believing in what we do, or design and fund alternatives that have thinking and design of their own (Heick, 2017, Para. 19).

Caring teachers are doing good for themselves; they work hard, have good communication channels with the administration, students and parents. However, those who are careless and do not get along with the whole educational process are normally replaced, or sacked. "An underperforming teacher eventually gets replaced. Underperforming schools, districts—and most critically, learning models—are perma-funded and untouchable (Heick, 2017, Para. 20).

Too much pressure causes problems. Take, for example, teachers who are so critical about themselves and always seem not satisfied with their performance, and the result is: not so much progress. They have to make some changes in the way they look at themselves.

Many teachers are far too hard on themselves and constantly feel guilty about things they're not doing. You can make 3 small changes that will create a dramatic shift in how you think and feel about yourself. Learn how to change your mindset and move from self-criticism to self-acceptance (Watson, 2015, Para. 1).

Being overly critical of yourself is a problem that a lot of teachers struggle with for a number of reasons. For one thing, teaching is an important job. When we make mistakes or fall short, those errors have the potential to impact children's lives in a negative way. That's a huge burden to carry (Watson, 2015, Para. 3).

Going to the maximum extreme affects the teaching process. Some teachers are born perfectionists and love doing things as accurate and precise as possible. They have the utmost standards to follow. This is worrying and might lead to so much self-critique. "On top of that, many teachers are by nature perfectionists. We want things done right, we have high standards for ourselves, and we tend to get mad at ourselves when we don't meet those standards" (Watson, 2015, Para. 5).

Self-critique is acceptable in some situations, but it gets worse when it comes (arbitrarily) from others who keep pointing out everything you have done. This very much affects one's self-esteem and causes trouble for that teacher.

It's not hard to imagine what would happen to your self-esteem if someone was following you around 24 hours a day, pointing out everything you've done wrong and why your life is never going to get any better. Yet that's exactly what happens to some of us—we become our own worst critics (Watson, 2015, Para. 9).

Too much thinking of bad things teachers do, will affect their mood, personality and performance. These bad things should be solved and not letting them play a negative effect in the teaching process, otherwise, teachers might become useless and disappointed figures.

If you think something you did is really awful, you'll probably waste a lot of time thinking about how awful it is rather than expending your energy on problem solving. Repeatedly thinking about how bad things are can cause you to become convinced that you're a hopeless case. So choosing less extreme language reminds you that the situation is not impossible and you can get better (Watson, 2015, Para.14).

Every problem has a solution. One can refer to more experienced people seeking advice, such as mentors, supervisors, advisors, etc. There is nobody who does not face problems, and maybe on daily basis. Educational books and brochures do help, as well. "Instead of telling myself how bad I am at classroom management, what can I do to become better? Is there something I can read or someone I can talk with to learn new strategies?" (Watson, 2015, Para.16).

There are a number of things that reduce self-critique including self-control, taking responsibility with no complaints, respecting colleagues. Smiling is a magic weapon that shows positivity while communicating with others. All that leads to, and strengthens professionalism, and reduces self-criticism.

Professionalism involves self-control, including the attitude you show to others in the workplace. Complaining less and taking responsibility for your actions instead of blaming others for mistakes creates a more positive environment for students and colleagues. Striving to be positive in the way you speak to others can also improve your mood and outlook. Smiling is another way to show positivity to others as you communicate (Indeed Editorial Team, 2013, Para.8).

Dealing with teacher colleagues showing respect, integrity and courtesy give you a high reputation among others and become more successful in your life. "Acting with integrity and showing courtesy to others is an important way to share and maintain your character and reputation at school" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2013, Para.3).

When teachers admit their mistakes, small or big, it becomes a sign of healthy self-critique. However, ignoring, or avoiding hurtful, or fatal mistakes usually results in remorse: regret. When teachers feel remorse, they highlight new approaches of dealing with students and feel empathy towards them.

However, if there is no thinking and rethinking over the approaches and ways of delivering lessons, it becomes hard to expect an effective and successful lesson. The effective lesson is normally the outcome of thinking deeply. Moreover, thinking should focus mainly on the learners, as well. Mature and experienced teachers-old hands- are the ones who appreciate self-

critique and different opinions by other sides such as colleagues, administrators, students, and supervisors.

Methodology

The researchers apply the analytical approach that concentrates on getting data from a reliable and dependable source in order to get precise results about the issue of self-critiquing that some teachers suffer from.

Participants

This study was applied to twenty male and female school teachers in AL Dhahirah Region in the Sultanate of Oman. The participants are both Omani and expats coming from different Arab countries. Their first language is Arabic and they teach different subjects.

Nature of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of (10) questions: (5) Yes/No, (5) Agree/ Disagree. This is shown in the appendix page.

Findings and Discussion

Table1

1. Teachers should focus on positive, rather than negative sides of their work.	Yes	No
	18	2
	90%	10%

1. Teachers should focus on positive, rather than negative sides of their work.
20 responses

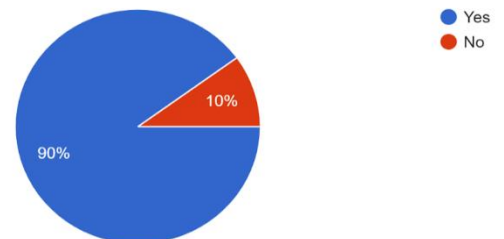


Table 1 illustrates that 90% of participants agree that teachers should focus on positive, rather than negative sides of their work. Thus, when a teacher projects negative emotions on to their classroom, it results in an uncomfortable atmosphere for learning.

Table 2

2. Teachers should avoid repeatedly thinking about bad downfalls, as they become convinced they are failures and hopeless cases.	Yes	No
	17	3
	85%	15%

2. Teachers should avoid repeatedly thinking about bad downfalls, as they become convinced they are failures and hopeless cases.
20 responses

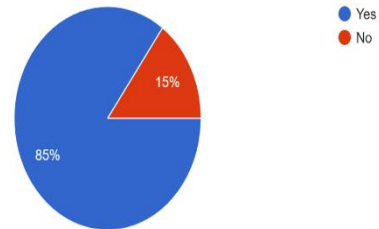
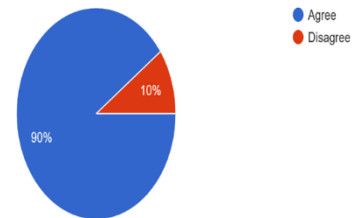


Table 2 shows that 85% of participants agree that teachers should avoid repeatedly thinking about bad downfalls, as they become convinced, they are failures and hopeless cases. The teacher needs to stop and make the necessary and needed procedures to address the errors he encounters.

Table 3

9. Without self-care, teachers are at risk of emotional exhaustion and/or professional burnout.	Agree	Disagree
	18	2
	90%	10%

9. Without self-care, teachers are at risk of emotional exhaustion and/or professional burnout.
20 responses



The findings indicate that the participants -about (90%)- believe that without self-care, teachers are at risk of emotional exhaustion and/or professional burnout.

Table 4

10. Too much work under pressure causes health and psychological problems for teachers.	Agree	Disagree
	20	-
	100%	100%

10. Too much work under pressure causes health and psychological problems for teachers.
20 responses

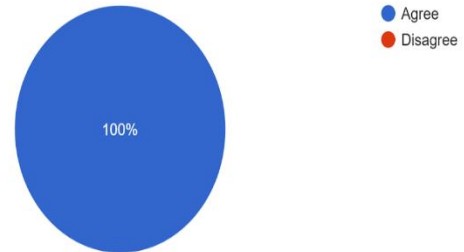


Table 4 shows that all participants -(100%)- agree that too much work under pressure causes health and psychological problems for teachers. Therefore, teachers need to take more care of themselves, which will-automatically- be reflected on their students.

Recommendations

- Teachers should focus on positive, rather than negative sides of their work.
- Teachers should avoid repeatedly thinking about bad downfalls lest they become convinced they are failures and hopeless cases.
- Self-critique is healthy and acceptable, but it gets worse when comes from mistake-hunters who keep pointing out everything one does.
- Caring teachers are successful; they are doing good for themselves by working hard and having positive communication channels with their colleagues.
- Too much teachers’ negative self-criticism affects students’ conditions, as well.
- Teachers should always demonstrate the value of the course material at hand, and welcome students’ comments and feedback.
- Teachers who are always critical, should make some changes in the way they view themselves.

Acknowledgement

The researchers would like to thank all participants without whom things would not have come this way.

Conclusion

To conclude, quality, industrious, and hard-working teachers do not mind critiquing themselves to see and fix their downfalls, whether personal or professional, provided that it is done objectively. Caring teachers are normally eager to show a sort of desire towards learning, just for the sake of learning and getting the ultimate benefit of improving themselves. In this article, the researchers have found that a good number of teachers, especially the old- hands, do welcome self-critique as a way of betterment and perfectionism, and school administrations should encourage teachers-especially the beginners- to critique and evaluate themselves in order to create and live in a healthy academic atmosphere.

References

- Fullerton, M. (March 30, 2022). 7 ways to identify and overcome self-criticism. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from: <https://www.edutopia.org>.
- Heick, T. (November 2, 2017). The necessity of self-criticism in education. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from : <https://www.teachthought.com>
- Indeed, Editorial Team. (March 11, 2023). 13 ways to show professionalism in teaching. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from: <https://www.indeed.com>
- Indeed, Editorial Team. (October 1, 2022). How to write a critique including a definition and example? Retrieved January 1, 2024, from <https://ca.indeed.com/>
- Lehmiller, Justin J. (August 29, 2014). Tips from a self-taught teacher. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from: <https://www.psychologicalscience.org>
- Palmer, P. (June 20, 2022). Why we need to care about teacher self-care? Retrieved December 28, 2023, from: <https://www.edcan.ca>
- Watson, A. (January 26, 2015). How to stop being overly critical of yourself as a teacher. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from: <https://truthforteachers.com>

Appendices

Questionnaire

Dear participants,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information for an article titled “Teachers Critique Themselves: Pros and Cons. This information will not be misused and you will not be identified.

Part One

Yes/ No questions

1. Teachers should focus on positive, rather than negative sides of their work.

(A)Yes

(B)No

2. Teachers should avoid repeatedly thinking about bad downfalls, lest they become convinced they are failures and hopeless cases.

(A)Yes

(B)No

3. Old -hands, do welcome self-critique as a way of betterment and perfectionism

(A) yes

(B) No

4. School administrations should encourage teachers-especially the beginners- to critique and evaluate themselves in order to be more creative and live in a healthy academic atmosphere.

(A)Yes

(B)No

5. Skillful teachers can face the challenge and get rid of their mistakes as soon as possible and set a good example for new and fresh teachers.

(A)Yes

(B)No

Part Two

Agree / Disagree

6. Teachers who are careless and do not get along with the whole educational process are normally replaced, or sacked

(A)Agree

(B) Disagree

7. Dealing with teacher colleagues showing respect, integrity and courtesy give you a high reputation among others, and become more successful in your life

(A)Agree

(B)Disagree

8. Teachers who are always critical should make some changes in the way they view themselves.

(A) Agree

(B)Disagree

9. Without self-care, teachers are at risk of emotional exhaustion and/or professional burnout

(A)Agree

(B)Disagree

10. Too much work under pressure causes health and psychological problems for teachers.

(A) Agree

(B)Disagree

About the Researchers

Afra AL Hatmi is an Information Resource specialist in the LRC (Learning Resource Center) at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri- the Sultanate of Oman. She holds a Ph.D. in Academic Libraries and Information Science from the International Islamic University Malaysia. She is interested in educational and academic research and co-authored many research papers in different fields.

Sumayya AL Kalbani is a lecturer of English at the Preparatory Studies Center –University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri- Oman. She holds a B.A. in English Language Studies, has a number of prestigious certificates: IC3M1 - English for Business Communication - Entrepreneurship - Cambridge English Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA). Moreover, she has participated in diverse national courses, including CV Writing Skills, preparations for interviews workshops, organized local heritage forums, as well as language conferences. Her interest is ESL/EFL field of teaching.

Hind AL Mahrouki is the Head of the General Requirements Unit and a lecturer at the Preparatory Studies Centre - University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri. She holds a Master of Education in TESOL from the University of Sydney- Australia. She has been teaching English for over eight years. She is interested in autonomous learning and technology use in the classroom.

Mohammad Aslam is a Lecturer at the Preparatory Studies Center, UTAS, Ibri, in the Sultanate of Oman. He has done Masters in English from the University of Punjab, Pakistan, and M.A TEFL from AIOU, Islamabad, Pakistan. He has been teaching English language and literature for the last thirty years. His major interest areas are “ESL reading and writing skills”.

Hilal Alshandudi is an ESL/EFL instructor at the Preparatory Studies Centre - University of Technology and Applied Sciences- the Sultanate of Oman. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Management and Leadership from the University of Reading- UK. He has been teaching English for a long time at a number of schools, colleges and the Ministry of Education, College of Health Sciences in Oman. His research interest is —Educational Leadership and Management.

Younes Audeh is a lecturer at the Preparatory Studies Centre - University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri- the Sultanate of Oman. He is an M.A. holder in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania- USA. He has been teaching English as an ESL/EFL for a long time. He has taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries: Jordan,

the Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. His research interest is “Academic Writing”.