

# Tutors' Use of Reflective Practice to Promote Teaching and Learning

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**How to cite this paper:** Oduro, I. K., Akuta, A. B., & Kuranchie, A. (2022). Tutors' Use of Reflective Practice to Promote Teaching and Learning. *Creative Education*, 13, 2308-2320. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.137147>

**Received:** June 10, 2022

**Accepted:** July 25, 2022

**Published:** July 28, 2022

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## Abstract

Reflective teaching is a significant element in pre-service teachers' initial training programmes as well as teachers' continuous development activities. It has been widely acknowledged by many researchers as an approach that promotes teachers' professional development and improves the quality of teaching and learning. The research sought to uncover the use of reflective teaching by tutors in a College of Education in Ghana. It is qualitative research based on the phenomenological research design, which implements constructivist ideas. Participants were purposively sampled in view of their professional and academic backgrounds and experiences. Data was generated via the conduct of semi-structured interviews with the participants. The data was analyzed in relation to the research questions that guided the study. The research revealed that the tutors had a clear understanding of reflective practice and considered it a vital approach that enables tutors to identify weaknesses in the teaching process, and adopt mechanisms to assuage the weaknesses to engender learners' understanding and performance. The research confirmed reflective practice as a powerful, durable, and effective agent of quality educational change and therefore urged tutors to recognise and employ it as a tool to facilitate effective teaching and learning to help in the attainment of national educational goals. It suggests that reflective practice be habitually and constantly applied by tutors in their preparation; teaching and evaluation of instructions to enable them successfully achieve the instructional objectives and have an improvement in pre-service teachers' performance.

## Keywords

Reflective Practice, Pre-Service Teachers, In-Service Teachers, Teacher Education, College of Education

## 1. Introduction

Teachers are of critical importance to any country's educational system. They form an integral part of education systems as they are key implementers of educational curricula. They serve as a conduit for the transmission of knowledge, skills and values to students. The quality of education given to the citizens, therefore, depends largely, on the way and manner that teachers are prepared for their professional job. This makes teacher education which trains the cadre of teachers to shepherd the implementation of educational curricula very critical and essential. Teacher education plays a very significant role in reforming and strengthening the education system of a country. According to [Priya, Prasanth, and Peechattu \(2017\)](#), the training of teachers has global trends in education and helps accomplish the overall needs and aspirations of the people. This underscores why countries make frantic efforts in investing in human, material and financial resources to train teachers to acquire the requisite competencies they require to exquisitely execute their functions expectedly. Countries, for instance, invest hugely in their Colleges of Education to train pre-service teachers to acquire the technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) that they need to handle students and subjects at the basic level of education. In the technological era, pre-service teachers are not only trained to master their subject specialisations and the competencies needed to deliver, but also acquire competence in the use of essential technological tools and their accessories in instructional delivery.

Educational authorities' efforts in ensuring effective training of teachers stem from the fact that teaching is a more complex and demanding task that requires much preparation and organisation from the teacher ([Gore, 2001](#)). The complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner and other bottlenecks the school and its actors encounter have added to the daunting tasks of the teacher. These facts indicate that the educators or tutors of the Colleges of Education who prepare the pre-service teachers to teach at the basic level of education ought to act and deliver more professionally. Failure to do that would disappoint stakeholders of education and training institutions would be blamed for that. As [Darling-Hammond \(2010\)](#) contends, teacher education programmes have been criticized for not preparing teachers sufficiently to educate future generations of students.

One of the means to make tutors of teacher training institutions effective to execute their critical roles as expected is by developing them to make reflective practice a focal point in the teaching and learning processes. Reflective practice in teaching, according to [Amidu \(2016\)](#), is one of the most important sources of personal as well as professional development and improvement. No matter how good a lesson is, and how effective teachers are, their practice can always be improved through reflective practices. Teachers with reflective practice can guarantee successful learning outcomes. According to [Ottesen \(2007\)](#), reflective teacher education has been introduced as a suitable approach for use in teacher education programmes. Due to the complex nature of teaching and learning, teachers are required to be reflective and be able to adjust to diverse classroom situations.

As [Priya, Prasanth, and Peechattu \(2017\)](#) postulate, a key rationale for reflective practice is that experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning; deliberate reflection on experience is essential.

Reflective practice, according to [Knowles, Gilbourne, and Tomlinson \(2007\)](#), is the exploration of thoughts, feelings and actions. Through reflective practice and critical interpretation, understanding and learning can be formed. [Marzano \(2007\)](#) also regards reflective process as a modicum of interactive instructional strategies that assist learners to be in a communicative process during instructions. It is a conscious analysis of one's action to ascertain how well the action has been and the reasons for that and then think of the next line of action ([Kuranchie, 2019](#)). It is thus regarded as a process through which teachers think over the various aspects of their teaching to ascertain their strengths and weaknesses in order to know the actions to take to improve the entire teaching and learning process and outputs. [Choy \(2012\)](#) succinctly gives these as characteristics of reflective practice: reflection as a retrospective analysis; reflection as a problem solving, self-critical reflection and self-belief and self-efficacy.

The justifications for teachers to engage in reflective practice during instructional delivery are numerous and varied. One of the ideal practices reckoned to be helpful in improving the quality of teaching is reflective practice. Research evidence quantifies the effectiveness of reflective practice because of its opportunity to support individuals and groups ([Farrell, 2008; Knowles, Gilbourne, & Tomlinson, 2007](#)). Reflective practice is essential in the teaching and learning process as it triggers both teachers and students to develop skills such as decision-making, metacognition and logical thinking ([Goodley, 2018](#) as cited by [Kuranchie, 2019](#)). To [Gutierrez \(2015\)](#), reflective practice offers an avenue for teachers to develop a culture of reflection on their teaching activities.

The use of reflective practice also makes teachers become aware of the various contexts of education ([Parra, Gutiérrez, & Aldana, 2014](#)). Knowing the various contexts of education makes teachers devise appropriate strategies to approach their teaching more cogently. [Kheirzadeh and Sistani \(2018\)](#) also contend that reflective teaching contributes greatly to enhancing the capability of ineffective teachers for them to become effective ones. Reflective practice helps make ineffective teachers become effective because when such teachers employ reflective teaching they are able to observe to evaluate students' learning improvement needs, find ideal delivery techniques and try innovative ways to achieve new insights on instructions ([Disu, 2017](#)). The practice of reflection also helps to improve teachers' self-awareness and makes them unlearn the inappropriate teaching techniques and methods which can result in students' unfavourable learning experiences ([Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015](#)). In the view of [Korthagen \(2017\)](#), reflective practice can bring about new and effective behaviour in the classroom. This is because the practice aids teachers to know what ought to be changed in the classroom ([Olaya Mesa, 2018](#)). Essentially, the practice of teachers reflecting on their teaching activities enables them to identify and analyse complex classroom issues ([Shoffner, 2008](#)), and to find ideal means to deal with them to inure to the

benefits of both the teacher and the students.

Reflective practice contributes to enhancement of teacher quality (Suphasn & Chinokul, 2021) and studies support this claim. For instance, Miradkhani, Raygan, and Moein (2017) discovered that reflective practice enhances teachers' self-efficacy while Gutierrez (2015) found that reflective practice enhances in-service teachers' professional teaching performance. Reflective practice enables teachers to understand how learners develop knowledge and learn well (Boateng & Boadi, 2015). A study conducted by Olaya Mesa (2018) revealed that reflective practice helps to improve teachers' professional practices as well as students' learning outcomes. Furthermore, East (2014) found that reflective practice helps to improve pedagogical innovative practices of both pre-service and in-service teachers. Implicitly, the student-teachers who are being prepared to teach at the basic level of education ought to engage in reflective practice to add to their quality to be able to help themselves and their students. The in-service teachers as well ought to solidly embrace and practise reflection in their instructional delivery. Tutors of Colleges of Education would experience a qualitative change in their competencies if they usually engage in reflective practice. That precipitated the need to undertake the current study to unravel College of Education tutors' understanding and use of reflective practice in their instructional delivery.

To Priya, Prasanth, and Peechattu (2017), reflective practice has become a focus of interest and a powerful movement in teacher education. The complexity of teaching requires teachers to question their practices for their own professional development in order to improve and to increase learner performance. Reflective teaching offers teachers the opportunity to question and renew their practice and to understand the effects of their teaching (Jacobs, Vakalisa, & Gawe, 2011). Yang (2009) indicates that critical reflection does not come naturally to most teachers. Teachers ought to make deliberate efforts to reflect on their practices. Eyler and Giles (1999) discovered that the more rigorous the reflection in the course of teaching, the better the learning including academic outcomes such as deeper understanding and better application of subject matter, increased complexity of problem solving, openness to new ideas, and critical thinking skills.

Reflective practice ought to manifest in all stages of teaching namely before (preparation), during (delivery) and after (evaluation). Teachers ought to reflect on whatever transpires in their before, during and after every instruction. This would give teachers good ideas about the effectiveness of their teaching. Unfortunately, it is not all teachers who do reflective practice at all the three main stages of teaching. A study conducted by Yanuarti and Treagust (2016) corroborated this perspective that the teachers' reflection was on only students' work, not on their own teaching practice as well.

The foregoing point out that teachers ought to undertake reflective practice in order to have improved learning outcomes in their classrooms. They need to reflect on what they do and change their actions when necessary. They need to reflect on their instructions and other classroom activities and practices to engender good learning outcomes. To be able to do that effectively, teachers need

to hone the skill through continuous practice of reflection. The more teachers become conscious of reflection and reflect back on their instructions that have been taught, the better and effective they become reflective practitioners.

### **Problem statement**

Reflective practice is related to both pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher activities. Thus, in the training of students to become professional teachers, reflective practice is immensely emphasised. This is done to help the students to acquire and use reflective practice skills after their training. It is observed that when reflective practice becomes part and parcel of teacher education programme, it helps make pre-service teachers to develop a lifetime habit of reflecting on best practices that impact student achievement (Lupinski, Jenkins, Beard, & Jones, 2012). It is also an undeniable fact that in-service teachers need to possess the skill of reflection and use it in their instructional delivery. This is because the practice contributes to enhancing teachers' delivery and student learning outcomes. Agustin (2019) therefore admonishes that every educator ought to recognise and adopt as reflective practice is the easiest and most practical means that teachers can employ to promote their professional development. Educators are, therefore, expected to actively engage in professional development programmes and activities to improve their teaching competence. Studies show that reflective practice and critical reflection are means for professional growth and development for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Hsiu-ting, 2008; Martin, 2008). This idea may account for Yanuarti and Treagust's (2016) advice that reflective teaching ought to be introduced into both pre-service teachers' education programmes and in-service teachers' professional development activities. Stancescu, Draghicescu, Petrescu, and Gorghui (2019) discovered that many of the teachers who participated in the study did not have the competence in undertaking effective reflective practice. This could be due to the failure of incorporating or emphasising reflective practice in their training programmes as well as their continuous professional development activities. Undoubtedly, teachers cannot apply a competence they have not been exposed to.

Curiously, it has been observed that although reflective practice is good for both pre-service and in-service teachers, much research studies have focused on pre-service teachers as opposed to in-service teachers (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Hence, the current study focused on in-service teachers and more specifically tutors of a College of Education. The teacher education programmes at the Colleges of Education in Ghana have experienced dramatic change over the last decade. The college tutors have consequently been trained to match up to the standards or in response to the changes in the programmes of their institutions. The study investigated the use of reflective practice in teaching in a College of Education in Ghana, which core mandate is to ensure quality teacher education delivery to pre-service teachers. The responsibilities apportioned to college tutors require higher level of professionalism and commitment in the training of the young prospective teachers. The reason is that pre-service teachers usually habituate the qualities or traits of their tutors and would like to emulate the cha-

racter traits in their own field of practice. In view of that there is the need for tutors to carefully and frequently assess their teaching experiences for effective training of the pre-service teachers.

Again, while many College of Education programmes and courses embed lessons and assessments focused around the topic of reflection, there remains a question around the extent to which tutors themselves positively and productively participate in reflective practice regularly enough so that the encouragement of students to engage in this practice will not seem hypocritical. To enable student teachers to grow personally and professionally, they need to reflect both individually and collectively with their teacher educators and fellow pre-service teachers. Consequently, the study sought to unravel tutors' use of reflective practice in teaching and bring to light what could be done to improve reflective practice in teacher education institutions.

### **Research questions**

The questions that guided the research are:

- 1) How do tutors understand reflective practice in their teaching?
- 2) How do tutors use reflective practice in their teaching?
- 3) How can the reflective practice be improved in teacher training institutions?

## **2. Methodology**

### ***Research design***

In undertaking this research, the qualitative approach was employed. Phenomenological research design based on the constructivist approach was used to address the research questions that guided the study. The design enabled the tutors to share their lived experiences relative to their views on and use of reflective practice in their training of pre-service teachers in the College of Education. As Kuranchie (2021) points out, phenomenology as a research design is employed when one intends to delve into people's perspectives of issues with respect to their thoughts and feelings of an experience. Constructivists create knowledge through interaction between the researcher and participants using dialogue and reasoning as the primary methods of investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### ***Population and sample***

The study targeted tutors of a College of Education who have a long standing teaching experience at that level. Non-probabilistic sampling technique, specifically, expert purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the research. In view of the foci of the study, two inclusion criteria; higher academic qualification and long years of teaching at College of Education were set for selection of the research participants. In the College of Education where the research was conducted, four tutors who had advance qualifications and had taught at the College of Education level for more than ten years were selected to participate in the study. This category of participants was deemed to be adequate professional acumen and have practised teaching long enough to offer insightful

ideas to address the research problem.

#### ***Data collection and analysis***

Semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants. An interview guide with some questions was used to guide the conduct of the study. The interview conducted was one-on-one at places which were convenient for the interviewees. A relaxed atmosphere was created for the conduct of the interview to enable the participants to systematically and subjectively answer the questions posed to them. The method of data collection also enabled follow-up questions to be posed to garner further and better understanding of the responses provided. In the course of the interviews, all relevant protocols and courtesies were accorded the participants such as voluntary participation, non-coercion, the right to opt out of the interview at any time, anonymity and confidentiality. Permission was also sought from the participants to record the proceeding of the interviews and the recording of the processes assisted in capturing the responses provided by the participants. After the interview with each participant, the recording was played back for them to authenticate.

The data gathered was subjected to thematic analysis. Prior to the analysis, transcription of the interviews was done followed with coding and other necessary arrangements to get the data in shape. The analytical method helped to generate responses to answer the research questions. The outcomes of the analysis were organized into themes. Thus, the results of the analysis are primarily presented in themes with direct quotations to support.

To ensure rigour of the study and its outcomes, the following were observed as suggested by [Kuranchie \(2021\)](#), [Kusi \(2012\)](#) and [Guba and Lincoln \(1994\)](#) among others: member checking, peer view and re-reading. Thus, two colleagues of the researchers peer reviewed the study outcomes and offered inputs for validation. After the analysis, the outcomes were shown to the research participants for their perusal and comments to ascertain whether they were a true reflection of what they provided during the interview and further comments. This process resulted in some slight changes in the outcomes of the analysis. Thus, the member checking proved very essential as the inputs of the participants aided to improve the final results. Finally, the individual researchers read over the results several times to fine tune and shape the study.

### **3. Discussion of the Results**

This section of the write-up is in four parts: Part “A” covers personal information of the research participants; Part “B” deals with the tutors’ understanding of reflective practice in their teaching; Part “C” concerns the tutors’ use of reflective practice in their instructional delivery; and Part “D” covers the suggestions on how tutors can greatly use reflective practice in their teaching activities.

#### ***Part “A”: Personal information of the participants***

The search for participants for the study yielded two male and female tutors respectively, three of whom had second degree and one with a third degree. The participants had also taught for more than a decade at College of Education lev-

el. The information provided further revealed that while three of the participants pursued Bachelor of Education degree (B. Ed.), one offered Bachelor of Art degree (B.A Art) with a postgraduate diploma in education. The information also disclosed that the participants were PhD, MPhil, M. Ed and MA degree holders, respectively.

The qualifications of the participants insinuate that they had adequate pedagogical content knowledge in their fields of study. Many of them also had good background knowledge in education as a discipline and its philosophy. It could be inferred that the study participants possessed the requisite competencies in the delivery of instructions to their students, who they were preparing to teach at the basic level of education.

It can also be deduced that per their long years in the training of pre-service teachers they had comprehensive knowledge about teaching and learning situation, which has the propensity to contribute immensely to this research study. The accumulated knowledge they had amassed over the years in teaching at the college level positioned them well to provide the essential data required.

#### ***Part “B”: Tutors’ understanding of reflective practice in teaching***

Respondents shared their views on what they make of reflective practice in teaching. According to a respondent, reflective practice is

*“the afterthought of a lesson”. Thus, the various assessments and evaluations done by teachers after instructions are given.*

A respondent also explains reflective practice as

*“the activities every teachers go through in preparing a lesson”.*

Another respondent sees reflective practice as

*“all the reflections the teacher does in order to position his teachings very well. During teaching, we ponder over what we do in order to know what worked and what didn’t work”.*

A respondent also explains reflective practice as

*“thinking about how you can teach well or improve upon your teaching”.*

The responses indicate that any form of preparation teachers make to enhance the teaching and learning process can be referred as a reflective practice. The responses also mean that any form of critical analysis and thinking done on a lesson delivered or yet to be delivered in order to improve pedagogical knowledge and subject matter amounts to a reflective practice. These confirm Schon’s (1993) explanation that reflective teaching is a process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analyze how something was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes. It can then be established that the tutors’ understanding of reflective practice is very encouraging.

#### ***Part “C”: Tutors’ use of reflective practice in their teaching***

Tutors of Colleges of Education are expected to do reflective practice to engender productivity and for it to resonate in the pre-service teachers when they get the opportunity to also teach. The responses show that some of the participants always apply reflective practice in their teaching and learning process.



One of them indicated that

*“reflective practise is a routine practice in my daily work. Almost all the time, I do that as I want to improve on what I do”.*

Another participant said

*“it’s something I always do in my teaching work”.*

One of the participants claim to seldomly use reflective practices in his delivery. He said,

*“I sometimes or occasionally use reflective practice in teaching”.*

However, one participant admitted that he does not apply reflectivity in the teaching and learning process he engages in with his students. He said,

*“I’m not a fan of reflective practice. I don’t remember using it in my teaching”.*

The responses indicate that the participants make reflective practice a normal practice in their teaching. This is a good development as the tutors’ use of reflection aids in providing the critical pedagogical content knowledge for the pre-service teachers they handle and who are also expected to practise it at their various schools when they pass out. The practice of the tutors applying reflection could resonate in the pre-service teachers who may also end up reflecting on their lessons.

The analysis also revealed that the participants engage in reflective practice at the various stages in teaching. While some of them do reflectivity at the beginning and in the course of their instructions, others do that before and after instructions. A participant pointed out,

*“I engage in reflective practice before and after teaching and learning process. Mostly, prior to my lectures, I reflect on what I’m going to teach. Also, after lectures, I do same to enable me to know what went wrong and what went right. This is to guide my next teaching”.*

On the other hand, a participant indicated

*“I apply reflective practice during and after the teaching process. In the course of teaching, I ponder on some issues when the need arises. However, after every teaching, I do reflect on the entire teaching process”.*

A participant was unsure of the point in time he usually uses reflective practice. He said,

*“I cannot identify a specific stage at which I always do reflective practice; I cannot say I do it at the preparation or teaching stage only. But I know when it is necessary, I apply reflective practice”.*

The responses from the participants confirm that the tutors have reflectivity at different periods in their teaching and learning process. The different phases where the tutors practise reflectivity may be as a result of the nature of the subject matter of the various courses.

#### ***Part “D”: How to improve on the use of reflective practice in teaching***

In order to improve implementation of effective reflective practice, the participants were asked to offer suggestions. They consequently offered the following as means that would make tutors greatly employ reflective practice in their professional work.

A participant offered that,

*“Reflective practice should be habitual: it should be constantly or frequently practised. By so doing, one can become perfect in it”.*

The suggestion implies that when tutors constantly practise reflectivity, it will help improve their competence and also contribute enormously to the effectiveness of their teaching and learning processes. This agrees with Brookfield (1995) who states that, teachers who take actions in teaching without reflections may not be aware of problems that need to be attended to in teaching. It is through informed decision that teachers’ actions have a chance of achieving the desired results.

Another participant contended that,

*“Tutors have to value the time-spent in lesson preparation and delivery. Spending enough time preparing instructions would enable the teacher to ponder over their previous lessons to know how to improve on the current one. Same should be done in course of delivery so as to deliver well”.*

According to Gore (2001), teaching has become a more complex and demanding task than ever before and requires much preparation and organization from the teacher. This implies that, teachers will appreciate the time spent in reflective practice because of its worthiness.

Two participants suggested that,

*“In order to improve the practice of reflectivity, one needs to engage in effective research. By engaging in research would help to know more about effective teaching”.*

The essence of further research is to widen the search for knowledge in solving potential challenges towards the teaching and learning process. It also aids in discovering the strengths and weaknesses of reflectivity in order to know the way forward.

A participant opined that,

*“There should be enough time allocated for course periods to enable good reflection after each lesson. One can’t engage in better reflective practice if the time allotted to deliver a lesson is limited, else the main teaching activities may be overlooked”.*

This suggestion implies that timetables should be flexible enough to provide opportunities for tutors to reflect on lessons before, during and after. When instructional periods are limited tutors may want to concentrate more on the content of their lessons; reflective practice may not have a place in the instructional practice.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Reflective practice is an indispensable tool as far as effective teaching and learning are concerned when well practised can be regarded as a good option to create understanding in the teaching and learning process for attainment of educational goals. The participants had a good understanding and perception and consi-

dered it a vital element in the teaching process. It is regarded as an essential means to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of their professional practice and which can make them live up to expectation. Tutors should therefore be encouraged to continually adopt the reflective practice in their preparation, teaching and learning, and evaluation processes. This will also serve as a yardstick for pre-service teachers to become abreast with tutors' way of delivering lessons, and consequently apply these skills in their various schools of practices. It is therefore expedient for teachers to constantly evaluate their capacity and use of the metacognition skill which is reflective practice for future practice. The practice ought to be an indispensable part of the professional practice of a teacher.

Tutors ought to incorporate reflection in the various stages of instruction to increase learning outcomes. They ought to use reflections to gain more insights and understanding of their teaching activities to improve their professional practice.

It is therefore recommended that reflective practice be part of each lesson planning and delivery in Colleges of Education to facilitate understanding in the teaching and learning process. On their part, Colleges of Education need to constantly organize seminars, workshops and refresher courses for tutors and pre-service teachers on best practices of reflective teaching and learning.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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