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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Promoting Reflective Practice for Professional Development of Teachers through the Lens of College Principals: A Qualitative Research Inquiry**

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**ABSTRACT**

The concept of reflection is currently gaining popularity in the realm of academia, as it can be a powerful tool for professional growth, enabling teachers to critically analyze their teaching methods, assess student learning outcomes, and make informed instructional decisions. The objective of this qualitative research inquiry was to explore the attitude of principals towards promoting reflective practice (RP) for the professional development of teachers within the colleges. For the purpose of data collection, a total of eighteen (18) principals, including male (n = 12) and female (n = 6), were selected using a purposive sampling method from colleges in Dera Ghazi Khan, South Punjab, Pakistan. The results of this investigation suggested various strategies that can be used to promote reflective practice among teachers. The insights gained from this research could potentially inform policymakers and administrators in designing supportive structures and policies to encourage reflective practice among professionals in various fields.

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**KEYWORDS** College Principals, Development, Professional, Reflective Practice, Teachers

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**Introduction**

The roots of the term "reflection" in the academic milieu can be traced in classical literature, presented by Dewey (1933) as a cognitive process that involves thinking about one's own experiences. Furthermore, reflective practice has been termed an action of personal and contextual understanding that focuses on promoting development in the form of improved knowledge and skills (Tovey & Skolits, 2022). Additionally, the concept of (RP) is becoming increasingly important in both professional and educational settings (Marshall et al., 2021). Besides this, it has been believed that the success of teachers is significantly intertwined with various constructs, such as reflective practice (Namaziandost et al., 2023). Furthermore, Yuan and Mak (2018) cited the fact that reflection is inextricably associated with a professional's motivation for continual improvement through personal accountability for their own conduct and actions. According to Habib (2017), the process of reflection can serve as an excellent tool for teachers to critically assess the quality of their work. Following this; Islam (2015) believed reflection helps to determine one's own capabilities in terms of developing oneself professionally. Moreover, Maksimovic and Osmanovic (2018) recognized reflective practice as a vital aspect of promoting the quality of teaching. Furthermore, Zahid and

Khanam (2019) also identified reflective practice as a key component for the professional development of teachers.

Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that the concept of reflective practice is emerging as a new trend in the world of academia in Pakistan (Zulfqar et al., 2022). In addition to this, Ashraf and Rarieya (2008) described that in low-income nations, to which Pakistan belongs; the concept of engaging in reflective practice is new. On the other hand, Fazal and Amin (2014) also highlighted the same fact that reflection is a popular concept in advanced countries such as Europe, Canada, and Australia. However, the concept is relatively new in developing countries such as Pakistan.

Since the concept of reflection has been acknowledged as a key aspect of the professional development of teachers in the field of education, principals can significantly contribute in this respect by promoting reflective practices in their academic environment. Moreover, as one of the main stakeholders, a teacher is entrusted with the responsibility of constantly striving to enhance their personal attributes and to improve their professional skills (Crock & Farrell, 2017). In addition to this, the complexity of teaching necessitates that teachers examine their practices for their own professional development. However, as Akram and Mehmood (2023) observed in their study, teachers sometimes feel hesitant to use reflective practices because of a less favorable organizational environment. Thus, it is important for administrators of institutions to create a culture that values and supports reflective practices among teachers. In addition to this, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, the investigations related to (RP) in its various manifestations carried out at different levels in Pakistan (see Ali and Khan, 2021; Bibi and Aziz 2012; Hussain et al., 2011; Tabassum and Malik ., 2014)) highlighted that practitioners in the field of education in Pakistan are not aware of the significance of reflective practice and the function it plays in the continuing professional development of teachers and indicated that the domain of reflective practice received little attention. Moreover, the researchers observed a few research studies that have been conducted on principals' attitudes towards reflective practices. So far, many research studies have been done to investigate the perception or attitude of teachers about their reflective practices and approaches. The purpose of the current study was to explore the perspectives of college principals towards promoting reflective practice among teachers within the context of Pakistan. This study seeks to gain insights into how college principals perceive and support reflective practice among teachers, as well as the strategies they employ to enhance its implementation. The findings of this study can be used to develop effective professional development programs for teachers to enhance their reflective practice skills.

## **Literature Review**

Since (RP) is one of the most significant fields, it has captured the attention of many researchers in the field. In this regard, Lubbe and Botha (2020), in their research, accentuate the significance of reflective practices for teachers' professional development in educational institutions. Moreover, Korthagen (2017) also emphasized the significance of reflective practice as a modern approach for the professional growth of teachers in academic institutions. In a similar manner, Ashraf et al. (2016), in their investigation, also considered it an essential component and highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own experiences and actions. By engaging in reflective practice, teachers critically analyze their experiences, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary changes to their practice. In addition to this, Mohammed and Ab Rashid (2023) also highlighted that reflective practice is useful to identify the weaknesses and strengths of educators and sustain their professional competence. Additionally, Mathew et al. (2017) also revealed in their study that reflection

is a highly valuable source for one's own growth, both personally and professionally. In addition to this, Imran et al. (2023) also recommended in their study that by encouraging teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices, administrators can create a culture of continuous improvement and growth within the institution and can help teachers identify areas for improvement and growth. Additionally, Gudeta, (2022), in another study, found that reflective practice helps teachers stay up-to-date with the latest educational trends, enabling them to adapt their teaching approaches to meet the changing needs of the teaching profession. Shahzadi and Hussain (2019) also suggested in their study that reflective practice supports teachers in accordance with contemporary educational requirements and helps them review their own performance in accordance with both national and international benchmarks.

## **Material and Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research approach. This approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and gain insights into the phenomenon of how principals encourage their teachers to engage in reflective practices in order to strengthen their professional development. In this investigation, all of the principals of the college, Dera Ghazi Khan Division, which is located in the South Punjab region of Pakistan, were included in the study's population. The population of the current study represented both male and female principals from a total of twenty-one (21) Public sector degree colleges and Associate Degree Colleges that were under the purview of the Punjab government. Therefore, one principal was selected from each college, and a total of eighteen (18) principals, including males (12) and females (6) were selected by using the technique of purposive sampling. This technique allowed the researcher to take a targeted and focused approach to data collection, ensuring that the sample was representative of the population being studied. These participants were chosen in accordance with the following criteria: (a) male and female principals were chosen purposefully; (b) principals with approximately a year of experience were chosen; and (c) only those male and female principals who served in the Higher Education Department (HED) and were regular Punjab government employees. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit rich descriptions of principals' attitudes, experiences, and practices related to promoting reflective practice. For this, mainly three interview questions were designed after a thorough literature review on the key themes and areas of focus for the interview questions regarding reflective practices. The questions were also reviewed by experts in the field to eliminate any potential biases and ensure that the questions were relevant and appropriate for the intended purpose of increasing the overall validity of the interview. To obtain information, these principals were approached in their respective colleges according to their convenience to provide a comfortable and open atmosphere, allowing participants to express themselves more freely and provide more honest responses about how reflection was promoted among college teachers and which reflective tools were employed to empower teachers to use reflection. The researcher used a set of predetermined questions but also had the flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. This allowed for a balance between standardization and individualization in the interview process. Furthermore, each interview session lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded for data analysis. The study was conducted with the utmost respect for the rights and dignity of the participants, and all necessary measures were taken to ensure their safety and well-being. The ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the entire research process.

## Results and Discussion

For the analysis of qualitative data, NVIVO 11 was used, as this software offers a user-friendly interface that allows researchers to efficiently analyze qualitative data. Its advanced features, such as coding, tagging, and theme extraction, make it the ideal tool for conducting in-depth analysis. For this purpose, the recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns. The participants were informed of the key themes that were identified and asked for clarification to verify that their responses had been reviewed correctly. The transcriptions were then examined, and themes were highlighted and categorized according to the three questions that were posed in the interview session. These categories were as follows: (1) principals' attitudes towards promoting reflective practices (2) reflective tools used to promote reflective practices (3) suggestions regarding strategies to promote reflective practices. The themes identified in this section provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.



Figure 1: Word Cloud indicating Principals Attitudes towards Promoting Reflective Practices for Teachers Professional Development

The above given word cloud figure 1 question analyzed the principal's views on reflective practice for the professional growth of their teachers at colleges. The most frequently employed terms are highlighted, making a cloud around the word "reflection." These terms are: development, awareness, growth, promotes knowledge and technology, and so forth. Some of the responses of the participants are presented here. "I think, reflection supports teachers to get valuable feedback on their teaching performance." On the basis of the analysis, the depicted theme denotes that principals viewed reflection as beneficial in fostering self-awareness among teachers and considered it as a major source of teachers' overall professional development, which helped to enhance the effectiveness of their instruction.



Figure 2 Word Cloud indicating the Reflective Tools for Promoting Reflective Practices

The following word cloud figure 2 highlights the most frequently used terms for a specific type of reflective tools indicated by the college administrators. These key words are "reflective, coaching; cognitive, dialogues, portfolios, conferences, lectures and action. The word's origins offered concepts relating to various reflecting approaches used by college principals for their teachers. According to the findings, principals perceive various forms of artifacts and portfolios as beneficial ways for teachers to reflect on their instructional capability. Furthermore, respondents identified cognitive coaching as the greatest source for improving reflection in their institutions. Moreover, the extracted theme also indicates that respondents prefer to implement reflective questions as a way to encourage reflection.



Figure 3 Word Cloud Suggesting different strategies for promoting reflective practice

The above given word cloud figure 3 demonstrates information related to the various strategies offered by the Principals for encouraging reflection among teachers in their institution. The words that are most frequently utilized are highlighted and form a cloud around the word "diaries". Journals, video, peer, observation, query, and research are examples of these terms. The idea gleaned from the responses that were provided indicates that participants believed that providing reflection time was an effective tool for teachers' professional growth. Furthermore, the participants considered keeping reflective journals was a beneficial way to reflect. Moreover, the theme also suggests that participants favored video reflection over peer observation, according to the responses. Similarly, the participants viewed action research as a good technique for generating reflection in their colleges.

## Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to represent the perspectives of principals on the reflective practices carried out for the professional development of teachers in their respective institutions at the college level. The study findings revealed that principals viewed reflection as an activity that was valuable, relevant, and beneficial for the professional growth of their teachers. The current study's findings correspond with those of Farrell (2020), indicating that reflective practice may help teachers grow professionally. Moreover, according to the results, principals believed that, reflective dialogues, and collaborative learning were beneficial as well as successful ways for teachers looking to enhance their teaching capacity. The results are in line with those of Burhan-Horasanl and Ortactepe (2016), who found that teachers benefited more from collaborative reflective practice. In addition to this, study findings revealed that peer reflection was also proposed as a valuable exercise by principals as a means to help

teachers improve their teaching skills. The results are in accordance with Gungor's (2016) assertion that peer-reflection helps teachers grow professionally.

The findings of this qualitative study led to the conclusion that, despite the fact that the idea of reflective practice is still in its infancy in educational institutions in the Dera Ghazi Khan Division. The principals strongly advocated that reflective practice was very effective in improving and enhancing the teaching performance of their teachers. In addition, the investigation concluded that reflection is necessary for teachers in order to determine their particular areas of strength and weakness, which is crucial for their professional development. However, principals also expressed that one effective strategy for promoting reflection among teachers in colleges is to provide opportunities for collaborative learning and discussion. These strategies could include providing opportunities for self-reflection, encouraging peer feedback and support, and incorporating reflective practice into professional development programs. By implementing these approaches, teachers may be better equipped to critically evaluate their own actions and improve their performance in their respective fields.

### **Recommendations**

Some of the study's recommendations are presented in the section that follows.

1. Moreover, in order to implement this concept into practice in the most effective manner, it is necessary to provide opportunities through training and workshops to encourage teachers to engage in reflective practices.
2. Furthermore, to promote reflective practice effectively, teachers must be provided with reflection tools such as journal, or reflective prompts to help them engage in regular reflection. These tools can help teachers document their thinking, evaluate their practice, and identify areas for growth.
3. It is imperative to create a supportive culture of trust, emphasizing the importance of feedback, and recognizing the value of reflective practice for professional development of teachers in academic institutions.

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