

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflective Practice in Language Teaching

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Abstract

This thesis explores reflective practice in language education and proposes a paradigm for a more comprehensive approach to teacher reflection and practice. The article provides a brief overview of reflective practice and its implementation by John Dewey and Donald Schön, as well as limitations to their ideas. This research provides an overview of how the author applied Dewey and Schön's concepts to create ACT model of reflective practice for language teachers. This thesis highlights the significance of emotions in reflective practice for language teachers and suggests ways to advance it.

KEY WORDS

Language teaching, reflective teaching, reflective inquiry, guiding idea, teacher's lenses, hypothesis testing, holistic approach, ACT (analyse, connect, transform) model.

INTRODUCTION

Reflective practice has increasingly been recognized as a key indicator of professional competence across a wide range of disciplines, including science, law, medicine, nursing, and education. In the field of education, as Tabachnik and Zeichner (2002) observe, "there is not a single teacher educator who would say that he or she is not concerned about preparing teachers who are reflective" (p. 13). This highlights the central role reflective practice now plays in teacher education and professional development programs, where it is widely regarded as an essential skill (Loughran, 2002; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).

Reflective practice enables teachers to articulate and make sense of their professional knowledge by encouraging them to critically examine what they know and how they teach. It supports practitioners in developing a deeper awareness of their actions by reconsidering their experiences and learning processes within teaching contexts (Smyth, 1992). As Zwozdiak-Myers (2012, p. 3) explains, reflective practice is fundamental to teacher development because it helps educators "analyse and evaluate what is happening" in their

classrooms, thereby enhancing both teaching quality and students' learning opportunities.

In the domain of language teaching, reflective practice has become even more significant, particularly as the profession has entered a "post-method condition" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), where reliance on fixed teaching methods has diminished. According to Freeman (2016), reflective practice refers to the "mental activity that teachers do as they think in teaching situations" (p. 207). Its integration into language teacher education is grounded in two main assumptions: "(1) Improvement in teaching comes when teachers can turn actions that are automatic and routine into ones that are considered. (2) This shift from automatic to considered actions supports a more professionalized view of teaching" (p. 221). Despite its growing importance, however, "what it actually is and how it might be developed are more problematic" (Walsh & Mann, 2015, p. 351).

In other words, although reflective practice is widely acknowledged as a hallmark of professional competence in language teaching and is incorporated into both pre-service

and in-service teacher education programs, there remains a lack of consensus regarding its definition and implementation. While most educators agree on the value of reflection, there is still ambiguity surrounding what exactly constitutes reflective practice and how it can be effectively fostered. This has led to differing interpretations, particularly concerning the philosophical foundations that inform the concept and are frequently cited in the literature.

Historically, the idea of reflection has roots in various ancient religious and cultural traditions. The modern use of the term, however, originates from the Latin word *reflectere*, meaning "to bend back" (Valli, 1997, p. 67), or to revisit and gain awareness of past experiences. Across different civilizations, such as those of ancient Greece, China, and India, it is evident that individuals have long engaged in forms of reflection as part of everyday life. In the early twentieth century, the concept of reflection gained prominence in North America, particularly through the influential work of John Dewey. In the field of language teaching, the early use of the concept of reflection differentiated between two levels: a "weak" and a "strong" form. The weaker interpretation viewed reflection simply as a form of thoughtful practice, where teachers occasionally engage in informal consideration of their professional actions. As Wallace (1996) noted, teachers may "informally evaluate various aspects of their professional expertise" (p. 292). However, he also emphasized that such "informal reflection" is unlikely to lead to meaningful improvement in teaching and may even result in "unpleasant emotions without suggesting any way forward" (p. 13). Consequently, a more robust understanding of reflection emerged, advocating a systematic and evidence-based approach. This "stronger" perspective suggests that language teachers should gather data about their teaching practices and use this information to inform responsible and reasoned decisions (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). This view aligns with Dewey's (1933) earlier assertion that "data (facts) and ideas (suggestions, possible solutions) thus form the two indispensable and correlative factors of all reflective activity" (p. 104). More recent scholarship, such as Walsh and Mann (2015), reinforces the importance of data-informed reflection, encouraging teachers to collect and analyze evidence in order to deepen their understanding of teaching and enhance the quality of their reflections. This more structured, evidence-based conceptualization of reflection is increasingly gaining acceptance in language teaching (e.g., Mann & Walsh, 2017). However, it is important to ensure that such approaches do

not become narrowly focused on solving immediate classroom issues. There is a risk that teachers may collect data merely to "fix" problems without engaging in deeper consideration of the broader social, emotional, ethical, or political dimensions of their practice. (Mamatkulova N, 2024). Furthermore, critical reflection should extend beyond simply questioning the use of particular teaching methods, as was common in earlier discussions of reflection. As Hatton and Smith (1995) pointed out, the term critical reflection is often misunderstood, with some interpreting it to "mean no more than constructive self-criticism of one's actions with a view to improvement" (p. 35). To engage in genuinely critical reflection, teachers need to move beyond surface-level self-evaluation and examine the ideological and contextual factors that shape their practices. This also involves recognizing the interaction between emotional experiences and reflective processes. An early advocate of such a perspective in language teaching was Bartlett (1990), who argued that reflection should incorporate broader societal considerations. He suggested that critically reflective teachers must "transcend the technicalities of teaching and think beyond the need to improve . . . instructional techniques" (p. 204). Although Bartlett's ideas were not widely adopted at the time, later scholars, including Crookes (2013), emphasized the need for a more critical orientation in language teaching. Crookes promoted "teaching for social justice, in ways that support the development of active, engaged citizens who . . . will be prepared to seek out solutions to the problems they define and encounter, and take action accordingly" (p. 8). Therefore, reflective practice should also involve examining issues of equity within the profession (Hatton & Smith, 1995) and critically analyzing power relations within educational institutions (Brookfield, 1995).

John Dewey and Donald Schön contributed significantly to the concept of reflective practice; nonetheless, their theories have major drawbacks. For starters, their methodologies are somewhat context-independent, failing to adequately account for varied socio-cultural and institutional environments. Second, while both scholars give solid theoretical foundations, they provide little practical direction on how reflection might be systematically practiced and evaluated in teaching. Third, their research focuses exclusively on cognitive processes, paying insufficient attention to the function of emotions in reflective practice. Furthermore, their frameworks lack a critical viewpoint and do not adequately address issues such as power, injustice, and social justice in education. The concept of reflection in their theories remains wide and

unclear, resulting in a variety of interpretations in educational research and practice.

The ACT (Analyze, Connect, Transform) model of reflective practice builds on and extends the foundational ideas of John Dewey, Donald Schön, and Thomas S. C. Farrell. Dewey's concept of reflection as a systematic, inquiry-based process grounded in experience is closely aligned with the Analyze stage, where teachers critically examine their practices, collect evidence, and evaluate classroom events. Similarly, Schön's notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action support this analytical dimension by encouraging teachers to think critically both during and after teaching (Jonibekova M, 2025).

The Connect stage draws on Farrell's emphasis on reflective practice as a holistic and context-sensitive process. Farrell highlights the importance of linking teachers' beliefs, experiences, and contextual factors, including social, cultural, and emotional dimensions. In this stage, teachers connect their prior knowledge, teaching experiences, and learner needs, as well as their personal and professional identities, to develop a deeper understanding of their practice.

Finally, the Transform stage reflects the developmental and action-oriented outcomes of reflection emphasized across all three scholars. Dewey's view of reflection as leading to informed action, Schön's focus on improving professional practice, and Farrell's advocacy for critical and meaningful change converge in this stage. Here, teachers use insights gained through analysis and connection to modify their teaching strategies, enhance their professional competence, and foster more effective and contextually appropriate learning environments.

Thus, the ACT model synthesizes and operationalizes key elements of reflective practice by integrating analytical, contextual, and transformative dimensions into a coherent framework for developing the reflective skills of future English language teachers.

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