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Exploring Reflective Writing Skills among Prospective Teachers

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Abstract

Reflective writing is a skill that affects teachers' professional growth and learning as well as the climber of the instruction they deliver in order to enhance and comprehend the teaching process.Many skills can be improved with reflective practice, such as assessing and recognizing one's own teaching shortcomings, formulating practical development plans, and creating activities.This study aimed to explore the reflective writing skills of prospective teachers of İnstitute of Education at University of Sargodha.The study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design. The participants were 90 prospective teachers, selected through convenience sampling technique.Data were collected through self-administered descriptive types Questionnaire designed according to Gibbs reflective cycle containing six components Description, Feeling, Evaluations, Analysis, Conclusion and Action plan. The questionnaire consists of ten short answer questions, covering students perception and experiences with reflective writing as well as their demographics characteristics .The qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis and coded according to Moon's level of reflection .The coded data were summarize using frequencies and percentages to describe the distribution of participants across the levels of reflection . The study's findings reveled that prospective teacher's fall in level 01 (noticing) of reflection.Therefore it is essential to provide treatment, instruction and feedback to support prospective teachers for the development of reflective writing skills.

Keywords: Prospective teachers, Reflective writing skills, Gibbs Reflective cycle ,Moon's level of reflection

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Introductıon

Reflection has become an essential component of teacher education since it allows students to critically assess their learning, evaluate their practice, and identify areas for growth. Modern education calls for teachers who think critically and reflect on their practice and its impact on students. This trend has made reflective practice a key element in preparing teachers for the classroom. As one of the primary participants in the educational process, or more precisely, the teaching process, a teacher has significant responsibilities that are different from those that defined their function in the past. These days, their function is evolving. Since the instructor is in the middle of the teaching process, he is no longer only a conduit for knowledge transfer. Students are now the subjects of instruction, and the teacher's job is to support, uplift, guide, and counsel them. Additionally, the instructor takes on the roles of director, coordinator, motivator, evaluator, researcher, and reflective practitioner.Reflection is a multidimensional term with many different meaning. Reflective skills are an action of recognizing oneself and one's experiences with the goal of fostering development in the form of enhanced knowledge and abilities. (Tovey & Skolits, 2022). One method that is thought to aid in bridging the gap between academic and professional life is reflective thinking (Sutherland, Howard, at, all 2001).According to Farrell (2016a) and Mathew & Peechattu (2017), reflective practice is generally understood as a kind of systematic and cyclical inquiry in which educators precisely collect data about their approaches in order to assess, analyse, and interpret their experiences in order to improve their instruction moving ahead. Furthermore, it is a process of creating meaning that aids in the growth of educators (Rodgers, 2002). Reflective educators seek not only better answers but also a deeper understanding of themselves and how the answers they have discovered relate to other ideas and experiences. Indeed, the significance of reflective practice has been emphasised repeatedly (Loughran, 2002; Yalcin Arslan, 2019). The evidence indicates that two important facets of teachers' professional lives—teacher identity and teaching quality—are significantly impacted by reflection. Since reflective practice is essential to its advancement, educators should adopt it in the future. Reflection is the process of

reviewing one's practice before, during, and after the concrete activity.

Significance of reflection: An early proponent of this idea, Dewey (1933), described reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p. 9). The process of reflection is designed to help students become more self-aware in the context of their practice and to stimulate critical thinking. Additionally, introspection promotes the creation of new ideas and knowledge as well as self-actualization. Reflection is "fodder for self-regulation" in a dynamic setting where behaviour must constantly adjust to the difficulties of the circumstance at hand (Scot 2010, p. 432).

Literature Review

Reflection is among the important concepts that have been embraced by teacher training programs due to the fact that it allows the trainees to reflect on their teaching experiences and improve their teaching methods. Reflection as a concept of thinking was initially introduced by Dewey (1933) who described reflection as a form of thoughtful consideration of our beliefs and experiences to come up with important conclusions. According to Dewey, meaningful learning arises through critical analysis of experiences and not participation. Schön's (1983) extension of the theory of reflection was through the introduction of the two types of reflections referred to as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is done during teaching; therefore, it enables the teacher to alter the teaching decision instantly, while reflection-on-action is done after teaching and helps the teachers evaluate events in the classroom and determine improvement strategies. Reflective practice plays an important role in teacher education in terms of developing critical thinking, self-reflection, and decision making. As pointed out by Larrivee (2008), reflective teachers reflect on their assumptions and beliefs and their classroom practices. This is why reflective practice has become an important part of teacher education programs due to its importance in teacher education.

Many scholars in the discipline have focused on reflective practice, which is one of the most significant areas. In this context,

Lubbe and Botha's (2020) study emphasises the value of reflective techniques for educators' professional growth in educational establishments. Furthermore, Korthagen (2017) highlighted the importance of reflection as a contemporary strategy for academic institutions' instructors' professional development. Experiences, pinpoint areas that need work, and adjust their practice accordingly. Furthermore, Mohammed and Ab Rashid (2023) emphasised that reflective reflection is helpful in identifying educators' strengths and flaws and maintaining their professional competence. Furthermore, Mathew et al. (2017) found that reflection is an extremely useful tool for personal and professional development. Additionally, Imran et al. (2023) suggested in their study that administrators foster a culture of continuous improvement and growth within the organization and assist teachers in identifying areas for improvement and growth by encouraging them to reflect on their own teaching practices. Dewey (1933). Reflective practice helps educators maintain their professional competence by identifying their strengths and faults. Ab Rashid and Mohammed (2023). In order to gain a better understanding of oneself and the situation, reflection is a metacognitive process that takes place before, during, and after events. This allows future encounters with the problem to be influenced by past encounters (p.685) Sandars (2009). Thus, reflective writing helps to develop reflective practitioners, who have the ability to make informed teaching decisions (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2024).Besides, current research indicates that there is a significant number of pre-service teachers who exhibit descriptive reflection at the initial stage of their training instead of critical reflection. In the absence of purposeful guidance, students tend to stay at low levels of reflection and have problems with advancing into analytical and transformative levels of reflection (Körkkö, 2023).

Importance of Reflective practice in improving teaching quality

Reflective practice is described as a variable that affects teachers' professional growth and learning as well as the caliber of the instruction they deliver in order to enhance and comprehend the teaching process. It also looks into the effects of all complex elements (Vijna Kumari, 2014).Many skills can be improved with reflective practice, such as assessing and recognizing one's own teaching shortcomings, formulating practical development plans, and creating activities that will change one's approach (Bilac, 19

2015).Regardless of whether the classroom is in a regular classroom, a scientific lab, or a gym, reflective leadership and action research are necessary to improve the practice of classroom management (Ryan, 2007).Professional development for teachers is supported by reflective practice, which forces them to come up with fresh approaches to managing and leading the classroom (Soisangwarn &Wongwanich,2014).Furthermore, reflective practice enables teachers to recognize each student's specific requirements, assist students in being aware of their emotions, and assist students in developing strategies for managing their thoughts. Reevaluating one's own practice can help with the following: improving the quality of one's work; effectively sharing professional experience with colleagues; realizing professional standards; developing as an active educator; supervising one's own professional development; becoming more aware of one's own and one's students' activities; creating a suitable environment in the classroom; avoiding routine and saturation; and gathering new ideas for future work. Reflective writing in a professional setting seeks to document in-depth learning experiences that carefully enhance diverse viewpoints (Thompson, 2022). Engaging in such activities strengthens students' reexamination of in-depth scholarly content, methodology, and knowledge. They are inherently linked to reflective practice. They connect their relevant interactions and learning experiences to higher-order thinking skills through the usage of essential themes. Once students adopt reflective practice with curiosity, the outcomes of their reflections can unlock creativity (Pendrey, 2022). According to Pederrey, reflective writing helps them create more areas for in-depth thought; however, addressing the crucial issues at hand is essential for maximizing self-awareness, critical thinking, and professional development (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018). Reflective practice will therefore probably foster knowledge, pedagogy, and creativity. For professional growth, teaching, learning, and teacher preparation, reflection and reflective practice are crucial. According to Grayling (2003), "the habit of reflection and questioning is the best thing any education can bequeath" (p. 179. Numerous researchers have also widely accepted it as a strategy that might support teachers' professional development and raise the standard of instruction and learning.

Jacobs, Vakalisa, and Gawe (2011), stated that reflective teaching gives teachers an opportunity to refine their approaches as well as understand the impact of their education. They went on to argue that reflective teaching offers insights into how educators may effectively engage students, thereby increasing effective teaching and learning practices.

Importance of reflective practice for students

Reflective thinking can help students think about the best ways to achieve learning goals (Mirzaei, Phang, and Kashefi, 2014b). Additionally, through examinations, Reflective thinking may help people integrate their cognitive capacities (Maksimović and Osmanovic, 2019). Reflective thinking is necessary for students to address problems as successfully as feasible (Spears et al., 2021). Consequently, it affects how pupils decide to participate in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor tasks as well as other facets of learning achievement.

Theoretical Framework

The study grounded in reflective learning theory .The framework draws upon the work of John Dewey (1933), Donald Schön (1983), and David Kolb (1984). John Dewey stated that reflection is an active, persistent and careful consideration of experiences that results in learning and wise judgment. In addition, Schön developed the notion of the reflective practitioner who is engaged in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to evaluate and develop his/her professional practice. Moreover, the Experiential Learning Theory proposed by David Kolb states that learning is an ongoing process of experiencing, reflecting, abstracting and experimenting. This cycle of experiential learning involves reflection as a mechanism linking experiences and learning. Thus, all above-mentioned theories constitute the basis for studying the reflective abilities of prospective teachers since they explain the significance of critical reflection on experience as the source of professional learning and reflective practice.

Model of reflection.

Prospective teachers may not know exactly how to engage in reflective practice. This section introduces three frameworks that can be used to direct and "scaffold" the reflective process in teacher education. Gibb (1988) originally presented the first framework, which is organised in a cycle.

Gibbs Reflective Cycle: There are many reflective models that have been developed for various purposes; however, Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) stands out from other models since it is one of the most popular models used in teacher education. This reflective model is follows six stages that proceed sequentially stating with Description and ending with an action plan ,with Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis and Conclusion in between .Gibbs' reflective cycle is highly systematic, which is why it is most suitable for those who are just starting out in their reflective practice as prospective teachers. There have been research studies that have shown that repeated use of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle improves critical thinking and learning.

Moon level of reflection: Moon (1999, 2004) developed a model that explains the process of how reflective thinking evolves from awareness to transformative learning. According to moon reflective thinking moves through five stages; Noticing, Making Sense, Making Meaning, Working with Meaning, and finally Transformative Learning. The Noticing stage is characterized by the description of experience devoid of any interpretation. In the stage of Making Sense, the learner engages in organization and relating of the ideas within the experiences. Making Meaning entails the connection of the experiences with existing knowledge and forming meanings from such. Working with Meaning entails critically evaluating situations and making valid conclusions. Lastly, Transformative Learning is the stage of highest reflection of the learning process. This framework offers a practical way of analyzing the effectiveness of reflective writing and tracking the progress of students towards higher levels of reflective thinking. Hence, its application has become widespread in research on reflective journal writing among teacher education students.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The research objectives of the study is:
To explore the reflective writing skills among prospective teachers.

Research Methodology

Qualitative descriptive research design was used in this study to investigate the reflective writing ability of the prospective teachers. This research design was found to be more suitable for the study since it would allow the researcher to analyze the participants' reflection and understand the depth of reflective thinking of the participants. The study aimed at analyzing participants' reflection instead of testing any hypothesis. In addition, it assisted the researchers to comprehend the level of reflection of the participants.

Participants and Sampling technique

The research was conducted at the Institute of Education, University of Sargodha. The participants consisted of 90 prospective teachers enrolled in teacher education programs. A convenient sampling method was used to identify participants that were accessible and willing to take part in the research. The use of this sampling method was considered appropriate given the availability of participants and the exploratory nature of the research. .Detail for sample is shown in table 1.

Level of class	Semester	Number(N)	Male	Female
B.S	4th	48	18	30
B.Ed.	8th	42	12	30
Total		90	30	60

Research Instrument

Based on Gibbs Reflective Cycle an open ended questions were developed to measure level of reflective writing skills among undergraduate students .It consist of six components starting from description, feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, conclusion and an Action plan.**Description** include context (setting of class, purpose

of class, participants of class, components of class (teaching method ,students interaction),Outcome of class. **Feelings** include initial feelings, and reason of their feelings .**Evaluatio**n include positive aspect and reason behind it and dissatisfied aspect and reason of it. **Analysis** include learning in term of three domains of learning Cognitive (knowledge), Affective (feelings, disposition), Psychomotor (skills).**Conclusion** include Impact of class on academic skills and personal skills. **Action plan** include steps taken in future for academic life and personal life on the basis of this class. (Appandix 05).

Instrument validation and pilot study:

In order to ensure validity and feasibility of the tool used, the open-ended questionnaire was initially reviewed by three experts in the field of teaching and education. The experts analyzed the questionnaire in terms of its clarity, relevancy, comprehensiveness, and correspondence to the six elements of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988).According to the suggestions provided, slight changes were made to enhance the questions' wording and structure. The pilot study involved 10 prospective teachers, constituting about 11% of the total number of respondents in the study. These participants were not included in the main study because they were part of the pilot study.

Data Collection: Approval to carry out this study was obtained from the Institute of Education at the University of Sargodha. The participants were informed about the objectives of the study and it was assured that their involvement in the research was purely on voluntary basis. They were also assured that their responses would confidential. They were also assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes .A consent farm was provided to each participant (appendix 1). After receiving their consent the questionnaires along with demographics sheet were distributed among them. The researcher personally collected back the filled questionnaire and the respondents were thanked for their cooperation and support. (appendix 4 and 05).

Data analysis:

The Qualitative data gathered from the participants written reflections were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. To ensure consistency in coding, a researcher-developed coding rubric was prepared by adapting Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) and Moon's Levels of Reflection (2004). The rubric specified operational indicators for each level of reflection across the six components of Gibbs' model. (Appandix 6) .Participants' written responses were coded according to the descriptors in the rubric, and the coded data were subsequently summarized using frequencies and percentages to describe the distribution of reflective writing levels. The findings were presented using tables and graphs to facilitate the visual representation and interpretation of the results. Presenting frequencies and percentages is an accepted practice in qualitative research for identifying patterns while preserving the interpretive nature of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020).

Results

This following section report the outcomes of the study which examined reflective skills level among prospective teachers of institute of Education. This research analyzed the reflective skills of 90prospective teachers. The result presented below shows the reflective skills among prespective teachers enrolled in BS, B.Ed. self-support, B.Ed. regular .

Table 1: Indicates descriptive analysis of prospective teachers of B.S regarding five level of reflection by Moon (1999) and six components of reflection by Gibbs (1988).

Level of reflection											
Gibbs Reflection Components	**Level 01** Noticing		**Level 02** Making sense		**Level 03** Making meaning		**Level 04** Working with meaning		**Level 05** Transformative learning		**Remarks**
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	
Description	39	81.2	09	18.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	The quality of reflective writing is not up to
Feeling	48	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	

Evaluation	45	93.7	03	6.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	the mark .Students don't know the purpose of their learning .They only describe the things which are visible but they lack abstract thinking. They fall in level-1 of reflection
Analysis	48	100	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Conclusion	45	93.7	03	6.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Action plan	46	95.8	02	4.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	

Table 01: Reported the total number of B.S prospective teachers are 48 .And they fall in level 01 (noticing) of reflection in description, feelings and analysis component of Gibbs reflective cycle .Only 09 prospective teachers fall in level 02 of reflection in description component and prospective teachers fall in level 02 of reflection in conclusion and Action plan components.

Graphical Representation of Table 01

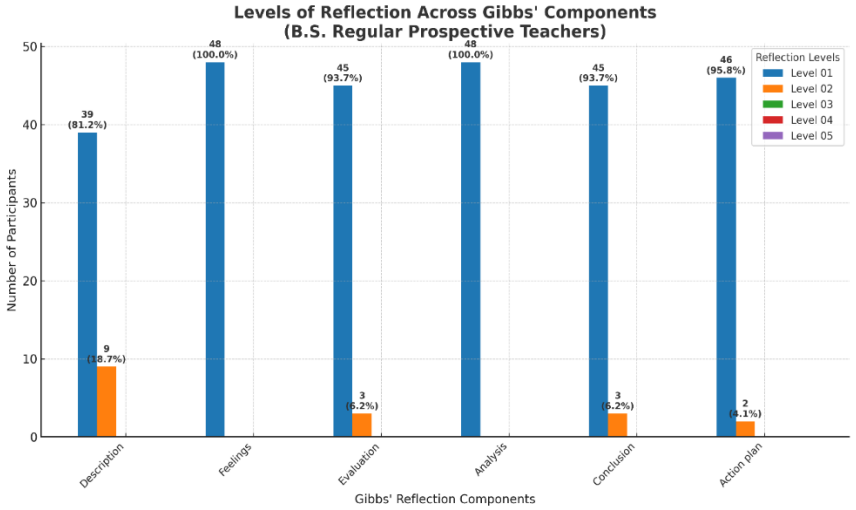


Table 2: Indicates descriptive analysis of 42 prospective teachers of B.Ed. regarding reflection components.

Level of reflection											
Gibbs reflection components	**Level 01** Noticing		**Level 02** Making sense		**Level 03** Making meaning		**Level 04** Working with meaning		**Level 05** Transformative learning		**Remarks**
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	
Description	38	90.4	04	9.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	The quality of reflective writing is not up to the mark .Prospective teachers don't know the purpose of their learning .They only describe the things which are visible but they lack abstract thinking. They fall in level 01 of reflection
Feeling	42	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Evaluation	38	90.4	04	9.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Analysis	42	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Conclusion	37	88.9	05	11.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Action plan	39	92.8	04	9.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	

Description of table 02: Table shows that total number of prospective teachers of B.Ed. honors 42 .And they fall in level 01 (noticing) of reflection in description, feelings and analysis component of Gibbs reflective cycle .Only few prospective teachers fall in level 02 of reflection in description component and 2 to 5 prospective teachers fall in level 02 of reflection in Evaluation, conclusion and action plan.

Graphical Representation of table 02

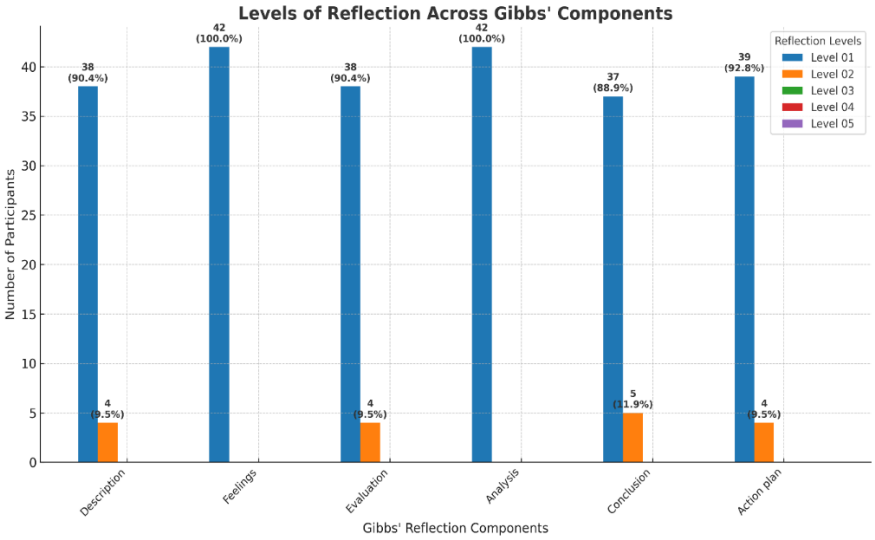
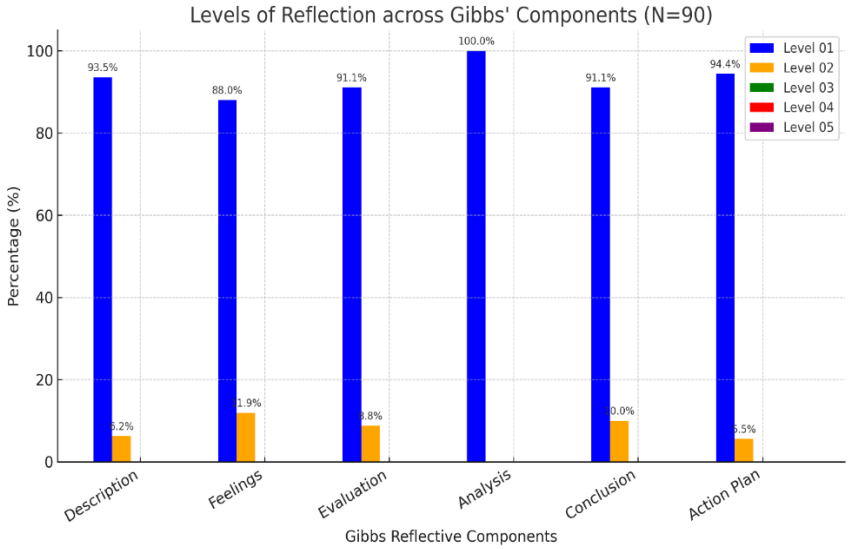


Table 03: Indicates descriptive analysis of 90 prospective teachers regarding reflection components.

Level of classes	**Level of reflection**				
Total No:90	**Level 01**	**Level 02**	**Level 03**	**Level 04**	**Level 05**
Description	**77(85.5)**	**13(6.25)**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Feelings	**90(100)**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Evaluation	**83(91.1)**	**8(8.8)**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Analysis	**90(100)**	**0(0.00)**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Conclusion	**82(91..1)**	**9(10.0)**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Action Plan	**85(94.4)**	**5(5.55)**	**0**	**0**	**0**

Description of Table 03: Table indicated that levels of Reflection across Gibbs' Reflective Components (N=90).This shows the distribution of students' reflection levels for each stage of Gibbs' reflective cycle (Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis,

Conclusion, and Action Plan). The results indicate that the majority of students remained at Level 01 (Description) across all components, with percentages ranging between 88% and 100%. A smaller proportion of students reached Level 02 (Making sense), with values between 5% and 9%. No students achieved higher reflection levels (Levels 03–05). This suggests that students' reflective writing is largely descriptive, with limited evidence of deeper critical thinking or transformative learning.



Findings

- The Majority of prospective teachers demonstrated level 01 (noticing) of reflection across all the six components of Gibbs Reflective cycle indicating that their reflective writing was predominantly descriptive rather than analytical or critical.
- The study findings indicated a limited reflective depth in the description component reflective writing. . Most prospective teachers described classroom activities and learning experiences; however, only a few explained the purpose, significance, or meaning of their learning which indicated lack of reflection on their underlying goals.
- Prospective teachers found it easier to express their initial feelings but showed limited ability to explain how these

emotions influenced their learning, thinking or future professional practice.

- In **Evaluation** component the prospective teachers identified positive and negative aspects of their learning experiences: however most responses lacked clear justification or critical reasoning to support their judgment.
- In **Analysis** component the prospective teachers showed lowest level of reflection. Most of them focused on what they have learned rather than analyzing why learning occurred, how their knowledge and skills developed or how the experience influenced their attitudes and professional growth.
- In the **Conclusion** component, most prospective teachers identified the knowledge or skills they had gained from the learning experience. However, only a small number demonstrated an ability to synthesize their learning or relate it to broader educational or real-life contexts.
- In the **Action Plan** component, most participants proposed simple strategies for applying their learning in future academic tasks. However, relatively few developed detailed or forward-looking action plans that reflected continuous professional or personal development.
- No participants reached the advanced stages of reflection, which include **Level 3 (Making Meaning), Level 4 (Working with Meaning), or Level 5 (Transformative Learning)** in any component of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, indicating an absence of higher-order reflective thinking.
- A comparative analysis of the teacher education programs indicated that prospective teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. Regular program demonstrated relatively stronger reflective writing skills than those enrolled in the other programs, although the majority of participants across all groups remained at **Level 1 (Noticing)**.
- Overall, the findings suggest that prospective teachers require structured instruction, guided reflective writing activities, and constructive feedback to progress from descriptive reflection towards deeper analytical, critical, and transformative reflection.

Discussions:

This study was executed to examine the level of reflective writing among prospective teachers. This study provides useful insights into prospective teacher's reflective writing. Most of prospective teachers remained at Level 01 (Description), and a smaller number reached Level 02 (Making sense). None of the students moved on to the higher levels of reflection: Level 03 (Making meaning), Level 04 (Working with meaning), or Level 05 (Transformative learning). This means that while prospective teachers could describe what happened and share their feelings, they found it difficult to analyze their experiences in detail or to learn lessons that could change their future actions. Looking at Gibbs' reflective cycle, the Analysis stage was the weakest. All students only described events without going deeper. The Evaluation and Conclusion stages were also mostly descriptive. Only in the Feelings stage did a few more students move to Level 02, this suggests that prospective teachers were more comfortable in expressing emotions than critical thinking about what those experiences meant. The findings of this study are similar to those reported in other research. Naber and Wyatt (2014) in their study with nursing students found that often remained at descriptive levels of reflection, which matches the results here. Gouthro and Holloway (2017) also showed that learners improved only when they were given structured prompts and support. Other studies confirm this pattern. For example, O'Loughlin and Griffith (2020) reported that many students write descriptively because they are not confident in linking experiences to theory or future practice. Hughes et al. (2019) also explained that students often lack the tools to move beyond description and need guided frameworks. Sweet et al. (2019) further noted that reflection improves when it is repeated and supported by teacher feedback. In addition, Taczak and Robertson (2017) highlighted that reflective writing requires students to be aware of their own thinking, which does not come naturally without practice. Gibson et al. (2016) found that reflection is often shallow unless students are taught step by step how to analyze their experiences. Similarly, Septina et al. (2018) observed that structured reflection tasks helped students develop deeper insights compared to unstructured ones. Previous studies aligns with these results, by indiciting that reflective writing is a skill that must be taught and developed. In the absence of inadequate guidance, students tends to remain at descriptive level, rather than critical thinking and analysis.

Conclusion and implications

The main aim of this study was to explore the reflective writing skills of prospective teachers. The results of this study suggest that while students can describe and share their experiences, they often struggle to reach higher levels of reflection such as analysis, evaluation, and action planning .Therefore it is essential to provide treatment, instruction and feedback to support prospective teacher's development of reflective writing skills. This has important implications for teaching and learning. Teachers need to provide clear instruction on reflective writing, supported by guiding questions and structured activities that encourage deeper thinking. Regular practice and constructive feedback are necessary to help students move beyond description. Peer discussions can also provide new perspectives that support critical reflection. At the institutional level, teacher training and curriculum design should place more emphasis on reflective practice to strengthen students' ability to think critically and learn from their experiences.

Recommendations:

Below are some of the key recommendations drawn from this study.

- Teachers should actively foster reflective writing skills by applying strategies vely by using some strategies such as journal writing, or reflective prompts to help them engage in regular reflection.
- Encourage prospective teachers to reflect on skills they developed and dispositions or attitude they formed during the learning experiences.
- Training should be provided to students to apply knowledge in daily life .(Theory to practice)
- There should be continuity in course of teaching training program and constrictive feedback should be provided to students.
- It is recommended that future researcher may explore reflective writing skills of students in any others programs.

Contribution to the Field: This study contribute a novel understanding of how journal writing interventions can enhance reflective skills of prospective teachers filling a gap in literature.

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