

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF VIETNAMESE EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE TEACHING

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Abstract. Although teacher reflection has been hailed as a crucial component that improves teaching and learning processes, the topic of factors affecting teachers' reflective practices is yet to be thoroughly investigated in Vietnam. This qualitative study explores on-action reflective teaching among Vietnamese teachers, a critical aspect of professional teaching practices that remains understudied in the Vietnamese context. Grounded in the model of reflective practice and ecological systems theory, the study investigates the factors influencing reflective teaching practices of Vietnamese English as foreign language (EFL) teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL teachers working at different schooling levels. The findings reveal that reflective teaching practices are affected by numerous factors at multiple levels, including teachers' beliefs and attitudes, cultural norms and societal expectations, institutional support, and student feedback.

Keywords: On-action reflection, reflective teaching, influential factors, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In an era marked by an increasing emphasis on quality education, teacher reflection has been hailed as a crucial component that improves teaching and learning processes (Namaziandost et al., 2023; Schön, 1983). However, the concept of reflective teaching is yet to be thoroughly investigated in specific socio-cultural contexts, such as Vietnam. This is particularly critical because of the profound influences that cultural, social, and educational norms may have on teaching methods and reflective practices (Caruana, 2014; Richardson, 2004). This research, therefore, sets out to examine on-action reflective teaching in Vietnam - a timely and relevant inquiry given the rapid changes in the educational landscape in the country.

On-action reflection refers to the thoughtful consideration of one's own teaching after it occurs, and it represents a significant part of the reflective teaching continuum (Schön, 1983). This reflective practice enables teachers to critically analyze their teaching styles, strategies, and overall efficacy, thus contributing to the improvement of educational quality (Cattaneo & Motta, 2021). In Vietnam, where reforms in education have been continuously taking place to meet the demands of a modernizing society (Thao & Mai, 2020), understanding the factors influencing Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher's practices could offer valuable insights into enhancing teaching effectiveness.

This study aims to offer an in-depth qualitative exploration of on-action reflective teaching practices in Vietnam. Specifically, it seeks to understand what influences their reflective practices

in Vietnamese classrooms. The research question guiding this study is: “*What factors influence the reflective teaching practices of Vietnamese EFL teachers?*”.

2. Content

2.1. On-Action Reflective Teaching

On-action reflective teaching, often referred to as reflection-on-action, is a concept initially proposed by Schön (1983). It involves thoughtful consideration about teaching actions after they have occurred, with the aim of improving future practices. Schön (1983) argued that on-action reflection allows teachers to revisit their experiences, challenge their assumptions, and explore different strategies or approaches. Several studies have expanded upon this concept. For instance, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) suggested that on-action reflection enables teachers to connect theory with practice, thereby promoting professional growth. Meanwhile, Zeichner and Liston (2014) argued that reflective teaching involves a critical examination of the social and political context of education, not just the individual teacher’s practices.

2.2. Influences on Reflective Teaching Practices

Several factors have been found to influence reflective teaching practices. Generally, these factors can be categorized into individual, interpersonal, and institutional influences (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Individual influences include a teacher’s beliefs, experiences, and knowledge (Larrivee, 2000). Research suggests that teachers with strong pedagogical knowledge are more likely to engage in reflective practices (Chen & Chen, 2022). Additionally, a teacher’s prior experiences in education can shape how they reflect on their practices (Caine et al., 2013). Interpersonal influences primarily involve interactions with colleagues and students. Collaboration with peers has been shown to foster reflective practices by providing alternative perspectives and feedback (Loughran, 2002). Moreover, interactions with students can spur reflection, particularly when teachers encounter challenging situations (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Institutional influences refer to the broader school environment and educational system. Elements such as school culture, leadership, and policy can affect the extent and depth of teacher reflection (Seashore Louis & Lee, 2016). For instance, supportive leadership and a culture that values continuous learning can promote reflective teaching.

2.3. Methods

2.3.1. Research Design

This qualitative study used a grounded-based approach to explore on-action reflective teaching practices in Vietnam, guided by Schön’s model of reflective practice (1983) and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979). Schön’s model, distinguishing between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, informed the examination of post-event teacher reflections. Bronfenbrenner’s theory, offering a multi-tiered framework, helped assess influential factors in reflective practices, considering interactions between individuals and their environments at micro, meso, exo, and macro levels. The study looked at influences from classroom dynamics to cultural values and education policies.

2.3.2. Participants

The study involved a total of 15 participants, who were purposively sampled to ensure a diverse representation of teachers across different regions of Vietnam. These teachers represented a range of educational levels, including lower and higher secondary high school teachers and tertiary lecturers. They had diverse years of teaching experience of EFL teaching. To ensure ethical considerations, all participants were informed about the objectives, the methods of the study, and potential risks and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before their involvement in the study. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study

at any time without any repercussions. All participants' identities were anonymized to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Table 1 presents each participant (Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity) in detail.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Educational level
Tran	Female	5	Higher Education
Nguyen	Male	10	Higher Education
Pham	Female	15	Higher Education
Hoang	Female	7	Lower Secondary
Le	Male	20	Lower Secondary
Vu	Female	12	Lower Secondary
Dang	Male	15	Higher Secondary
Do	Female	5	Higher Secondary
Phan	Male	25	Higher Secondary
Bui	Female	3	Higher Education
Truong	Male	8	Lower Secondary
Duong	Female	10	Higher Secondary
Lam	Male	20	Higher Education
Ly	Female	15	Lower Secondary
Vo	Male	30	Higher Secondary

It should be noted that by engaging a diverse group of participants, the study sought to understand the richness and complexity of on-action reflective teaching practices in Vietnam from various perspectives and contexts.

2.3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The study utilized semi-structured interviews, blending predetermined questions with flexibility for further probes based on participant responses. The format was chosen for in-depth exploration of experiences while maintaining consistency. The interview guide, piloted with three teachers, was refined based on feedback. All interviews, conducted in Vietnamese by the trained primary researcher, followed the guide but allowed for follow-up questions. After securing participant consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. To ensure accuracy, the transcripts were reviewed while listening to the audio and were then professionally translated into English, respecting cultural and contextual nuances.

2.3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed Braun et al.'s (2023) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. This method was chosen for its ability to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data, providing a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data. The researchers first immersed themselves in the data, reading transcripts multiple times to grasp the participants' experiences. They then coded the data, highlighting features that could form repeated themes, considering both explicit meanings and underlying ideas. The codes were sorted into potential themes and sub-themes, which were reviewed against the entire data set for coherence and accuracy. After refining these themes and capturing their 'essence', each was given a concise name. Finally, the themes were woven into an analytical narrative, contextualized within the

existing literature, and related back to the original research questions. The data analysis process was iterative, moving back and forth between the different stages as needed. The use of thematic analysis enabled a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data, enhancing the understanding of factors affecting on-action reflective teaching practices in the Vietnamese context.

2.4. Findings

2.4.1. Influence of Peer and Supervisor Feedback

A majority of participants (n=11 out of 15) indicated that feedback from peers and supervisors significantly influenced their reflective practices. They noted that such feedback offered new perspectives, challenged their assumptions, and helped them identify areas of improvement. Mr. Nguyen shared: “The feedback I get from my colleagues is a crucial part of my reflection. They might notice things that I did not, which can lead me to reconsider my strategies”. Ms. Ly echoed this sentiment: “The observations and suggestions from my supervisor influence my reflections. His insights often highlight aspects I need to work on”. In light of the responses from participants, it is evident that feedback from peers and supervisors plays a pivotal role in shaping and enhancing their reflective practices.

2.4.2. Influence of Cultural and Societal Expectations

Almost all participants (n=14 out of 15) highlighted the influence of cultural and societal expectations on their reflective practices. They expressed that the cultural emphasis on respect for authority and conformity sometimes hindered critical reflection and innovative practice. Ms. Pham stated: “In our culture, challenging authority or established ways is often seen as disrespectful. This makes it hard for me to question my own or others’ teaching practices”. Similarly, Ms. Tran shared: “Society expects us to produce high exam results. This pressure often leads me to stick to traditional methods rather than trying innovative approaches that I reflect upon”. Given the responses from the vast majority of participants, it is acceptable to say that cultural and societal expectations have a profound impact on their reflective practices, often limiting their capacity for critical reflection and innovative teaching methodologies.

2.4.3. Influence of Time Constraints and Demanding Workloads

More than half of the participants (n=8 out of 15) expressed that time constraints significantly influenced their reflective practices. They mentioned that heavy workloads and administrative tasks often left them with limited time for deep reflection. Mr. Truong said: “With the heavy teaching load and administrative tasks, I often find it hard to make time for in-depth reflection”. Considering the feedback from over half of the participants, it becomes apparent that time constraints and demanding workloads pose a significant barrier to deep and meaningful reflective practices.

2.4.4. Influence of Personal Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

Nearly all participants (n=14 out of 15) pointed out that their personal beliefs about teaching and learning greatly influenced their reflective teaching practices. They mentioned that their underlying beliefs guided their evaluation of teaching effectiveness and the subsequent adaptations in their approaches. Mr. Lam explained: “I believe in active learning. So, when I reflect, I focus on whether my students were actively engaged and if my methods promoted active participation”. Mr. Nguyen expressed a similar idea: “I believe that every child can learn, just not on the same day, or in the same way. My reflections often revolve around how I can accommodate the diverse needs of my students”. Given the insights from nearly all participants, it is clear that individual beliefs about teaching and learning are foundational to their reflective teaching practices, guiding their evaluations and adaptations in the classroom.

2.4.5. Influence of Prior Experiences

The findings show that many participants (n=10 out of 15) highlighted the role of their prior experiences – as students, as teachers, and even experiences outside of teaching – in influencing

their reflective practices. They indicated that these experiences provided a frame of reference for evaluating their current teaching practices and identifying areas for improvement. Ms. Hoang shared: "My experiences as a student help me empathize with my students. When I reflect, I often put myself in my students' shoes, thinking about how they might have perceived the lesson". In the same vein, Mr. Le said: "My past successes and failures as a teacher inform my reflections. They provide me lessons about what works and what does not". From the feedback of many participants, it is seen that prior experiences, whether as students, teachers, or outside the teaching realm, play a significant role in shaping and informing their reflective teaching practices.

2.4.6. Influence of Institutional Support

More than half of the participants (n= 8 out of 15) mentioned that institutional support, or the lack thereof, significantly influenced their reflective teaching practices. This support included the provision of resources, opportunities for professional development, and a supportive culture that values and encourages reflection. Ms. Duong noted: "My school provides regular workshops on reflective teaching. It is an important part of our professional development. I feel encouraged and supported to reflect and improve". In contrast, Mr. Vo shared: "In my school, there is little emphasis on reflection. There is no encouragement or resources to support us. It makes reflective teaching challenging". It is clear that the presence or absence of institutional support, encompassing resources, professional development, and fostering culture, plays a crucial role in influencing and facilitating reflective teaching practices.

2.4.7. Influence of Student Feedback

A significant number of participants (n= 9 out of 15) indicated that student feedback played a crucial role in their reflective practices. They used this feedback to gauge their teaching effectiveness, adjust their methods, and cater to the diverse needs of students. Ms. Bui explained: "Students' responses, both verbal and non-verbal, are important for my reflection. Their understanding, engagement, and interest levels guide me to adapt my teaching". Mr. Vo said: "I regularly ask for my students' feedback. Their perspectives help me see things I might have overlooked and rethink my methods". From the insights provided by a significant number of participants, it can be seen that student feedback is a pivotal component in shaping their reflective teaching practices, aiding them in assessing and refining their instructional methods.

2.5. Discussion

2.5.1. Influence of Peer and Supervisor Feedback

This finding aligns with prior research highlighting the significance of peer and supervisor feedback in facilitating reflective teaching (Athanasos & Martin, 2006). Schön's model of reflective practice (1983) suggests that feedback can help challenge and reshape a teacher's knowledge-in-action, thereby enhancing their reflective practice. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) situates this feedback within the microsystem of the teacher's immediate environment, emphasizing how interactions within this environment can shape their reflective practices.

2.5.2. Influence of Cultural and Societal Expectations

The expectations corroborate previous studies indicating the role of societal and cultural factors in shaping reflective teaching practices (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). In the light of Schön's model (1983), such societal and cultural expectations can influence the repertoire of a teacher's knowledge-in-action, potentially limiting their ability to critically reflect and experiment with new practices. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), specifically the macrosystem, illuminates how overarching cultural ideologies and societal structures can indirectly influence a teacher's reflective practice.

2.5.3. Influence of Time Constraints and Demanding Workloads

This influence of time constraints found in this current study echoes previous research which suggests that time constraints can pose a significant barrier to reflective teaching (Mathew, 2012).

Applying Schön's model (1983), time constraints can limit the opportunities for on-action reflection, which requires dedicated time for introspection and consideration. In terms of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), these time constraints can be seen as part of the mesosystem, where the demands from different roles and settings (e.g., teaching, administrative tasks) interact to influence a teacher's reflective practices.

2.5.4. Influence of Personal Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

The influence of teachers' personal beliefs on their reflective practices aligns with previous research, which emphasizes that reflection is not a neutral process but is shaped by one's underlying beliefs and values (Monabbati & Faravani, 2020). In terms of Schön's model of reflective practice (1983), these personal beliefs can be seen as forming the basis of a teacher's knowledge-in-action, guiding their interpretations and responses in the teaching process. In the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), these personal beliefs represent the individual's characteristics that interact with their environmental systems to shape their development, in this case, their reflective practices.

2.5.5. Influence of Prior Experiences

The impacts of prior experiences on teachers' reflective teaching are consistent with existing literature that recognizes the influence of prior experiences in shaping reflective practices (Loughran, 2002). Schön's model (1983) also acknowledges the influence of past experiences, as they contribute to a teacher's knowledge-in-action. Reflecting on these experiences helps teachers in reframing problems and devising innovative solutions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) would view these experiences as part of the chronosystem, which involves the influence of past experiences and life transitions on a person's development, in this case, their reflective practices.

2.5.6. Influence of Institutional Support

This finding resonates with previous research underscoring the role of institutional support in enabling or inhibiting reflective teaching (Harrison & Lee, 2011). Under the lens of Schön's reflective practice model (1983), institutional support can help create a conducive environment for reflection, enabling teachers to enhance their knowledge-in-action through on-action reflection. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) situates this within the exosystem, illustrating how the school's policies and culture, as an indirect environmental factor, can influence teachers' reflective practices.

2.5.7. Influence of Student Feedback

This idea is supported by prior research which argues that student feedback can provide valuable insights into teachers' reflective practices (Fatemipour & Hosseingholikhani, 2014). In Schön's model of reflective practice (1983), student feedback can help teachers refine their knowledge-in-action, informing their in-the-moment and retrospective reflections on teaching. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), student feedback constitutes part of the teacher's microsystem, directly interacting with and influencing their reflective practices.

3. Conclusion

This study, in the context of Vietnam's ongoing educational reform, focused on the under-researched area of on-action reflective teaching among Vietnamese EFL teachers. It shed light on the multi-layered factors influencing reflective teaching, including teachers' beliefs, cultural norms, societal expectations, institutional support, and student feedback. These findings underscore the complex interplay of factors affecting teaching practices, implying the need for a comprehensive approach to professional development that addresses these elements. This could involve cultivating a supportive institutional environment, respecting cultural and societal

nuances, and integrating student feedback in teaching strategies to enhance the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study offers valuable insights into on-action reflective teaching in Vietnam but has limitations, including a small sample size limited to urban settings and a sole reliance on semi-structured interviews. For future research, it is recommended to use larger and more diverse samples, encompassing various teaching experiences, ages, and educational levels. Different data collection techniques like classroom observations and reflective journals could provide a broader perspective on reflective teaching. Longitudinal studies could explore the lasting impacts of this teaching style, and a mixed-methods approach might offer a deeper, multifaceted understanding of the subject.

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