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**TEACHERS’ VIEWS ON REFLECTIVE TEACHING**

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*Abstract*

In the current context of reforming higher school education in Russia, the reflective teaching methodology is an essential factor for innovations. To understand how teachers can evaluate their teaching practice and engage their students in reflective activities, it is very important to analyse the benefits and limitations of integrating reflective teaching methodologies into their own teaching processes. The purpose of the study is to obtain teachers’ views on the reflective teaching that are essential in evaluating their experiences. The study explores relationships between teaching approach and student learning. Therefore, the importance of social constructivism as a way of knowing, current theories, and different models of reflection commonly used in practice will be discussed. We hypothesised that reflective methodology help improve knowledge of oneself, personal and professional skills as well as actual practice. To verify this hypothesis, a self-reported reflective teaching questionnaire was designed, and the teachers were surveyed in four Russian universities. The results revealed that while this reflective methodology is not still common in the context of Russian higher education, self-reflection and critical analysing of teaching processes contributes to their professional development and optimizing the teaching practice.

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**Keywords:** Reflective teaching, social constructivism, self-reflection, university.



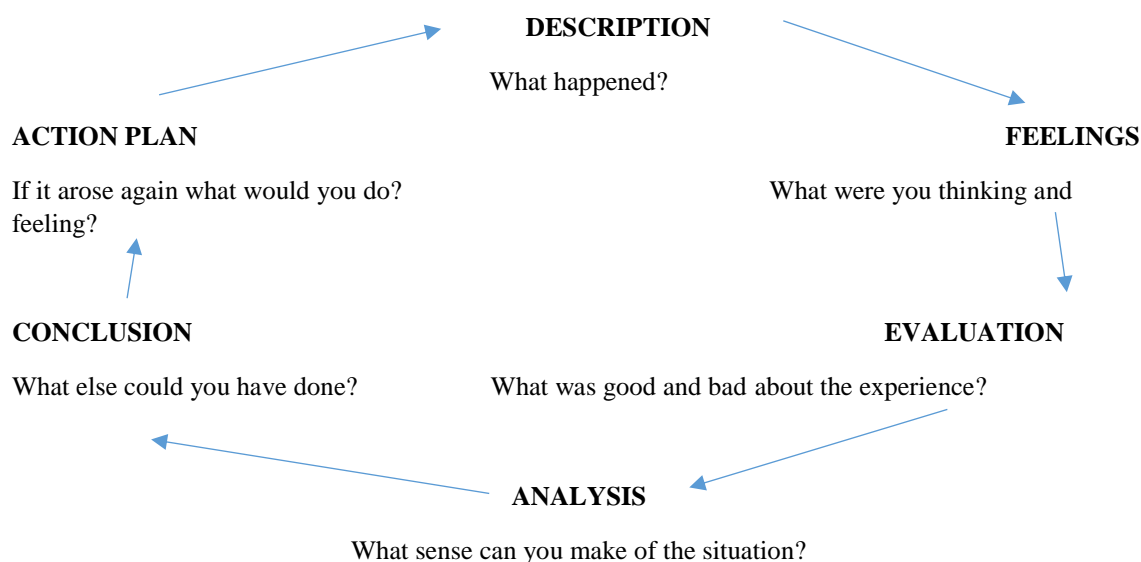
## 1. Introduction

In Russia, the new articulated national curriculum requires higher school teachers to engage their students in reflective education-focused activities. This teaching approach contrasts significantly with the traditional practice. If earlier the student had a passive position, now he is an active participant in the educational process.

Over the last few decades the issue of reflective teaching has attracted researchers' attention. To date, there are three scientific areas of reflection study: the psychology of reflection, the methodology of reflection of intellectual systems and pedagogical approach to reflection that aims to the development of reflexive abilities, knowledge of techniques of reflection, the formation of multidimensional consciousness (Sizikova, Voloshina & Poveshchenko, 2016). While there are studies about reflective learners' strategies and teachers' reflective activities in engineering, mathematics and technology education, only a small amount of educational research has analysed Russian university teachers' experiences which provides deeper insight into understanding the reflective teacher and the reflective practices from teachers' perspectives. Therefore, this study examines how teachers' analysis of reflective teaching may change their understanding of professional identity and teaching practice in Russian higher school context.

It should be noted that the problem of reflection in thinking, consciousness and activity is quite well studied theoretically by Russian and foreign scientists. Among researchers of cross-cutting issues it is widely believed that reflection is a significant human activity in which people recall their experiences, think about it and evaluate it.

The most commonly model of reflection is Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) (Figure 1). It shows that theory and practice enrich each other in a never-ending circle, and contains also the basic questions for teachers' reflection.



**Figure 01.** Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

The pedagogical basis of reflective teaching is constructive approach which considers the teaching process as bi-directional, with reflexive interaction between the teacher and the student. In addition, discourse analysis allows to draw out benefits and challenges of incorporating the reflective teaching into educational processes. According to researchers, using discourse analysis of teachers' and students' performances in the classroom may also reveal implications for pedagogy and social organization of the learning environment (Razfaret. al., 2015). The practice of reflection as a methodical approach allows to put university teachers into the experiences and explore personal and theoretical knowledge as well as understand how they can teach more successfully. According to Black, reflective practice is "the strategy of self-evaluation and make judgements about knowledge, skills, competence and confidence as a teacher" (2015, p. 72).

## **2. Problem Statement**

In actual teaching practice elements of reflexive teaching are found today more and more often. However, it is not clarified methodically. Since Russian teachers do not understand the importance of reflective practice and its effects on professional development and students' learning, they do not use reflective teaching. As Larrivee notes, "unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity" (Larrivee, 2000, p.293). Although teachers know what they are doing in the classroom, they cannot clearly reflect their actual pedagogical experience, especially describe reflective teaching. Regarding the importance of teachers' reflection about teaching practice for their professional development as well as students' learning process, it is imperative to identify possible factors that promote or hinder reflective practice. Moreover, there is a need for determine the relationship between Russian university teachers' self-knowledge and their experiences.

## **3. Research Questions**

For studying of teachers' views on reflective the following research questions are put:

RQ1. How do teachers' beliefs about reflective teaching influence their own teaching processes?

RQ2. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' self-knowledge and their experience?

RQ3. Are there any significant benefits and difficulties in integrating reflective teaching methodologies and educational processes?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

This study focuses on analysing the university teachers' views on reflective teaching practice by identifying the benefits and limitations of using and incorporating reflective teaching methodologies into the educational discourses. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it includes evaluating of the teachers' applied experiences. Therefore, this paper aims at understanding of teachers' beliefs about teaching experiences and the reflective teacher; collecting evidence of the results of becoming the reflective

teacher and main difficulties; examining relationship between teachers' self-knowledge and their experience.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Participants

The sample was made up of 81 teacher sat four Russian universities in South Ural. The respondents were 54 females and 27 males with the age range of 24 to 67 years old. The participants teach on Master's Degrees in three disciplinary areas: Arts and Humanities – courses in Foreign Languages (36 % of the sample), Social and Human Sciences – courses in Education, Psychology and Communication (64%). All respondents had a teaching experience in higher schools.

### 5.2. Instruments and Procedures

We surveyed university teachers anonymously through self-reported reflective questionnaire, including 29 closed- and open-ended items. The questionnaire is designed to obtain teacher's assessment of various aspects of teaching processes. We administered Teacher knowledge of oneself Scale and Reflective measurement teaching Scale (Marzano, 2012). The answers were on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. To get more information regarding reflective teaching, an open-ended questionnaire survey collects data about teachers' opinions of using and incorporating reflective practice in their teaching. Reliability coefficients for the whole questionnaire have ranged from .87 to .94. Data analyses involved two steps consisted of an exploratory descriptive analysis of the reflective practice questionnaire results and a qualitative analysis of the open questions. SPSS version 19.0 was used to analyse the data.

## 6. Findings

The main findings of this study provide the answers to three research questions. The following data were obtained on the first research question how do teachers' beliefs about reflective teaching influence their own teaching processes. The respondents can be divided into three groups: with high, medium and low levels of reflective practice experience, accordingly 14 %, 21% and 65% of the respondents. The results of this study reveal that when teachers (89%) used reflective teaching methodologies, they came to new understandings of teaching practice and reflective teacher. They identified their own negative attitudes and acknowledged that their teaching contributed to the professional development. As for the teachers' views on reflective teaching, the most valued items refer to helping analyze emotions and reactions to professional situations. 13 % of the teachers responded to this item disagreed.

As for second question: is there any significant relationship between teachers' self-knowledge and their experience, following data were obtained. The results demonstrate that as teachers engaged in reflective analysis, they tended to move from the previous views of teachers' teaching to new understanding of reflective methodology (87% of the respondents). The data indicate that they believed it helped them to improve knowledge about themselves and their own experiences (96%). They observed also that their

decisions affect the students' behavior and their learning process (67%). All teachers also acknowledged that their reflective teaching contributed to their professional development. However, the teachers gave low score to the item indicating that reflective teaching is used to help them on self-regulation. This statement can be explained by a low level of the self-regulation ability of the teachers. Thus, the appropriate training is needed.

We note the following, answering the third research question: are there any significant benefits and challenges in integrating reflective teaching methodologies and educational process. Teachers found some benefits as well as some difficulties. Among the benefits encountered by teachers (87%) was the fact that controlled reflection can be an important tool to better understanding not only the professional development, but also their relationships with students, as well as relation between teaching and learning processes. The teachers (91%) point out that reflecting about teaching has provided perception into control (33%), understand motivation, planning of teaching and its results (45%), organize time and material (43%), as well as their own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher (67%). Teachers' benefits (89%) include the fact that reflecting allows to improve and extend pedagogical knowledge and eventually the quality of teaching.

However, more than half of the teachers (79%) encountered a number of challenges such as involving colleagues and educators in giving feedback. In practice, it is common that experts pay more attention to negative aspects of teaching than using of positive ones. As teachers emphasized, it was extremely difficult to challenge the opinions of experts about their negative comments. However, uncontrolled reflection may not generate understanding of reflective practice or theory for reflection. The most of teachers (88%) noted the difficulty of reflection due to lack of time and ability to reflect and to teach reflectively. Quite often the teachers (47%) pointed out that they are not enough motivated to find time for reflection. Common difficulties with using reflective evaluating the knowledge of students are associated with the individual characteristics of the teachers such as emotions that leads to a subjective form of evaluation. The difficulties are also related to the fact that this reflective practice assumes a new teaching process they are not accustomed to. This indicates that the practice is not widespread in higher Russian education.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, the results of the study confirm the research hypothesis. Firstly, this study demonstrates that when teachers develop reflective teaching, they come to new understandings of reflective teacher and reflecting practice. Secondly, it is essential that the results suggest that there is a relationship between the teachers' self-knowledge and teaching practice, the set of their personal factors and pedagogical methods of teaching contributes to the development of students' reflection. The revealed dynamic features of teachers' reflection are characterized by heterogeneity in different years of work in higher school. Thirdly, university teachers deemed the experience of the reflective teaching worthwhile but considered it difficult to integrate the reflective methodology into teaching process.

The collected data show the need for further research that would involve large groups of university teachers. The study's limitation is a small sample, but the present findings provide better understanding of

reflective teaching practices and process of becoming reflective teacher. This study yields implications for teacher development and contributes to a continuously growing body of educational researches.

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