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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION IN MICROTEACHING CONTEXT AT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED SCIENCES – RUSTAQ, OMAN

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Abstract. *Being reflective is one of the required skills in the 21st century era; however, the concept has been researched since its inception by John Dewey (1859-1952) whose famous observation stated that “we do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience”. This study aims to find out pre-service teachers' self- reflection patterns in one of the practicum courses at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Rustaq, Oman. It is more specifically contextualized in a microteaching session where the pre-service teachers are required to teach their peers and then self-reflect on their own teaching performances. Pre-service teachers had to teach twice. It is found that the pre-service teachers do not sufficiently self-reflect on their performances; thus, there is not much improvement in their second teaching lesson. It is important, therefore, as teacher educators to enlighten ELT pre-service teachers about self-reflection based on a rigorous model. Benchmarking Gibbs' (1998) comprehensive model of reflective cycle to the existing form of self-reflection, the findings show that they provide more descriptive than critical self-reflection for a number of significant reasons. Thus, the study urges the use of an effective and rigorous model in practicum courses such as Gibbs' model.*

Key words: *Self-reflection, Gibbs's self-reflection model, pre-service English language Teachers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many teacher education programs have attempted to put theories into practice and hence have shifted their emphasis towards reflective approach and towards developing critical reflective teachers. Teachers are considered a basic source for development in each country as they build knowledgeable generations to prepare them for various future fields. Therefore, teachers' preparation programmes have been established in educational institutions to prepare teachers and provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills. Students, teachers to be, move through different stages since they join these programmes. Initially they receive theoretical and practical knowledge about their field such as science, language, or art. As students advance in their study, the programmes focus more on the practical side in which they engage the students in teaching practices,

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starting with in-college teaching, called micro teaching, and moving to training at schools. All of these are intended to ensure the preparedness of pre-service teachers before joining the actual teaching field.

Thus, it is not surprising that the profession of teaching witnessed a myriad of research (Williams & Grudnoff, 2011; Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017; DiGregorio & Liston, 2021) for critical reflection. Any profession encounters obstacles and it is the awareness of such obstacles which demand reflection and evaluation for a better status of any profession, including teaching and therefore education. For instance, Williams and Grudnoff (2011) examined how critical reflection was used by experienced and beginning teachers in New Zealand undergraduate teacher education program. Both groups were formally introduced to Smyth's (1989) four-step process of reflection namely describe (what did I do?); inform (what does this mean?); confront (how did I come to be this way?); and reconstruct (how might I do things differently?). The findings of the study showed that both groups of teachers valued and used the reflection as a tool to analyse the professional practice with a view to refine and improve it. Also, Smyth's (1989) four-step process of reflection was approved to assist both groups to reflect on and refine their practice. Such findings on either the study of reflection in general or self-reflection in particular, corroborate with the findings of Hollingsworth and Clarke (2017), Williams and Grudnoff (2011), as well as the most recent study by DiGregorio and Liston (2021), who specifically focused on the positive impact of self-reflection on personal, academic and professional growth of pre service teachers.

This study argues that the existing status of self-reflection of pre-service English language teacher education program at University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Rustaq College of Education, urges an immediate attention for the purpose of evaluation and refinement of courses which entail self-reflection. Hence, the quality of the program and the graduates, outcomes of the university could improve should the opportunity arise to improve the pre-service teacher program. The current program offers courses where pre-service teachers can have the opportunity to foster their reflection practice. In a microteaching course, pre-service teachers have to deliver a lesson to their peers and then reflect on each lesson orally at the microteaching hall. In addition, the pre-service teacher is also expected to provide a written account of self-reflection. This self-reflection practice could enable pre-service teachers to improve their teaching as instructors encourage the pre-service teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses. This would allow them to find alternative ways to overcome their teaching obstacles and improve their future teaching performances.

This study attempts to initiate efforts to contribute to the research of self-reflection and how to be more effective in the teaching of practicum courses as the existing literature has emphasized (Williams & Grudnoff, 2011; Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017; DiGregorio & Liston (2021). Therefore, this study investigates the practices of critical self-reflection among pre-service English teachers in a microteaching context at UTAS, Rustaq.

The research is reported by firstly situating the study in its theoretical context and reviewing the relevant literature. Following this, the research methods used for both data collection and analysis, namely documents (written self-reflection), focused-group interviews, thematic analysis, are explained. The research findings are outlined and discussed with an emphasis on the critical self-reflection practices in which the research was conducted. The paper concludes by examining how the results of the study can

inform improvements to the current practices among pre-service English Language teachers, a proposal which could ultimately contribute to the development of the ELT program in UTAS-Rustaq in particular and across Oman in general.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience”, said John Dewey. This paper stands firmly on that concept eloquently stated by Dewey. This section elaborates on reflection and self-reflection in particular. It has been reviewed in the teacher programme research for the purpose of refining self-reflection in the investigated context. The best start with reviewing the literature in self-reflection is to begin explicating on how the term of reflection has been contested and reviewed in the literature. Reflection is often considered to be one of the 21st century skills, yet it is dated back to the work of the father of experiential learning John Dewey (1859-1952) who stated that reflection is an “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 conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 118). He believed and so is the argument of this paper that reflection plays a positive role in fostering students' self-reflection and critical thinking as it gives them an opportunity to think and reflect about their learning in order to tackle the obstacles they might face during the process of learning. This reflection process will enable the students to identify their strengths and weakness which is conducive to increase their confidence (Can, 2019). However, it should be admitted that the process of reflection is not easy. According to Bury and Hair (2022), some teachers might struggle in identifying the best way to address their teaching issues.

Schön (1983-1987) further elaborated on the concept of reflection by distinguishing between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former one deals with the on-the spot professional problems as they rise, so the learners can think about reasons for what was going on as it happened. However, the latter one takes place some considerable time after the teaching decisions and event being reflected upon, so the learners who were involved in practicum courses might mull over the events soon after they took place. Reflection-on-action can have three distinctive forms: descriptive, dialogic and critical. According to Hatton and Smith (1995), descriptive reflection depends on analyzing one's performance in the professional role giving a reason for actions taken. Dialogic reflection requires hearing one's own voice in order to explore alternative ways to solve a problem in a professional situation. Critical reflection is thinking about the effects upon others of one's action, taking account of the social, political and/or cultural forces.

This is evident within Mezirow's ideology of “critical reflection” (1998). According to Mezirow's transformative learning theory, critical reflection is the way by which our beliefs and assumptions are worked through, then their validity is assessed in the light of new knowledge we form, mulling over their sources and underlying premises. Mezirow (1998) further claimed that our frames of references can be transformed through: a) subjective reframing, which entails critical self-reflection, and b) objective reframing, which entails critical reflection upon other materials. All of these theoretical underpinnings emphasize the usefulness and effectiveness of reflection in general, and self-reflection in particular. One of the models which stood out to the literature was Gibbs's model of self-reflection. This study argues that such a model could be useful to

the Omani context at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Rustaq, in the learning experience of pre-service teachers. Reviewed below is an account of the model followed with a synthesis of some of the studies which deemed its use as effective in the processes of learning.

Husebø et al. (2015) utilized Gibbs's reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988) in their paper titled "Reflective Practice and its Role in Simulation" (in a structured debriefing with six nursing students in simulation-based education). The researchers used questions from Gibbs's reflective cycle to guide the debriefing and provide structure. The findings proved that Gibbs's reflective cycle was helpful as it conceptualized/embraced the multidimensional aspects of learning: cognitive, social and affective. It also reflects its internal dimension with regard to its aim and intent. That is, it aims to describe the reflection process in education.

Similarly, Wikström (2012) found in the same discipline, nursing education resonates with Husebø et al.'s findings (2015). Although the field or discipline is different from the investigated context (Teacher Education) in this paper, the same model has been implemented which is why it is deemed important to flesh-out how such a model has benefited learners whether in the field of preparing novice teachers or learners in general across disciplines. That cycle of reflection model proved useful to learners to think about their observations of the patient-representation illustration that was given to them at the museum. They concluded their reports were more critical and reflective insights guided by Gibbs's model. Having awareness of the knowledge of practice is vital, something that our study endeavors to fulfill by equipping our pre-service teachers with the necessary knowledge to guide their self-reflection which would ultimately guide their future teaching practices through UTAS offered ELT courses which have a component of microteaching or practicum. However, Wikström (2012) did not question the importance of the model as its usefulness was apparently taken for granted, as much as it questioned the effectiveness of using visual arts at the museum applying the respective model in their reflection of the object at the art museum.

Similar to Husebø et al. (2015), Gibbs's reflective cycle was also used by Sekarwinahyu et al. (2019) in the design of problem based learning (PBL) in an online tutorial biology program to promote reflective thinking. The findings of the study showed the effectiveness of Gibbs's reflective cycle. The same authors (2019) used Gibbs's reflective cycle to find out the problem-based learning skills and reflection skills of biology students. The results showed that the scores of PBL skills are less than reflection skills.

Similarly, the study, "A reflective cycle: Understanding challenging situations in a school setting" conducted by Markkanen et al. (2020), affirmed that Gibbs's reflective cycle a "helpful model and basis for structuring the content of the reflections" (p.14). The study was conducted on teaching staff that need support to encounter students' mental health during daily school life. Thus, Gibbs's reflective cycle framework guides them to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and actions, related to the challenging situations with students and how to meet their students' individual needs constantly. Moreover, the framework helps in turning challenging situations into valuable learning experiences.

In the EFL context, Gibbs's reflective cycle was implemented in the study "Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle in Making Reflections of Literary Analysis" to make reflections of literary analysis based on students' reflection artifacts (Adeani et al., 2020). Similar to the findings of the previous studies, Gibbs's reflective cycle was found to be an effective framework to guide students in writing reflection on literacy works. Students were able to

reflect deeply on a short story written by Amy Tan exploring the description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan in each paragraph of the reflection in comparison with students who did not use Gibbs's reflective cycle. Resonant to this study, Ahmed (2019) emphasized in his paper, that the model has contributed positively to students' journaling in EFL Brighton University context in Qatar. The learners' reports were guided by Gibbs's reflective cycle to provide description, feelings, evaluation, conclusion and action in their reports.

Hussein (2018) examined "the effects of reflective journals on students' growth mindset" showcasing a tertiary level of EFL students in the United Arab Emirates. She emphasized the importance of reflection on learning. However, she noticed limited research was conducted on the way EFL students in the United Arab Emirates reflect on their academic learning and their awareness of growth mindset (The ability to change and improve practices). She studied the importance of reflection through journal writing. The study aimed to examine the effect of reflective journals on students' learning, the way reflective journals enhance students' growth mindset, and students' views of journal writing. Fifteen female students who were studying an introduction to nutrition elective course were asked to write reflective journals about their eating habits in relation to the course content. A focus-group interview was carried out next to examine students' perception of journal writing and the impact of journal writing on developing students' understanding of the course content and students' growth mindset. The results revealed that reflective journals were significant. They enhanced students' learning of course concepts and promoted students' growth mindset.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Microteaching was defined by Gower et al. (1995) as "a time when trainees [pre-service teachers] teach only part of a lesson, either in terms of time or content" (p.190). Allen and Clark (1967) consider it as a situation where teaching takes place with reduced time and number of students. Mergler and Tangen (2010) see microteaching as an activity in which preservice teachers combine both theory and practice to deliver a planned lesson to peers. It is a critical practice in teachers' preparation programmes. Zakaria et al. (2010) perceive it as a very important stage to prepare student teachers before becoming in-service teachers. It is essential to the development and growth of pre-service teachers. Many researchers consider microteaching as an effective instructional tool that combines both theory and practice (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Wahba, 1999; Ghanaguru et al., 2013). It provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to implement theoretical knowledge they have learned through the course. According to Al Sohbani (2012) practicum is pivotal to the development of pre-service teachers because it is their first hands-on experience with teaching (p. 196). Microteaching helps pre-service teachers to become effective teachers as they are exposed to teaching experiences where they apply teaching strategies they have learned (Mergler & Tangen, 2010). It also develops students' English proficiency and English teaching skills (Savas, 2012). Ogeyik (2009) found that microteaching enhances pre-service teachers' academic study and teaching experience.

In the microteaching context, self-reflection has been considered as an alternative tool to develop students' performances compared to the traditional model whereby the teacher has been the only evaluator (Majzub 2012). According to Ismail (2011) reflective practices provide valuable opportunities for pre-service teachers to look back at their taught lessons

and make thoughtful decisions for improvement. Self-reflection provokes pre-service teachers through awareness of the areas for improvement in order to support their teaching practices (Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017). The myriad of research on self-reflection highlights the positive impact of it on academic growth (DiGregorio & Liston, 2021).

Many researchers point out that self-reflection is significant in language learning (Mergler & Tangen, 2010; Majzub, 2012; Al Humaidi & Abu Rahmah, 2015; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2017; Bunys, 2019). Xhaferi and Xhaferi, for example, found out that all participants consider reflection an important tool that promotes learning. Various studies have looked at the impact of self-reflection on pre-service teachers' performance. Al Humaidi and Abu Rahmah (2015) examined the effectiveness of a five-component model in two groups of participants. Self-reflection was one the basic components of the model. They found that students who used the model performed better in their microteaching course. However, the study did not examine the effectiveness of self-reflection deeply and separately.

As the above body of literature reviewed self-reflection and its pivotal role in influencing the teaching performance among teachers, the debate over the means of self-reflection is lurking. There is an emphasis not only on highlighting what self-reflection is, but also how self-reflection should be effective through different modes of both observation and documentation. Mode of self-reflection such as the use of video-based-self-reflection can enhance teaching practices according to Yatun's (2017) research. There is a growing attention to investigating the role of teachers in scaffolding their own teaching through self-reflection means of self-assessment. One effective way to self-reflect on the teaching performance is to observe one's performance as video-taped to identify the areas for improvements (Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017). The effective use of e-portfolio has also been shown to enable the pre-service teachers to identify their areas of strengths and weakness as they note their self-reflection within the period of their teaching training (Slepcevic-Zach & Stock, 2018). There is an emphasis on the importance of comparative self-reflection within a period of time that is provided through the e-portfolio. Each self-reflection sheet highlights the areas for improvement and the more the pre-service teachers observe how one attends to these weaknesses, the more likely they will overcome some of the teaching obstacles. It is recommended, therefore, in this study (Slepcevic-Zach & Stock, 2018) that the e-portfolio must be used along with the assessment of pre-service teachers to allow pre-service teachers to observe their development which will ultimately have a great impact on their teaching practices. This study aims to investigate the critical self-reflection practices among pre-service English language teachers at UTAS, Rustaq, in light of Gibbs's reflection model. The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the current practices of pre-service teacher critical self-reflection in a microteaching context at Rustaq College of Education?
2. How do/can pre-service English language teachers practice critical self-reflection in a microteaching context at Rustaq College of Education?

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a mixed-method approach to yield a better understanding of the status of self-reflection practices among pre-service teachers (Silverman, 2006). First, it operated document analysis which encompassed both qualitative thematic analysis and

quantitative content analysis to identify the most dominant patterns and stages of self-reflection as informed by Gibb's model. Based on the results of the method, interview questions were conducted by qualitative focus-group interviews to explain the status quo. This section provides an account of the participant, and data collection and analysis.

4.1. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 30 written self-reflection pieces from pre-service English language teachers at University of Technology and Applied Sciences - Rustaq College of Education. The participants as mentioned in the introduction were enrolled in practicum 2 course where they were involved in two micro-teaching sessions. In these sessions, pre-service teachers were required to teach their peers in the presence of their instructor. Following the sessions, they have to orally self-reflect and submit their written self-reflection form where they need to indicate three main areas: positive points; negative points and points for improvement. For the sake of this study, the researcher, who is also the instructor, asked the participants not to be constrained with any form when writing their self-reflections. The purpose of this task is to determine the knowledge and practice of the participants in being able to reflect on their teaching performance.

4.1.1. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through documents (written self-reflection) and focused-group interviews. The documents were collected voluntarily after getting permission from the participants. Documents as supported by Creswell (2014) can be easily accessed by the researcher and thus repeatedly analyzed. The documents were analyzed using Gibbs' reflective model as an analytical framework. Gibbs' model of self-reflection (1988) is based on Kolb's theory. Dimension of emotion has been added to the model, which is a cornerstone of subsequent learning. The model comprises six stages that guide the process of reflection and focuses on learning from experiences. Six key words unveil a short-cut to the operationalization of the respective model: 1) Description; 2) Feelings; 3) Action Plan; 4) Evaluation; 5) Analysis; 6) Conclusion. Then, quantitative content Analysis was implemented on the selected self-reflection written documents for the identified six stages. The data was analyzed in the light of the operational model. Demonstrating a mastery of these operations maximizes the effectiveness and usefulness of the learning experiences.

Based on the result of the document analysis, focused-group interviews with the participants were conducted. Prior to the interviews, an informed consent from the participants was obtained and details about continuing or withdrawing from the interviews were discussed highlighting the confidentiality of their identities. Researchers carefully observed ethical considerations from the Head of Scientific committee in the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Rustaq College of Education (ethical approval number: 2022 ENGL 2).

The questions of the interviews were informed by the findings from the document analysis. This shows how triangulation on the level of data was achieved. In the light of Gibbs' model, the interviews transcripts were thematically analyzed. Gibbs' six stages were treated as identified themes to investigate the data and check to which extent such themes were prevalent in the written self-reflection documents (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This paper argues that the use of mixed methods and triangulation could yield a better understanding of self-reflection practices among pre-service teachers. This study is one of a few studies which has shown how such triangulation could be achieved through the use of document analysis, content analysis and focus-group interviews which demonstrate how mixed methods and triangulation collaborate for a better understanding of the investigated issue in this paper.

5. FINDINGS

In the light of Gibbs's reflective model, the investigation showed the current practices of pre-service teachers' critical self-reflection in a microteaching context at UTAS, Rustaq. In addition, it attempted to explain how pre-service English Language teachers reflected on their teaching practices and processes. The following table shows the percentage of pre-service teachers who practice Gibbs's aspects.

Table 1 The percentage of pre-service teachers practicing Gibbs's aspects

Gibbs's reflective aspects	Description of the experience	Feelings and thoughts about the experience	Evaluation of the experience, both good and bad	Analysis to make sense of the situation	Conclusion about what you learned and what you could have done differently	Action Plan for how you would deal with similar situations in the future, or general changes you might find appropriate
Percentage of pre-service teachers	93.4%	33.4%	93.4%	63.4%	40%	80%

5.1. Description and Evaluation

In relation to meeting Gibb's components of description and evaluation, this study unveiled that their self-reflection accounts were dominantly and equally descriptive and evaluative. There were 93.4% of the cases who described their experiences and equally evaluated their teaching practices either positively or negatively. There were numerous examples which demonstrated their descriptive and evaluative critical self-reflection. A participant, Sulaiman described that he "began with a short story that tells about some of the characteristics, and students derive[d] the title of the lesson by listening to the story". Huda's self-reflection is mainly descriptive. No other aspects have been investigated in her self-reflection.

There is a noted pattern in this investigation which showed how pre-service teachers, some of them being Mohammed, Fatma, Ruqya, Renad, rated the achievements of their described objectives and planned teaching tasks as a positive aspect in their self-reflection accounts. It seems that some pre-service teachers confused the achievements of their steps to what would be considered positive in their teaching practices. Mohammed hardly explained his descriptive account, "I followed my lesson plan." Similarly, Ibtihal provided a vague description of her lesson.

Fatma demonstrated how evaluative her reflection was on her lesson, but her use of the word "good" to describe her positive practices does not clarify what is meant by

“good”. She stated that “the warm up was very good”. Some pre-teachers (Fatma and Asmahan highlighted a number of issues in their teaching lessons and suggested some remedies for such problems. However, these respective issues were not well explained in the context of their teaching.

On the other hand, Renad and Ruqiya of the pre-service teachers' evaluation aspects were well-explained. For example, Renad documented that “the pronunciation of some words were pronounced wrongly and that may have affected the students' understanding in later stages.” Similarly, Ruqiya evaluated her lesson and explained what went wrong in her teaching class, “For the last activity about writing sentences, the students were supposed to write the sentences during the class but unfortunately there was no time for that, so I made it as homework for them.” It is an interesting observation that female pre-service teachers provided more details on positive or negative aspects of their teaching practices than their male counterparts. One of the most evaluative accounts reflecting on the negative aspects of her teaching experience was produced by Asma. Here is a sample of her extensive evaluation of the negative aspects of her lesson.

- “Mispronunciation of some words and the language (questions) I used aren't accurate.
- I didn't succeed in showing a positive attitude toward the lesson and not involving students to participate in the lesson.
- I didn't manage the class well.
- In the first activity, the students are supposed to watch the video but because of the problems with the PC, the video appears like a sound. The students may get confused and wait for the video.
- I didn't consider individual differences and let the students watch the video two times. Actually, I planned to let students watch the video two times but because the time and some students said they didn't need to watch again.”
- I didn't encourage students to talk more in the production stage. They seemed to have great knowledge.

However, the majority of the pre-service teachers were reluctant to mention their weaknesses. The reasons behind it when interviewed were ‘fear of losing marks’ and ‘it is the teacher's job’. It seems that the pre-service teachers do not understand that part of self-understanding and forming new knowledge is being able to highlight the weakness so that they can overcome them next time.

5.2. Analysis and Feeling

With regard to the analysis, 63% of the pre-service English language teachers produced an analytical account about their teaching practices and showed an understanding of the situation. Interestingly, the majority of them, Ruqiya, Shahad, Noor, Asma, Rudiana, Ibtihal, Ahlam, and Amani, focused on time-management as a constraint which impinged on performing lesson tasks as planned. Because of this constraint, pre-service teachers mentioned that they were unable to write sentences or engage students in the class activities, for example. Ultimately, this issue affected the achievements of their lesson objectives, except Malak who stated that “students have done all the activities as I planned in the lesson plan because I was able to manage the time of each stage”. Another issue to discuss is that there were few pre-service teachers who focused on other factors such as language barrier, internet connection and unwell-explanation of the lesson as a

rationale for understanding the pitfalls in their teaching practices. Yet, they did not demonstrate how the respective factors affect their performance. For example, Ahlam stated: "I tried to produce an accurate language structure but I think I need to work more on the structure of forming questions". So, she was aware of her language problem of not being able to produce well-structured questions, but she did not specify how she would have addressed this issue in her action plan. On the contrary, there is an exceptional case when a participant clearly explained that he was able to control the class and analyzed how that was achieved. It was demonstrated in the following excerpt.

"First of all, the lesson went well, and I controlled the class in a good way by give them the instruction to raise their hands when they want to answer. Moreover, I tried as much as possible to engage all students to participate even sometimes I call their names to answer without [they] raise(ing) their hands, trying to engage the silent students. The way to deliver the information and the materials have been used was all suitable and good..." (Salim)

However, the data showed that 66.6% of the pre-service teachers did not express their feelings and thoughts about their teaching experiences, and only 33.4% were able to do so. The feeling component of self-reflection is the lowest in comparison to the other aspects of the self-reflection model. Rarely, pre-service teachers expressed their feelings about their teaching practices. This is an indication that the pre-service teachers did not have a guide like Gibbs's reflective framework to guide them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings as mentioned by Markkanen a et al. (2020).

One suggested reason by the pre-service teachers when interviewed is the fact that they can express their feelings orally but not in writing as they have not been trained to include their feelings in the written self-reflection. This alludes to the lack of a critical self-reflection model which reflects on all aspects of students' psychological states. The feeling aspect as indicated by Gibb's reflective model is significantly important to affirm pre-service teacher's identity and enhance their critical thinking. For instance, Fatma expressed that by saying "So my feelings, I cannot show them in a paper. But you can know my feelings while I'm talking". The preservice teacher stressed the importance of oral reflection as there is a drawback of written self-reflection. The teacher became more aware of the pre-service teachers' feelings via body language and facial expressions as stressed by Fatma.

However, some pre-service teachers like Salim indicated the need for including feelings in the written self-reflection as he said, "So I think that feeling should be included in the self-reflection". This highlights the importance of including feelings as a major component in the self-reflection model which this study proposes in order to fill this gap. Also, when the pre-service teachers expressed their feelings, they intended to describe their feelings towards the whole experience not the details, for instance, Noor said, "I am happy with my lesson because I achieved the learning outcomes". Similarly, Ruqiya stated that "it was an interesting experience to me". Only one pre-service teacher, Renad, who was keen to express her feelings/thoughts towards the steps in the teaching practices, showed her detailed feelings in the following excerpt.

"First of all, I feel that I made a good point when I greeted my students and asked them about their health and remember them about the title and the number of the

unit and asking them about the date and the day to make them active before starting the lesson. In the warm up I think it is good step to introduce student with some vocabularies that they have studied before and they need them for reading a story to refresh their memory and the new vocabularies that they need when reading a story.”

6. FINDINGS AND ACTION PLANS

The findings revealed that 60% of the pre-service English language teachers did not show what they learned from their teaching experiences. For instance, four participants focused on describing their lessons without mentioning what they had learned from this teaching practice. This might be attributed to the lack of a clear template of self-reflection. Others were able to report what they learned. Ahlam, for example, mentioned that she “should have chosen only five ways of understanding instead of nine when planning the lesson”. However, it was interesting to find out that around 80% of the pre-service teachers demonstrated what they would have done differently if they would teach a similar lesson in the future. They considered the importance of developing their teaching practices next time. Asma for example, indicated that she would “Find ways to encourage students to participate in the class and give them different feedback”. In another example, Mohammed listed some strategies he would need to consider in his next lesson. He wrote “Learn more strategies to make students interact more and more, and practice teaching more and more”. This indicates that pre-service teachers consider changing and modifying content, language level, learning objectives, and teaching activities to produce better lessons. This resonates with Majzub’ (2012) study findings which showed that pre-service teachers became aware of their teaching skills after reflecting on the lessons.

Although future actions are thought of by pre-service teachers, yet these action plans have weaknesses. Some tended to be unspecific and vague in some cases. Suleiman wrote that he would “do better in the future”. He did not indicate any specific area of improvement. In other plans, pre-service teachers identified teaching problems, but did not consider improving them in their action plans. Fatma, for example, realized she had pronunciation mistakes in her lesson, but failed to mention improving or checking correct pronunciation of words in future lessons. Similarly, Ruqaiya struggled with a time management issue when she taught the lesson, but she did not consider addressing it in her action plan. In contrast, we could observe that pre-service teachers state action plans for aspects which were not evaluated nor analyzed. Huda, for instance, stated that she will plan to use more collaborative websites in her teaching, but she never stated in her reflection on the nature of such a problem.

It is a fact that the pre-service teachers provide an account of potential problems while they were planning their lesson plans because the lesson plan form asks students to mention the challenges and the potential solutions learners might face during the lesson. However, the reflection form lacks any question about the problems they faced and how they tackled in the teaching contexts. Salim said, “I recount that in doing it in actually by doing it in actual lesson plan. So that’s what I used to do, but I’m sure that they’re were not indicated in the self-reflection form”. However, due to the fact that the self-reflection lacks a question about how pre-service teachers manage such teaching problems some of participants reflect on such issues even when it is not a mandatory component of the self-reflection requirement.

Renad agreed to that stating that “I would sometimes write about them because many problems can emerge, and that we never thought of before. So when they emerged, I would go and write about them. And if I have a solution for them, I will write it too. But sometimes, if I don’t, I will only write about the problem that’s going to repeat more than once”. Thus, the participant here chooses to either write or not about such challenging issues simply because it is not a required complement in the self-reflection form.

6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the goals of most teacher education programs are to bridge the gap between theory and practice which corroborates with the myriad of literature that underlines how self-reflection could contribute to better professional practices in general and teaching in particular (Williams & Grudnoff, 2011; Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017; DiGregorio & Liston, 2021). Therefore, it is not only sufficient to encourage pre-service teachers to implement philosophies in practice, but also to expand their practice into meaningful and effective responses to students’ learning through developing critical thinking skills (Kaldi & Zafeiri, 2023). The premise of reflection is to develop the skills necessary to become self-directed and self-reflective thinkers. However, in the Omani context, particularly within UTAS-Rustaq context, pre-service teachers still lack the skills needed to become a critical self-reflective thinker.

The reasons as shown in the findings can be attributed to the lack of a rigor a self-reflection model like Gibbs’ reflective cycle. This study has shown that pre-service teachers are not aware of the significance of feelings in teaching more effectively. However, the existing literature (Williams & Grudnoff, 2011; DiGregorio & Liston, 2021) highlighted the positive impact of self-reflection for personal and academic development of pre service teachers. This status entails more effort towards contributing to an increased awareness of expressing feelings in relation to teaching performance such as by the proposed adoption of the model. Also, in relation to the discussion of investigating the pre-service teachers’ consideration of description and evaluation, the findings reiterated problems attributed to the lack of clarity in self-reflection existing *vague* rubrics which is also an indicator that the system of assessment is inherently urging more review and therefore development. The suggested model could potentially contribute in boosting pre-service teachers’ confidence (Can, 2019) in teaching, given that they are aware of their strengths and weakness (Ibid). Therefore, Zafeer et al. (2023) stressed on use of Gibbs’ reflective cycle in the professional education as strategy to foster reflection. By using such a model, pre-service teachers’ ability to analyze and assess their current practice will be profoundly improved.

A noteworthy point to mention, Zafeer et al. (2023) emphasized that theory and practice are “mutually beneficial” (p.4) in Gibbs’ reflective cycle; thus written reflection report for pre-service teachers is a significant tool through which they can critically write and corroborate the ELT theories with their practices in the light of reforming and forming new and potentially best practices. This notion resonates with Mezirow’s ideology of critical reflection (1998). However, reaching the phase of questioning their beliefs and assumptions in order to be critical would not be achieved comprehensively without the guide and support of the instructor. Thus, the instructor has to have a dialogic reflection with the pre-service teachers after they have submitted their self-reflection report. This process will enhance the pre-service teachers’ learning and improve their critical thinking skills.

Hence, since the existing literature demonstrated how useful and effective the model has been, it is stressed here that the use of such rubric is urgent in the ELT programme. Thus, the study presents a number of recommendations. First, as pre-service teachers are not trained on how to critically reflect on their performance, training on this aspect is highly recommended. Then, as teachers are not aware of this model, a workshop about this rigor model and how it can be implemented is needed. Next, as self-reflect component is not part of the course content, thus a review in the course contents and integrating this aspect in the learning and assessment process is vital. This status resonates with Dewey's (1933, p. 118) conceptualization of having clear awareness of "grounds". The findings have shown how pre-service teachers do not have grounds or solid foundation for the improvement of teaching practices due to the respective reasons. Last but not least, the status quo is considered an ad-hoc approach, thus a systematic and rigorous approach need to be framed and structured so that we can generate a critical reflective thinker.

7. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the critical self-reflection practices among pre-service English language teachers at UTAS, Rustaq, in light of Gibbs's reflection model. The findings showed that although the pre-service teachers were not given a clear model or rubric to inform nor structure their reflective feedback, analysis of their reflection sheets showed the variant presence of Gibbs' model components. Such a practice, we argue, could be improved through providing the model, beforehand, to pre-service teachers so that they equally become aware of the areas they need to attend while evaluating their microteaching lessons.

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature related to the reflective practice, particularly in the ELT context from the analysis of the written reflection reports and pre-service teachers' perspectives. It showed that this study is unique as it utilized Gibbs' reflective cycle as a theoretical and analytical framework to critically and comprehensively reveal the current self-reflection practices in light of reforming and forming practices that enable pre-service teachers to be a critical self-reflective thinker.

However, this study has some limitations which merit consideration. One of the limitations is that it gathered the data from one section of the practicum course which does not allow the findings to be generalized; however, it gives researchers an insight on how Gibbs' reflective cycle can be a powerful tool to analyze any set of data. Another limitation is that the data was obtained from one institution across the Sultanate of Oman; it would be more profound and insightful gathering the data from a number of institutions targeting ELT context in order to reveal the commonalities and differences on how self-reflection is practiced. Thus, further studies may look at the similarities and differences among the policies and practices of self-reflection in their ELT program in order to standardize it through implementing a rigorous model that can assist pre-service teachers to develop their reflective thinking skills to cope with the required needed skills for 21st century.

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