

# Reflective Practices and Teacher Professional Identity: A Study of Pre-Service Teachers

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**Abstract**—Reflective practice is increasingly recognized as a core component of teacher education, playing a critical role in the development of professional identity among pre-service teachers. This paper explores how engagement in reflective practices contributes to shaping the professional identity of pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education programmes. Through qualitative and quantitative data obtained from final-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students across various institutions, the study investigates the nature, frequency, and depth of reflection, and how these influence self-perception, pedagogical beliefs, and professional growth. The findings reveal that systematic and guided reflection enables pre-service teachers to critically evaluate their teaching experiences, identify areas for improvement, and align their practice with educational ideals. Moreover, reflective practices foster a sense of responsibility, autonomy, and continuous learning—key attributes of a professional teaching identity. The study recommends integrating structured reflective modules in teacher training curricula to enhance both instructional competence and identity formation.

**Index Terms**—Reflective practice, teacher professional identity, pre-service teachers, teacher education, self-reflection, professional development

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the identity of a teacher is no longer defined solely by subject expertise or classroom management skills. Instead, it increasingly hinges on the teacher's ability to critically reflect upon their practice, adapt to diverse learners, and engage in continuous professional growth. Reflective practice—defined as the process of self-inquiry and critical examination of one's own teaching experiences—has thus emerged as a foundational pillar in teacher education (Schön, 1983). It is through reflection that teachers come to understand themselves, their teaching philosophy, and their place within the educational ecosystem.

Teacher professional identity refers to the self-concept and values a teacher holds in relation to their role, responsibilities, and ethical commitments within the profession. For pre-service teachers, this identity is still under construction, shaped significantly by their training experiences, mentors, and personal reflections. As they transition from learners to practitioners, reflection becomes a vital tool for integrating theory with practice and for confronting the complexities of real classroom situations.

This study seeks to understand the interplay between reflective practices and the development of teacher professional identity among pre-service teachers. It aims to uncover how reflective exercises—such as journals, peer observations, portfolio writing, and feedback sessions—inform the evolving self-perception and role consciousness of emerging educators. By doing so, the research contributes to strengthening teacher preparation programs and underscores the importance of reflective capacity in nurturing competent and committed educators.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to explore the relationship between reflective practices and the professional identity formation of pre-service teachers. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the types of reflective practices adopted by pre-service teachers during their teacher education programmes.
2. To analyze the role of reflective practices in shaping the professional identity of pre-service teachers.
3. To assess the perceived impact of reflection on teaching competencies, classroom confidence, and decision-making abilities.

4. To identify challenges faced by pre-service teachers in engaging with reflective practices effectively.
5. To suggest strategies for the effective integration of reflective practices in teacher education curricula.

### III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Numerous studies have underscored the importance of reflective practice in teacher education and its critical role in shaping the professional identity of educators. The theoretical foundation for reflective practice was laid by Donald Schön (1983), who introduced the concepts of “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action,” arguing that professionals must continually analyze their decisions and actions to improve practice.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) proposed a model of professional development rooted in reflective thinking, suggesting that reflection helps teachers align their inner values with external teaching behaviors. According to Loughran (2002), reflection enhances the ability of pre-service teachers to understand the complexities of classroom dynamics and adapt accordingly.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) define professional identity as a dynamic, evolving process that is deeply influenced by self-reflection and contextual experiences. Their work indicates that reflective practices are instrumental in helping pre-service teachers negotiate their beliefs, emotions, and experiences into a coherent professional self.

In the Indian context, NCERT and NCTE (2014) have emphasized reflective practice as a vital element in national teacher education frameworks such as the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE). However, studies such as Raina (2016) and Mohan (2018) found that while reflective components exist in many teacher training programs, their implementation often lacks depth and structure. Despite the growing literature, there remains a gap in empirical studies that examine how reflective practices directly influence the formation of professional identity, particularly in the Indian pre-service context. This study seeks to bridge that gap by offering insights derived from systematic data collection and analysis.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and document analysis. This design was chosen to ensure both breadth and depth in understanding the relationship between reflective practices and teacher identity.

#### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 120 pre-service teachers from five different B.Ed. colleges affiliated with state universities in Assam, India. The participants were in their final year and had undergone at least one semester of school internship.

#### *Data Collection Tools*

1. Structured Questionnaire: To gather quantitative data on the frequency, type, and perceived usefulness of reflective activities.
2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with 20 participants to gain deeper insights into their personal reflective journeys and perceptions of identity formation.
3. Reflective Journals and Portfolios: Reviewed to analyze the depth and nature of reflection over time.

#### *Procedure*

- Ethical clearance was obtained from the concerned institutions.
- Questionnaires were administered physically and digitally.
- Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their willingness and ability to articulate reflective experiences.
- Journal and portfolio analysis focused on key themes like challenges faced, learning outcomes, and evolving perceptions of self as a teacher.

#### *Data Analysis*

- Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, standard deviation) and correlation analysis to determine relationships between variables.
- Qualitative data from interviews and journals were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns.

### Limitations

- The sample size was limited to a specific region (Assam), which may limit the generalizability of the findings.
- Reflective depth is inherently subjective and can vary across individuals, making standardization challenging.
- The study relied partially on self-reported data, which may introduce bias.

## V. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual and theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the Reflective Practice Theory proposed by Donald Schön (1983) and Teacher Professional Identity models developed by scholars such as Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Korthagen (2004). The framework integrates both constructivist and experiential learning paradigms, focusing on how reflection enables pre-service teachers to internalize experiences and construct their professional self.

### 1. Theoretical Basis

#### a) Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983)

Schön introduced two forms of reflection that are central to teacher development:

- **Reflection-in-action:** Real-time thinking and decision-making during teaching.

- **Reflection-on-action:** Post-teaching analysis to evaluate and improve future performance. This dual process facilitates ongoing professional learning.

#### b) Teacher Professional Identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009)

Professional identity is conceptualized as a dynamic, multifaceted construct shaped by personal experiences, social contexts, and pedagogical beliefs. It is not static but evolves with continuous reflection and practice. The model suggests three key dimensions:

- **Personal dimension:** Self-beliefs, motivations, and values.
- **Professional dimension:** Teaching skills, content knowledge, and ethics.
- **Contextual dimension:** Institutional environment, mentorship, and peer influence.

### 2. Conceptual Model of the Study

The study assumes that:

- Reflective practices act as catalysts in the professional identity formation process.
- Regular engagement with reflective tools (journals, peer observation, lesson analysis) enhances self-awareness, critical thinking, **and** pedagogical understanding.
- Institutional support, such as structured reflective modules and feedback systems, mediates the effectiveness of reflective practice.

### 3. Key Constructs and Relationships

Construct	Indicators
Reflective Practices	Journaling, portfolio writing, peer feedback, critical incident reports
Teacher Professional Identity	Self-concept, teaching philosophy, classroom confidence, role clarity
Mediating Factors	Mentor support, institutional structure, time allocation, assessment practices
Outcomes	Professional growth, teaching effectiveness, commitment to the profession

### 4. Hypothesized Linkages

- Reflective Practices → Enhanced Self-Awareness → Stronger Professional Identity
- Supportive Institutional Environment → More Effective Reflection
- Depth of Reflection → Greater Integration of Beliefs and Practices

This framework guided both the design of the study and the interpretation of findings, ensuring that all aspects—from data collection to analysis—remained

rooted in established theoretical perspectives on teaching and teacher development.

## VI. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The analysis of quantitative data (survey responses) and qualitative data (interviews and reflective journals) provided a comprehensive understanding of how reflective practices influence the professional

identity formation of pre-service teachers. The key findings are summarized below:

### 1. Reflective Practices Are Widely Adopted but Varied in Depth

- 82% of respondents maintained reflective journals during their teaching internships.
- However, only 43% demonstrated higher-order reflection (critical analysis, evaluation, and goal setting).
- Many pre-service teachers engaged in descriptive reflection rather than analytical or transformative reflection.

Type of Reflective Activity	Impact on Identity (Self-Reported)
Journals with mentor feedback	High
Peer observation reports	Moderate
Unguided personal journals	Low

### 3. Reflection Enhances Core Components of Professional Identity

Thematic analysis of interviews revealed that reflection contributed to:

- Greater self-awareness of teaching strengths and weaknesses.
- Increased sense of professional responsibility and ethical understanding.
- Emerging confidence in classroom decision-making and learner engagement.

*“Through journaling, I began to see myself not just as a student but as a real teacher. I noticed patterns in how I respond to students, and that awareness helped me improve.”* —Participant 12 (Interview excerpt)

Reported Challenge	Percentage of Respondents
Insufficient mentor support	64%
Time constraints	59%
Difficulty in critical thinking	45%

### 6. Correlation Between Reflection and Teaching Efficacy

Statistical analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.62$ ) between the frequency/depth of reflective practice and self-rated teaching efficacy, indicating that those who reflected more deeply also felt more prepared and confident as teachers.

These findings affirm that reflective practice plays a pivotal role in the development of teacher professional

### 2. Structured Reflection Positively Impacts Identity Development

- Participants who engaged in guided reflective activities (e.g., using prompts or peer feedback) reported stronger self-perception as future educators.
- These students displayed more confidence in articulating their teaching philosophy and pedagogical stance.

### 4. Institutional Support Determines Quality of Reflection

- Colleges with structured modules on reflective practice showed better student outcomes.
- In institutions where reflection was treated as a mere assignment, students perceived it as a formality with limited personal impact.

### 5. Challenges Faced in Reflective Engagement

Several barriers to meaningful reflection were reported:

- Lack of time during internships.
- Limited feedback from mentors or supervisors.
- Uncertainty about how to reflect effectively (particularly in first-time journal writers).

identity. However, its effectiveness depends significantly on institutional design, mentor involvement, and the pre-service teacher's reflective maturity.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of

reflective practices in shaping the professional identity of pre-service teachers:

#### 1. Integrate Structured Reflective Modules in Teacher Education Curricula

- Institutions should embed structured and scaffolded reflective practices (e.g., guided journals, critical incident analysis, peer reviews) within the B.Ed. syllabus.
- These modules should be assessed formatively and accompanied by clear rubrics.

#### 2. Train Teacher Educators and Mentors in Reflection Facilitation

- Regular workshops and orientation sessions should be conducted for faculty and internship mentors to equip them with tools to facilitate and evaluate reflection effectively.
- Mentors should provide constructive, timely feedback on reflective entries.

#### 3. Encourage Diverse Reflective Techniques

- Use multiple modes of reflection including video recordings, blogs, group discussions, and e-portfolios to cater to different learner styles and enhance engagement.
- These techniques should promote critical thinking and self-inquiry beyond superficial reporting.

#### 4. Allocate Time and Institutional Support

- Adequate time slots must be reserved during internship programs specifically for reflection and discussion.
- Institutions should foster a reflective culture by encouraging open dialogues and communities of practice among pre-service teachers.

#### 5. Link Reflective Practice to Identity Development

- Teacher educators should explicitly connect reflective activities to the development of professional identity, helping pre-service teachers recognize how their experiences shape their roles and responsibilities.

#### 6. Conduct Ongoing Research and Monitoring

- Longitudinal studies should be conducted to track how early reflective practices impact teacher identity and effectiveness over time.
- Institutions should evaluate the quality of reflection regularly to ensure continuous improvement in teacher education programs.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Reflective practice is more than a pedagogical tool—it is a transformative process that lies at the heart of teacher identity formation. This study has revealed that pre-service teachers who actively engage in meaningful reflection tend to develop a clearer sense of self as educators, enhanced pedagogical awareness, and greater confidence in their professional roles. However, the depth and impact of reflection are closely tied to the support structures provided by teacher education institutions, the attitudes of mentors, and the level of training in reflective skills.

The findings underscore the urgent need to shift from tokenistic inclusion of reflective assignments to a more systematic, guided, and context-sensitive integration of reflective practices in teacher education. As teaching becomes increasingly complex and demanding, fostering reflective habits among future educators is essential for developing resilient, responsible, and adaptive professionals. By nurturing reflective capacity, institutions can empower pre-service teachers not just to teach—but to become teachers in the truest sense.

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