

REFLECTIVE THINKING AMONG ARABIC LANGUAGE FEMALE TEACHERS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on exploring the perceptions of Arabic language female teachers regarding reflective thinking and analyzing the perceived relationship between this type of thinking and the quality of education. The study adopted a qualitative approach, specifically the focus group method. A structured focus group guide was developed, covering themes related to the concept of reflective thinking, its practices, obstacles, and its impact on educational quality. The study sample consisted of eight Arabic language female teachers. Data were collected through audio-recorded focus group sessions, which were later transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that the teachers recognize the importance of reflective thinking, and they practice it to varying degrees through self-reflection and by sharing their experience. Moreover, reflective thinking was found to contribute to enhancing the quality of education in areas such as planning, assessment, and addressing individual differences among students. The study also identified several obstacles, including time constraints, workload pressure, and a lack of training. Based on these findings, the study recommended the integration of reflective thinking skills into teacher preparation programs, allocating sufficient time, and providing an encouraging environment for reflection.

Keywords: Reflective thinking, Quality of education, Arabic language female teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher is considered one of the most vital pillars of the teaching and learning process, playing a central role in building students' knowledge and shaping their attitudes and values. With the advancement of educational theories, the concept of the reflective teacher has emerged as a progressive model that contributes to enhancing teachers' professional performance and in improving the effectiveness of instruction. This concept refers to a teacher who engages in critical thinking about their teaching practices and consciously reviews educational decisions through analysis and reflection. However, this is aimed at fostering continuous learning and improving the quality of education. In light of the growing challenges facing the educational system, the need has become increasingly urgent for teachers who are capable of reflection, analysis, and self-development to achieve sustainable professional growth.

A reflective teacher is one who systematically engages in professional reflection in the field of education, with the aim of improving performance and making thoughtful, effective decisions within the classroom. According to Farrell (2019), a reflective teacher is someone who critically examines their teaching practices while taking into account the cultural, social, and educational context in which they work, striving to enhance their professional performance and practices. Liu

and Xu (2021) also pointed out that reflective thinking is no longer viewed as merely an individual practice, but rather as an integral part of sustainable professional development that contributes to improving the quality of education.

Reflective thinking is considered one of the most important strategies for the continuous professional development of teachers. It refers to the cognitive process through which teachers analyze and deeply evaluate their teaching practices with the aim of improving performance both inside and outside the classroom. Farrell (2019) views reflective thinking as going beyond simply reviewing lessons; it is a conscious process that fosters professional and cognitive growth in teachers. Similarly, Liu and Xu (2021) noted that reflective thinking enhances the teacher's ability to make effective educational decisions based on the analysis of instructional situations, thereby contributing to the quality of educational processes.

According to the classification by Zeichner and Liston (2014), levels of educational reflection can be categorized as follows: Surface Reflection, which focuses on what happened in the classroom without in-depth analysis; Pedagogical Reflection, which involves analyzing the teaching methods used and their impact on student learning; and Critical Reflection, which examines the values, beliefs, and social justice issues associated with educational practices.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2020) indicated that reflective thinking can be divided into three types. This includes Reflection-in-action, which refers to thinking that occurs during the implementation of the lesson; Reflection-on-action, which involves reviewing what happened after the lesson has ended; and Reflection-for-action, which refers to forward-looking and strategic thinking that takes place before instruction.

Consequently, recent research highlights several benefits of teachers engaging in reflective practice. These include improving the quality of instruction through self-assessment (Farrell, 2018), enhancing professional effectiveness and adaptability to changing environments (Korthagen, 2017), promoting cultural and educational competence—especially in multicultural settings (Liu & Xu, 2021), and developing teachers' professional identity while fostering lifelong learning (Griffiths, 2020).

Larrivee (2020) and Farrell (2019) pointed out that there are several strategies teachers can use to enhance reflection. These include: reflective journals, professional learning communities (PLCs), peer classroom observations, and guided self-reflection through structured questioning.

On the other hand, the quality of education is defined as "the extent to which the educational process achieves its objectives through effective teaching methods, appropriate content, a supportive learning environment, and constructive assessment" (UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, the quality of education relies on several key pillars, including: well-planned lessons, the use of effective teaching strategies, positive teacher–student interaction, a safe and motivating learning environment, and continuous, purposeful assessment.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) indicated that teacher quality is the most influential factor in improving learning outcomes, directly linking professional competence with reflective thinking. Recent studies suggest that reflective thinking is a key factor that directly impacts the quality of education, as it contributes to better decision-making by teachers, the development of more effective teaching methods, and, consequently, a more effective classroom environment and improved learning outcomes.

A study by Huang and Shulman (2022) found that teachers who consistently engage in reflective thinking demonstrate higher levels of quality in planning, interaction, and assessment

compared to their peers. Griffiths (2020) also emphasized that reflective thinking enables teachers to gain deeper insights into what occurs in the classroom, leading to more accurate and effective educational decisions.

Several studies have addressed reflective thinking among teachers. One of such study is by Al-Zahrani and Al-Ghamdi (2025), which aimed to explore the impact of using reflective practices on the professional development of novice English language female teachers in middle schools in Jeddah. The study also sought to understand these teachers' perceptions of reflective practice as a means of professional development and to identify the challenges that hinder their engagement in self-reflection. A qualitative approach was used through a phenomenological design. Thus, the results indicated that reflective practices had a positive impact on the professional development of teachers. The findings revealed differences in teachers' perceptions of reflective practice before and after using a self-reflection form and highlighted several ongoing challenges that prevent teachers from engaging in reflective practice.

Another study conducted by Khalaf, Fayyad, and Al-Musha'an (2022) aimed to identify the level of reflective thinking among middle school teachers of Arabic and History. The findings showed that teachers' engagement in reflective thinking was at a moderate level.

The study conducted by Sari and Fares (2021) aimed to identify the level of reflective thinking skills among first-cycle basic education teachers. The study found that the level of reflective thinking skills was low. Similarly, Maqousi (2019) conducted a study to investigate the extent to which secondary school Islamic education teachers practiced reflective thinking skills. The results showed that, overall, the degree to which these teachers practiced reflective thinking skills was above average.

Al-Kubaisi (2017) conducted a study aimed at determining the extent to which upper basic stage Arabic language teachers in Jordan possess and practice reflective thinking skills. The results showed that the teachers' level of possession and practice of reflective thinking skills was high.

The study by Liu and Xu (2021) showed that teachers with high reflective thinking skills demonstrate greater effectiveness in classroom management and achieve higher educational outcomes. Reflective thinking also enhances teachers' ability to accommodate classroom diversity and improve student interaction. Similarly, Zhao and Tan (2023) found that reflective thinking practices are positively associated with job satisfaction, student academic achievement, and the overall effectiveness of the learning environment.

Farrell (2019) confirmed that consistent professional reflection is a key indicator of an effective teacher, while Griffiths (2020) stated that a positive relationship exists between reflection and constructive evaluation of teacher performance. Additionally, Huang and Shulman (2022) found that reflective thinking directly influences the quality of educational planning and implementation.

Statement of the Problem

The quality of education is one of the most prominent and critical issues in the field of education, serving as a key indicator of how well educational systems achieve their goals. It also shows the competence of teachers and their ability to deliver effective and impactful instruction. In light of the growing challenges facing the educational process, it has become essential to focus on factors that influence the quality of education, chief among them being teacher reflective thinking. Reflective thinking is considered a fundamental component of professional development,

as it enables teachers to review their performance, analyze their classroom practices, and make more informed decisions in educational situations.

Recent educational literature indicates that teachers who consistently engage in reflective thinking are more capable of effective planning, employing appropriate teaching strategies, and conducting meaningful student assessment—all of which contribute to enhancing classroom education quality.

Despite the theoretical and practical significance of reflective thinking, the extent to which it is practiced by teachers and its contribution to educational quality still requires in-depth investigation, especially from the teachers' own perspectives. This is because they are the central element in the educational process.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following main research question:

What are Arabic language teachers' perceptions of the relationship between reflective thinking and the quality of education?

From this main study question, the following sub-questions emerge:

- What is the concept of reflective thinking from the perspective of Arabic language teachers?
- What are the key reflective thinking practices implemented by Arabic language teachers in their classrooms?
- How does reflective thinking contribute to improving the quality of education from the perspective of Arabic language teachers?
- What challenges do Arabic language teachers face in applying reflective thinking?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to enriching the educational literature on reflective thinking, particularly in the field of teaching Arabic language. It establishes a connection between reflective thinking and the quality of education, thereby enhancing the understanding of this relationship from both theoretical and professional perspectives. The results of this study can be valuable for policymakers in developing professional development programs for teachers. Furthermore, it helps teachers themselves recognize the importance of reflective thinking and activate it to improve their teaching practices. In addition, it opens the door for future studies in related areas.

Methodology of the Study

The study relied on a qualitative approach, specifically the focus group method. This approach was chosen due to its suitability for the nature of the study's questions, which aim to understand how Arabic language teachers perceive the relationship between reflective thinking and the quality of education from their direct perspectives and real-life experiences.

Study Tool

The tool used in the study was a focus group guide, which consisted of a set of organized open-ended questions designed based on the theoretical framework and relevant previous studies. The guide included the following key areas: the teachers' perceptions of the concept of reflective thinking, the reflective thinking practices they implement in the classroom, their views on the relationship between reflective thinking and the quality of education, and the challenges they face in applying reflective thinking. The guide was reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of

curricula and teaching methods to ensure content validity and its appropriateness for the study's objectives.

Study Sample

The sample was selected using purposive sampling, and it included eight (8) Arabic language teachers who had at least three years of experience and worked in different educational stages (primary and secondary). The participants were contacted officially after obtaining their written consent, with full assurance of confidentiality regarding their names, institutions, and respect for their privacy during the participation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The focus group session was conducted in a comfortable educational environment within the schools, and the session lasted for 60 minutes. The session was recorded audibly after obtaining the participants' consent, and then it was transcribed accurately, ensuring that the impressions and interactive context of the dialogue were documented.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include: repeated reading of the transcribed texts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content, coding the data and extracting recurring ideas, grouping the codes into main themes that represent common patterns in the participants' responses, reviewing and refining the themes to confirm their relevance to the study's questions and objectives, and formulating the final results by linking them to the theoretical framework and previous studies. Also, direct quotes from the participants were used to support each theme of the results, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the analysis. To ensure the quality of the analysis, the session transcripts were reviewed by an external specialist.

2. STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Area One: Teachers' Awareness of Reflective Thinking Concept

The results showed that most of the participants had a good awareness of the concept of reflective thinking. They described it as an "internal review process" that helps improve teaching performance and analyze the reasons for lesson success or failure. One of the teachers stated, "I always review the lesson and ask myself: Did the students respond? Where did I go wrong? This has made me change many of my methods." Some participants indicated that reflective thinking does not always happen in an organized manner, but they often occurs as a reaction to difficult or unexpected teaching situations.

Although there was variability in the levels of their understanding and application, the results revealed that the teachers had a clear awareness of the concept of reflective thinking. They agreed that reflective thinking is an internal review that helps assess performance and make improved teaching decisions. This aligns with Van Manen's (2017) assertion that reflective thinking represents an advanced stage of professional educational thinking, where it goes beyond mere implementation to self-criticism and continuous improvement.

Area Two: Reflective Thinking Practices in the Classroom

The analysis results revealed that teachers practice reflective thinking through reviewing daily plans, taking notes, or discussing lessons with colleagues. Evidence of this is seen in one teacher's statement: "Sometimes I write notes after the lesson, even if they are simple, because they help me

prepare for the next lesson." Another teacher added, "I often review my interactions with the students and think about how I could have handled the situation differently."

The teachers reported practicing reflection through self-reflection after the lesson, note-taking, or even discussing their performance with colleagues. However, they indicated that these practices do not follow a clear methodology or use specific tools. This aligns with what Korthagen and Vasalos (2020) stated in their study, which shows that teachers tend to engage in reflection informally and need tools to help turn it into an organized and continuous practice.

Area Three: The Relationship Between Reflective Thinking and Educational Quality

Most participants agreed on the existence of a direct relationship between reflective thinking and educational quality. They mentioned that self-reflection helped them improve teaching strategies, increase student engagement, and provide education that is more responsive to the needs of the classroom. In this context, one teacher stated: "When I start reviewing myself, I find better ways to deliver the lesson, and this helps the students understand more and get more engaged." They also confirmed that the conscious planning resulting from the reflection process improves the efficiency of the lesson, making it more organized and focused.

The most significant finding from the group was the teachers' awareness of the positive direct relationship between reflective thinking and educational quality. Reflection helped them in effective planning, selecting appropriate strategies, and engaging with students more effectively. This aligns with the results of the study by Zhao and Tan (2023), which confirmed that teachers who regularly practice reflective thinking achieve higher academic results with their students. Also, they show better levels of engagement and participation in the classroom.

Area Four: Barriers to Practicing Reflective Thinking

The teachers pointed out several barriers to practicing reflective thinking, including limited time, pressure from preparation and assessment tasks, and the lack of training programs dedicated to this aspect. In this context, one teacher said: "Time is the biggest obstacle; reflection requires rest and calm, and we barely keep up with the lesson schedule." Another added, "If there were training workshops to help us reflect in scientific ways, its impact would be stronger."

Therefore, the participants explained that there are several obstacles that limit the practice of reflection, most notably work pressure, limited time, and the unavailability of training programs focusing on developing this skill. This finding aligns with the study of Hatton and Smith (2019), which states that reflective practices often face challenges related to the school and organizational environment. Hence, this may prevent teachers from engaging in deep and continuous reflective thinking.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the relationship between reflective thinking and the quality of education from the perspective of Arabic language teachers, using the focus group method as a tool for collecting qualitative data. The results of the sessions showed the following:

- Arabic language teachers have a good awareness of the importance of reflective thinking and they practice it to varying degrees, mostly through self-performance review or sharing experiences with colleagues.

- Reflective thinking clearly contributes to improving the quality of education by developing planning, enhancing teaching strategies, and increasing teachers' awareness of students' needs.
- There are barriers that limit the practice of reflective thinking. The most prominent of these barriers include: time constraints, administrative task pressures, and the lack of specialized training programs.
- Teachers express an urgent need to be trained in reflective thinking skills through organized training programs and practical tools that help them integrate this skill into their daily practices.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- Including reflective thinking skills in pre-service teacher preparation programs and training teachers to use systematic reflective tools (such as: reflective journals, self-feedback, and professional learning communities).
- Providing regular workshops within schools to enable teachers to develop their reflective skills and exchange experiences regarding their practical applications.
- Allocating official time within the school schedule for reflective thinking practices as part of ongoing professional development.
- Raising awareness among educational leaders (school principals and supervisors) about the importance of supporting reflective thinking and creating a school environment that encourages educational dialogue and constructive criticism.
- Using assessment tools to measure the level of reflective thinking among teachers as part of professional performance evaluation.

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