



## Research Article

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# Importance of Reflective Practice in the Teaching Profession during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

*The research aimed to determine the importance of reflective practice in the teaching profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. To obtain the required information, 85 teachers were selected. Teachers from both public and private educational institutions in the city of Azogues, Cañar province. Most of the participants were female and over 40 years of age. The teachers taught their subjects at the General Basic Education level. A demographic analysis was carried out for data collection. A questionnaire was used in which questions were included to determine the degree of application of reflective practice by the educators. The answers were provided based on a Likert scale with 5 response options. The results obtained showed that not all educators apply reflective practice. Teachers who apply reflective practice found it easier to adapt to the needs of students in the context of the pandemic. Difficulties in implementing improvements in pedagogical planning were also recognized.*

**Keywords:** Reflective practice, teaching practice, teaching processes, online education, COVID-19, Ecuador

## 1. Introduction

Reflective teaching practice is an approach that is associated with the precepts underpinning cognitivist theory. Knowledge is constructed from experiencing and experiencing events. These provide information that is stored in short-term memory and can be useful for long-term applications

(Cardenas et al., 2021). From this perspective, reflective practice is described as the ability of educators to critically analyze their performance. It also allows them to analyze the effects that their actions have had on student learning (Medina & Mollo, 2021). Reflection makes it possible to identify their main strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to establish improvements that will have a direct impact on teaching processes (Mendoza et al., 2021).

This approach originated from the contributions of Donal Schön in 1990. Reflection was described as a process by which the professional can obtain information from his or her own experiences. Reflection helps to gain in-depth knowledge about the way he/she acts when practicing his/her profession. Knowledge leads to the implementation of changes that lead to better results (Nocetti, et al., 2020). While Schön sought to promote the implementation of this approach within the teaching profession. At present, not all professionals in this field apply it. This creates a disadvantage if decisions need to be made that involve adjusting. Reflection makes it easier to establish changes in pedagogical planning and the way educators teach their classes (Anijovich & Capelletti, 2018).

In the current context, education systems are subject to constant changes aimed at promoting continuous improvement in the quality of teaching. Educators must have the necessary skills and competences to adapt to dynamic and changing processes (Espinoza & Miguel, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic showed that not all teachers were adequately prepared to adapt to change. It was felt that when moving from face-to-face classes to a virtual modality, many educators experienced difficulties. Many did not manage to adjust their teaching strategies and respond efficiently to the educational needs of students (Mereles, et al., 2020).

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021), one of the main challenges experienced by teachers was the insufficient adaptation of teaching methods to a virtual environment. According to ECLAC, most of them opted to use study guides, but in some cases their application did not favor student learning. This situation generated learning gaps and setbacks that must be addressed once the pandemic has been overcome. Consequently, teachers are required to adapt their practices and implement innovative pedagogical methodologies that allow them to attract students' interest, motivate them and establish an environment that favors their learning (Barrón et al., 2021).

Reflective teaching practice is essential, so that teachers can recognize the pedagogical strategies applied. Recognize the expected results on the teaching and learning processes that were developed through a virtual environment during the first months of the pandemic. In addition, through observation, critical analysis and feedback, the actions required to improve educational practices can be established. Similarly, to be able to adapt to the learning needs of students (Domingo, 2021). Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine the importance of reflective practice in the teaching profession during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Ecuadorian context.

### 1.1 Reflective teaching practice

Reflective practice is a way of self-evaluating from a critical and active stance the different actions that are carried out when developing teaching processes. Reflective practice also evaluates the effects that are generated from them. The verbalization of educators' professional experience is the most effective tool and means for improving reflective practice, which is also a way of strengthening teachers' professional competences (Cerecero, 2018). In this sense, changes that lead to improved performance are based on the discovery and understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. It leads to the ability to modify their practice and adapt to circumstances that produce significant changes on educational processes (Espinoza & Leal, 2020).

In the context of changing education systems, the concept of reflective practice allows for a better understanding of teaching practice. The understanding considers reducing reactive and superficial approaches. That is, it implies a change in the approach to understanding practice that emerges because of reflective thinking. In addition, teachers become aware of the importance of the

complexity of looking at the work they do from different perspectives. Moreover, they reflect on the ethical implications and consequences of their role (Gálvez & Milla, 2018).

One can speak of reflective practice only in conditions where, on the one hand, there is constant questioning and reflection on one's own actions. From the point of view of theoretical-practical knowledge, the verification and revision of this knowledge is carried out through practice and action. According to Peña, et al., (2021) indicate that the teacher plays a key role in the development of the quality of education. At the same time, positive changes in educational practice cannot be initiated by reforms unless educators are their initiators. Therefore, for the development of the quality of education, one of the main priorities and concerns of national educational policies is the effective professional development of teachers.

For Ponce & Camus, (2019) teacher professional development is a complex process that includes numerous elements and factors, such as:

Needs analysis

Problems in the educational context

The process of change and adaptation to students' learning needs

The sense of effectiveness

The centre of the process

The teacher as both subject and object capable of bringing about continuous improvement in his or her performance.

According to the results of Gorichon's research (2021), there is a growing interest in the reflection processes of teachers and their influence on change. For example: on knowledge, beliefs, professional performance. At the same time, the changing needs of learners require new roles, knowledge and competences of teachers, which implies taking responsibility for professional development. Other authors warn about the complexity of the modern classroom that demands from teachers not only quality teaching but also an understanding of students' needs and a deep understanding of the context and environment in which students interact, as these conditions may directly or indirectly influence their learning processes (Villalta et al., 2022).

Faced with the constant challenges in education, teachers are needed with skills and competences that enable them to make decisions, solve problems, develop self-awareness and philosophical reflection as determinants of the ethical and professional code of conduct. Therefore, the importance of assuming the role of a reflective practitioner who can self-assess him/herself and his/her practice from multiple perspectives, reconsiders the fundamental determinants and principles of action and provides support to students has been significantly pointed out in recent decades (Román et al., 2020). In this sense, reflection occurs continuously as a form of assistance to educators who, by considering practice, learn, develop their knowledge and improve their professional performance. However, if teachers do not think critically about themselves and their practice, they run the risk of basing it on prejudices and outdated approaches.

If teachers express themselves critically about their practice and strengthen observation and reasoning skills, they show responsibility for personal and professional development and practice, but also responsibility for students' learning. In the context of teachers' professional development and quality education, one of the main components is reflective practice, as it enables educators to learn from their own experience. Given the importance of experience as a basis for learning, it is important to connect theory and practice to make improvements in educational processes. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of the process of thinking about the outcomes and impact of practice on oneself and the environment, as well as involving decision-making for action, goal achievement and practice change, and encourages the introduction of changes and improvements in practice (Buitriago, 2018).

## 2. Methodology

To carry out this study, a methodology described by Navarro et al (2022) was used, framed in the quantitative modality of research.

### 2.1 Participants

Eighty-five teachers from public and private educational institutions in the city of Azogues participated in the study, of whom 60.0% were female and 40.0% male. In terms of age, 18.8% belonged to an age group of 25 to 30 years, 28.2% were in the 31 to 35 age range, 23.5% were in the 36 to 40 age range, and 29.4% indicated that they were over 40 years of age. More than half of the teachers (71.1%) worked in public sector educational institutions, while 25.9% worked in private sector schools. According to the length of time they have been teaching, 21.2% indicated that they have been teaching for 3 to 5 years, 29.4% for 6 to 10 years, while 49.4% have been teaching for more than 10 years. On the other hand, according to the level of teaching, 30.6% indicated that they teach their subjects at the initial education level, 36.5% at the General Basic Education (EGB) level, and 32.9% at the General Unified Baccalaureate (BGU) level, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographics of participants

Variables	n	%	Variables	n	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Sector</b>		
Male	34	40,0	Public	63	74,1
Female	51	60,0	Private	22	26,9
<b>Age</b>			<b>Time exercising</b>		
From 25 to 30 years old	16	18,8	Between 3 to 5 years	18	21,2
From 31 to 35 years old	24	28,2	Between 6 to 10 years	25	29,4
From 36 to 40 years old	20	23,5	More than 10 years	42	49,4
More than 40 years	25	29,4	<b>Level of education</b>		
			Early childhood education	26	30,6
			EGB	31	36,5
			BGU	28	32,9

### 2.2 Instrumentation

The participating teachers to whom the survey was applied designed asked questions related to the two variables, i.e. reflective practice and COVID-19 pandemic, and it was necessary to define previous dimensions and 2 items for each, which are briefly described below: Reflective practice variable, the dimensions and items were: Cognitive characteristic dimension: -item 1: Regularity with which it is exposed to new knowledge; -item 2: The structure of tasks to be carried out with students is updated to the new educational requirements. Critical thinking dimension: -item 1: Proposes strategies to work based on the current context and student diversity; -item 2: Is reflective about the aspects to be improved after being evaluated. Dimension teacher narrative competences: -item 1: Executes activities based on students' suggestions or needs; -item 2: The activities applied awaken students' sensitivity, motivation and imagination. As for the dimensions evaluated for the COVID-19 pandemic variable, the following were established: Dimension coupling to the new online modality: -item 1: Experience towards the transition of online education; -item 2: Time it took to couple to the online education modality. Personal perspective dimension: -item 1: felt that online education since the pandemic generated favourable results among students; -item 2: perceived post-pandemic online education in the face-to-face mode; -item 3: perceived post-pandemic online education in the face-to-face mode; -item 4: perceived post-pandemic online education in the face-to-face mode. Dimension impact of the COVID pandemic on your professional life: -item 1: The pandemic had an impact on other aspects of your life that affected your role as a teacher; -item 2: After the pandemic, you feel that you are more reflective or have other skills that are useful to apply to your students. It is worth mentioning that the tabulation of these results was carried out considering that the instrument was designed on a Likert scale (Mendoza et al, 2022).

### 2.3 Procedure

The participants of the study were randomly selected from different educational institutions in the city of Azogues in the province of Cañar, Ecuador. For the selection of educators, the following inclusion criteria were taken into consideration:

1. at least three years in the profession
2. having taught their classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators who did not meet the above criteria were not included. The study was conducted during the academic period 2021-2022. Educators responded to the questions included in the questionnaire under anonymity, in this case the instrument was applied in person.

## 3. Discussion and Results

### 3.1 Descriptive statistics

The surveys were tabulated and processed using Microsoft Excel, identifying relevant aspects for each of the variables analyzed, highlighting the following aspects.

### 3.2 Reflective practice variable

This variable was analyzed under three dimensions, which consequently counted with two analysis items each, the results were:

#### 3.3 Cognitive characteristic dimension:

Item 1: Regularity with which they expose themselves to new knowledge; 75% of the teachers mentioned that every day they try to allocate time in their lives to broaden their knowledge in the areas or subjects in which they work as teachers, as this is the way through which they manage to update themselves in the face of the changes suggested at the curricular level within the Ecuadorian territory.

Item 2: The structure of tasks to be carried out with students is updated to the new educational requirements: The results of this item reflected that from the perspective of 42% of teachers, this being the highest percentage to this question, is barely in agreement with it, as they suggest that it is necessary that the curricular mesh is much more inclusive with other methodologies and teaching strategies, where teachers manage to have more freedom to explore and at the same time complement these methodologies to make classes more active taking into consideration student diversity and the diverse contexts they face.

#### 3.4 Critical thinking dimension:

Item 1: Proposes strategies to work based on the current context and student diversity; 48% of teachers on this question mentioned that, yes they usually propose strategies to couple them to the student curriculum, however, they should keep in mind that they usually also face limitations attributed to the fact that the Ministry of Education requires teachers to embrace the activities that are proposed in these, so the strategies are not significantly changeable.

Item 2: Is reflective about the aspects that need to be improved after being evaluated: 54% of teachers mentioned that they are usually reflective when they are evaluated, regardless of the grades they get, they said that they always try to know more than the content they receive and on which they are graded to know how important and significant these are for their profession, as they have also stated that they often perceive that sometimes the topics on which they are tested have little relation or significance to prepare their classes.

### 3.5 Dimension competences teachers' narratives:

Item 1: Executes activities based on the suggestions or needs of the students; Regarding this item of the last dimension, it was identified that 61% of the teachers try to execute activities based on what the students suggest to them, this attributed to the fact that based on previous assessments, they have identified that each student presents a dissimilar or multiple type of intelligence, so they try to make each student feel that they can participate from diverse contributions; Another aspect that draws the attention of teachers is the need of students to learn at a pace that is not always general, but that each one with the same aptitudes as the majority, learns in a different way than their classmates, so teachers try to implement new activities for the teaching and learning of their group of students.

Item 2: The activities applied awaken the sensitivity, motivation and imagination of the students: According to 68% of the teachers, they were able to mention that in effect the activities that they usually complement to implement in their classes manage to motivate and awaken the sensitivity and imagination of the students, this attributed to the fact that as explained in the previous answer, they try to implement new alternatives of activities that go hand in hand with what the school curriculum suggests, being in this way possible to promote other skills, in addition it is necessary to maintain a constantly participatory classroom, given that teachers are aware that constant feedback is needed as a result of participation in classes and student consultations.

Regarding the dimensions evaluated for the COVID-19 pandemic variable, the results obtained were as follows:

### 3.6 Dimension coupling to the new online modality:

Item 1: Experience of the transition to online education; 38% of the teaching staff stated that the change to the online mode was slow, not only because it took them all by surprise, but also because they had to structure a lesson plan, ensure that the majority of students were present in the classes, take notes, manage the group chats by email, and so on, managing group chats per class with parents, as well as identifying resistance from a significant group of teachers who had little familiarity with the technology and the new tools available for video calls, reflected a challenge for the national education system.

Item 2: Time taken to adapt to the online mode of education: Regarding this question, 38% of the teachers indicated that it took between one to three weeks to adapt to the new modality, however, they stated that from time to time when faced with a situation or new development linked to the use of the connection technology, they would contact someone for support and a solution; It was also identified that 24% of the teachers took more than six months to be able to adapt to the whole new modality, within this group are those teachers who presented some resistance to this new modality and above all to the use of new technologies, as their knowledge of these was almost nil.

### 3.7 Personal perspective dimension:

-Item 1: Do you think that online education after the pandemic generated favorable results among the students? Regarding this question, 31% of the teachers indicated that the results of online education have not been entirely favorable due to various aspects, for example, at the beginning of the pandemic, the technological gap caused many students to miss important classes; Similarly, the transfer of classes via online did not always manage to capture the interest of the students, the evaluations could not be corroborated with veracity that the students were responding without external help; another aspect that drew attention is that most parents were not very present despite the fact that the classes were online, which meant that the group chats were filled with many questions and in the end the student did not fully comply with what was previously required.

Item 2: In the face-to-face modality that has been perceived after online education: Particularly 39% of the teachers that once they returned to the classroom in face-to-face mode it was determined that in the virtual classes they did not manage to attend as they should to the students with diverse requirements, for example, some students without having any intellectual disability require more time to review and review a topic so that it is assimilated and learned, and this was little possible through video calls; Another relevant aspect that was identified according to 34% was the need to go back over topics from previous years so that students had a grasp of them, which delayed some of the planning that had been assigned to teachers; not least, 21% of teachers indicated that ultimately upon returning to the physical classroom, many students had gaps in knowledge even of basic topics, which caused concern.

### 3.8 Dimension impact of the COVID pandemic on your professional life:

Item 1: Did the pandemic have an impact on other aspects of their life that affected their role as a teacher? On this question, it was possible to identify that for 28% of the teachers the pandemic caused by COVID-19 had a significant impact, since, like many other people, this health situation increased their stress levels due to the fear of becoming infected or that a family member would fall ill, and the abrupt change to online education, which was a challenge, also affected their work at the beginning; Only 9% of teachers indicated that the pandemic did not stop worrying them, but they tried not to despair and to safeguard their lives and those of their family members and be ready for whatever this new approach to work would bring.

Item 2: After the pandemic, do you feel that you are more reflective or have other skills that are useful to apply to your students? 75% of the teachers, being clear about what reflective practice encompasses, mentioned being in total agreement with this, since from this health crisis they managed to understand many aspects such as knowing how to adapt much more to the context that the world was going through, and given that many of them have teaching as a vocation, This also influenced their interest in innovating and updating their knowledge in order to apply it in virtual classes, and they were able to see that although students share many similar characteristics, they also have different ways of learning, and for this it was necessary to apply reflective practices that made it possible to redirect their teaching processes and strategies (Cejas et al., 2022).

## 4. Discussion

This article aimed to determine the importance of reflective practice in the teaching profession during the covid-19 pandemic, in the Ecuadorian context, being necessary to contrast the results obtained from the surveys with contributions from the perspective of other authors, determining firstly that reflective practice is not intended to be just an attitude, but a way of acting based on what happens in the educational environment. When applying information about cultures or points of view, it is necessary to avoid acting based on stereotypes, schematic concepts (Zambrano, 2020). Instead, information about the current context, types of intelligence, as well as the guidance and views of other teachers or trainers could be considered a versatile selection, a repertoire that could provide clues to understand dissimilar situations (Marín, et al., 2019).

When a teacher is aware of his or her own skills and position as a professional, as well as the views of his or her diverse learners, he or she can also take aspects into account when planning his or her teaching or common school events. If the educational professional considers the multiple identities, situations on which education unfolds and supports their natural occurrence in different contexts, he/she can reduce their occurrence in surprising and negative ways.

Reflective practice is related to a constant search for new knowledge and to corroborate whether traditional theories and contributions have had a significant change, this could also be attributed to various factors according to Salinas et al., (2019), for example, the structure of the educational curriculum which should be designed for a heterogeneous student population,

considering student diversity that does not necessarily refer to disabilities, but keeping in mind that each student learns at his or her own pace.

Teachers must be prepared for duality, that is to say, they must follow what the educational curricula suggest, but also establish actions that encourage students and motivate them to learn, especially after an online modality where many students did not manage to assimilate the subjects covered online, this has been corroborated by studies such as that of (Yi, 2021), who identified that in general, secondary and primary school teachers in the online modality organised practical and experimental courses, as well as synchronous-asynchronous activities, and complemented their classes with home videos, which in some way influenced the students' interest; however, as time went by, these types of activities tended to generate a sense of monotony if they were not addressed in a timely manner.

The teaching profession demands a vocation, the same one that drives to constant learning about everything that surrounds it and particularly about the contents they have to transmit to students, as well as requires reflection to adapt to changes in the environment and the profiles of the students in their charge, however, teachers are also prone to experience situations that impact on their practice, for example, according to data obtained from surveys and a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2020), teachers who resisted technology during the first months of the pandemic did not manage to develop in a timely manner, in addition to this, the levels of stress in the teacher also increased due to the fear of becoming infected or that someone in their family would become ill, which in some way limited their activities.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, through this article it was possible to identify that reflective practice involves constant learning from a critical-analytical perspective, where the intellectual capacity is constantly fed and evaluated from the context in which it works, in order to establish a pedagogical didactic based on that, as well as the creation of curricula from the suggestions that are defined from the educational curriculum in conjunction with personal and professional experiences, However, the teaching profession is no stranger to experiencing situations that limit its performance, given that there may be factors that have a significant impact on the teacher's role that are not precisely related to a lack of coping skills, but go beyond that, and this was identified in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not all teachers experienced positive aspects of the change to the new online mode, some took longer to adapt to the prolonged use of technological devices, others required external support, and others faced stressful scenarios due to fear of the virus or confinement, however, according to the results obtained in the surveys presented, students were also affected, which was reflected in their low achievement and gaps in some content. It is precisely these results that encourage teachers to implement reflective practice to contribute to the teaching of students, requiring methods, strategies and activities that encourage, motivate and sensitive students so that they can receive the contents taught in a timely manner.

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