

Axiological Orientation of Learning Facilitators on Reflective Teaching Practice in Selected Universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia

Elizabeth Namonje¹, Hikabasa Halwiindi², Cosmas Zyambo³, Francis Simui^{4*}, Gistered Muleya⁵

^{1,4,5}Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

^{2,3}School of Public Health, University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

*Corresponding author: francis.simui@unza.zm

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Abstract This study explored axiological orientation herein referred to values that learning facilitators place on reflective teaching practice in selected universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia. The study was qualitative with an application of case study design. A total number of 32 participants were recruited purposively and were subjected to one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The data was analyzed using thematic approach. In terms of the values that lecturers placed on reflective teaching, the study revealed that reflective teaching practice promotes self-evaluation and improvement of the lecturers, improves the quality of learning for students and helps lecturers to adjust their teaching methodologies. The study also found that reflective practice helps lecturers to be kept up to date and also helping in achieving the objective of the courses. The study concluded that reflective practice on and in action is an important element that lecturers should embrace as it helps to promote quality teaching and learning in institutions offering public health programmes. Among others, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education should consider creating a platform for sensitizing lecturers on reflective teaching where all lecturers can hold conferences as this may allow lecturers to identify their colleagues teaching similar courses and may begin to share experiences, challenges, exchange notes and best strategies for teaching.

Keywords: *Reflective Practice, Public Health, Teaching-Learning Process, Value, Zambia*

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1. Introduction

Research has shown that one of the factors that can influence the quality of teaching and learning is reflective practice [1]. Reflective learning is a type of learning in which one explores his or her experiences to become more conscious, open-minded, and self-critical. The process of Reflective Practice takes place when an individual explores an experience; they have had to identify what happened, and what their role in the experience was, including their thinking and behavior as well as emotions [2,3] posit that reflective practice is considered important within health promotion. This is supported by [4] who observed that when teachers reflect on their teaching practices, it helps them to avoid teaching methods that have negative influence on the learning process of students. This could be the reason why the study by [5] on the teaching of Civic Education in Zambia employed teachers to be grounded on methods that can have positive influence on students learning as well as societal transformation. [6] is of the view that asking teachers to

reflect on their personal core qualities along with their teaching competencies allows them to gain deeper awareness of their classroom problems thus, offering an opportunity to rethink of possible remedy to classroom fragilities.

[7] posit that reflective practice is central to medical education due to the fact that it helps lecturers to focus on approaches that increase in knowledge and clinical skills of students.

In view of reflective practice, [8] indicated that there are mainly two forms of reflection. Reflection in action and reflection on action. On one hand, Reflection in action is a self-awareness process in which we pause and think about the progress of an activity. On the other hand, Reflection on action is a self-awareness process in which we pause and think back after something has happened. In the context of this study, reflection in action may require lecturers in public health to pause as they deliver their lessons to their students and assess if students are able to follow what is being taught. In the light of reflection on action, this may require lecturers to think back and be able to reflect of their action after teaching if the objectives of the lessons have been achieved.

Despite the narrative that reflective practice is imperative in the teaching process, a study by [9] reported that while several approaches to reflection were found, none of these were linked directly to public health practice. Further, there was also scant information available on the value that lecturers place on reflective practice hence this study to explore the value if any, that lecturers place on reflective teaching practice in selected universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia.

1.1. Statement of the problem

European Commission for Education and Training [10] posit the development of the intellectual and reflective skills of students begins with the teachers. Thus, the commission suggested that learning institutions should promote a culture of reflective practice among teachers. [11] explains that when lecturers are embedded in reflective practice, they will be able to examine their practices, implement alternative methods and share the best practices with colleagues for achieving quality education. This view is in line with the quality of higher education and its relevance to industry as reflected in Educating Our Future Policy of 1996. However, this goal remains elusive and unachieved going by higher education performance reports of 2013-2014. When public health lecturers do not attach any value to reflective practice, teaching becomes haphazardly, accidental and superficial [12]. In spite of reflective practice being viewed by many scholars to be a beneficial classroom instructional practice in the public health teaching and learning process, its values placed by lecturers from institutions offering public health programmes in Zambia, Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces in particular were still unknown hence this study.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the values if any, that lecturers place on reflective teaching practice in selected universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia.

1.3. Theoretical framework

This study was guided by [13] teaching framework. The Danielson framework for teaching “is a research-based set of components of instruction grounded in a constructivist view of learning”. The twenty-two components are clustered into four domains and include descriptors of instructional practices toward effective teaching. The four domains include: planning and preparation, classroom culture and climate, instruction, and professional responsibilities. [13] emphasized, “Teachers’ professional learning to include self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation”. Therefore, using a teaching framework such as The Danielson framework for teaching [13]. can enable teachers to measure their own teaching performance. This is supported by [11]. who argued that following a framework is a good practice as this can help teachers to generate and receive feedback without the involvement of a supervisor. In the context of this study, it was ideal to adopt this teaching framework

when exploring value that lecturers place on reflective practice because of its salient features such as its support for self-reflection, promoting collaborative inquiry, and increase collegial dialogue to support teachers’ improvement of their teaching.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

This was a qualitative research riding on a case study design. This was targeted at four selected universities offering public health training in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia.

2.2. Study Sample

The study recruited 32 participants from four selected universities. The sample comprised of Deans, heads of department and the lecturers from the four universities in the school of public training in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia. This study design falls within the constraints of constructivist and relativist ontology worldview whose argument paint a picture that knowledge generation and knowing a reality of a particular phenomenon requires social interaction with people. This entails that the researcher had an opportunity to interact with participants from the targeted universities as the cases to generate evidence on the values that lecturers place on reflective teaching practice.

2.3. Sampling Procedure

The study focused on generating deeper understanding of the value that lecturers place on reflective practice. To achieve this within the constraints of the study, homogenous purposive sampling was used by which the researcher decided who to include in the sample, a decision which was made based on participants who possessed similar characteristics that were relevant to the study [14,15].

2.4. Instruments for data Generation

The study relied on primary data which was collected through interview guide with semi-structured questions and focus group discussion. The use of Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gather in-depth information which gave the researcher a complete and detailed understanding of values placed by the lecturers on reflective practice [16]. However, before engaging participants in an interview, permission was sought from the relevant authorities.

3. Findings and Discussion of the Study

A. Participants were asked to give their views on what they sought were the values of reflective teaching practice. Through data analysis and interpretations, one (1) theme and five (5) sub-themes emerged.

3.1. Self-evaluation and improvement of the staff

The study revealed that reflective teaching is important because it promotes self-evaluation and improvement of the teaching staff. Participants mentioned that reflective teaching helps lecturers to evaluate their methods of teaching and try to come up with better ways of delivering their lessons to the students. The participants further mentioned that reflective teaching is very important for both the students and the lecturers because it gives educators an opportunity to research more and improve on the way lecturers give information to the students. This is evident from what the participants said by mentioning that:

“[...] reflective teaching helps you a lecturer to improve on your teaching because when you realize that your learners did not understand or do not understand your course in a particular topic; then you are going to reflect on it to change the method and that will help you to change for the better” (FGD P4, University B).

“Ahh what I would say is reflective teaching is very important from both the students and the lecturers because it also gives us educators to research more and also to improve on the way we give information or deliver the information to the students. So, it's very important and the students tend to benefit in that you will be able to change the strategies in terms of delivering the information to them.” (FGD P2, University D).

“I think it gives educators an opportunity to do their own self-evaluation and of course try to achieve better ways of how to reach out to the students they are undertaking or lecturing within a semester.” (FGD P4, University A)

In terms of self-evaluation and improvement of the staff, findings give an impression that reflective teaching helps lecturers to evaluate their methods of teaching and try to come up with better ways of delivering their lessons to the students. The implication of this finding is that this is important for both the students and the lecturers because it gives educators an opportunity to research more and improve on the way they deliver the lessons to the students. This finding is in tandem with European Commission for Education and Training [17] who suggested that promoting a culture of reflective practice and research among teachers may help to paint a new face in the education sector. The implication of this finding is that it may offer an opportunity for teachers be equipped with a new range of skills which would lead to new teaching methods.

3.2. Improves the quality of learning for students

Participants had a view that reflecting teaching improves the quality of learning for the students. The participants argued that reflective teaching helps the lecturers to improve their methods of teaching and also to improve the quality of learning for the students because it lays a good foundation for the students in that particular course they are learning. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

“Ahh from the Dean's point of view I think reflective practice is important in that it brings the best if you are

implementing the reflective strategies because it improves the quality of learning on the part of students and when it improves the quality of learning then we are assured of good quality products because as a medical training learning institution as we are key to the delivery of health services in the country” (KII-Dean, University C).

“Reflection on our teaching is of great benefits in the sense that it helps us to meet our student's needs. Wow on the part of students I think it helps them to get the material that they need because if the lecturer is able to reflect on how the lecture was conducted and whether or not students have understood it will help the lecturer to adjust their lecturing and in turn it is going to cause them to grasp more information from that lecture” (FGD P1, University D).

“It helps me to improve my way of teaching and helps the students to get the benefits of what they are learning to make it easier for them to understand because if a student finds the topic very hard, they may develop the attitude towards that subject that it is hard. But if you make it interesting and participatory then they enjoy it and relate even to their own life. Oh, that's how it is; oh, this is why I am used to do this, so that it is participatory and enjoyable” (FGD P1, University C).

This study is related to [18] who advocate for improved quality of learning through lesson plan preparation workshops for an independent learning model.

The study found that another value which was placed on reflective teaching is that it improves the quality of learning for students. This meant that through reflective teaching, both students and lecturers are able to discuss and point out areas that requires improvement. Participants argued that reflecting teaching helps the lecturers to improve their methods of teaching which improves the quality of learning for the students by meeting the needs of the students through provision of materials needed to them. In addition, key informants also argued that reflective teaching helps lecturers to adjust their teaching methodologies when they encounter different groups of learners since they teach the same courses year in and year out for the different intakes. This is beneficial to the educators because learning is dynamic and lecturers need to employ different strategies to help the learners understand the topic or course [19]. This finding confirms the previous study conducted by [3] who found that the practice of self-reflection in academic achievement has been captured in disciplines that contribute to Public Health.

3.3. Helps lecturers to adjust their teaching methodologies

The study in line with [20] also revealed that reflective teaching prepares lecturers to encounter different groups of learners they teach the same courses year in and year out for the different intakes. The participants mentioned that reflective teaching is beneficial to the educators in the sense that it helps them as lecturers to adjust their behaviors so that students can be able to learn to avoid making the same mistakes over and over. The verbal responses below supports this point:

“I think it prepares you as a lecturer to encounter different groups because we teach the same courses year

in and year out and we teach different groups. How a certain group performed last semester will be different from the way another group will perform in the next semesters. After you reflect on your teaching you are able to say that I need just to balance to meet every need of other learners” (FGD P2, University B).

“Ahh reflective teaching is a basis for improvement; if each time when you are teaching then you are going to have great desire to make your learning more practical in life as you reflect you may want to change your method of teaching you are taking it; now will involve how to change from the old one to the new one so that the students are able to understand you very well” (FGD P4, University C).

“I think reflection on teaching is of great benefits in the sense that it helps us as lecturers to adjust our behaviours so that our students can be able to learn because if we don’t reflect on our teaching, then definitely what will happen is that we are going to be making the same mistakes over and over and we won’t create an environment where students can actually learn.” (FGD P1, University D).

The study also found that reflective teaching helps lecturers to be kept update with the current situations of the learners they are teaching. Findings gives an impression that the idea behind adjusting teaching methods was to ensure that students are able to assimilate the content taught and be able to apply it in real life situation [21]. In this regard, participants argued that their goal as educators is to make sure that they teach students to understand the course and be able to apply the knowledge acquired from class to the real-life situation in the industries. This helps the lecturers to learn other ways of delivering the lessons to the students as they are forced to look up for new information on how to deliver they can better present their lessons.

The above finding could be a confirmation by a study conducted by [5] on the teaching of Civic Education in Zambia: An Examination of trends in the teaching of Civic Education in Schools revealed salient issues where service learning is concerned. Findings indicated that some teachers were not well grounded on active teaching pedagogies hence there was need to rethink of active methods that can be of relevance to society.

3.4. Helps lecturers to be kept up to date

The study also found that reflective practice is important because it helps the lecturers to be kept up to date with the current situations of the learners they are teaching [22,23,24]. They argued that their goal as educators is to make sure that they teach students to understand the course and be able to apply the knowledge acquired from class to the real-life situation in the industries. One of the participants from the FGDs had this to say:

“Reflective practice is beneficial as it keeps us up to date and how to approach different characters for example in a class of 20 students, they may not all think alike, they may not all have the same attention and because of that we always want to reflect on how best can I deliver this message so that they are able to understand a thing” (FGD P4, University A).

Similar to the above response, the key informant mentioned that reflective teaching is beneficial to the lecturers because it helps them to learn other ways of delivering the lessons to the students as they are forced to look up for new information on how they can better present their lessons. This is evident from the verbal account below:

“The other importance of reflectiveness is the teacher himself or herself because the more you reflect on the methods of teaching and how our teaching has been the more, we may try to get it and other means that might be effective so that the teacher process and learns other ways because they will be forced to search what will be other best ways to presenting” (KII-Dean, University B).

From the responses given by the participants, findings give an impression that reflective teaching is important because it helps the lecturers to be kept up to date with the current situations of the learners they are teaching. They argued that their goal as educators is to make sure that they teach students to understand the course and be able to apply the knowledge acquired from class to the real-life situation in the industries. These results are complemented by the information obtained from the key informants who also reported that reflective teaching is beneficial to the lecturers because it helps them to learn other ways of delivering the lessons to the students as they are forced to look up for new information on how they can better present their lessons.

The above insights reflect well with several purposes of reflection proposed by [18] and [23] whose studies allude to teacher’s self-reflection as a tool for self-knowledge, Reflection for professional development, reflection to aid research on teaching, reflection to enhance student learning experience and reflection as a teaching and assessment tool.

3.5. Helps to achieve the objective of the courses

Further, the study revealed that reflective teaching is important strategy because it helps the learners to learn the different topics delivered to them [24]. The participants mentioned that they usually encounter different kinds of learners from each intake and they need to reflective on their teaching methods in order to make the learners participate in class to achieve the objective of courses the following verbal response support the above theme:

“I think it helps to achieve the objectives in that it helps the learners to learn because we encounter different kinds of people and learners. So, we will not continue with one particular kind of strategy and think that everyone will be able to understand a particular course with that one strategy. We keep on changing with the kind of learners we are encountering on different occasions. But the purpose is to help the learners learn to engage them so that they are continually engaged in a particular course; I need to help them even as they are going higher outside in the society.” (FGD P1, University B).

From the verbal accounts given, it was deduced that study participants had their own values attached to reflective teaching practice. Both participants from the FGDs and the key informants claimed that reflective teaching practice is important in that it promotes self-

evaluation and improvement of the teaching staff, improves the quality of learning for students, helps lecturers to adjust their teaching methodologies, helps lecturers to be kept up to date, and also helps in achieving the objective of the courses.

The study also found that reflective teaching helps lecturers to achieve the objective of the course. Participants argued that they usually encounter different kinds of students from each intake and they needed to be reflective on their teaching methods in order to make the students participate in class to achieve the objective of courses. This reflects well with [25,26,28] who recognized for the first time that an individual can reflect on things, particularly when there is a real problem or a sense of difficulty by merely 'thinking' about them and how to come out of such problems. By and large, reflection on practice is a precursor to quality education [29].

4. Conclusion

The study concluded that the key axiological orientation herein referred to as values placed by lecturers on reflective practice were that it promotes self-evaluation and improvement of the lecturers, improves the quality of learning for students, helps to achieve helps lecturers to adjust their teaching methodologies as well as keeping them up to date. Similarly, the study established that reflective practice helps lecturers to achieve the objective of the courses. This gives an impression that reflective practice is an important art when delivering public health lessons and if well harnessed by the lecturers, it has a potential to help lecturers deal with difficult situation as they deliver their lessons for easy assimilation of the content by the students.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

- i The Ministry of Education should consider creating a platform for sensitizing lecturers on reflective teaching where all lecturers can hold conferences as this may allow lecturers to identify their colleagues teaching similar courses and may begin to share experiences, challenges, exchange notes and best strategies for teaching.
- ii University policies and plans for curriculum innovations should be available to all stakeholders for them to study and understand the innovations taking place. The lecturers' understanding in innovation is cardinal because lecturers will be made aware of the innovations, embrace it and be prepared to implement it.
- iii The Ministry of Education and the university administrators should seriously look into the plight of providing sufficient quality teaching and learning resources for both lecturers and students and these should be delivered on time.

Education standards officers should continue to maintain standards in Universities and Colleges to control over enrolments and overcrowding in classes so that the

lecturers can teach efficiently and effectively so that students can benefit fully from the lecturers.

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