Reflective teaching a requisite for Teacher Professional Development-A case Study in secondary education in the Kingdom of Bhutan

Sumitra Pokhrel

Abstract:

This study attempts to present reflective teaching practice as a tool for educators for continued professional development. Reflective teaching allows to adopt and develop classroom practices making educator a lifelong learner. Enhancing the quality of teacher to improve the quality of education is one of the strategies of education system of many countries ,including Bhutan. Education system of Bhutan is built on the unique Bhutanese values of *tha dam- tshig ley gjudrey* and philosophies of child centeredness, inclusivity and lifelong learning. Upholding these values, educator must engage in introspecting their teaching practices, analyzing how something was taught and ways to improve/modify practices to enhance academic performance of the learner. The purpose of this paper is to promote reflective thinking and reflective teaching practice among educators and adopt better technique of teaching methods to suit the evolving learning need of the students. It is also to encourage continuous enhancement of teaching profession. It incorporates the case study carried out for a considerable group of students in the class levels where the researcher was teaching. The case study throws some light on how different components of classroom teaching is implemented and identifies adjustments required.

Keywords: *Reflective teaching, secondary school educator, professional development, introspection, feedback*

Introduction:

Educators are key assets of any secondary and post-secondary education system. They are not only educators imparting knowledge, skills and cultural values but also often assume the role of second parent and role model supporting students both emotionally and morally. Teacher education plays a vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. Teacher training is critical to education and the quality of education depends on the quality of the teacher

and their teaching approaches. There is always some differences on learning and imparting it to others. Proper feedback on teaching helps educator to improve the teaching style. Schon (1983) is of the view that reflective teaching practice is a continuous process that enhances professionalism in educators. The research studies showed that reflective practices enhance the professional development of the educators especially in in-service contexts where people want to learn from real-life experiences. (KAUNG, 2020). The reflection practice that educators adopt allows them to review teaching methodology in relation to academic performances of the learners and development of knowledge, skills and values.

Literature review

The Reflective Teacher

Reflective teacher is the one who regularly engages in evaluating their own teaching, considering the scope of their pedagogy, structure of their course and the classroom management. (Center for the Advancement of Teaching, 2021) Reflective educator analyzes and reflects on how their teaching decisions impact the learning outcome of the learners and considers how to approach particular task or challenge in the future. Some of the characteristics of a reflective educator includes the ability to self-analyze, identify their own strengths, weaknesses and threats, self - acceptance and implementation of self-improvement plans. Reflective teaching is a personal tool that educators use to observe and evaluate the way they deal and behave in the classroom to bring perfection in teaching. The strong education system and the well-founded curriculum will actually be a reality, only ,when an educator decides how a lesson is delivered in the class and how the learners are engaged in the classroom.

Reflective pedagogy is the idea that professionals continuously and carefully evaluate their own work, seeking to understand their motives and rationales as well as their practices, and then try to improve upon their work (Bailey & Kathleen, 2012). This means examining at what one does in the classroom, thinking about why one does it, and determining whether it is effective. It is essentially a continual process of self-observation and self-evaluation. This is further reviewed under the two following sub-topics.

What is Reflective Teaching?

Reflective teaching is an important and emerging modality that assists educators to evaluate and analyze their teaching practices regularly and incorporate the suitable and necessary changes. The goal of analyzing reflective teaching specifically allows

the educator to discover what works best or what is not working in the classroom environment. It enables the educator to identify which model they are using and when required adjust their approach. Effective reflection is an important component of quality teaching. An educator who can reflect on their own practices to find better ways of teaching is a reflective educator. Seeking proper feedback on teaching helps educator to improve the teaching strategies.

Reflective Teaching is similarly learner-centered activity in which the educator ensures that learning is made possible for learners and supports, guides, and encourages them in their active and independent creation of new knowledge. Research has deduced that only reflective teachers are able to refine and modify their practices for improved teaching and learning skills. They are able to accommodate diverse learning styles of students and contribute in quality teaching learning process. Atherson (2005) argues that reflective practitioner stimulates the classroom by making it thought-provoking, challenging and motivating for the learners. Reflective teaching can be adopted through various means such as teacher's reflective journal, students feedback and peer evaluation.

Reflective teaching is focused and practiced more rigorously during the teacher training period as it is one of the components of Teaching Practice module. The usage of the reflective practice slowly vanishes over a period of time once the teacher enters the field. However, the continuity of the reflective practice is found to be effective and necessary for continuous teacher professional development. An attempt for continuity of such a practice is made in this research through a case study by the researcher.

This enhances the educator's effectiveness in the classroom and signals to the students that their best interests are always at the core of how classroom teaching strategies are designed. Knowing how reflective teaching can create a better learning environment for the learners is the best way to understand why one should use the best-suited techniques in the class room. It is also a learner centered approach and one of the foundations of modern educational practices that helps educators understand how to better prepare and maintain effective learning structures that enable students to achieve the set education goals.

Being able to continuously reflect upon the teaching approaches and the measured impacts within the classroom is an essential tool in preparing and guiding the student experience and reaching new educational opportunities. It is also a self-reflective practice essential for the caring teacher to continue to progress professionally and remain engaged.

Reflection-in Action and Reflection on Action

Reflection-in Action and Reflection on Action are two categories of reflection used by researchers to investigate how educators use their experience to analyze their practices. As demonstrated by Schon (1983), the approach of considering the chain of actions during an activity for consistent improvement is reflection in action and thinking about overall outcome of the activity in a logical way is reflection-on action, which the educator can make changes and improvement in their teaching approaches and style. Reflective teaching involves recognizing, examining, and ruminating over the way an individual teaches. Donald (1983) emphasizes that first collecting information on the classroom environment and activities, and then analyzing and evaluating this information is useful in exploring and identifying best practices for a successful educator.

Why Reflective teaching?

Reflective teaching is an important tool for professional educators to evaluate how an activity is successful in terms of learner engagement and learning outcomes. (Farrell, 2007). Soisangwarn & Wongwanich identify a reflective educator is one who engages critical approaches in their thinking about what occurs in classroom lessons and considers alternative means of achieving goals or aims.

In order to maintain continuous professional growth, it is advisable for both pre-service and in- service educators to adopt reflective teaching practices. Reflective teaching is an essential component of the professional career of the educator. Being a reflective practitioner means to not only engage a critical mind-set in reflecting upon their work as educators but also to use these insights to refine their teaching, improve their teaching styles and improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Educator maintains multiple roles in the classroom. They are the controller, information creator and user, and information supplier in the classroom (Shalabi, Sameem, & Almuqati, 2018). Educator must maintain attention to everything inside the classroom while at the same time convey knowledge and learning that is innovative, objective and flexible in its approach to be effective in the classroom environment. Reflective teaching also plays a big role in the educator's personal and professional development. It gives freedom to teachers to impose their own methodology enhancing rational thinking. (Navaneedhan, 2012).

Three main characteristics of reflective process

Researchers have identified three main characteristics of reflective processess that are quite important. They are open-mindedness, responsible and enthusiasm

(Farrell, 2014). A dedicated teacher with open-mindedness and sense of responsibility at the heart of their teaching profession can make a reflective teacher a lifelong learning educator. The practice of reflective teaching allows the educator to accept constructive feedbacks and remain open to continued professional development and progress. Reflective teaching allows educators to engage in a thoughtful and purposeful mindset and avoid the "I don't know what I will do today" syndrome. Braun and Crumpler (2004) hypothesized that reflective practice increases the educator's sense of self efficacy, job satisfaction, and promotes the development of interpersonal relationships with other teacher colleagues and the school administration. Farrell opined that reflective teaching assists the teacher from the impulse and routine behaviour. Several research work identifies that reflective teaching also produces many active and intelligent students who learn to reflect on their own learning and overcome the academic challenges.

However, it has been observed that owing to time constraints and workload, reflective teaching is rarely practiced by most in-service teachers except during the teaching practice and formal class observations by mentors. More intrinsically, the educators in the field gain confidence and mastery over the pedagogy and content with time and the need for reflective practice is undervalued. The educators in the field gains mastery over curriculum and overall approaches to teaching. Classroom and time management becomes effective over a period of time. Understanding child psychology and giving moral and emotional support to the learner becomes easier for the educator with growing number of years and experiences. Therefore, the practice of Reflective Teaching is not adopted by many educators in the field. It is also observed that some educators lack the methods and reflective models needed for quick and effective reflection. Some reflection methods used worldwide by the teachers in the field include learner's feedback, self-reflection, peer coaching, discussion and students' performance. Peer coaching is now considered an important proactive strategy that enriches the educator's personal reflections on their practices. It also elicits suggestions from peers on how to refine their practices and foster a community of teachers. One of the best methods for developing the reflective understanding is to ask for learner feedback and use that information to transform and adjust the lesson in future.

A case study was carried out by an educator using student feedback form from various class levels taught towards the mid 2019 at Phuentsholing Higher Secondary School in Chukka, situated in the Himalayan foothills of the south western region of Bhutan. The school has the class level ranging from class Pre-primary (PP) to class XII and is a Day School. The school was established in 1983 with 200 teachers as a Primary school. It underwent a series of up-gradation until it became a Higher Secondary School in 2003.It has more than 60 teaching faculty along with 16 support staff.

Case Study

The case study used a qualitative enquiry for the research and data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The students' feedback is used as a tool for reflection and the results analyzed graphically to identify the strength and weaknesses of teaching process. This case study includes students of classes VII, XI and XII within the average age range of 12 years to 18 years at Phuentsholing Higher Secondary school, Phuentsholing Bhutan. The Five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree is used in feedback form. The questions ranged from teaching strategies to assessment and behavioural aspect of the teacher. A descriptive data analysis is used to compile and generate the graphical analysis.

The reflective teaching has been one of the requisites for professional betterment of teachers. Therefore, the case study's aim is to:

1. Promote reflective thinking and a reflective teaching practice among the teachers.
2. Help educators learn about and adopt suitable method of teaching methods to suit the evolving learning need of the students.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected through convenience sampling from the teaching classes using a set of questionnaires with thirteen questions. The face validity of the questionnaire was conducted with the researcher from the College of Science and Technology and the reliability of the same was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha (.97). A total of 90 respondents participated for the research study. The respondents were from classes VII, XI and XII. The data is compiled and analyzed in terms of the percentage of the respondents with respect to preparedness of the teacher, pedagogy used, assessment covering range of teaching components and behaviour of the teacher in the classroom.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is presented with different type of figures. The main areas like preparedness of the educator, pedagogy used and assessment are analyzed in detail and the remaining components of the questionnaire are explained in general using a common graph.

Figure 1 indicates the preparedness of the educator for the class with 100% towards positive side. It was found that 54.4% of the respondents strongly agree

and another 37.8% agree that the teacher is prepared for the class with proper lesson plan, teaching learning materials and other necessary resources prior to the class.As no students observed the lack of preparedness, it is an encouraging response for the educator for maintaining greater enthusiasm.
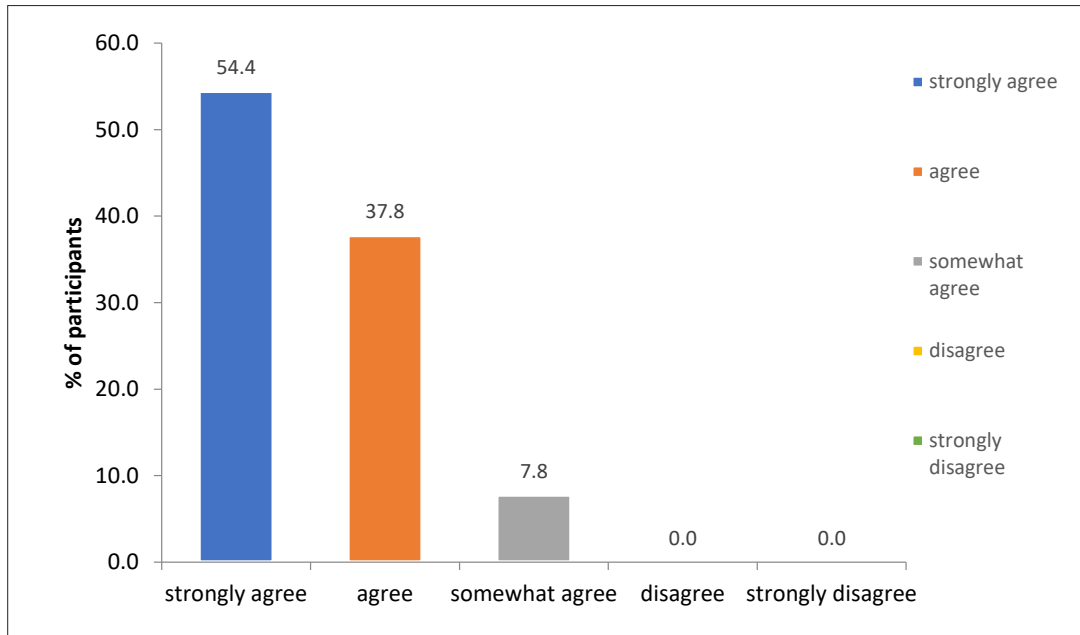

Figure 1: Preparedness of teacher

Pedagogy Used

The second area of reflection was pedagogy. Figure 2 represents the pedagogy used and the effective communication practiced by the educator during the classroom teaching. It is observed that 77.8% of the learner either strongly agreed (31.1%) or agreed (46.7%) with the inclusion of variety of teaching strategies during the delivery of the lesson. Another 18.9 % of the respondents somewhat agreed and 3.3% disagreed that the teacher uses varieties of strategies in the classroom to enhance the performance and learning of the learner.

Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. Effective educators use a variety of teaching strategies because there is no one size fits all, universal approach that suits all learners in all situations. Different strategies used in different combinations with different groups of students improve learning outcomes. Therefore, the respondents' perception of educator who used varied strategies in daily teaching was found to be the most motivating note to work harder for making the teaching learning process an engaging one.
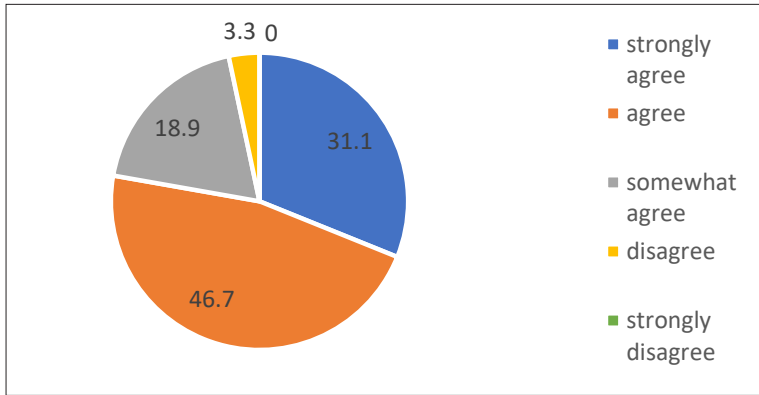
Figure 2: Varieties of strategies used

Assessment

The fundamental purpose of assessment in education is to establish and understand where learners are in an aspect of their learning at the time of assessment. (Masters, 2014). Fairness in assessment is one of the four principles of assessment. Assessment is fair when the assessment process is clearly understood by candidates and agreed by both assessors and candidates and when candidates' needs and characteristics are addressed either in formative or in summative assessment.

As assessments are an integral part of teaching and learning in the case study, 97.8% of the respondents felt the assessment was fair with 53.5% strongly agreed, 32.2% agreed and 12.2% agreed somewhat. Only 2.2% strongly disagreed with fairness in assessment. It is shown in figure 3.
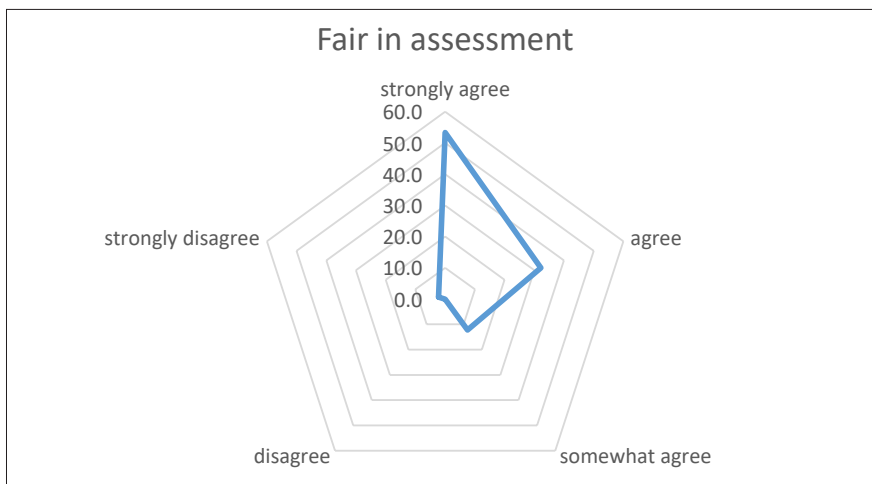
Figure 3: Fair Assessment

The graph in the figure 4 indicates overall feedback of the respondents. The first three columns indicate the first component- content knowledge of the teacher. Around 45 % of the respondents strongly agreed, indicating that the educator demonstrated competent knowledge of the content taught.
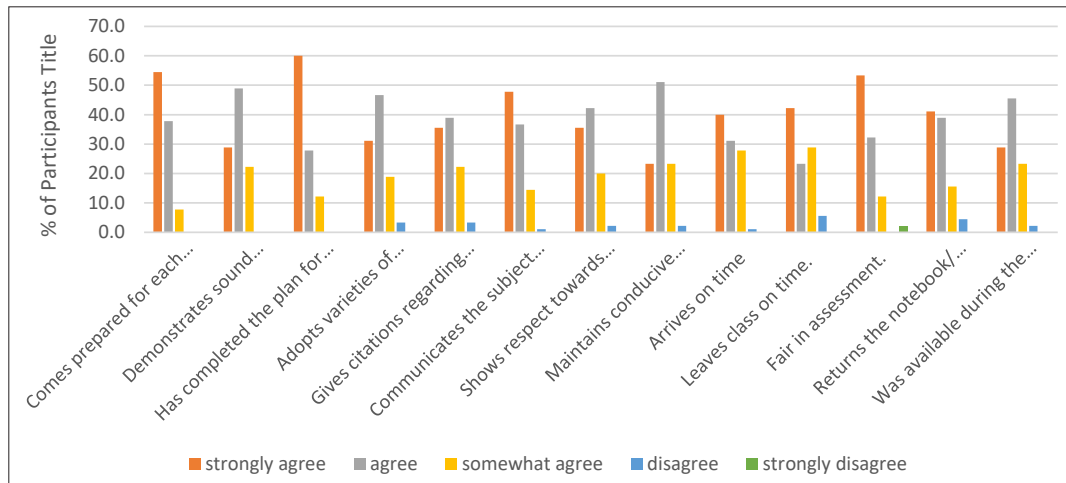
Figure 4: Overall Feedback of learners

Punctuality and assessment aspect of teaching is depicted by the 9th to 13th columns. The majority of the learners strongly agreed with the display of punctuality as a strong social value upheld by the educator. Fairness in assessment and timely returning of the notebooks and assignments also indicated that more than 50 % of the learner strongly agreed.

There were an insignificant number of learners who disagreed with the different components and almost none strongly disagreed.

Discussion

Reflective Teaching is an important step in an educators' professional development. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to be reflective on their teaching practice. Moreover by having reflective habit, an educator will recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their own practices.

From the analysis of the feedback in the case study, it is clear that there are many positive aspects of reflective teaching. Most of the learners demonstrated satisfaction from educators' preparedness and pedagogy used in classroom and responded that they looked forward to class. The preparedness and clarity of content knowledge was observed as the strongest strength in teaching. Effective communication of the content with relevant reference to the local and global context

is yet another facet that makes teaching compelling to the learners and demonstrated the competence of the educator. Fairness in assessment and punctuality are also professional values that learners identified as important attributes in the educator.

However, the feedback also indicates that the educator leaving the class on time needed immediate improvement. Several interruptions during the class and other factors sometimes hindered the educator from closing the lesson on time. A negligible percentage of the respondents felt that the educator was unavailable for consultation after the class and that educator be more empathetic. This could be due to the day schooling nature of the school. Therefore, attending to learners after class and giving them personal time to have direct contact is observed to be an area of intervention.

Conclusion

Reflective Teaching is one of the key components in a teacher's professional development. The case study revealed that the educator gained insight of the teaching methodology and other components of teaching enabling them to redesign and modify their teaching to better suit specific learning needs of the learners and their environments.
The reflective practice is a cyclical process, because once we start to implement changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins. Reflective practice is beneficial for professional development as it cultivates critical thinking, enhances personal growth, and gives freedom to teachers to engage their own methodologies and develop their unique teaching styles.

Reflection is not panacea to all the problems that we encounter in striving to be a good teacher. The aim of reflective teaching is to help teachers shift from routine actions rooted in common-sense thinking to reflective action stemming from professional thinking (Pollard et al., 2008).

Although reflective teaching has been found to be a useful tool for the educator to enhance their professional development, there are few studies that explore the relationship between Reflective Teaching and student performance. Some researchers feel there is need for further research to explore the relationship and impact of Reflective Teaching on the students' achievement. (Noormohammadi, 2014).The case study discussed here is an attempt of the researcher to try being a reflective teacher through students' feedback.

Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST) is one of the reforms that the Ministry of Education brought forward to improve the quality of education through enhancing the quality of teachers. It was instituted in 2017 and formally launched on 2nd May 2019. It is built on the unique Bhutanese values of *tha dam-tshig ley gjudrey* and philosophies of child centeredness, inclusivity and lifelong learning (MOE, 2020).

With Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST) coming into effect from 2020 academic session, Reflective Teaching is included as a component of 6th Standard - Personal Growth and Professional Development. This standard highlights the importance of teachers' beliefs and principles in shaping instructional practices. It emphasizes the need for teachers to set professional goals and engage in reflection for lifelong learning. Therefore it is imperative that educators both in Bhutan and around the world recognize how Reflective Teaching is important for educator's personal growth and professional development.

However not all educators are equipped with reflective methods and suitable models. Therefore the teacher training colleges and the education ministries across the world need to upscale the support and the skills imparted to the educators during and after the training. The continuous professional development activities in this field would provide the tools for educators to be a reflective teacher.

References

Bailey, & Kathleen. (2012). Refelctive Pedagogy. *The Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching*, 15.

Center for the Advancement of Teaching. (2021). Retrieved from Temple University: https://teaching.temple.edu/edvice/reflective-teacher

Farrell, T. (2007). Reflective language Teaching. *Research to practice continnum*, 13.

Harmer, J. (2007). The Practice of English Language Teaching. *UK: Pearson Education Limited.*

Hudaya, D. W. (2017). Reflective Teaching. *Medium*.

KAUNG, P. P. (2020). A STUDY OF TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MYANMAR . *KDI School of Public Policy and Management*.

Masters, G. N. (2014, August). Assessment: Getting to the essence. *Center for Assessment Reforms and Innovation*(1), 6.

Ministry of Education. (2020). *Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers.*

Navaneedhan, C. G. (2012, december). Reflective teaching pedagogy as innovative approach in Teacher Education through open and distance learning. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies, 3*(12), 5. doi:10.5897/JMCS11.028

Noormohammadi, S. (2014). Teacher Reflection and its Relation to Teacher Efficacy and autonomy. *International Conference on Current Trends in ELT* (p. 10). Procedia- Social and Behavioural Science.

Rodgers, A. T. (1997). Refelction on what makes a good teacher. *Back to Teaching Methods and resources, 62*(2).

RSerra. (2017, September 19). What Is Reflective Teaching And Why Is It Important?:. *Richmondshare Blog: High quality content and interaction in the ELT world*.

Sadeghi, M. (2012). Action research in reflective teaching. *Basic Research Journal*, 6.

Santha, V., & Choden, P. (n.d.). Improving the quality of Schooling: Some observation from Bhutan.

Schon, D. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action. *New York: Basic Books*.

Shalabi, M. M., Sameem, M., & Almuqati, A. N. (2018). Reflective Teaching as a Practical Approach. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics ; Peer reviewed journal, 83*, 10.

Soisangwarn, A., & Wongwanich, S. (2014). Promoting the Reflective Teacher through Peer Coaching. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 8.

Wangdi, T. (2016). Reflective teaching in thoughts or action: Bhutanese teachers' 2Ps (perception and Practices). *Bhutan Journal of Research & Development*, 16. Retrieved 2020

Zahid, M., & Khanam, A. (2019, January). Effect of Reflective Teaching Practices on the Performance of Prospective Teachers. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 18*(1).

About the Author

Sumitra Pokhrel is a teacher at Phuentsholing Higher Secondary School, Ministry of Education, Bhutan. She teaches Geography and Economics for higher secondary classes. She has M.Sc. in Geography from Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam, Post Graduate Certificate in Education from Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) and Bachelor in Arts Geography (hons) from Sherubtse College (RUB), Bhutan. She is a member of Subject Committee for geography at Royal Education Council (REC) and involved in curriculum development and reforms with REC. She is also a member of textbook writer for Geography for classes VII to X (REC), Ministry of Education, Bhutan. She was a panel member for Validation of M. Ed in Geography program and Post Graduate Diploma in Education program for Royal University of Bhutan (RUB).She is an emerging researcher.