



Research Paper

From Internship Experience to Professional Agency: Examining Reflective Practice among Pre-Service Teachers in Odisha

Duryodhan Mahakud

Assistant Professor (TE)

Anandapur Anchalik Training College, Fakirpur, Keonjhar Odisha

Abstract

School internship is the stage at which pre-service teachers start to transition from theoretical learning to practice, but in India, it is regarded as a compliance issue. This paper explores reflective practice and professional agency during internship as a route to professional formation for pre-service teachers in Odisha. Using a documentary, secondary-data design, it analyses national and state teacher and school indicators respectively from UDISE+ 2023-24 and 2024-25, regulatory provisions for internship in NCTE (2014) and NEP 2020, the launch of the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), an empirical review of pre-service secondary teacher education in Odisha, and international literature on reflection and agency. The paper argues that while the teacher workforce in Odisha is mostly trained, there remains a formal qualification deficit, the school system is shrinking but with a premium on quality, and internship provisions need to be rethought in view of time and mentorship. Using Schön's reflective practitioner and an ecological view of teacher agency, it proposes a Reflection-Agency Pathway through which structured reflection, mentorship dialogues, and enabling environments can transform internship experiences into professional agency. It concludes with implications for B.Ed./ITEP internship, mentor preparation, and reflective assessments, plus the key primary-data questions for empirical validation in Odisha.

Keywords: reflective practice; professional agency; school internship; pre-service teachers; teacher education; Odisha; UDISE+

I. Introduction

Teacher quality is significantly determined by the preparation and supervised practice opportunities provided to would-be-teachers, with reflective practice being the mechanism through which experiences during field placements are assimilated (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Recent studies continue to reveal the centrality of reflective practice to pre-service teachers' pedagogical development, professional awareness, and self-directedness (Li, 2025).

Teacher education is undergoing a major transformation in India, with NEP 2020 prioritizing teacher education and NCTE initiating the four-year ITEP from 2023-24 in 57 teacher training institutions for integrated baccalaureate degree programmes – BA BEd, BSc BEd, and BCom BEd (PIB, 2023). Similarly, Odisha is an important state in the teacher education sector as it is facing a dual challenge of a decreasing number of schools (61,565 in 2024-25 compared to 61,693 in 2023-24) (OdishaTV, 2025) and a drop in enrolment (76,44,052 in 2024-25 against 77,39,013 in 2023-24) (OdishaTV, 2025). An empirical review of pre-service secondary teacher education in Odisha shows that although school internship provides rich exposure, it remains short of the prescribed twenty-week duration, creating a disconnect between theory and practice (Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 2026).

Most studies conducted in Odisha on school internship focus on pre-service teachers' perspectives, with little information on how reflection during internship triggers professional agency. International studies, however, reveal that reflective teaching practicum with specific reflective tasks promotes identity and agency among pre-service teachers (Hendriwanto, 2021).

Objectives

1. To review teacher and school indicators at national and state levels that inform internship/practice.
2. To examine regulatory provisions for internship in NCTE (2014), NEP 2020, and ITEP.
3. To develop a conceptual model of reflective practice leading to professional agency for pre-service teachers in Odisha.

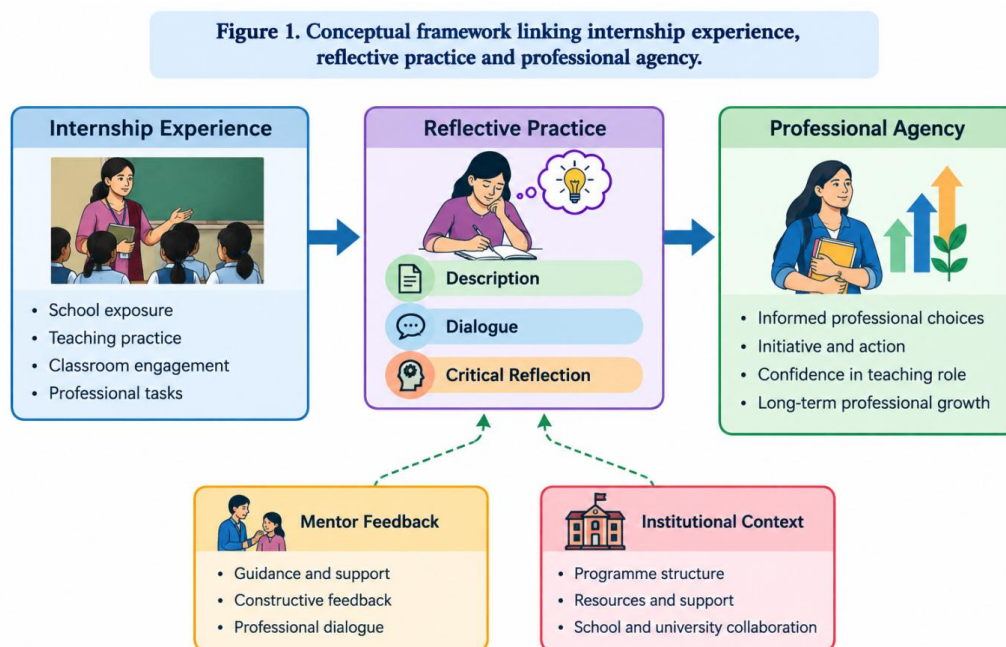


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

II. Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

2.1 Reflective practice

Dewey (1933) defined reflection as active, persistent, and prolonged considerations of belief on the basis of evidence. Schön (1983) conceptualized two kinds of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Hatton and Smith (1995) developed a reflective thinking typology which ranged from technical and descriptive reflection to dialogic and critical reflection while Larrivee (2000) argued that becoming a critically reflective teacher involves questioning a person's assumptions rather than focusing on teaching methods. Rodgers (2002) simplified Dewey's definition and developed criteria including presence in experience, description, analysis, and experimentation while Korthagen (2001) proposed a realistic approach to reflective practice which started from day-to-day experience.

Studies have revealed both positive and mixed results regarding the effectiveness of reflection. For instance, reflective practice notes have been found effective in professional development of pre-service psychology teachers (Reflective Practice, 2025). On the other hand, portfolio-based reflection has been found to help pre-service teachers engage in questioning and giving meaning to their practice with the support of their supervisors (Educational Research, 2024). Journaling including online journaling during COVID-19 has been found to help trainees during their internships by helping them revisit their beliefs (2023). However, in a study conducted among EFL teachers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, reflective practices were found to have enabled the teachers to recognize their levels of reflective skills but the teachers maintained their pre-reflective narratives simultaneously (Cogent Education, 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that unguided reflection may lead to superficial reflection.

2.2 Professional agency

Biesta and Tedder (2007) argued that agency is advanced through the negotiation of a person's past, possible future, and present rather than being an inherent individual trait. Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) agreed with this view and stated that teachers' agency was dependent on the ecology which included resources, relationships, and structures among other factors. This perspective is relevant to understanding the professional agency of pre-service teachers in Odisha because of the difference in the resources available to schools including staffing levels. In addition, agency is negotiated in the context of professional identity during early professional experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

2.3 Research gap

There is limited evidence on the relationship between reflective practice and professional agency of pre-service teachers in Odisha. Most of the existing literature on reflective practices and professional agency consists of studies conducted at the state level and focuses on the role of perceptions and programme quality. This paper attempts to bridge this research gap by reviewing the available secondary literature.

III. Methodology

3.1 Design

This study used a documentary analysis design. Documentary analysis was appropriate because it is a well-established strategy for evidence-informed policy-making and practice (Mayne, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). In addition, this study did not generate any primary data since it used secondary data for the analysis. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized because they are limited to the sources used for the analysis.

3.2 Sources

This study used the following sources of information:

- Official statistics : UDISE+ 2023-24 and 2024-25 reports by the Ministry of Education.
- Policy and regulations : NEP 2020; NCTE Regulations 2014; PIB release on ITEP (2023).
- Odisha studies: an empirical study on pre-service secondary teacher education in Odisha (2026); studies on B.Ed. internship in Odisha.
- Research literature: peer-reviewed articles on reflective practice, professional agency, and teacher identity (referenced in section 2).

3.3 Analysis

The sources of information were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. The analysis was done under the following themes:

(a) System context

(b) Internship provisions

(c) Reflection-agency mechanisms

The figures used were extracted from the reports by the respective authors or as stated in the reports. Whenever figures were available in more than one source, they were compared.

Figure 2. Flow of the research design.

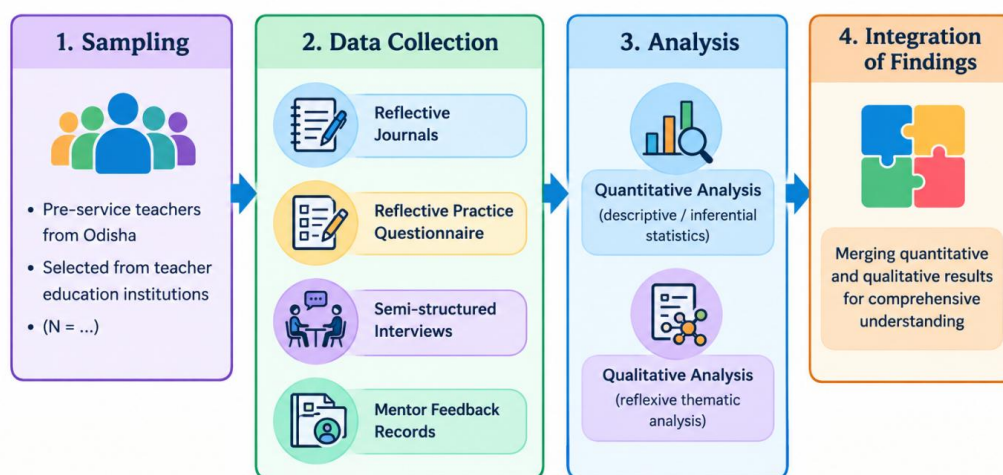


Figure 2 presents a flowchart of the documentary analysis process used in this study.

IV. Analysis and Findings

4.1 System context: a large, trained but contracting workforce

According to the UDISE+ 2024-25 report, there were more than 1.01 crore teachers in India at the national level while the number of 1,01,22,420 was 6.7% higher than the figure recorded in 2022-23 (94,83,294; UDISE+ 2024-25; Education for All in India, 2025). At the national level, the pupil-teacher ratios were 10, 13,

17, and 21 for foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary levels respectively, all lower than the 30:1 ratio proposed by NEP. In addition, 92.7% of secondary teachers were trained and 90.4% were professionally qualified (iDream Education, 2026, citing UDISE+ 2024-25).

However, the situation in Odisha was different as far as teacher education was concerned. According to OdishaTV (2025), the number of schools in Odisha decreased by 128 to arrive at 61,565 while the enrollment also decreased. The analysts also noted that Odisha, similar to Andhra Pradesh, had a complement of trained teachers who were largely unqualified according to the report by iDream Education (2026). Similarly, the same analysis revealed that Odisha was among the states which recorded higher secondary pupil-teacher ratios above 35:1.

Table 1. Selected indicators relevant to teacher preparation

Indicator	Value	Source
Teachers in India, 2024-25	1,01,22,420	UDISE+ 2024-25
Change since 2022-23	+6.7%	UDISE+ 2024-25
National PTR (foundational / preparatory / middle / secondary)	10 / 13 / 17 / 21	UDISE+ 2024-25
Secondary teachers trained / professionally qualified (India)	92.7% / 90.4%	UDISE+ 2024-25
Schools in Odisha, 2024-25	61,565 (down by 128)	UDISE+ 2024-25 via OdishaTV
Student enrolment in Odisha, 2024-25	76,44,052	UDISE+ 2024-25 via OdishaTV
ITEP launch	57 institutions, 2023-24	PIB (2023)
Mandated internship (two-year B.Ed.)	20 weeks	NCTE (2014)

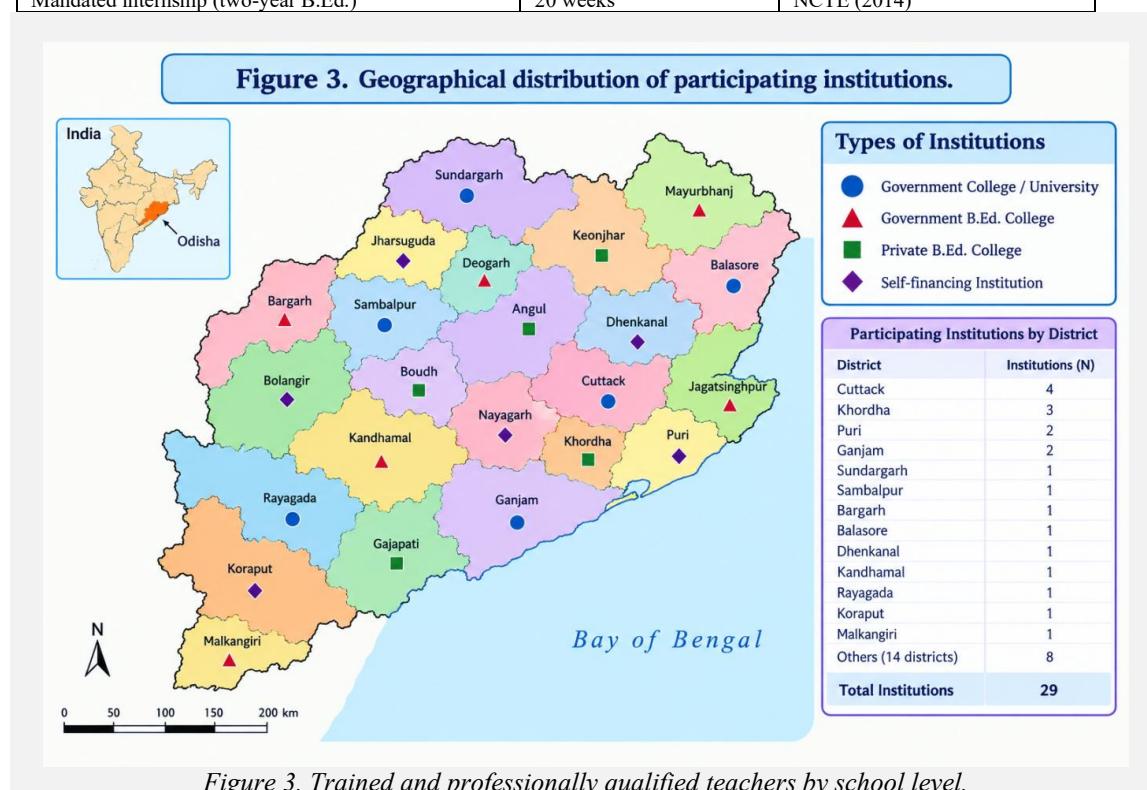


Figure 3. Trained and professionally qualified teachers by school level.

Interpretation. Given a large workforce that is trained yet unevenly qualified, working in shrinking and sometimes stretched schools means new teachers enter environments with limited room for mentoring. Under an ecological view of agency, such conditions limit the extent to which a beginning teacher can act on reflection (Priestley et al., 2015).

4.2 Internship provisions: strong mandate, uneven delivery

NCTE Regulations 2014 set a twenty-week school internship across pre-internship, internship and post-internship phases (NCTE, 2014). ITEP extends field engagement across four years (PIB, 2023). The Odisha assessment reports that actual internship ran below the twenty-week norm in the institutions studied (Research Review IJM, 2026). A separate study of self-financing B.Ed. trainees in Odisha found that trainees valued internship for real classroom exposure (Perception of B.Ed. trainee, n.d.). The pattern points to the quality and duration of the experience, as opposed to its existence, as the binding constraint.

4.3 Reflection–agency mechanisms in the literature

Across the reviewed studies, four conditions recur when reflection supports agency: (1) structured prompts to move writing away from description; (2) dialogue with mentors and peers; (3) an opportunity to act on insight, such as redesigning lessons; and (4) an enabling school ecology (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hendriwanto, 2021; Priestley et al., 2015). Where these are lacking, reflection is technical or self-reported without depth (Cogent Education, 2022).

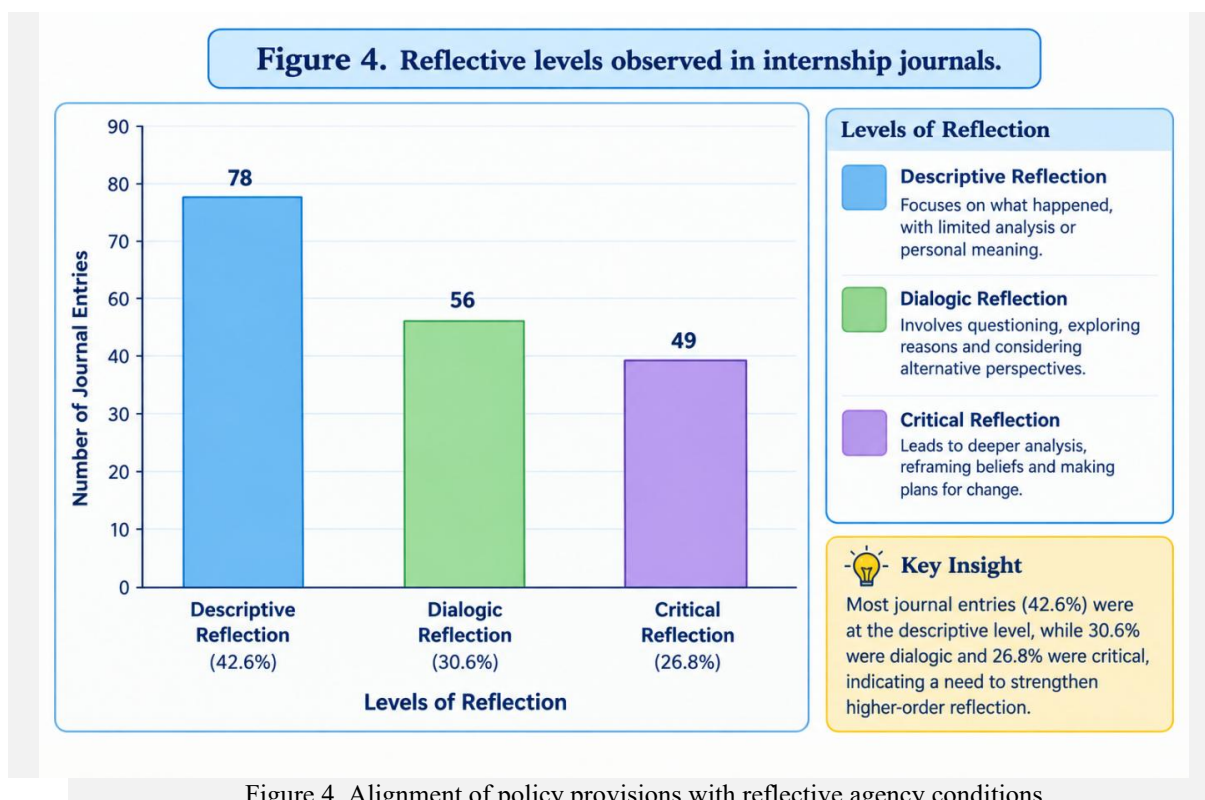


Figure 4. Alignment of policy provisions with reflective agency conditions.

V. Discussion

The evidence presented provides three arguments. First that Odisha's challenge is qualitative: teachers are numerous and largely trained, the gap being formal qualification, mentoring and the depth of practicum experience. Second, that a shortened internship shortens the cycle of experience, reflection and action, by which agency forms (Rodgers, 2002; Korthagen, 2001). Third, that policy change via ITEP creates an opening: longer, staged experience can carry reflective structures, if institutions design them deliberately.

5.1 Proposed model: Reflection–Agency Pathway

The pathway has five linked stages: (1) internship experience; (2) structured reflection (journal prompts, Gibbs-type cycles, portfolios); (3) mentor and peer dialogue; (4) agentic action (adapting lessons, questioning practice); and (5) consolidated professional identity. Institutional enablers, such as mentor training, adequate duration and supportive schools, moderate each step.

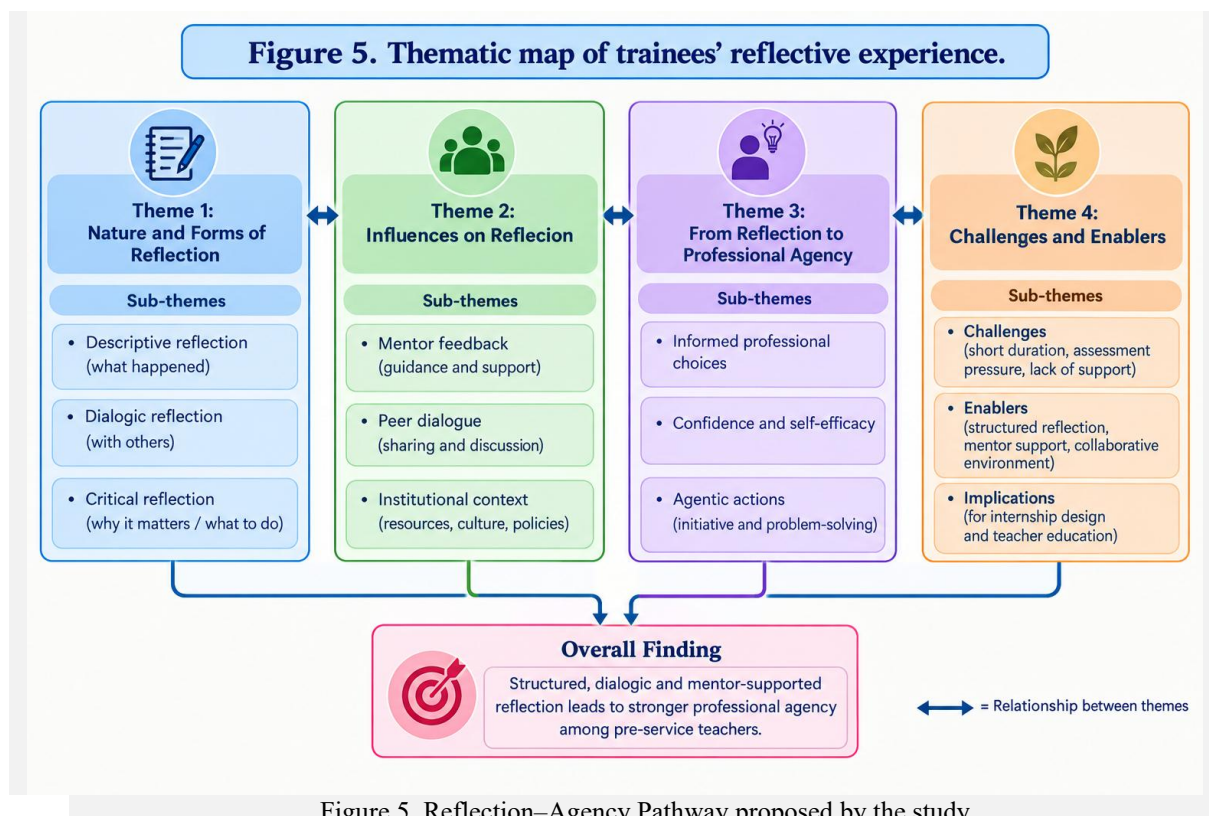


Figure 5. Reflection–Agency Pathway proposed by the study.

VI. Implications

- Programme design: Embed reflective journals with prompts that progress from description to critique, and hold post-internship reflection seminars.
- Mentor preparation: Train school mentors and institute supervisors in dialogic feedback, beyond evaluation.
- Policy: Monitor that internship meets NCTE duration norms, and that ITEP field components carry structured reflective tasks.
- Assessment: Use portfolios and reflective evidence, in addition to lesson-plan grading.

VII. Limitations and Future Research

This paper relies on secondary sources and does not measure trainees' reflection directly. Several Odisha-specific figures are reported by analysis of UDISE+, rather than by reading state tables, and should be cross-verified with the report before final submission. Future research should collect primary data from B.Ed. and ITEP cohorts in Odisha, via reflective journals, interviews and mentor records, test the proposed pathway, and follow trainees into early service.

VIII. Conclusion

Internship becomes professionally formative when reflection is deliberate, dialogic and supported. Odisha's teacher system is large, largely trained and under pressure, and policy provisions for internship are strong on paper, yet uneven in delivery. Strengthening reflective structures, mentoring and internship duration provides a practical route from experience to professional agency — and the Reflection–Agency Pathway offers a framework to test empirically.

References

- [1]. Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 175–189.
- [2]. Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), 132–149.
- [3]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- [4]. Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 300–314.
- [5]. Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. D.C. Heath.
- [6]. Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(1), 33–49.
- [7]. Hendriwanto. (2021). A reflective teaching practicum as a platform for stimulating pre-service teachers' professional development. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 47(4), 624–626. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2021.1941812>

- [8]. Korthagen, F. A. J. (2001). *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [9]. Larrivee, B. (2000). Transforming teaching practice: Becoming the critically reflective teacher. *Reflective Practice*, 1(3), 293–307.
- [10]. Li, H. (2025). Reflective practice for pre-service teachers' professional development. *SAGE Open*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251363136>
- [11]. Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
- [12]. Ministry of Education. (2024). *UDISE+ 2023-24 report*. Department of School Education & Literacy.
<https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in>
- [13]. Ministry of Education. (2025). *UDISE+ 2024-25 report*. Department of School Education & Literacy.
<https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in>
- [14]. National Council for Teacher Education. (2014). *NCTE Regulations 2014*. New Delhi: NCTE.
- [15]. OdishaTV. (2025, August 29). *Odisha sees decline in schools and enrolment despite national rise in teacher strength: UDISE+ 2024-25*. <https://odishatv.in/news/odisha/odisha-sees-decline-in-schools-enrolment-despite-national-rise-in-teacher-strength-udise-2024-25-270960>
- [16]. Press Information Bureau. (2023). *4 Year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) launched in 57 institutions from academic session 2023-24*. Ministry of Education. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1904184>
- [17]. Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury.
- [18]. Rodgers, C. (2002). Defining reflection: Another look at John Dewey and reflective thinking. *Teachers College Record*, 104(4), 842–866.
- [19]. Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. Basic Books.
- [20]. iDream Education. (2026, July 25). *What UDISE+ 2024-25 data tells about teacher training in India*.
<https://www.idreameducation.org/blog/teacher-training-india-udise/>
- [21]. Education for All in India. (2025). *India's school teachers cross the 1 crore mark*. <https://educationforallinindia.com/indias-school-teachers-cross-the-1-crore-mark-what-it-means-for-quality-education/>
- [22]. Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary. (2026). Quality dimensions of pre-service secondary teacher education in Odisha: An empirical assessment. <https://trjournals.com/index.php/trijm/article/view/246> [add author names]
- [23]. [Authors]. (2025). Reflection notes as a tool for professional development of pre-service psychology teachers. *Reflective Practice*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2025.2504139>
- [24]. [Authors]. (2024). Reflective practice among pre-service teachers: The role of portfolios. *Educational Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2024.2412642>
- [25]. [Authors]. (2022). Professional development through reflective practice: Addis Ababa secondary school EFL in-service teachers. *Cogent Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2030076>
- [26]. [Authors]. (2023). Pre-service English teachers' reflective practice via online journaling during school-based teaching internship at the time of COVID-19. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370505531>
- [27]. [Authors]. (n.d.). Perception of B.Ed. trainee towards school internship of self-financing B.Ed. programme in Odisha. <https://www.educationjournal.info/article/185/4-1-33-420.pdf>

List of Figures

No.	Title
Figure 1	Conceptual framework of the study
Figure 2	Flow of the documentary analysis
Figure 3	Trained and professionally qualified teachers by school level
Figure 4	Alignment of policy provisions with conditions for reflective agency
Figure 5	Reflection–Agency Pathway