

## **GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF-EVALUATION: THE CASE OF SERBIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated how geography teacher perceived self-evaluation process in their teaching and learning activities. A total of 273 geography teachers in primary and secondary school in Serbia were surveyed using questionnaires. The findings suggest that geography teachers perceive self-evaluation as a positive and useful process. There is also evidence that geography teacher attitudes change in relation to their teaching experience and type of school. The results may be further explored by other researchers and education practitioners to future improve of self-evaluation process and outcomes.

*Keywords: self-evaluation, reflection, geography teachers, professional development*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Teacher self-evaluation is a complex process that directly involves the teacher. To understand the process of self-evaluation, it is necessary to understand the substance of teacher reflection. Purpose of the self-evaluation process is to encourage continuing teacher reflection, to promote an innovative approach to teaching and to support teachers with approaches that will move students to higher levels of performance.

However, fundamental principle of effective self-evaluation is that teachers should see themselves as learners. It is also accepted as a key component and vital skill of teacher professional development (Bolton 2010; Costa and Kallick 2008; Danielson 2007; Eraut 1994; Ilic 2014, Kolb et al. 2000; Korthagen and Vasalos 2005). Pollard and Tann (1993, 4) “believe that the process of reflection feeds a constructive spiral of professional development and competence”. The studies discussed in this research focused explicitly on teachers’ self-evaluation in terms of acquires in teaching and learning competencies and professional development growth.

### **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this study is to explore the perception and attitudes of the geography teachers from Serbia concerning self-evaluation as a tool for professional development growth.

The study also explored the perceived professional practice of geography teachers as it relates to reflective practice. The following are some of the major objectives associated with this research.

- To investigate the geography teacher motives towards self-evaluation process;
- To identify the effects in implementing self-evaluation process;
- To identify the barriers in implementing self-evaluation process.

## **2.1 Research Questions**

RQ1: What are geography teachers' perceptions regarding the self-evaluation process?

RQ2: What motivates geography teachers to use self-evaluation process?

RQ3: What are the effects of using self-evaluation in learning and teaching activities?

RQ4: What are the obstacles to implementing self-evaluation process?

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many terms have been used synonymously with self-evaluation, including reflection, self-assessment, self-appraisal, self-monitoring, self-rating. Broadly, self-evaluation is a process whereby teachers collect the data on their own teaching effectiveness and analyse the information to consider improvement to that teaching. According to Airasian and Galikson self-evaluation refers to those process by which "a person can make judgments about the adequacy and effectiveness of performance for the purpose of self-improvement" (1997, 2)." Same authors state that "self-evaluation occurs when questions, thoughts and interpretations suggest teachers to decide on teaching performance" (Ibid, 3).

Close analysis of teacher practices and the literature on self-evaluation reveals that the primary focus of teacher self-evaluation learning (and learning for professional development) is reflection and the term "teacher self-evaluation" has been almost synonymous to 'teacher reflection' or "reflective practitioner", term which was coined by Schön (1987).

Reflection is the mental process of trying to structure or restructure an experience, a problem, or existing knowledge or insights by making it an explicit subject of thinking (Korthagen 2001). As Schön (1983) points out, reflection involves intuitive thinking: 'we exhibit it by the competent behaviour we carry out, but we are unable to describe what it is that we do.' On the other hand, reflection enables us to know what we are about when we act.

According to the Bolton (2010, 19) it involves "paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining learning practice reflectively and reflexively. This leads to developmental insight."

An important aspect relating to systematic reflection concerns the moment of reflection. Schön (1983, 1988) makes a distinction between three types: (a) reflection-in-action, in which the learner reflects on an action past and engages in retrospective sense making; (b) reflection-in-action in which reflection occurs as an attempt to "stop and think" in the midst of action, a time during which action can be modified; and (c) knowing-in-action, the most tacit of reflective processes in which knowledge is embedded in the action itself, rarely considered at a conscious level.

According to Korthagen and Vasalos' "onion model" (2005), there are six different levels on which reflection can take place: mission, identity, beliefs, competencies, behavior and environment.

Brookfield (1995) suggests that we employ four “critical lenses” through which to view and reflect upon our practice. These are: (1) our own view; (2) that of our students; (3) that of our fellow professionals; (4) and the various theoretical perspectives propounded in educational literature. Examining our own experiences as learners as well as teachers helps us “to uncover our most deeply embedded allegiances and motivations as teachers.” (Brookfield 1995, 32)

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on the framework of reflective theory. Donald Schön made a most significant contribution to our understanding of the theory of practice and learning. This theory helps “to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning” (Schön, 1983).

The concept of reflection has been widely debated in educational circles for many years (Kreber, 2004). To advocates of reflective practice, deep-learning is dependent on individuals making meaning from their experiences through reflection (Sugerman et al, 2000, Kolb 2002). Moreover, reflection is enable learners to connect their previous experiences to the new behavior and acting. Most importantly active and strategic reflection involved in reflective learning indirectly enables teaching and learning processes to deliver some of the very important teaching skills (Danielson, 2007).

#### **5. METHODOLOGY**

##### **5.1 Design**

The study employs the quantitative approach using the survey method. In order to reflect geography teachers opinions effectively, descriptive analysis was realized and direct quotations are made by the researchers. The data has been analyzed using correlation (Pearson), t-test and ANOVA with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0).

##### **5.2 Population and Sample**

The sample consisted of 273 geography teachers, out of the 300 geography teachers who completed the questionnaire. All of the geography teachers were Serbian.

##### **5.3 Instrumentation**

The Self-Evaluation Attitude Survey (Cronbach alpha 0.87) by professor dr. Sait Kacapor (Ilić 2014) was modified to elicit responses and insights regarding the perception of self-evaluation process among geography teachers. The questionnaire included two parts. The first one was concerned with the background variables of the geography teachers: gender, teaching experience, educational background, type of school and the school’s district area. In the second part of the questionnaire teachers were asked to present their perceptions on self-evaluation process (Q: 1), motivation, effects and obstacles (Qs: 2, 3, 4). It included one multiple choice question (Q: 1- teachers were asked to rate their opinion according to a 5-point Likert-type scale, 5=strongly agree, and 1=strongly disagree) and three open-response question.

### 5.4 Procedure of Data Collection

Data were generated via self-completion questionnaire administered to geography teachers, who were on “Annual Meeting of Serbian Geography Society” (April 2012, Belgrade) or were on “Serbian Geography Competition for Primary School” ( May 2012, Pozarevac). Part of survey was administered by email (March-May, 2012). The data was elicited from 273 geography teachers. The statistical tests performed, included an analysis of frequencies, mean score, analysis of variance (ANOVA), t-test and Pearson correlation test. All findings reported were statistically significant to at least the 5% level.

### 5.5 Sample

Table 1. presents the demographic profiles of the teachers including gender, educational background, teaching experience, type of school and school district area.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profiles of the Teachers

<b>Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	84	30.8
Female	189	69.2
<b>EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND</b>		
High school	9	3.3
Bachelor Degree	225	82.4
Magistrate	24	8.8
Master	15	5.5
<b>TEACHING EXPERIENCE</b>		
up to 10 years	81	29.7
11-20 years	108	39.6
21-30 years	54	19.7
more than 30 years	30	11
<b>TYPE OF SCHOOL</b>		
<b>Primary</b>	228	83.5
Secondary	27	9.9
Both	18	6.6
<b>SCHOOL DISTRICT AREA</b>		
Urban	183	67
Rural	42	15.4
Both	48	17.6

N=273

Regarding the background variables, female geography teachers (N= 189) outnumbered male teachers (N= 84). This is in line with European Commission's (2013) study where illustrated that in all European countries female teacher are the majority. Most of the teachers (82.4%) have bachelor degrees, while 13.3% have magistrate or master degrees. Concerning their teaching experience, approximately a one third of the teachers (29.7%) have up to 10 years of teaching experience, 39.6% have between 11 and 20 years experience, while 30% of teachers have more than 21 years teaching experience. A majority (83.5%) of the teachers work at primary school, while 9.9% teach in secondary school and 6.6% teach geography in both types of schools. This is due to the fact that Geography is elective or one-year course in secondary school in Serbia. Most of the geography teachers work in the city school area (67%).

## 6. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE ITEMS

### 6.1 Research Question One

*What are the perceptions of the geography teachers regarding self-evaluation process?*

Table 1.2 represents the summary of means and standard deviations for items in the categories of perception regarding self-evaluation process. It was found that more than 90% of 273 geography teachers use self-evaluation process in their work. The mean scores are shifted at the high end of the distribution.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for the Self-evaluation process

Questions	Min.	Max	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation
Self-evaluation Areas	12	30	24.82	3.85
Self-evaluation Approaches	9	29	20.65	4.16
Total score	38	72	57.65	8.04

Most of the geography teachers stated that they use self-evaluation process in a different areas (mean = 24.82; SD= 3.85) and a different approaches (mean = 20.65; SD= 4.16). Generally, they are tend to use self-evaluation in their teaching and learning process (mean = 57.65; SD= 8.04). The highest mean score in perception is for item which state that they use self-evaluation in the area of students achievement and evaluation (mean = 4.23; SD= .787). Further analysis revealed that most of the geography teachers usually use self-evaluation as approach to assessment teaching documents - lesson planning, students portfolio, curriculum (mean = 3.98; SD= 8.27).

Comparing these results with the background variables we found significant differences between the geography teachers' perception and variables – type of school (F=7.54; p< 0.01) and teaching experience (F=4.02, p< 0.01). Geography teachers that work in both type of schools (SD=4.09) tended to use self-evaluation process more than their colleagues who work only in one school. Experienced teachers (21-30 years of teaching experience (SD=2.24)) use reflection in their work much more than the early stage career teacher (1-10 years experience (SD=4.03)).

However, we did not reveal any statistically significant difference comparing these results perceived by geography teachers with the background variables - gender, education background and school district area.

## 6.2 Research Question Two

*What motivates geography teachers to use self-evaluation process?*

In the category of the geography teacher's motives, the perceptions of motivation for self-evaluation were considerable. The result revealed that the most important motive of self-evaluation for Serbian geography teachers is personal needs for improving teaching performance which has a mean rating of 4.31, while effective teaching motive achieve score second with a mean of 4.21. Three other motives were data on actual practice, students' need and upgrade professional competence (See table 1.3 for detail).

**Table 3.** Motives for using self-evaluation

Items	Min.	Max	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation
Personal needs for improving teaching performance	1	5	4.31	.796
Effective and quality teaching performance	2	5	4.21	.909
Data on actual practice	2	5	4.03	.802
Students' needs	2	5	3.97	.779
Upgrade my professional competence	1	5	3.89	.921
Lack of education policy	1	5	3.09	1.036

## 6.3 Research Question Three

*What are the effects of using self-evaluation in professional development activities?*

The majority of the teachers (29.7%) argued that the reflection had greatly effect to the improving teaching performance in their professional development activities. It is concerning that half of the teachers (47.3%) didn't respond or didn't state the most important effects which underpin their satisfaction in the self-evaluation (table 1.4).

Comparing this effect with the background variables, the results showed that significant differences existed between the data on actual practice and the teaching experience, since the junior geography teachers ( $\chi^2=11.94$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) was more likely to attribute greater importance to this effects than the senior teachers. In addition, secondary school teachers ( $\chi^2=32.63$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) indicated effect students motivation more than primary school teachers. The data also suggested that junior teachers (up to 20 years experience- ( $\chi^2=9.14$ ;  $p < 0.05$ )) teachers with master degree

( $\chi^2=5.71$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and rural school teachers ( $\chi^2=39.59$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) perceived reflection to be useful in teacher engagement. Interestingly, results showed that enhancing teachers motivation as effect indicated only junior geography teachers ( $\chi^2=22.06$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), master degree holders ( $\chi^2=20.85$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and rural school teachers ( $\chi^2=51.19$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). More educated teachers also underlined that the self-evaluation process ensures qualitative professional development growth ( $\chi^2=5.71$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Analysing the observed results, secondary school teachers as an important factor of self-evaluation stated improving teaching performance ( $\chi^2=33.79$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 4.** Effects of using self-evaluation

Items	n	%
No response	87	31.9
Improving teaching performance	81	29.7
Other	42	15.4
Improving teacher engagement	18	6.6
Professional development growth	18	6.6
Students' achievement	18	6.6
Data on actual practice	15	5.5
Dealing with future problems	15	5.5
Enhancing teachers' motivation	9	3.3
Enhancing students' motivation	6	2.2

#### 6.4 Research Question Four

*What are the obstacles to implementing self-evaluation process?*

This section highlights the statements about problems and difficulties in implementing self-evaluation process. It is important to note that a high percentage of teachers didn't answer (39.6%) or didn't perceive obstacles (24.3%). Lack of time and motivation took 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> position (11%). Furthermore, lack of seminars (9.9%), education policy (7.7%) and financial resources (6.6%) were underlined as negative factors for the teachers' sense of self-evaluation process.

**Table 5.** Obstacles in self-evaluation process

Items	n	%
No response	108	39.6
Other	66	24.3
Lack of time	30	11
Lack of motivation	30	11
Lack of seminars	27	9.9
Lack of education policy	21	7.7
Lack of financial resource	18	6.6
Don't know self-evaluation methodology	18	6.6
Fear from results	15	5.5
Lack of a handbook/guide	9	3.3

The application of ANOVA revealed a significant differences between the lack of motivation and school district, whereas, geography teachers who work in the rural school district ( $\chi^2=6.03$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) stated this more than city school teachers. Rural school teachers ( $\chi^2=19.12$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) of Serbia also perceived a lack of Handbook to be more problem in teachers self-evaluation than the urban school teachers. A significant difference was also found between the lack of seminar and school district and the type of school. As a problem this indicated teachers who work in the city school ( $\chi^2=7.46$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and their secondary school colleagues ( $\chi^2=7.46$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

Research did not reveal any statistically significant difference comparing these results with the variable gender, education background and teaching experience.

### **6.5 The Correlation between Self-Evaluation and Teachers Motivation**

In order to understand the interactions between the teacher motivations and self-evaluation process, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. The size of correlations range from moderate to strong ( $.37 \leq r \leq .56$ ) and all correlations were highly statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). Among these motives, relatively strong positive correlation exist between the motives 'data on actual practice' ( $r = .56$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and 'upgrade professional competence' ( $r = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Motives 'effective and quality geography teaching performance' and 'teachers and students needs' predicts moderate correlations ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Motive 'lack of education policy' also has moderate positive influence on the self-evaluation process ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## **7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The present study examined geography teachers' opinion and attitudes about self-evaluation process (reflection) in their professional development activities. Across all of the data discussed above, improving teacher performance, teacher achievements and professional development growth, appear to be the most important determinants to the implementation and decision of using self-evaluation, regardless of personal background followed.

One of the most significant findings that emerge from this study is that the self-evaluation is a positive perceived action for the most geography teachers. Important findings that also emerge from this study are that geography teachers indicated self-evaluation process as a very useful tool that effects both their and students motivation. Lack of time, lack of teachers' motivation and lack of seminars are considered as the most important obstacles for implementing.

Finally, as an exploratory study in a field that is under-researched, the questionnaire did achieve its aim of presenting a broad picture of geography teachers' views about self-evaluation process. Implication of these data includes the need to continue to provide effective support which helps teachers to identify gaps in knowledge about reflection that can be addressed in future professional-development activity.

Concerning the findings of the present study, following recommendation can be offered for further study: (1) A similar study may be conducted on the geography teachers in other countries; (2) A similar study can be conducted on primary and secondary school geography teachers separately; (3) The study can be conducted on junior and senior geography teachers separately; (4) The present study can be replaced with different gathering instruments.

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