

A Study to Explore the Teachers' Reflective Practices to Improve the Teaching for Students with Different Needs

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the effective teaching methodologies of teachers to improve the teaching of students with different needs. In this study, 12 teachers who were teaching 7th and 8th grades in their schools were interviewed. These teachers were from six private schools and in each school two teachers were taken as a sample. A qualitative approach was used in this study. Researchers developed the semi-structured interview protocol through an intensive literature review. The instrument was validated by three experts in the related field. Research data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants. Teachers were also asked about writing a diary to reflect on their teaching and learning process. Teachers were given four weeks to reflect on their actions and these teachers were interviewed after four weeks of writing diaries regarding the reflection of their teaching. Qualitative descriptive analysis was applied to analyze the data. The qualitative descriptive study describes the phenomenon rather than an explanation of the phenomenon. Data explored that teachers are not familiar with the use of reflective practices to improve the teaching-learning process. Teachers considered the lesson planning to be enough for them. Moreover, school authorities do not motivate teachers to be engaged in reflection on their teaching. After analyzing the diaries, it was concluded that teachers did not manage properly their reflective journals or they did not use these diaries daily. However, they thought that the process of reflection required a lot of time. Recommendations for future research have been incorporated in the article.

Keywords: Reflective practices, reflective diaries, teaching methodology, students with different needs

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Introduction

In the 21st century education sector has undergone many changes in teaching approaches, strategies, and methods. With the change in trends in education, teachers need to think, observe, assess, and modify their teaching-learning actions to reach the highest level of teaching. To reach this highest level of teaching is “Reflection” on actions. In thought process, memory has the least thoughtful level, understanding is thoughtful and reflection has the highest level of thought process. In reflection, teachers engage in thoughtful and deliberate approaches (Shah, 2023). Experience does not teach us anything. We learn from reflecting on experience (Dewey, 1933).

Reflection is an active and careful process in which links are made among many experiences. To make teachers more confident about their teaching they must reflect upon their teaching-learning process constantly. By reflecting, you will find new ways of teaching, and having a wider range of skills makes you more confident in classrooms, especially in a class where students are sitting with different needs. Teachers are confronted with many challenges during the teaching and learning process. Sometimes teachers have to take action during the lesson. This situation is called reflection in action an approach suggested by Schön (1991). On the other hand reflection on action is carried out after the lesson has been taught (Schön, 1983). Reflection on action and reflection in action are basic and crucial approaches being used by teachers in the teaching-learning process. Reflection on teaching helps to understand how students best learn and teachers allow themselves to be accountable for their progress. When used faithfully, reflection on actions is a time and energy-intensive yet incredibly beneficial tool for teachers (Machost & Stains, 2023). A certain amount of time and effort should be spent to reflect on the actions which provides insights into the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies.

Reflections help teachers in understanding the effectiveness of their teaching methods and they also indicate teachers to take specific steps, involving resources and figuring out critical situations. In the context of Pakistan, most of the teachers use traditional practices in teaching. Although, they use reflective practices in teaching in some ways but not well aware of all aspects of the reflective process. In this study, it was explored how reflective practices helped teachers for effective teaching to meet the different needs of students.

Reflective Practices in Teaching

The concept of "teacher identity" describes how educators view themselves as educators (Mockler, 2011). The concept encompasses a teacher's personal and professional aspects. Reflective practices allow educators to examine and improve their

feelings, beliefs, and pedagogical philosophies (Walkington, 2005). Teachers become more conscious of their teaching when they reflect on their approaches. This reflection allows them to unlearn bad teaching strategies that could negatively impact students' learning experiences (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015). Reflective practices in education include the capacity for introspection, application of insights, and encouragement of a culture of ongoing learning (Aryal, 2024). Reflective practice's fundamental tenets are that it facilitates teachers' application of theory to practice, improves classroom instruction, and allows practitioners to advance their careers by learning from experiences linked to the classroom (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017). To act based on a thorough and reflective understanding of events, alternatives, and ethics, practitioners who express concerns about being "reflective" must focus on a specific aspect of their instruction and view it from a different perspective. They also engage in peer dialogue, employ reframing and reflective listening techniques, and investigate different viewpoints to diversify different thoughts and ideas within their current perspective (Rodger, 2020).

It is doubtful that educators will understand how their motivations, expectations, and experiences affect their practice if they do not regularly engage in reflective practice (Lubbe & Botha, 2020). By making a distinction between "reflection for action," "reflection in action," and "reflection on action," Grushka et al. (2005) advanced our understanding of reflective practice in the educational setting. These categories provide a systematic framework for ongoing improvement by posing technical, practical, and critical concerns that direct teachers in their reflective work. To help pre-service teachers with their professional lives, the article of Suphasri and Chinokul (2021) emphasizes reflective practice. Moreover, when engaging in reflection, one must be mindful that the approach closely examines the inner lives of teachers in addition to addressing issues in classroom instruction.

The effectiveness of reflective practice as a vital technique to enhance English instruction and learning is demonstrated by research findings. Its effectiveness in a range of educational settings is demonstrated by the literature, which also highlights its ability to promote favorable results and improve the general standard of instruction (Mann, 2011). For instance, in the field of literacy, reflective practices among teachers help to enhance students' literacy levels. Teachers can easily identify areas where students might have challenges, such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, or writing skills, and alter their instructional procedures to address the student's specific needs, thereby improving overall literacy levels (Farrell, 2015).

Reflection may only be beneficial for reflective teaching, if it helps one better comprehend issues from several perspectives so that diverse solutions can be found. Research on how to become a reflective teacher was conducted by Saylag (2012),

emphasizes the significance of individual beliefs and life experiences that support critical reflection as the characteristic that sets reflective practitioners. Nuraeni and Heryatun (2021) researched the reflective attitude of pre-service teachers to check the benefits of reflective practices. They found that pre-service teachers were able to develop and rebuild their theories of language teaching and learning as well as reflect on or assess their ideas and practices through reflective practice.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Following are the objectives and corresponding questions of the study:

1. To explore the understanding of reflective practices among teachers.
 - What do you know about reflective practices in teaching?
 - How do you reflect upon your teaching-learning process?
 - How frequently do you reflect upon your teaching-learning process?
2. To find effective teaching methodologies for students with different needs.
 - How many teaching methods do you use in one lesson?

When do you decide that now I should move to another method?

Methodology

For this study, a qualitative design is most appropriate. A qualitative design helps the researcher capture the voices of the teacher, witness the real instructional changes, and respond to the meaningful ways the teacher engaged with the learners and their different needs. This research design outlines how reflective practice offers the opportunity to improve instructional practice to address the different needs of the learners.

Sampling

As this research was qualitative, a convenient sampling technique was used to take teachers' opinions. In this study, 12 teachers who were teaching 7th and 8th grades in their schools were interviewed. These teachers were from six private schools from each school two teachers were taken as a sample. All teachers were interviewed personally and permission was taken from school heads to take views of their teachers on reflective practices.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed through an intense literature review of national and international research. Literature was reviewed on

reflective practices, teaching methodologies, self-assessment, and effective teaching strategies. After this total of 10 questions were stated in a semi-structured interview protocol. The instrument was validated by three experts in the related field. Two questions out of seven were excluded from experts' suggestions. A total of eight questions were included in the final interview protocol.

Data Collection

Research data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants. Participants were assured that their views were used only for research purposes and would not be shared with their concerned authorities. Additionally, in the pre-interview, the participants were informed about the reason, context, and aims of the research. In this study, teachers were also asked to write a diary to reflect on their teaching and learning process. Teachers were given four weeks to reflect on their actions, and these teachers were interviewed after four weeks of writing diaries regarding the reflection of their teaching. At the time of interviews, these diaries were collected from teachers for analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for this study, to present the results from semi-structured interviews. This thematic analysis was conducted by using the six steps: (Kiger & Varpio, 2020) 1. Familiarizing with data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Producing the report.

Findings

Results have been established after thematic analysis of interviews and reflective diaries that were given to teachers. Teachers were not exposed to the reflective practices term by the researchers when they were given diaries to reflect or assess their teaching. They were just asked about to assess their teaching.

Knowledge about Reflective Practices

Teachers were asked about their knowledge of reflection. Teachers have very little knowledge about reflective practices in the teaching-learning process. In their career, they have never been familiar with this term. A teacher from 7th grade said, "*I do not*

know exactly about reflective practices as you asked in your question [pause ummm] I think it is like a reflection of something”.

Reflection upon Teaching-Learning Process

Teachers said they rarely reflect upon their teaching-learning process. They do not use reflective journals. They do not have enough time to reflect and assess their teaching. All teachers said they use students’ results to assess their teaching-learning process. After that, they modify their teaching strategies. While planning the lesson they think and decide on new teaching methods for students so that they can grab the attention and interest of students towards the lesson. Teachers do not assess the previous lessons they just plan the next lesson. As said by a teacher *“Lesson planning is the best way for effective teaching. When a teacher plans a lesson he/she can better plan the teaching activities and in this, he/she can handle the low results students”.*

Another teacher said *“we do not have enough time to reflect upon our teaching it is very time taking more important for us are the results of our students so we focus on better results and we use students test and papers’ results for further lesson planning”.*

Lack of motivation to learn new methodologies

Results of the study explored that teachers’ lack motivation from their concerned authorities. Teachers are not encouraged to use new teaching methodologies to meet the diverse needs of students. Most of the teachers use the lecture method in their classes. Using one method of teaching does not allow teachers to reflect upon their teaching. The use of multiple teaching methods compels teachers to reflect upon effective teaching methodology.

Infrequent use of Reflective Practices’ Steps

From the data, it was found that teachers are not very aware of the proper steps of reflective practices. Teachers do not use reflective steps in routine teaching. Moreover, teachers do not take feedback from students about their teaching. For example, they do not carry out any activity to evaluate their teaching in class. Teachers did not use reflective journals that were given to them to reflect upon the teaching-learning process. Even teachers are asked to write reflective journals, but they had no time to write them.

The participants' limited adoption of reflective practices the severe workload, time shortage, and low motivation. These themes are presented understandably and succinctly to reach conclusions. Moreover, these results demonstrate the necessity of assistance and intervention to encourage the adoption of reflective practices in teaching.

Conclusion and Discussion

This qualitative research was conducted on 7th and 8th grade teachers to know about their understanding of reflective practice in teaching and how they use it. Data revealed that teachers are not familiar with the use of reflective practices to improve the teaching-learning process. These results are aligned with Korau et al. (2024) who found in their study that teachers have a lack of awareness about reflective practice. Before the course, teachers lacked sufficient knowledge of the principles of reflection (Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024).

Furthermore, teachers considered the lesson planning to be enough for them. Teachers also reported that school authorities do not motivate teachers to be engaged in reflection on their teaching. After analyzing the diaries, it is concluded that teachers did not manage properly their reflective journals or they did not use these diaries daily. However, they thought that the process of reflection required a lot of time. The limitation of time was also reported in research by La Sunra et al. (2020). Teachers are not very aware of the proper steps of reflective practices in their daily teaching.

The conclusion shows the connection between the findings and the data generated through the interviews and reflective diaries. All data sources revealed that teachers have a shallow conception of reflective practices, are dependent on lesson planning and student outcomes, and face minimal institutional support. The study adds understanding by illuminating the ways that workload, time constraints, and minimal acquaintance with reflective practice determine teachers' choices on how to teach. These data positively answer the question of how reflective practices so permeated are the changes. There are changes, and the changes are needed, but reflective practices are not as prevalent as desired. These changes may be within the scope of professional learning, administrative facilitation, and simplified conditions to allow for regular reflective practice.

Limitations and Recommendations

1. Offer training and support so that teachers can learn how to implement reflective practices meaningfully.
2. Provide teachers with allocated time in their calendars for reflection in order to minimize the effects of workload and time pressure.
3. Foster the application of various pedagogical approaches and encourage students to provide feedback so that educators can reflect on and enhance their teaching.
4. This research is limited to its context; therefore the same phenomenon can be investigated in other contexts to know more about the benefits of reflective practices in teaching.
5. A qualitative approach was used for this research. To know more about current reflective practices among teachers and challenges, future research can use other methods and approaches such as observations, check lists, and quantitative approaches.

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