Exploring the Use of Reflective Practices among Teachers of English in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Reflective practice has been reported to be effective in enhancing teaching and learning. However, many teachers of English in Nigeria are not aware of it. Thus, this study investigates the awareness and implementation of reflective practices among English language teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted and 77 teachers were selected to participate in the study. Data for the study were collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study discovered that most of the respondents have a low level of engagement in reflective practice in their teaching activities. The findings also suggest a lack of awareness of reflective practices among the majority of respondents. Additionally, the study discovered that even those with some awareness of reflective practices rarely followed established steps for incorporating reflection into their teaching. This indicates a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practice. Thus, the study makes recommendations for professional development programs to familiarize educators with the concept of reflective teaching and its potential impact on instructional effectiveness. **Key words:** English as a Second Language, Nigerian Secondary Schools, Reflective Practices

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English language education in Nigeria, persistent challenges continue to impede the attainment of optimal teaching and learning outcomes. Despite concerted efforts by the government to enhance the quality of English language instruction, the observed shortcomings manifest conspicuously in the form of students' performance. A critical examination of these challenges reveals a significant contributing factor—the dearth of pedagogical knowledge and skills among English language teachers, hindering their ability to effectively impart linguistic proficiency to their students (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2017). Furthermore, a critical void exists in the exposure of students to a diverse array of materials and technologies essential for fostering effective language acquisition (Okoye & Umoh, 2020). This deficiency in both pedagogical expertise and resource utilization culminates in students' inability to attain the proficiency necessary for academic success and future workplace endeavors (Oduolowu & Adeleke, 2017).

Amidst these challenges, reflective practice emerges as a beacon of potential transformation in English language education. Reflective practice is an approach to teaching that compels educators to critically analyze and contemplate their experiences in the classroom with the ultimate goal of enhancing their pedagogical strategies (Schön, 1983). The inherent philosophy acknowledges that teaching is not a static endeavor; instead, it is a dynamic process that demands continuous adaptation and improvement. Notably, reflective practice is widely recognized as a powerful mechanism for improving teaching and learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts, including the field of English language education (Mann, 2011).

Research findings underscore the efficacy of reflective practice as an invaluable tool in augmenting the teaching and learning of English. The literature demonstrates its success in various educational contexts, showcasing its capacity to foster positive outcomes and elevate the overall quality of instruction (Mann, 2011). For example, in the area 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 make adjustments in their instructional procedures to address the student's specific needs, thereby improving overall literacy levels (Farrell, 2015). Also, through reflective practice, teachers can identify areas where their methods might not be effectively promoting students' learning objectives, including literacy development (Richards & Farrington, 2005).

However, a critical gap exists in the current body of knowledge regarding the utilization of reflective practice, specifically within the landscape of English language education in Nigeria. This lacuna is not merely an academic

oversight; rather, it underscores the urgent need for targeted exploration and understanding of the dynamics surrounding the integration of reflective practices among English teachers in Nigerian secondary schools.

Therefore, this research endeavors to fill this void by delving into the application of reflective practices among secondary school teachers of English in Nigeria. By undertaking a comprehensive investigation, this study seeks to shed light on the current landscape of reflective practices in Nigerian secondary schools, their perceived effectiveness, and the potential barriers hindering their widespread adoption. Through this exploration, we aspire to contribute meaningful insights to the discourse on English language education in Nigeria and, subsequently, propose informed recommendations for the integration of reflective practices as a transformative pedagogical tool. Hence, this study aims to answer the following research question: How do secondary school English teachers use reflective practices in teaching English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In exploring the use of reflective practices among English teachers in Nigerian secondary schools, the literature review navigates several key topics, which are discussed hereunder.

Definition and Modes of Reflective Practice

Schön's (1983) seminal work defined reflective practice as an individual's ability to reflect on action to engage in a process of continuous learning. At its core, reflective practice in the field of education involves teachers introspectively examining their teaching or learning experiences, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and utilizing this insight to enhance future practice. Schön (1987) asserted that continuous reflection on one's practice is pivotal to achieving professional development. He delineated two distinct modes of reflection: Reflection-on-action, occurring after an event, requires teachers to retrospectively evaluate and contemplate what transpired during the lesson. Reflection-in-action, conversely, transpires at the moment, with practitioners scrutinizing their actions, probing the values and assumptions underlying their practice, and contemplating the future consequences of their actions.

In both modes, professionals endeavor to connect with their emotions and integrate relevant theory, with the ultimate goal of constructing new understandings that guide their actions in unfolding situations. Schön highlighted the importance of experiencing surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in uncertain or unique situations, leading to a reflective process that generates both a new understanding and a change in the situation (Schön, 1983). Additionally, Schön posited a developmental aspect to reflective practice, suggesting that professionals gradually develop the ability to monitor and adapt their practice simultaneously, while novices tend to rely mechanistically on rules and procedures, lacking tacit knowledge.

Empirical Evidence and Educational Impact

Building on these definitions, it is important to explore the empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of reflective practice in educational settings. Supporting Schön's theoretical framework, Kember et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 studies in higher education, revealing a positive correlation between reflective practice and students' academic achievement. Hatton and Smith (1995) corroborated these findings, specifically in the context of English language teachers, showing that reflective practice was associated with enhanced teaching effectiveness.

The diverse forms of reflective practice, such as self-reflection, peer observation, and group reflection, offer educators various avenues for professional development. Self-reflection involves individuals introspectively analyzing their own experiences and identifying areas for improvement. Peer observation brings a collaborative element, with colleagues providing constructive feedback through observing each other's teaching. Group reflection fosters collective learning, as individuals collaboratively reflect on their experiences, sharing insights and strategies.

Frameworks for Reflective Practice in Education

Within the educational context, Grushka et al.(2005) contribute to the understanding of reflective practice by distinguishing between 'reflection for action,' 'reflection in action,' and 'reflection on action.' These categories involve technical, practical, and critical questions that guide teachers in engaging with the reflective process, offering a structured framework for continuous improvement.

Expanding on this framework, Zeichner and Liston (1996) delineate five distinct levels of reflection occurring during teaching. The first level, rapid reflection, involves immediate, ongoing, and automatic actions by the teacher. The second level, repair, entails thoughtful decision-making as teachers adjust their behavior in response to students' cues. Moving to the third level, review, teachers engage in thinking, discussions, or written reflections about specific elements of their teaching. The fourth level, research, encompasses a more systematic and sustained form of reflection, potentially involving data collection or extensive reading of the research. Finally, the fifth level, reauthorizing and reformulating, signifies the critical examination of a teacher's practice and theories in the context of academic theories. These levels offer a comprehensive framework that captures the diverse dimensions and intensities of reflective practice within the dynamic context of teaching.

Application of Reflective Practices in English Language Education

Reflective practice has demonstrated particular efficacy in the domain of English language education. Farrell (2015) showcased its impact on improving lesson planning by helping teachers identify areas for enhancement and explore alternative approaches. Richards and Farrington (2005) emphasized its pivotal role in enhancing classroom management through the identification and resolution of problematic behaviors.

In language proficiency development, Zhang et al. (2019) conducted a study among Chinese students learning English, establishing a positive association between reflective practice and improved language proficiency. Similarly, Phan and Rao (2015) identified a positive correlation between reflective practices and improved writing skills among English language learners in Singapore. Hence, the integration of reflective practices into English language education emerges as a transformative approach, fostering continuous professional development and positively impacting both educators and learners.

Models of Reflective Practices

Various models of reflective practice exist, and one commonly employed in education is Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988). This reflective model comprises six sequential stages designed to guide individuals through the process of introspection. The stages encompass the following: Description, involving the articulation of the experience or situation under consideration; Feelings, which entail expressing and exploring the emotions associated with the experience; Evaluation, where individuals assess both the positive and negative aspects of the encounter; Analysis, involving the breakdown of the experience into its constituent parts to foster a deeper understanding; Conclusion, where individuals draw overarching conclusions about the experience and its implications for practice; and finally, Action Plan, which involves formulating a concrete plan for future practice based on the insights and conclusions derived from the reflective process. This literature review lays the foundation for the subsequent exploration of reflective practices among secondary school teachers of English in Nigerian schools, aiming to bridge the existing gap in research within this specific context.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting data from respondents at a single point in time. This design allows for an overview of the current state of reflective practices among the target population.

Respondents of the Study

The study involved 77 English language teachers from secondary schools in northern Nigeria, with at least three years of teaching experience. Participants were drawn from both private and public schools, as well as urban and rural areas, to ensure a representative sample. The sample size of 77 teachers seems relatively small, which could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of English language teachers in Nigeria.

Instrument for Data Collection

A questionnaire designed with a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the teachers' awareness of reflective practice. Items 1-22 of the questionnaire are adapted from

Faghihi and Sarab (2016) to assess teachers' level of reflective practice. The items are categorized into four aspects of reflection, as follows:

1. Practical: (items 1-6): Actual act of reflection by using different tools, such as keeping journals or talking to colleagues
2. Cognitive (items 7-12): Conscious efforts for professional development by attending conferences and reading professional books and journals
3. Learner (items 13-15): Deals with knowledge of learners and their affective/cognitive states.
4. Meta-cognitive (items 16-22): Deals with teachers' knowledge of their personalities, their definition of learning and teaching, their view of their profession

Items 23 and 24 were added to Sections 3 and 4, to suit the current study. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with 10 participants to collect more data for the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. The qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed to identify emerging themes related to reflective practices. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem

RESULTS

This section answers the research question of the study: How do secondary school English teachers use reflective practices in teaching English?" The results of the descriptive statistical analysis revealed that most of the respondents do not engage in reflective practice in their teaching practices. All the items of the questionnaire have mean scores less than 2.40 out of 5.00. This suggests that the majority of respondents have low and are not actively incorporating reflective practice into their teaching activities. Based on Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) scoring, a mean score of 3.5 and above indicated high usage, while a mean score within the range of 2.5-3.4 denoted moderate usage. On the other hand, a mean score of 2.4 and below indicated low usage. For example, Item 11 has the lowest mean score ($M=$ 2.07, $SD=$1.16), which shows that the majority of the respondents strongly disagree. They carry out small-scale research activities in their classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes. This implies a substantial gap in the integration of research-based activities into their pedagogical practices. This is followed by Item 1 with the mean score ($M=$2.08, $SD=$ 1.16). It reveals that many of the respondents believe that they do not have a file where they keep the accounts of their teaching for reviewing purposes. This lack of documentation suggests a serious limitation in their ability to systematically reflect on and improve their teaching methods. Generally, the results indicate that the respondents have a low level of engagement in reflective practice in teaching based on the classification of Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), as mean scores of all the components of regulatory strategies

in writing fall between 2.00-2.30. These findings highlight the need for interventions or support mechanisms to encourage and enhance reflective practices among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. Table 1presents the details of the results.

The themes derived from the semi-structured interviews complement and reinforce the quantitative results, providing additional depth and context to the findings. Themes such as "Limited Use of Reflective Practices," "Lack of Awareness about Reflective Practices," and "Infrequent Adherence to Reflective Steps" directly align with and support the low engagement levels observed in the quantitative data:

Limited Use of Reflective Practices

The study found that a majority of participants do not incorporate reflective practices into their teaching methods. Many participants explicitly stated that they do not utilize reflective practices in their teaching.

Lack of Awareness about Reflective Practices

Most participants demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding reflective practices. Specifically, they expressed unfamiliarity with reflective practices as a strategy to enhance their teaching profession.

Infrequent Adherence to Reflective Steps

Even among the participants with some awareness of reflective practices, the participants reported infrequently following established steps for reflective practice. This suggests that even if some participants have a certain understanding of reflective practice, the application of reflective steps in teaching is not a routine practice. For example, they do not care to carry out small-scale research activities in their classes to evaluate their teaching strategies; or ask students' perceptions of their teaching methods.

Workload as a Barrier to Learning New Methodologies

The participants identified a significant challenge in the form of a heavy workload, including teaching multiple classes, grading, and other school-related activities. This substantial workload, according to the participants, hinders their ability to learn and incorporate new teaching methodologies.

Poor Motivation as a Barrier to Learning New Methodologies

The study revealed that poor motivation from the government, school proprietors, and managers acts as a barrier to learning new teaching methodologies. The participants expressed that a lack of support and encouragement affects

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the respondents

S/N	Item	M	SD
1	I have a file where I keep accounts of my teaching for review purposes.	2.08	1.16
2	I talk about my classroom experiences with my colleagues and seek their advice/feedback.	2.21	1.23
3	After each lesson, I write about the accomplishments/failures of that lesson or I talk about the lesson to a colleague.	2.15	1.2
4	I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.	2.2	1.23
5	I observe other teachers' classrooms to learn about their efficient practices.	2.27	1.33
6	I ask my peers to observe my teaching and comment on my teaching performance.	2.29	1.31
7	I read books/articles related to effective teaching to improve my classroom performance.	2.2	1.27
8	I participate in workshops/conferences related to teaching/learning issues.	2.2	1.27
9	I think of writing articles based on my classroom experiences.	2.27	1.32
10	I look at journal articles or search the internet to see what the recent developments in my profession are.	2.27	1.36
11	I carry out small-scale research activities in my classes to become better informed of learning/teaching processes.	2.07	1.1
12	I think of classroom events as potential research topics and think of finding a method for investigating them.	2.21	1.23
13	I talk to my students to learn about their learning styles and preferences.	2.15	1.2
14	I talk to my students to learn about their family backgrounds, hobbies, interests and abilities.	2.2	1.23
15	I ask my students whether they like a teaching task or not.	2.2	1.33
16	As a teacher, I think about my teaching philosophy and the way it is affecting my teaching.	2.28	1.31
17	I think of the ways my biography or my background affects the way I define myself as a teacher.	2.23	1.27
18	I think of the meaning or significance of my job as a teacher.	2.23	1.27
19	I try to find out which aspects of my teaching provide me with a sense of satisfaction.	2.28	1.33
20	I think about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.	2.27	1.36
21	I think of the positive/negative role models I have had as a student and the way they have affected me in my practice.	2.28	1.1
22	I think of inconsistencies and contradictions that occur in my classroom practice.	2.21	1.23
23	I make students review/reflect on my lessons in order to assess and guide my classroom instructions.	2.2	1.23
24	Reflecting on my teaching has changed my view as a teacher.	2.22	1.24

their motivation to explore and adopt innovative teaching methodologies, such as reflective practices.

The identification of barriers, such as heavy workload and poor motivation, offers potential explanations for the limited adoption of reflective practices among the participants. The presentation of these themes is clear and concise, effectively summarizing the key findings from the qualitative data. These findings highlight the need for intervention and support to promote the integration of reflective practices in the teaching profession in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The study discovered a very low level of engagement and a lack of awareness of reflective practices among teachers of secondary schools in Nigeria. It is further revealed that even those with some awareness of reflective practice rarely follow established steps for incorporating reflection into their teaching. These findings are not surprising because previous studies have shown that many language teachers in Nigeria are not aware of methods proven to be effective in developing learners' language skills. The study investigates the extent to which secondary school English teachers in Nigeria engage in reflective practices. The researchers used triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data to come up with the results. A quantitative analysis, facilitated through a questionnaire, uncovers a disconcerting trend where most respondents indicate a low level of involvement in reflective practices. These findings serve as a catalyst for a more profound exploration of the challenges surrounding reflective teaching within the Nigerian educational landscape.

The quantitative findings, vividly presented in Table 1 depict a significant deficiency in the integration of reflective practices into the teaching methodologies of the surveyed teachers. Consistently low mean scores below 2.40 out of 5.00 reveal a pervasive lack of engagement in various facets of reflective teaching, with Item 11 reflecting the lowest mean score, highlighting a notable reluctance among teachers to undertake small-scale research in their classrooms. This reluctance signifies not only a substantial gap in research-based activities but also a missed opportunity for educators to enhance their understanding of the learning and teaching processes. Aligning with Van Manen's (1977) classification of reflection into descriptive, comparative, and critical reflection, participants in this study predominantly focused on actions to complete daily lesson teaching, neglecting the examination of their beliefs and theories based on reflective practice. This inclination towards action-oriented reflection may be indicative of participants' overall lack of engagement in reflective practice.

In juxtaposing the study's findings with existing literature, striking parallels emerge, underscoring a consistent pattern of limited awareness and application of reflective practices among language teachers, particularly in the Nigerian educational landscape. This alignment with prior research, including studies by scholars such as Habtamu and Belay (2023) and Gudeta (2022), underscores the persistent nature of this issue, necessitating targeted interventions. Moreover, the consistent conformity of the study's findings with Ostaz's

(2011) research, revealing in-service teachers' perceptions of reflective practice and engagement far below average, underscores the overarching theme of limited engagement in reflective practices among the surveyed educators.

The significance of the study lies in its implications for the professional development of English teachers. The identified gap signals a potential stagnation in teaching methodologies, with educators relying on routine practices rather than actively seeking opportunities for improvement. These implications extend beyond individual teaching practices to the overall quality of English language education in Nigerian secondary schools. Without a commitment to reflective practices, the potential for innovation and growth in teaching approaches is constrained.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the awareness and implementation of reflective practices among English language teachers in secondary schools across northern Nigeria. The findings reveal a very low usage of reflective practices among the respondents in teaching English. The findings also revealed a lack of awareness of reflective practices and effectiveness in teaching English. The findings further revealed that, despite some theoretical knowledge among some teachers, they rarely engage in or follow any established steps for incorporating reflective practices into their teaching of English. This shows a disconnection between understanding theoretical knowledge and practical application, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to bridge this gap within this context. This study has some limitations, which include a limited number of participants. Despite the limitations, the study is significant as it triggers teacher education institutions and school administrators to develop a culture of reflective practices in teaching English, particularly in Nigeria. This would eventually improve English language learning outcomes in the country.

The study provides a set of recommendations for the effective implementation of reflective practices in teaching English in Nigerian secondary schools. Firstly, it suggests that educators should be provided with adequate training, support, time, resources, opportunities, and diverse methods for reflection. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of prioritizing and facilitating teachers' participation in professional development activities specifically focused on self-reflection. To achieve this, workshops, seminars, and in-service training programs are recommended to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills. Additionally, administrators and school leaders are encouraged to foster a culture of reflective practice within the school environment. The study suggests that institutions responsible for training teachers integrate reflective practices into their curriculum, providing prospective teachers with opportunities to cultivate their reflective abilities. Access to resources such as reflective journals, teaching portfolios, and reflective prompts is advocated. The establishment of coaching and mentoring programs is proposed to offer teachers the necessary support and guidance in their reflective activities. Furthermore, the study recommends the utilization of digital

tools and platforms, such as online reflective journals, video recordings, and virtual collaboration platforms, to enhance and facilitate reflective practices. Finally, the encouragement of collaborative reflection activities, including lesson study groups, learning communities, and professional learning communities, is suggested to enable teachers to collectively reflect on their teaching practices, share experiences, and learn from one another.

In conclusion, this study highlights a substantial gap between the theoretical perception and practical application of reflective practices among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. Participants, predominantly involved in routine actions without critically examining their teaching philosophies, reflect a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation. Addressing this gap necessitates targeted interventions aimed at enhancing awareness, reducing workload, and improving motivation. The findings underscore the urgency of fostering a reflective culture within the teaching profession to elevate the quality of education in Nigeria.

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