

Exploring Novice EFL Teachers' Reflective Practice on Their Teaching Performances During Online Learning: A Narrative Inquiry Approach

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused sudden changes in the world of education, requiring teachers to adapt their teaching methods to online platforms. This narrative inquiry investigates the reflective practices of novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesian schools during the transition to online learning. This research aims to explore how teachers reflect on their teaching performance and how this reflective practice influences their professional development. A qualitative approach was used to collect data from a sample of two novice EFL teachers working in schools in Indonesia. Data was collected through teachers' reflective journals that focused on their experiences and perceptions of online teaching practices. Teachers' reflections were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and trends in their experiences. Preliminary findings suggest that novice EFL teachers actively engage in reflective practice to assess their teaching performance during online learning. Teachers demonstrated awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their online teaching methods and expressed a willingness to experiment with new approaches to improve student learning. This study contributes to the understanding of how reflective practice influences novice EFL teachers' professional development in online learning contexts. This highlights the importance of ongoing self-evaluation and the potential benefits of incorporating reflective practice into teacher training programs. These findings have implications for policy makers, teacher educators, and school administrators, highlighting the need to support teachers in developing reflective skills to improve online teaching performance.

Keywords: Reflective Practice, Novice EFL Teachers, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the recent surge in online learning has profoundly transformed the way teachers engage with their students. The integration of technology and the shift to virtual classrooms have presented both challenges and opportunities for educators across the globe. Among those navigating this educational paradigm shift, novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers stand out as a particularly noteworthy group. These educators, often in the early stages of their teaching careers, find themselves at the intersection of two significant transitions: their initiation into the teaching profession and the rapid adoption of online learning platforms. Reflective Practice can be defined as how the teachers think about their underlying values and beliefs about teaching and learning process while comparing them to classroom activities. In the process of engaging in reflective practice, teachers must systematically collect many important data related to the learning process in the classroom and then analyze whether some inconsistencies occur between the teaching practices and values (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019). Understanding how novice EFL teachers reflect on and adapt to these changes is essential for fostering their growth and enhancing the quality of EFL education in an online context.

Reflective practice, a concept rooted in the work of influential theorists such as Donald Schön and John Dewey, is a vital element of teacher professional development. It encourages educators to examine their teaching experiences, critically analyze their strategies, and consider how they can enhance their pedagogical approaches. Through reflective practice, teachers can become more responsive and effective in their teaching, adapting to the unique needs of their students and the challenges of the learning environment. While reflective practice has been widely explored in traditional, face-to-face teaching settings, its role and significance in the online EFL teaching domain, particularly among novice teachers, remain a relatively underexplored area of research. In teaching online, technology is essential. It is not only as a background but also as a context for instruction in teaching because it can be the place where the teaching and learning process occurs (Major, 2015, pp. 9–10). Cooperman (2017, p.8) states that it is important for online teachers to know about technology or the ability of technical background to use new technology which can be delivered in teaching online both effectively and efficiently. Each skill in using technology which the teachers have learned, surely related to the improvement of their teaching, both online or face-to-face classrooms (Morris, 2002, p. 38).

Research conducted by Soisangwarn & Wongwanich (2014) showed that self-reflective practice and reflective peer coaching practice can help teachers understand themselves and their students better in order to make learning more meaningful. Research on Teacher's Reflective Practice was conducted for online learning from LaPrade, K, et. al. (2014) to find the impact of RP towards higher education teachers' online teaching performance and it showed statistically significant positive effects of the utilization of *Five by Five* by online faculty in terms of their participation in the discussion forums and their use of quality instructional techniques. Research conducted by Yayli (2009) explored both the types of reflection in the reflective journals written by 62 preservice teachers of an English Language Teaching Department of a University in Turkey and their opinions on their engagement with reflective journal writing. The findings of the study indicated that the preservice teachers developed a positive attitude toward journal writing and using it in their future teaching.

This study sought to bridge this gap by employing a Narrative Inquiry approach to explore novice EFL teachers' reflective practice in the context of online learning. By examining their narratives and reflections, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how novice EFL teachers perceive and adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by online teaching. Furthermore, we sought to elucidate the ways in which reflective practice influenced their teaching performances and professional development. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform the design of teacher training programs and support mechanisms, which could better prepare novice EFL teachers for the unique demands of online instruction. It is essential not only to identify the challenges they face but also to celebrate their successes and innovative practices, which may serve as models for others in the field. As such, this research was not only concerned with the experiences of novice EFL teachers but also with the broader implications for the enhancement of EFL education in an online environment.

In the following sections, we explored the relevant literature, presented the research objectives, outlined the methodology employed, and discussed the potential contributions and limitations of this study. Through this exploration, we aim to shed light on the intricate world of novice EFL teachers navigating the digital realm of education while engaging in reflective practice to enhance their teaching performances. The researcher used the Dewey and Schön (1983) reflective model as the framework which was developed by Farrell (2012) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The main focus in this research was the researcher wanted to find out how the junior high school English teachers as the participants applied the Reflective Practice for their professional development during online learning. This study aimed to investigate the EFL teachers' attitudes toward the use of Reflective Practice on their teaching performances. Thus, from this research it would construct a proper use of Reflective Practice for the EFL teachers. Based on the research gap above, the researcher comes up with the research questions below: How do the teachers reflect their teaching process during online learning?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a narrative inquiry approach to examine the lived experience of two English novice teachers with experience in applying reflective practices through their online classroom activities in 2020 in Indonesia. researchers focused this study on how the teacher's reflective practice during EFL online learning affected their teaching performance. According to (Polkinghorne, 1995), narrative inquiry is not new to qualitative researchers and it is defined as a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories were used to describe human actions. The researcher described the research's result deliberately and narratively. According to (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) the narrative inquiry method of research requires adopting a particular thing that views experience as the phenomenon being studied. The majority of this research method started with researchers conducting interviews with participants, where the respondents shared their experiences because narrative inquiry was about life and living. Researchers employed interviews in this study to gather data. Purposive sampling of the research was used after an initial survey or interview in the field to ensure that the people chosen for the study meet the appropriate criteria. In an interview, data were gathered through face-to-face or telephone interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, according to (Ary et al. 1985:342). In the stage of analyzing data,

we adopted thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for the thematic analysis process were as followed, and it went through the following stages: 1. becoming familiar with the information, 2. creating initial codes 3. examining themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. naming and defining themes, and 6. producing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To promote critical and creative thinking in the classroom, teacher told the story entitled “The Lion and the Mouse” and checked students’ understanding of the story by asking some questions. Those questions are intentionally and clearly asked to check students’ critical and creative thinking. This was the first time; the students were told about this classic story. Teacher supported her story with picture of Lion and Mouse to ignite students’ prior knowledge. Below is displayed the result of questions and answer session between teacher and students in the classroom followed with confirmation questions if needed as well as students’ responses towards the questions.

How Do the Novice English Teachers Reflect Their Teaching Process During Online Learning?

The Novice Teachers’ Beliefs on Reflective Practice

Some beliefs from the teachers’ perspectives were obtained from interview sessions clearly stating that Reflective Practice (RP) is a strategy to look back and keep on track on something that happened in the past to find some ideas from the previous experiences to solve some problems and improve their skills in the future.

“Reflective Practice for me is one way to look back on how things happened in order to find insights or ideas to overcome the problems that occurred or even to see that a way may work better in some certain situations. The key is to keep a track of certain experiences and use the information to reflect and improve the solution.” (P1, Int)

“Personally, reflective practice is a process of past experiences that I can use as learning. Through the experiences I have learned, this will guide me to plan things that are useful for my self-development process.” (P2, Int)

Both participants stated their beliefs on what reflective practice was to them. They believed that Reflective Practice (RP) was an important strategy to reflect and evaluate on what happened in the classroom to practically improve their way of teaching. They could gather the information and then look for some loops and fill them with new improvements. In accordance with the theory from Dewey and Schon (1987) that reflecting on practice generally means teachers thinking about their underlying values and beliefs about teaching and learning and comparing these to classroom practices. As such, ‘reflection’ is considered as a vital component connected with grasping the concept of ‘self’ because it elevates these explicit concepts to a higher state of awareness (Farrell, 2008; Farrell 2011).

Novice Teachers' Ability to Implement RP in Their Online Classroom

This finding found that novice English teachers discussed their experiences in adapting their teaching strategies and materials for online learning. This included experimenting with various online tools and resources.

“To achieve our main goals to achieve effective and meaningful learning, it really helps me to do reflective practice. I also do some of the reflective activities that I do as a teacher during online learning, such as reflective journal diary, collaborative learning, recording lessons and even asking for student feedback to reflect on learning in the field. Through these RP activities, I received information that was useful for developing myself as a student and I also felt fully responsible for improving my professionalism to become a good teacher. I feel like using peer coaching is more beneficial for my reflective practice because I can get various insights and advice from more experienced colleagues. I also used fun/interactive videos that I found on the internet (YouTube) to support the learning material.” (P1, Int)

“During online learning, I as a teacher feel the need to proactively look for interesting online learning platforms so that students get more engaged in classroom activities, such as using games from Kahoot! watching explanation videos from YouTube, filling in quizzes on Google Classroom, etc. But also, the role of peer-coaching was very helpful, because I can get feedback and constructive criticism for improving my teaching performance. Peer-coaching can also help me during the creative process such as finding new ideas or using new online learning platforms.” (P2, Int)

By looking at the quotes from the two research participants above, the results of this research showed that the reflective practice activities carried out by novice teachers vary greatly. From the quotes we can also understand that teachers should be able to keep up on the advancement of technologies so they can utilize them in their online teaching. This showed positive behavior from novice teachers in adapting to online learning. They have learned and reflected on their teaching using RP. Apart from that, the results of this research revealed that peer coaching was a very useful activity for novice researchers because this activity helped them to further develop themselves through suggestions from their colleagues. This was in line with previous research from (Soisangwan & Wongwanich, 2014) showed that self-reflective practice and reflective peer coaching practice can help teachers understand themselves and their students better in order to make learning more meaningful.

Novice Teacher's Skill Improvement

This finding revealed that novice teachers used reflective practice as one tool to improve their professional development which could be helpful during the teaching process in the classroom. Teachers also felt more comfortable knowing that their teaching could fit into the students' needs and helped students to fulfil their learning aims.

“After adopting RP to evaluate the learning process in class, I enjoy the teaching and learning process with students more because I have analyzed and understood how each student understands the material presented and whether the teaching material I convey is able to meet their needs. This makes teachers able to handle the different needs and problems experienced by students.” (P1, Int)

“Before applying RP, I felt that the learning strategies and methods that I applied had not changed and only followed what I thought was good for my students and it turned out that what I thought was the best for my students was not necessarily in accordance with their needs. Well, but after I applied RP, I felt more professional and organized in teaching because I also paid attention to the differences in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. I was able to try various kinds of learning methods which made the learning atmosphere more varied.” (P2, Int)

Looking at the statements from the participants' interview, applying reflective practice in their teaching could be helpful to their teaching skill improvement and helped them understand the students' needs better. Reflective practice also encouraged novice teachers to significantly improve their teaching practices by trying various kinds of teaching methods and eventually made them feel more confident in teaching.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this narrative inquiry approach sheds light on the diverse experiences and reflective practices of novice EFL teachers during online learning. The research identified several key factors influencing novice EFL teachers' reflective practices during online learning. First, in this phase, novice teachers who were more comfortable with online teaching tools and platforms tended to engage in more reflective practices. Second, in this phase, teachers who had access to mentors or peer support networks were more likely to reflect on their teaching performance. Third, novice teachers with higher self-efficacy in their teaching abilities were more likely to reflect on their online teaching performance.

The findings highlight the need for tailored support and training to enhance reflective practices and ultimately improve the quality of online EFL instruction. Understanding the factors that influence reflection and the common themes in reflective narratives can contribute to the professional development of novice teachers and, in turn, benefit their students. However, there is still some room for improvement in this research. The study opens doors for future research. Some potential areas of investigation include; comparative studies between novice teachers and their more experienced counterparts to understand the impact of experience on reflective practice, and exploring the connection between reflective practices and student learning outcomes in online EFL classrooms.

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