

ESL Teachers' Awareness of Reflective Practice in Basic Education Writing Lessons in Nigeria

Wisdom Inibehe Jude, Ph.D¹ & Uduakgold Innocent Ido, Ph.D²

¹Directorate of General Studies Federal University of Technology, Ikot Abasi, Nigeria.

²Department of Curriculum Studies, Educational Management and Planning, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Nigeria.

¹wisinibehe28@gmail.com; +2348034949830

²goldisaiah2@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examined Basic Education English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' awareness of reflective practice in writing instruction in primary schools. The study adopted an ex post facto research design. The population comprised 1,300 teachers from 260 primary schools. Most of the teachers were not specialists in ESL but taught English studies as part of their general teaching responsibilities. A sample of 120 teachers was selected using a purposive random sampling technique. Data were collected using the Reflective Practice Questionnaire (RPQ). Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that a greater proportion of ESL teachers at the Basic Education level were unaware of reflective practice. The results further showed that teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience recorded higher awareness mean scores than those with less than ten years and less than five years of experience. Similarly, teachers with higher academic qualifications obtained higher mean awareness scores than those with the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). The findings indicated that the first hypothesis was rejected, whereas the second hypothesis was retained. Based on these findings, the study recommended the integration of reflective practice into the College of Education curriculum and the

provision of formal professional development opportunities, such as workshops and seminars, to enhance teachers' effectiveness in writing instruction.

Keywords: Reflective Practice, ESL Teachers, Writing Instruction, Teacher Awareness, Basic Education

Introduction

In a global society that is as complex and dynamic as ours, teachers remain central to the achievement of educational goals. In all these, the basic education ESL teachers are the most powerful, durable and effective agents for the fulfilment of educational aims and objectives. This is because they teach at the formative stage of the education system and stand in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. In pursuit of high-quality teacher continuous professional development (CPD) activities, reflective practice has received wider attention because teaching experience itself does not guarantee improved practices (Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018). Although basic education ESL teachers have always been engaged in reflection in some way, it is only during recent decades that the notion has become a well-established theoretical concept in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language, TESOL (Farrell, 2019). To embark on this extremely challenging task, the traditionally held notions of what it is to be an effective teacher must be transformed (Shostak, 2011 & Webster-Wright, 2010).

Rodgers (2002) opines that reflective practice is a meaning-making process that enables basic education ESL teachers' continuous professional growth. The process is intended to build up writing, teaching and learning proficiency premised on a cyclical and systemic self-examination of their teaching experiences (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). By implication, when basic education ESL teachers reflect on their teaching practices, their awareness of their teaching increases, and they can then unlearn the ineffective teaching methods.

Schools and various places of learning are constantly challenged to develop appropriate skill sets in their learners, such as key competencies, which have shifted educational discourse from education to learning, with a focus on developing lifelong learning and employability (Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012). However, many basic education ESL teachers have not had a formal introduction to reflective practice. They work in conditions of constraint and challenge, experiencing a lack of resources and support and often working with large classes (Hyacinth & Mann, 2014).

The basic education ESL teachers' experiences vary, as some are qualified English language teachers, but a few have first degrees in English or other fields but no teaching qualifications. Most of them have not been introduced to reflective practice in any formal or theoretical way. The basic education ESL teacher's role is widely characterised to be

more complex than it was in the past, and teachers are tasked with forming the citizens of tomorrow (Vloet & Van Swet, 2010). It is necessary that basic education ESL teachers be prepared not only with knowledge in their discipline but also with continuous professional development (CPD) to make them become agents of change in their classrooms and communities.

The English language has become a global lingua franca or a hyper-central language in an ever-shrinking world witnessing cultural fusion (Al-Issa, 2016). Learning English is no longer a choice for many countries and their citizens, but it is considered a vital economic need synonymous with employment opportunities, educational benefits, and personal enrichment. Ultimately, the English language has transformed into the de facto medium of global communications. Given the global perception of English proficiency and economic mobility, the need for ESL instruction is monumental.

Writing together with its teaching in second language contexts previously was rarely seen as something to be taught for its own sake, and in the second language classroom, it was most often used as a way of demonstrating mastery of the structures studied in class or for dictation. Despite this huge increase in interest in writing and a considerable amount of work on models of how people write for a second language, or L2, writing, there have been relatively few models developed of the role of instruction in writing in a second language (Cumming & Riazi 2000; Grabe 2001). This is, at least in part, due to the multifaceted nature of writing.

The term 'writing' refers both to an act and the result of that act. Writing can be acquired through learning the process of composing and learning the form and organisation of the product. In addition, writing has a social dimension and purpose, which can lead to other perspectives such as genre, voice, and audience. The writer is expected to think, construct and encode a formal and social context in a text, while the reader is required to decode the formal and social aspects of the text. This is because writing is a visual form of communication, either printed in hard copy or in electronic form. It operates through conventions that must be understood mutually by the writer and the reader. It is a productive skill because the writer creates new language and does not only interpret existing information.

Writing is a complex process that requires the author to be aware of and combine various components of language successfully. The physical act of writing is fairly automatic for adult writers; in the second language, it becomes a conscious process once more, especially when the target orthography is different from the learners' mother tongue (Silva, 1993). According to the researcher, second-language writers spend less time planning and organising ideas and have more difficulties with these steps. Reflective practice introduces the basic education ESL writing teacher to develop the skill of planning and critical thinking before, during and after the writing lesson. Therefore, the writing teachers' awareness of writing lessons reflecting practice cannot be ignored in this context.

To counter this, second language teaching should include time for planning both content and form, for generating ideas as well as for improving accuracy.

'Language instruction in ESL' refers to second language learners who are living in an English-speaking country, like Nigeria. All teachers, not just specialists in English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual professionals, need to be able to work with English language learners. The need to prepare teachers to work with this group of learners is important across the basic education level, which is the formative stage of learning in Nigeria. This is because in the primary education system teachers are required to teach all subjects in their classrooms. Consequently, this operational procedure puts pressure on teacher education programmes to prepare teachers on how to proficiently teach writing skills to learners in the English language.

Furthermore, basic education teachers need to create a supportive and academically challenging environment for second language English learners. According to Hammond and Gibbons (2005), primary school teachers need to be able to provide best practices for learners, such as recognising different linguistic and academic needs of pupils in various contexts. The art of teaching learners using language learning strategies, specifically reading and writing strategies, and a gradual release of responsibility model for organising instruction for learners as well as other tools and strategies, including materials and instructions in pupils' native language, is of utmost importance (Faltis, Arias, & Ramírez-Marín, 2010).

The adverb 'reflectivity' is derived from the verb 'reflect', which means 'to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions' (Cambridge University Press, 2005). For Akbari and Allvar (2010), the mere meaning of reflection is stepping back and thinking about one's actions or thoughts. Though there exist few empirical research results linking teacher reflectivity with student academic performance, a close look at the literature of reflective teaching provides us a good theoretical understanding of the concept.

However, Akbari and Allvar (2010) contended that, as ESL teachers are more aware of reflective practices, they begin to exhibit reflective behaviour for their students. Again, teachers' engagement in reflective teaching promotes students' ability to be critically reflective. Stronge (2002) also opined that when basic education ESL teachers are aware of reflective practice, they readily accept constructive criticism and reflect upon it in the attempt to improve their capacity to enhance students' writing skills. He argued further that initially, the reflective practice can create confusion for the teacher; the process requires honesty, open-mindedness, and sufficient time to change teaching behaviours. The researcher also postulated the following as values of reflective practice to a practising teacher:

- i. Reflective teachers believe in one's efficacy and maintain high expectations for the learners.

- ii. Teachers may reflect on their work formally or informally while reviewing a day's work mentally.
- iii. They keep journals or portfolios, meet regularly with a mentor or with colleagues, or assess a videotaped recording of their teaching. By implication, they develop open-mindedness.
- iv. Reflective teachers constantly mention reflection on their duties as an important component of improving their teaching, which results in high learners' achievement rates.

In addition, reflective practice helps to shape basic education lessons among ESL teachers' classroom approaches and to reduce their over-reliance on traditional practices, especially when such practices are not yielding or producing the desired educational outcomes. Thus, they tend to replace these old and traditional practices, thereby making them become not only consumers of knowledge but also producers of new knowledge (LaBoskey, 1994).

Reflective practice is an important factor in the development of a competent basic education ESL teacher, the main characteristic of teacher training programmes, and one of the elements contributing enormously to teaching practice. Reflective teaching considers the procedure of content presentation during the teaching and learning process, thinks about the pros and cons of practices, and reflects on the functionality of the materials. Within the process, basic education ESL teachers will be aware of the classroom setting, and using the collected data, they could analyse their thoughts and the presented practices or teaching.

The way a basic education ESL teacher ponders or reflects about the class brings about competence development in teaching. Reflective teaching involves a process of self-assessment, thinking about what has been done in the class, and considering possible changes of action if required. Akbari (2007) claimed that a reflective teacher is one who carefully appraises his/her teaching practices, takes new decisions based on his/her previous experience, and implements goals systematically.

Research studies suggest that many Nigerian primary school teachers usually have negative attitudes towards teaching because they reluctantly joined teacher education programmes due to their inability to qualify for other preferred courses with higher entry criteria. The teaching job is still apparently viewed by many in Nigeria as a stepping stone to a better job.

The role of basic education ESL teacher reflective practice has been ignored in second language acquisition. Reflective teaching is a process of self-questioning about the practices in teaching in general and the way one presents the materials in the classroom and establishes a relationship with other colleagues who have the same question. Hence, reflective teaching is a process of ESL writing teachers' thought and realisation of reflective procedure through awareness in the classroom based on the experience acquired in the setting. A basic education ESL teacher's involvement in reflective teaching has a mutual effect on pupils' knowledge of reflectivity (Yost, Sentner, & Frolenza-Bailey as cited in

Akbari, 2007). Accordingly, teachers' awareness of reflective practice is more likely to transfer knowledge, in the form of behaviour or skill, to their pupils. According to Pollard (2005), cited in Akbari and Allvar (2010), reflective teaching has to do with an active concern with aims and consequences as well as means and technical competence (p. 15). The researcher proposed the seven main characteristics of reflective practices as follows:

- i. Reflective practice awareness would involve the writing teacher's active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency in writing lessons.
- ii. When adequately perceived by writing teachers, reflective practice will be applied in a cyclical or spiral process in which basic education ESL teachers monitor, evaluate and revise their own writing lesson practice continuously.
- iii. Reflective practice hinges on writing teachers' competence in methods of evidence-based classroom enquiry to support the progressive development of higher standards of teaching of writing lessons.
- iv. It inculcates in the writing teacher attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness.
- v. The practice is based on teacher judgement, informed by evidence-based enquiry and insights from other research.
- vi. Reflective teaching motivates ESL writing teachers' professional learning and personal fulfilment, which are enhanced by dialogue with themselves and colleagues.
- vii. Basic education ESL writing teachers can be enabled to creatively mediate externally developed frameworks for teaching and learning.

Despite the lack of models of learning to write, it is generally accepted that the teaching of ESL writing does have an effect and that the knowledge required of a writer is learnable and the skills trainable. It is imperative to ESL writing instruction that learners make progress as a direct result of the instruction they receive. In a second language learning context, a pupil's progress in writing is often assumed to be simply a part of the overall increase in their English language proficiency. Learners' ability to write clearly and accurately depends to an extent on their general level of proficiency in the English language, although according to Weissberg (2000), there are aspects of proficiency that are either specific to pupils' writing or may be specifically seen to develop through writing.

The procedure of writing instruction affects learners' accuracy in the use of the English language in their writing and also the range of choice of structure and vocabulary available to them for use in writing. Instruction affects the student's understanding of the cultural and contextual appropriateness of particular structures or vocabulary, their

understanding of the norms and expectations of the target genres regarding form, and their understanding of the norms of the target genres regarding the choice of information and its sequencing and structuring.

The study focused on establishing whether they were aware of or saw themselves as reflective and could articulate ways in which reflection was important for them in their everyday practice. Teachers' awareness determines how Nigerian teachers conceptualise reflection and in what ways it is important for them. The study is in line with the move and effort of making reflective practice less vague and more achievable for teachers.

Purpose of the Study

This study is set to achieve the following purposes:

- i. To find out basic education ESL teachers' opinion of reflective practice on writing skills?
- ii. To determine how basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice differs according to teaching experience?
- iii. To examine how basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice differs according to academic status.

Research Questions

- i. What is the opinion of basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice on writing skills?
- ii. How does basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice differ according to Teaching experience?
- iii. How does basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice differ according to academic status?

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant difference between the mean awareness scores of basic education ESL teachers with more than five years, below five years and more than ten years of teaching experience by writing skills.
- ii. There is no significant difference between the mean awareness scores of basic education ESL teachers by academic status.

Methodology

The state of Akwa Ibom in Nigeria also has a massive and diverse population. The participants were drawn from schools chosen by the state government to partake in the annual State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) workshop training, which was

organised for basic education teachers. The research assistance consisted of the resource persons for the various centres within senatorial districts in the state. The study employs an ex post facto research design. The population of the study consisted of all 1,300 basic education ESL teachers. The researchers made use of a purposeful sampling technique to select the sample size of 120 teachers from the 3 senatorial districts in the state, namely Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene. Participants were drawn from 260 primary schools.

Most of the basic education ESL teachers did not specialise in the English language but were employed to teach English studies because primary school teachers are mandated to teach all subjects. Thus, they were not recruited based on the subject they will be teaching. Three research questions and 2 hypotheses were developed to guide the study. A researcher-made Reflective Practice Awareness Questionnaire (RPAQ) comprising 20 items, covering conceptual awareness (knowledge of what reflective practice is), procedural awareness (knowledge of how to execute reflection) and evaluative awareness (capacity to critique self-performance). The Likert-scaled format questionnaire was constructed and tested for face and content validity by experts. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.80.

The questionnaire maintained the standard 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree & Strongly Agree) with 20 items positively phrased; the scoring structure used direct summation. The questionnaire was later administered to respondents during the SUBEB workshop in the 3 senatorial districts. Those who scored between 20 and 46 are interpreted as having low awareness. The basic education ESL teachers view reflection as a casual, passive afterthought. They lack familiarity with formal frameworks, systematic tracking tools, and data-driven evaluation. Secondly, scores from 47 to 73 indicate moderate awareness. The basic education ESL teachers actively critique their writing lessons and understand standard reflective procedures. However, they struggle to link reflections to formal research or address deep socio-cultural classroom dynamics. Lastly, 74 – 100 scores showed high awareness. The teachers exhibit an advanced, deeply systematic approach to reflection. They seamlessly connect theory to practice, rigorously critique their biases, and adapt lessons to ensure student equity.

The descriptive statistical tools of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tested the hypotheses formulated at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One:

What is the opinion of Basic Education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice on primary school writing skills.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation for Basic Education ESL teachers opinion on awareness and unawareness of reflective writing skills

GROUP	n	Mean	STD
UNAWARE	76	140.588 ^a	1.989
AWARE	44	110.105 ^a	2.344

In Table 1, out of a total number of 120 participants, the number of basic education ESL teachers who were unaware of reflective practice was 76, with an unawareness mean score of 140.588 and a standard deviation of 1.989. The number of those aware of reflective practice is 44, with a mean score of 110.105 and 2.344 as the standard deviation. More basic education ESL teachers are unaware of reflective practices.

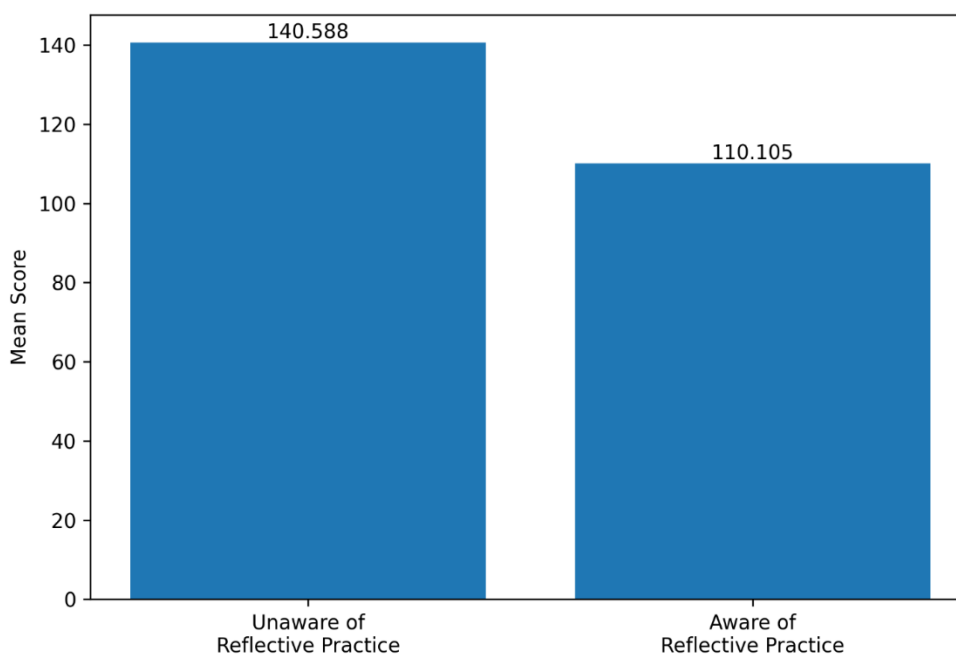
**Figure 1:** Profile of Differences in Basic Education ESL Teachers' Awareness of Reflective Practice in Primary School Writing Lessons

Figure 1 presents the differences in basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice in writing lessons. Of the 120 participants, 76 indicated that they were unaware of reflective practice in writing instruction, whereas 44 reported being aware of the concept. The chart shows that teachers who were unaware of reflective practice recorded a mean score of 140.588, while those who were aware recorded a mean score of 110.105. The findings suggest that a larger proportion of the sampled Basic Education ESL teachers lacked awareness of reflective practice. This highlights the importance of professional

development initiatives aimed at increasing teachers' awareness and implementation of reflective practice for effective writing instruction in second-language learning contexts.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation for Basic Education ESL teachers opinion of reflective writing skills based on teaching experience

GROUP	n	Mean	STD
Below 5yrs	24	122.463 ^a	3.265
Below 10 yrs	43	128.647 ^a	2.529
Above 10 yrs	53	130.037 ^a	2.222

This table shows the opinions of basic education ESL teachers on reflective practice based on their teaching experience. Basic Education ESL teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience, numbering 53, scored the highest mean of 130.037 with a standard deviation of 2.222. Those with less than 10 years' teaching experience, numbering 43, came second with a mean score of 128.647 with STD at 2.529. Twenty-four of them scored a mean score of 122.463, which is the lowest. By implication, basic education ESL teachers who have more than ten years' experience are likely to have been aware of reflective practice, although no formal training in the concept has been provided for them. Hence, those respondents learnt about the concept incidentally.

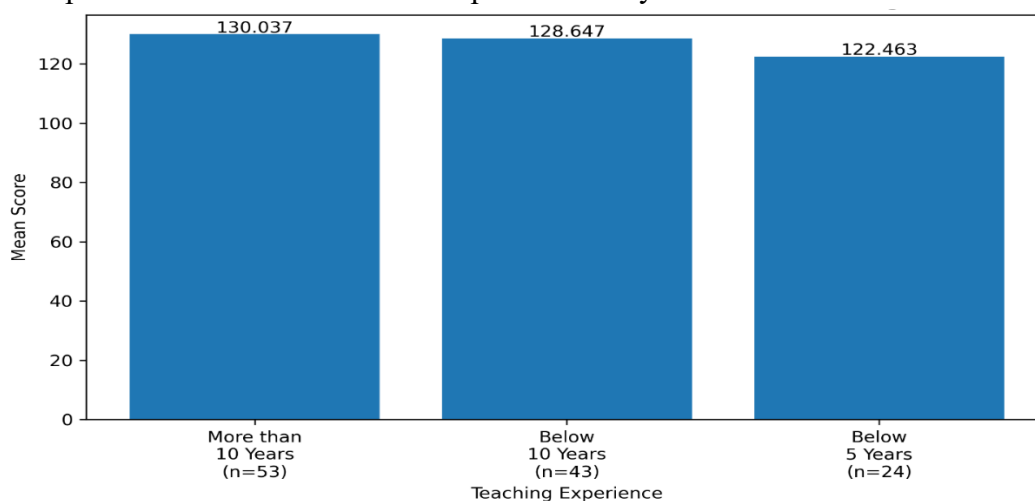


Figure 2: Profile of Differences in Basic Education ESL Teachers' Awareness of Reflective Practice in Writing Lessons Based on Teaching Experience

Figure 2 presents the differences in basic education ESL teachers' awareness of reflective practice in writing lessons based on teaching experience. Of the 120 participants, 53 teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience recorded the highest mean score (130.037). Teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience (n = 43) obtained a

mean score of 128.647, while those with less than 5 years of teaching experience recorded the lowest mean score (122.463). The results indicate that teachers with longer teaching experience demonstrated relatively higher levels of awareness of reflective practice than their less experienced counterparts. This finding suggests that professional experience may contribute to teachers' awareness of reflective practice, possibly through continuous engagement with classroom teaching and learning activities.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation for Basic Education ESL teachers' opinion scores of reflective writing skills by academic status

Academic Status	n	Mean	STD
NCE	79	124.502 ^a	3.265
First degree & above	41	133.334 ^a	2.619

Table 3 is an illustration of basic education ESL teachers' reflective practice based on academic status. Respondents with NCE, which is the minimum qualification in teaching, were 79, signifying that basically the majority of the teachers had the basic teaching qualification. At the basic education level, teachers with a first degree or more, although fewer, had the highest mean score of 133.334 with a standard deviation of 2.619.

By implication, basic education ESL teachers who have a first degree and above are likely to have been aware of reflective practice, although no formal training at the basic level in the concept has been provided for them. It also implies that the NCE curriculum does not have reflective practice as content for teacher training institutions, while the curriculum for teacher training at the first-degree level has reflective practice in its content. Hence, the concept should be included in the new NCE curriculum under review by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA Results Testing for Differences Between Basic Education ESL Teachers' Awareness of Reflective Writing Skills Based on Years of Teaching Experience and Academic Status

SOURCE	Type III sum of square	df	Mean square	F	SIG
Corrected model	29864.381	40	746.610	4.259	.000
Intercept	656441.145	1	656441.145	3744.427	.000
Opticategory	11106.051	1	11106.051	63.350	.000
Experience	130.072	2	65.036	.371	.691
Academic status	1203.097	1	1203.097	6.863	.011
Error	13849.611	79	175.312		
Total	2048123.000	120			
Corrected total	43713.992	119			

a. **R Squared = .683 (Adjusted R Squared = .523)**

An examination of Table 4 of analyses revealed that the effect of basic education ESL teachers' opinion on awareness of reflective practice in writing skills by years of teaching experience is not significant. Since the significance value (.691) is greater than 0.05, the first null hypothesis was retained. There is no significant difference between the mean awareness scores of respondents with more than five years, below five years and more than ten years of teaching experience in reflective writing skills. Basic Education ESL teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience may have incidentally been aware of reflective practice in the line of duty. Those with less than 5 years of teaching experience were unaware of the reflective practice, as no formal training on the concept has been made available to ESL teachers at the basic education level in Nigeria.

For hypothesis 2, there is no significant difference between the mean awareness scores of basic education ESL teachers by academic status. The p-value (0.011) is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference in the mean awareness scores of basic education ESL teachers based on their academic status. It is a meaningful factor in driving variations in awareness scores.

Furthermore, reflective practice is anchored on ESL students' learning and a commitment to helping them succeed. When basic ESL teachers become exposed to the concept of reflective practice, they develop interest in growing and learning, but not for learning's sake or necessarily for increased pedagogical skills except as it may help the learners. The basic education ESL teacher will constantly be searching for new ideas and techniques. Reflective practice operates within the ambit of passion for wanting to help the learners succeed. They would constantly be puzzling over what works and what does not work in order to help the ESL learners learn (Waltermire, 1999).

Reflective practice helps to shape Basic Education ESL teachers' classroom approach and to reduce their over-reliance on traditional practices, especially when such practices are not yielding or producing the desired educational outcomes. Thus, basic education ESL teachers tend to replace these old and traditional practices, thereby making them become not only consumers of knowledge but also producers of new knowledge (LaBoskey, 1994).

The findings corroborate Akbari and Allvar's (2010) and Sponge's (2002) assertions that, as basic education ESL teachers become aware of reflective practices, they begin to exhibit reflective behaviour and promote students' ability to be critically reflective. Reflective practice creates in ESL teachers the willingness to readily accept constructive criticism and reflect upon it in the attempt of improving their capacity to enhance students' writing skills.

Conclusion

There are very few accounts of what reflection looks like in practice or what teachers think of it outside training settings (Mann and Walsh 2013). The sampled basic education ESL

teachers demonstrated limited awareness of reflective practice. The study revealed that reflection is a tangible and beneficial aspect of the professional lives of basic education ESL teachers. Based on the context of non-formal training in reflective practice, the findings indicate that reflective practice is primarily intuitive rather than something that is learned theoretically and then applied. Facts supported the basic education ESL teachers with above 10 years of teaching experience having the highest awareness mean score in the study. It also goes some way to supporting the view that Basic Education ESL teachers who are aware of reflective practice are more self-critical, more self-aware of their development needs and more learner-centred.

However, an important idea that emerged from the study is the idea that in the research context, reflection may need to be included in the NCE curriculum and be taught more explicitly with input from theoretical perspectives if it is to become more critical. This is premised on the findings that basic education ESL teachers with higher academic status (first degree and above) scored a higher awareness mean score than those with NCE.

Basic Education ESL teachers need to reflect on their experiences or activities for growth and professional development. Thus, by developing knowledge and understanding of reflective practice, including the ability to identify and react to problems, the basic education ESL teachers can become effective teachers. Teachers can deal with the needs and different issues of the learners and demand of time if they reflect on their daily teaching and learning activities for their professional growth. To deal and survive in their professional field, they need to grow and bring changes in their behaviour and style.

Recommendations

- i. The NUC and TRCN should mandate specialized ESL postgraduate certifications for all basic education teachers to standardise qualifications and elevate their theoretical foundation for reflective writing.
- ii. UBEC and SUBEBs should fund targeted skill development rather than rewarding longevity, as teaching experience does not automatically guarantee higher awareness of reflective writing skills.
- iii. School heads should pair lower-qualified teachers with highly qualified peers for peer coaching to leverage higher academic strengths and bridge the awareness gap.
- iv. SUBEBs should redesign mandatory training to offer specialized, structured CPD tracks that focus on practical reflective writing skills across all academic levels, since years on the job do not automatically increase awareness.

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