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Abstract

This paper employs a qualitative descriptive research design to determine how early career teachers (ECTs) use reflective practices to identify and mitigate major instructional challenges in the context of Bangladeshi higher education. A questionnaire was given to 20 ECTs working in different universities to collect data on their reflective practices related to instructional challenges. Analysis of the responses of the ECTs to the questionnaire via thematic analysis revealed three major challenges: (a) inadequate logistic support, (b) diversity of students and pedagogical context, and (c) inadequate comprehension of the students. Solutions to these challenges include (a) three levels of collaboration, (b) context-specific measures, and (c) providing interesting and interactive materials. Various levels of reflection include the timing, depth, and content of reflection. The discussion of this paper provides the reasons for these challenges, possible solutions from the past experiences of ECTs, and implications for future teaching. Practical implications are also provided for policy-makers.

Keywords

reflective practice, instructional challenges, early career teachers (ECTs), higher education

Revisions

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Reflective Practice of Early Career Teachers: Identifying and Mitigating Major Instructional Challenges

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Abstract

This paper employs a qualitative descriptive research design to determine how early career teachers (ECTs) use reflective practices to identify and mitigate major instructional challenges in the context of Bangladeshi higher education. A questionnaire was given to 20 ECTs working in different universities to collect data on their reflective practices related to instructional challenges. Analysis of the responses of the ECTs to the questionnaire via thematic analysis revealed three major challenges: (a) inadequate logistic support, (b) diversity of students and pedagogical context, and (c) inadequate comprehension of the students. Solutions to these challenges include (a) three levels of collaboration, (b) context-specific measures, and (c) providing interesting and interactive materials. Various levels of reflection include the timing, depth, and content of reflection. The discussion of this paper provides the reasons for these challenges, possible solutions from the past experiences of ECTs, and implications for future teaching. Practical implications are also provided for policy-makers.

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Introduction

Teaching has been challenging since its initiation in Mesopotamia and Egypt in approximately 3000 BCE (Shimahara, 2023). It is ever more challenging for early career teachers (ECTs), who are in their first two years of teaching, according to the Department of Education (2022). Admiraal et al. (2023) divided ECTs into two groups: Novice teachers (with a maximum of 2 years of teaching experience) and advanced beginners (with between 2 and 5 years of teaching experience). Another definition of ECTs is given by Van den Borre et al. (2021), who stated that ECTs are teachers with no more than 5 years of teaching experience. Early career teachers are required to balance what they learn to do theoretically as preservice teachers and what they are actually doing in practicality as in-service teachers. This discrepancy between theory and practice leads to a number of challenges to ECTs, which include personal and contextual challenges in the tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Mansfield et al., 2014), three major challenges for early-career faculty members: (a) teaching in the context of higher education; (b) advising in the context of higher education; and (c) coping with organizational change (Zimmerman, 2021), challenges of novice teachers related to students, the workplace, the educational system and a lack

of professional knowledge and expertise. Early career teachers also find it challenging to balance roles as teachers and researchers, for example, time management, the integration of research and teaching, classroom management, and the application of knowledge (Cheng et al., 2022). Major challenges, such as a lack of preservice training, early career support, and job satisfaction, may lead ECTs to overwinter or leave teaching professionals together (Kelly et al., 2019). This rate of leaving teaching within the first five years of teaching is as high as 50% in some parts of the world (Queensland College of Teachers, 2013). The challenges of ECTs in Bangladesh are further made more complex by a lack of quality instruction (Raqib, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to identify and mitigate the major challenges faced by ECTs in the tertiary EFL context in Bangladesh.

One way for ECTs to solve problems is through reflective practice. Learning to solve various problems, including both academic and non-academic problems, is an essential part of the professional life of early ECTs. According to Schön (1983), reflection is a problem-solving process for analyzing and interpreting a problem in detail and developing a 'plan of action' to mitigate it. Reflection is a mechanism used to advance teaching instruction through framing and reframing problems (Farrell, 2024). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) defined reflection as a mental process to structure and restructure a problem. Preservice teachers use reflective practices during their practicums (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016) to analyze problems and decide on future endeavors on the basis of those reflections. They carry forward this practice in in-service teaching. The act of problem-solving by reflecting helps develop teachers' effectiveness (Cimer et al., 2013)

Schön (1983) stressed that importance is given to problem-solving in professional practice. Problems can be specific, explicit, vague, or implicit (Cimer et al., 2013). Through reflective practice, teachers divide the problem into components and attempt to solve it. Reflective practitioners use a variety of exemplars to frame different situations (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016). While they face new problem areas, they try to match some aspects of these problems with the existing exemplars and solve problems. Schön (1983) opined that reflection is necessary in this diversely complex world to provide particular solutions to individual problems. To meet diverse student challenges, ECTs need to diagnose problems by evaluating all possible solutions. According to Admiraal et al. (2023), reflective practice helps teachers devise strategies and identify personalized techniques for their struggling students. As a result, ECTs can become more resourceful and hope for their problem-solving skills through reflective practice. It also helps them, especially in solving problems of classroom instruction.

Reflective practice can also be used by ECTs to identify and mitigate major challenges of classroom instruction. Early career teachers in Bangladesh face different instructional challenges when they conduct classes (Raqib, 2019). According to Duquette and Dabrowsky (2016), classroom inquiry through reflection can improve teaching practices and student learning. Reflection helps identify a problem, collect data in an organized manner, and reflect and analyze data on classroom instruction. Early career teachers can play the role of both researchers and teachers by practicing reflection in classroom inquiry. To mitigate everyday classroom instructional challenges, trial and error, reflection, and actual action are needed (Cheng et al., 2022). Thus, it helps ECTs gain greater control over their instructions. Problem-posing reflective strategies are used by ECTs to solve various professional challenges, including classroom instruction and management. According to Cheng et al. (2022), problem-focused reflections include (a) reframing difficulties in a positive light, (b) changing the explanatory style, (c) reflectively setting realistic goals, and (d) practicing self-compassion. These help ECTs reflect on

their performance, and the balance between their priorities and students needs to be improved in practice. As a result, they can manage adverse situations in the classroom. Reflective strategies help ECTs reframe their identity during their early years of practice.

The purpose of this paper is to foster the professional development of early-career university teachers in the EFL context in Bangladesh by exploring the major instructional challenges via reflective practice. It will also help policymakers redesign the curriculum of teacher education in Bangladesh to include more reflective practices to engage student-teachers in ongoing problem-solving.

Literature Review

Research on reflective practice began on the basis of the works of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), who opined that learning takes place when experience merges with reflection. Schön (1983) introduced the concept of *practitioner-generated* problems, where teachers engage in problem-posing rather than problem-solving roles. Although other strategies, such as resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016), teacher buoyancy (Cheng et al., 2022), level of preparedness, working conditions and feelings of distress (Admiraal et al., 2023), preservice education, early career support and job satisfaction (Kelly et al., 2019), exist in abundance in solving problems of ECTs, reflective practices have been underscored in identifying and mitigating major instructional challenges of ECTs. Few studies exist that connect reflective practice and classroom instruction, such as Molotja and Maruma (2018), who used classroom reflective practice to identify instructional challenges and overcome those challenges via different strategies. These studies lack the in-depth opinions and views of the teachers involved, who use reflective practices to answer questions through questionnaires regarding their past practices. Other works, such as Yadav and Bhatia (2022), provided evidence of the positive effects of reflective practices on learner success as well as teachers' professional development strategies in higher education in Australia. Zeichner and Liston (1996) provided a substantial definition of reflective practice by problem-posing, where importance is given to *problem-posing*, self-reflection, and assessment and contextual awareness.

Faghi and Sarab (2016) measured EFL teachers' perceptions of levels of reflection by asking questions from their studies. They stressed the importance of further research on using different instructional elements in reflective practice. Other studies, such as Yadav and Bhatia (2022), Slade et al. (2019), and Molotja and Maruma (2018), address the reflective practices of students, teacher candidates, student teachers, and preservice teachers but not ECTs in the EFL context. Yazan (2016), in the EFL context at a private university in Turkiye, reported major instructional challenges such as curricular constraints and students' low motivation to learn and use English and strategies such as flexing the curriculum to construct a supportive classroom environment as well as seeking support from colleagues (Cracknell, 2020) and the literature. Gudeta (2022) provided a list of strategies for reflective practice in general, including keeping a journal, lesson reports, teacher portfolios, peer observations, etc.

Raqib (2019) provides a contextual background for university teacher recruitment in Bangladesh, where training is not a prerequisite for joining the profession. Therefore, ECTs do not receive any formal training before becoming faculty, unlike in the UK, where a 2-year teacher induction program is mandatory (Department of Education, 2022). Although the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh recommends that universities ensure formal teacher preparation and

induction programs (Raqib, 2019), universities are reluctant to implement these programs because of a lack of logistic support, such as university teacher training centers. This makes the Bangladeshi context more intriguing for determining whether ECTs can use reflective practices without formal training. Furthermore, Raqib (2019) based his research on the workshop of 20 ECTs at various universities in Bangladesh and provided a model for teacher training, with a focus on the importance of reflection in self-assessment and seminar sharing. Research on the impact of contextual factors in ECTs is limited in South Asia. In fact, a systematic review by Kutsyuruba et al. (2019) revealed that South Asia is not even present, whereas countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. are present. Therefore, further research on ECTs on the role of reflective practice in a more specific classroom instructional context is needed. This paper aims to determine whether these strategies are used by ECTs in specific classroom instruction contexts. This study on reflection practices in classroom instruction provides insights for both learners and teachers regarding their academic and professional development, respectively. Using reflective practice as a theoretical framework is self-explanatory for the two research questions of identifying and mitigating major instructional challenges. Few papers on reflective practices are used to identify and mitigate instructional challenges in the context of higher education in Bangladesh.

This reflective problem-solving approach will help future teachers, including preservice student teachers, become more aware of the potential challenges of classroom instruction. The development of reflective strategies will help ECTs cope better with the ever-changing challenges they face. Therefore, this paper addresses two research questions:

- What are the major instructional challenges that the ECTs of universities face in the Bangladeshi EFL context?
- How do ECTs try to identify and overcome these challenges via different levels of reflection?

Methods

Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive research methodology that uses qualitative thematic analysis to explore the central phenomenon of the role of reflective practice in identifying major instructional challenges and quantitative descriptive statistics to explain the process of mitigating those challenges via descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2025). The qualitative method segment is used because it aims to identify intricate details about the central phenomenon of reflective practice to delve deeply into participants' thought processes and emotions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Participants

Purposeful sampling is used to intentionally choose participants and sites to better understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). For example, ECTs with 0–5 years of teaching experience at different autonomous, public, and private universities in Bangladesh were chosen. Per the requirements of qualitative research, 20 participants were chosen. The demographic information, such as university type, gender, and years of experience, of the 20 participants is given below in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Information Form

	Total	Gender		Experience		
University Type	***n***	***M***	***F***	***0-<2***	***2-<4***	***4-<5***
Autonomous	2	1	1	1	1	0
Public	7	3	4	5	2	2
Private	11	4	7	3	2	4

They are selected in terms of homogenous sampling to describe and analyze the characteristic traits of that subgroup, the ECTs (Creswell, 2015). The researcher mailed explanations about the research and invitations to join the research to the target population of ECTs in university teaching in Bangladesh. This process continued until 20 emails were returned with consent to join the project. After receiving approval from the university ethics committee of the research project, the participants were emailed the research instrument, and all 20 who agreed to complete the questionnaire returned it in due time. The identities of the participants were not disclosed unless the participants themselves requested doing so.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire is used as a data collection tool so that useful information can be accumulated quickly due to time constraints in observing the participants in person. The participants in the questionnaire provided answers to the questions by filling out a form and returning it to the researcher (Creswell, 2015). An emailed questionnaire is used to collect qualitative data rapidly from a "geographically dispersed" group of people (Creswell, 2015, p. 218). Given that the participants are far from the researcher's location, an emailed questionnaire helps them collect information quickly. It provides rapid access to a large number of people. There is no pressure on the participants to respond, as they are not being observed by the researcher. As a result, the questionnaire responses became more flexible and realistic. The questionnaire questions focused on the reflective problem-solving process and aimed to identify major instructional challenges and possible solutions.

The researcher employed 6 open-ended questions and 12 closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions are used as qualitative questions because, according to Creswell (2015), by using these types of questions, "the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 216). In addition to open-ended questions, several closed-ended questions were used as quantitative questions to obtain useful information about the participants' levels of reflection. Thus, the open-ended questions explored the reasons for the closed-ended responses. The questionnaire is on a one-to-one basis to obtain more insights from participants, where six open-ended questions regarding the identification and mitigation of major challenges of instructional practice using reflective practice are posed to the participants. Some closed-ended questions adopted from Machost and Stains (2023) are used to measure the level of reflection of the participants quantitatively before the main segment of the questionnaire, with open-ended questions qualitatively where they invest their reflective practice.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the theoretical framework designed by Machost and Stains (2023), where three different levels of reflection are considered, namely, *the time, depth,* and *content of reflection*, to find the diverse patterns of reflection present in ECTs. These include first, for the timing of

reflection, Schön's (1983) two different concepts—(a) *reflection-on-action* (reflecting on past action from different perspectives) and (b) *reflection-in-action* (reflecting while completing the action simultaneously) are used. Loughran renamed the original two timings to make them more intuitive and added a one-time point (Loughran, 2002). The three categories include *anticipatory*, *contemporaneous*, and *retrospective*, wherein actions taken or to be taken are contemplated before, during, and after an educating experience, respectively. Second, for depth of reflection, Larrivee (2008) designed a depth-classification system encompassing an array of terminologies and explanations preexisting in the literature. This classification includes a progression in reflective practices across four levels: (a) *Prereflection* (reacting to events automatically without considering other options*),* (b) *surface* (questioning whether specific pedagogic practices will achieve targets without considering other pedagogic alternatives), (c) *pedagogical* (reflecting on educational goals, the theories underlying approaches, and the connections between theoretical principles and practice) along with their beliefs and (d) *critical reflection* (reflecting on ethical, moral and political dimensions underlying pedagogy; Larrivee, 2008; p. 343). Third, for the content of reflection, Valli's five types of reflection are (a) *technical reflection* (evaluating instructional practice through results of research on pedagogy), (b) *reflection-in and on-action* (the same as before in Schön's (1983) concepts), (c) *deliberative reflection* (a whole range of teaching concerns, including students, the curriculum, instructional strategies, the rules and organization of the classroom; Valli, 1997, p. 75), (d) *personalist reflection* (the personal growth of educators and their relationship with pupils) and (e) *critical reflection* (same as before as in Larrivee, 2008).

Data Analysis Process

This study used qualitative descriptive analysis, where mainly qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative descriptive statistical analysis were conducted. First, thematic content analysis is used to analyze and interpret the response data of the participants. The data were collected from the questionnaire and then transformed into a Word file. The data are then organized in terms of each question of the questionnaire, followed by the responses of all participants to those questions. Then, the whole dataset is segmented in terms of key ideas expressed by the participants by giving these codes. These codes are then collapsed into multiple subthemes. These subthemes are then further merged into a few broader themes to obtain a more precise and more comprehensive view of the participants. For each theme, direct quotes, as well as paraphrasing and summarizing the responses of different participants, are provided to substantiate these themes. Contrasting evidence has also been analyzed, as such evidence would provide a more complex view of the situation (Creswell, 2015). Second, descriptive statistical analysis is used to determine the extent to which the levels of reflection of different teachers vary across public and private universities. These statistics are collected as percentages through the questionnaire with closed-ended questions where the participants ticked options such as yes or no in a Google Form and submitted their responses by using their email address. When all the participants' responses are complete, those responses are compared across the ECTs of public and private universities.

Findings

From the responses of the participants, both research questions can be answered. These answers focus on the major instructional challenges of ECTs as well as the solutions to these challenges via reflective practice. The participants' responses below show the major instructional challenges of the ECTs, which answer the first research question.

Inadequate Logistic Support

One of the most common challenges in the participants' responses was inadequate logistic support for teaching and learning. Participants 1 and 17 noted that a large class size means a large number of students and a large classroom size, which means that the physical dimensions of the class are not congenial to teaching. Participant 12 voiced this view with precision: "For me, as a public university teacher, I find the class sizes to be quite overwhelming. I believe things could be much more interactive, interesting, and intellectually stimulating if everyone had the chance to get involved." In a public university setting, large class sizes problematize the level of teacher–student and student–student interaction. As a result, classes cannot ensure the inclusion of most students and become intellectually less stimulating. Participant 16 claimed that a lack of logistic support is the major instructional challenge, hindering interactive sessions. Another challenge is to issue related technology. First, inadequate technological support was mentioned by Participants 1 and 6. Participant 8 also mentioned technological issues as a major problem. Second, the difficulty in using different technological tools was endured by Participant 17, which was marked by the response "equipment issues." A lack of access to subscription-based research journal articles is suggested by Participant 8: "However, mostly technological challenges and limited access to subscription-based academic websites created hindrances and challenges in material distribution." On the other hand, learning and remaining updated with new technology is a major challenge, according to Participant 10.

Diversity of Students and Pedagogical Context

The diversity of students is considered another major challenge by respondents. According to Participant 2, "The diversity of the students is not well accounted for, and so the classroom instructions will not be appropriate for the whole class." As the whole class has different levels of proficiency, styles, and strategy preferences, students are unable to make use of one-way instruction. The student's level of proficiency is not considered when planning for instructions, so dealing with "mixed-ability students" becomes very difficult, which is opposed by Participant 1. Another two reasons provided by Participant 2 also add to the complexity of dealing with mixed types of students. First, some students do not like the teacher's body language, and second, the pace of instruction of the teacher is not suitable for diverse groups of students. Participant 4 provides further examples of students of varying needs, such as a special child and an international student. According to Participants 1 and 6, the behavioral issues of some students also hinder the congenial learning environment. Some students lacked motivation, and others lacked motivation, according to Participant 16. Similarly, Participant 8 claimed that challenges are related to "course context and situation." If the context includes children with special needs and international students, then the challenge for the teacher is to be more vigilant while delving into any discussion in the class, according to Participant 4. Some students gossiped during classroom instruction, as they lost interest in the class. This is due to the nature of the content and lack of logistic support, which caused them to lose interest, according to Participant 16. Some students lacked motivation, gossiped in the classroom, and some were absent-minded during lectures. Because of the nature of the content and lack of logistic support for interactive sessions, sometimes I had to rely on the lecture mode, and students lost interest.

Inadequate Comprehension of Students

Another major challenge that ECTs face is the lack of understanding among students of the course content and the lack of classroom instruction provided by teachers. As a result, the teacher must repeat topics before the final exam, according to Participant 3. The pace of instruction also hinders the students' comprehension (Participant 2). In line with the previous two respondents, Participant 5 said that the students did not understand the lectures due to language, especially lexicon use. Participant 9 noted, "Some students did not understand the lecture and often gave blank looks or lost interest in class." Similarly, Participant 9 expressed dissatisfaction with the blank looks of the students who lost interest in class owing to a lack of understanding of the lecture. According to Participant 11, some students struggled to understand a challenging topic. Participant 13 opined, "Students remain silent most of the time, even after asking questions. The teacher needs to proceed without receiving answers from them. It is quite demotivating." Due to the students' inadequacy in understanding the questions, the students remained silent, which made the teacher feel at a loss. Participant 14 provided a general rule that "No type of lecture can be commonly understood by all students." Participant 17 opined in the same vein that students "hesitated to acknowledge confusion." Inadequate comprehension occurs because of the 90-minute classes (Participant 18). Some students could not understand the "unfamiliar term, complexity of structure and minute changes," according to Participant 20. The solutions provided by the respondents are three levels of collaboration, context-specific measures, and providing interesting and interactive materials and activities that answer the second research question.

Three Levels of Collaboration

The participants consider various levels of collaboration to be major solutions to instructional challenges. There are three major types of collaboration: teacher–teacher, teacher-student, and student-student collaboration. Participant 1 stressed three levels of collaboration in terms of peers, parents, and administrators for teachers and stressed teacher-student collaboration: "Collaboration with peers, parents, and administrators, as well as staying attuned to student feedback, can also help address these challenges effectively." Collaboration with peer teachers is called collegial collaboration, which helps teachers solve instructional challenges. To address instructional challenges, Participant 8 resorted to informing university administrators to take action. Similarly, participant 2 designed collaborative and creative activities for learners. In the same vein, participant 4 collaborated with more helpful and active students. Closely related is the view of Participant 10, which is that self-help is the best help and reflects on strategies used in the classroom. Participant 11 used practice sheets to engage students in collaboration with each other. According to Participant 13, "I often arranged debate sessions to engage them in communication. I try to find some interesting topics from my teaching materials and ask for debate competitions in class. Students are quite interested in participating, and they speak up." Similarly, participant 13 arranged debate sessions that boosted student–student and student–teacher collaboration. In the same vein, participant 14 used group activities, assignments, and field tasks to facilitate student collaboration. In addition, participant 16 opined, "First, I increased my interaction with the students inside and outside the classroom to determine the problems they were facing" and stressed the importance of teacher–student collaboration through interaction inside and outside the classroom to identify their problems. Moreover, Participant 17 informed authorities to solve instructional challenges, thus collaborating with the university. Participant 20 listened to the

learners to collaborate with them and took notes of their suggestions to develop a learner-friendly environment.

Context-Specific Measures

Context-specific measures are considered by participants as key solutions to instructional problems. Participant 1 provided context-specific strategies such as "differentiated instruction, classroom management techniques, professional development, curriculum updates, blended learning approaches, equitable source location" to solve problems of logistic support by catering to the needs of various types of learners. These strategies are used to accommodate the needs and challenges of the context. Dividing topics proportionately in the lesson plan helps Participant 16 be flexible in meeting context-specific needs. Participant 16 suggested:

> Second, I made lesson plans so that the topics were proportionately distributed every week. Sometimes I used relevant and interesting audio–visual materials in the classroom or sent the materials to my students the night before my class. Finally, at the end of my class, I arranged a question-answer session.

To help students understand a challenging topic, participant 11 simplified the lectures from complex to simpler forms. The same is true for Participant 5, who also rephrased the instructions as "simpler and easier language." In line with participants 11 and 5, participant 19 opined, "Changing some of the study materials as in simplified them so that it can reach most of the class." Using lesson plans, practical and contemporary examples are the two strategies opined by Participant 2, which again cater to the needs of different teaching and learning situations. Similarly, participant 9 said, "Stopped the rush, asked students what they had not understood, took time to clarify the issue to students, did not take the previous approach, next class." Moreover, participant 9 focused on the classroom context to determine the students' problems by hearing them out. The solution is "here-and-now" and not "there-and-then" for that participant. In the same vein, participant 6 generalized the measures and said the measures to be taken depend on a particular situation. Participant 11 provided many examples of real life to match the demands of the teaching context. At the end of the class, participant 16 arranged a question-and-answer session to address the queries of that particular class. Owing to the large classroom and lack of opportunity to engage students in interactive sessions, participant 12 had to resort to lecture-based lessons. Participant 19 changed materials to make instantaneous adaptations according to the context simpler.

Providing Interesting and Interactive Materials and Activities

The participants in this study considered providing interesting and interactive materials as solutions to instructional challenges. According to Participant 11, "I use lots of examples from real life I give then loads of materials ranging from simpler to more challenging ones." Moreover, participant 11 opines that materials are presented to students in a graded form from simpler to more complex, which helps learners systematically interact with the materials. Similarly, participant 13 arranged "debate sessions" to engage them in communication by choosing interesting topics. As a result, students become more interested in these interesting topics. Similarly, participant 16 opined, "Sometimes I used relevant and interesting audio–visual materials in the classroom or sent the materials to my students the night before my class." In addition, participant 18 used healthy jokes to engage students in different activities.

Various Levels of Reflection

Participants use three main types of reflection to identify and mitigate major instructional challenges by answering the second research question. The participants' levels of use of reflective practice in instructional problem-solving are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Reflection (Yes and No in Percentage %)

Type of Reflection	Anticipatory		Reflection-in-Action		Reflection-on-Action	
	Y	***N***	***Y***	***N***	***Y***	***N***
Timing of Reflection	100	0	80	20	30	70
Depth of Reflection	**Prereflection**		**Surface**		**Pedagogical**	
	85	15	100	0	70	30
	Critical					
	80	20				
Content of Reflection	**Technical**		**Ref. in & on action**		**Deliberate reflection**	
	65	35	85	15	40	60
	Personal		**Critical**			
	70	30	45	55		

Concerning the timing of reflection, all participants agreed that they practiced anticipatory reflection by predicting future measures for improving instructional challenges. Most of them used reflection-in-action after performing instructional tasks and reflected their views later in the questionnaire. However, most of them did not use reflection-on-action or reflecting while doing the instructional tasks. Almost all of them used preflection or reflection before the instruction for the depth of reflection. All of them used surface reflection, and most agreed that they practice it for pedagogical reflection. Almost all of them use critical reflection. For the content of reflection, the ECTs mostly use reflection in and on action, but fewer than half of them use deliberate reflection. On the other hand, more than half of the ECTs use technical reflection. Most ECTs use personalistic reflection, and critical reflection is used by less than half of the ECTs.

Discussions

The discussion will focus on the reasons these challenges arose. It will also focus on what could have been done to avoid them, how these incidents changed the ECTs' teaching methods and the interpretation of the choices made regarding the various levels of reflection on the ECTs.

Reasons for Major Instructional Challenges

First, one of the major reasons for instructional challenges in Bangladesh is socioeconomic constraints. It entails contextual challenges, which include inadequate resources, a lack of subject matter knowledge, inappropriate teaching approaches and methods, insufficient teacher training, teacher induction and mentoring programs, outdated policies, limited parental involvement, and the ever-evolving needs of a diverse student population (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2014; Molotja & Maruma, 2018). Another reason is that teachers are not aware of the diversity of the students (Mansfield et al., 2014) regarding socioeconomic differences resulting from varied backgrounds. This claim is supported by Machost and Stains (2023), who found instruction challenging in *varied educational and cultural backgrounds*. Students' individual differences are not considered when planning the curriculum. According to Zeichner and Liston (1996), as the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners

are ignored, students have high affective filters, resulting in a lack of motivation to participate in class. In addition, teachers are sometimes recruited on the sole basis of academic excellence, not actual teaching skills.

Furthermore, a lack of teacher mentoring, monitoring, and lesson plans curtails a healthy learning environment (Farrell, 2024; Molotja & Maruma, 2018). As a result, those teachers can hardly become successful in making healthy relationships with students, teachers, and administrators. In some universities, the administrative body does not properly collaborate with ECTs, as they are new to the profession (Farrell, 2024). Lecture-based teaching is also responsible for instructional challenges, as this method does not promote autonomous learning. Nevertheless, some ECTs resort to this method because their beliefs are *self-generating and often unchanged* (Larrivee, 2010). Due to longstanding teacher-centric approaches, students are unwilling to participate in interactive activities (Molotja & Maruma, 2018). The curriculum includes some topics that are far above the comprehension level of the learners.

According to Yazan (2016), curricular constraints constitute a major issue in classroom instruction. As a result, students lose interest and try to avoid those concepts. Students' lack of motivation is one of the major instructional challenges (Yazan, 2016). As teacher-student interaction has not developed owing to the traditional notion of the superiority of the teacher and because of this, the distance that the students always keep from the teachers. Sometimes, the teachers themselves are blamed for challenging situations, as they lack professional peer support (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Some teachers are forced into the teaching profession solely on the basis of academic results, and they also tend to switch professions in the early years of teaching (Farrell, 2024). Owing to curricular constraints, some teachers tend to use the lecture mode to cover more topics in a short period of time (Yazan, 2016). As a result, they are forced to teach for tests, which may result in negative backwash (Wall, 1997). Teachers are not properly trained to teach in student-centered classrooms. As a result, teachers fail to play the role of multitaskers by being facilitators, mentors, advisors, and supervisors at the same time. Students from rural areas do not have enough exposure to English and lack efficient teachers at the primary and secondary levels.

Possible Solutions From Teachers' Past Experiences

After the reasons for the challenges are understood, the focus is now on what could have been done to avoid these challenges to determine the lack of an existing teacher education system. Several possible solutions were deduced from the ECT responses. According to Schön (1983) and Dewey (1933), teachers use their past experiences along with their knowledge and beliefs to make reasonable pedagogical decisions. Reflective practice helps to *fix* issues that present themselves (Brookfield, 2017). It reveals the past experiences of the teachers as well as the existing strategies to prevent these challenges. The integration of experience and reflection provides ECTs with the opportunity to become critical thinkers (Dewey, 1933; Faghihi & Sarab, 2013; Schön, 1983). Teachers were required to accept the limitations of the pedagogic context and work to improve the methods in accordance with the needs and goals of the learners.

Teachers could have received collegial support and peer observation (Cracknell, 2020; Machost & Stains, 2023; Yadav & Bhatia, 2022), giving students more time and providing them with consultancy hours. Taking measures according to context or situation, which is called *professional socialization* by Yazan (2016), could have helped teachers avoid problems. Cheng et al. (2022)

noted that changing the pace of instruction and using simpler terms and descriptions to gain a better understanding of students are two strategies similar to *changing explanatory style*. Proper fund collection and distribution, which means that logistic support, could have provided incentives for teaching. Students should have been given more time to prepare before engaging in interactive activities. An analysis of the needs of teachers and students could help teachers manage classroom instruction better. Differentiated instruction could be helpful in addressing diverse student needs through the use of different styles and strategies (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016). Many students are selected by departments and university authorities (Molotja & Maruma, 2018). A decreased number of seats would provide more opportunities for more student-teacher collaboration as well as better management of classroom instruction. Some quizzes, interesting presentations debates sessions and any available sources (Mansfield et al., 2014) could have helped students become autonomous learners and active participants in those activities. Preservice teacher training, induction, and teacher development are vital elements of teacher education (Admiraal et al., 2023), which could have given the ECTs a more realistic essence of real-world activities through simulations of possible critical situations. The collective responsibility of individuals, departments, universities, administrations (Mansfield et al., 2014), administrative support and student feedback (Yadav & Bhatia, 2022), workplace support and working conditions (Admiraal et al., 2023), and parental roles could have resulted in fewer constraints on logistic support (Cracknell, 2020). Participant 12 questioned the authority's decision to take too many students for classroom instruction, which reflects the political context of teaching (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). More technological innovations in teaching, such as blogs, video journaling, and video recording of the teaching experience (Machost & Stains, 2023), could have been included in the curriculum. Easier and more interesting materials could have been used in class. As logistics support was unavailable, study materials could have been shared beforehand via email, WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.

Effects on Ways of Teaching in the Future

Finally, these situations changed teachers' way of teaching. Teachers have become more accommodating of changes and student-centered, considering diverse student needs as well as pedagogic contexts (Molotja & Maruma, 2018). They are now more aware of what happens in the classroom, becoming critical thinkers (Faghihi & Sarab, 2013). They have developed *informed action* considering the uncertainty and uniqueness of the situation as opposed to *routine action* on the basis of tradition, habit, and authority by challenging and reviewing their own actions (Cimer et al., 2013; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). They learned to use different teaching strategies, embraced technology as part of their teaching, and advocated for equitable education. As a result, reflective practice "generates professional learning and knowledge" for ECTs (Cimer et al., 2013, p. 138). Teachers have become more open to new concepts and ideas by becoming more aware of themselves (Cimer et al., 2013). This helps teachers balance changing situations (Brookfield, 2017). Guided reflection helps ECTs become better teaching professionals (Dewey, 1933; Gudeta, 2022). The role of a teacher is that of a multitasker by being a facilitator as well as a lifelong learner. Classes have become more interactive using teacher–teacher, teacher–student and student–student collaboration. Collegial support plays a vital role in promoting social responsibility and flexibility through reflection (Cimer et al., 2013). In this same vein, Brookfield (2017) suggested that students, peers, and teachers themselves can collaborate in reflective practice. More peer feedback and student feedback can be helpful in the development of reflective practice (Molotja & Maruma, 2018). Teachers have learned to use new strategies in critical situations. For the

schema activation of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers realized the inclusion of a method that suits most learners and provides some insight for the minority. The ones who followed the teacher-centric teaching approach became lecture-based teachers. According to Zeichner and Liston (1996), unreflective teachers tend to accept everyday realities, especially educational issues, unquestionably. As a result, classes became less interactive. Some teachers considered instructional challenges too vague and too general and did not use any specific measures to mitigate instructional challenges. Others have generalized instructional challenges and resorted to situation-specific solutions. Owing to the inadequacy of funding for access to subscription-based research journal articles, the teacher used free and pirated papers, and the teaching style was unaltered. Teachers have become more confident and better prepared for future practice by using synchronized approaches (Molotja & Maruma, 2018). The materials they prepare are shared with students beforehand, which are interesting and interactive for student–teacher and student–student collaboration. By gaining confidence, students become more motivated and active learners. Teachers also became more confident in being reflective practitioners and multitaskers, such as facilitators, mentors, advisors, and supervisors.

Various Levels of Reflection in Identifying and Mitigating Challenges

The ECTs used various degrees of reflection to identify and mitigate major instructional challenges. Valli (1997) reported that practicing various types of reflection is more useful than practicing only one specific type.

For the timing of reflection, they used more anticipatory reflection, for example, by sending video materials the night before the class to students by participant 16 and reflecting on the action; for example, a large class size issue was identified later after instruction by participant 12 than reflected on the action; for example, participant 11 used an easier structure, as the students did not understand the lecture. The respondents agreed that they all use anticipatory reflection, which reflects that they are generally prepared before classroom instructions. For reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, most agreed that they used more reflection after the instruction was done, and few of them opted to use reflection during the classroom instructions. It is very difficult for the ECTs to reflect on what they are doing at the same time while concentrating on doing the task. Machost and Stains (2023) identified various contextual factors that work as barriers to reflective practice. One of these reasons is that reflective practice is promoted at the surface level by institutions, but these are not valued at the end. Therefore, teachers do not find incentives to practice reflection at deeper levels, such as reflection-on-action, pedagogic reflection, critical reflection, technical reflection, and deliberate reflection. Duquette and Dabrowsky (2016) reported that only one of their participant teachers used technical and dialogic reflection. Therefore, ECTs tend to reflect after class, and contextual issues are sometimes unresolved. For depth of reflection, almost all ECTs use prereflection before reflecting on the incidents that occurred during the instruction. This aligns with the findings of Admiraal et al. (2023), who reported that the *perceived level of preparedness* was useful in reflective problem-solving. All of the ECTs use surface reflection, as they are well informed about practicing reflection in classroom practice. However, not all of them used pedagogical reflection, which is considered one of the key components in identifying and mitigating major instructional challenges. ECTs use pedagogical reflection to give "serious and consecutive consideration" to a subject matter (Dewey, 1933, p. 3; Schön, 1984). Pedagogical reflection is a systematic process and can be learned in preservice teacher training and during in-service teacher development (Ur, 1996). However, ECTs are critical thinkers and

use critical reflection to shed light on critical incidents. The reflection in action and reflection on action are aggregated for the content of reflection. Most of the ECTs use this as a whole. However, more than half of them use their technical reflection; thus, less than half do not practice it. Those who used technical reflection used it for "implementing collaborative learning" (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016, p. 585). One of the reasons why ECTs do not tend to use them is that this reflection does not consider sociocultural influences while solving a problem. Moreover, technical support from teachers and colleagues is needed to learn and practice implementing it during classroom instruction (Cracknell, 2020). Reflective practice, especially in the timing and frequency of reflection, sometimes becomes a mere *routinizing and systematizing* thinking process. It creates a mental block for ECTs, who think creatively to find unique solutions to instructional problems (Machost & Stains, 2023). Less than half of the ECTs practice deliberate reflection, as they do not deliberately use reflection during or after instruction. Instead, reflection is context-specific and is practiced when needed.

Conclusions

This paper investigated the major instructional challenges of ECTs, and the findings highlighted inadequate logistic support, contextual diversity, student diversity, and their lack of comprehension. ECTs use reflective practice to identify these challenges and their possible remedies. Early career teachers show varied levels of reflective practice, which adds to the complex nature of reflective problem-solving. Possible solutions include three levels of collaboration (teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and student-student), context-specific measures, and providing interesting and interactive materials and activities that answer the second research question. Some possible future remedies are described in the practical implications section for better facilitation of teaching and learning processes.

Theoretical Implications

The framework of Machost and Stains (2023) provided insights into the intricate reflection patterns for ECTs. Merging this framework with differentiated instruction (Duquette & Dabrowsky, 2016) provides context-specific solutions for ECTs. As a result, complex and multilayered contextual factors, including social, cultural, and political variances, were examined simultaneously in these frameworks. Both of these theories help better understand qualitative and quantitative data from ECTs in solving instructional challenges.

Practical Implications

The following measures can be implemented by teachers, university authorities, curriculum designers, and policymakers to prevent problems in practical pedagogy fields. The University Grants Commission should train ECTs in diverse teaching conditions, especially socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as varying pedagogic situations. Mandatory ECT training with a reflective module is essential to avoid teacher burnout and switching from teaching. In addition, group reflection on three main levels of interaction should be promoted concurrently in a teaching situation. Examples include teacher–teacher, teacher–student and student–student collaboration. For teachers, collaboration will be threefold in a teaching situation: teacher-teacher, teacher-parent, and teacher-administrator. In addition to the in-house relationships among these groups, external community relationship building should be part of the teacher induction and mentoring

process. More attention should be given to teacher-parent and teacher-teacher collaboration. Moreover, necessary logistic support, including the latest educational technologies and proportional classrooms, should be provided for students to facilitate better teaching and learning processes. Early career teachers should consider making their lectures easier to comprehend for students with varying proficiency levels by using simpler structures and vocabulary. Similarly, the curricula of different universities should provide detailed guidelines for teachers and administrators on how to address educational issues, including disputes between ECTs and administrators. The materials and tasks used at the tertiary level should be interesting and connected to real-life activities, which will motivate learners. Reflective practice should not be too systematic, and the orientation of the reflective process and continuous incentives such as motivation should be given to the ECTs to take it out eventually.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of this study is that it included a qualitative questionnaire to collect data from the participants instead of direct interviewing. As a result, the research could not tailor questions to the respondents' immediate responses. In addition, the number of participants was low, as many ECTs could not make spare time to participate in this study. Therefore, more studies are needed to demonstrate how ECTs use reflective practices in the context of Bangladesh, where curricular contextual constraints challenge the implementation of the plans of the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell under the University Grants Commission. The University Grants Commission can be used to conduct large-scale research on how and to what extent longitudinal studies using reflective practice can benefit ECTs in instructional problem-solving skill development. In addition, most existing studies focus on parts of reflection, not reflection as a whole. Therefore, the framework of Machost and Stains (2023) can be tailored according to the needs of the ECTs in a particular context to determine their context-specific solutions. Research should also be conducted on how some ECTs become reluctant to use reflection for instructional problem-solving.

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