

# 365 Complexities in reflective pedagogical practices among adult learners

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## Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

## Abstract

This paper is part of wider research study from the experiences of mature adult university students from Black Asian and Ethnic Minority background in the UK. 63% of these learners were Black African, mainly female with an average age of between 45-54. The study is drawn from Dewey's (1910/1933) strategies on reflective thinking skills to promote reflective practice and improve their future lifelong learning goals following gaps in their learning. Data has been drawn from a mixed methods action research study. Despite years of experience, the project unearths complexities in the learners' backgrounds which has not been actively addressed in most studies. The students view this promotion of reflective practice and the pedagogical practices introduced, as an opportunity for personal growth where there is a growing sense of empowerment due to objects of knowledge acquired in the praxis.

**KEY WORDS:** Reflective practice; Lifelong Learning; Experiences

## Full paper

### Introduction

There has been a sharp rise in the number of mature adult learners being enrolled in higher education institutions (Caruth, 2014; Barshay, 2020). With adult learners constituting almost half of the student body today, what has been overlooked is the knowledge and years of experience these group of learners bring to these institutions. Higher education as a sector has continued with the same teaching and learning approaches irrespective of the changes in their student demography. What is not clear is whether there are any plans to make any adjustments on the curriculum that would meet the needs of this diverse student population. This paper is part of a wider research study where I seek to examine how a group of top up degree Health and Social Care adult learners in a UK university developed critical thinking skills to promote reflective practice and improve on their future lifelong learning goals by actively participating in their own learning through the application of different pedagogical approaches in a work integrated learning project. The study adapted Dewey's (1910/1933) strategies on reflective thinking in response to the gaps that emerged from the first cohort of learners' who lacked skills in the conceptual and methodological approaches to reflective practice.

Dewey's original conception of reflection can be summarised as 'a meaning making systematic, rigorous disciplined way of thinking that happens in communities through interaction; and requires attitudes that value growth of oneself and others' (Rodgers, 2002). Reflection as an active process relates to personal learning. The steps taken in drawing up pedagogical approaches that recognises different learning styles would benefit diverse learners. As majority of the learners were from Black Asian and Ethnic minorities with English as an additional language, I recognised the complexity of the learners' background and experiences in choosing a research method that included action research which requires participation that supports purpose and practice (Reason and Bradbury, 2008 in Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

### Methods

The paper draws on a sequential mixed methods action research study where 188 responses were collected from online questionnaire survey followed by interviews from six focus groups conducted with adult learners from a UK Higher institution. In this mixed methods action research study, I frame my focus on how to promote reflective practice as a lifelong learning skill through transformative pedagogical practices. Four action research cycles were

carried out which helped to improve praxis while allowing for an infusion of other methods into the course. The learners were sent online questionnaires on completion of the module. The data was statistically analysed at the conclusion of the survey using descriptive statistics and chi square, which determined a significant relationship among five variables that was representative of the pedagogical practices.

Next, I carried out seven focus group interviews from five different cohort of learners. Within this action research framework, the use of focus groups is particularly useful for generating some unanticipated responses (Chui, 2003, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005 in Braun and Clarke 2013 p111). The topics in the focus groups included the application of pedagogical approaches, improving reflective thinking and feelings and promotion of reflective practice and lifelong learning. It was an open and conceptual discussion with a semi-structured interview topic guide.

## Findings

Effective communication was viewed as the most important transferable lifelong learning skill by four of the six cohorts in the qualitative question in the questionnaire.

In the promotion of reflective practice and the pedagogical practices introduced, the key emerging concept is personal growth where there is a growing sense of empowerment due to objects of knowledge acquired in the praxis.

From the emerging results, the respondents show they have a contribution to make which they attribute to collaborative learning that provides a catharsis to face up to the complexities in their lives. Promoting reflective practice in their own work practice is more meaningful when they can relate it to their own experiences where they take ownership of their stories. It reiterates Dewey's acknowledgement of the importance of reflection that 'we do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience' (1933)

Since the data analysis is ongoing, it would be premature to make any conclusion at this stage; However, Dewey's relational view (Holdo, 2023) where the learners value the relationships that they build which bring a sense of purpose in their lives and make them feel more included as they are able to confidently express themselves based on the knowledge, they have acquired is a transformative process that would influence their lifelong learning skills.

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