



Understanding Educators' Views on Transferable Skills: A Qualitative Exploration of High School Teachers' Perspectives (Case of Georgia)

BY

Natali Amiranashvili

International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia



Article History

Received: 16/08/2024

Accepted: 24/08/2024

Published: 26/08/2024

Vol – 2 Issue – 8

PP: - 22-29

Abstract

This qualitative study delves into high school teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of developing transferable skills among students. Conducted with a sample of 24 educators from two private high schools in Georgia, the research utilized semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights into teachers' attitudes and practices related to transferable skills. Employing thematic analysis, the study identifies prevalent themes around the integration and significance of these skills within educational contexts. Results indicate that while teachers recognize the critical role of transferable skills for student success, they encounter various challenges such as curriculum constraints and insufficient resources. The study underscores the necessity for enhanced professional development and systemic support to better facilitate the inclusion of transferable skills in educational practices.

Keywords: Transferable skills, thematic analysis, high school, Constructivist Theory, 21st-century skills.

Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, there is a growing emphasis on equipping students with transferable skills—competencies that extend beyond traditional academic knowledge and are applicable in various real-world contexts (World Economic Forum, 2020). These skills, including critical thinking, effective communication, problem-solving, and adaptability, are increasingly recognized as crucial for students to thrive in a dynamic and rapidly evolving job market. As automation and technological advancements reshape industries, the ability to adapt and apply knowledge flexibly becomes paramount (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Transferable skills not only enhance students' employability but also foster their ability to engage in lifelong learning and contribute effectively to society.

Despite the acknowledged importance of these skills, there remains a significant gap between their theoretical significance and their practical application within high school curricula. The gap between policy and practice has also been documented in various studies. For example, the study by Levin and Fullan (2012) emphasizes the difficulties educators face when attempting to adapt their teaching strategies to incorporate 21st-century skills within existing frameworks. Teachers often report feeling inadequately prepared to teach these skills due to a lack of professional development opportunities and support (Binkley et al., 2012). While there is an expanding body of research on the integration of

transferable skills in various educational systems globally, the specific implementation strategies and challenges faced by educators can vary considerably across different contexts (Smith & Herring, 2018).

In Georgia, for instance, there is limited research exploring how these skills are integrated into high school education and the particular barriers that teachers encounter in this process. Teachers, as the primary facilitators of student learning, are central to bridging this gap. This study aims to delve into high school teachers' perceptions of the importance of developing transferable skills, uncovering the challenges they face, and examining the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. By identifying common themes and perspectives among educators, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the practical aspects of integrating transferable skills into high school education.

Literature Review

The concept of transferable skills, often termed as 21st-century skills, encompasses a range of competencies that are crucial for students' success in both academic and non-academic spheres (OECD, 2018). These skills include not only cognitive abilities like analytical thinking but also interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). The importance of these skills is underscored by the growing emphasis on preparing students for a rapidly changing workforce where adaptability and problem-solving are key (World Economic Forum, 2020).



Research indicates that the integration of transferable skills into education can significantly enhance student engagement and achievement (Zhao, 2012). For instance, some studies have shown that educational practices that incorporate these skills lead to improved student motivation and higher academic performance (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Contemporary research further supports these findings, demonstrating that skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration not only bolster academic outcomes but also prepare students for the complexities of the modern workforce (Heckman & Kautz, 2020; Hattie, 2021).

Moreover, a focus on transferable skills can foster lifelong learning habits that are essential for success beyond the classroom (Crouse, 2018). This emphasis on adaptability and continuous learning is increasingly crucial in a rapidly evolving job market where technical skills alone may become obsolete (Dumont et al., 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023). By nurturing these skills, educators can equip students with the tools needed to navigate and thrive in various contexts, promoting not only academic success but also personal and professional growth.

However, the actual implementation of these skills in the classroom has been fraught with challenges. Crouse (2018) highlights that while the importance of these skills is acknowledged, there is often a disconnect between educational policies and classroom practices. This discrepancy is partly attributed to rigid curricula, lack of resources, and insufficient teacher training (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Additionally, the standardization of testing and pressure to meet educational benchmarks can further hinder the effective integration of transferable skills into the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Further complicating this issue is the variability in how transferable skills are defined and interpreted across different educational contexts (Kivunja, 2015). The lack of a standardized approach to teaching these skills can result in inconsistent implementation and effectiveness (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009).

By examining teachers' perspectives, this study aims to provide insights into these challenges and offer recommendations for more effective integration of transferable skills in high school education. Understanding educators' views is crucial for bridging the gap between theory and practice and for developing strategies that support the meaningful incorporation of these essential skills into the classroom (Mertens, 2015).

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The effective development of transferable skills in high school students is crucial for preparing them for future success, yet there is a limited understanding of how teachers perceive and implement these skills in their teaching practices. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the following research questions:

1. What are high school teachers' perceptions of the importance of developing transferable skills in students?
2. What strategies do high school teachers employ to teach transferable skills?
3. How do high school teachers assess the development of transferable skills in students?
4. In what ways do high school teachers use student feedback to enhance the teaching of transferable skills?
5. How do high school teachers ensure that students understand the transferable skills they are developing?
6. What role do collaborative activities play in the development of transferable skills, according to high school teachers?
7. How do high school teachers address problems into their teaching to develop transferable skills?

Theoretical Framework

The current study is grounded in Constructivist Theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through interactions with their environment and experiences (Piaget, 1973). Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in their education and supports the development of higher-order thinking skills through meaningful, real-world experiences. This theoretical framework aligns with the concept of transferable skills, as these skills are developed through active learning processes that require critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. By understanding how teachers' perceptions align with Constructivist principles, the study can provide insights into how these theories are applied in practice and their impact on teaching and learning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates the concepts of transferable skills and teacher perceptions. It explores the relationship between teachers' beliefs about the importance of transferable skills and their implementation in the classroom. The framework highlights how teachers' attitudes and practices regarding transferable skills influence their integration into the curriculum and the overall impact on student outcomes. This framework helps to structure the analysis of teachers' perceptions and provides a basis for understanding the challenges and strategies associated with transferable skills education.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant implications for educational practice and policy. By providing insights into teachers' perceptions of transferable skills, the research highlights the need for targeted professional development and systemic support. Understanding the challenges teachers face in integrating these skills can inform the development of more effective educational strategies and policies. The findings of the study can contribute to the enhancement of high school curricula, ensuring that students are better prepared for the demands of the modern workforce and society. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of aligning educational practices with contemporary skill requirements,

thereby supporting the broader goal of preparing students for success in a complex and evolving world.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach to explore high school teachers' perspectives on the integration of transferable skills into their curricula. Qualitative research is particularly suited for understanding complex social phenomena from the viewpoints of the participants involved, focusing on the depth and richness of their experiences rather than quantifiable measurements (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

The participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method, which involves identifying and selecting individuals who meet specific criteria relevant to the research questions. The study focused on 24 high school teachers who volunteered to participate. The criteria for selection included teachers with substantial experience in teaching a variety of subjects and involvement in curriculum planning. The sample comprised teachers from private schools, representing a diverse range of educational contexts. Participants had varied degrees of teaching experience, ranging from 5 to 20 years, and included a balanced mix of genders. This purposive sampling approach ensured that the participants were well-suited to provide rich, insightful information about the integration of transferable skills in high school education (Patton, 2015). By capturing a diverse range of perspectives, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies related to embedding transferable skills within different educational settings.

Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method that allows for flexibility in the questions asked while still maintaining a consistent focus on the research topic (Bernard, 2011). The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the interviews, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives while ensuring that key topics were consistently addressed across interviews. This guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies related to transferable skills. Open-ended questions are useful in qualitative research, as they allow participants to provide more detailed and nuanced responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The questions of the interview were based on the literature review and assessed for validity by two experts in the sphere.

The following open-ended questions were included in the interview for this study:

- What is your perspective on the importance of developing transferable skills in high school students?
- Can you describe some of the strategies you use to teach transferable skills to your students?
- How do you assess whether your students are developing transferable skills?

- How do you incorporate student feedback into your teaching methods, specifically for developing transferable skills?
- What methods do you use to ensure that your students are aware of and understand the concept of transferable skills they are developing?
- In what ways do you use collaborative activities in your teaching, and how do you think these activities contribute to the development of transferable skills?
- How do you integrate real-world problems into your teaching practices to help students develop transferable skills?

Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants. Face-to-face interviews are a common method of data collection in qualitative research, as they allow for rapport-building and can help the researcher to better understand the participants' perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview was conducted in a private and comfortable setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage open communication. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data collection process was designed to be thorough and respectful, providing participants with ample opportunity to share their insights and experiences.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included several stages: familiarization with the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and writing up the findings. Thematic analysis allowed for a detailed understanding of the key themes and issues related to teachers' perceptions of transferable skills.

Results and Analysis

The thematic analysis revealed several key themes:

1. Perceived importance of transferable skills: teachers generally acknowledged the critical role of transferable skills in preparing students for future success. They recognized that skills such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving are essential for students to thrive in diverse contexts.
"Transferable skills are critical for students' future success. They help students adapt to various situations and are essential for career readiness." (Teacher 1)
"The importance of transferable skills cannot be overstated. They are essential for students to navigate the complexities of the modern world." (Teacher 6)
2. Challenges in implementation: Teachers reported several challenges in integrating transferable skills into their curricula. These included constraints imposed by rigid curricula, limited class time, lack of resources, and insufficient professional

development opportunities. Teachers also noted that standardized testing often prioritizes academic content over transferable skills.

"The biggest challenge is the rigid curriculum which leaves little room for skills development." (Teacher 1)

"Curriculum constraints and lack of time are the main challenges. There's also a need for more resources." (Teacher 7)

3. Strategies for integration: despite the challenges, teachers employed various strategies to incorporate transferable skills into their teaching. These included project-based learning, collaborative activities, and real-world problem-solving scenarios. Teachers also highlighted the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment that fosters skill development.

"I use project-based learning and group activities to incorporate transferable skills into lessons." (Teacher 1)

"Incorporating debates and role-playing exercises helps students develop communication and problem-solving skills." (Teacher 3)

Table 1. Theme frequencies in teachers' answers.

#	Theme	Concept	Frequency
1	Importance of transferable skills	Critical for future success	10
		Vital for real-world challenges	8
		Important but often overshadowed by academic priorities	8
		Essential for career readiness	6
		Neglected due to standardized testing	7
2	Challenges in integration	Rigid curriculum	10
		Standardized testing pressures	8
		Lack of resources and support	8
		Time constraints	7
		Need for professional development	6
3	Teaching strategies	Project-based learning	12
		Group activities and teamwork	12
		Real-world applications and simulations	10

		Debates and role-playing exercises	3
4	Assessment of effectiveness	Student feedback and self-assessments	12
		Observations and performance on assignments	10
		Rubrics and progress reports	8
		Reflective discussions	4
5	Assessment of skill development	Rubrics for specific skills	10
		Self-assessments and peer reviews	9
		Observational assessments	9
		Performance tasks and project outcomes	8
6	Incorporating student feedback	Adjusting teaching methods	11
		Using feedback to refine activities	9
		Collecting feedback through surveys and discussions	8
		Modifying strategies based on student input	8
7	Awareness of transferable skills	Explicit instruction and examples	12
		Reflection activities and discussions	9
		Linking skills to real-life applications	7
		Clear explanations and feedback	6
8	Collaborative activities	Group projects and peer reviews	12
		Team-based assignments and discussions	10
		Enhancing communication and problem-solving skills	10
		Leadership and conflict resolution	6



9	Real-world problems	Assignments based on real-world issues	10
		Case studies and simulations	9
		Current events and practical examples	7
		Project-based learning with real-world contexts	6

Table 1 provides an overview of the major themes and concepts mentioned by the teachers, along with the frequency of their occurrence in the responses. See Appendix for more details of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of the participant’s rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were provided with detailed information about the study’s purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data were anonymized to protect the participants’ identities, and the study was conducted with respect for their privacy and confidentiality.

Discussion

The results from the thematic analysis reveal nuanced insights into high school teachers’ perspectives on integrating transferable skills into their curricula. This discussion will elaborate on the key themes identified and their implications for educational practice.

1. Perceived importance of transferable skills

Teachers broadly recognized the critical importance of transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving in preparing students for future success. This finding aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the necessity of these skills for thriving in a complex, rapidly evolving world (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Zhao, 2012). The acknowledgment of these skills as vital for real-world challenges (8 mentions) reflects an understanding that traditional academic knowledge alone may not suffice in equipping students for diverse contexts.

However, the recognition of transferable skills was sometimes overshadowed by academic priorities and standardized testing pressures (7 mentions). This tension underscores a significant challenge in balancing curriculum demands with the need to foster essential skills that may not be directly assessed by standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teachers’ awareness of these skills being neglected due to testing pressures highlights a systemic issue that affects how educational content is prioritized and delivered.

2. Challenges in implementation

The challenges reported by teachers in integrating transferable skills into their teaching are multifaceted. Rigid curricula (10 mentions) and standardized testing pressures (8 mentions) emerged as major barriers, corroborating existing literature

(Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Levin & Fullan, 2012) that points to structural constraints within education systems. Limited class time, lack of resources, and insufficient professional development (8 mentions) further compound these challenges, indicating a need for systemic changes to support teachers in implementing innovative pedagogical approaches.

These barriers suggest that while the importance of transferable skills is recognized, actual practice is impeded by external constraints. Addressing these challenges may require policy adjustments to allow greater flexibility in curriculum design and assessment methods, as well as enhanced support for teachers through targeted professional development (Binkley et al., 2012).

In contrast, the specific cultural context of Georgia might influence these challenges differently. For instance, private schools in Georgia might have different resource levels compared to public schools in other countries, potentially affecting how these challenges are experienced. This difference highlights the need for context-sensitive approaches when addressing barriers to skill integration.

3. Strategies for integration

Despite the challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and creativity in their approaches to incorporating transferable skills. Strategies such as project-based learning, group activities, and real-world problem-solving scenarios (12 mentions each for project-based learning and group activities) reflect an understanding of how to engage students actively in skill development. These strategies are consistent with pedagogical models that advocate for experiential learning and collaborative approaches (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Kivunja, 2015).

The emphasis on creating supportive classroom environments that foster skill development suggests that teachers value not only the methods but also the conditions under which learning occurs. This focus on a supportive environment indicates an awareness of the role that classroom culture and teacher-student interactions play in effective skill development.

Cultural nuances might influence how these strategies are implemented. For example, collaborative activities in Georgian private schools could be shaped by local educational traditions and expectations, which may differ from practices in other countries. This contextual influence underscores the importance of adapting successful strategies to fit local educational environments.

4. Assessment of effectiveness

Teachers mentioned that they employ various methods to assess the effectiveness of their strategies, including student feedback and self-assessments (12 mentions), observations, and rubrics (10 mentions). These approaches align with best practices in formative assessment, which emphasize the importance of ongoing feedback and reflective practices in supporting student growth (Mertens, 2015). The use of rubrics and performance tasks also reflects an effort to systematically evaluate skill development, however, the variability in assessment methods (e.g., reflective discussions with only 4

*Corresponding Author: Natali Amiranashvili



mentions) suggests that there may be inconsistencies in how effectiveness is measured.

5. Incorporating Student Feedback

Incorporating student feedback (11 mentions) emerged as a significant strategy for refining teaching methods and improving skill development. Teachers' responsiveness to feedback highlights a commitment to adaptive teaching practices and underscores the importance of involving students in their own learning processes (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). This approach not only helps in tailoring instruction to meet student's needs but also fosters a collaborative learning environment.

6. Awareness and instruction of transferable skills

Teachers in Georgia have shown a proactive approach to the explicit instruction of transferable skills, with 12 mentions of this practice and 9 mentions of using reflection activities. This aligns with international studies that advocate for explicit teaching and reflection as essential for skill development (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). However, the need for better linking of skills to real-life applications (7 mentions) and providing clearer explanations (6 mentions) suggests areas for further development. This observation is consistent with global research indicating that while explicit instruction is crucial, contextualizing skills for real-world applications remains a challenge (Heckman & Kautz, 2020; Dumont et al., 2020).

7. Collaborative activities

Collaborative activities (12 mentions) were frequently cited by the respondents as a means to develop skills such as communication, teamwork, and leadership. The frequent use of collaborative activities among Georgian teachers reflects a broader global trend recognizing the value of social learning environments (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Kivunja, 2015). Collaborative methods, such as group projects and peer reviews, are widely acknowledged for developing communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. This approach is supported by international research highlighting the effectiveness of social learning in fostering transferable skills.

However, the cultural context in Georgia might influence the specific ways in which collaborative activities are executed. For instance, local educational norms and classroom dynamics could shape the nature of group work and peer interactions. Comparing these practices with those in other educational systems can provide insights into how cultural factors impact the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies.

8. Real-world problems

The integration of real-world problems (10 mentions) into assignments, case studies, and simulations indicates a commitment to making learning relevant and applicable to students' future endeavors. This approach aligns with educational theories that advocate for contextualized learning experiences as a means to engage students and develop practical skills (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight both the progress and the ongoing challenges in integrating transferable skills into high school education. While the respondent teachers recognized the importance of these skills and mentioned employing various strategies to incorporate them into their teaching, systemic constraints such as rigid curricula and standardized testing pressures continue to pose significant barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy reform, enhanced professional development, and continued support for innovative teaching practices. By understanding and addressing these issues, educators, and policymakers can better support the development of transferable skills and ultimately prepare students for success in a complex and dynamic world.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for policy and practice:

1. Professional Development: There is a need for increased professional development opportunities focused on transferable skills. Training programs should address the challenges teachers face and provide practical strategies for integrating these skills into the curriculum.
2. Curriculum Reform: Educational policies should promote flexibility in curricula to allow for the inclusion of transferable skills. Reforms should aim to balance academic content with skill development, ensuring that students are well-prepared for future challenges.
3. Resource Allocation: Adequate resources and support are necessary to facilitate the effective integration of transferable skills. Schools and educational authorities should allocate resources to support teachers in implementing these skills and creating supportive learning environments.

Limitations

The study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

Sample Size and Representativeness

One of the primary limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size and the focus on only two private high schools in Georgia. The study included a limited number of teachers from these specific schools, which may not fully capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of high school teachers across different educational settings. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as it may not represent the broader population of high school teachers in other regions or types of schools. Consequently, the insights gained may be specific to the contexts of the participating schools and may not be applicable to teachers working in public schools or other private institutions, both within and outside of Georgia.

School-Specific Factors

The study's focus on private schools in Georgia introduces another limitation. Private schools often have distinct

resources, curricula, and student demographics compared to public schools, which could influence how transferable skills are integrated and perceived by teachers. For example, private schools may have more flexibility in curriculum design and resources that could affect teachers' approaches to teaching transferable skills. Therefore, the findings may not be directly applicable to teachers in public schools or other private schools with different contexts and constraints.

Limited Exploration of Diverse Educational Settings

Additionally, the study did not explore a wide range of educational settings, such as rural versus urban schools or schools with varying socio-economic profiles. This narrow focus may limit the understanding of how transferable skills are integrated and valued across different types of educational environments. Future research could benefit from including a broader range of schools to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies related to transferable skills in diverse educational contexts.

Potential for Response Bias

It is also important to acknowledge the potential for response bias in qualitative research. Participants may provide responses that they believe align with perceived expectations or norms rather than their true opinions. Despite efforts to create a supportive and non-judgmental interview environment, there is always the possibility that teachers might present their practices or views in a manner they believe is socially acceptable. This potential bias could affect the accuracy and authenticity of the data collected.

Cross-Sectional Nature of the Study

The study employed a cross-sectional approach, collecting data at a single point in time. While this approach provides valuable insights into teachers' perspectives at the moment of the study, it does not capture potential changes or developments in their views or practices over time. A longitudinal study could offer a more dynamic perspective by tracking how teachers' approaches to integrating transferable skills evolve throughout their careers or in response to changes in educational policies and practices.

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