



Analysis the Level of Students' Reflective Writing on Their English Language Learning at UKIT

Ratu Lendrati¹, Linerda Tulaktondok², Viktor Siumarlata³

¹SMP Negeri 1 Makale, ^{2,3}Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja

E-Mail: ratulendratri17@gmail.com

Abstract: *In such situations, reflective writing has become a key tool for the development of literacy skills in general and critical thinking and self-assessment in language acquisition specifically. A study of reflective writing about learning English as a foreign language among adults' learners in English Education Students' reflective journals are classified according to their depth, reliance on learning approaches and subjective insights in the study part. This research was qualitative content analysis approach. The participants were 10 second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UKI Toraja. The findings showed that the majority of students are learning to write reflectively and many still operate on a descriptive level. A small number of students displayed elements of dialogic and critical reflection indicating that all students are capable of attaining the higher levels of reflective writing, if they receive helpful guidance. The results suggest that students indeed share a basic understanding of reflective writing but could do more to express more meaningful insights about their learning process. This research argues for pedagogical consequences and strategies to promote reflective practice in language courses.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, English learning, self-assessment, self-reflection, Reflective writing*

INTRODUCTION

Reflective writing is a pedagogical tool commonly employed in language education, which prompts students to reflect on their experiences and demonstrate critical self-awareness with regard to their learning processes, problems and achievements. It enhances not only language proficiency, but also metacognitive awareness, an outcome that encourages students to become more independent learners (Bassot, 2024; Johns, 2009; Roy & Uekusa, 2020; Stevens & Levi, 2023). The role of reflective writing in English language learning is to assist students internalize language skills, evaluate their strategies, and identify areas they could improve on. Although reflective writing has the potential to develop EFL learners' language awareness, how deeply they reflect in such pieces and whether L2 students are benefited from it or not are little known.

Several studies have reported on how reflective writing can increase learners' awareness of their learning strategies and thus better adjust to their language needs (Moon, 2013a, 2013b). Reflective writing is often used in language education as it can encourage self-assessment and metacognition, both of which are key to language learning (Farrell, 2020; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). That said, the level of reflections may differ since students can reflect at a superficial form or at an organizational psychological amount (Loose & Ryan, 2020; Tsui & Cheng, 2022).

This study made the choice to conduct given heightened visibility of reflective writing in language learning, especially for enhancing students' metacognitive skills. Reflective writing helps students to self-evaluate, recognize their best and worst traits, and make informed decisions about how they learn. Despite general acceptance of the positive implications of reflection, relatively little literature exists on how well students actually perform reflective tasks, particularly in English as an additional language. Reflective writing is a common introduction for students in many academic contexts, but too often the reflection remains at a surface-level — simply summarizing what has been experienced and failing to extract deeper analysis or relate this learning to future experiences. By failing to engage in this critical reflection, learners may be preventing the acquisition of those very autonomous learning skills they need in order to successfully learn a second language. This study aimed at identifying the common problems to seek solutions for improving reflective practices among English learners, which can be done through checking the level of reflective writing from these students. Knowing how students think about their learning can help educators create specific interventions to increase the type of thinking that mediates better language acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflective writing is an important pedagogical tool in language education that fosters metacognitive awareness and language skills. By encouraging students to reflect critically on their learning experiences, reflective writing promotes self-evaluation and helps learners develop autonomous learning strategies (Bassot, 2024; Johns, 2009; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). It supports the internalization of language skills by prompting students to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and learning strategies (Stevens & Levi, 2023). Reflective practices are also linked to enhanced metacognitive awareness, which is essential for self-regulated learning (Farrell, 2020; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020).

However, the depth of reflection varies among students. Superficial reflections often involve mere summaries of experiences, while deeper reflections require critical analysis and thoughtful consideration of future learning strategies (Moon, 2013a; Loose & Ryan, 2020). Reflective writing can lead to a greater understanding of one's language learning strategies, helping students identify areas for improvement. Despite its benefits, many students struggle to engage in meaningful reflection, often stopping at surface-level descriptions (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Tsui & Cheng, 2022).

The role of reflective writing in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning contexts has been well-documented, though research on its actual effectiveness remains limited. While reflective writing can foster language

awareness, many learners fail to perform reflective tasks at a deep level, which limits its impact on language acquisition (Farrell, 2020). This study seeks to address this gap by examining the quality of reflective writing at UKIT, aiming to identify challenges and propose solutions to improve reflective practices.

In conclusion, reflective writing enhances language learning by promoting self-evaluation, metacognitive awareness, and autonomous learning. However, the depth of reflection remains a key challenge, and further research is needed to develop strategies for improving reflective writing in language education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the reflective writing of English Education students. The participants of this research were 10 second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UKI Toraja. They were asked to submit reflective journal on their language learning experiences at two points during the semester, on midterm and on final evaluation. Students were instructed to reflect on their learning strategies, challenges, successes, and future goals. The reflective journals were collected and anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

The reflective journals were analyzed using a coding framework based on level of reflection, adapted from (Hatton & Smith, 1995). The framework categorized reflection into three levels. They are descriptive reflection where simple recounting of experiences without deeper analysis; dialogic reflection where engagement with personal learning strategies and challenges, and critical reflection where in-depth analysis of learning, integrating theory with personal experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Levels of students' reflective writing

Analysis showed that most students (60%) engaged in Descriptive Reflection, in which they predominantly described their learning experiences with little additional analysis. This group of students lay more towards the surface-level side of learning (vocabulary, assignments etc) and so studying was managed accordingly. The rest of participants (30 %) activated Dialogic Reflection which was a reflection about learning strategies, different episodes of facing grammar problems or communication anxiety and the ways to cope with it. On the other hand, Critical reflection corresponding to a deep level was accomplished by 10% of students. Students did not just mention challenges, they also drew on theoretical concepts from their courses to explicitly connect their experiences with adaptation strategies for improvement.

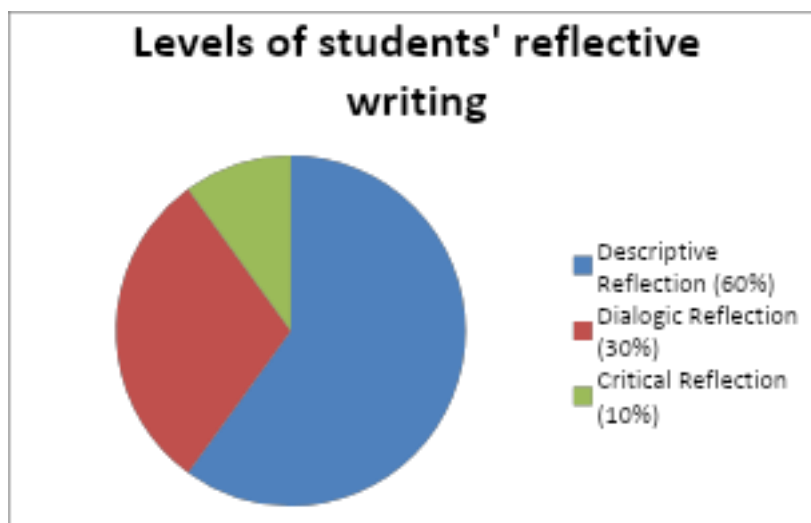


Figure 1. Percentage

Descriptive Reflection (60%):

Most students were engaged in the shallow impulsive type of reflection. They talked about their own learning activities, one after another; discerned nothing in that experience and many did not even question why things turned out as they were accustomed to. For example, some students said, *"I learned new words and at group work I used it"*. Others wrote: *"I did my grammar exercises in advance but mistakes were still there."* Types of reflections such as these tended to be just listings of activities done without exploring how these activities influenced one's study or one's growth. Such remarks suggest a lack of metacognitive awareness when students were talking about what they had learned and why they had learned it. Most students in this category exclusively focused on the ear: noting resolved assignments or critique responses from teachers, but never connecting these matters to their own strategies within language acquisition or what those problems may be with how languages function.

Dialogic Reflection (30%):

A quarter of the students (just under) demonstrated further analytical reflection, an understanding of their learning when considering strategies and weaknesses. For second round, they start criticizing themselves and made improvements to their behaviors. A potential typical reflection could be, *"I find I have trouble with listening comprehension and seeing as I need to listen more on my own accord in English not just in class."* The level of reflection is starting to go deeper, moving away from purely descriptive and point out specific areas in which they struggle (e.g., listening comprehension, speaking fluency) as well as what can be done to overcome these difficulties. They were more aware of themselves and how they can improve their language skills, such as using English in real-life situations.

In addition, a few students introspected on how they felt when preparing for their learning, and identified nervousness or calm as conditions that would have an impact in the manner they learned. Something like, *"I recognize becoming very stressed while speaking activities, and I am unable to speak fluently because of it. I*

think I need more confidence. This points to a nascent ability to associate affective factors with educational outcomes, which is one of the hallmarks of dialogic reflection.

Critical Reflection (10%):

One student who showed the type of critical thought exclaimed, “Thinking about my pronunciation in detail now, I realize that the accuracy approach is just me being obsessed with how well they make out what I am saying – which was literally what we talked about when considering global Englishers! From now on, I can work with simply being understood rather than speaking perfectly.

The student demonstrated an understanding of how their learning experience related to class room theory, how they self-analyzed and made considered changes into practice using a combination of first- hand experiences backed up by documented knowledge. This increased level of reflection suggested a greater depth of involvement the learning experience and an ability to adjust and innovate their methods for learning English.

Reflective Factors Analysis

Factors that impacted students' ability to engage in reflective writing were discovered during the analysis:

Reflective Writing:

Familiar with where or how to Reflect on the content. We found that students who were aware of reflective writing, whether from previous courses or personal practice, were more likely to reflect at high levels. These students were more fluent in discussing their thought processes around learning and were quicker to hold themselves accountable for their strategies. One student, for example, who had been introduced to the concept of reflective writing previously reflected on her ability to "analyze what words and what doesn't in learning a language" having written reflexive journals before.

Guidance and Scaffolding:

This type of instruction related to reflective writing was summarized by the students as having an idea on what you are doing (e.g., using prompts to guide what gets written, using reflection models) and correspondingly these reflections were rated stronger. By contrast, students who were provided with minimal guidance frequently stayed at the descriptive level. A reflection from one student: *"I didn't know how in depth of a job I was supposed to write, so I just explained what we were doing during class.* This could imply that without scaffolding, students may struggle to engage into deeper reflection.

Confidence and Proficiency in Language

For example, lower English confident students produced the reflection that shorter and more superficial. They often spent more time writing about how they had trouble with their language than on writing a deeper reflection of their strategies

to learning. One student said, *"I didn't feel fantastic about my English writing so I made it brief in the reflection.* In contrast, learners who felt more secure about their proficiency in the language often exhibited more developed and critical reflections implying that anxiety on the part of English may inhibit the depth of reflection.

Emotional Engagement:

Students showing increased emotional engagement in their learning were found to more likely demonstrate higher levels of reflective writing as measured by personal insight and critical evaluation. In another example, a student who battles speaking anxiety reflected: *"I am really ashamed that I have such high fear for English Speaking; but after the critical reflection, it is something practicable and mark able."* These reflections often incorporated cognitive and affective elements of learning, offering a more complete account of the essential experiences for student development.

Emerging Patterns and Themes

This was further reflected in some of the themes that appeared most frequently within students' reflective writing when considering the coded data, including:

Speaking and Listening Challenges

Almost of the students took account on challenges in oral communication (Hadi et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2019), especially speaking fluency and listening comprehension. These were by far the most common responses, and many pinpointed these subjects as their most difficult roadblocks to learning a language; for instance, one of them said *"Listening native speakers is still very hard because I've practiced it only few months. Reflections on speaking difficulties often revolved around anxiety, and suggested tips for success ranged from practicing with others to watching media in English.*

Emphasize the Vocabulary and Grammar:

Also, very common were the students who studied with words and grammar. Although students also engaged in descriptive reflections on vocabulary learning, a smaller group of students within the dialogic and critical groups began to criticize their learning strategies. As one student put it, *"I've been stuck trying to memorize vocabulary lists, but I know that's not enough. I have to put them in to sentences and conversations or I don't get it at all-*

Identifying Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies such as self-, monitoring, goal setting and planning were relatively well recognized in the critical reflection category of students (Silver et al., 2023). And another example, a student wrote, *"I could have done better in setting language goals every week besides doing the assessment last meticulously.* That is, it may be the case that students who engaged in critical reflection had a better sense of the metacognitive moves necessary for effective language learning.

The study indicates that the majority of students are learning to write reflectively and many still operate on a descriptive level. A small number of students displayed elements of dialogic and critical reflection indicating that all students are capable of attaining the higher levels of reflective writing, if they receive helpful guidance.

Discussion

While most students reflect on their writing, the findings show a significant variance in how deep these reflections go. This finding is supported by the high proportion of descriptive reflections, also indicating a need for students to be trained in critically reflecting. A potential reason for the lack of detail in reflection might be due to a lack of training in how to write reflectively (Sandrone et al., 2021). Therefore, language instructors need to give enhanced directives and scaffoldings so that students can go deeper than mere contemplation.

There are some pedagogical implications for strategies that instructors used in corporately. Explicit teaching on reflection models (Knight et al., 2020)) that the students can follow might help them to structure their reflections more effectively; Prompts for guided reflection — Providing the students with specific questions will help them engage critically with their lessons; Peer review — Including some peer review in reflective writing so learners are challenged from multiple viewpoints may lead to a deeper interaction with their thoughts; Practicing reflectiveness regularly within the course — This will gradually train the students into becoming better at reflective writing.

CONCLUSION

The significance of the study has presented noteworthy findings for investigating reflective writing demonstrated by English Education students. Reflective writing has high potential to promote metacognition and critical thinking in language learning but, unfortunately, a majority of students in previous studies generally wrote descriptively. Lecturers can enable students to utilize the kind of deep reflection which might otherwise occur more incidentally, by delivering clearer instruction and scaffolding these skills: thus contributing to improved language learning.

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