

EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PRACTICES AND PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received:15-02-2024 Accepted: 24-03-2024 Published: 31-03-2024 Volume: 8 Issue: 1 DOI: https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v8i1.292	Critical thinking helps students analyze information thoroughly and identify relevant information for themselves. Students are encouraged to think critically about their studies, which can be achieved through reflective learning. This study aims to understand the students' perceptions of reflective learning and how the students practice it in the class, especially in higher students. This research was done by using a qualitative, descriptive case study approach, the participants were 33 students and the participants for the interview were four women and two men enrolled in an Indonesian university from the English Education Department in the seventh semester and the same class. It can be concluded that the responses to the questionnaire are affirmative, supporting the practices and having a good perception of reflective learning. The practices of reflective learning that the students ever faced in the class are text diary and learning log. Reflective learning gives some benefits to the students such as building critical thinking and helping the students to prepare themselves.
KEYWORDS	
<i>Critical Thinking, Experience, Perception, Reflection, Understanding</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

The learning paradigm of the 21st century emphasizes critical thinking and the integration of several sciences with real-life applications. Critical thinking enables pupils to analyze information thoroughly and identify relevant information for themselves. Students are encouraged to think critically about their studies, which can be achieved through reflective learning. Reflective practice and reflective learning (RL) have become increasingly prevalent in higher education and adult education literature since the 1980s. Reflective learning is essential because it encourages students to combine theory and practice through reflection, to engage in a continuous process of situation evaluation, and to find creative and constructive solutions to both their own and the world's problems (Malaysia Ministry of Education 2015; United Nations 2015; Wong et al. 1995). Boud et al. (1985) stated that systematic reflection is crucial for learning from experience, while the act of reflection can be somewhat challenging. The establishment of the European Higher Education Area prompted a comprehensive review of university education curricula and methodologies. As a result, there have been more studies and creative endeavours utilizing fresh student-based methodologies, and RL methodology and reflective practice are now receiving increasing attention in higher education (Brockbank and

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McGill 1998; Light et al. 2009). Reflective learning, as described by Gibson (1998), involves transforming a learning process into a framework that can be comprehended through experience.

Reflection as a thorough and ongoing analysis of a belief or knowledge, considering its supporting foundations and resulting conclusions (Dewey, 1993). Reflective learning is a process for learners to remember their learning experience and helps them to develop critical thinking skills also increases their future learning by analyzing what they have learned and how far it is. As a result, Boud et al. (1985) idea that reflection serves as a link between experience and learning. Students are encouraged to analyze their past experiences to inform their future practices. The argument made by Bulman et al. (2014) that reflective education "provides a way to learn from the complexities of practice" is supported by this information. RL can involve a group of students openly discussing the challenges that they faced while studying, actively tracking and evaluating skills, performance, and knowledge as students learn to enhance the process and the results that follow. A variety of techniques, including reflective portfolios, mentoring programs, and incidental and anecdotal professional reflection, can be used to develop RL (Tarrant, 2013). Another tool that is frequently used in conjunction with professional practice experiences is the reflective diary (Moon, 2006). Typically, narrative systems are used to evaluate levels of reflection.

Empirical studies had shown that students think RL contributes to a better understanding of themselves, their learning, and their motivation learning (Fullana et.al, 2014), RL can help students manage the inevitable crisis that arises from the dissonance between theory and actual practice (Fook, 2015), as well as understand the self in practice (Blakemore & Aglias, 2018), One must first and foremost be able to recognize the imaginative aspect inside oneself to improve pupils' reflective learning to enhance learning for pupils by using reflective practice (Elíðóttir, 2018). As evidenced by the discussion, students' personal experiences and viewpoints, including sociocultural values and practices, may influence how they engage in reflective learning (Tan, 2021). The previous study also showed that reflective learning can support social work students to become professionals who evaluate or critically appraise practice experiences (Conner, 2020).

However, despite the rich literature on students' perceptions of reflective learning, more research into students' perceptions of reflection as part of the everyday learning experience is needed, as this engagement is regarded as critical in planning for pedagogical approaches when facilitating reflective learning (Fullana et al. 2016). In addition, previous studies only focus on the students' perception in general such as the students from some departments but this research only focuses on the English Education Department in the seventh semester and their practice. It is critical that their voices be heard and insight into students' perception of reflection such as its benefit as they navigate the process could help to strengthen the mechanism and effectiveness



of reflection in the future. Such findings could be used to improve student reflection processes, develop students' reflective skills, and inform pedagogical decisions. This research aims to investigate students' practice of reflective learning and their perception of its benefits, particularly in higher education settings. This research also aims to offer a comprehensive explanation of reflective learning and its application in the classroom, covering both theoretical and practical aspects for students. The study focuses on how students do practice reflective learning in the class and how students perceive the benefit of reflective learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

The researchers conducted this research by using a qualitative, descriptive case study approach (Yin, 2014). A case study is a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained time (Cresswell, 2014). In addition, Yin (2009, p. 18) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand students' perceptions of reflective learning and how they practice it in the classroom, particularly with larger student populations. In this investigation, real-world situations are the students' experiences with reflective learning and practice in the classroom. This research invited 33 students consist of 26 women and 7 men and the participants for the interview were four women and two men enrolled in State Islamic University of North Sumatra, English Education Department in the seventh semester and the same class. They were asked about their experience and perception of reflection in learning and the practices in the class. The participants were assured about their right to privacy, anonymity, secrecy, and to withdraw from this research at any moment (Merriam 2009; Yin 2009; Cresswell 2012).

2.2. Data Collection

To collect the data in this research, the researchers used semi-structured interviews (open-ended questions) and questionnaires. The purpose of the questions was to allow participants to explore their understanding and perspectives of reflection, their early exposure to and impression of reflection, and their typical process for completing reflection assignments. The questionnaire replies from the participants served as a guide to assist the researcher in getting ready to ask more detailed and probing inquiries in the conversation. Before analysis, every interview was audio recorded, and transcribed, and then the goal of higher fidelity in the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The purpose of the questionnaire and interview was to serve as a tool for the individuals to voice their opinions. Here, the researchers' primary responsibility was to listen, to learn more about the perspectives of the participants.



2.3. Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic content analysis to analyze the data by reading and underlining words, phrases, and concepts from each response to the questionnaire and interview questions. The questionnaire responses from the participants and the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed. The data familiarization process was completed by the researchers before moving on to data coding, theme development and refinement, and report writing (Clarke and Braun, 2006). Among the first codes produced were those for assessment, time-consuming, sincerity, and inspiration. Potential themes were developed from these and analyzed iteratively into five subthemes and three main themes (Merriam, 2009). Long-term interaction with the data contributed to its credibility (Nowell et al. 2017). with the investigator taking notes regarding new themes and codes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Iteratively, the researchers moved between the stages (Creswell 2012; Lincoln and Guba, 1985): as an illustration, to go over the themes or data instances to be spoken about. This approach aligned with the study's goal of understanding students' perceptions on reflection and practices.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Practices of Reflective Learning

Incorporating reflective practices into educational settings, such as journaling, discussions, or portfolios, can be a valuable strategy for educators to gain insights into their students' thought processes, learning styles, and overall development. The result of the questionnaire about the practices of reflective learning shows that 46% (n=15) of the students use reflective diaries, 30% (n=10) of the students use learning logs, 15% (n=5) of the students use portfolios and 9% (n=3) of the students use discussion. The result of the data revealed that students utilized four practices of reflective learning, with the most prevalent being reflective diary and learning logs.

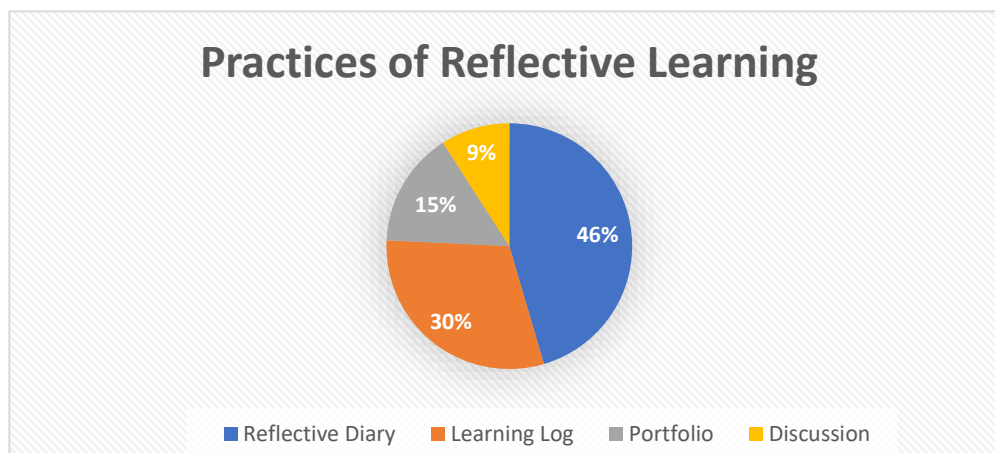


Figure 1. Practices of Reflective Learning



First, based on the interview, the students mentioned that one of the practices of reflective learning in the class is a reflective diary. Reflective learning is an approach that involves critical thinking about experience, and diary texts can be an excellent means of running this process. It is related to the student said that:

“Reflective learning that I've been dealing with is a reflective diary, I can express myself during learning”. (Participant 1, interview)

The student said that he ever made a reflective diary in the class and in the reflective diary he can express all that he wanted in the diary free related to the material that he had learnt in the class. In the class, the practice of reflective learning by diary text is done by writing everything that they wanted on a piece of paper about the material that they had learnt and what they felt or something that they wanted to tell to the lecturers. In the diary text, students detailed their experience and reflected on its impact, students are hoped can associate practical experience with theory and a deeper understanding. A diary or personal journal is often used as a tool to record personal experiences, thoughts, and reflections on a particular event or time. Through writing a diary, one can run a process of reflection, which is an important part of reflective learning. This finding is also related to the argument that reflective diaries are a popular tool for documenting professional practice experiences (Moon 2006). So, diaries can be used for documenting students' progress in the learning process so that the lecturer can make an evaluation based on the students' writing in their diary text and solve the problem together.

The second practice of reflective learning that the students face in the class is the learning log. The students said that in the learning log, there are some instructions for making the learning log, first, what is their feeling while studying the material, what part they understand or not, and last what they do to solve the problem? It is related to the statement of the students that said that:

“One of the things I've ever faced is the practice of writing, asking me to write through my learning experience how I feel when I study, what I'm studying, what is understood and what is not and what I want to do in the future”. (Participant 3, interview)

The students agreed and liked to make a learning log because they could tell what they felt and what they learnt, also the student could solve their problems by themselves after thinking critically. A learning log is a form of journal or record created by individuals to record their learning experience all the time. In the learning log, one can record the learning activity, thoughts, feelings, and learning that they gain from the experience. Learning logs are often used in the context of formal education, such as in schools or colleges, as a tool for self-monitoring and self-assessment. However, they can also be used informally by individuals who want to independently reflect on their learning experiences. Through learning logs, the students can



develop reflexive skills, optimize learning processes, and a deeper understanding of themselves as learners.

The finding strengthens the argument that according to Schön (1983, 1987) on professional training and development, one assumption is that journal writing, also known as professional journals, course diaries, personal logs, or learning logs, will allow for reflection-on-action. This finding relates to the argument because the the learning log is done to see the development of the students in the class and can see the reflection of every student and the students can show and express what they need and want to do about the material that they learn in the class so the lecturer can prepare the suitable material based on what they like and dislike. Reflection is a cognitive exercise that entails evaluating the process of acquiring knowledge. Reflections encompass the emotions, thoughts, and perceptions of students throughout their academic experience. Students should not face excessive pressure from teachers when sharing their reflections. Students should be candid and open when sharing their reflections to clearly convey any distressing thoughts or emotions (Hudriyah, 2022).

3.2. Perceived Benefits of Reflective Learning

The first goal of this research is to discover how students generally perceive the use of reflective learning in higher education. To determine their perception, data was gathered by distributing a questionnaire containing 5 statements covering various statements about reflective learning. The data analysis reveals that in general, students positively perceived the benefits of reflective learning. Table 1 shows the students' responses to each statement.

Table 1. Benefits of Reflective Learning

No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1.	Reflective learning helps students apply their experience in the learning process	9,1%	90,9%	-	-	-
2.	Reflective learning provides a learning process that can be understood via experience	18,2%	81,8%	-	-	-
3.	Reflective learning contributes to a better understanding	9,1%	72,7%	18,2%	-	-
4.	Reflective learning can increase students' motivation in learning	-	81,8%	9,1%	9,1%	-
5.	Reflective learning bridges the dissonance between the theory and practice	-	81,8%	18,2%	-	-
Average		12,1%	81,8%	15,1%	9,1%	-



From the average number shown in the table (SA=12,1%, A=81,8%, N=15,1%, DA=9,1%, and SDA= 0%) it can be concluded that the responses to the questionnaire are affirmative, supporting the practices and have good perception about reflective learning. Regarding the first statement "Reflective learning helps students to remember their learning experience", 9,1% (n=3) selected strongly disagree and 90,9% (n=30) selected strongly agree. In this statement, no students choose to be neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Students agree with this statement because based on their experience in reflective learning during the learning process, they can apply or use their experience in their real life so it's easy for them to follow the learning because they face it in their lives.

Regarding the second statement "Reflective learning provides a learning process that can be understood via experience", 18,2% (n=6) chose strongly agree 81,8% (n=27) chose agree, none chose neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. These findings indicate that reflective learning helps the students in the process of learning so that students can understand the framework well using their experience. Because, sometimes students find it difficult to understand the framework but by using their experience the students feel that the framework can be understood because relates to their lives.

Regarding the third statement "Reflective learning contributes to a better understanding of themselves", 9,1% (n=3) selected strongly agree, 72,7% (n=24) selected agree, and 18,2% (n=6) selected neutral. No students selected disagree and strongly disagree. In line with this statement, reflective learning can help the students understand about their learning well. Reflective learning can contribute significantly to a better understanding of students. Reflective learning involves thoughtful consideration of one's own experiences, actions, and perspectives. This process encourages individuals, including students, to analyze and critically evaluate their thoughts, behaviours, and learning experiences

Regarding the fourth statement "Reflective learning can increase students' motivation in learning", 81,8% (n=27) selected agree, 9,1% (n=3) selected neutral, and 9,1% (n=3) selected disagree. In this statement, no students choose to strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree. These findings indicate that students agree that reflective learning can increase their motivation in learning but reflective learning is only one of many factors that can increase students' motivation. 81,8% (n=27) agree with this statement because as students reflect on their achievements and challenges, they may find increased motivation to overcome obstacles and strive for success. Recognizing progress can be a powerful motivator for continued learning.

Regarding the fifth statement "Reflective learning helps students manage a crisis that arises from the dissonance between theory and actual practice", 81,8% (n=27) chose to agree, and 18,2% (n=6) chose neutral. In this statement, no students choose to strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Reflective learning is particularly valuable in helping students manage crises or challenges that arise from a dissonance between theoretical knowledge and actual practice. Reflective learning fosters critical thinking skills as students analyze and evaluate their



experiences. This process encourages them to question assumptions, consider different perspectives, and make connections between theory and practice.

From the result of the questionnaire that was given to the students, the average result of each statement was agree (81,8%) followed by neutral (15,1%), strongly agree (12,1%), disagree (9,1%) and none of them chose strongly disagree. They showed positive perceptions that they felt because of the reflective learning in their class based on their experience and practice in the class. They felt that reflective learning gave some benefits not only for their learning but also for themselves. They can know themselves well and use their knowledge to make their learning run well.

a). Applying the experiences in the learning process

The second benefit of reflective learning is that students use their experience in the learning process so that they have background knowledge about the material that they learnt from the experience that they had. It is related to the result of the questionnaire that 90,9% (n=30) chose to agree and 9,1% (n=3) chose strongly agree. After that, the interview is conducted to ask deeper into the reason for it. The following participant supports this statement:

"I think reflective learning is a concept of flashback learning that is asked about the previous material and then associated with the current situation and then related to what will be done in the future". (Participant 1, Interview)

Based on participant 1, he said that reflective learning is a learning process that based on their experience such as their daily activity, they can connect it to their learning process in the class. So, reflective learning, makes them easily improve themselves. A similar opinion was also expressed by the third student who also said that learning reflective learning is similar to the realia method where they explain and express what they want to learn based on what is around them, reflective learning also digs their potential because in learning especially English there are 4 skills to master we may be able to write but bellum can speak, can speak not necessarily hear, can hear not necessarily read or understand reading. With this reflective teaching, we can convince ourselves that learning does not have to be in the classroom. Sometimes everything that happened outside the classroom also taught us about the material in the class without realising it.

This finding also supports an argument that reflection entails moving between dimensions (i.e., going through an event and looking back at it from outside, through the mind's eye) (Hiebert 1992; Kilpatrick 1985). Researchers have argued that when reflecting on events, there must be dialogue with oneself (Hatton and Smith 1995) and discourse with others (Mann and Walsh 2013). When such discourses are activated, the interaction between one's experiential knowledge and received knowledge occurs (Wallace 1991). This argument showed that students' experiences took part in their reflection to face and receive new knowledge. The students used their experience in the learning process so they support the argument above that



there must be an interaction between their experience and knowledge before learning after that the students received new knowledge in the class.

b). Contributing to a better understanding

The result of the data interview also shows the same result as the questioner, they believe that reflective learning is a learning or a reflection of what a student has learned and makes them understand well. Based on the questionnaire, 9,1% (n=3) chose strongly agree, 72, 7% (n=24) chose to agree and 18,2% (n=6) chose neutral. The first benefit of reflective learning based on their experience is that it can contribute to the student's understanding of the learning better. The students can understand the learning better with reflective learning. It is also supported by the statement of the participants that said that:

"I think reflective learning is a concept that can help one understand lessons easily".
(Participant 1, interview).

The same argument about this benefit of reflective learning also

"I think this reflective learning is a good way to apply it because it can help students repeat or remember an understanding of the material that has been described".
(Participant 2, interview).

Based on the explanation from Participant 1, Reflective learning contributes to their understanding well. They knew what they learnt in the class and what must they do so they took part in the learning process. From this statement, reflective learning is a reflection on students about all that they learn whether they understand it or not. This suggests that when using reflection as part of learning, greater consideration should be given to clear understanding and focus. This finding supports the argument that reflection must give students' learning meaning: when asked to reflect regularly, students must understand what they are doing and why (Dymont and O'Connell 2010). Aside from that, RL helps people better understand themselves, their learning, and their motivation to learn (Fullana et al, 2014). This argument said that students must understand what they are doing and why also understand themselves well and RL can help them to do it all. Based on this finding and strengthened by the statement, reflective learning is hoped to contribute a better understanding because if the students can understand themselves well, they also can understand the learning and what must they do in the class during the learning process.

c). Bridging the dissonance between the theory and practice

Besides that, the third benefit shows that reflective learning bridges the dissonance between the theory and the practice. The difference between the theory in the class and practice in real life sometimes creates a problem for the students because most of them just focus on the theory, but reflective learning can help them solve the problem. The result of the questionnaire shows that



81,8% (n=27) chose to agree and 18,2% (n=6) chose neutral and it is also related to the students who agree with this statement who said that:

“With this reflective learning, I can improvise or imagine what it would be like if this material were applied in real life or we'd differ depending on what material was being carried”. (Participant 1, interview)

Based on this statement, the participant said that he can imagine how to apply theory in real life because reflective learning makes it easy to do it. Many students have difficulty in the transition from the theory into the practice because sometimes the theory is different from the practice in our daily lives. So, with RL many students think that it will be easier to understand the theory and practice it because it is always connected and related directly to their life so they don't only learn but also comprehend the learning and participate in the learning process. So, RL helps students to solve the problem of understanding the theory and can practice it in their actual lives. This finding strengthens the argument that RL can help students manage the inevitable crisis that arises from the dissonance between theory and actual practice (Fook, 2015). This argument shows that the crisis can be solved by reflective learning because the reflection that they do, can make them know what they do and understand it well after that know to apply it well because they know themselves well.

4. CONCLUSION

Most students responded positively to reflective learning in this study. Reflective learning offers various benefits such as enhancing understanding, fostering critical thinking, and improving preparation for the learning process. Lecturers can utilize reflective learning to engage students actively, maintain focus, and encourage participation. Through reflective learning, students can articulate their emotions and challenges, facilitating collaborative problem-solving.

Due to the limited participant size and scope, it is important to highlight that the diversity of the class between all the students in the English education department will have different perceptions and practices about reflective learning in the class. Further research, thus is required to ensure that reflective learning can be done in every class from both the beginner and advanced students in the English education department and to find the other perception about reflective learning in higher education.

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