

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Abstract: *From our everyday life experience, journaling can be understood as a written record of our lives' thoughts and feelings. Further, this term has been explored in the educational context, especially in language learning to refer to particular writing that promotes learners' writing ability. This article looks critically at the basic concept of a reflective journal, drawing on the general overview of reflection and following the role of journal writing in the learning process. Then it takes a closer look at the effectiveness of reflective journal writing from two perspectives: teacher and student. It is further followed by the discussion of the reflection model which covering Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, Kolb's (1984) experimental learning cycle, and Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle. Finally, it rounds the discussion by addressing factors to consider in the implementation of reflective journal writing.*

Keywords: *reflective journal, learning process, teaching practices*

DEFINING CONCEPT OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING

Every learning process invites reflection to reveal an in-depth view of what has happened in the classroom and how to respond better if it happened again in the future. Reflection unravels any obstacles during the learning process to measure the significance of instructions used and map out future actions' possible solutions. Dewey coined the concept of reflective thinking in 1900 (Dewey, 1933). He outlines reflection as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (pp. 9). Further, he views that reflective thinking entails a systemic and scientific process of describing the experiences, then explains the questions arising from those experiences to generate theories or hypotheses, and finally considers actions to test the theories (Ramsden, 1992). In line with Dewey's statement, Kirkham (1997) states that reflection increases self-awareness and a deeper understanding of analysis and an evaluation to strengthen critical inquiry and inform practice; in other words it supports life-long learning.

The concept of reflection or reflective thinking is mostly found within the educational context. Through reflection, both teachers and students gain a new understanding of their existing experiences. During the learning process, there must be an up-and-down situation which requires the teacher, as the instructor to think further on how to manage the situation and prepare a more effective teaching scenario for the future, and students, as the participants of the class, to think back on their own learning process to find their individual's problem. To do this, they need to rely on self-awareness as it drives the process of reflection deeper. Clarke and Graham (1996) state that through reflection, people are usually engaging in the process of examining complex experiences or situations in a period of thinking; allows individual to make sense of their experiences; and finally reflect on how to separate the influencing factors and decide reasonable action in the future.

For students, reflection bridges the gap between what they have done and what they should do in the learning process (Cathro, O'Kane, & Gilbertson: 2017). In this sense, reflection allows learners to mirror their learning process as a considerable way for self-improvement (Hussein, 2018). However, the key point of reflection for students is not to increase their grades, instead it sharpens their thinking skills (Murphy & Ermeling, 2016). Having high scores in the

classroom does not guarantee that learners will have a better thinking process. The term 'self-improvement' in the previous statement is more likely defined as the ability to always being eager in learning, turn criticism into inspiration, and embrace any challenges or problems in learning as a way to elevate their skills. It should be obvious to conclude that reflection for students focuses more on their performance rather than the product (Park, 2003).

On the other hand, for teachers, reflection is considered as one of the tools which enables them to think over and reconstruct their mistakes in terms of instructional practices as well as classroom behaviour (Donyaie & Afshar, 2019). Similarly, Körkköo, Kyrö-Ämmälä, & Turunen (2016) maintain that reflection refers to the ability of teachers in observing and assessing their teaching experiences critically to become more aware of their feeling and thoughts. From these two perspectives, it can be argued that teaching practice will always require reflection to overcome any problems that happened in teaching and utilize it as a motivation to help students learn better. Due to this, teachers are not passive participants in the classroom since they theorize their practices and practice their theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Griffiths, 2000). In this sense, it can be argued that reflection is a set of beliefs and practices that improve the quality of teaching so that it should not be taken for granted, especially for the sake of aesthetic purposes (Farrell, 2015).

When it comes to talk about the media on doing reflection, journal writing seems to be the most feasible tool. Casanave (2013) and Fulwiler and Gardner (1999) have emphasized the critical role of journal writing, especially in L2 education. Further, Casanave (2013) states:

"Journal writing in L2 field is risk-free, personal, reflective, and responsive writing activity done regularly over time in a style that suits the writer's personality and proficiency level. Journal writing is unconstrained, in most cases, by academic conventions and generally uncorrected for language errors that do not impede comprehensibility." (p. 5)

Given the above definition, reflective journal writing is suggested to be used regularly. For example, in terms of teacher, journaling will help them observe and find the area that needs to improve and maintain the area that has already shown a positive outcome. Power (2017) believes that reflective journal writing depicts a general picture of themselves in the classroom within the teaching community. However, this method requires a lot of time and energy, including a strong motivation to keep practicing the journaling activities.

Meanwhile, if these journaling practices are assigned for students, they will gain a better understanding of themselves in which it leads to the development of self-consciousness and self-awareness. When it happens, learners begin to question themselves about how to be a good learner or how to make better their learning process. Sumsion and Fleet (1996:121) argue that reflective journaling writing allows learners to be "looking back on experiences, decisions, and action; recognizing values and beliefs underlying these actions and decisions; considering the consequences and implications of beliefs and actions; exploring possible alternatives; and reconsidering former views."

OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING

A considerable number of studies have been conducted with regard to reflection or reflective thinking, especially in second/foreign language contexts. Farrel (2004) states that reflection is not a one-dimensional approach; instead it is a holistic approach covering the intellectual, cognitive and metacognitive, spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of teaching. To emphasize, Jones (2016) says that reflective journal writing allows teachers to have the opportunity to explore their professional identities, such as characteristics, values, and beliefs and it also helps teachers to recognize the important events in the classroom.

Meanwhile, reflective journals for students are considered an effective tool to develop metacognitive awareness and conscious control over learning. Through reflective journal

writing, students are invited to reflect on pedagogical changes, past experiences, attitude, self-awareness, personal experiences, and future careers (Hashemi and Mirzaei, 2015).

From the above description, it is obvious that reflective journal writing benefits both teachers and students. The following discussion notifies on the effectiveness of reflective journal writing from two perspectives:

Teacher's Perspective

As outlined above, one of the purposes of a reflective journal is to raise self-awareness. In this context, teacher's awareness may suggest any changes in teaching practice. Regarding this purpose, Moghaddam et al. (2019) reported a positive result for the Iranian EFL teachers, both female and male teachers. Using experimental method, the result revealed the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of using reflective teaching components. Informed by Farrel's (2004) framework, those EFL teachers use three types of reflection in their teaching practice: reflection-for action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action in different degrees. To be specific, the result indicates that the Iranian EFL teachers engaged in five different factors underlying reflective teaching, i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, affective, critical, and practical to varying degrees as the outcome of their self-awareness. Through those factors, the Iranian EFL teachers can develop their self-awareness for the sake of professional context.

Another study of Iranian teachers was conducted by Donyaie & Afshar (2019), examined to what extent Iranian EFL teachers familiar with the reflection practices, the possible contribution of an interactive workshop toward the participants' individual and collective journal writing, and the teachers' perspective about the obstacles in reflective journal writing. Using qualitative design in reflective journal writing (RJW) and a face-to-face interview, the result showed an improvement in teacher's familiarity with reflective journal writing after the interactive workshop. Having a better understanding of reflective journal writing makes those Iranian EFL teachers write their reflection from a critical point of view, resulting in more in-depth reflection. It is beneficial for future teaching practices. Besides, the result also identified institutional issues, teacher issues, and educational system issues as the most common barriers of reflective journal writing (RJW). The identification process is crucial because it shows how much effort they should put on in the future to make a better learning process.

In a narrative study, Yoshihara et al. (2020) explored reflective journals as a media to promote two novice Japanese EFL instructors' teaching practices. In specific, this study intended to examine the instructors' practical difficulties and challenges in using communicative language teaching (CLT) and how they overcome the obstacles and reflect for future teaching. The result informed three difficulties found during research, i.e., the students' reluctance to engage in group activities, the instructors' difficulty speaking L1, the imbalance of course goals, the students' English proficiency, and a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. In other words, the result also pointed out that through reflective journals, those novice Japanese instructors gained valuable insight for the sake of their future teaching and professional development.

In a similar context, Jones (2016) reported action research which entails online reflective journaling for the EFL Japanese instructors, specifically the in-service ones. This study aims to explore in what ways reflective journaling promotes professional development. Interestingly, the result revealed that reflective journaling enhances the in-service teachers' professional development in classroom management, questioning one's perspective/practices, and the important role of relationship in classroom context. Additionally, those in-service teachers seem to experience a range of emotions and notice the learners' range of emotions as well. In short, this finding helps them to develop self-esteem and avoid burnout.

Having leadership skill in teaching allows teachers to gain higher motivation and confidence. Göker's (2016) research on reflective journals contributes to developing leadership skills and teaching skills for Turkish pre-service teachers. Informed by quantitative and

qualitative methods, including the open-ended questioning techniques (surveys and interviews), this study shows that reflective journaling helps pre-service teachers reflect on their teaching experiences. Another point is it enhances their self-awareness so that they can evaluate and improve leadership skills.

Student's Perspective

Metacognitive skills allow students to take control of their learning so that they have the opportunity to improve performance in academic and/or attitudes related to learning. Informed by this understanding, Ramadhantiet al. (2020) investigated the use of reflective journals to monitor metacognition growth in students' writing. The metacognition itself consists of awareness, evaluation, and regulation. Students are asked to write an explanatory text while monitoring their metacognition growth using reflective journal guidelines. The findings suggest that reflective journal guidelines can help students in measuring their metacognition growth in writing. Seeing this benefit, students must be encouraged to write a reflective journal as it also enhances their awareness about knowledge and task completion efforts, monitors their performance, and promotes a new habit of planning, setting goals, and applying strategies in the learning process.

Besides metacognition growth, a reflective journal is also beneficial for students in fostering their growth mindset. Hussein (2018) investigated the effect of reflective journals on students' learning and their growth mindset and perceptions of the journaling itself. Using the qualitative instrumental case study method, involving the students' journals and focus group interview, the result showed that reflective journaling improves students' conceptual understanding of the course materials, encourages a growth mindset, and emphasizes students' inner thoughts. In this context, a growth mindset allows students to have higher desire or motivation and be persistent in facing any challenges, leading them to achieve a higher level of achievement (Dweck, 2006).

Motivation in learning is an essential factor in promoting students' understanding. This idea is administrated in a study by Amirkhanova et al. (2016), examining the role of reflective journals to enhance Russian students' motivation in learning. Combining literature review, an experiment conducted in Kazan Federal University, and questionnaires administered to students and their analysis, this study demonstrated a high level of students' motivation in learning at the end of the course. In addition, the result showed an improvement in students' learning process and an increase in students' confidence in which all of them benefit the students to promote their progress in study.

The advantages of students' reflective journals are not solely implied to students' development but also teachers' as well. Ahmed (2019) observed the impact of students' reflective journals toward instructional practices in EFL writing context at Qatar University. The data was analysed qualitatively using thematic content analysis and showed that students have their preferences during the classroom's learning process, i.e., gradual teaching, exemplification, discussion, comprehension checking, cooperative learning, and graphic organizers. Additionally, the finding included any challenges that the students faced, such as strict classroom management, lack of teachers' online feedback, frequent questioning by teachers, recurrent turn-taking during the classroom, mismanagement of time, lack of handouts, problems in cooperative learning, mocking at students, the ringing of mobile phones, students who come late, and how a teacher deals with disruptive students. All in all, the information given above reveals how students' reflection process can help teachers find the strength of his/her teaching practice and work on the area that needs improvement.

MODELS OF REFLECTIONS

After Dewey (1933) initiated reflective thinking, more and more studies began promoting the importance of reflection in the learning process. As an attempt to support the studies, some models of reflective practice are employed. Despite the fact that they share different cycle or

phase, they are similar in terms of purpose, i.e., to promote the learning process at best, both for teachers and students. Below are the most common models of reflective thinking:

1. Schön (1983)

Reflective thinking in this model is differentiated into reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Figure 1). Schön's model more likely deals in the context of practitioners or teachers rather than students. Reflection-in-action refers to the process of reflection during the 'doing' stage; meaning that the adjustment is made at the time it happens rather than in the future. It allows teachers to respond immediately yet responsibly and resourcefully, drawing on existing knowledge and previous experiences (Bolton, 2014). In this sense, reflection-in-action offers personalized learning and does not rely on preconceived methods on what a teacher should do in a particular situation.

In contrast, reflection-on-action refers to the looking-back process of reflection to inform better future actions. It means that the reflection is done after the events, inviting teacher's knowledge and previous teaching experiences. The highlight point of reflection-on-action is on the ideas needed to change for the sake of a better learning process in the future. It can be assumed that reflection requires a deeper thought while considering the situation again to overcome the problems. Further, Schön (1983) views this reflection's importance since it determines how a teacher's knowing-in-action may contribute to an unexpected outcome.

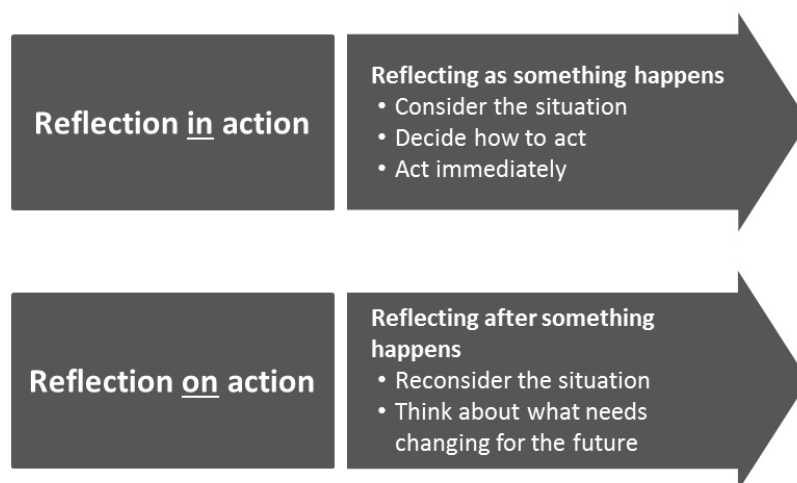


Figure 1. Schön's Reflection-in Action and Reflection-on-Action (1983)

2. Kolb (1984)

Through its four-stage cycle, Kolb (1984) proposes that his reflection model provides a holistic model of the learning process aiming to take learning into new experiences (Figure 2). Due to its emphasis on experience in the learning process, Kolb's reflection process is also called 'experimental learning' (Wain, 2017). This reflection model consists of the following stages:

- a. Concrete experience: active involvement is the key in this stage since the experience is a new and active one, used to test out new ideas.
- b. Reflective observation: reviewing the experience to discover the strength and areas of development.
- c. Abstract conceptualization: drawing the ideas between what has been done, what already know, and what needs to learn and interpret them to promote new understanding. At this stage, using textbooks and/or researches also asking for support from colleagues is allowed if needed.
- d. Active experimentation: considering how to put what has been learned into practice.

3. Gibbs (1988)

In this model, the process of reflection is based on a six-stage approach, leading from a description to a conclusion and the consideration for future actions (Figure 3). While most reflection models are similar to Kolbs', Gibbs' model allows teachers or students to reflect on their thoughts and feeling. This model incorporates six different stages as follow:

- a. Description: teacher/student outlines the experience by recalling the important events of what has happened in the classroom.
- b. Feeling: teacher/student explores any thoughts or feelings of the events. At this stage, they should be able to identify their feeling, both positive or negative.
- c. Evaluation: teacher/student discuss the positive and negative aspects of the experience.
- d. Analysis: teacher/student highlight their experience and refers to any relevant literature or research. For example, if teacher finds the instructional strategy used was not helpful, he/she can come upon relevant literature to overcome the problem.
- e. Conclusion: teacher/student recapitulates their ideas to the events, covering what has been learned and what needs to improve in the future.
- f. Action plan: teacher/student creates a step-by-step method as the outcome of the reflection. (McMillan & Weyers, 2013)

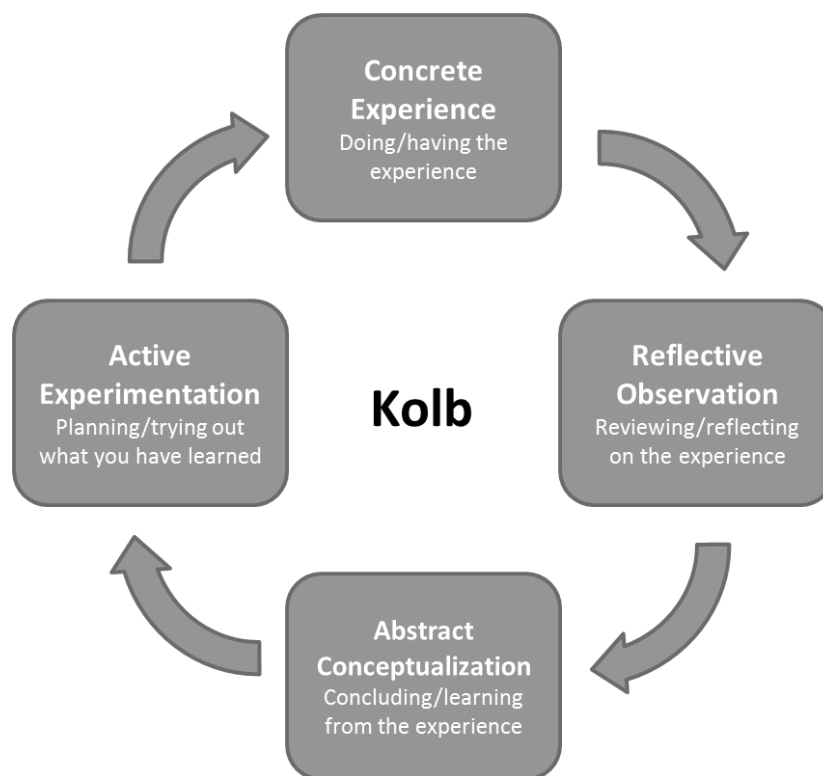


Figure 2. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)

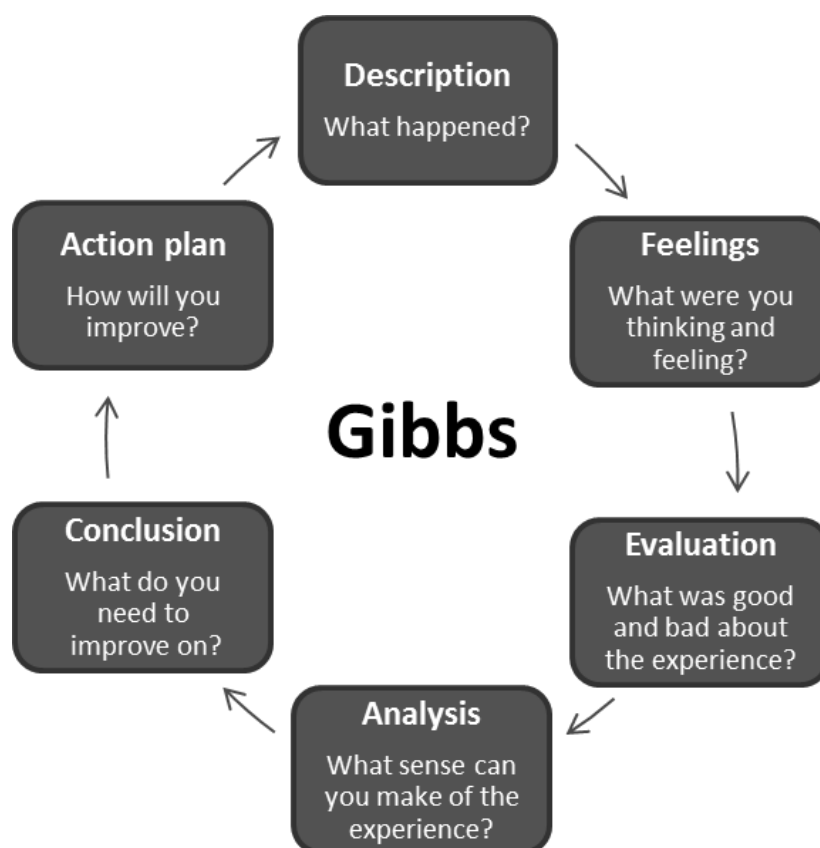


Figure 3. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988)

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING

Based on the literature review, the following points can be considered as the supporting factors to make the implementation of reflective writing successful:

1. The reflective journal should increase teachers' awareness beyond the technical aspect, such as seeing their reflection experience from a critical perspective (Valli, 1997). In addition, Moghaddam et al. (2020) also mentioned looking at other data sources, such as classroom observation to gain more valid results.
2. Before taking reflection into practice, Donyaie & Afshar (2019) suggest that the participants, either teachers or students, to be trained on reflection in general and reflective journal writing in particular through interactive workshops or other activities which raise their self-consciousness on reflection.
3. In the context of teachers' reflection, especially the novice ones, the role of faculty development programs and/or university is needed (Yoshihara, 2020). Both the faculty or university can provide access to professional and personal networks and give the opportunity to consult, ask for help, and socialize with tenure-track faculty.
4. Preparing prompts that address more critical reflection to one's perspective (Jones, 2016).
5. Implementation of reflective journal for students requires teachers to provide regular feedback, state the goals of journaling clearly, and establish good communication to maintain teacher-students relationship (Amirkhanova, et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

In the language learning context, the concept of reflective journal writing is rooted in the experiences that teachers and students faced in the classroom. For teachers, doing a reflection means that they can identify and overcome the obstacles for future teaching practice, raise self-awareness on how to improve their quality of teaching for professional development and students' learning development, and develop leadership skill which allows higher motivation.

Meanwhile, for students, having a reflective journal writing helps to monitor their metacognitive skills, enhance awareness toward task completion, set the learning strategies, promote a growth mindset, understand the course materials, enhance motivation which affects their confidence level, and inform the teacher's instructional practices.

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