



Student's reflective thinking (An analysis of student's reflective journal in English paragraph writing)

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Abstract

This study outlines a content analysis that focused on students' level of reflective thinking, how much it contributed to the level of their writing and how they felt about using reflective journals. 15 students from the 2019/2020 Paragraph-based Writing course participated in this study, which was performed at the English Education Department of a state University located in Banten province. Students' writing samples and reflective journals were gathered through documentation, and responses to a questionnaire were gathered from them. The theme analysis technique, Oshima and Hogue's (2006) theory of paragraph writing, and Hatton and Smith's (1995) theory of reflective thinking level were all applied in this study. Three conclusions came from the data analysis. First, most of the students' reflective thinking skills fell under Descriptive Writing and First, the proportion of students' reflective thinking was identified between the levels of descriptive writing and descriptive reflection. Second, the analysis demonstrated that a rise in the number of cases at the Descriptive Reflection level was consistent with an improvement in the quality of students' writing. Meanwhile, the rise in the number of descriptive writing level incidents coincided with a decline in the level of students' writing. Third, despite being viewed as demanding and stressful, the usage of reflective journal in the class was viewed favorably because it helped students remember lessons and recognize their errors, which helped them to produce well-organized paragraphs. The results suggested that reflective journaling helped students to enhance their writing skills and may be used as a substitute for developing other language skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Reflective thinking is a crucial component of students' writing skill development for two reasons. First is to make students become mindful of what they have done, reflective thinking first requires their direct and active involvement in unearthing their own personal events (Dyment & O'Connell, 2003). Second, reflective thinking is used to help students to develop a conscience for looking for fresh and reflected meanings. Their reflective thinking can take on diverse meanings in many areas, such as varied views, skewed dimensions, and sympathy (Dyment & O'Connell, 2003). Moreover, the direct influence of students' reflective experiences and reflective thinking-related procedure most likely leads students to find new input which is expected to give space for better future doings and smoother content-making in the writing process.

Actions in doing and realizing reflective thinking can be done through numerous reflective practices. In this instance, the journal as an instrument for reflective practice has gained a noteworthy stake in the application of reflective practice (Ahmed, 2019). There are two points on why reflective journals get more acceptance. Firstly, a reflective journal

gives room for self-assessment because the writer also acts as a reader, so the opportunity to revise the imperfections is vast (Ahmed, 2019; Bavli 2021). In addition to that Kerka (1996) reveals that journal writing gives chance for students to "articulate connections between new information and what they already know" (p.2). Secondly, a reflective journal comprises reflective thinking levels as the major classification of the quality of students' reflection (Ahmed, 2019; Bavli, 2021). In other words, the practice that journal writing carries is also the chance for students to detect their learning progress.

Furthermore, a preliminary interview revealed the major premise of why a lecturer in the 2019/2020 Paragraph-based Writing course for 3rd-semester students in the English Department of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa employed reflective journal writing as an attempt to find out students' level of reflection and how the students contribute to the excellence of their writing. This research focused on analyzing the EFL pre-service teachers' levels of reflection.

Previous studies showed that levels of reflection confirm the quality of the teachers' reflective thinking

(Hatton & Smith, 1995; Gil-Garcia and Cintron, 2002; Mirzae, Phang, Kashafi, 2014). The study revealed how teachers and administrators utilized reflective journals as a tool to foster learning and professionalism. It has been demonstrated that teachers' learning and professionalism grow when they think about what teaching entails in their daily work. Even though many studies recommend using reflective journals to determine a student's degree of reflection, there is a limitation to research that specifically examine students' levels of reflection within the unique educational context of a paragraph-based writing course. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent to which third-semester students engaged in reflective thinking while engaging in learning activities in Paragraph-Based Writing course.

Experience and reflective thinking are intricately related. Dewey (1933) defined reflective thinking as an active, persistent, and in-depth investigation of any knowledge or epistemology in a specific subject that supports it and the deeper discoveries it generates. According to Dewey (1993), reflective thinking is a process that involves chaining, organizing, and connecting ideas with their

antecedents in order to solve issues. It is possible to say that reflective thinking may be thought of as a conscious cognitive action that involves fusing concepts and transforming experiences into fresh conceptual frameworks while considering both the past and the present. Furthermore, reflective thinking calls for the practice of recognizing the potential of concepts (Stein, 2008). In short, it can be understood that reflective thinking is, to put it simply, the process of accepting responsibility for one's knowledge.

Level of Reflective Thinking

Hierarchy is frequently used when analytical thinking is applied. These hierarchical ideas gave rise to what we now refer to as classification or levels. Although there are several levels of reflective thinking, Hatton & Smith's (1995) approach is well recognized to be frequently employed. Descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection are the four degrees of reflective thinking that are involved. Descriptive writing, or non-reflective writing, fills the lowest level in Hatton and Smith's (1995) taxonomy of reflection. Because it just

contains a description of what occurred throughout the course, it is not considered to be reflective. By describing descriptive writing, which delivers only facts or analyzes notions of a certain course subject or ideas without integrating the muse of one's insights or personal integration. Rivera (2017) attempted to re-conceptualize this level of reflective thinking by Hatton & Smith (1995). Furthermore, no justification is required, and no logic is offered. Only facts, matter concepts, event narrations, concept remarks, and word definitions are present in descriptive writing (Rivera, 2017). Hatton and Smith (1995), however, assert that because it serves as the catalyst for reflection, it is inherently reflective. Dos and Demir (2013) support this point by stating that students' initial attempts at developing reflective outputs nearly invariably emerge in this level of reflective thinking. Given that descriptive writing has the quality of leaving from the higher level of reflective thought, it may be deduced that its major appearance is expected.

The next phase, Descriptive Reflection, is when a description of the events is followed by straightforward arguments or explanations. According to Hatton & Smith (1995),

descriptive reflection is distinguished by the introduction of alternatives and justifications while still exhibiting in a descriptive or reporting manner. According to Rivera (2017), Descriptive Reflection incorporates sentiment as well as personal judgment. This subjective assessment highlights the "I" component that sets reflection apart from other types of thought since, as Vos and Cowan (2009) note, "Thinking is not always reflective." According to Rivera (2017), descriptive reflection involves detailed experiences, decisions, answers, expressions of sentiments and desires or viewpoints with arguments, as well as individual judgment.

Dialogic reflection is the next level, according to Hatton and Smith (1995), who defined it as "stepping back from the events/actions leading to a different level of mulling over, discourse with self and exploring the experiences, events, and actions using qualities of judgment and possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesizing" (p. 19). The highest level of reflection is critical reflection, which, according to Hatton and Smith (1995), prompts acknowledgments that can lead to actions, refers to multiple perspectives, and is influenced by multiple different historical or simple

experiences, epistemologies, or sociopolitical contexts.

Reflective Journal

Learning involves more than just getting information; it also involves understanding it. It is necessary to encounter related events in order to learn, since "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). According to Dewey (1938), educational opportunities should promote meaningful learning. Additionally, relevant lessons are frequently based on students' everyday lives (Bennet et al., 2016). When students actively interact with appropriate information, they are engaged in meaningful learning. Such self-discovering acts are closely linked to practices that encourage reflectivity, which is why it is also crucial to investigate what kind of instruments could allow reflection to spark, as per Rogers (1982), who states that "the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered self-appropriated learning" (p. 223).

The format of the reflective journal itself has an impact on whether

it fosters the development of innovative thinking. A reflective journal serves as a platform for students to express themselves as they write about their learning experiences, what they believe they are learning in their classes, what they believe they are excellent at, and what they believe they are lacking in (Ahmed, 2019; Anderson, 2012). The experiences function in a connected cycle that provides rich information, mostly about the description of their own, and students may write intriguing themes, extend their creativity via easy compositions.

The association between crucial points in a reflective journal has an impact on how well the journal fosters critical thinking. In their reflective journals, students draw connections between theory and practice (Kerka, 1996). It also functions by looking at students' norms and convictions on a certain subject (Minott, 2008), which enables students to contextualize their academic and future lives. According to Moon (2006), the purposes of journals vary, with some just chronicling experiences with minimal thinking and others being deeply personal and introspective. Reflective journals enable pupils to perceive their thoughts (Freidus, 1991) regardless of

the subject matter by explicitly describing their aggressive ideas and behaviors (Andrews & Wheeler, 1990). In a nutshell, a reflective journal makes connections between crucial ideas, which prompts critical thinking.

Additionally, keeping a reflective journal helps students become more conscious of how they learn (Burton & Carroll, 2001). Through reading, examination, and prior reflective thinking after journal writing, students' writing products are purposefully corrected for better future access, and by doing so, they can recall and "utilize their experience as a basis for assessing and revising existing theories of action to develop more effective action strategies" (Osterman, 1990, p. 133) as well as to experience and reach professional learning as the goal. Writing in a reflective notebook also helps students become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (Sinclair & Woodward, 1997).

The reflective journal allows for this to happen since the writer is also serving as the reader, which makes it evident that the writer cannot instantly amend or withdraw thoughts if there is a misunderstanding between the reader and the writer (Hedge, 2005, p. 7). Additionally, it explains why kids

frequently take great care in their diaries. Additionally, according to Gil-Garcia & Cintron (2002), reflective journal writing enables students to engage in "self-assessment, collaborative critique, self-reflection, and goal setting" (p. The methodical stages of reflective journal writing, where students actively participate, have a lasting effect on long-term retention. In other words, students may participate in self-evaluation and progress monitoring.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to examine students' degree of reflective thinking in their reflective journals and how it affects the standard of their paragraph-based writing output. The study topics were addressed using a qualitative approach, namely a content analysis design. The research doesn't necessarily need to connect directly with living phenomena; it only needs associated documents. According to Krippendorff (2004) "A research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" is content analysis. Thus, content analysis is a suitable research method for achieving the study's goals.

This study was carried out at the Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University's English Education Department. It is situated in Serang, Banten Province Indonesia. The site was chosen for its accessibility, which in turn increases the study's viability (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The participants for this study were 15 students from the three classrooms of the third semester of the English Department's Paragraph-based Writing course in 2019–2020, with five students in each class. In order to grasp the research topic and the research questions, qualitative researchers must actively choose the people (or papers, or visual material). According to Creswell (2014), in order to make the categorization procedure for data analysis easier, those 15 students were selectively selected based on the consideration of both the quality of their journals and writings, with just five best from each class were picked.

Documentation and an open-ended questionnaire were the instruments employed to gather data to answer the research questions. The first and second research questions required students' reflective journals, and students' written outputs for the second. The documentation was a useful tool in addressing these issues.

According to Ary et al. (2006), the word "document" covers a wide range of textual, sexual, and visual materials, including what other scholars may describe as "artefacts" (p. 442). It may be implied that the use of documentation enabled the successful collection of the two papers required for the investigation.

The third research issue, on the other hand, required student responses, thus an open-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data. An open-ended questionnaire is one that includes questions intended to elicit a wide variety of responses that weren't previously anticipated (Hyman & Sierra, 2016). Additionally, according to Creswell (2008), this kind of questionnaire can reveal integrative steps that support the hypotheses in the literature under examination. It may be claimed that the use of an open-ended questionnaire allowed for the efficient collection of the different replies from the pupils.

Through the application of content analysis, as recommended by (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 83–87), this research's data were qualitatively examined. There are six phases in the content analysis process. To start, unitizing entails identifying any observable units of analysis relevant to

the researcher. The second phase is sampling, which is the process of reducing observations to controllable units that are anticipated to be representative of all potential units. In qualitative research, no "valid" sampling is necessary in the sense that a representative sample should ideally reflect the entire population. Thirdly, recording is done to turn phenomena into long-lasting recordings that may later be contrasted and evaluated. Original, unedited texts, photos, and even unstructured sounds will be converted into analyzable representations in this way. Fourth, combining units of analysis is done in decreasing, reducing to streamline the data and provide effective exhibits. Fifth, drawing inferences based on the outcomes of data analysis is known as abductive inference. The last method, narrating, involves recounting responses to make material understandable to readers.

RESULT

Students' Level of Reflective Thinking

Data analysis on students' level of reflective thinking revealed that students' level of reflective thinking revolves around Descriptive Writing and Descriptive Reflection levels of reflective thinking. 52% of the data is

dominated by the Descriptive Writing level of reflective thinking, then directly followed by 48% identified to be Descriptive Reflection level of reflective thinking, as displayed in Figure 1.

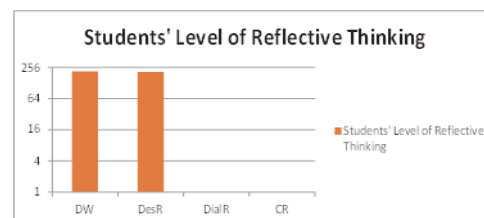


Figure 1. Students' Level of Reflective Thinking

Contribution of Reflective Thinking to The Students' Writing

Data analysis on the contribution of students' reflective thinking to the quality of their writing products revealed two corresponding patterns. First, the sight of improved number of Descriptive Reflection occurrence in students' journals is in line with the sight of advancement of students' writing products quality. Second, the sight of improved number of Descriptive Writing occurrences in students' journals is in line with the sight of deterioration of students' writing products quality. As shown in Figure 2. However, this article will only present the first one due to the limited number of words in this article.

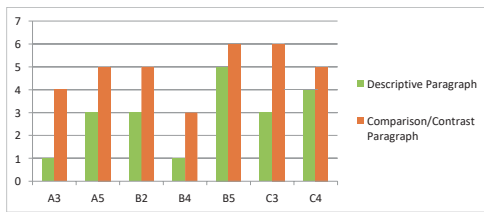


Figure 2. Improved Number of Descriptive Reflection

Figure 2 depicts data of students along with the improvement of number of Descriptive Reflection occurrences.

Students' Response on the Use of Reflective Journal

Data analysis showed on the third research questions revealed that students' responses are varied. The emerging themes of the responses were categorized into themes 'recall and 'aware'. The activity of writing reflective journals after writing paragraphs was done as an obliged part in the course. The questionnaire and interview result showed that this activity was important for the students as it lets them recall learning.

DISCUSSION

Although counted as the non-reflective, descriptive writing level is also depicted as the first steppingstone in reflective thinking levels. This category of level arose in almost all identified submitted reflective journals. This non-reflective record was substantially often found

as point of departure in the participants' reflective thinking.

B1 and C4's data performed to be with the most occurrences in this level which is 25 Descriptive Writing occurrences. As in C4, this partly is due to the large quantity of sentences count she put in the submitted reflective journals which is 46 sentences/occurrences, compared to the rest. Besides that, she also has the inclination to delve into her learning experiences in terms of technical stuff regarding the material in mere reports as exemplified in the following.

"The third is about consistent on using conjunction on each step." (Journal #2)

This occurrence indicates the value of Descriptive Writing as Hatton & Smith (1995) unveils this level to often deal with sole description of what happened in the course. Followed by B1, with 25 total sentences of journals, all of them are identified as this level of reflective thinking. B1's data does not show any higher-level occurrences as she showed tendency of stating technical stuff related to the material, focusing on the matter structure without even a hint of close- observing to show personal connection. As portrayed in the following:

"A process paragraph also consists about a series of steps that explains how something happens." (Journal #2)

Those occurrences in C4 and B1 data indicates the value of Descriptive Writing as a level which unveils only course matter without cognitive, confirming remark by Rivera (2017) which states Descriptive Writing solely deals with the appearance of term definitions. This occurrence also confirmed the state of Descriptive Writing level stated by Hatton & Smith (1995) that of this level of reflective thinking is the level which deals with report of literature which is not reflective at all, when it is not reflective, it means the occurrence does not even have any significance with the definition by Dewey (1938) which unveils reflective thinking as an activity between ideas and its forerunners chaining, ordering and linking through gathering thoughts to resolve issues.

Furthermore, data analysis showed that the Descriptive Reflective arose 50%.

Generating with considerable records of sentence count in the reflective journal, B5 revealed the most amount of descriptive reflection level. B5 showed Descriptive Reflection even

in the early stage of journal writing. It was first revealed in journal 1. It occurred when B5 showed such mental realization to show what he was feeling and justified a phenomenon during writing process of Descriptive Paragraph writing, without providing an attempt to probe more alternatives as in the following extract:

"The writing process of descriptive paragraph was so bad." (Journal #1)

Directly followed by:

"I thought that I was not get the lesson when I was on writing the paragraph." (Journal #1)

Those occurrences above indicate the state of reflection as a platform to show opinions on what was being felt as it confirmed remark by Rivera (2017) Descriptive Writing includes feeling as it involves the immersion of personal judgment. The occurrence also confirmed remark by Stein (2008) that uncovers the matter of reflective thinking which involves the act of perceiving potencies.

Along with B5, C5 showed quite accountable occurrences of this fashion. In journal 1, C5 showed judgement with the contribution of deliberation of feelings toward the experience, C5 showed a as in following extract:

"It was very interesting and new for me." (Journal #1)

This occurrence indicates the value of reflective thinking in Descriptive Reflection level which involves statement of one's awareness in a shape of mental realization, confirming statement by Rivera (2017) which uncovers Descriptive Reflection includes expression of feelings and wants.

On the other hand, although showed up with the least amount of sentence count, C2 reflective journals are totally dominated by the most satisfying occurrences of this level. C2 showed personal perspectives and attempts on giving rationales to what happened and the awareness of being connected to past experiences. It confirmed the value of Descriptive Reflection level as a level in which providing reasons on certain events as remarked by Hatton & Smith (1995) that Descriptive Reflection involves not only narration of events but also

Some attempts to provide alternates in a descriptive expression. It can be seen in this following example:

"The journey is rather larger than the previous paragraph about smoking, maybe this is because there are different kinds of people that

aren't usually in my group that pitch in their correction for me to better myself." (Journal #1)

This occurrence indicates the value of reflective thinking in which it provides possible reason, it confirms value of Descriptive Reflection by Hatton & Smith (1995) as Descriptive Reflection characterized by the appearance of alternate and rationale. This occurrence also confirms the value of Descriptive Reflection as Descriptive Reflection which manifest in elaborated experiences (Rivera, 2017).

Compared to another participant, B1 reflected no record at all in this fashion. From all four reflective journals, this level emerged not even once. It can be inferred that B1 reflective journals displayed less reflection sense compared to the others.

Furthermore, data analysis of the contribution of the reflective thinking to the quality of students' writing showed the dynamics between the quality of both types of paragraphs to the reflective journals, showing the clear contribution of reflective thinking to the writing products quality.

A3's data performed to show advancement, she gained the score 72 for her Descriptive Paragraph which

was submitted as the first official task that was taken into record in the semester, her score improved to be 86 in the Comparison/Contrast Paragraph task that was taken as a part of the latter half record of the semester. Her record on Descriptive Reflection occurrence showed improvement in her reflective journal. Her first journal following the Descriptive Paragraph possessed 1 Descriptive Reflection occurrence. However, her last journal following the Comparison/Contrast Paragraph possessed 4 Descriptive Reflection occurrences. This phenomenon indicates the fact that sight of reflective thinking in any way involves students to do revision over their works creating better outcomes which confirmed the value of reflective thinking by Sezer (2008) as it was remarked that it involves students in becoming aware and taking control of their learning by actively processing what is known, what needs to be known and how to fill in drawbacks.

A similar thing happened to A5. A5's data showed advancement as she gained 73 for the Descriptive Paragraph and 86 for the Comparison/Contrast Paragraph. It was allegedly believed that the phenomenon happened because A5

also has the record of improved Descriptive Reflection occurrences, her first journal possessed 3 Descriptive Reflection occurrences and 5 occurrences in the last journal. This phenomenon indicates that the existence of reflective thinking in any way intrigued students to learn from the past resulting better future doings which confirmed the value of reflective thinking remarked by Choy and Oo (2012) & Farrah (2012) that it supports elder experiences in a way that it affects recent doings practices (Choy & Oo, 2012).

As in B2 and C4's data, to the answer of their advanced quality of her writing products, it was shown that B2 also experienced improvement in the record of Descriptive Reflection occurrences from 3 occurrences in the first journal to 5 occurrences in the last journal. Along with that, C4 also showed improvement in the record of Descriptive Reflection occurrences from 4 occurrences to 5 occurrences. However, the rest of the students with improved number of Descriptive Reflection occurrences which were B4, B5 and C3 did not show any advancement in their writing products quality. It showed that even with no appearance of the prior alleged characteristics, advancement of

writing products quality was yet to be settled.

Moreover, factors of no advancement in texts qualities that were likely learned were varied. One could be described as wrong-targeted focus by the students, the fact that most of the students with no advancement in text qualities had improved number of Descriptive Reflection level occurrences. It indicated that students' focus was distracted, as they took reflective journal writing part as a task they prioritized, they lacked focus in the paragraph writing part. Students prioritizing reflective journal writing indicated that there was a certain challenge the reflective thinking carries inside. It was confirming the value of reflective thinking by McNamara (1990) as it needs time and opportunity, added to this reflective thinking is also in need of deeper enigma (Anderson, 2012; Bella et al, 2011; Farrah, 2012; Helyer, 2012). Those challenges carried brought by reflective thinking in reflective journal writing distracted students from doing their best in the actual task of paragraph writing.

Furthermore, data analysis of the students' responses on the use of reflective journal showed positive

responses as depicted in the following responses.

C3 noted:

"It helps me to remind myself about what had I learnt" (C3)

Feeling the same way, A5 stated:

"I think it's important to note what we have learned before and to reminds it."(A5)

The comments made by C3 and A5 confirmed the position of reflective journal writing as an important activity that it involves students in noting "their personal reactions to question about, and reflections on what they read, write, observe, listen to, discuss, do, and think" (Pearson, 1994, p.12). In addition, Ahmed (2019) argued that Reflective assignments were effective in motivating students to develop their learning strategies and actively engage in self-reflective practice that would be useful for them as managers in the future. This implied that reflective practice through journal writing is beneficial for students' present and future learning.

Furthermore, A4 stated that reflective journal not only helped them recall lessons. It also helped them to be aware of shortcomings. As noted,

"It really helped us to remember certain lessons we got from the mistake that we made. (A4)

Likewise, C1 and B2 comments indicated the value of reflective journal as a tool to help them to be aware of shortcomings confirming remarks by Sezer (2008) that thinking reflectively also means becoming aware and taking control of one's learning by actively processing what is known, what needs to be known and how to fill in drawbacks. As noted:

"made me even more aware that there were many mistakes in my writing." (C1)

"Writing reflective journals makes us becomes know about some mistake that we made while we wrote it. "(B2)

The Three participants' responses implied that the use of a learning journal can be used as a pedagogical instrument that can provide an innovative and flexible approach to teaching, learning, and assessment that promotes multi-layered learning (Anderson, 2012; Bennet, et al., 2016). Thus, a teacher needs to promote its use in their teaching and be able to

optimally make use of it for their students' learning success.

CONCLUSION

This study showed three things. First, most of the students' reflective thinking fell into the descriptive writing and descriptive reflection levels. The students' capacity to delve deeply into their learning experiences in terms of technical information on the topic in the form of simple reports was demonstrated by the descriptive writing level of reflective thinking discovered in the reflective journals. They could also speak in scientific terms about the subject matter, concentrating entirely on the issue's structure and avoiding any attempt to use it as a means of personal seduction.

The reflective journals' descriptive reflection level, on the other hand, demonstrated the students' capacity to convey their feelings to others by using their own mental realizations. Along with the role of reflection on events and the knowledge of connection, personal judgments and viewpoints were also discovered. They also showed the ability to explain a phenomenon throughout the paragraph-writing process and provide explanations for what

occurred, despite the lack of attempts to go deeper into other possibilities.

Second, two patterns emerged in the contribution of reflective thought to the caliber of students' writing. First, the increased frequency of descriptive reflections at this level is consistent with the improvement in the caliber of students' writing. Additionally, there is no connection between the improvement of descriptive reflection level occurrence and the decline in writing output quality. Only when lower levels of reflective thinking are improved does the quality of written output decline. The appearance of increased Descriptive Writing level occurrence has also been linked to a decline in the caliber of pupils' writing. Additionally, there is no correlation between the progress of writing product quality and the amount of descriptive writing. The improvement of a higher degree of reflective thinking is the single factor that influences the quality of literary output.

Third, there is good feedback from the students on the course. Despite being seen as difficult, the course's writing assignment and the lecturer's delivery style enabled the students to compose well-structured paragraphs and ensured quality

writing results. The self-reflection notebooks were demanding and demanding. However, given that the kids were able to memorize the lesson and learn from their mistakes, it was a realistic expectation. The course ended, and the students felt they had done well on the last assignments. They were appreciative of the lessons they learned thanks to the reflective diaries. But for the same reason, they believed they could perform better.

According to the results, it can be concluded that reflective journaling helps students develop their writing skills and may be used in place of other methods to enhance other skills.

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