

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter briefly explains some theories that support the study. The theories related to reflective journal writing in EFL classrooms, its benefits, and its obstacles. It also includes some relevant studies.

#### **2.1 Reflective Learning in EFL Classroom**

Reflection is a technique that helps students to delve into and comprehend their emotions, thoughts, and knowledge. This text carefully contemplates academic content, personal experiences, and connections between people. Reflection is a type of self-examination that expands the importance of concepts and enhances the comprehension of how to apply them in daily life and professional endeavours (Chang, 2019). Reflection is a crucial component of the learning process. It allows students to return to what they have learned, enhancing their understanding, and delving deeper into the subject matter. It permits students to record their educational experience and offer recommendations and guidance for future students. Students can acknowledge and appreciate their ongoing learning and skill development by contemplation. Moreover, reflective practice is one approach for analysing and evaluating what is occurring in the classroom and helping teachers improve the quality of their teaching (Yoshihara et al., 2019).

Scholars have widely discussed reflection and categorised reflection from different angles. As cited in the journal by Chang (2019), Scholars have categorised reflection into different types depending on their function, structure, and timeline. Regarding its function, reflection encompasses personal reflection and reflection on classroom practice. In terms of its structure, reflection involves scaffolding, reframing, and debriefing. Regarding a timeline, reflection can take the form of looking back on past actions, analysing ongoing activities, or contemplating future actions.

Documentation for reflection-in-action includes classroom observations, reflective journals, and videotaping classrooms (Farrell, 2015). In this current study, the teacher has documented reflection-in-action using reflective journals, so

the benefits and obstacles of writing reflective journals were investigated. In addition, keeping a journal can assist students in connecting with their responses to readings, behaviour, experiments, group discussions, work encounters, and interpersonal connections. This will assist students in reflecting on their thinking process, promoting the merging of theory and practice, and function as a documentation of their program experiences and learning.

In the Asian context, for example, reflection is implemented through courses like Micro-teaching and Teaching Practicum that are part of university-based teacher education programs to help pre-service teachers establish reflection routines (Cirocki et al., in press; Widodo, 2018). The underlying belief of reflective practice is that it enables pre-service teachers to utilise theory in real-life situations, resulting in enhanced classroom performance and professional growth through experiential learning (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017a).

One of the journals written by Girocki and Widodo (2019) mentioned that in the past five years, reflective practice has also been documented in Indonesia – the context of the current contribution. These studies explored how pre-service teachers of English are involved in reflective practice in the Teaching Practicum module mentioned above (Kuswandono, 2014; Widodo & Ferdiansyah, 2018). For instance, Widodo and Ferdiansyah (2018) explored how English student teachers reflected on their practicum experience through video-based journaling (e.g., writing a reflective journal after watching filmed footage) and photo voicing (e.g., documenting a moment of teaching by digital photography). The student teachers could connect their theoretical knowledge to classroom events by continuing reflection with these techniques. Moreover, they were required to deliver a rationale for what occurred in the classroom, thus combining theory, research, and practice.

In addition, thinking reflectively is considered as important as writing reflectively. For university students, thinking reflectively or doing reflection is an important activity that helps them find meaningful learning based on their daily experiences (Benne et al., 2016). Thinking by writing is an effective way to make decisions carefully and deeply, and it can also improve awareness of the environment, situation, experience, and themselves to act better in the future life

(Sani, et al., 2018). It can be concluded that reflection in learning is necessary for students to revisit what they have learned for improvement and in-depth learning. It allows students to document their learning journey and provide references and suggestions for future students. According to Helyer (2015) through reflection, students will become skilled at acknowledging that they are constantly learning and developing abilities (as cited from Chang, 2019).

## **2.2 Reflective Journal Writing**

Reflective journals are written documents that students produce while reflecting on different ideas, events, or exchanges to understand themselves better and enhance their learning abilities (Thorpe, 2004 in Alt et al., 2022). Likewise, journal writing records personal insights, reflections, and questions on assigned topics (Abednia et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2021; Arifin, S., 2021). Reflective journals aim to assist students in developing their metacognitive skills, which are the ability to reflect on one's learning process and to turn experience into knowledge. This is in line with Sudirman et al. (2021), who state that writing reflective journals is supposed to have the power to bridge the gap between existing and new knowledge. As a learning tool, writing a reflective journal promotes critical thinking (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018), cognitive task complexity (Johnson, 2017), metacognition, and self-efficacy (Zhang, 2016; Zhenget et al., 2018), and self-awareness of following knowledge (Sudirman et al., 2021).

Learning Centre of the University of New South Wales (2008) identifies some characteristics of reflective journal writing that it contains: (a) students' responses to experiences, opinions, events, or new information, (b) students' responses to thoughts and feelings, (c) students' way of thinking to explore their learning, (d) an opportunity to gain self-knowledge, (e) a way to achieve clarity and a better understanding of what they are learning, (f) a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills, (g) a way of making meaning out of what they study. Another point of attributes characterise reflective journals are: 'written, dated, informal, flexible, private and archival' (Stevens & Cooper, 2009, pp. 5–7). Learning goals of reflective journaling:

1. To enable students to observe their learning process, explain their reactions to specific content, and thereby profoundly engage with the course content,
2. To challenge students to become aware (consider/describe) their values, beliefs, standpoints,
3. To challenge students to examine their values, beliefs, standpoints, and experiences,
4. To lead students to question, contextualise, and explain values, beliefs, standpoints,
5. To create space and opportunities for students to improve (to see the need for transformative action),
6. To enable students to differentiate between description and reflection,
7. To enable students to distinguish between different levels of reflective practices (reflection and self-reflexivity),
8. To enable regular practice of reflective writing.

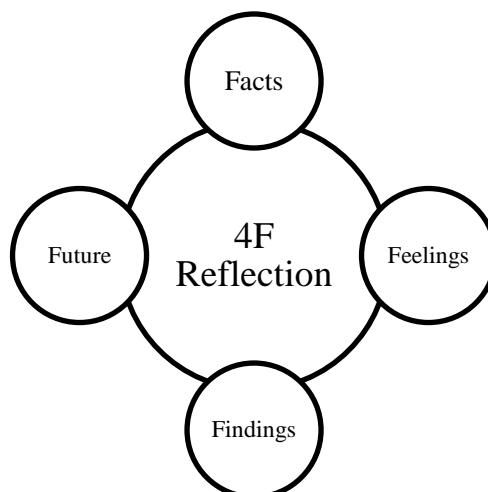
Previous work summarized by Kendall and Associates (1990) in *Combining Service Learning: A resource book for community and public service*. Types of reflective journals include:

1. Personal journal: Students free-write journal entries each week about any aspect of the service-learning experience. If personal journals are submitted to the teacher, students can maintain a sense of privacy by earmarking pages they prefer not to be read by others.
2. Dialogue journal: Students submit loose-leaf pages from the dialogue journal weekly for the teacher to read and comment on. Dialogue journals could also be read by a peer (Goldsmith, 1995).
3. Highlighted journal: Before students submit the reflective journal, they reread personal entries and, using a highlighter, mark sections of the journal that directly relate to concepts discussed in the text or class. This makes it easier for the teacher to identify the academic connections made during the reflective process.
4. Key phrase journal: Students are asked to integrate terms and key phrases within their journal entries. The teacher can provide a list of terms at the

beginning of the semester or for a certain portion of the text. Students could also create their list of key phrases to include. Journal entries are written within the framework of the course content and become an observation of how course content is evident in the service experience.

5. Double-entry journal: Students are asked to write two one-page entries each week: Students describe their thoughts and reactions to the service experience on the left page of the journal and write about key issues from class discussion or readings on the right page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experience and course content. This type of journal is a compilation of personal data and a summary of course content in preparation for a more formal reflective paper at the end of the semester (Angelo & Cross, 1993).
6. Critical incident journal: This type of journal entry focuses the student on the analysis of a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future. Describe a significant event that occurred (societal, interpersonal, curricular) that surfaced because of this experience.
7. Three-part journal: Students are asked to divide each page of their journal into thirds, and write weekly entries during the semester. In the top section, students describe some aspects of the service experience. In the middle of the page, they are asked to analyse how course content relates to the service experience. Finally, an application section prompts students to comment on how their experiences and course content can be applied to their personal or professional lives.

In this study, the teacher used types of dialogue journal and reflection models from Dr Roger Greenaway (2018), namely 4F's reflection:



**Figure 2. 1** 4F's Reflection Model

Multiple questions can assist in forming the reflective analysis using the 4 Fs of active reviewing. Below are the questions for each case.

1. Facts

In this section, the students will underline the obvious incidents that happened during the experience they want to reflect upon. This section will look at the situations objectively in an account of what exactly happened. In this study, the teacher gives the facts question: How do you do the project?

2. Feelings

Second F will focus on feelings that an individual experiences. Effective understanding of the students' feelings during the incident will assist in getting a better picture of finding the main reasons behind things that happened in the way they did. However, the students must make sure that they do not mistake their feelings for judgment. This could result in a biased reflective analysis. In this study, the teacher gives the feelings question: What do you feel when doing the project?

3. Findings

The third F is about findings. At this stage, the students start investigating and introspecting the whole experience to draw out the main

findings. In this section, the teacher gives the findings question: What do you think about the result?

#### 4. Future

The last and the most important F will assist the students in evaluating all their learnings. Further, all these driven learnings will assist the students in creating an action plan for the implementation of all learnings in the future. In this study, the teacher asks the following question: What will you do for the future project?

4F's reflection model can be used to think and reflect on a situation and can help structure written reflections. The model is easy to remember and covers the main aspects of what is helpful to consider when reviewing an experience.

### **2.3 The Benefits of Reflective Journal Writing**

In the EFL setting, it is reported that reflective journal writing has many benefits for students, such as increasing students' writing competence generally, which includes the frequency and accuracy of using cohesive devices, generic meanings, cohesion, and textual environment (Alfalagg, 2020). In addition, a reflective journal also enhances self-discovery, self-inquiry, critical ideas, advancement of cognitive and metacognitive skills, creativity, self-organisation, and professional practice development, among others. Sulastri et al. (2022) added reflection has been one of the important tools for knowing one's strengths and weaknesses. It also encourages the development of the students' higher-order cognitive skills, such as monitoring, inference, and perspective-taking (Kim & Park, 2019), and students' reflective skills (So et al., 2018). It is also reported that reflective journal writing facilitates students' reflection on their personal opinions, activities, and learning experiences, enabling them to develop new awareness and understanding of learning activities (Boud, 2001). Reflective writing in a journal helps students connect their learning experiences (Fisher, 1996) and use background materials relevant to their individual learning experiences (Hashemi & Mirzaei, 2015).

Based on the explanation above, reflective journal writing is an effective technique to make the students communicate their personal feelings, ideas, thoughts, and learning experiences, such as their difficulties or even what they like in a topic given in written form. A reflective journal is not a collection of students' lesson material notes but a written record of students' reflections and thoughts during the learning activity. It encourages students to become involved and interested in learning because the reflective journal allows them to express their feelings. The students may write about their learning goals, reflections on their learning, or their learning development. Reflective journal writing has pedagogical implications for teachers and students in an ESL/EFL classroom. It develops the students' metacognition, an essential requirement that allows them to be aware of their learning needs and plan, monitor and evaluate their learning process. As for the teachers, when the students' metacognition is increased, it helps them design and deliver their course content successfully (Baresh, 2022).

#### **2.4 The Obstacles of Reflective Journal Writing**

Despite the numerous benefits of using reflective journals, they are imperfect in some respects. First, reflection is a complex, rigorous, intellectual, and emotional enterprise that takes time to do well' (Rodgers, 2002). Second, the definitions of reflection, along with its criteria, processes, and teaching techniques, are not transparent (Procee,2006; Rogers,2001; Russell,2005). Third, university students must be trained consistently and systematically and taught over time to produce profound reflective writing (Bain et al.,2002; Orland-Barak,2005). In addition, many student journals have been perceived as descriptive with limited reflection (Jensen & Joy,2005; Minott,2008; Wessel & Larin,2006). Moreover, teachers find giving feedback to students on their reflective journals a time-consuming process, resulting in students not wanting to continue using journal assignments (Moon,2006; Pavlovich,2007; Thorpe,2004). Another challenge is that when students write their reflective journals, they consider what their teachers like to read to get a high mark (Crème,2005).



Thus, learners, especially EFL, should be aware of evidence-based writing and have some basic English language skills, editing skills, or peer feedback (Balderaset & Cuamatzi, 2018), as these would help to minimise multiple revisions and teachers' comments. Thus, implementing reflective journal writing in the EFL context could be better if second or third-year students are used to it because they have at least acquired basic English vocabulary, spelling, sentence formation, and punctuation. Reflective journal writing may be challenging for first-year students because some are not used to regular writing in their previous schools, while others lack basic English skills.

## **2.5 Study of Relevant Research**

The study of reflective journal writing has received much discussion by scholars. Ahmed (2022) used a case study methodology to explore the impact of reflective journals on Qatari undergraduate students' learning and its challenges in an English writing course. The study revealed that students experienced the following learning moments in their English writing course: engaging, invaluable, surprising, challenging, novel, perplexing, worrying, enlightening, and transferable. Moreover, participants reported a few benefits and challenges of using reflective journals peculiar to the Qatari context. Also, the participants revealed four challenges with using reflective journals: the inability to reflect elaborately, a fixed template for reflection, a routine task, and a time-consuming task.

Further, Kis and Kartal (2019) found out the benefits and problems that student teachers experience throughout the process of reflective practice in large classes. Participants acknowledged that involvement in reflective practices helped them develop self-awareness, criticality, and reflective mindsets while also expanding their understanding of new content. They also indicated three major challenges in observing self and peers, and writing journals: lack of reflective skills, time pressure, and repetitive process. The researchers conclude that implementing reflective practices is demanding but attainable in large classes.

Tahmasbi et al. (2022) in their study implemented reflective journal writing through action research and aimed to investigate (1) the participants' views

about reflective journal writing, (2) the effects of journal writing on reflective thinking development, and (3) the learners' grammar uses in writing. The data collected used analyses of the participants' journals, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and final exam scores were considered. The findings showed that the participants had positive views about journal writing and that they could enhance their level of reflective thinking and grammar use in writing. They could enhance their level of reflective thinking.

Another study by Aliyu et al. (2023) adopted a pre-and-post quasi-experimental research design and employed a reflective journal writing strategy to develop undergraduate metacognitive awareness and writing performances. The study results show a significant improvement in the participants' metacognitive awareness level and writing skills after writing the reflective journals.

The fourth relevant study shows that reflective journal writing is crucial today. Implementing reflective writing-based courses and training in university curricula can benefit students by increasing professional development and improving students' learning performances. Moreover, identifying students' learning experiences has benefits for teachers and students. Ma'rifah et al. (2020) said that it assesses all student's strengths and weaknesses, identifying shared interests and specific needs for individual and group learning. In addition, to fill the gap in reflective writing in listening and speaking areas, the researcher aimed to investigate the benefits and obstacles of writing reflective journals in a Professional listening and speaking classroom.