

The Role of Reflective Journaling in Creative Writing Learning

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe the role of reflective journals in learning creative writing. By using a qualitative approach, information was obtained about student responses about the use of reflective journals in creative writing learning. Sixteen students were randomly selected to share their experiences using reflective journals. The research results show that students can creatively produce creative writing as a form of freedom of imagination and thinking creatively. In creative writing, the process starting from finding ideas, collecting written material, and evaluating needs to be the main consideration rather than the final product because good products are produced through a complex writing process. Reflective journals in this case help students monitor and control their freedom of thought.

Keywords: Role, Reflective Journal, Creative Writing

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran jurnal reflektif dalam pembelajaran menulis kreatif. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif diperoleh informasi tentang tanggapan mahasiswa tentang penggunaan jurnal reflektif dalam pembelajaran menulis kreatif. Sebanyak 16 orang mahasiswa dipilih secara acak untuk memberikan informasi pengalaman mereka menggunakan jurnal reflektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa secara kreatif dapat menghasilkan tulisan-tulisan yang kreatif sebagai bentuk kebebasan berimajinasi dan kebebasan berpikir secara kreatif. Dalam menulis kreatif, proses yang dilakukan mulai dari penemuan ide, mengumpulkan bahan tulisan, dan evaluasi yang dilakukan perlu menjadi pertimbangan utama ketimbang produk akhir karena produk yang bagus dihasilkan melalui proses menulis yang kompleks. Jurnal reflektif dalam hal ini membantu mahasiswa mengawal dan mengontrol kebebasan berpikir tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Peran, Jurnal Reflektif, Menulis Kreatif

INTRODUCTION

Learning through reflection is one of the most engaging experiences that learners can have. Through reflection, learners can assess themselves to what extent their abilities reach and what efforts they can make to complete tasks. They are allowed to think and reflect on their learning, noting the obstacles they face during the process. Meanwhile, educators ensure that their learners are fully engaged in the meaning-making process (Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2017).. Considering the importance of self-reflection in learning, reflective journals are increasingly used as a tool for reflection in higher education. Reflective journals serve as a means to facilitate and assess learning (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2009).

The use of reflective journals in higher education adds a new dimension to learners' education. By documenting their experiences and thoughts, learners not only enhance self-understanding but also identify effective learning patterns or challenges that need to be overcome (Lubis, 2023). Additionally, reflective journals serve as a tool for educators to gain a deeper understanding of learners' development and thinking. The reflection process strengthens learners' engagement in the learning process, creating an environment that supports the exploration of new ideas and the development of creativity (Arief & Wiratman, 2023; Yanti &

Novitasari, 2021). With the growing use of reflective journals, it is expected that learners will not only become more independent but also be able to integrate their learning experiences into their personal and professional development. Overall, reflective journals serve not only as an evaluation tool but also as a crucial means of shaping more comprehensive and empowered learners.

The writing of reflective journals is a process of thinking and exploring issues triggered by experience (Walker, 2006). Reflective journals are used with the aim that learners can use them to enhance their own learning. In terms of learning, journals serve as a means to record events and experiences, process those experiences, and shape new ones (Boud, 2001). Experiences are understood in such a way that the results are used to build new experiences and ultimately trigger new learning. Boud's described reflective model contains two assumptions. First, learning is always based on previous experiences, and any effort to promote new learning must take those experiences into account. Second, the learning process from experience is an active process involving learners engaged with events.

Reflection is often overlooked in the learning process, despite playing a crucial role with three key aspects. First, only the learner can learn and reflect on their personal experiences. While educators can provide interventions to assist, they can only access the thoughts and feelings expressed by learners. Second, reflection is done with a purpose, not just as a contemplative activity but as an effort that directly contributes to learning goals. Third, the reflection process is a complex one where emotions and cognition are closely related and interact. Negative feelings, especially towards oneself, can be a major hindrance in the learning process. Negative emotions can impede reflection by leading to misinterpretations of various events and even undermine the motivation to continue learning. Conversely, positive feelings and emotions can enhance the learning process, keeping learners focused on tasks and providing motivation to explore new learning.

In pursuing continuous and meaningful learning, it is important for learners to recognize that reflection is not just about looking back at past experiences but also about planning steps forward (Kainde & Tahya, 2020; Sutiah & Pd, 2020). Through a deep understanding of the learning process, learners can identify effective strategies, plan improvements, and apply new knowledge to their life contexts (Alfiah et al., 2018). Goal-directed reflective approaches provide a foundation for learners to grow and develop holistically. Therefore, creating a learning environment that supports and motivates learners to reflect with intent is a key factor in the success of reflection in the learning process. Thus, reflection becomes not only a self-evaluation tool but also a driver of personal and professional growth. In the overall educational context, emphasis on the significance of reflection brings widespread positive impacts, creating a generation of learners capable of independent learning, adapting to changes, and continually evolving throughout their lives.

Previous research has found that reflective journals offer various benefits, such as self-expression, summarizing event notes, and therapeutic purposes (Boud, 2001). They also enhance the learning experience (Estrada et al., 2014), facilitate and assess reflection (Tang, 2002), and contribute to improving learning motivation (Amirkhanova et al., 2016). However, reflective journal writing in higher education has not received much attention because not everyone realizes the importance of journals as a tool for self-reflection. This research utilizes reflective journals in creative writing learning. Furthermore, it seeks feedback from learners regarding the implementation of reflective journals in learning. Therefore, the study aims to describe the role of reflective journals in creative writing learning, considering their application in teaching and learners' responses to the use of reflective journals in learning.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to depict students' responses after using reflective journals in creative writing learning. The subjects of this study are students who have undergone creative writing instruction using reflective journals as a guide in writing. A total of 16 student subjects were selected to provide information about their learning experiences using reflective journals. The instrument used is a set of closed-ended interview questions distributed through Google Forms. Data was collected in two ways: conducting creative writing instruction and providing reflective journals to guide students' creative writing processes, along with posing questions to gather student responses to the use of reflective journals in creative writing. Data was analyzed by reading and summarizing students' responses to the use of reflective journals in creative writing instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Reflective Journals in Creative Writing Learning

Reflective journals serve as a crucial instrument for students in guiding and controlling the quality of the creative writing they produce. Each reflective journal provided to students contains a set of reflective questions related to their experiences during writing assignments, including efforts made in gathering material and completing the writing. These questions act as a guide for students to report on their efforts in completing tasks, as well as a tool for evaluating their thinking skills in writing (Ramadhanti et al., 2020). Consequently, they can understand the strategies they have employed and the extent to which they have achieved their learning goals (Swanson, 1984).

These reflective journals include specific questions designed to control the execution of writing tasks in various genres, such as poetry, short stories, biography, essays, and opinions. These questions cover the following aspects:

- a) Describe your process of finding story ideas from your surroundings to be used as the thesis in writing (poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion)!
- b) Explain how familiar you are with the theme and topic you are going to write into a poem/short story/biography/essay/opinion!
- c) Explain why you chose that topic for your writing (poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion)!
- d) What strategies did you use while gathering information for composing poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion?
- e) How long did it take and how much information did you need to complete poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion?
- f) How familiar are you with the writing (poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion) you have written?
- g) What difficulties did you encounter while writing poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion?
- h) What efforts did you make to overcome difficulties and weaknesses in writing poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion?
- i) What interesting things did you feel during gathering information and writing a poem/short story/biography/essay/opinion?

- j) How do you determine that the essay you wrote can be considered a creative work of poetry/short story/biography/essay/opinion?
- k) Summarize your creative process in writing an essay, starting from planning ideas, developing ideas into a poem/short story/biography/essay/opinion, and evaluating the written results!

Students' Responses to the Use of Reflective Journals

Reflective journals are used as companions for students in writing and as tools to assess their abilities and thinking processes in producing creative writings. Based on interviews conducted with 16 selected students, information was obtained about their learning experiences using reflective journals in creative writing classes. Specifically, inquiries were made regarding students' assessment of the use of reflective journals in creative writing classes, their learning experiences in creative writing using reflective journals, weaknesses encountered in using reflective journals, benefits of using reflective journals in creative writing instruction, and evaluations of the use of reflective journals for future learning.

Firstly, students' assessments of their learning experiences using reflective journals. According to their evaluations, reflective journals play a crucial role in creative writing learning by facilitating writing, enhancing creativity and creative thinking, providing guidance and instructions in producing a work systematically as documented in the reflective journals, making creative writing learning enjoyable, helping instructors understand the process and creativity levels of students, preventing plagiarism as all writing processes are recorded in reflective journals, and assisting students in creating their own creative writing processes by reflecting on each writing stage and its associated weaknesses. Reflective journals also help students produce writing more systematically; for instance, in writing poetry, students can generate pure poetry from their own thoughts, from ideation to the creation of a creative poetry work. Through reflective journals, instructors can also identify students' weaknesses in writing and provide solutions to the challenges they face.

Secondly, students' learning experiences using reflective journals in creative writing classes. Some of their experiences are summarized below. (a) Students mentioned that initially, they struggled with writing while reporting writing activities through reflective journals. However, reflective questions in the journal helped them build their imagination in writing, as every process from ideation to writing is recorded in the reflective journal. (b) Students who initially faced difficulties in writing felt assisted by the reflective questions in the journal, allowing them to produce writings according to the guidance and instructions provided by those questions. (c) Students mentioned that writing while documenting writing activities in the journal was a new experience for them and became an attraction as they could capture every writing process through the journal. (d) Students felt that with the existence of the journal, the writing process they underwent felt more appreciated because instructors not only assessed the written product but also evaluated the writing process. (e) Students felt they gained good writing experiences in addition to the freedom to imagine in producing creative writings.

Thirdly, weaknesses encountered during the use of reflective journals. Some weaknesses experienced by students in using reflective journals in creative writing instruction include time constraints leading to difficulties in reporting the process and stages of obtaining writing ideas in the journal. Additionally, unfamiliarity with using reflective journals made it challenging for students to understand the purpose of the questions inside the journal, and confusion about writing ideas made them less interested in reporting their writing process in the reflective journal. Instead of reporting weaknesses, some students stated that they found convenience and

experienced specific benefits while using reflective journals, especially for developing their understanding and creativity in writing, assisting in completing writing tasks, and feeling free to present ideas in the form of creative writing.

Fourthly, positive benefits of using reflective journals in creative writing learning. Benefits obtained by students using reflective journals in learning include serving as a tool for self-reflection to produce quality writings, facilitating the generation of writing ideas, feeling free to imagine and write, understanding how to write effectively, increasing creativity in writing, making writing and structuring sentences and paragraphs easier, recognizing that writers must place themselves as readers to determine whether the writing is understandable, having more directed and systematic writing processes, and understanding the development of writing over time as recorded in the journal. In addition, questions in the reflective journal challenge students to collect data directly from data sources, for example, in writing a biography. In writing a biography, students directly gather data in the field by meeting data sources and conducting interviews according to the needs of the writing.

Fifthly, the future evaluation of creative writing learning using reflective journals. Some student perspectives on the use of reflective journals in the future include that reflective journals can be a bridge for students to produce higher quality writings, using reflective journals in learning as an effort to understand the creative aspects students have undertaken and the weaknesses they have experienced, and what efforts can be made to overcome those weaknesses. Additionally, the questions in the journal guide students to think creatively and lead them to produce good writing.

Based on these interview findings, several key notes were identified regarding the use of reflective journals in creative writing learning. In creative writing, the process needs to be a primary consideration over the

product because a good product is generated through a complex writing process. Freedom to think of ideas in creative writing is crucial, and instructors should not restrict students' freedom to think creatively. In this regard, reflective journals help students monitor and control their freedom of creative thinking. This is considering that reflective journals provide space for participants to sort out learning and experiences and examine their thoughts, follow up on their learning experiences, and as an effort to explore participants' interest tendencies towards learning. In writing learning, reflective journals are seen as a tool to understand metacognitive development (Henter & Indreica, 2016) and as an effective technique in learning (Farrah, 2012), as well as an approach to enhancing students' learning experiences (Estrada et al., 2014).

Several previous studies have also supported the use of reflective journals in the context of creative writing learning. Reflective journals have benefits as a form of self-expression, event summaries, and therapy (Musdalifah & Rahmawati, 2023; Sudirman et al., 2021). Reflective journals can enhance learning experiences (Zazuli, 2012). Reflective journals can facilitate and assess self-reflection (Chaetsunnajah & Badawi, 2023). Reflective journals can be used as an effort to increase learning motivation (San Fauziya et al., 2020). These findings provide a strong foundation to continue research on the role of reflective journals in creative writing learning.

The theory supporting the use of reflective journals in learning also involves the concept of metacognition. Setiawan and Susilo note that reflective journals can help develop metacognition, which is self-awareness of the learning process and self-regulation of understanding (Setiawan & Susilo, 2015). In this view, reflective journals not only record the final results of writing but also capture the thinking process, challenges faced, and strategies applied during writing. This concept of metacognition strengthens the idea that self-understanding and self-regulation through reflection can enhance the quality and self-awareness of creative writing learning. Therefore, this

research builds on previous findings and metacognition theory to further explore the role of reflective journals in the context of creative writing learning at the university level.

CONCLUSION

Reflective journals can be used as a tool to determine the creative process of students in writing. Creative writing is created through thinking processes accompanied by experiences. Participants' experiences in writing are recorded in their journals, which can serve as notes on their creative process in writing or producing creative pieces. The actions taken by educators include preparing appropriate instruments to assign students to write, providing journal guidelines to record the creative process of students in writing, reading students' creative processes through journals, and assisting students in overcoming their weaknesses in writing. Other necessary steps include ensuring students' readiness for learning and motivating them that reflective journals are the most effective self-reflection tool in writing, especially creative writing. Actions to be taken by students include understanding that reflective journals are tools for self-reflection. Through reflective journals, students are guided to produce more creative, structured writing and are given space for free imagination. All weaknesses experienced are freely conveyed in the journal, and efforts are made to overcome these weaknesses through various problem-solving approaches in writing.

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