

Impact of Journal Writing as a Part of Reflective Practices

Dr. Afshan Naseem¹ & Dr. Rizwan Akram Rana²

¹*Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.*

E-Mail: afshan.naseem@umt.edu.pk

²*Professor, Mukabbir University of Science and Technology, Gujrat, Pakistan. E-Mail: rizwan.akram@mukabbiruniversity.edu.pk*

Abstract

Written reflective journals enable students to discover effective learning strategies by reflecting on and understanding their own circumstances during the learning process. This study explores the impact of journal writing as a part of reflective practices on students' learning. The study shows the importance of journal writing and how it contributes to students' learning. The study was qualitative in nature and used a phenomenological design. One hundred and thirty-three BEd (Hons.) program students made up the study's sample. Written reflective journals served as a tool for collecting their reflections. Nine reflections from each student were gathered weekly. Reflections were collected, and feedback was given on a weekly basis. On analysis, it was revealed that most students found the topic useful when it was connected to their prior experiences. They also discovered their strengths and weaknesses and developed systematic problem-solving techniques. Data analysis demonstrated that reflective practices and innovative teaching approaches could both enhance students' learning. The research suggests that teachers should receive training on the implementation of written reflective journals, including guidance on the appropriate timing, methods, and rationale for students to engage in this writing practice.

Keywords: Impact, Reflection, Reflective Practices, Writing Journal, Peer Learning.

Introduction

Reflective Practice is a well-known approach seeking to learn through the purposeful and thoughtful reflection on experience in order to gain new insights and develop an effective instruction practice (McCormick, 2023). According to Schon (1983; cited as in Colemer et al. 2013), reflective practice involves a dialogue between doing and thinking which leads to

improvement of skills. This bridge theory with practical knowledge and acts as an important tool to bring theory to practice. The term 'reflective practice' in education 'to reflect' refers to continual personal shaping. It involves thinking back on significant events in one's own life experience. Throughout the world, many instructors in teacher education programs and teacher training institutions favour the incorporation of reflective practice into the most popular learning style as a good teaching strategy. Reflection is essential to the learning process because it increases learning efficiency, according to numerous studies (Hamilton & Mallett, 2023; Iman et al., 2024; Stevens & Cooper, 2023). Keeping a journal is one of the most effective ways to reflect, learn, and make sense of our lives. The diversity in reflections relies on its relationship to the activity occurring. Reflection catches the conceptualization of information, considerations, and sentiments that are concealed in ordinary class routines (YuekMing & Manaf, 2014).

The current study's objective is to investigate how journal writing affects students' learning in the context of Pakistan. The significance of the current study lies in its potential to improve students' learning. By rethinking and understanding their own circumstances, students can find effective learning strategies by keeping written reflective journals. In this way, observing students' own learning activities to support their learning strategies may require reflection to a great extent. Similarly, journaling, reflection, and experiences can help students develop their capacity to find solutions to get through challenging situations. The ongoing research contributes to the body of literature already in existence and provides empirical evidence supporting the link between reflective practices and students' learning. Additionally, this research offers broader advantages. Additionally, teachers gain a broader understanding of students' learning environments through the written reflective journals.

Reflection

In deliberate learning, reflection is expected in the powerful course of examining one's own experiences. Hence the most common way of learning is connected with reflections demonstrating to consider a wide range of data which helps with grasping the state of individual practices and their sources. A reflection is an act of individual reaction to pertinent encounters, conditions, activities, or new knowledge. In the handling stage of reflection, learning happens in a deliberate and sensible way. When it comes to reflective thinking, there are no right or wrong answers, it's just questions to ask. One essential element of learning is reflection.

The capacity to recognize difficulties and respond to them allows student teachers to develop into competent teachers by learning about the

classroom environment, practicing in it, and strengthening these skills (Mathew et al., 2017).

Schools and other educational institutions face difficulties in maintaining proper and legitimate skills in their students, such as foundational skills that have shifted the focus of education from teaching to learning with an emphasis on increasing employability and consistent learning. The potential for reflective practice is typically utilized in the creation of numerous programs for beginning teacher education in the fields of teacher education and teacher professional development (Loughran, 2002). Without reflection, teachers can't look precisely at their activities or think about the sentiments, experiences, or upsides of activities to improve their training (McCormick, 2023). It is the duty of a teacher to resist creating a controlled classroom culture, develop into a reflective educator, engage in ongoing critical reflection, and foster a self-motivated learning environment (Silver et al., 2023). Students' learning in the twenty-first century should also incorporate reflective practice. Critical reflection and processes are essential to online teaching and learning, and teachers need to be more aware of them (Zia et al., 2024).

Students engage in reflection, consider how their work meets established guidelines, look into the value of their efforts, and then make plans for improvement as part of the reflective process. Iman et al. (2024) conducted a recent qualitative study in Pakistan that shed light on students' perceptions of reflective learning and helped develop methods to increase its efficacy. The results show that students are in favor of encouraging reflective learning because they think it will help them succeed academically (Hamilton & Mallett, 2023; Iman et al., 2024).

Reflective Practices

Reflective practices are thought to serve as a link between theory and practice, strengthening the connections between theoretical knowledge and practical comprehension by bridging the gap between what is taught as theory and what is provided in practice (Asselin 2011; Hatlevik 2012). Reflecting on experience is an effective way of learning rather than direct insight, wrote John Dewey (1933: as cited by Stevens & Cooper, 2023). One way to improve learning is through reflection on experience. According to Dewey, journaling serves as a reflecting bridge that enables the mind to adjust to challenging circumstances.

Reflective practices can be a more useful tool in a variety of learning contexts where students gain knowledge from their unique and personal experiences. An analysis of the research suggests that reflective practice in education is best described as an ongoing process that involves the skillful analysis of the practice to identify what motivates children to learn and

advance. Student learning is enhanced by the use of metacognition and reflection (Silver et al., 2023).

Reflective Journal

It is believed that during the process of learning experiences in students' lives, reflection on their part is essential. A variety of practices can be used to both extrinsic motivational and intrinsically motivate students. Among these practices is the use of reflective practices, which arouse students intrinsically through the analysis of their own written reflections. Written reflection is one exercise that supports and develops the process of reflection. Journal keeping is an incredibly powerful tool for learning, self-reflection, and gaining a deeper understanding of our lives.

Journals can be used for personal and professional development, with a particular focus on their benefits for those in academic settings. Journals can improve learning and communication among college students, and they can enhance creative thinking (Stevens & Cooper, 2023). It gives students the tools and knowledge to create an appropriate reflective writing style, no matter what degree they're studying (Williams et al. 2020)

Journals help in developing time management and problem-solving skills and important things and create less stress. People who write in their journals and then return to their earlier entries can record their thoughts, growth and observations. This particular process also allows for the examination of assumptions, creating fresh perspectives and offering new insights on past events (Stevens & Cooper, 2023). A study by Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman (2018) showed that most participants believed that the reflective journals helped them develop as reflective teachers. They say reflective notebooks can make students do better work and make teachers more aware.

Creating a journal, is an example of what reflective writing states. Reflective writing is an important process for personal development. Reflective practices specially writing reflective logs help to personal development and career planning (Williams et al., 2020). Students can also learn new things through writing in reflective journals. One strategy we can often use to show reflection is reflective writing. Reflective writing can demand much self-reflection and integrating of theory and practice (McGuire et al., 2009). Teachers should guide students' reflective writing so that students will focus on studies. It is necessary to give the students writing tasks and assignments so that they attain a variety of learning outcomes.

Chan and Wong (2023) conducted a study to assess students' perception of reflective approaches, which encompassed written, audio, video, and face-to-face methods. The findings revealed that all students found these

approaches to be highly beneficial in enhancing their learning experience. In Pakistan, less examination is accounted for about reflective practices. Rarieya (2005) investigated how students engaged in reflection. She looked at the perplexing cycle of students' reflecting practices. Reflective thinking in students is influenced by a variety of factors, including language proficiency, the attitudes of teachers, and the methods used in teacher education programs. In Pakistan, reflection studies typically focus on the examination of teachers' reflective practices and their development (Ashraf & Rarieya, 2008; Sharar, 2012; Tajjudin & Khan, 2012), but they frequently ignore the reflective practices of students.

Critical Review of Reflective Practices and Reflective journals

After reviewing literature a critical review of reflective practices and reflective journals involves an evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, and implications of these tools in various contexts. According to the literature review the strengths may be:

- A journal is a written or digital regular entry which requires the writers to encourage reflection. It facilitates self-awareness and the ability to analyze an individual condition from a variety of perspectives (Hagg, 2021; McLeod et al., 2020; Sudirman et al., 2021).
- Reflective practices help enhance your personal and professional growth. It offers a organized way for individuals to pinpoint improvement areas and track their progress over time (Alt & Raichel, 2020).
- Reflective practices lead to deeper understanding of knowledge and experiences, which become more meaningful. When people reflect on their success and failure they can get valuable insights that provide a mechanism for continuing learning (Neergaard et al., 2021).
- Writing can help improve communication skills. Being able to write well is an important skill to have in education and work (Chan & Wong, 2023).

Some of the weaknesses may be.

- Inherently subjective, reflective practices depend upon people's perceptions and interpretations. Because it's subjective, it introduces bias, making it hard to generalize.
- Keeping a reflective journal can be difficult during a busy working day. Some people might find it hard to always take the time to reflect (Ghaye, 2010; O'Connell & Dymen, 2011).
- Lack of standardized formats for the reflective practice can make the depth and quality of the reflective process variable. The

absence of standardization may influence the reliability and comparability of reflective outputs.

- Some individuals may resist engaging in deep self-reflection due to concerns about vulnerability or discomfort. This resistance can limit the effectiveness of reflective practices (Petillo, 2020).

This study examines the effects of journal writing as a component of reflective practices on students' learning in a Pakistani setting while keeping in mind the benefits and drawbacks of these practices. The primary goal of the current study was to determine how journal writing influences students' learning. In an effort to accomplish the aforementioned goal, the following research question was formulated: Is there a connection between journal writing and the learning of students?

Methodology

Context of the Study

The study was qualitative by nature. The participants of the study were the students of all two sections of BSEd. (Hons.) Self-Support program from fourth semester at Government University. There were 12 males and 91 females who contributed to the study. To comprehend the lived experiences of students regarding written reflective journals, a phenomenological approach was used. Because the chosen participants had completed the third semester course "Critical thinking and Reflecting Practices," purposive sampling was used in the sample process. Based on their merit scores, participants were split into sections A and B, with even and odd student numbers allocated by the university department.

Research Instruments

Data was gathered using two research instruments: focus group discussions (FGD) and written-reflective journals (WRJ). Expert opinions were used to validate these instruments. Weekly thoughtful and reflective responses from students were gathered using the first tool, the WRJ. There were eight questions on the test. The WRJ instrument was adopted and the researcher obtained formal permission to use the instrument. A pilot study was carried out on a different group of students to ensure reliability by determining whether or not the questions in written reflective journals were understandable and not deceptive. Further rubric was developed to analyze the quality of written reflective journals of the students.

Eight students chosen from both sections participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the second instrument. Their perceptions of the value of a reflective journal, its purpose, and the ease or difficulty of writing reflectively were the main topics of discussion questions. Face and content

validity of the instruments (Written-Reflective Journal and Focus Group Discussion) were ensured from experts of education who had experience in the field of research from last 10 to 15 years.

The data was collected by the researcher herself. Themes and codes were generated and these themes then presented in the shape of graphs. Students' journals were examined using a rubric to gauge how well they had developed their reflective abilities. The NVivo software was used to analyze descriptive data.

Analysis of Written Reflective Journals

While the students completed nine reflections, five reflections; the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth reflections were chosen to illustrate the progression. These reflections were categories as for R1, R3, R5, R7, and R9.

The first question concerned the participants' time spent on their study. Data showed that they vary in the amount of time they spend studying outside of class. The majority of participants, according to the data, significantly reduced from their first to their last reflection when it came to not spending time outside of class. Studying reading materials outside of what the course instructor provided was the subject of question 2. Data demonstrated how participants' study habits had changed to include using additional reading to gain a deeper understanding of the course material.

The third question asked about the most satisfying educational experience. The themes were "effective teaching method", "reading notes before lectures", "cooperating learning", "discussion method," and "peer sharing". The majority of participants initially relied on independent reading or were teacher-dependent because they were unfamiliar with this approach. One helpful method they used to improve their learning was cooperative learning. The "discussion method," which complements the first two approaches of cooperative learning and peer sharing, was the major method that the participants selected as the most fulfilling learning experience.

The fourth question asked about using any random idea that strikes you. The majority of students who were initially unfamiliar to recognizing and sharing their unexpected thoughts in class showed a significant decline from their first to their last reflection. Question 5 asked about any concept among the people who were studied but were unable to grasp it despite their best efforts. The data show that participant responses did not significantly change over the course of the semester. The sixth question asked about the challenges faced each week. The study participants reported encountering two primary challenges related to the lecture that week: reading difficult text and having trouble understanding the notes.

Participants were taught a new topic each week, and they were asked to report their thoughts on it.

The strategies used to overcome these challenges were covered in Question 7. The participants shared various strategies they used to overcome the challenges they faced in class included using a learning partner, taking notes, using a dictionary, the internet, and books, as well as learning material in-depth. The number of participants reporting that they used no strategy at all to solve their problems is trending downward. Students are seeing a positive trend where they can find a learning partner and discuss any issues they are having with the lecture. The second strategy was ‘got notes’. Fewer participants used this strategy to solve the learning problems. The third strategy reported by the participants was ‘use of dictionary, internet and books. Data also indicates the slow falling trend in using the strategy of ‘learn thoroughly’.

Figure 1 shows the trends in the reflection in using different strategies. The "got notes" strategy was the second one. Less participants used this strategy to work through the learning problems. Utilizing books, the internet, and dictionaries was the third strategy mentioned by the participants. The data also shows a gradually declining trend in the application of the "learn thoroughly" strategy. The trends in the use of various strategies for reflection are depicted in

Figure 1.

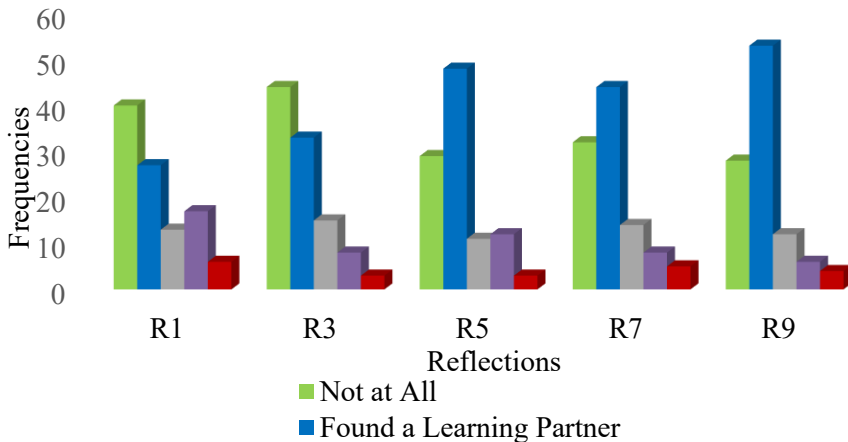


Figure 1. Strategies used to overcome the obstacles in different reflections

In Question 8, participants discussed their experiences with self-learning, and their answers varied. The various self-learning experiences they reported are explained in Table 1.

Table 1
The Learner Self-Reported Learning Experience

Sr. #	Factors	Nodes	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	Example of coded text
1-8	Strengths	Learn with full concentration	7	1	2	3	3	I learn with full concentration
		Time Management	5	8	1	1	2	I manage my time this week
		Improve Self Confidence	1	4	7	9	1	I Improve my self-confidence
		Interactive Learning Style	3	5	9	1	1	I can learn better through an interactive learning style
		Balance my Studies	1	1	1	1	1	I learn how to balance studies with other responsibilities
		Better in morning	6	1	1	3	0	I can learn best in morning time
		Better at Night	1	3	3	4	1	I can learn better at night time in silence
		Learn topic	4	3	2	1	5	I learn the topic thoroughly
9-10	Weaknesses	Difficulty in understanding	1	1	6	3	1	lack of understanding due to a difficult text
		Due to illness and unpleasant event	1	4	7	8	6	Noisy class lack of understanding due to illness weakness is an

Sr. #	Factors	Nodes	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	Example of coded text
								unpleasant event
11	Other pressure and responsibilities		9	9	10	7	7	During this week other pressures were my weakness (other subject assignments) I am weak in managing my studies with other activities
12	Lack of Time Management		6	20	17	5	5	I learn many new things but I still lack time management

Note: R= Respondents

Table 1 displays data illustrating various trends in the self-reported experiences of various participants. Participants' practices were divided into two categories: strengths and weaknesses. Figures 2 and 3, respectively, shows developments about strengths and weaknesses of the respondents. The most important aspect of self-learning was learning while paying close attention. The various trends in the participants' strengths are explained in Figure 3. The growing pattern of this experience indicates that participants were confident in their grasp of the material and had learned it with complete concentration as a strength after going over and managing their problems and solutions. Just seven participants at first indicated that they had paid close attention to their lessons, and this trend steadily increased until R7, when 35 students reported doing so. Eventually, however, the number of respondents dropped to 32 in R9.

The second trend that many participants in their learning experiences reported was time management. How well learners managed their time for various activities is evident in the rising trend of their self-reported learning experiences in all reflections from R1 (5 participants) to R9 (28 participants), as Table 1 and Figure 2 illustrate.

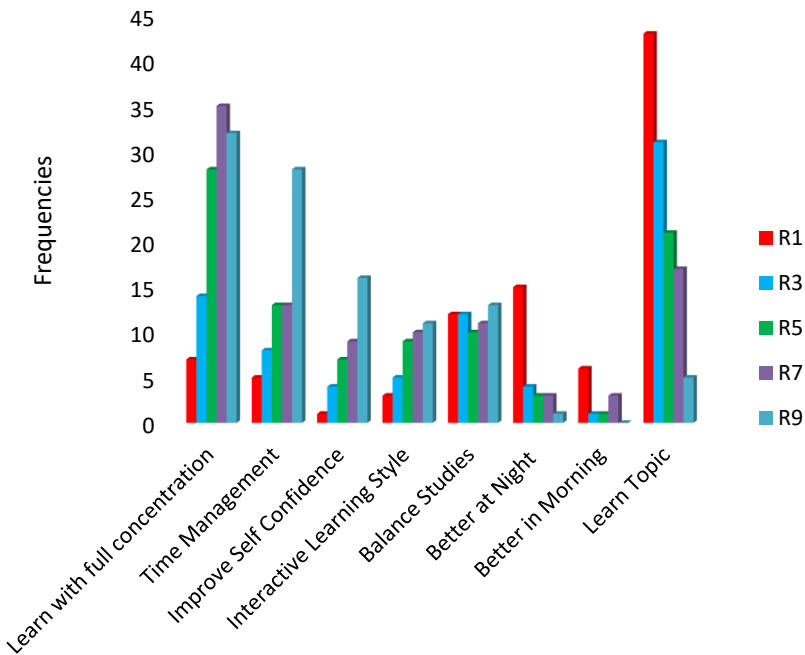


Figure 2. Reflections about strengths of learner’s self-reflection experiences

A few participants expressed that they are more at ease learning when they manage their time well. Some stated that upon reflecting on their areas of weakness in their education, they realized that time management was the primary issue. In an attempt to address this, they first learned time management.

"Self-confidence" ranked as the third component of the learning experience as reported by the learners. Table 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the increasing trend in participant responses regarding enhancing their self-confidence. Participants in their reflective journals that they were uncomfortable and awkward discussing the subjects with other people. However, after writing the reflections, they realized that they could speak and share with others if they wrote about their problems and past experiences and solved them.

The fourth factor that the BSEd (Hons) participants reported was the interactive learning style, which demands sharing the learning experiences with peers. Table 1 and Figure 2 illustrate this point. From R1 to R9, the participants' responses supporting the interactive learning style gradually

increased. Participants listed "balancing study with other responsibilities" as the fifth factor. Less variance was found between the first and last reflections, supporting the idea of balancing the study. Regarding the balance study conducted by students, a decreasing trend was observed from R4 to R5. At the end of the week, the participants recorded in their written reflective journals that they had managed to reconcile their studies with other obligations.

The next two elements concerned the period of time during which pupils were at ease as they studied their lessons. They emphasized the morning and night time clauses twice. The steadily declining trend in students' responses regarding the time (both morning and night) is evident in Table 1 and Figure 2. Their inclinations toward other aspects of their strengths were most likely the cause of the declining trend in the time selection. "Learn the topic" was the eighth factor that most students reported at the beginning of the session. The general declining tendency to "learn the topic" from Figure 2 is portrayed.

In their written reflective journals, participants also disclosed their areas of weakness during their self-reported learning experience. Figure 3 illustrates the four types of weaknesses they reported. The first weakness was the challenge of comprehending what the participants said they had learned on their own. The graph clearly shows that, from R1 to R9, there was a general downward trend in the percentage of respondents who reported difficulty comprehending various reflections. The declining trend demonstrated a positive tendency among students who made an effort to get past the obstacles they had in order to comprehend the lesson and were successful in doing so.

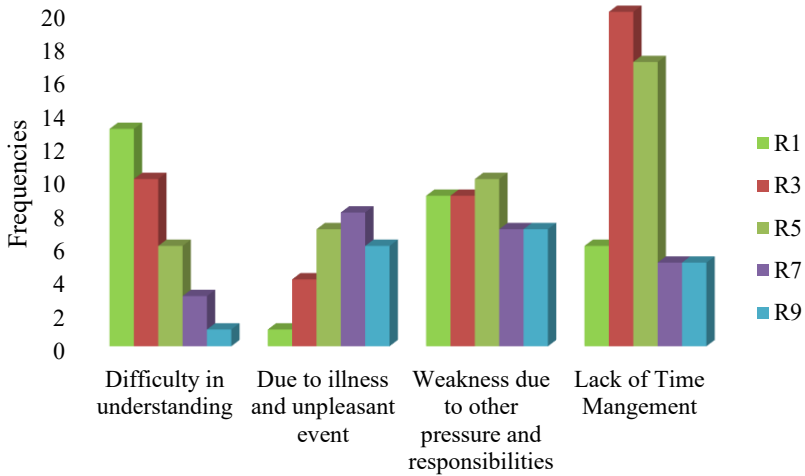


Figure 3. Reflections on the weaknesses of learners' self-learning experiences

The second weakness resulting from illness and unpleasant event, is depicted in Table 2 and Figure 3. In their journals, participants expressed that they were unable to attend class because of illness, which hindered their ability to learn. Participants listed third weakness "due to other pressure and responsibilities". The participants stated that they encountered difficulties with their learning as a result of external pressures and obligations. In their written reflective journals, a few students shared that they occasionally felt overworked and unable to focus on their studies because of their morning jobs.

The students' fourth weakness was "lack of time management." Table 1 and Figure 3 show the differences between R1 and R9. One student stated in their written reflective journal that her inability to manage her time is the biggest obstacle to her learning, and that once she mastered it, she would undoubtedly be able to overcome her learning issue. Another student claimed that this week's lack of learning was due to his laziness and time wastage. Another student expressed concern about his routine and stated that although he made an effort to learn well, his inability to manage his time prevented him from learning completely.

In summary, the aim of the study was to explore the connection between journal writing as reflective practice and their learning. It can be observed that the students' skills were gradually developing. Their shortcomings were also addressed in each subsequent reflection. When it came to self-reported learning experiences, the participants' reflections on various

aspects of their experiences generally showed that learning with complete concentration had the highest increasing trend. In the same way, time management significantly improved. In a similar vein, their learning and self-confidence both significantly improved as a result of the interactive learning method.

Focus Group Discussion

For the eight-student focus group discussion, there were four questions. The researcher documented their responses. They enjoyed the feedback provided following their reflective journal and thought the Written Reflective Journal was a worthwhile experience. Reflections helped them look back on these subjects, identify areas of difficulty in their learning, and ultimately identify solutions. They also used reflections to help them manage their time. The most beneficial learning exercises focused on time management and problem solving. They were able to communicate their emotions in a way that allowed them to express themselves through writing reflective journals. Writing reflections, recognizing issues and offering solutions, as well as managing their time effectively to balance study, gave them confidence.

Discussion

Use of reflective practice is an established method for learning and growth that entails purposefully and thoughtfully contemplating experiences in order to gain valuable insights and effectively implement them in teaching practice. Reflections are regarded as a self-motivated process of analyzing learners' own practices in meaningful learning. Students who practice writing are better able to comprehend new ideas. In order for students to concentrate on learning, they need to be guided in reflective writing (Iman et al., 2024). Numerous significant elements concerning learning and reflective practices were investigated. Students were first encouraged to use reflective practices, and then the connection between their learning and the reflective practices in terms of journal writing used by the university students was investigated. In Pakistan, university students and instructors are not as acquainted of the value of reflection and reflective practices (Iman et al., 2024; Rarieya, 2005; Khan, 2012).

The study supports recommendations made by Appl and Yorde (2005) for teachers to help students develop reflective skills and practice continuously to increase their reflectivity. The interactive learning style was acknowledged by the students as being crucial to their education. Having a variety of learning styles can greatly improve academic performance. It was discovered that offering feedback would increase the value of

engaging in class activities, productive teaching strategies, assignments, and projects. Feedback, whether it be from a group or an individual, forces students to reflect on their performance and look for opportunities for improvement.

Implications and Conclusion

The following implications and considerations for reflective practices and reflective journals are the effectiveness of reflective practices depends on the context in which they are implemented. Just because something works in one setting, does not mean it will work in another. Consideration of the specific context is crucial. In a meaningful way, reflective practices must be incorporated in educational and professional curricula. In this way, people get support to develop reflective skills with guidance. It is very important to train and support people to reflect. It also includes the tools to be able to journal effectively and give feedback and create a culture of reflection. It is important to provide enough structure to help someone think but not so much that an individual feels prohibited to express his/her thoughts. Too much structure may hinder authenticity, and yet too much freedom could give rise to inconsistencies. In summary, reflective practices and journals can offer valuable opportunities for self and professional development.

Recommendations

- Teachers may encourage the student's and assist them in using the various library resources, including books, journals, newspaper articles, and online reports and to reflect upon what they have learnt from these sources.
- Teachers can encourage reflection by giving students course outlines, notes, or discussion topics ahead of time so they can read them before class. This will encourage them to comprehend the subject and enable them to effectively reflect on what they have learned in class.
- By giving students samples or examples of reflective journal writing, they can encourage students to write reflective journals.
- Teachers can share their reflective journals with all of their students during class discussions. This will help students understand the journal topic clearly because the issue isn't that they lack original ideas; rather, it's that they find it difficult to write effectively to convey their ideas.

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