



Reflective Learning in Higher Education: Assessing Its Effectiveness and Strategies Among University Students

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Abstract:

This study investigates the effectiveness of reflective learning among university learners. It gives a clear insight into using experiential learning to emphasize the significance of reflection in developing learning in university. The main aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of reflective learning in higher education levels. Furthermore, it aims to investigate university learners' reflection perspectives and reflective learning strategies they use when they transition to university. This study adopts a triangulation approach implemented by a qualitative method by interviewing 6 students studying English at the Faculty of Education and a questionnaire distributed to 32 students. The study concludes that students in the Faculty of Education find reflective learning is fruitful and effective. They find that reflective learning helps students become more self-directed to enhance their performances when they gain experience and regular feedback after years of study.

Key words: reflective learning, higher education, self-awareness, strategies, students perception

المخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة مدى فاعلية التعلم التأملية بين متعلمي الجامعة. حيث يعطي رؤية واضحة لاستخدام التعلم التجريبي للتأكيد على أهمية التفكير في تطوير التعلم في المرحلة الجامعية.

وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اختبار مدى فاعلية التعلم التأملية في مستوى التعلم الجامعي. علاوة على ذلك، تهدف إلى التحقيق في وجهات نظر المتعلمين الجامعيين واستراتيجيات التعلم التأملية التي يستخدمونها عند انتقالهم إلى الجامعة. تعتمد هذه الدراسة طريقة التثليث الذي تم تنفيذه بطريقتي: الطريقة النوعية من خلال إجراء مقابلات مع 6 طلاب يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية واستبيان تم توزيعه على 32 طالباً. وطالبة في القسم نفسه. واستنتجت الدراسة إلى أن الطلاب في كلية التربية يجدون التعلم التأملية مثمراً وفعالاً. حيث وجدوا التعلم التأملية قد يساعد الطلاب على أن يصبحوا أكثر توجيهها لذاتهم وإلى تعزيز أدائهم عندما يكتسبون الخبرة والتغذية الراجعة لمنظمة بعد سنوات من الدراسة.



الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم التأملي، التعليم العالي، الوعي الذاتي، الاستراتيجيات، وجهات نظر الطلاب

Introduction:

Reflective learning is a significant element of any learning process. All fields require experience to function effectively. Reflective learning is the act of having one's own knowledge and experience to obtain new knowledge and improve future performance. (Iman, et al, 2024)

Learners can improve their learning through their own experiences and enhance their activities. This is an improvement through self-evaluation that allows learners to understand their thoughts, feelings, and actions. It is a powerful tool for personal development.

Moon (2004) defines reflective learning as a mental process that promotes learning and purifies its drawbacks. Moreover, learners can develop their reflection through their teachers' support. Several studies have indicated that reflective learning helps learners promote their learning. For example, Boud et al. (1985); Colomer, et al. (2013), and Iman et al. (2024). According to Iman (2020), reflective learning offers many advantages that students can gain. Learners can gain deeper senses and self-awareness by refreshing and thinking about their experiences. They eliminate their weaknesses and improve and enhance their strengths.

Based on Viene et al. (2019), teachers can support their students at university by preparing them for solving tomorrow's problems. However, higher education institutions must create opportunities for learners to work across disciplinary and cultural boundaries so students can learn from those experiences.

Boud et al. (1985) defines reflection as students reflect critically on their own practices rather than the prescription of 'good' learning practice. Students must develop themselves not only to learn but also how to learn. Boud et al. assert in their book the importance of reflection both to teachers and students and encourage them to adopt a deep understanding of the reflection role in their teaching and learning. They provide a clear explanation of the reflection approaches and its processes.



There are several explanations of the reflective learning stages. Based on Boud et al. (1985), three elements of the reflective process are vital to learners' understanding. Returning to experience is the first type Boud et al. explains. In this type of learning, learners must recollect the basic events they have gained. In other words, learners must recall all the past events they have gone through to select a suitable one that is appropriate in the new situation. The second type is called attending of feelings, which has two aspects; utilizing positive feelings and obstructing feelings. Positive feelings should be supported by a conscious recollection of good experiences, enhancement of the immediate environment, or anticipation of future benefits. The obstructing feelings must be removed by involving one's feelings when recounting a past event to others.

The last element is the re-evaluation of experiences. This involves reexamining learners' experiences to gain new knowledge and integrating it with the new learners' conceptual framework.

Boud et al. (1983) explains the four elements of re-evaluation. They believe that these elements contribute to reflective learning and enhance its outcomes. These elements are represented as follows:

Association, which is to relate new data to that which is already known; *integration*, which is attempting to connect all the data together; *validation*, to enhance the authenticity of learners' ideas and their feelings, and the *appreciation*, that is, making one's own knowledge.

According to Schon (1987), there are two types of reflective learning. Learners can think critically about what they are learning through actions. The other type is when learners think after they have completed action. This is common in learning in the education system. However, Colomer et al. (2020), investigate reflective learning using some activities. Learners can get benefits when they actively participate in their experiences rather than attend without performance.

The Reflective Learning Model: It is not sufficient to have an experience to learn. Without reflecting this experience, it could be lost or misunderstood. Davys & Beddoe (2009). Reflective learning needs to transform to practical scope so that learners can gain benefit. According to Veine et al. (2020), by reflective learning, learners are



expected to gain a deeper understanding of their own processes, experiences, and they do self-awareness and evaluation to develop their learning process.

Davys & Beddoe (2009) claim that one of the reflection is that after students gain experience in their learning, they need less structures and they promote and normalize their feelings and emotions. Consequently, experienced students gain value from their learning and growth which comes from making mistakes.

Problem Statement

Reflective learning is considered as a powerful tool for personal and academic development. Educational institutions must integrate reflection into their systems so that learners do not waste time going through inappropriate paths. Learners should practice this method to provide opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection, self-directed learning and critical thinking, and other skills. However, learners often find it difficult to relate this method to practical fields. The gap found between theoretical and practical application needs to be bridged. This study asserts the significance of the effectiveness of reflective learning and the strategies to be employed in educational systems to enhance learning reflection.

Questions of the Study

The main questions of this study are as follows:

To what extent does reflective learning influence students' academic performance in higher education?

What reflective learning strategies can be employed in English classrooms?

What are university students' perceptions of reflective learning?

The significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of education by enhancing reflective learning effectiveness among university students. This encourages students to improve their academic and personal development. Moreover, reflective learning can help students to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and learning strategies. Consequently, this may help to provide a useful programme to the students so that they can take ownership of their education, set realistic goals, and adapt their approaches to research and assignments.



Objectives of the Study

The basic aims of this study are as follows:

To investigate the effectiveness of reflective learning in higher education.

To identify university students' strategies to enhance their learning.

To assess the impact of reflection on university students.

Methodology

Reflective learning is a recent methodology that involves learners to understand one's learning process. It can determine areas for improvement and find solutions to challenges by reflecting on experiences. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. This mixed-method approach can provide depth for understanding university reflection.

Participants

The sample consists of 32 students (ages 20-32) enrolled between fifth to ninth semester at Faculty of Education- Misurata University. The sample has been randomly chosen. The students who participated in this questionnaire, have studied at least 30 subjects in English at the college. The sample is diverse in terms of gender (3 males, 28 females) and academic levels.

Research Design

This study explores how university students use reflective learning in their studying in the university. The methodology is incorporated using qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather thorough data.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured Interview

In this study, 6 students have been interviewed individually. However, this method determines unique experiences that students may obtain and it explores techniques and strategies that learners have performed during their learning.

The interview has been conducted in person in the English Department. Participants have explained techniques and strategies they employ after they have gained an experience in the university.



Questionnaire

The study conducted a questionnaire with 32 students studying English in the Faculty of Education, Misurata University. These participants have been selected via purposive sampling, ensuring that they had good background knowledge of their self-direction and self-awareness. The questionnaire consists of a 5-item Likert scale survey with responses ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Data Analysis

The research instrument was examined using descriptive methodology. However, this study's main objective was to examine the effectiveness of reflective learning in university students and the strategies that may be useful to learners at this level. The questionnaire responses are divided into three sections to meet the aims of the research paper. The following analyses show this:

Table (1)

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 2	10 (38%)	19 (53%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Statement 4	21 (66%)	7 (22%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
Statement 7	5 (16%)	21 (66%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Statement 10	6 (19%)	16 (50%)	7 (22%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)

Table (1) shows to what extent reflective learning influences students' academic performance in higher education. The data indicate that a significant percentage (91%) strongly agree and agree on a benefit from reflective learning in university. They assert that reflective learning is vital to them to promote themselves. In contrast, only 2 of respondents (6%) reveal that reflective learning is not useful to them. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (88%) agree and strongly agree that they are better now much more than when they first joined university. Whereas a few students claim that they do not gain benefit from their experience.

Additionally, the data indicate that a significant proportion of respondents (69%) report that reflective learning enriches students' knowledge and capabilities in their learning. On the other hand, a few respondents (3%) disagree and strongly disagree that reflective learning does not play a significant role in their learning.



Table (2)

Item	rongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 3	11(34%)	15(47%)	5(16%)	0(0%)	1 (3%)
Statement 5	7(22%)	16(50%)	7(22%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
Statement 8	8(21%)	5(16%)	3(9%)	2(6%)	0 (0%)
Statement 9	10(31%)	18(56%)	4(13%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)

Table (2) shows whether learners use reflective learning strategies to improve their performance in higher education.

As illustrated in the table, a large number of respondents (81%) claim that they always think of what they have done before. They use self-awareness strategies to develop themselves while only (1%) of respondents report that they do not use self-awareness and self-evaluation to critically think of what they have done before. In the same way, over two-thirds of respondents (72%) assert that they are aware of what they are learning and they have a set of practices. Whereas a small fraction 2(6%) show that they do not have self-awareness.

In addition, most students either agree (25%) or strongly agree (59%) that they use-self assessment tools like checklists and rubrics to evaluate their learning outcomes. In contrast, only, (2%) of students address that they do not think that self-assessment is significant. Besides, most students (53%) report they incorporate feedback from their instructors into their reflective practice to promote their learning. Conversely, non respondents (0%) suggest that they find feedback vital to their learning.

Table (3)

Item	rongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 1	7(13%)	12(44%)	8(25%)	3(1%)	3(9%)
Statement 6	7(19%)	12(34%)	11(38%)	1(3%)	2(6%)

This table reveals that a majority of participants (57%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating that more than half of the respondents initially followed orders rather than creating strategies. In other words, students depend on structured instructions when transitioning to university. On the other hand, only a small percentage (18%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that few respondents reject following orders.



Interestingly, a quarter of the participants (25%) have chosen "neutral," which may mean that they have been trying to balance being independent with obeying orders or that they are unclear of how to do their learning.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that they lack appropriate skills to do well as a reflective learning when they joined university. An important portion (38%) responded neutrally, while only 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This can suggest that most learners find themselves unprepared for reflective learning when transitioning to university.

The responses in the questionnaire align that the process of reflection increases and expands students' self-awareness and self-evaluation. The findings suggest that students in university use their experiences and their own learning process to develop their current and future learning. Furthermore, reflective learning programs can enhance building independence and self-awareness learning habits.

As illustrated from the data analysis, students show agreement about the effectiveness of using reflection in their learning. They emphasize the significance of using reflective strategies at the university level. Moreover, respondents' opinions indicate that they promote their learning after they have gained sufficient experience. A high proportion of responses indicate that students have joined university without this reflection. In contrast, a few students report that they do not find reflection helpful to them in their learning.

The significant neutral responses may highlight the need for qualitative research so that the researcher can understand the reason. This could be understood in the analysis of the interviews the researcher has done with the students.

Semi- Structured Interviews

Thematic analysis

Advanced students in university tend to have a good background and sufficient experience of how to learn. When students reflect on their learning, they can help themselves to conceptualize the experience and raise their knowledge to a higher degree.



The researcher asks 5 questions related to the objectives of the study. Additionally, the interviewer's questions have been adapted from previous research to suit the purpose (Iman et al. 2024). Students answer the questions according to their experience in the university. The students in this sample have been interviewed in-person in the Faculty of Education. These participants have finished seventh and eighth semesters. All of them have a good experience regarding the study in the faculty. The following is the analysis of a sample of what they have reported.

Question 1. How do you feel about applying reflective learning strategies to your studies at the university level?

Students 1: “ I like using reflective learning as it helps me understand my problems and find out where my strengths and weaknesses are. It allows me to be aware of my failure and how I can overcome my challenges.”

Student 2: “ Reflective learning provides me the opportunity of self-assessment that is essential for personal development. In addition, it helps me recognize how to solve my problems which I face when I study. I always pay attention to my mistakes and attempt to correct them.”

Student 4: These techniques facilitate my learning. I could understand how to do during my study.”

Based on the students' answers, it is essential to claim that students find effective learning techniques fruitful. Students in university find reflective learning effective to develop their study and raise problem solving skills.

Question 2: In your opinion, what are the most important factors that contribute to the effectiveness of reflective learning at the university level?

Student 3: “ The most important factors that help me in my study are regular feedback, teachers’ support and self-assessment.”

Student 5: “ When I engage in activities, I understand better. There are some factors that help me to develop my learning like feedback, self and teacher’s corrections as well as formal examinations. “



Clearly, students in the university are more aware of their learning. They can recognize which factors facilitate their learning and which do not. Based on their answers, students tend to use some techniques that are appropriate to them. Students learn from their past experience, regular feedback, self-assessment and teacher's support.

Question 3: So how would you think reflective techniques have affected your entire college learning experience?

Student 3: “ Reflective techniques allow me to build my confidence, learn from my mistakes and it strongly contributes to building my abilities. “

Student 6: “ Reflective learning has helped me to learn from my mistakes, stay organized and perform better in my study.”

This sample of the students’ answers show that students are aware of the techniques reflective learning provides to them. The answers indicate that students’ reflection builds their confidence, and helps them to manage their time.

Question 4: Can you describe any connection you have noticed between the use of reflective learning strategies and your self-awareness and self-regulation in your studies?

Student 5: “ Reflective learning forced me to focus on my goals, and it helped me raise my self-awareness. In the past, I could not manage my time but after I recognized that now I can concentrate on the time available and I try to develop my other skills.”

Question 5: How do you think reflective learning has affected your academic performance in higher education?

Student 1: Reflective learning improved my performance and now I can identify my problems and solve them more quickly. I can say that it helps me to know where is the shortest path to approach my study.”

Overall, this sample of answers indicate that students use reflection in their learning and it facilitates their learning. Furthermore, it provides them with knowledge on how to promote their learning and use several techniques to improve themselves.



Conclusion

Reflective learning is one of the tools that students need to use to promote their learning. It emphasizes the significance of transforming knowledge from theory to practice. This study underlines the development that students gain through the experience they have got when they advance from beginning to advanced.

This study concludes that students in university use reflective learning strategies that they have gained through their experience. These strategies facilitate their learning. 88% of the students participating in this study claim that they are better now much more than when they joined the university. This means that they find reflective learning like take-notes and self-assessment fruitful. In addition, reflection provides students development and support.

Moreover, many students (81%) in the study report that they use some reflective learning strategies like feedback and self-awareness. Students claim that reflection is useful and they tend to use it in their study. Whereas only 9 % of students disagree and strongly disagree that reflection is not beneficial to them.

Recommendations

This study has been conducted on only English department students at Faculty of Education. Future research recommends to expand the sample size of the study and do similar research on other settings.

Findings of this study indicate that students join university without much experience of reflective learning. Consequently, this research recommends that instructors should be encouraged to integrate reflective learning activities so that learners can understand deeply and their learning can be facilitated.

Educators have to advocate for workshops and training sessions for students when they join university. This may guide students to think tactically and do self-assessment.

Longitudinal studies should be done to measure how students gain their reflective learning experience and which activities are more appropriate in this level.



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<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2019.1659797>



Appendix 1

A Questionnaire on reflective learning in higher education: Assessing Its effectiveness among university students"

Instruction: Please state whether you totally disagree, partly disagree, agree, partly agree, or completely agree with the following statements by putting atick (✓) in the appropriate column

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.When I joined university, I tend to follow orders rather than to create my own strategies					
2.I think reflective learning is significant to me to improve myself					
3.I always think of what I have done before so I can improve my learning					
4.I am much better now than when I joined the university, I gained benefit from my experience of how to learn in college.					
5.Reflective learning has motivated me to take ownership of my learning process and strive for excellence					
6.When I joined university, I did not have sufficient skills to work with reflective learning.					
7.I now have a better understanding of the complexity of my learning.					
8.I use self-assessment tools (e.g., checklists, rubrics) to evaluate my learning outcomes					
9..I incorporate feedback from instructors into my reflective practices to improve my learning.					
10.It has resulted in more complex and enriched knowledge and capabilities and also identifying.					