Exploring Reflexivity in Students' Diaries: Writing Styles and Critical Reflections on Dominant Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Writing diary as an assessment tool for learning has many advantages for language learners; however, in higher education, it is frequently disregarded as a reflective practice tool. Also, least attention has been given to this practice in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) classrooms. This study aims to explore reflexivity in students' diary writings, and it also aims to determine the types of the diaries and the level of criticality. The data is taken from the assignments of 66 students from two modules at Soran University. A content analysis method is used for data analysis based on Kember et al.'s (2008) classification of the types of diaries. The study findings reveal that an overwhelming majority of the students are rather non- reflective in their diaries. With regard to the rest, 22 students were rather reflective in some paragraphs and only 3 students were critically reflective and this criticality was not on the classroom discourse but rather, teacher practices. Based on the findings, the implications were that classroom pedagogical practices and cultural aspects have not assisted the process and in so many other aspects the students have not been given frequent feedback. The study recommends that teachers should be provided with training on how to monitor students' progress, and how to utilize scaffolding with peers. Providing support can also help students to be reflective and critical in their diaries.
KEYWORDS: Diary Writing, Reflexivity, Modes of Reflection, Critical Reflection, Assessment for learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing diary, also known as journal, is a document in which individuals can record their feelings, ideas, experiences, and thoughts at their discretion. In the current teaching and learning practices, reflective diary has evolved as an assessment tool of students' understanding in addition to reflecting on their acquired knowledge. According to Farahian et al. (2020), in the broader scope of education, where learning process has firmly established itself ahead of learning outcomes, and different approaches of task-based, project-based and problem-solving learning are used, alternative tools of assessment have essentially arisen as a response to new views.

Reflective writing, as a key component of reflexivity in education, entails a problem-solving process that requires "active chaining, a careful ordering of ideas linking each with its predecessors" (Hatton and Smith, 1993: 33).

Further, Dewey (1993) demonstrates that reflective thinking is an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (P: 118). Such a reflection is considered to help students critically examine their own learning and behavior processes, and recognize how they can manage their learning style. Writing a reflection journal serves several purposes, such as reviewing behaviors critically in terms of strengths and weaknesses; learning styles and strategies, learning about oneself and others; setting or checking learning goals (i.e., how learning occurs); and investigating connections between previously learned material and students' own insights of it (Sahebkheir, 2020).

This process involves three stages namely: description, analysis and act (Janesick, 2000), and also entails critical thinking and awareness of specific contextual factors. Similarly, according to Taggart and Wilson (2005), reflection is an internal conversation in which a person brings up experiences, convictions, and perception, which, as stated by Risko et. al, (2002), should alter and apprise knowledge and action. This shows the incorporation of a specific component of critical thinking known as informal fallacy. In other words, a proficient critical thinker would be capable of identifying these

fallacies and exposing them before drawing conclusions or making decisions.

Reflective thinking is frequently characterized as exhibiting numerous features. Nguyen (2014), and Wynn and Clarkson (2018) consider deliberate thinking, to which Helyer (2015) associates the element of time, as a requirement for its deliberate management. This fosters cognitive growth and new insights that inform future actions (Dewey, 1993). In practical terms, according to Denton (2011), reflection is a cyclical process that can inspire learners to generate new ideas for subsequent stages of learning, since it accommodates different perspectives, allowing individuals to criticize their own thoughts and gain a better understanding of the bigger picture (Farahian, et al, 2020).

Inherently, a thorough analysis and exploration of reflection, through various approaches, can provide a deeper insight into each component of reflective practices. Along these lines, much research is being conducted to develop conceptual models that provide a simple abstraction of each component that constitutes reflection. Up to this point, there are numerous models that share certain characteristics of relation, description, feelings and emotions, reasoning, and critical reflection (Marrow, 2014).

In developing a protocol for assessing reflective thinking in journal writing, building on Mezirow's (1991) framework, Kember et al. (2010) identified four major constructs underlying reflective thinking—habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection—which represent levels of thinking that progress from rigid and simple to flexible and sophisticated. Each category is defined below.

Habitual action/non-reflection: These actions are performed consistently without paying significant attention to actions being undertaken and their underlying rationale; hence, no noticeable reflection or comprehension takes place.

Understanding: In this level, learners seek meaning and apply deep learning, but fail to connect knowledge to personal experiences. They focus on realizing gained knowledge within the context without extending it (Lim, 2011). Although more sophisticated, this level is considered unreflective due to inconsistent evaluation of ideas and thoughts (Kember et al., 2008; Rodgers, 2001), and lack of personal application.

Reflection: Going beyond simple accounts of events, in this level, learners reevaluate actions or thoughts within their context allowing them to evaluate their learning experience, identify areas for improvement, and explore potential solutions (Lim, 2011).

Critical reflection: Through this crucial step in the scheme under examination, the learner carefully considers the underlying theories and beliefs that underpin their chosen courses of action. Critical reflection

is roughly equivalent to concepts like metacognition and critical thinking (Harrison, Short, & Roberts 2003). Kember (2010) describes critical reflection as the most thorough and demanding stage in the method of reflection which can be hardly observed. The writer at this level can critique the previously held presumptions along with the awareness of the reasons that underlie activities, insights, and reactions.

In this regard, critical reflection provides a corresponding social theory perspective that facilitates the investigation of the distinctiveness of each person's "positionality" within social systems. A more expansive, but related, sociological concept of "reflective knowing" views critical reflection as a thinking that can take place outside of normatively recognized social processes. "It critiques all other forms of knowledge, and in so doing, it moves beyond merely reproducing what it is" (Habermas 1978 p. 42 cited in Marrow, 2020).

Moreover, critical thinking involves actively accessing previous information, requisite knowledge, and addressing the knowledge gaps to make the learners conscious of and in charge of their learning (Jalilifar et al., 2014). These mental procedures align harmoniously with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which observes how social power misuse, dominance, and inequality are reflected in text and talk within social and political contexts (Van Dijk, 2015). Observation of critical reflection in students' diary writings unveils the depth of their understanding of materials and learning environment specifically highlighting its role in enhancing students' academic skills. Examining diary writings according to Kember et al.'s (2000) classification, reveals the way they evaluate and review the world through texts and talks. This also sheds light on educators' efforts to extend their practices beyond linguistic training aiming to develop students' critical thinking skills.

The above mentioned explanation supports the claim that education is political, and that students must establish their own learning and be responsible for their learning and be aware of the dominant discourse (Freire, 2005). In this context, dominant discourse refers to the prevailing ideas, beliefs, language, and ways of thinking that shape how knowledge, power, and social norms are constructed and maintained in society. It is also reflected in the dominant ways of speaking and writing that reinforce dominant ideologies, cultural norms that influence how students learn, communicate, and engage with knowledge. Reflective practices help students recognize these influences, question assumptions, and consider alternative perspectives. Hence, reflective diary writing is a significant method for students to think about their achieved goals and to explore diverse methods of learning, or even, criticize certain aspects of the teaching materials in the light of their cognitive efficacy (Dewey,

1993). In this regard, critical reflection which involves critical thinking fosters students to transcend the barriers and find their own path of learning. Reflective thinking aids in integrating the skills and making judgments. Moreover, being critically reflexive plays a crucial role in problem-solving by prompting individuals to consider optimal strategies to achieve their goals (Rudd, 2007).

1.1. Reflexivity in education

Reflexive teaching as an approach heavily relies on Experience-Based Learning (EBL). Through this method, learners are exposed to new experiences, engage holistically, and are encouraged to reflect on their knowledge and subject matter (Duarte & Fitzgerald, 2006). Students can gain a more comprehensive and fulfilling academic experience by reflecting on their lived experiences and considering diverse perspectives on their acquired knowledge. Additionally, this approach promotes a "deep approach" to learning, encouraging students to engage with learning activities in a more meaningful and appropriate manner. For example, it helps students understand the purpose behind their studies. Learning tasks, when designed effectively, further support the learning process (Denton, 2011). Regarding the association between reflexivity and personal practice, according to Boud (2001), reflective writing can be perceived as a means of expressiveness, a method to keep track of events, or even a kind of therapy in addition to other possible functions, involving working with experiences and events to derive meaning from them. From this angle, journal writing in all its possible forms is seen as a means of understanding the dynamics of the world and people's role, purpose and function in it; hence, improving the actions and methods of professional and personal growth. It can be used as a learning tool in professional settings, in formal courses, or in any kind of informal learning to enhance the quality of education, and the ability to criticize it (Kasprabow et.al, 2021). Based on Dewey (1993), students' use of diaries is a means to explore how this process of critical reflection influences their perceptions of the world and themselves, as well as how they challenge or correspond to dominant discourses, such as political beliefs, cultural norms, or educational paradigms.

1.2. Diary writing as learning tool

Modern pedagogical research across various higher education disciplines has demonstrated that journal writing fosters creativity among students. Moreover, it is recognized as a valuable assessment and learning tool applicable both within and beyond the classroom (Essa, 2024).

Both teachers and students can benefit from reflective diaries, as they enhance students' educational experiences in several ways. Diary writing serves as a tool for assessing students' understanding at the end of each lesson, encouraging them to think critically and reflect on their acquired knowledge. It helps students recognize and evaluate their challenges in the subject matter while also fostering the development and cross-disciplinary transfer of cognitive and metacognitive skills. Additionally, diaries empower students to question, analyze, and engage deeply with the subject matter, promoting inquiry-based learning. Furthermore, they function as an assessment tool, enabling students to express their opinions on critical topics, draw conclusions, and develop their critical thinking skills.

1.3. Related previous studies

Diary writing has become a common practice in the majority of today's classrooms to check the students' understanding and perceptions of the acquired knowledge. Initially, focusing on teachers; Tay's (2022) research on transforming their professional development in Singapore demonstrated that the teachers' reflections for years has reasoned with their fixed curriculum due to having no power on its modification. Closer to that, Iranian prospective teachers' cognition abilities with regard to critical thinking were investigated by Jalilifar, et al. (2014), after showing them a series of movies, and giving them time to reflect on what they have watched and understood; the study concluded that the participants had a stronger sense of narrating than criticizing. In contrast to them, Choy and Oo (2012) examined the university teacher's practices in using reflective writing diaries. It was revealed that the majority of instructors did not engage in such in-depth self-reflection methods. The four learning processes that were indicative of reflection—supposition analysis, contextual attentiveness, imaginative speculation, and reflective skepticism—was not consistently applied by them. Hence, critical reflection, to a greater extent, was lacking among the students; this was attributed to the teachers' weak practices.

With regard to students, Gentile (2014) examined moment-to-moment critical analyses of students' literacy skills. Through Kember et al.'s (2008) classification, it identified dominant discourses in the classroom and their impact on students' literacy identities. The study also disclosed that the students were quite critical in demonstrating their acquired knowledge and the manner through which they were shaping their learning trajectory. This study found that teachers, despite controlling the students, were dominating the text structure; specific language choices by the teachers establish experiential value from the students.

Concerning the impact of reflective writing, Handayani and Aminatun (2020) studied how teachers' language selection affects the empirical, relational, and expressive values of their students during classroom

interactions in Indonesia. In Iranian context, Hashemi and Ghanizade's (2012) experiment with university students' reading skills showed that diary writing significantly and favorably enhance students' critical thinking capacity; hence, it emphasized that students need to practice reflexivity. In supporting the absence of critical thinking in diary writing, Hamdi (2022) proved that reading skills classes lack criticality due to the absence of opportunities for students to articulate their experiences. A socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk served as the basis for a training program aimed at revealing the manner in which diary writing promotes critical consciousness and empowering students to negotiate and resist dominant views on their curriculum. The participants' ability to deal with news on social media improved significantly by applying critical discourse analysis. They became conscious of their social responsibilities in bringing about a constructive transformation. The study also concluded that the participants acted in high quality reflection with regard to rhetoric, and their critical thinking was quite different from one person to the other.

As it has been highlighted from the literature, research on diary writing has been utilized to investigate the acquired knowledge by the students. Further, the quality of the students' diaries has not been investigated. Although some training courses have been provided in the Eastern part of Kurdistan to improve the critical reflection in the students' diaries, the rate of reflective writing has investigated to be quite low (Hamdi, 2022). This implies that the teaching methodology may not be adequately fostering critical analysis and questioning of social reality (Marrow, 2011). Language learning is a crucial tool for carrying out these tasks. Researchers (see, for example, Fairclough, 1992 and Dewey 1993) have so-called for an education that fosters a significant level of critical ability to request and criticize not only social settings but also teachers and the educational system. Given these insights, this study's contribution is to explore how students use different types of diary writing and the patterns in their writing styles, and whether they demonstrate critical thinking and engagement in their diary entries. By examining the quality of reflective diaries among EFL students at Soran University, to determine whether diary writing is used as an assessment tool for learning or merely as a means of documentation, thereby addressing broader concerns about the role of reflexivity in fostering critical awareness.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore the relationship between reflexivity, diary writing, and possibly the EFL students' awareness of dominant discourses at Soran University, i. e., the ability to critically analyze the language, values,

and assumptions that shape their academic and social contexts based on Kember et al. (2008) and Mizrow's (1991) classification of diary writing. Also, it aims to find out whether diary writing is implemented as an assessment of learning or for learning. Students who use diary writing as a medium for reflexivity can not only document their experiences, but also interrogate and challenge the prevailing societal norms and power structures embedded within dominant discourses (Bazerman, 2011). The essential focus of this research is to investigate quality of the students' diaries and to explore how the students in KRI engage in critical reflection and recognition of the dominant discourses that influence various aspects of their lives, more specifically education. According to Farahian et al. (2020), true reflection can only be promoted, addressed, or evaluated through a methodical approach to written reflection analysis (Farahian et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers must be capable to identify the various ranks of reflection that occur, since it is not sufficient to know that reflection is encouraged by a procedure or technique, based on the identification of the reflective practice teaching and learning process can be addressed (Hatton and Smith, 2006). Nonetheless, critical reflection has been least investigated due to teachers' incompetency in diary writing process (Farahian, et al, 2020). For instance, in Iranian traditional EFL writing classes, teacher-oriented methods predominate almost entirely. EFL students have not been trained to be reflective thinkers; instead, they have been taught to transmit knowledge. The product-oriented method to EFL writing is prevalent in such educational systems, and as Naghdipour and Koç (2014) point out, there is little understanding of the cognitive procedures involved in text composition

Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students use different types of diary writing, and what patterns emerge in their writing styles?

2. To what extent do students demonstrate critical thinking and engage in their diary entries?

2.1. Participants

This study employed purposive sampling, selecting only classes that incorporated reflective diary writing assignments. Specifically, two classes from the two English Departments at Soran University, comprising second- and fourth-year students, were chosen for analysis. Fourth-year students participated in the "Textbook Analysis" module, from whose diaries 21 texts were selected based on their well-structured composition and adherence to the instructor's criteria. Additionally, 45 diaries were chosen from second-year students enrolled in the "Old and Renaissance Literature" module. The

remaining diaries were excluded due to their brevity and failure to meet the instructor's requirements.

2.2. Reflective writing procedure

Over the course of 14 weeks, students had two 90-mintue long classes every week. For this research, the diaries were taken from the students as their impressions on the subjects they have studied. The researcher provided a set of questions so that the students would rely on and have their reflections. In the "Textbook Analysis" module, the instructor asked the fourth year students to choose a chapter from one of the main resource, a book entitled "Cutting Edge", and they were asked to be critical in analyzing the chapter including determining the weak and strong points. In the "Old and Renaincance Literature class", the instructor asked the students to pick one short story, novella or poem that they have studied at that semester and to write their reflections on one of them. The requirements were given as below:

• Which of the topics of this module did you like the most during the second semester? Why? What interests you about this topic?

• Has the knowledge you have obtained from your favorite subject changed your mind about something? If so, explain how. If not, why not?

• Have you got any questions on the subject? What exactly are they?

• What areas of the subject do you believe were not well covered and require further studies? What are your thoughts and comments?

• Describe the knowledge you gained and the general lesson you learned from studying this topic.

The requirements of such a writing dairy were specified in the module descriptors, also known as course guides. The students were asked to unhide the change in their mindset about their community and to raise the questions that had come up to their mind. After each class, 30 minutes had been given to the students to write their thoughts on the class. By the end of the module, the students had sufficient time to write their reflective diaries on the subject on their favor, as specified in the course guides. In the assessment phase, all the diaries were to be reviewed and evaluated. The reflective diary had to be in the form of essay showing their aim of selecting the specific subject in the introduction, followed by body and conclusion.

Once the essays were graded by the instructors, the researchers collected them in hard copy and started the coding process. The content analysis method was implemented for analyzing the data, as this method is suitable for taking themes and categories of certain words or a text (Macnamara, 2020). In this regard, all the writings underwent an intensive reading so that the level of diary writings would be determined. After coding all the manuscripts before writing the analysis, all the manuscripts were given to two other instructors to analyze the level of reflexivity to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings as well as the accuracy and objectivity of the procedures.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Totally, 66 final version diary writings were collected as the first source of data. The students had been given feedback regularly during the course. So, each piece of writing was between two to three printed pages. In order to preserve the anonymity, the pseudonyms were given to each student.

A content analysis method was implemented for data analysis. The reflective assignments were coded adopting the four-category scheme developed by Kember et al. (2008) (See Table 1). This scheme takes an integrated approach to coding assessing the level of reflection across the entire writing, hence, a deductive approach of coding is implemented. A reflective writing typically includes an introduction, context description, experience narration, work analysis, and personal reflection. Kember et al. (2008) recommend that the entire work be examined to define the highest stage of reflection. Thus, each piece of writing is read twice and then reread by the second assessor to ensure a thorough understanding of the writings.
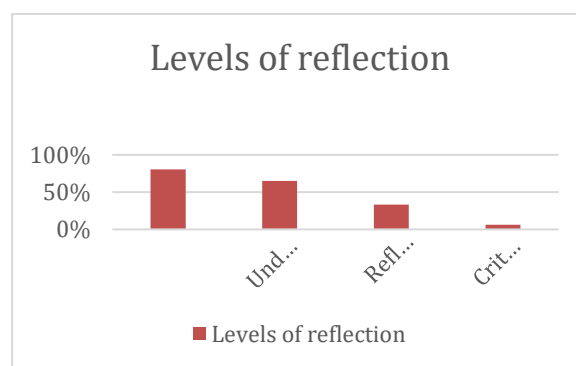

Figure 1 Levels of Critical Reflection

Table 1

Scheme to Measure Reflection levels in Written Work David Kember, Jan McKay, Kit Sinclair and Francis Wong

Non reflection
• The response shows no clue of the student trying to reach an understanding of the notion or theory which supports the topic.
• Material has been located into an essay without the student thinking seriously about it, trying to understand the material, or forming a view.
• Largely reproduction with or without adaptations, of the work of others.

Understanding
• Evidence or understanding of a concept or topic.
• Material is confined to theory.
• Reliance upon what was in the textbook or the lecture notes.
• Theory is not related to personal experiences, real-life applications or practical situations.

Reflection
• Theory is applied to practical situations.
• Situations encountered in practice will be considered and successfully discussed in relationship to what has been taught.
• There are personal insights which go beyond theory.

Critical reflection
• Evidence of a change in perspective over a fundamental belief of the understanding of a key concept or phenomenon.

(2008) cited in (Roux et. al, 201

Table 2

Non- reflection mode of the writings

Theme	Frequency: 43	Quote
Non-reflection	Description (habitual)	The textbook effectively integrates grammar points related to future intentions using "going to" for plans and "would like to" and "want to" for wishes. For example, in a section about planning a festival, it provides exercises where students can practice using these grammar structures to express their intentions for organizing events. Paraphrase in a simple word, hence, grammar, vocabulary and expressions are accumulated in one part".
	Knowledge transferring	"The Shakespearean sonnet, also known as the English sonnet, is a poetic form that William Shakespeare has been popularized by during the Elizabethan era, as his sonnets are admired for their exploration of themes like love, time, beauty and morality". Similarly, the rest of the students among the 30 literal pieces of writings were rather narrative and were in a non- reflective mode". "The book was simply about some expressions and concepts like grammar, pronunciation and other skills"

As a result of analyzing the assignments based on Kember et al.'s (2008) categorization, it seemed that, despite being reminded to be critical, the students have had least contributions to the two top levels of reflection and critical reflection. Hence, all pieces of writings pertain to non-reflection and understanding modes. For this, the researchers benefited from the verbs representing various levels of learning in bloom's taxonomy. Among them, 43 of the 66 papers were classified as a non- reflection. Generally, the writings were the repetition of information in the textbooks without any attempts showing an in-depth or a nuanced understanding of certain contexts. Simply, there were excerpts from the textbooks, for example, Baha, a fourth year student has written:

"The textbook effectively integrates grammar points related to future intentions using "going to" for plans and "would like to" and "want to" for wishes. For example, in a section about planning a festival, it provides exercises where students can practice using these grammar structures to express their intentions for organizing events. paraphrase in a simple word, hence, grammar, vocabulary and expressions are accumulated in one part".

Furthermore, second year students had written rather in a non- reflective way, as they had narrated the themes and ideas of the poem without using certain words like understanding or referring to "I" pronoun, as Hasty noted:

"The Shakespearean sonnet, also known as the English sonnet, is a poetic form that William Shakespeare has been popularized by during the Elizabethan era, as his sonnets are admired for their exploration of themes like love, time, beauty and morality".

Similarly, the rest of the students among the 30 literal pieces of writings were rather narrative and were in a

non- reflective mode. It can be inferred that, the students tried to transfer what is written in the textbook directly to the paper, which simply can be seen as knowledge transferring. Even, there are not any linking words to enhance linking of the ideas. Furthermore, the texts can be regarded below understanding (Kasprabowo, 2021). Based on Kasprabow's (2021) explanation, when none of the levels of blooms taxonomy are seen (verbs he means), then the writing is regarded as a non- reflective piece.

Table 1
Understanding mode of the writings

Theme	Frequency: 53	Quote
Understanding Codes:	Narration	"The Cutting Edge textbook is a good fit for my learning preferences and goals, which helps me stay focused. The use of real-life examples and practical activities also enhances my understanding of the material. In terms of my goals, the book covers a variety of topics relevant to language learning and communication skills, which are important for my personal and professional growth. Now, I am able to communicate by using some certain expressions like how to ask for advice, how to give instruction and how to create a friendship in English".
	Students' take away	"I have found miracle, mystery, and morality plays as the fascinating aspects of Medieval English drama, because they provide insight into the cultural and religious beliefs of the period, as well as the theatrical practices of the era"
	Alignment of their achievements with the learning activities	"Working on groups has made me to better understand the lectures and the subjects, as each learner has a different view towards the subject, I could learn more from them"

With regard to a category referred to as understanding, among the 66 pieces of work, 53 of them were classified within understating mode. This means that, the students have tried to write on their own understating or to let the instructor know that he/she has understood the materials. In this perspective, mostly the first person pronoun is used to refer back to the subject and topics, like "my understanding, I learnt, I understood", which all these means the speaker expresses his/ her understanding. For example, Yaas has declared:

"The Cutting Edge textbook is a good fit for my learning preferences and goals, which helps me stay focused. The use of real-life examples and practical activities also enhances my understanding of the material. In terms of my goals, the book covers a variety of topics relevant to language learning and communication skills, which are important for my personal and professional growth. Now, I am able to communicate by using some certain expressions like how to ask for advice, how to give instruction and how to create a friendship in English".

Similarly, 38 out of 40 reflective essays in the Literature module were around an understanding mode. As the students have rather tried to demonstrate what they took away from the class rather than reflecting on the topics being studied. For instance, Ayah has chosen "medieval English literature" as a reflective essay, along the paragraphs she tried to depict whatever she has learnt as she declared "I have found miracle, mystery, and morality plays as the fascinating aspects of Medieval English drama, because they provide insight into the cultural and religious beliefs of the period, as well as the theatrical practices of the era". During the whole work, she has provided a clear picture of the plays based on her understanding.

Certain expressions from the students' texts were taken in order to investigate the level of students' reflexivity on the subject matter. For instance, one student has further dived into one of the plays in the medieval period. She indicated that "as a religious play on "morality", as it has been played for the people, it is wondering how did it appreciate by the people". This questioning shows that she is still keen to know its impact on the viewers, whether as a means of entertainment or a moral lesson. So, having those questions asked, can let the reader know that the student has established his/ her understanding on the topic. Furthermore, a student mentioned group work in the second chapter of the cutting edge. She stated that she learned various aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and daily expressions while practicing them in groups; she further noted that "because each learner knows a different thing", it seems that teaching practices encouraged their understanding of the topic.

Table 4
Reflection mode of the writings

Theme	Frequency: 22	Quote
Reflection	Expressing their opinion	"I can say that as a result of reading medieval English drama, my insights have further dived into history. I am rather interested in our history and eager to find out more, drama has always been a transferable tool for moral and social education, and this insight has increased my respect for it"
	Referring to their context	"Studying Beowulf deepened my appreciation for the enduring power of storytelling and its ability to convey the universal truth, even the same is true for our community as we have many stories that they reflect the hardness and nature of our people in the past".
	Reflecting on the classroom activities	"The Cutting Edge textbook is a good fit for my learning preferences and goals. which helps me stay focused. The use of real-life examples and practical activities also enhances my understanding of the material. In terms of my goals, the book covers a variety of topics relevant to language learning and communication skills, which are important for my personal and professional growth. Now I am able to use them in my future career even I am quite confident to be able to communicate successfully in a native context".

With regard to reflection, 22 of the 66 papers had one paragraph around reflecting on the topic and going beyond the subject, i.e., the insights have deepened into other contexts. In general, the students from the fourth-year in the linguistic works were rather reflective in their writings. Nonetheless, there were only 6 students in a literature class who had one reflective paragraph. As Mani stated:

"I can say that as a result of reading medieval English drama, my insights have further dived into history. I am rather interested in our history and eager to find out more, drama has always been a transferable tool for moral and social education, and this insight has increased my respect for it".

Neda also reflected on Beowulf as:

"Studying Beowulf deepened my appreciation for the enduring power of storytelling and its ability to convey the universal truth, even the same is true for our community as we have many stories that they reflect the hardness and nature of our people in the past".

What Neda and Mani have just pointed out was linking their knowledge to their culture and community by developing the text. The rest of the participants declared lack of information about the subject before studying it; they have rather understood the exact nature of the subjects.

In the reflective texts written by the fourth-year students in the linguistic module, there is a comprehensive reflection of the classroom activities implemented within the subjects being studied. For instance, Mohamad described the whole book as:

"I think this book is not about updating or outdating, in the other word it is not bound up with time or scientific research holistic. It works with common and prevalent to pics around the world like cultures, tourism places, foods, rituals and furthermore things. As the application of those terms are rather interesting while practicing them with the groups".

In this regard, to explore reflexivity, the researchers were looking for the verbs that the students have used while reflecting, especially those that show higher level of creativity. For instance, analyze, compare, evaluate, relate…… Dunya discussed real- life activities within the book, as she wrote:

"The Cutting Edge textbook is a good fit for my learning preferences and goals, which helps me stay focused. The use of real-life examples and practical activities also enhances my understanding of the material. In terms of my goals, the book covers a variety of topics relevant to language learning and communication skills, which are important for my personal and professional growth. Now I am able to use them in my future career even I am quite confident to be able to communicate successfully in a native context".

It can be noticed that the students didn't write deeply, and they only want to say something that is out of there. I.e,. their voice within the materials is absent, although they have tried to link it to their real life contexts.

Table 2
Critical reflection mode of the writings

Theme	Frequency: 3	Quote
Critical reflection	Criticizing the materials	"There can be a lack of diverse examples covering various situations and contexts, which could limit the students' exposure. Additionally, finding the right balance between teacher-led instruction and student-centered activities can be a bit tricky. It's crucial to be flexible and adapt the content to meet the unique needs and interests of the students".
		"One challenge I encountered was making the textbook content more relatable and engaging for my students in the future. Sometimes the topics or activities didn't connect with their interests or experiences, so I had to get creative in finding ways to make it more relevant to their lives"
	Lack of deep learning	"In Unit Two of the "Cutting Edge" book, it's important to critically analyze the parts where you feel confused or have disagreements that you might encounter some concepts or arguments that might be a bit challenging to grasp".
		"While the textbook contributes significantly to understanding indigenous cultures, some areas may still be confusing, such as the complexity of indigenous rights issues and the impact of colonialism. However, these topics spark further exploration and discussion, contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject even in the classroom with the teacher. Unfortunately, it was absent. So, I have encountered the limited availability of comprehensive information about certain indigenous groups online. However, this led to insights about the importance of diverse perspectives and the need for inclusive representation in educational materials".

With regard to the critical reflection, none of the literature texts from the second- year students can fit in this category, as none of the students was critical in their writings, and were highly descriptive and narrative in their accounts. With regard to the fourth- year students' reflective texts, only 3 out of the 18 exhibited instances of criticality. Here, critical reflection can be divided into some categories based on the data gained. For example, two students criticized the book for not fulfilling the needs of the students, Bahar stated:

"There can be a lack of diverse examples covering various situations and contexts, which could limit the students' exposure. Additionally, finding the right balance between teacher-led instruction and student-centered activities can be a bit tricky. It's crucial to be flexible and adapt the content to meet the unique needs and interests of the students".

What Bahar has just mentioned is the link between the teaching activities and the materials. As the classes were learning- centered, she thinks that the way the book is designed cannot be suitable for this context. In this perspective, a sense of awareness is displayed by the student as she pointed out that they have not gained enough exposure.

Furthermore, a student referred to the confusion that they have faced during one chapter of the book as Leila noted "In Unit Two of the "Cutting Edge" book, it's important to critically analyze the parts where you feel confused or have disagreements that you might encounter some concepts or arguments that might be a bit challenging to grasp". What she has stated might be attributed to the learning style, and the confusion could be due to the expressions found in the book. Another student pointed to her teaching style in the future as she

has written "One challenge I encountered was making the textbook content more relevant and engaging for my students in the future. Sometimes the topics or activities didn't match their interests or experiences, so I had to get creative in finding ways to make it more relevant to their lives". Thus, it seems that they grasped that sometimes content must suit the students' environment and need; otherwise, deep learning may never happen.

A point relating to cultural diversity was raised by Liam, as in the following:

"While the textbook contributes significantly to understanding indigenous cultures, some areas may still be confusing, such as the complexity of indigenous rights issues and the impact of colonialism. However, these topics spark further exploration and discussion, contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject even in the classroom with the teacher. Unfortunately, it was absent. So, I have encountered the limited availability of comprehensive information about certain indigenous groups online. However, this led to insights about the importance of diverse perspectives and the need for inclusive representation in educational materials".

This is an attempt to inform the instructor about some concepts in the textbook that were in need of further exploration and discussion, which is a critical point. This means that her knowledge of the subject has not been established. To support this, two other students have declared that they experienced challenges in comprehending some terms. As they discussed that they were in need of further practice.

In their final paragraphs, four students have provided some recommendations to enhance the book. For instance, Behzad urged the need for including various

cultural topics as he stated "the book itself is for the EFL learners", so he pointed to the need of having various classroom activities to make the content feasible to everyone.

Another student suggested including real-life activities in the classroom as it has been required by the book, as they claimed that the instructor has not implemented them. Also, they indicated the need of further rehearsal in the classroom. All in all, except the above mentioned student, the others did not dive into subjects in relation to the context, and they have rather tried to show what they have learnt and praise the part they have chosen.

4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the university students' diary writings in two classes. It also aimed to explore the types of the reflective writing on students' pieces of texts based on Kember et al.'s (2008) classification, further, to determine the extent of critical thinking and the level of engagement to their arguments. After analyzing the data, as it was demonstrated, all the texts have non- reflective senses and the students have tried to transfer what is been studied or available on the lecture slides to the paper. As the data displayed that 43 of the 66 papers were classified as non-reflective, which is regarded as knowledge-transferring mode, without indicating the first person singular pronoun (I), which means they have not referred to their acquired knowledge. Medina (2005) investigated on a drama class and she demonstrated that none of the students were able to express their thoughts or reflect as they were only narrating what they have on their lectures. Roux (2012) discusses that the students are further tied to deliver exactly what they studied whether they thought it is a way to getting marks, or the teachers do not assist them or follow them up with their feedback. Chong et al. (2019) claims that the students are rather non- reflective in their writing as it seems that diary writing is a new phenomenon, and the students are not trained to get benefits from the words like verbs and other parts of speech to exactly express their opinion. Abdulla (2023) argues that culture plays a significant role in determining whether students develop critical thinking skills. In addition, they are further tied to some sort of learning activities that are not fostering critical thinking and reflection on the materials. Depending on this clue, it can be associated that the students in KRI are not used to critically evaluate or comment on the teachers' materials or teaching styles.

Analysis of the data showed that 53 of the texts were around the understanding mode as the students tried to write how much they have understood of the lectures or subjects. Further, there were repetitions of the expressions "I learnt, I understood, I have got" which all

mean that they tried to transfer exactly what is there without referring back to their reflectivity. Svačinová (2022) discusses that when students are asked to reflect on the class, they are not argumentative and they do not want to think on and out of the subject matter which is exposing their internal- knowledge rather than linking it to the outside context and making inquiries about it. On the other hand, it was demonstrated that the students from the literature class were rather descriptive, which according to Roux (2012), students must have more than just a basic understanding of the content area. Reflection involves various skills such as comparison, classification, synthesis, evaluation, and inference. Students require time and support to develop such academic areas. It can be interpreted that lack of monitoring may have contributed to students' remaining descriptive rather than reflective. Marrow (2011) believes that when the students do not have a sense of reflectivity or even understanding the context well, they mostly show that they have gained knowledge by referring to a specific content. It can be noted that literature needs understanding and reflecting on the community or real world which is quite absent in the students' writings. Kember et al. (2008) still regard understanding as a very basic phenomenon that no signs of deep learning can be noticed. Hence, it can be said that the most frequent patterns of diary writing which appeared in this study was non- reflection and understanding modes.

On the other hand, it was displayed that a small number of students (22) were reflective in either about their learning process or activities. More specifically, it was noted that the students from the linguistics class were more reflective than the literature ones. This means that linguistics students had understood the materials and subjects. Also, two students from the literature class have asked some questions in relation to the plays. This matches with Dewey's (1995) idea on the journal writing, as he specifies that the students are reflexive when they question and link their knowledge to their community (Williams, 2017), i.e. they can be regarded as conscious figures in the classroom. What Dewey has just pointed out is a sense of awareness. This aligns with Klimova (2015) as he demonstrated, writing diaries benefits both teachers and students by providing feedback on learning constraints and difficulties, as well as teaching students how to learn effectively.

With reference to Dewey's (1995) concept of awareness, it was shown that few students referred to the assistance of the classroom learning activities in enhancing their learning. Furthermore, reference to real life activities, by one of the students, denotes their awareness of the innovative activities as they are implemented for serving their learning process. Parallel with this, Farhaian et al. (2020) regard this as part of the reflective thinking, as it can be motivated by various

factors, such as instructor feedback, and a new method of practicing. Therefore, increased attention to reflective writing highlights the importance of learning activities, and has major impact on students' knowledge acquisition, and interaction with the outside world. More specifically, in various educational contexts, there is a notable deficiency in classroom practices designed to promote student engagement. According to Williams (2017), fostering positive learning communities in classrooms can lead to increased academic achievement. This aligns with Dewey's concept of "awareness" in the classroom through employing Dewey's (1993) contemporary practice of teaching, such as giving students time and chance to reflect on the class, i.e., devoting half of the class time for checking their reflective statements individually and occasionally with their peers.

To investigate the level of critical reflection, it was found out that, among the 66 pieces of writing, only 3 instances of criticality were observed. However, this sense of criticality did not emerge as a result of their knowledge or their learning, but blaming the textbook for not meeting their needs, and in another case, facing confusion in one chapter of the book. Although based on Kember et al. (2008) and Mizero (1991), these can be classified under the critical reflection, it was not on the learning process but the environment, learning activities and materials and no instance of questioning the discourse and analysis of the concepts studied. Therefore, it is highly likely that the process of deep learning has not happened. In this regard, the results contradict the findings of Janistic (2000) and Kasprabowo et al. (2021) that emphasize diary writing's implicit role as a method for students to express their inner feelings and dissatisfactions in class as they claim that they might be unable to express their ideas in a spoken communication. The absence of critical reflection on the acquired knowledge is also raised by Marrow (2014), as she states that thinking, learning and assessment of self and social systems should be placed in a critical reflection, to give a teacher a sense of self- assessment on a material been taught. Williams (2017) notes that in a diverse educational system like the United States and any other contexts alike, it is critical to explicitly teach that different points of view and perspectives are highly valued in today's classrooms. He rather recommends the Responsive Classroom approach as it provides specific recommendations and strategies for teachers to create a classroom community that fosters social and academic success in addition to enabling them to pursue their interests and search for related information until they are satisfied with what they find.

Thus, it can be added that diary writing, as an expressed version of interior discourse, is a personalized and hybrid activity that can meet various needs for the diarist. In this resspect, this study illustrated that writing

diaries was conducted as an assessment tool of learning not for learning. Diaries do not capture typical internal dialogue to address specific needs. In other words, most of those (59 out of 66) were regarded as a report without capturing anything new. Further, there were no space for the teachers to improve and modify their curriculum, to answer students' questions and direct them to process where a deep learning can happen. Rymes (2008), urges that to preserve high and unbiased student attainment in public education, instructors must internally be motivated to continue the hard work to assist the students and guide them with their methods of teaching because reflection gives meaning to the teaching process. For instance, many researchers have provided some practical solutions to drive students to be active agents in the classroom. For instance, Klimova (2016) refers to the in-person sessions of suggesting specific issues. After students write their diaries, they can be asked to review them to determine their own problem patterns and strategies for resolving them. In this way, teachers can better meet the needs of their students, which is an indirect method of self-reflection.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The study investigated the level of the students' diaries in the two modules of English departments at Soran University. The study came to the conclusion that the 66 diaries did not meet the criteria for being well-constructed because the vast majority of them were deemed to be non-reflective. Language difficulties were reasoned in the literature module to motivate the students to transfer the exact knowledge as it was noticed that students had tried to deliver the exact content without any changes.

In this respect, the students' diaries have recorded to have the lowest level of reflection based on analyzing them on Kember et al. (2008) classification. As it was all based on the knowledge- transferring aspect, it can be decided that the diaries are the assessment of learning not for learning, which is the same traditional method of testing and it is not a way to render students to be reflective and critical.

With regard to reflexivity, it was noted that the 22 students were reflexive especially in the linguistics module because, compared to the literature module, the course content of the linguistics module was easier. A lower level of reflexivity was noticed in two diaries of the literature module based on what is required in the assessment guidelines. Also, the diaries did not address all the questions in the diary writing specifications. It is also concluded that monitoring and regular feedback by teachers were absent during the process of constructing

diaries, as nothing was mentioned in their course guidelines.

With regard to the pedagogical practices, as it was observed from the module descriptors, the literature module's practices were quite teacher-centered, but there were group and pair work activities mentioned in the linguistic modules. Hence, none of the students referred to classroom activities that assisted their learning process. Still, they all regarded diaries as a process of assessing their competency of knowledge not their awareness of the discourse.

The study also concludes that deep learning has not taken place in those students as any sort of questioning and criticizing were absent. This means that the students were not active agents of their learning, but rather they were regarded as passive receivers since only 3 students were critical on their writings, all of which were related to the teaching style and cultural aspects.

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends that diary writing should be implemented in a natural context and through gradual steps. Also, teachers are regarded as the role models in this aspect, as they have to pave the way for the students. When reflective writing is implemented in multiple courses using a methodical, developmental approach, it ought to produce better outcomes. To become reflective writers, teachers and students need to be aware that reflection is a hard and delicate process. Students need to put in time, effort, and experience. Also, organizing the reflection process is essential to maximizing the positive attributes. This structure consists of giving students targeted questions or prompts to help them concentrate on topics that are most pertinent to the course material, and implementing the process approach to writing, which gives students lots of chances to get feedback from peers and the instructor, and additionally, to have all their questions answered, which is a reflection for the teachers too. This process will implement the real approach of assessment for learning through roundtable classes. Additionally, student writers benefit from peer review since it allows them to form relationships with other students and provides an organized environment in which they can think critically and see how their ideas are applied.

Furthermore, long-term scaffolding is necessary for successful writing, especially when the writers are not speaking in their native language. Teaching participants to recognize linguistic elements in their own writing can lead to even greater progress. As noticed from the module descriptors, students' attempts to write reflectively were not aided by the provision of reflective writing examples on the teaching practices, context and linkage to the outside world. It is possible that students' reflective writings might have improved more if they had been taught how to recognize, contrast, and compare the characteristics of assessed or critical reflection with those of expressive reflection or retelling at a lesser level. Such explicit demonstration and delivering more training courses will enable the teachers to monitor students while progressing with their diaries. This, in turn, could enhance sustained reflective writing.

The final recommendation goes to the future research, as this study investigated a limited context. Therefore, future studies can be implemented on a wider context and embrace all the universities in KRI region. An action research can tackle so many problems that have been disclosed in the study like teaching methods and cultural aspects that can potentially enhance students' competency on the reflective aspects, and render them to be more critical and be aware to speak out of the aspects that may not meet their needs.

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