

Students' Critical Thinking and Writing Skills Regarded to Reflective Writing

Firda Fauziah Nur Sajidin ¹,

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta

Supeno ²,

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta

e-mail: firdafauziah@gmail.com¹

e-mail: supeno@gmail.com²

Abstract: The research aims to describe and analyze the students writing skill and critical thinking by making reflective writing. Specifically, this research is conducted to find out: (1) Whether or not Reflective Writing could improve students in writing skill. (2) Whether or not Critical Thinking Disposition appears in Reflective Writing. (3) Participants response to Reflective Writing. This research is conducted in qualitative, particularly in a case study. The result shows that all participants improve skill in general writing. The participants improve in general aspect of writing such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. In making reflection, two participants improve the level of reflection that is from non-reflection become in the understanding level and in the reflection level or the third level. However, a participant is in the same level of reflection that is still in level of non-reflection. The Critical Thinking Dispositions that appear in this research are Open-Mindedness, Inquisitiveness, Systematic, and Analyticity. In addition, the participants present a positive response to reflective writing because RW helps in self-evaluation and self- awareness.

Key Words: Reflective writing; students' critical thinking; students' writing skills

Introduction

The research is aimed at finding out how the use of Reflective Writing (RW) helps students to improve writing and critical thinking skills. Writing skill becomes important for every student and it becomes a challenge for them. In making an essay, one of the forms of formal writing, writers should focus on how they develop ideas for the content and the linguistic aspect such as grammar, structure, and vocabulary. A good writer serves a good content of writing which combines their various insights from the environment, experience, and interaction in daily life. In addition, A good thinker uses the activity of analyzing and evaluating the argument, idea, or viewpoint.

In writing, students improve the way of communication because the activity helps students to keep learning from their mistakes while writing a text. Suleiman (2000) states that writing skill has an important role in language. In addition, language represents the writer's thinking. By writing, students afford the same opportunity to learn new knowledge and language all at once. The new knowledge should be expanded and arranged to increase the writer's content of writing and improve their thinking process. Furthermore, writing is the best way of forming thinking and thought (Beed et al.,2005).

Kamler & Thomson (2006) as cited in Burton, et al. (2009:1) states that writing is difficult and emotional. Writing activity needs the writer's high thinking process in accumulating and arranging ideas of writing. The ideas of writing do not simply flow through the writer's head into the paper, but it needs the stimulation of ideas such as by free writing and brainstorming. Moreover, it will be harder when the students are not accustomed to writing regarding the language which is related to a linguistic aspect. In Indonesia, the position of English is as a foreign language (EFL). It makes the ongoing practice in writing



becomes necessary because the English for Foreign Language (EFL) students are struggling more than the English for Second Language (ESL) students related to the linguistics aspect.

This research purposes to use Reflective Writing (RW) as a tool for the teacher to improve students' writing and critical thinking skill. The research is focused on the use of Reflective Writing (RW) because it is commonly used and assessed by the tutor as the outcome of reflection according to Moon (2006:36). The term of RW is also recognized as Personal Journal Writing (PJW), Journal Writing (JW), Learning Journal, Diary Writing (DR), or Reflective Journal Writing (RJW). That kind of writing represents the students' feeling and thought towards the activity done in the classroom, convey opinion freely towards the books, articles, or texts read by students or reflecting some problem found in the daily life.

In Reflective Writing, students critically give some opinions, ideas, or reasons towards the interesting object of the lesson and develop their thought into a paragraph or a text without the anxiety of the sentence error. Moreover, making Reflective Writing helps students to record and to organize their feeling and thinking. RW also facilitates the student to gradually evaluate their learning process and it makes the students aware of the writing process. Evaluating learning process means that students do a self-assessment which is significant for knowing the students' progress. Doing the reflection is useful and positive for the students. However, making the reflective writing is consuming time (Yazım, 2014)

There are previous researches related to RW and its implementation in different field of study. Amirkhanova, et al. (2016) state that students who keep RW shows a good result at the final examination and increase students' intrinsic motivation. Based on Fritson, Forrest, & Boon, n.d (2016), students increase content comprehension of the lesson. Al-Rawahi & Al-Balushi (2015) have done a research in terms of the effect of journal writing to students' self-regulated learning strategies and the result showed that students increase self-regulation strategies if they structured in self-reflection which is related to students' learning goal, observation, and feeling. The diary writing is effective to help the student in improving writing skill and also their level achievement in vocabulary and grammar (Taqi, Akbar, Al-Nouh, & Dashti, 2015). Teachers are able to understand students' feelings, needs and thought through journal writing and also to know students' preference in learning writing or learning style (Tuan, 2010).

Method

This research is conducted in qualitative, particularly in a case study. The participants are selected purposively by considering the result from the first draft of reflective writing. The instruments to collect the data are document analysis and interview. Students need to make RW approximately for three or four weeks. The structured form of reflective writing is created by adapting the template based on the Reflective cycle by Gibbs' (1988). The interview was conducted in the informal setting. The interview was chosen because the optimal result is expected. To gain the students' opinion and to know their improvement, the discussion is related to the RW such as the problem faced during writing the reflection template by meeting personally with each student or using social media. The students are able to share freely related to the difficulties faced during writing the reflective template.

To investigate students' general writing skill, the rubric from Brown (2007) was used with performance description score range from low to high 1 – 4 and the formula is:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{3C + 2O + 2G + 1,5V + 1,5M}{40} \times 10 \dots$$

Note: C= 30% Content (Topic and details)

O= 20% Organization (Identification and description)

G= 20% Grammar (Use present tense and agreement)

V=15% Vocabulary

M=15% Mechanics (Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization)



The type of interview used is a semi-structured interview, open-ended data email interview used as the data collection. Data analysis is the process which is involving several steps and techniques.

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis

In this step, all the data is collected and grouped according to the different types depending on the information.

2. Read through all the data

After organizing and preparing the data, the entire data would be read and the general information about the students' RW would be gained

3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process

The data from analyzing and collecting the students' RW template is coded based on the collage-writing rubric and critical thinking disposition analysis.

4. Consider some remarks that will provide detailed guidance for the coding process.

5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

6. A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data.

Results and Discussion

Results

In this research, four-category scheme from Kember, et al. (2008) used as a rubric to analyze students' reflection and to reinforce the identifications. According to the theory above, there are four level of reflections and each of the level has its indicators. The first level or the highest level is critical reflection. The second level is reflection. The third level is understanding. The last is non-reflection level

Table 1 Student's Reflection on the first RW

Students' Reflection	
1	I and the teacher work hard to achieve the goal is to explore what the students learn in learning process. We should work together with other people, we should have good relationship with students, teacher, headmaster, parents and society
2	there are some stage that we should prepare, when we want to be an entrepreneurship. Made think what should be prepared and what should be ready to bear when we want to be an entrepreneur. I was glad to took part. When we want to be entrepreneurship accept failure as part of journey. Do what we love, make a new thing, have a plan and enjoy the process
3	Now I realize that I still lack of experience. I wish I could do better on explaining and gaining new knowledge in Australia

The first participant did not do analysis or evaluation in this reflective writing. This condition makes categorized as non-level of reflection.

The second Participant did not write and try to find out in the other reliable sources the information about how to be an antreprenuer. There is no detail plan for the future action as the result of her experience. This condition make The second Participant is categorized as non-reflection level.

The third participants are in the level of non-reflection because of not showing evidence that they are trying to understand the topic and they are not seriously thinking about the topic which leads them to gain new skill or knowledge

Table 2 Student’s Reflection on the third RW

No	Participant	Level of Reflection
1	First Participant	Understanding; there is evidence that The first Participant understands the topic by mentioning the details of the underpins topic.
2	Second Participant	Non-reflection; the evidence of understanding the topic could not be found in the text.
3	Third Participant	Reflection; the personal perspective appear that is related the subject matter or information.

Table 3 CTD Appear in students

No	Participants	First Week of Making RW	Third Week of Making RW
1	First Participant	Open-mindedness	a. Systematicity b. Analyticity
2	second Participant	Inquisitiveness	Inquisitiveness
3	Third participant	Inquisitiveness	a. Analyticity b. Open-mindedness

Table 4 Students’ response

RESPONSE	The first participant’s response:	The second participant’s response:	The third participant’s response:
self-awareness and self-reflection	I can recall some improvement in my life then I can list what went wrong and right to lead me in the future	I realize that the experience has benefit and I could learning from this experience for the future life	I could get many lessons from what happened
self-evaluation	It's quite easy because reflective writing is like make an evaluation		reflective writing requires our own experience
RW could improve both their writing and critical thinking skill	we evaluate ourselves in so many aspect then unconsciously our critical thinking is improved	We could directly write our perspective	it does stimulate our critical thinking

Discussion

Based the first participant she is consistent to what she thinks and beliefs in reflective writing. Consistency is important in critical thinking due to its relation to logic. Logic helps to identify if individual holds inconsistent beliefs means there is a possibility that one of beliefs might be wrong (Bassham, 2010:4). The statement that consistent to the topic “Working together or teamwork”:

Based on second participant she can identifying and collecting several information greatly. The statement from the topic is she can motivate herself to be a better business. The motivation to think critically in the relevant circumstances largely means that, when encountering situations that require critical thinking, one is motivated to seek reasons and to evaluate the weight of different reasons.

At the first time making RW, the third participant shows no excessive mistakes in general writing skill. She can identify and collecting relevant information. They have improvement on their third making reflective writing.

Based on the two assessors and the rubric from Brown (2007), the first participant improves in general writing that could be seen in her first and third RW. The assessors agree that the first Participant improves in content, grammar, and mechanics.

The second participant explained her experience about being one of the members in a computer application course. Based on the assessors and Brown (2007), third RW improved in aspects of general writing. Assessor 1 gives an improvement in content and vocabulary. Assessor 2 increases score in organization.



At the first time making RW, shows no excessive mistakes in general writing skill and she improves general writing aspects. Assessor 1 (A1) gives an improvement in grammar and vocabulary aspect. Assessor 2 (A2) gives improvement in mechanics.

RW helps students to do evaluation through a week. This section would reveal whether or not students increase their reflection after making reflective writing during three weeks. Kember, et al. (2008) state that the process of reflection happened when the individual personally involves in the activity of analyzing the past action and evaluating the experience and belief.

Students critical thinking are improve too, In the long-term implication section, The first Participant indicates her open-mindedness by being ready to accept other people's suggestion, comments, and critics. There are two CTDs appear in this student's RW. The first is systematic and the second is analytic person. First, she inclines to systematic person because she is being focused and diligent to investigate some bad impacts of addicting to hand phone. She wrote the topic based on the information from the articles on internet. Second, she disposes to analyticity because she presented prevention of the consequence of hand phone addiction. She decided some methods to minimize and to decrease the bad impact of hand phone. The second Participant is stimulated and motivated by the informants who share their experience when she attended the seminar. After feeling motivated, the second Participant shows the attitude of curiosity and the desire to learn to be a successful entrepreneur. She tries to find out how to be a successful entrepreneur; what to do and what to prepare. The second Participant is better in expressing her confidence in learning new knowledge and in describing her feeling towards the topic rather than the first and third Participant. These are the second Participant's self-confidence in learning new knowledge:

“I can receive all the material well and I can apply it”.

“.....So, my ability is always growing”.

“.....Also, my ability to computer application becomes deeper”.

In conclusion, the second Participant is indicated as an inquisitive person because she has a desire to explore and to gain new knowledge.

The disposition appears in The Third Participant reflective writing is the inquisitiveness. The Third Participant wrote in the RW:

“I wish I could do better on exploring and gaining new knowledge in Australia... (Inquisitiveness of CTD)”

“there are so many thing i could learn from every place in the world. You should have a high curiosity to explore the world beyond what we think we could do... (Inquisitiveness of CTD).”

In the third week of making RW, open-mindedness and analyticity emerge. The Third Participant inclines to analyticity because she is aware about some preventive actions to the consequences that might appear in the future. In addition, she disposes to open-mindedness because she is ready to receive other's suggestions and advices.

RW gains a positive response for the participants. It facilitates self-awareness and self-reflection towards the experience. Due to self-experience, the participants are free to evaluate their experience in RW. In addition, RW helps them to convey personal perspectives and statements that stimulate their critical thinking.

Conclusions

1. Students' Improvement both in General Writing and Writing Reflection.

a. General Writing

The improvement of general writing skill could be assessed by using the rubric. The participants have been given a month to write three reflective writings which mean they wrote one RW in a week. The topic to write in RW is based on the participant's personal experiences. The two assessors that have given score of reflective writing agree that the participants are improving their score in general writing aspects.

b. Reflection

To assess students' reflection in RW, the level of reflection is used as a rubric. There is four level reflection. They are from the lowest is non-reflection, the second is understanding, the third level is reflection, and the highest level is critical reflection.

Based on the research have done with the participants. All participants are in the non-reflection level in the first reflective writing. However, the third RW presents that the first Participant moves from non-reflection to the understanding level and The Third Participant starts from non-reflection level to the stage three that is reflection level. In contrast, the second Participant is in the non-reflection level in the first and the third of RW because the vagueness is still found in The second Participant's reflective writing.

2. The Critical Thinking Dispositions in Reflective Writing.

In the first RW, the critical thinking dispositions that appear are Open-Mindedness, and Inquisitiveness. Furthermore, in the third RW, the dispositions of critical thinking that are presented by the participants are Systematic, Analyticity, Analyticity, Open-mindedness, and Inquisitiveness. Dispositions of critical thinking is a tendency to think and to choose decision in particular circumstances. It is related to the habitual act of thinking which means this skill needs time to be acquired by practicing and using it in learning activity from very young age.

3. The Response to Reflective Writing

The participants present positive response to the use of RW to capture their personal experiences. They see RW improves self-learning by evaluating good and bad experience in order to act better and to prevent similar bad experience happened in the future. They also realize RW could improve writing skill both in general writing and making reflection. Additionally, by reviewing experience, they could evaluate the experience and think seriously about what happened.

Acknowledgements

This Journal was written to fulfill one of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree at the Indraprasta PGRI University. On this good occasion, allow the author to convey respect and gratitude to all parties who have sincerely provided assistance and encouragement to the author in completing this thesis. especially to:

1. Prof. Dr. H. Sumaryoto as material thesis advisor Indraprasta PGRI University.
2. Dr. Supeno, M.Hum as technical thesis advisor of Indraprasta PGRI University.
3. Prof. Dr. H. Sumaryoto as a rector of Indraprasta PGRI University.
4. Dr. Mamik Suendarti as a dean of Indraprasta PGRI University.
5. All lecturers of English Education of Indraprasta PGRI University
6. All of my friends in English Education Department batch 2019, especially all of friends in Ekstensi A Class.
7. The writer's beloved parents, Mr. Aep Sajidin S.Sos and Mrs. Elis Juarsih S.Ag, as my beloved parents who always have a big room in their hearts to forgive all of my faults, to love me unconditionally and to never stop praying in their Qiyamullail for my happiness.

And For those who involved in the process of writing this paper, whose name cannot be mentioned one by one, I hope God will reply all of your kindness. May Allah bless all of them, Amiin.



References

- Al-Rawahi & Al-Balushi (2015). *Examining The Effects of Reflective Journals on Pre-service Science Teachers' General Chemistry Laboratory Achievement*. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 125-146.
- Amirkhanova. (2016). *Enhancing Students' Learning Motivation through Reflective*. 2nd International Forum on Teacher Education, 15-18.
- Bassham, G. (2010). *Critical thinking: a student's introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Brown, H. D. (2007) *Assessing Writing Descriptive Text*. Retrieved July 5, 2017, from Internasional Education Week: <https://teachingenglish4all.wordpress.com/2010/09/05/assessing-writing-descriptive-text/>
- David Kember, J. M. (2008). *A four-category scheme for coding and assessing the level of reflection in written work*. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 369-379.
- Gibbs, G. (1998). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Further Education Unit.
- Hanan A. Taqi, Akbar, Al-Nouh and Dashti R. S.-N. (2015). *The Effect of Diary Writing on EFL Student' Writing and Language Abilities*. European Centre for Research Training and Development UK, 75-91.
- Krista K. Fritson, K. D. (2016). *The Effects of Reflective Journaling on Content Comprehension*. International Journal of Education and Social Science, 39-42.
- Moon, J. A. (2006). *Learning Journal: A Handbook for Reflective Practice and Professional Development*. USA: Routledge.
- Penny L. Beed, V. G. (2005). *The Power of Reflective Writing for Students and Teachers*. International Reading Association, 163-167.
- Suleiman M. F. (2000) *The process and product of writing: Implications for elementary school teachers*. ERIC Digest, ERIC Identifier ED 442299.
- Tuan, L. T. (2010). *Enhancing EFL Learners' Writing Skill via Journal Writing*. English Language Teaching, 81 - 88.