



RESEARCH PAPER

Reflective Learning at the University Level: A Qualitative Study from the Student's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Reflective learning is the act of considering one's own experiences and thoughts to gain new knowledge and enhance performance in the future. To encourage student involvement and self-directed learning, reflective learning grew in popularity in higher education. This study aimed to investigate students' perspectives on reflective learning in higher education. Nature of the study is qualitative and phenomenological approach is used to understand the lived experiences of students about reflective learning in higher education. In-depth interviews were used in the study to collect information from undergraduate and graduate students. A thematic analysis of the data collected has identified the key factors that influence the effectiveness of reflective learning in higher education. This research has provided valuable insights into students' perspectives on reflective learning and has contributed to the development of strategies to enhance its effectiveness. The findings indicate that students are supportive of promoting reflective learning as they believe it improves their academic performance. The crucial elements of reflective learning include self-awareness, regular feedback, clear objectives, proper guidelines, and active engagement. Ultimately, the results of this study emphasize the importance of incorporating reflective learning into teaching practices.

KEYWORDS Career Readiness, Critical Thinking, Higher Education, Personal Development, Reflective Learning, Student's Perspectives

Introduction

Reflective learning is a process of introspection and self-evaluation that allows individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, thoughts, and actions. In higher education, it is a powerful tool for personal development and career readiness. Students who engage in reflective learning may be better able to think critically, solve problems more effectively, and become more self-aware. This article will examine the idea of reflective learning in higher education, concentrating on student viewpoints and their effects on career preparedness and personal growth.

The ability to better comprehend one's learning processes is one of the main advantages of reflective learning in higher education. Students can pinpoint their areas for improvement and create solutions to these problems by reflecting on their experiences. Increased learning efficiency and improved academic success can result from this self-awareness (Hughes et al., 2019). Furthermore, reflecting on one's experiences might aid pupils in acquiring critical thinking abilities, which are crucial for success in today's complex and fast-changing world (Morris, 2019).

Additionally, important for professional readiness and personal growth is reflective learning. Students can build a deeper sense of self-awareness by thinking back on their experiences and understanding their strengths and flaws. This can assist individuals in identifying their interests and passions, which can inform their academic and professional choices (Alam, 2022). Additionally, reflective learning can assist students in acquiring the knowledge and abilities necessary to thrive in their chosen careers, including good communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Almazroui, 2023).

Reflective learning has numerous advantages, but certain issues need to be resolved. Reflective learning needs time and effort, which can be challenging for students who are already busy with their academics and other commitments. This is one of the key problems (McGarr, 2021). Additionally, because reflective learning includes introspection and self-evaluation, some students can find it challenging to participate (Singh & Diefes-Dux, 2023).

Higher education institutions can give students the assistance and resources they need to engage in reflective learning to overcome these difficulties. This can involve instructing students on reflective learning strategies and providing them with opportunities to practice these strategies through assignments, notebooks, and other kinds of self-evaluation (Colomer et al., 2020). Institutions should also promote the use of modern tools like e-portfolios, which give students a simple and practical way to record their reflections and share them with others (Eynon & Gambino, 2023).

Reflective learning in higher education is a potent instrument for professional readiness and personal growth. Reflective learning can aid students in improving their problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and self-awareness by enabling them to obtain a deeper understanding of their learning processes. By offering instruction and materials as well as opportunities for self-evaluation, higher education institutions can assist students in engaging in reflective learning.

Literature Review

Reflective learning involves thinking about one's own experiences and ideas to comprehend and enhance them. It is becoming more widely acknowledged as a crucial component of higher education, especially in terms of the intellectual and personal development of students. This study of the literature will look at the several ways that reflective learning is used in higher education and how it affects student perspectives, academic growth, teacher support, and personal growth (Amjad et al., 2023). Higher educational institutions play an important role in nurturing critical thinking skills among students (Afzal et al., 2023), which enhance their reflective learning.

Students who participated in reflective learning had a greater comprehension of the subject matter and were better able to apply what they had learned to different contexts, according to a study (Chen et al., 2019). They were also more self-directed in their learning and better at recognizing and solving difficulties. According to this study, reflective learning may benefit a student's academic growth. In a similar vein, scholars discovered that reflective learning can help to advance the advancement of professional knowledge and abilities (Alsina & Mulà, 2019).

Additionally, Liu's (2020) study discovered that reflective learning might result in transformative learning and personal growth. Students can challenge their presumptions and views through reflective learning, which helps them gain a better knowledge of who they are and where they fit in the world (Liu, 2020). Critical thinking abilities and personal development may result from this. Regarding teacher assistance, a study (Mohseni et al., 2020). it is discovered that reflective learning can result in improved teacher-student communication and collaboration. Students are better able to express their wants and

concerns to teachers when they are encouraged to reflect on their learning, which results in more efficient teaching and learning (Amjad et al., 2022).

Colomer et al. (2020) investigated the use of reflective journals in a higher education context in a different study. The authors discovered that by allowing students to actively participate in their experiences and reflect on their learning processes, this method can effectively encourage reflective learning (Colomer et al., 2020). The study also discovered that reflective diaries can be especially helpful for college students majoring in professional subjects since they can support the growth of the abilities and expertise required for success in their chosen fields. Additionally, a study by Sweet (2023) discovered that reflective learning can result in transformative learning and personal growth. Students can challenge their presumptions and views through reflective learning, which helps them gain a better knowledge of who they are and where they fit in the world. Critical thinking abilities and personal development may result from this. Regarding its application in higher education (Sweet, 2023).

Comparably, A study by Colomer et al. (2020) found that students who engaged in reflective learning were better prepared for the workforce and had a more positive attitude towards their future career. Despite the numerous benefits of reflective learning, some students may struggle with the process. Accordingly, a study by Lorenzo-Moledo et al. (2021) discovered that using reflective diaries to promote reflective learning is a successful strategy. Students can write their ideas and experiences in journals and organize them for further reflection. This may result in a greater comprehension of the subject matter and personal development (Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2021).

In a related study, Silver et al. (2023) discovered that students who were less adept in metacognition—the capacity to reflect on their thoughts—had a harder time engaging in reflective learning. According to the study, teaching students how to reflect on their learning as a metacognitive awareness intervention may be helpful (Silver et al., 2023). Similarly, research has indicated that students who actively participate in reflective learning exhibit enhanced comprehension and application of the subject matter. Moreover, they are able to establish meaningful connections between the material and their personal lives and experiences (Chen et al., 2019).

Another study was conducted by Marinho et al., (2021). This article presents the outcomes of a review on assessing the perception of students taking part in reflective learning experiences highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. In four college-level courses—nursing, environmental sciences, psychology, and social education—four center events with students who had taken part in real-life encounters were scheduled. The data was separated using a thematic content analysis. According to the evaluation, students think that reflective learning enhances their self-awareness, their learning, and their desire to learn. The majority of the issues that were acknowledged had to do with comprehending the experience's main themes, the degree of personal transparency, and the assessment process. Additionally, the specialization offers certain standards and recommendations for enhancing undergraduate preparatory experiences in light of reflective learning (Marinho et al., 2021). It was observed that students while writing tend to be more reflective, and learners preferred the teachers' feedback on their writing tasks for reflection (Shah et al., 2023). Reflective learning is one of the many faces of Higher Order Thinking Skills which is a talent that seems to be difficult for students to be master in it due to the lack of help and practice with the skills provided by teachers. But the teachers' efficiency in using a variety of strategies and tactics in teaching and learning sessions has increased effectiveness of reflective learning for students in mastering higher order thinking skills (Bashir et al., 2021).

Additionally, in Colomer et al. (2020), a study titled “Reflective learning in higher education” Considering the learner-centered approach in higher education” was released.

The ability to reflect has grown in relevance, especially in higher education, as the value of deep learning has become more widely understood. Although the nature of understudy reflection may change, it is generally thought that when subordinates are given the responsibility of mirroring, they are aware of how to reflect. There is a need for a deeper understanding of undergrads' perceptions of reflection and the issues they face as they continue to struggle with the demonstration of thinking and the lifestyle of being fundamentally intelligent. This top-to-bottom, restricted scale assessment's goal was to identify the apprentice perspective by getting understudies to report on their experiences. Analysis of viewpoints and interactions from the perspectives of people who were actively experiencing and exploring the cycle was given particular priority. Eleven college freshmen from a Malaysian university took part in this qualitative study. After the students completed a vote, the expert conferred with the understudies. The gathered information was examined using a thematic method. Six subthemes and two major concerns emerged from the information assessment: (1) perspectives of reflection - beginning contacts, understanding of reflection, and transformation; (2) problems encountered - the need for greater cycle-centered critique, the truth being communicated, and inactivity all else being equal. The discoveries are investigated using important models derived from the data (Colomer et al., 2020). Additionally, reflective learning has been linked favorably to students' self-efficacy and self-esteem (Yang et al., 2020) and linked favorably to students' personal development and improvement (Menekse, 2020).

In summary, research indicates that reflective learning can benefit students' academic growth, personal growth, teacher support, and personal development. To promote reflective learning in higher education, reflective diaries, and other reflective activities might be useful. To completely comprehend the influence of reflective learning on student perspectives and to determine the best ways to use it in higher education, additional study is nonetheless required.

Reflective learning involves students critically evaluating their own experiences and ideas to better grasp the subject matter they are studying. Reflective learning in higher education may be utilized to improve critical thinking and student engagement, both of which are essential for success in the workforce. This paper intends to look into how pupils' attitudes in higher education are affected through reflective learning. The results of this study may help shape future educational practices and regulations that encourage student growth and learning. This research can also be a helpful tool for educators and administrators who want to enhance the efficiency of their instructional strategies and boost student achievement.

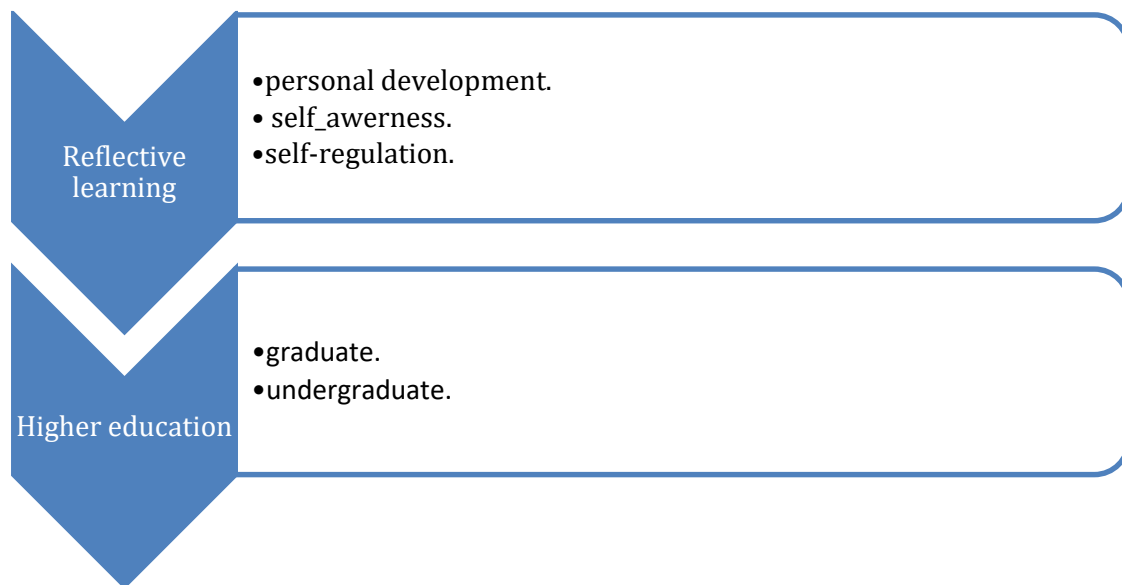
Conceptual Framework

One key theory that could inform this research is Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Nurunnabi et al., 2022) which proposes that individuals learn through a cyclical process of experiencing an event, reflecting on the experience, abstracting concepts and theories from the experience, and then applying these concepts in new situations. This theory suggests that reflective learning can be an effective method for adult learners in higher education to develop new knowledge and skills.

Another important theoretical framework that could inform this research is Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Rojo et al., 2023). Mezirow contends that when people start focusing on their experiences and presumptions, they may go through a process of "perspective transformation," which leads to a better knowledge of who they are and how the world works. According to this notion, reflective learning can result in social and individual change.

In addition, the research could also draw on the idea of independent learning which emphasizes the importance of student autonomy and ownership in the learning process.

This concept also stresses the role of critical reflection in shaping the student's perspective and learning.



According to the issue statement for this study, there is a lack of knowledge on how students see and interact with this kind of learning, despite the rising acknowledgement of the significance of reflective learning in higher education. This study aims to investigate students' perspectives on reflective learning in higher education, including their conceptualization of the idea, their methods for reflection, and the effects of reflective learning on their overall academic performance and personal growth.

Material and Methods

The nature of the study was qualitative research, using a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of students about reflective learning in higher education. The research design consisted of in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of undergraduate and graduate students from various disciplines who had experience with reflective learning in their coursework. The semi-structured interviews allowed for conversational freedom while also guaranteeing that particular subjects were covered. The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis to uncover trends and themes in the views of the students on reflective learning. As a result, the data gathered from the interviews was triangulated, giving a more comprehensive insight into the students' experiences with reflective learning. It provided information about how students viewed and engaged with reflective learning in higher education, and it supported the creation of effective reflective learning strategies in the classroom.

Population and Sampling

Using the purposive method in phenomenology, a sample of twelve participants from three private universities were chosen. They included 6 male and 6 female participants and having almost 5-year experience in studying the university.

Research Instrument

The study utilized semi-structured interviews as a tool for gathering and collecting the necessary data and information. In developing the interview questions, the research objectives and insights from previous studies on reflective learning at the university level,

particularly focusing on students' perspectives, were taken into account. The researcher adapted and modified a questionnaire developed by different researchers. Also, the researcher made slight modifications by removing unrelated sections and adding necessary ones.

In this study, the researcher aimed to ensure the reliability of the findings by using structured and consistent interview questions across all participants. This was achieved by using standardized interview questions and a consistent approach to asking the questions by the interviewer. To increase the validity of the questions in this research, the researcher used a content validity index. The aim was to make the questions as clear as possible, measuring only one thing at a time, and to provide the respondents with a clear definition of reflective learning at the university level to avoid any possible misinterpretations of the main concept. To further enhance the quality of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot test with 3 experts and 6 fellows. The researcher aimed to reach a validity and reliability coefficient of at least 70%.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews with students will be used to gather data and observation techniques will be used while interviewing the participants. Thematic analysis, which involves finding, classifying, and interpreting patterns and themes in the data, was used to examine the information.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Thematic Analysis

Statement	Theme	Percentage %	Sample statement
1. How do you feel about applying reflective learning strategies to your studies at the university level?	•Very helpful & Positive	83.3%	•“Reflective learning techniques are extremely helpful at the university level as they allow for us self-evaluation and identification of areas for improvement. By looking back on past experiences and evaluating what strategies were effective and where gaps or weaknesses existed, individuals can improve their understanding and performance in their studies.”
	•Neutral.	16.7%	•I am neutral on the idea of incorporating reflective learning at the university level, as while it may be beneficial, it is not currently practical in Pakistan due to the lack of teacher training and inclusion in the curriculum.”
2. In your opinion, what are the most important factors that contribute to the effectiveness of reflective learning at the	•Self-awareness and regular feedback. •Clear objectives and proper guidelines	83.3%	•In my view, the most effective factors that influence reflective learning are self-awareness, regular feedback, clear objectives, proper guidelines from the teacher, and active engagement.

<p>university level?</p>	<p>from the teacher, and Regular feedback from the teacher.</p>	<p>16.7%</p>	<p>•I believe that the instructor has the greatest impact on reflective learning. A skilled teacher can foster an environment in the classroom where pupils feel confident taking risks and making mistakes. Students can better comprehend what they are doing well and where they need to improve by receiving clear instructions and feedback from teachers. A teacher might also instruct pupils in reflective thinking by serving as an example for them.</p>
<p>3. So how would you think reflective techniques have affected your entire college learning experience?</p>	<p>•Self-regulation •Retention and application of the material studied. •Increased understanding of the subject matter. •better person</p>	<p>83.3%</p>	<p>•Reflective learning has been instrumental in boosting self-awareness and fostering a more creative approach to learning. Through constant self-evaluation, I have been able to identify areas for improvement and work towards closing any gaps in my understanding. This ongoing process has allowed me to continually enhance my learning and refine my approach."</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>•Setting goals. •Action plan. •Monitor the progress. •Modifying learning strategies. •Not relatable</p>	<p>83.3%</p>	<p>•Reflective learning in a university setting has been instrumental in my ability to set and achieve goals. Through consistent self-evaluation and adaptation of my learning strategies, I can continually improve my skills and academic performance, semester after semester. This process of reflection has been crucial in my progress and success in my university studies." •I can't relate to this as I never encountered these techniques in my learning journey.</p>
<p>5. How do you think reflective learning has affected your academic performance in higher education?</p>	<p>•Improved academic performance. •Increased my skills and critical thinking abilities.</p>	<p>83.3%.</p>	<p>•Yes, it has affected my academic performance I look back learn from my mistakes, and try never to repeat that one so yes it has affected my academic performance positively. •In my opinion, the feedback we receive is not comprehensive. We</p>
		<p>16.7%.</p>	

Discussion

This study reinforces the positive impact of reflective learning in higher education, echoing prior research on its role in enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-awareness, thereby fostering personal and academic growth. It particularly highlights the effectiveness of reflective journals for students in professional fields, as noted by (Colomer et al., 2020). The study also aligns with (Ions et al., 2020), emphasizing transformative learning and personal development as key outcomes of reflective practices.

Despite these benefits, challenges such as time constraints and the need for focused effort are acknowledged, along with the importance of proper guidance, as echoed by (Chang 2019). These challenges call for educational institutions to provide comprehensive support, including integrating reflective practices into curricula and utilizing tools like e-portfolios for tracking student progress. Interestingly, a minority of students' neutral or unresponsive attitudes towards reflective learning methods open avenues for further research. (Theobald et al., 2022) stress the significance of regular, detailed feedback from teachers in aiding student self-regulation and learning.

Conclusively, this research underscores the effectiveness of reflective learning while highlighting the need for educational institutions to address challenges to maximize its benefits for student success, as supported by (Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2021) regarding the use of reflective diaries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the synergy between self-study and transformative learning, both of which capitalize on personal experience and reflective practice to enhance learning. Through the lens of one professional's journey in a university advisory role, we explore the transformative impact of self-study on both the advisor and undergraduate students. Their research underlines the advancement of professional knowledge and skills facilitated by reflective learning. This paper's findings affirm the vital role of self-study in fostering critical thinking and transformative shifts in perspective, illustrating its broader applicability beyond traditional educational settings. Provides insights into student perceptions of reflective learning's impact on self-awareness and learning motivation.

Recommendations

This research was conducted only by private university students in Lahore so future researchers are recommended to expand the population and sample size also this research was realized there was 1% of the participants stated that reflective learning isn't currently applicable in Pakistan due to lack of teacher quality so researchers are recommended to do more research on that. Secondly, almost all the participants agreed on the importance of regular feedback and teacher motivation and guidance, so teachers should always guide students properly and motivate them to reflect on their learning and life also teachers should provide detailed feedback so students can know where they are lacking and where there are good at so they can do any modification and improvement if it's needed.

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