

3-15-2026

Utilising Reflective Journals as an Assessment Tool: A Case Study of Kurdish EFL Post Graduate Students at Salahaddin University-Erbil

Qismat Mohammed Zahawi

Salahaddin University, College of Basic Education, qismat.hussin@su.edu.krd

Follow this and additional works at: <https://alustath.uobaghdad.edu.iq/journal>

Recommended Citation

Zahawi, Qismat Mohammed (2026) "Utilising Reflective Journals as an Assessment Tool: A Case Study of Kurdish EFL Post Graduate Students at Salahaddin University-Erbil," *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences*: Vol. 65: Iss. 1, Article 4.

DOI: 10.36473/2518-9263.2451

Available at: <https://alustath.uobaghdad.edu.iq/journal/vol65/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences. It has been accepted for inclusion in Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences by an authorized editor of Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences.



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Utilising Reflective Journals as an Assessment Tool: A Case Study of Kurdish EFL Post Graduate Students at Salahaddin University-Erbil

Qismat Mohammed Zahawi

Salahaddin University, College of Basic Education

ABSTRACT

This study accentuates the notion that reflection profoundly aids students to profit from their own experiences. It aims at revealing Kurdish post-graduate students' perceptions toward utilising journal writing as an assessment tool. It also tries to uncover their language progress, metacognition, and self-awareness as a consequence of journal writing. Finally, it elicits challenges encountered by students when writing their journals. The current study is of qualitative-interpretive nature. Students' journal writing is the main tool of the study. Thematic analysis is carried out on data collected from reflective journals and a focus group interview including twelve Kurdish post-graduate students. Journaling resulted in greater class participation, better language skills, more profound professional insights, and the right set of circumstances for students to connect with authentic assessment.

Keywords: Journal writing, Reflection, Alternative assessment

The rationale of the study

When the researcher was thinking to design effective assessment tools for the MA course (Language Assessment and Evaluation), she pondered upon assignments which can go beyond traditional exams that can boost students' engagement. The researcher considered exactly what she wanted to assess. The main objectives were to assess students' acquisition of specific content knowledge, their capability to apply this knowledge in future contexts, their language skills, and diagnosing students' idiosyncratic features and creativity when thinking about their own learning. She found out that the most convenient alternative to the traditional exam that could best serve the discipline and the context was

Received 11 March 2025; revised 2 April 2025; accepted 27 May 2025.
Available online 15 March 2026

E-mail address: qismat.hussin@su.edu.krd (Q. M. Zahawi).

<https://doi.org/10.36473/2518-9263.2451>

2518-9263/© 2026 The Author(s). Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences. This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

students' journals since journal writing requires incorporating different skills and kinds of knowledge.

Proceeding from the students' claim that the courses they study do not sufficiently prepare them for their future career in the field, the researcher had in mind one essential aim, to enable the MA students to comprehend the significant role that journals play in language learning and familiarize them how journals can be utilised as an assessment tool.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded on a blend of experiential learning, scaffolding, and metacognition. This framework guided the researcher to gather comprehensive data as regards students' perceptions on journaling. The students produced journal entries based on their experience of being assessed at different stages of their study. In addition, their journals were scaffolded with prompts to enhance metacognitive reflection on their experience.

Introduction

Inherent to the process of learning is the assumption that students can learn from pondering on their own thinking. It has been well-said by the educationalist John Dewey a century ago that "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience". It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential is lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated.

According to [Dewey and Heath \(1933\)](#), reflection is deemed to be part and parcel of the process of education. However, [Moon \(1999\)](#) maintains that the notion of reflection is opposed in higher education setting. This is grounded on the conviction that reflection is a subsidiary skill as compared to other skills which are considered 'core' for students' future professional activity.

Journal writing is strongly endorsed by [Plack et al. \(2005\)](#) as an essential tool to facilitate reflection. Similarly, [Stevens and Cooper \(2009\)](#) are of the belief that "It is not enough just to have an experience. Reflection directs that experience to learning and deeper insights". They proceed by saying that a journal is a successive narrative of events and ideas concerning one's own learning. It is analogous to natural speech where there is a smooth uninhibited flow of writing. It provides a supportive context to practice writing and openly shows individual student's thought processes.

In this respect, [Kerka \(1996\)](#) views journal writing as essential in adult education. In this case, it would be roughly organised based on the purpose and level of self-direction. [Cottrell \(2003\)](#) considers a learning journal as a practical and consistent way to register and archive learning and collect information for reflection and self-analysis. Similarly, [Walker \(2006\)](#) maintains that "No true definitions of journal writing exist due to the vast number of ways journal writing can be used" (p. 216).

[Bain et al. \(2002\)](#) assert that journal writing specifically enhances students to reflect on their professional practice. As for them, the significance of journaling lies in the fact that it promotes writing skills in terms of "dialectical reasoning, critical reconstruction, problem solving, application and metacognition" (p. 172). By the same token, due to the crucialness of reflective journal writing, [Alt et al. \(2022\)](#) regard it as "an effective pedagogical tool for nurturing students' lifelong learning skills".

Concerning journal types, there are two main types: one includes giving little direction to students, in the second the students are provided with a prompt or specific topic to elaborate on. In the current study, the researcher employed the second type since it was

well-suited to serve the aim of the study and it involved setting the limits and guidelines necessary for accuracy. In addition to emphasizing on the linguistic aspects of students' writing, the researcher focused on how students made comments and suitable acclaims and how they expressed their ideas and understanding on paper. It is worth noting that the researcher paved the way for the students to express their views informally, individually, and frankly in their reflective journals. Thus, students' reflective journals were used as a basis for scrutinizing new understandings and challenges of assessment practices from students' perceptions.

It is worth mentioning that the reason behind employing reflective journals for conducting this research is the fact that reflecting on experience is of prime importance in creating environment professional disciplines since, as indicated by [McCarthy \(2011\)](#), it connects “knowing what” to “knowing how”, i.e., it contributes to make students think rationally on how to bring theory and practice together and use both complementarily.

Furthermore, language assessment is intended to achieve a wide range of legitimate purposes. Drawing on this, a single assessment form will not serve all needs adequately. Hence, making use of alternative forms of assessment (like reflective journals) was necessary.

Why journaling?

There are many different reasons that induce writing a reflective journal. Among these reasons: reproducing an experience, recording an event, investigating feelings, discerning what we know, and narrating something of significance ([Boud, 2001](#)).

[Dinç et al. \(2023\)](#) put forward some legitimate reasons to choose journal writing as an effective tool for assessing students' learning:

- Journal writing helps to refine students' metacognitive thinking since it acts as a “guiding mechanism that facilitates the processing and articulation of their experiences and associated thoughts”.
- Journal writing makes learning more personalized through recording personal experiences and thoughts.
- Journal writing actively engages students in introspection and self-analysis; hence, it deepens their understanding.
- Journal writing extensively shows students' progress on the intellectual emotional and academic level.

Hence, it can be argued that journaling is an indispensable tool to allow students to have a voice and express their own understanding and knowledge on a topic rather than just restating other's ideas.

Research aims

The current study aims to find out:

- 1- Kurdish post-graduate EFL students' perceptions toward utilising reflective journal writing as an assessment tool.
- 2- The extent to which writing reflective journals affects Kurdish post-graduate EFL students' language progress, professional insights, and metacognition.
- 3- The challenges encountered by Kurdish post-graduate EFL students when writing their reflective journals.

Research questions

This research tries to find answers for the following questions:

- 1- What are Kurdish post-graduate EFL students' perceptions toward utilising reflective journal writing as an assessment tool?
- 2- To what extent does utilising reflective journal writing affect Kurdish post-graduate EFL students' language progress, professional insights, and metacognition?
- 3- What are the challenges encountered by Kurdish post-graduate EFL students when writing their reflective journals?

Scope of the study

The current study is limited to eliciting Kurdish post-graduate EFL students' perceptions toward utilising reflective journal writing as an assessment tool in the academic year 2023–2024. The sample of the study consisted of twelve Kurdish MA students in applied linguistics- Assessment and Evaluation module.

These MA candidates will be teaching EFL at their universities in Kurdistan Region (KR) of Iraq upon obtaining their MA degrees. It is relevant to note that Bologna Process is being implemented in some local universities in KR. In Bologna Process, a specific grading scheme is being adopted for the purpose of assessing students authentically and comprehensively. Therefore, future university teachers are required to develop relevant and specified skills necessary for their future profession as regards assessment practices. This study contributes in familiarizing students with one form of authentic assessment.

Research method and sampling

This study is established on documentary review and case study and it investigates a potential gap in practice at post-graduate setting between the capacity for reflection to inaugurate the basis for change in assessment policy, and the recurrent reality of the conventional assessment practices employed in higher education.

The study is of qualitative-interpretive nature. This design, as asserted by [Denzin and Lincoln \(2000\)](#), is after obtaining a better understanding of the context of participants and the process in which actions take place to elucidate and provide justifications why things ensue. Furthermore, [Wiesner \(2022\)](#) maintains that qualitative and interpretative research lead to obtain rich data on two levels: surface and deep (describing and interpreting a phenomenon).

The study mainly adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore the effectiveness of utilizing journal writing as an assessment tool with postgraduate students. A structured approach is employed so as to process and communicate the meaning of students' experiences and consequently, provide a comprehensive assessment of their learning. As [Creswell \(2012\)](#) maintains, a qualitative case study concentrates on an event, location, issue, or time resulting in detailed reliable data. Besides, [Leedy and Ormrod \(2005\)](#) assert that qualitative approach is very beneficial since it yields in obtaining elaborate descriptions of "situations and settings, interpret phenomenon, verify information in a real-world context, or evaluate policies and practices". Consequently, the researcher deduced that qualitative approach was well-suited for the purpose of the study. Analyzing the data qualitatively enabled her to have an in-depth analysis of data collected in order to gain the totality of the phenomenon ([Kumar, 2014](#)). Hence, the researcher had more flexibleness to construct social reality

through the interpretations of the study findings and their critical self-reflections could possibly become part of research findings. However, this does not mean that the research data has been contaminated and manipulated by researcher's personal feelings, beliefs and attitudes. To further investigate the observed patterns and confirm the reliability of the results, the researcher concurrently engaged a second rater to assess students' journals. This was done to protect the integrity of research findings and assure that subjective judgments do not misrepresent the results. Correspondingly, using a focus group interview with the participants allowed comparisons to be made and also enabled generalization of data. Furthermore, the focus group interview helped to reduce dependence on written reflective practices and move to more dialogic and social reflection.

Twelve MA students in applied linguistics (The module/ Assessment and Evaluation) were assigned to write three journals related to the module in question at different times of the course. In addition, the researcher carried out a focus group interview with the MA students so as to validate the data obtained from analyzing the journals and deeply probe into the students' perspectives about journal writing.

Journal assignment

Throughout the MA course, which lasted for 12 weeks, the students were asked to write three journals as follows:

1. One at the beginning of the course entitled 'What are the examination moderation procedures at your university? How helpful do you think they are? What kind of improvement would you suggest?'
2. The second in the middle of the course entitled 'How do you define alternative forms of assessment? Do you think that they are applicable in your context? How?'
3. The third one at the end of the course entitled 'Given your exploration of a course in language assessment and evaluation, what are your perspectives toward the use of student journaling as an assessment tool throughout the course'.

At the onset of the course, the researcher provided her students with the needed instruction so as to let them have a vivid understanding of what and how they are expected to write a journal. Moreover, she set an approximate word count for each journal assignment. Besides, she assigned some prompts aligned with the module in order to serve as clear goal for them.

The focus of these journals was directed on the essence of the module 'Language assessment and Evaluation', the reflection process indicated in their writing, and the progress in their self-expression and awareness about practice. The students were individually provided with feedback on every journal entry they regularly submitted. Eventually, the students were successful to relay the depth of their experiential learning adeptly and discuss the desired outcomes. In reflecting on their own thinking process, students gradually become experts in identifying the significance of self-exploration and they attained a good level of reflection.

The researcher depended on pro formas to assess students' journals. [Bloxham and Campbell \(2010\)](#) define feedback pro forma as a form used by teachers to assess students' work and provide them with feedback upon completing a written task. It includes giving feedback by two (or more) assessors for the same assessment so as to guarantee consistent quality. The following details were included in the feedback pro formas:

- how students can refine their work in future,
- what they have done well,

- how they performed against the assessment criteria
- how they can interpret their marks

Utilising feedback pro formas for assessment provided the students with ample chances to reflect on their work and recognize how it could be refined, and how they have employed previous feedback to improve this piece of work (this was useful for the researcher to better understand what makes for helpful and constructive feedback and how it can be utilised. Some essential feedback provided by the journal assessors:

- The best features of this journal are
- This journal denotes that you may not totally understand the following
- You can develop your understanding to a greater distance by
- Steps you can take to refine future work are

Journal analysis

For the purpose of journal analysis, the researcher adopted a two-dimensional evaluative tool presented by [Fund et al. \(2002\)](#). These two dimensions are content and form. As for the content dimension, three components comprise this dimension as follows: subject matter content, didactic content, and personal content. The second dimension is sub-divided into four sub-dimensions: description, personal opinion, linking, and critical bridging.

A rubric was used to score the journals in order to make the assessment process more precise and fair. [Wolf and Stevens \(2007\)](#) believe that using a rubric “helps to anchor judgments” (p. 12) since it continuously reminds the scorer with the key criteria so that the scorer is less liable to fluctuate in applying the criteria from a student to student. In addition, it facilitates minimal marking because the priorities are established in advance. As mentioned earlier, the researcher engaged a second rater to assess the students’ journals so as to confirm the reliability of the results.

For the purpose of journal analysis, the researcher adopted a two-dimensional evaluative tool presented by [Fund et al. \(2002\)](#). These two dimensions are content and form. As for the content dimension, three components comprise this dimension as follows: subject matter content, didactic content, and personal content. The second dimension is sub-divided into four sub-dimensions: description, personal opinion, linking, and critical bridging.

To start with, the three components of content dimension were utilised in this way:

- **Subject matter content** was about the ‘what’ of the assessment process. As a part of ‘Language and Assessment and Evaluation’, there was a sort of correspondence between the content of the module and journal writing since it is a form of assessment. This coincidence facilitated for the students to internalize and increase their understanding.
- **Didactic content** worked on ‘how’ reflective writing was practically utilised in assessing students’ learning and intensifying the content. Consequently, this practical application developed students’ understanding of authentic assessment and how to translate it into daily practices in the future.
- **Personal content** is concerned with how students reflect on themselves (the ‘I’) as regards their views on assessment procedures. This component is significant since it creates in students a sort of personal commitment which consequently increases their involvement in and awareness of the assessment policy.

Concerning the four categories in the form dimension, they are:

- **Description** is important because it tracks students’ reflection ability and evaluates its progress.

- **Personal opinion** shows students' reservations and concerns connecting the topic with practical implementation.
- **Linking** is concerned with reinforcing what they learn with prior experiences.
- **Critical bridging** includes students' critical contemplation on the topic and putting forward alternate opinions so as to come up with logical conclusions propelled by their reflection.

Before commencing the analysis, it is worth noting that the researcher used a rubric to assess the journals (for the 4 components of form dimension) and the assessment reliability was worked out by engaging a second rater. In spite of this quantitative analysis, and due to the qualitative-interpretive nature of the study, the findings will be discussed qualitatively and compared to the findings of the interview data.

It is relevant to note that among the four components, the first two (description and personal opinion) show a low level of reflection; while the other two (linking and critical bridging) show a high level of reflection that transcends beyond the present situation. Understanding the context of the reflective exercise starts from providing a thorough description. The students expressed their personal opinions concerning the reflective experience. In addition, they described how journal writing allowed them to diagnose their learning needs, set relevant learning objectives, and assess their learning outcome.

The researcher adopted thematic analysis for analyzing the three journals. Four main themes were generated to analyse the data: description, personal opinion, linking, and critical bridging. Meanwhile, these four themes were discussed and analysed in conjunction with the three variables mentioned at the beginning of the research, namely: language progress, professional insights, and metacognition and self-awareness.

Concerning the students' language skill progress, the researcher found out that the students developed the specialised language and vocabulary relevant to the module (assessment). Moreover, they showed knowledge and critical understanding of the module, including some specialist areas. The researcher got further confirmation of this gradual growth in complexity of reflection in writing their journals and there were more evidences for higher coordination between them and their personal writing. They showed good command of expressive mode of writing. Eventually, they were able to exhibit good critical bridging of their reflection, writing, and knowledge building. In part, this finding is not in line with Cahyono (1997), who came to the conclusion that journal writing does not contribute to the development of students' writing skills. On the other hand, our finding supports his conclusion that the application of journal writing gave positive effects towards some subsidiary writing aspects such as freedom in writing, ideas generation and development, and critical bridging.

The students started to describe their thoughts and voice their feelings concerning their experience with reflective journals. Their reflections generally started with describing and recalling information and instances relevant to the way they were assessed in their under-graduate study. For example, one of the students said "When we were assessed by using traditional paper-based exams on the part of our teachers during college years, I felt content with my results. However, it was not effective to show how well I can apply what I have learnt in real life situations". Another student wrote "I felt that the assessment system was not successful to provide a comprehensive picture of my learning. Moreover, it did not show my uniqueness in progressing my language skills". A third opinion was "Overemphasis on tests can diminish students' intrinsic motivation to explore topics and it does not support students to increase their research and inquiry skills".

Their descriptions revealed their ability showing the fine detail of what they can do and how they are approaching the topic. Besides, it enabled the teacher to compare one

student's development to another, and to plan how the weaknesses of each one can be bridged. It increased the teacher's awareness of the stages of development they are moving through.

In addition, there was a systematic development in students' metacognition and self-awareness. They showed ability to take stock of what they know to plan for what they need to perform. They basically became aware of their weaknesses and endeavoured to overcome them. A student reported that "Now I can plan for my answers and regulate my learning".

They mostly expressed their reservations concerning the conventional assessment techniques prevalent in their institution. One student said "The assessment policy exhibits some degree of diversity (including exams, assignments, projects, and presentations), yet it needs to address students' progress in a more comprehensive way and include more authentic assessment procedures for the future". A third student expressed a similar idea "The inflexibility of test formats resulted in inaccurate skill diagnosis with providing no feedback to test-takers. Therefore, the assessment was not quite meaningful, relevant or sufficient for the purpose of the assessment". Another student proclaimed "The scoring guidelines were devised with the assessment's purpose in mind i.e., we were assessed objectively and we received direct diagnostic feedback as regards our strong and weak points". However, for the journal feedback, a student stated "I used the level of feedback details provided by the teacher as a basis for rectifying my mistakes in a constructive action". A student proceeded by writing "The provision of constructive feedback and feedforward enable students contemplate on their performance and make improvements".

Additionally, the researcher witnessed considerable progress in the MA students' professional insights. A student reported "When I become a university instructor in the future, I am more inclined to integrate both summative and formative assessment into my assessment scheme. This is due to the valuableness and effectiveness of both techniques. On one hand, summative assessment is helpful to communicate student achievement and mastery and to evaluate the success of one's course design and delivery. Formative assessment on the other hand is effective to examine student understanding, engagement, and continuous progress. Hence, mixing both types of assessment guarantees accountability and sustains academic integrity". Another student accentuated the importance of the experience by writing "This experience helped me to see classrooms through the eyes of teachers rather than students. I formed new conceptions about the nature of assessment. I can feel a shift from my already existing beliefs and dispositions and attitudes of assessment toward a more flexible view". A similar perspective was declared by another student "I would embed formative assessment into my regular instruction in an interactive and engrossing way so as to build a community for learning and make the students a part of the process".

There was a general consensus among the students concerning the vital role of formative assessment. This was absolutely evident in their journals. A student wrote "Formative assessment is of prime significance for teachers for it provides profound insights into how well their instructional methods are effective and whether the material is relevant and apt to their needs. Consequently, this would help teachers make amendments accordingly and tailor their teaching techniques in a way that successfully addresses different learning styles". A second student maintained "It is very essential for teachers to construct a consistent and coherent assessment plan for their courses. This plan should take into account some important factors like the course goals, content, level, and duration. Besides, incorporating a variety of assessment forms is crucial to accommodate different learning styles by integrating assessments with teaching and learning activities (assessment as learning) by devising authentic tasks". Finally, one of the students interrelated journal writing with being self-regulated and wrote "Journal writing made me actively engage with the material and take ownership of my learning. In addition, it promoted my level

of reflection encouraging me to reflect on the learning process and acquire a deeper understanding of the subject matter”.

The focus group interview

The focus group interview was carried out after the course, which lasted for 12 weeks. The questions focused on utilising journals to record learning, deal with new experiences, develop personally, and gain profound understanding. The interview questions invited students to elucidate the assessment policy employed at their institution, elicit their perceptions toward other alternative assessment forms, and make response to the difficulties involved in journal writing.

Starting with the **first question** which reads as “Do you consider journaling as an effective way to assess your learning? Explain your answer and How did reflective journaling assignments help or not help you identify and examine new ideas?”, all the respondents shared a common consensus concerning the effectiveness and of journal writing as an assessment tool. One of the respondents said ‘writing journals made me feel part of the learning experience. Imparting openness to our interventions and suggestions motivated us and resulted in better understanding of the module content’. A second respondent maintained “Journal writing enabled me to develop more sophisticated conceptions as regards language assessment”. Another respondent added “Reflective journal writing was really an excellent assessment tool because it catered to diverse learner needs. Previously, a one-size-fits-all approach was used to assess our abilities, which in turn did not account for our different learning styles and pacing”.

In response to **question No.2**, which reads as “Discuss how alternative forms of assessment are present in the context of your institution. How do those assessment practices align with the current trends in language assessment? Does the assessment policy followed in your institution help to identify your own progress?”, the majority of the respondents (75%) did not express evident satisfaction concerning the availability of alternative forms of assessment in the context of their institution. This is due to the heavy reliance on paper-based exams through the assessment procedures the respondents met with. It seems that diverse assessment forms have not been used adequately in their undergraduate context. One of the respondents said “in our under-graduate courses, we were required to recollect and reproduce the content”; this entails that the traditional method of assessment was adopted with no or little chance for students to exhibit their creativity and idiosyncrasies. The students felt like their skills and abilities were not demonstrated amply since traditional assessment did not typically require higher-order thinking. Another student reported “During our under graduate courses, we were required to perform well under pressure in a timed formal setting disregarding our abilities and learning styles, which negatively impacted our performance”. In spite of the respondents’ dissatisfaction with the assessment scheme followed by teachers in their undergraduate study, some of them expressed their contentment concerning the grading scheme adopted by teachers in their MA courses. Five respondents proclaimed that they are being assessed holistically and comprehensively. They attributed this comprehensiveness to having a grading scheme that includes seminars, review articles, quizzes, daily participation, assignments, mid-term and final exam. They considered the assessment as comprehensive and integrated because it was able to capture a fuller picture of a student’s performance and skills; in addition to demonstrating what they know, it also revealed how they can apply their knowledge practically. A respondent added “It assisted me in developing my knowledge further going beyond my abilities”.

As for **question No.3**, which reads as “How does knowledge of alternative assessments influence your thinking about your career path as a university teacher in the future?”, a big majority of the respondents indicated the profound influence of being introduced to alternative assessments on their thinking about their career path as a university teacher in the future. This was evident in their responses as nine of the respondents voiced their immense gratification to the utility of authentic assessment in higher education. A respondent remarked “In the face of technology expansion and job market progression, the shortcomings of conventional assessments at university level are being recognised ever more. This is why I will become a proponent of employing alternative forms of assessment if I become a university instructor in the future”. This attitude accords with Boyd and Fales (1983) assertion that considers reflective learning as “an exploration of an issue, triggered by experience, which alters perspective”.

In response to **question No4.**, which reads as “What ethical considerations does this experience bring to bear?”, almost all the respondents agreed that the ethicality of assessment practices is of utmost importance. They shared the belief that teachers need to provide students with the best possible professional consideration and respect for the humanity and privacy of each student. A respondent stated “The most interesting and helpful point was consulting us as students on matters concerning our interests. I was also informed about how to ensure the privacy and the secrecy of students’ scores and maintain their confidentiality”. Another respondent proceeded “Teachers should endeavour to communicate the information they produce to all relevant stakeholders in a meaningful way as possible”. However, two respondents reported that they have not been well-acquainted with journal writing as an assessment tool and how they will be assessed. In this regard, [Gitsaki and Robby \(2018\)](#) assert that ethical violations may arise when students are not sufficiently prepared for a novel or complicated method of assessment.

Although evaluating aspects like creativity or self-regulation does not have straightforward criteria, the assessment was designed and administered in a way that takes into account the ethical nature of assessment grounded in factors like student potential, perception, effort exerted, and attendance so as to increase the test accuracy in assessing student learning successively and comprehensively.

As for **question No.5**, which reads as “Have you encountered any challenges throughout the implementation of journal writing for assessment in your course?”, doubtlessly authentic assessment is not without its limitations. The majority of the students contended that there were enough hindrances that impeded their efforts in writing effective reflective journals. To start with, eight respondents stated that they were in need to collect some background knowledge and choose a suitable model to direct them through the process and help them get the most out of reflective journals. Other respondents maintained that they really required a sort of professional help since reflection was new to their education culture, and felt undecided concerning the place of emotions.

Another challenge of implementing reflective journal writing was not having sufficient time. The participants suffered from lack of time to handle their multiple assignments as MA students. A respondent stated “Affording time to reflect on our practice was not an easy job, particularly when we were loaded with competing priorities and deadlines for task completion”. Besides, she proceeded “Reflection necessitated a certain amount of mental and emotional effort that was hard to come by after the extensive and demanding course requirements”. Among other challenges, they mentioned lack of confidence, fear of consequences, poor training, and lack of exposure to systematic reflective models in their under-graduate study.

As for the **sixth question** which reads as “How do you think about the whole feedback cycle in your journal writing?”, most of the respondents considered the feedback effective

and constructive it developed their ability to inspect their own learning through self-questioning and dialogue with peers. A respondent stated “Receiving feedback provided me with the chance to organize my thoughts and prepare responses which, in turn, gave me enough confidence to take part in classroom discussions. Hence, it helped me to be less restrained when expressing myself. In re-writing my journals, I felt less threatened and they enabled me to write regardless of mood and assessment concerns since they were less formal”. She maintained “I felt as if it is my own travel through the academic world”.

Concerning **question No.7** which reads as “Do you think that your experience with writing reflective journals for assessment purposes and within your module ‘Language Assessment and Evaluation’ helped to connect theory to practice? Explain how.”, the respondents valued and thought highly of journaling as a learning experience that vividly connected theory and practice. “Journal writing helped me make connections between what is really important to our course and how we feel about it”. A second respondent believed that reflective journals were of great use to think open-mindedly and declared “It enabled me to analyze the big concepts and associate them with future learning situations”.

When writing a journal, the students initiate a reflection process as they start documenting their experiences and then remember and match it with previous situations. In this way, they integrate theory and practice. This study served as a preparatory training pre-service instructors on using reflective journals as a tool for assessment during their MA courses. As one of the respondents declared “Reflective journals improved my skills in using practical implementations of these learning journals for future applications in my career as a university instructor”. A second respondent stated “Practically applying learning journals improved my reflective thinking by generating deeper understanding and reflective dialogue”. This answer from a respondent adds support to [Walker \(2006\)](#) belief that it is of great benefit for students to reflect-on-action since this would help them to reshape what they are doing while doing it.

To sum up, it seems that the MA students approved of experiencing journal writing as an assessment tool. They acknowledged the successfulness of the experience and claimed it enabled them to become more self-directed and self-aware.

Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the findings pertaining to the research questions, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Instead of perceiving assessment as merely a mechanism for engendering proof of value, integrating the reflective layer to our assessment can yield a more heedful and realistic evaluation. Experiential learning accompanied with guided reflection can yield splendid outcomes. Diligently crafted journal prompts, planned with developing students’ self-analysis in mind, can aid students and pay out matchless reflective and analytical work.
- Kurdish EFL post-graduate students hold a favorable view towards incorporating reflective journals as an assessment tool.
- The participants identified range of benefits, most significantly, recognise their own areas of strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, reflective journal writing makes students aware of the different dimensions of their learning and gain better self-discipline through continuous monitoring of their own progress.
- The feedback elicited from students’ journals is elementary for teachers since it summarises the interaction between the students and the chosen instructional strategies, and it induces adapting and modifying the instruction accordingly.

- It can be deduced that journal writing is patently an accumulation of students' feelings, ideas and experience description recorded in ink on paper. Integrating journal writing into the classroom requires commitment and organization, but the return is stimulating and revitalising.
- Journaling enables teachers to learn more about their students since a journal record is considered as a good indication of students' progress. Teachers who decide to capitalize on the potential of writing reflective journals must be ready to afford enough time and effort for providing appropriate feedback instantly. Moreover, they should set aside some time for

Upon closer inspection of the assessment policy of my institution, it needs a gradual and serious evolution from traditional to more authentic and inclusive assessment methods that accords with concrete educational goal of fostering critical and adaptable graduates who are able to cope with 21st-century challenges. Hence, the educational landscape needs to refine how it assesses and cultivates learning and understanding so as to meet the job market needs.

Pedagogical recommendations

In the light of the research findings, teachers are recommended to:

- Check their students' understanding on regular basis through reflections and quizzes
- Employ feedback loops and measure students' progress cyclically by providing constructive feedback and practical commentary and advice
- Implement self-assessment in their classes so as to foster independence in learning
- Utilise peer assessment as an opportunity for students to critique and provide feedback to each other on their work, which in turn leads to knowledge diffusion and exchanging ideas

Conflict of interest

The author declare that they have no financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have potentially influenced the work reported in this study.

Author contribution

Qismat Mohammed Zahawi :conducted all aspects of the research, including conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of results, and writing – original draft preparation, as well as reviewing and editing the final manuscript.

Data availability

References

- Alt, D., Raichel, N., & Schneider, L. (2022). Higher education students' reflective journal writing and lifelong learning skills: insights from an exploratory sequential study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–17.

- Bain, J., Mills, C., Ballantyne, R., & Packer, J. (2002). Developing reflection on practice through journal writing: Impacts of variations in the focus and level of feedback. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(2), 171–196.
- Bloxham, S., & Campbell, L. (2010). Generating dialogue in assessment feedback: Exploring the use of interactive cover sheets. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(3), 291–300.
- Boud, D. (2001). Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. No. 90. *John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*
- Cahyono, B. Y. (1997). Effectiveness of journal writing in supporting skills in writing english essay. *The Journal of Education*, 4, 310–318.
- Cottrell, S. (2003). *Skills for success: Personal development planning handbook*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: *Pearson Learning Solutions*.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: *Sage Publications*.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: *D. C. Heath*.
- Dinç, E., Wherley, M., & Sankey, H. (2023). Student perception of journaling as an assessment for an engagement experience. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 1–20.
- Fund, Z., Court, D., & Kramarski, B. (2002). Construction and application of an evaluative tool to assess reflection in teacher-training courses. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(6), 485–499.
- Gitsaki, C. & Robby, M. (2018). Benefits of language assessment. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1–6.
- Kember, D., McKay, J., Sinclair, K., & Wong, F. (2008). A four-category scheme for coding and assessing the level of reflection in written work. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33, 369–379.
- Kerka, S. (1996). Journal writing as an adult learning. *ERIC Clearing house on adult Career and Vocational Education Columbus, OH, ERIC Digest No. 174*.
- Kumar, R. (2014). *Research Methodology* (4th ed.). London, *SAGE*.
- Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2005). *Practical research: Planning and design* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: *Prentice Hall*.
- McCarthy, J. (2011). Reflective writing, higher education and professional practice. *Journal for Education in the Built Environment*, 6(1), 29–43.
- Moon, J. (1999). *Reflection in learning and professional development*. London: *Kogan Page*.
- Plack, M., Driscoll, E., Blissett, S., McKenna, R., & Plack, T. (2005). A method for assessing reflective journal writing. *Journal of Allied Health*, 34(4), 199–208.
- Stevens, D. & Cooper, J. (2009). *Journal keeping: How to use reflection for effective teaching and learning, professional insights & positive change*. Sterling, Virginia: *Stylus Publishing, LLC*.
- Stevens, D. D. & Cooper, J. E. (2009). *Journal keeping: How to use reflection for effective teaching and learning, professional insights & positive change*. Sterling, Virginia: *Stylus Publishing, LLC*.
- Walker, S. (2006). Journal writing as a teaching technique to promote reflection. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 41(2), 216–221.
- Wiesner, C. (2022). Doing qualitative and interpretative research: Reflecting principles and principled challenges. *Political Research Exchange*, 4(1).
- Wolf, K. & Stevens, E. (2007). The role of rubrics in advancing and assessing student learning. *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 7(1), 3–14.

استخدام المجالات التأملية كأداة تقييم: دراسة حالة لطلاب الدراسات العليا الأكراد الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في جامعة صلاح الدين- أربيل

قسمت محمد زهاوي

جامعة صلاح الدين
كلية التربية الأساسية

المستخلص

تؤكد هذه الدراسة على فكرة مفادها أن التأمل يساعد الطلاب بشكل عميق على الاستفادة من تجاربهم الخاصة. وتهدف إلى الكشف عن تصورات طلاب الدراسات العليا الأكراد تجاه استخدام كتابة المجالات كأداة تقييم. كما تحاول الكشف عن تقدمهم اللغوي، والإدراك الذاتي، والوعي الذاتي نتيجة لكتابة المجالات. وأخيراً، تستنبط التحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب عند كتابة مجالاتهم. الدراسة الحالية ذات طبيعة تفسيرية نوعية. كتابة المجالات للطلاب هي الأداة الرئيسية للدراسة. يتم إجراء تحليل موضوعي على البيانات التي تم جمعها من المجالات التأملية ومقابلة مجموعة مركزة تضم اثني عشر طالباً كردياً للدراسات العليا. أدى تدوين المجالات إلى زيادة المشاركة في الفصل الدراسي، وتحسين مهارات اللغة، وزيادة الرؤى المهنية العميقة، ومجموعة الظروف المناسبة للطلاب للتواصل مع التقييم الأصيل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كتابة المجالات، التأمل، التقييم البديل.