

Reflective Journal to Explore Instructional Practices in an Online Writing Class: Students' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: This study explored reflective journals of Indonesian EFL undergraduate students aiming to investigate a teacher's instructional practices in online writing classes. Using the narrative methodology, the data were collected from students' reflective journals, recorded interviews, and a questionnaire. This study found that teachers' instructional practices have assisted students during the learning process, for instance, the integration of technology has made students more engaged. This study also observed students' challenges during online classes, such as the unsupportive learning environment—i.e. studying alone and household chores distraction. This study offers insight for teachers that students' reflective journal helps evaluate the instructional practice and improve teaching quality.

Reflective practice has been acknowledged as a form of teacher professional development. It is an approach where teachers analyze and evaluate any issues in the classroom to improve the quality of teaching (Yoshihara et al., 2020). This idea was derived from the concept of 'reflection' coined by Dewey (1933) and other pioneers such as Schön (1983) and Farrell (2004). In their works, reflection is defined as an action that inhibits teachers from impulsive and habitual teaching practice because they learn from experiences in the classroom. In other words, teachers must collect data, recognize the problem from their faulty instructional practices and classroom behaviour, and develop practical solutions for better future teaching. To Farrell (2004), reflective practice is not a one-dimensional approach since it involves a teacher's ongoing exercise of intellect, responsibility, and professionalism. By doing so, teachers are expected to significantly impact the educational system, i.e. the quality of classroom practices.

In pedagogical practice, the reflective journal has been used as media when it comes to the implementation of reflective practices. To put its definition, a reflective journal is a sequential, dated chronicle of events and ideas which inform what an individual responds to and reflects on (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). In other words, reflective journal functions as written logs of a continuing series of experiences, allowing the individual to review the situation, articulate thoughts and feelings, and consider actions if they happen again. Casanave (2011) mentions that a reflective journal is one of the crucial factors in teaching, learning, and research because it covers personal cognitive and social functions that encompass expressing feelings openly, building self-awareness, and maintaining a relationship with others. Similarly, Cogni (2019) declares that a reflective journal is an excellent medium to express critical and reflective thinking and increase self-awareness of issues to write about.

Addressing the issue of teacher professional development, the role of a reflective journal from students' perspectives is worth mentioning. Kim & Park (2019) argue that reflective journal allows students to develop higher-order cognitive skills, such as monitoring, inference, and perspective-taking. It confirms Power's (2017) statement that reflective journal provides valuable insight into higher education contexts as their fundamental advancement of learning. While students engage in their learning process, they may encounter unexpected situations or experience thoughts and feelings related to classroom practices. From this standpoint, a reflective journal can facilitate students' learning experience to inform relevant feedback to improve instructional practices in the classroom. Sudirman et al. (2021) report that students' reflective journals can generate critical insights into solving problems in classroom situations, enriching students' learning experiences.

Given the above view, the potential benefits of a reflective journal from students' perspectives to investigate teachers' instructional practices are worth mentioning. This current study's reflective journal writing was administered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite some advantages that online learning has (such as accessibility, personalized learning, cost-effectiveness, basic computer skills, and self-pacing learning), most language instructors are unfamiliar with the knowledge on how to make an effective online classroom which includes knowledge for educational technologies to deliver online teaching (pedagogy for educational technology) and knowledge of how to teach online (online pedagogy) (Russell, 2020). In such a context, a reflective journal may come to aid.

Studies on reflective journaling have taken place at various teachers' levels: pre-service and in-service teachers. For example, a study conducted by Altalhab et al. (2021), for example, investigated the use of reflective diaries of EFL pre-service teachers in the teaching practicum course. This reflective diary shares the same concept as a reflective journal where those pre-service teachers write down their reflections on what has happened in the classroom in a way to improve their future teaching practice. Fifty male pre-service teachers at a Saudi University were asked to write a reflective diary for eight weeks during their teaching practicum course. They were also interviewed to unfold their experiences in writing reflective diaries.

Regarding the interview, ten in-service teachers also participated since they are the supervisors of those pre-service teachers. Hence, their feedback or evaluation regarding the reflective diaries was worth considering. The findings of this study showed that the majority of pre-service teachers and all in-service teachers showed positive attitudes toward using reflective diaries due to several advantages they received. First, it enables them to identify and eliminate any mistakes that happen in the class. Second, it allows them to avoid the repetition of errors and promotes creativity. Third, it can assist their teaching by implementing new approaches, techniques, or diverse supporting activities. Last, it helps to demonstrate the progress of teaching skills.

Similarly, Nurfaidah et al. (2017) reported the level of reflection of four Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers during their field teaching. After analyzing 24 entries of reflective journals and other supporting data, i.e., videotaped observation, stimulated recall, and interview, this study found that the EFL pre-service teachers' level of reflectivity is mainly in the range of *dialogic reflection Level 3* and *Level 4*, which means that they were able to demonstrate the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate their instructional practices further. In detail, as the four pre-service teachers experienced more engagement with the students and the instructional approaches, they began developing thinking ability toward more complex and problematic matters in their approach. Additionally, they indicated improvement in evaluating certain phenomena by posing alternatives and raising awareness of what was happening in the class. Another study which explores pre-service teachers was conducted by Davut Göker (2016). This study analyzed the effect of the reflective journal of 16 student teachers at the Artvin Coruh University in Turkey. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for this study, including open-ended questioning techniques (surveys and interviews) and written reflections. Findings demonstrated the positive contribution of the reflective journal because the majority of the participants derived satisfaction from it after looking back at their progress in teaching. They also stated that their awareness increased in terms of evaluating their practice. These findings implicated that reflective journaling can be used in a school-based context to help student teachers develop teaching and leadership skills.

Some studies on in-service teachers also found positive responses after implementing reflective journaling. For example, Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman (2018) examined in-service teachers in a MA Linguistics program at a US Mid-Western University about how they perceived the impact of reflective journaling on their teaching practice. From the interview data, this study revealed that most in-service teachers agreed that reflective journal positively affects their perceptions of teacher-student interaction and their methods of preparing materials. They also perceived that reflective journaling fosters their teaching awareness of what they do in the classroom. In short, in-service teachers are convinced that reflective journaling helps them become reflective teachers. Jones (2016) also explored online reflective journaling as a form of professional development (PD). Seven male and three female teachers at University in Japan participated in writing a weekly online reflective journal for 15 weeks and were interviewed at weeks eight and fifteen. The finding was that online reflective journaling is feasible to use as a medium to enhance teachers' professional development (PD). This conclusion comes from the fact that participants of this study appear to have higher self-esteem and be more sensitive in deciding on classroom practice. They argued that online reflective journaling allowed them to explore their professional identities, including characteristics, values, and beliefs. It helped them identify and value the remarkable things they found in the classroom.

Some researchers also used reflective journaling to investigate problems or challenges during teaching practice. Donyaie & Afshar (2019) examined the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers were familiar with reflective journaling and identified its barriers. Thirty Iranian teachers were asked to write two reflective journals (one individually and one collectively) before attending a consciousness-raising workshop on reflection and two others after the event. An interview was also administered to the participants to gain a better understanding. The result showed improved participants' familiarity with reflective journaling after the event. Besides, Iranian teachers' barriers to reflective journaling were found to an institutional, teacher, and educational system issues. Also, Yoshihara et al. (2020) discussed the reflective journals of two novice EFL instructors in Japanese universities to find their practical difficulties and challenges experienced in using communicative language teaching (CLT) in class. Multiple data collections were conducted, including reflective journals, a background questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and follow-up interviews. The result identified novice Japanese teachers' struggles with CLT as unwillingness from students to engage in group activities, instructors' problems with L1 (first language) use, instructors' difficulty in balancing the course goals, the students' English proficiency, and a CLT approach. This study also highlighted how reflective journaling could promote teacher professional development (PD).

Despite many studies on teachers' reflective journaling, there is little discussion on using reflective journaling to investigate teachers' instructional practices in language learning from students' points of view. Ahmed (2019) reported that students' reflective journaling helps inform teachers' instructional practices at a university in Qatar. In his study, this strategy revealed several teaching methods that students preferred the most, i.e., gradual teaching, exemplification, discussion, comprehension checking, cooperative learning, and graphic organizers. Those students, consisting of females only, also pointed

out some challenges experienced during classroom activities, such as lack of teacher feedback, classroom management, time mismanagement, etc., which are essential for language instructors or teachers to improve their teaching process.

The current study bridges the gap in the literature mentioned by exploring students' reflective journals, both males and females, to inform instructional practices in an online writing classroom. Besides investigating instructional practices, this current study also examined students' challenges and lessons learned during online learning. Interviews and questionnaires were applied along with students' reflective journals to understand better how instructional practices should be delivered. Considering the idea stated above, two research questions were formulated (1) what are the EFL undergraduate students' perspectives on the instructional practices in an online writing class?; (2) What challenges do EFL undergraduate students encounter during online writing classes?

METHOD

Research Design

The narrative inquiry method is implemented in this study. Participants' narratives of teachers' instructional practices were collected via reflective journals, interviews, and questionnaires. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state that narrative study can capture and describe teachers' lived experiences. This study aims to discover the students' perspectives toward teachers' instructional practices and observe students' challenges and lessons learned in an online writing classroom.

Additionally, this study is inspired by Gibbs' (2013) reflective cycle and social constructivism as the theoretical framework. Gibbs' reflective cycle offers students a systematic phase to reflect (Helyer, 2015) as it consists of five stages, i.e., description, feelings, evaluation, conclusion, and action. Besides, this model provides cue questions to answer. In other words, students unfamiliar with reflective practice will follow each reflection process easily. The reflective journal questions were constructed to look for students' reflections on their teacher's instructional practices in an online writing course. Meanwhile, social constructivism is incorporated to identify the role of culture and context in understanding and interpreting social reality (Pritchard & John Woolard, 2013).

Research Participants

Two groups of participants signed an informed consent form and agreed to participate in this study voluntarily. First, nine students participated in writing weekly reflective journals and agreed to be interviewed. Second, fifteen students participated in the questionnaire only. All of these students were EFL Undergraduate students (male and female) of the English Department Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. They enrolled in an Essay Writing course taught by the same teacher.

Data Collection

Inspired by Gibbs' (2013) reflective cycle, this current study developed a reflective journal template to determine students' perspectives toward teachers' instructional practices in EFL online writing courses. Adapting the five stages in Gibbs' reflective cycle, the questions were constructed to fit with the participants' experience. There are nine questions in total; three questions were given in week 1 to identify the situation of the class through students' description; four questions were given in week 2 to examine students' feelings, evaluation, and analysis of the teacher's instructional practices; and two questions given in week 3 to collect students' conclusion and action as feedback for future teaching method. This reflective journal template was then checked by the teacher of the class to make sure that it covered the important points of the instructional practices.

Before starting the reflective practice, I made a WhatsApp group to communicate with the participants on November 24th, 2020. With the help of the teacher and the chief of the class, students were invited to join the group. After that, the researcher announced the participants of this study and distributed the consent form. It has been stated earlier that nine students agreed to participate in writing reflective journals. Those who submitted the consent form were then invited to join another WhatsApp group to receive a detailed explanation of how to do the reflective practice. Meanwhile, the rest of the students who did not agree to write reflective journals were asked to share their responses about the teacher's instructional practices in the questionnaire. The main reason behind students' unwillingness to participate was their concern about the schedule.

Students who participated in reflective journaling were requested to write a weekly reflective journal with guided questions for three weeks. Each week, they were given different questions to be submitted within five days through a google form link. They were informed that they do not need to pay attention to grammar and language organization and only focus on delivering their experiences and perspective toward the teacher's instructional practices. Students also acknowledged that their reflective journals would improve instructional practices in the future. Besides, to make the students feel comfortable, the teacher assured them that their opinions would not affect their grades and relationship with the teacher in class.

After writing reflective journals for three weeks, those students were invited to interview on January 18th - 30th, 2021. This aims to explore students' perspectives deeper about teachers' instructional practices. Despite completing reflective journals, students may be hesitant to express all their thoughts and feelings in writing. In this case, the interview serves as a second reflective journal, but in the form of oral communication. The interview process was conducted via WhatsApp video call and recorded with full consent from the participants.

Meanwhile, students who participated in the questionnaire were given a link to Google Forms to record their responses to the teacher's instructional practices. The questions addressed the same teacher's instructional practices as in reflective journals. There are 25 questions in total; 20 questions were set on the Likert scale, and five questions requested the students to elaborate on the answer in paragraphs. This questionnaire has been amended accordingly after having a trial run with some students and getting the teacher's permission and approval. Students were given the questionnaire on December 15th, 2020.

Unfortunately, during the process of collecting data, there were some obstacles occurred. First, some participants wrote a quite short journal (only 2-3 sentences) in week 1, lacking the detailed information needed in this study. Therefore, students were given a short brief to express their thoughts better in the following weeks. Second, the number of participants who submitted their responses to the questionnaire was limited, although the teacher encouraged them to participate. Third, the interview data were corrupted due to technical issues, so the participants were asked to be re-interviewed on July 19th - August 4th, 2021, via Zoom meeting.

Data Analysis

For this study, Riessman's (2008) thematic content analysis was employed to find the commonalities and differences in students' reflective journals. The analysis followed several stages, i.e., familiarization with data, identifying common thematic elements, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The themes and categories were used to analyze the reflective journals, guided by research questions focusing on teachers' instructional practices. The categories used in the data analysis were students' perspectives toward teachers' instructional practices and students' reported challenges and lessons learned during online writing classes. Meanwhile, the questionnaire employed is categorized as a descriptive statistics type using ordinal data. Thus, looking for the mode (the highest point) in each question was the data analysis method.

FINDINGS

Students' Perspective Toward Teacher's Instructional Practices

From all students' reflective journals, interviews and questionnaires, students reported that the teacher's instructional practices listed below effectively help them in an online writing class. Students also shared some suggestions to improve teachers' instructional practices in the future.

Video Presentation

A video presentation is a teaching method in which students explain a topic the teacher decides and record themselves in a video. The video was presented in class by sending the link to the WhatsApp group. Like any typical form of presentation, the presenter received questions and suggestions regarding his/her topic. Eight out of nine students' journals agreed this teaching method is effective. This is a sample of a journal entry:

Since the method asks each student to present one material, they will learn their presentation material. In contrast, the others who aren't present will be the audience and try to understand their friends' presentations. The presenter will learn to explain things and convey the material they already had learned before the audience did. Implicitly, the presenter will also practice speaking material, too; while the audience will implicitly practice their listening skill by listening to the presenter's material which will be different for each person, about how they pronounce a word, how they talk, and what they are talking about (Student 7).

In other journals, student 1 considered video presentation an exciting method because he had a chance to teach his peers. Additionally, making a video presentation allowed student 3 to feel proud of herself because she could make a video which required her to learn more about software and the technical complexity of technology. These positive reviews were also recorded in the student's questionnaire. Nine out of 13 students stated that the teacher always provided sufficient interactive media or platforms in teaching (including Padlet sessions). Likewise, through the interview, student 8 supported the previous reviews below:

"This video presentation is a distinctive method I've never found in other writing classes. It's interesting and fun."

Padlet Session

Padlet is a real-time collaborative web platform which allows users to upload, organize, and share content to a virtual bulletin board (Padlet.com). This learning platform was used to have a synchronous discussion after the video presentation session. One to two students in charge of being the day's presenters posted a writing prompt which emphasized the exercise of the topic presented earlier, such as "give one example of the use of the principle of classification in classification essay". Since this platform uses a bulletin board, the students' answers come from a post-it note. The students were allowed to comment on each other's work. Eight students argued that Padlet was a fun and engaging medium for discussion. This is a sample of a journal entry:

We use a media called Padlet where everyone can answer the question, and the others can also see it. In my opinion, it is an excellent way to involve everyone in the class. We can see the students that are not participating that day. So, even though we don't physically meet, the material is still accepted very well (Student 8).

Besides, student 4 wrote that discussing Padlet also made her more active, and she could share her opinion freely. In addition, student 1, in his interview, stated a similar review as below:

"When we discuss in Padlet, somehow, it also checks our comprehension simultaneously. It's a hands-on exercise after listening to the theory explained in the presentation."

However, students suggested teachers leave a comment on their works on Padlet. Although some students do this to their peers in the form of appreciation, such as "that's a good example", the teacher's comment will allow students to identify whether their answer is correct.

Teacher's Positive Attitude

Teacher's positive attitudes were the thing that all students praised in their journal entries, as exemplified below:

During the learning time, the lecturer greeted the students in the chat room and asked them how they would make them interested in interacting. Funny examples and remarks are helpful to keep the mood going so the students will not feel bored. (Student 4)

"... on time to start and end online classes. In my opinion, things like that were very important in online learning because in addition to students becoming more active, with the punctuality of students, they will also be more enthusiastic when participating in class. (Student 9)

This time manner was also found in the questionnaire result, where 10 out of 13 students admitted that the teacher could manage the time between students' presentations, evaluations, reviews, and discussions well. Additionally, the teacher can cope with some problems related to the online classroom, such as internet connection or audio trouble. The teacher masters the knowledge of the subject and addresses each question well during the Q&A session.

Other findings were that more than half of the students agreed that the teacher always presented a summary of the previous lesson at the beginning and delivered interactive communication with the students. This is in line with student 3's statement during the interview as follows:

"Teacher can keep students' mood in the class. And I think, she is the most active teacher that I've met. She doesn't hesitate to mention students' names so that they will reply to her question in the group. She interacts with both active and passive students."

Comprehension Checking

Using Zoom as a medium to check students' comprehension and give feedback on their essays was the teaching method that all students preferred to have in class. This is the sample journal entry:

After we wrote an example essay on our own, we met with the lecturer through Zoom, in which she discussed and gave feedback about the essay we had written (Student 4).

More than half of the students gave the same reviews in the questionnaire, in which the teacher provides appraisal and/or feedback and demonstrates the correct way to help students, especially those with poor performance. Seven out of thirteen students believed that the teacher's appraisal and feedback are important to their learning process. However, the teacher's feedback was rarely given. Thus, students shared their feedback to improve this comprehension checking as follows:

Based on the comprehension checking, I think it will be okay to have more time in a synchronous meeting in Zoom, maybe right after the end of every chapter, so the teacher can check the students' understanding through a pop-up quiz or Q n A (student 2).

Students also shared similar opinions in their interviews. This is the sample statement:

"Since the teacher's feedback is quite general, only pointing out the mistake that most students made, I think she can make it more specific in the future. As you know, there are a lot of components in writing, and students need to understand all of them well to make a good essay. Also, it will be better if the

teacher gives each student feedback. But, if she can't, just give feedback in general at the end of each type of essay.” (Student 9)

Their feedback is also applicable to mid-and final tests. This is the sample journal entry:

Based on my experience, I think it would be good if the teacher could post some general review or maybe the conclusion after we did the mid-test or final test. It is because I think we need suggestions after submitting our test. Because sometimes, I feel like I did the test well enough, but it can be a wrong answer/essay because we didn't know the result of our test (Student 3).

Peer Assessment

Based on the questionnaire data, eight out of thirteen students admitted that they must regularly evaluate and reflect upon their work. The evaluation is in the form of a peer assessment. Six students' journals revealed that having peer assessment is an interesting method. This is a sample of a journal entry:

This peer part is such an interesting way to learn essay writing. At least for me, I need to cover myself with the proper knowledge to check my peer's essay. The structure of the essay itself, the grammar, the punctuation, and the vocabularies are some of the aspects I need to understand before I do the peer-checking assignments (Student 8).

However, this method lacks reliability when the student's pair does not understand the essay well and appropriately give comments, as said by some students through the questionnaire and student 4 in her interview as follows:

“This method was good. But sometimes, it can be biased when your peer doesn't understand what you are writing about. It will be better for them to ask first the essay's writer before they score it.”

Therefore, in her interview, student 8 suggested teacher reformat the assessment sheet. Her suggestion is recorded as follows:

“In the earlier format, the comment was only given at the end of the assessment. So, maybe it will be better if the comment is provided in each criterion of the essay. So, we don't get the score only, but also the explanation of which part of the essay is incorrect.”

Teaching Materials

All students' journals revealed that the teacher's teaching material in an e-book has helped them understand each topic discussed in class. Here is the sample journal entry:

The teaching materials successfully covered all the needed materials (student 7).

This journal entry is aligned with students' opinions during the interview. This is what student 3 said:

“Teaching material is quite effective. The teacher has already divided pages to read from several books for each topic per week. It makes it easier for students to follow the material rather than only giving one book to read all pages.”

Although the teaching materials assisted students well in the learning process, they also stated their feedback toward this issue in the journal and interview, respectively, as follows:

Based on the teaching materials, I think it is better not just to give the PDF book as the only source material. Better if the teachers give other sources, too, maybe from YouTube, websites, and so on (Student 2).

“I think the teaching material was good enough, but maybe it can be developed. For example, the teacher can give an example in the discussion from a real case or share the materials in the video.” (Student 9)

Students' Assignment

From the questionnaire data, more than half of students elaborated that they were given individual homework using textbooks/worksheets regularly to practice newly taught subjects and improve writing skills at home. However, five out of nine journals addressed that topic decided by the teacher was quite bothering for them. This is the sample journal entry:

One problem I want to tell her is that when writing our essay (for the first and final drafts), we cannot choose the topic for the essay we will write ourselves. I think it is just unfortunate that the class cannot write what they want to express because I think it will be easier to look at and do research on something we like. The writing process will be smoother for us, and I think the result will be better than writing an essay based on a topic we are not comfortable with (Student 6).

In her interview, student 8 said that the decided topic leads to misinterpretation by the students. So, she gave feedback as follows:

“Sometimes, because of the topic, we (read: the students) often have different interpretations. That’s why I think that teachers should explain what the topic means so we can have the same understanding.”

Another student also shared her view about this in the interview:

“Teacher often gave us a similar topic for the assignments. So, I think the teacher should give us the theme for the essay, and we are free to decide our topic.” (Student 9)

Besides the decided topic, three students also highlighted the plagiarism issue in the class during the interview.

“Teacher seems to neglect that most students use a similar outline for the assignments. She never talked about the point of plagiarism in the class, and I think it affects how students tend to be lazy in writing the essay.” (Student 2)

However, student 8 praised the process of how the assignments are compiled in her journal as follows:

The assignments that the lecturer gave helped me greatly this semester. We must work on our draft before writing the final essay. Later, that draft would be checked by our peer.

Students’ Reported Challenges and Lessons Learned During Online Writing Class Virtual Interaction

Due to online learning, most students admitted through a questionnaire that online learning is quite tricky because they learn differently than before. Students’ journals revealed that virtual interaction is one factor giving them limitations in some aspects of learning. Here are the sample journal entries:

But to be honest, I kind of longing for a real-life explanation where I can interact with the lecturer and my peers. It’s not like it’s hard to understand what our lecturer or our friends have explained or presented. It would stimulate my brain even more and make me write something on my notes rather than staring at the screen and not paying that much attention to it. Especially for me, I get easily distracted, and it is hard to concentrate on an explanation through a screen for like 45-60 minutes. I have to keep myself awake too. Somehow it makes me sleepy listening to people talking and explaining things through a screen. (Student 8)

During the presentation, I feel comfortable recording a video of myself explaining. However, it’s a bit frustrating that I can’t see my friends’ reactions, whether they understand. And there are times when I feel like a nuisance typing a long answer to my friends. That’s one of the moments when I miss verbal speaking. (Student 4)

During the interview, student 1 also shared the same experience as follow:

“Online learning is challenging. I got betting understanding in face-to-face class because I couldn’t discuss with my peers at the same time. It stressed me initially, especially when I got a very demanding assignment.” (Student 1)

Internet Access

The Internet is the main factor to be provided in online learning. Thus, when internet function is troubled, it may cause several problems in students’ learning process. This study found this condition in most students' questionnaires and journals. Here is the journal entry:

For me, a bad network and a broken laptop camera all the time would be a problem. Apart from this, some lecturers require the submission of assignments within one minute, for example, 12.00-12.01 pm. Every student's network can be problematic, including mine. Furthermore, some lecturers do not

pay attention to the time of giving and collecting. Even outside the hours of the subjects he teaches. (Student 5)

Similarly, other students also put their thoughts in the interview as follows:

“Since it is online learning, we rely so much on the Internet. Then, I can do nothing when there is a blackout, which happens sometimes. Also, the internet access from the government isn’t enough to support our learning process, especially when we need to meet in Zoom.” (Student 7)

“We must listen to what the teacher explained during the class. But, when the internet connection got troubled, the material delivering is also troubled.” (Student 1)

Misinterpretation of Materials

Since the teacher’s explanation was conveyed online, students found misinterpretation undeniable. Here is the sample journal entry:

Besides, since the materials are conveyed digitally or in a way that we can’t see directly, it might cause several interpretations or be incorrectly delivered. Also, these whole online classes make me lazier day by day. Maybe because of the lack of pressure, I usually get if I am in the actual course. (Student 8)

In a similar vein, another student also agreed to the issue of misinterpretation during her interview as follows:

“Online class will be difficult when the teacher doesn’t have good technological literacy. I can cause misinterpretation too.” (Student 4)

Due to this, some students told through the questionnaire that they had to look for other sources to understand the materials.

Learning Environment

This learning environment covers supportive and distractive elements during students’ online learning. Students 5 and 9 found friends and household chores played their roles in the learning process during the interview below respectively:

“Online learning is hard, especially when it comes to assignments. I am a typical person who needs a support system in learning. I mean, in a face-to-face class, the situation supports us in doing the assignments because we meet our friends. But, in online classes, I often delay doing the assignment because I only rely on myself.” (Student 5)

“This class wasn’t too difficult to follow. The problems were with the internet connection and the household chores, which pretty much disturbed my learning mood. Also, cheating is unavoidable, especially on test days. It also demotivates students because they think their friends will search for the answer on the Internet. So why do we bother ourselves by reading books or thinking? (Student 9)

“I was so lazy doing the assignment because online class demotivated me. The main cause was my mood, especially when the assignments were difficult. But I handled that situation by resting and asking about my peers’ progress. So that I find the courage to do the tasks then.” (Student 4)

Besides challenges, students also shared their thoughts on any lessons learned they encountered during online learning as follows:

Time and Priority Management

Despite all the problems in the online class, students described through questionnaires and journals that managing time and priority was important to support their learning process. Here are the journal entries:

The good thing is I can learn about priority management. I list all the assignments and then write the deadline so I know which assignments must be done quickly and which have a lot of time. (Student 3)

The good thing is that I learn how to do and cope with online classes. I learn to stay sane, manage the stress because of the non-sense assignments, to manage time in doing all the tasks well. ... In this type of situation, next time, I will manage my time in better ways. I will not waste my time doing unimportant things like scrolling Instagram and watching series. I will allocate my time preparing the material, reading the PDF book, making notes, and searching for references to understand better.

Also, when finishing the tasks, I will manage my time to do them directly and try to finish them before the deadline. (Student 2)

All the above statements are in line with what students 5 and 1 said during their interview below:

“As I learn, making a schedule and setting the alarm is very helpful. It’s effective to help me become more disciplined in doing the assignments.” (Student 5)

“I made a to-do list to help me track all my assignments. I also did the assignments as soon as possible as I got them.” (Student 1)

Technological Literacy

It can be denied that technology is closely intertwined with online learning. Therefore, teachers and students must be aware of technological literacy in many cases to support their teaching/learning process. Students in their journals and questionnaires agreed that online learning allows them to be more advanced in using technology. Here are some samples of journal entries:

What I highlight the most from the positive side of online learning is the use of technological sophistication for everyone. I feel I have more ability to use technology. (Student 5)

On the other hand, I’m also quite amazed we get to make a video of ourselves during the presentation, evaluate our friends’ understanding through Padlet, and use Q n A session in the chat room. (Student)

Classroom Preparation

After online learning, students realized that they needed to prepare before starting the class. The preparation covers anything they should do inside and outside the course to support their understanding of the materials. Here are the sample journal entries:

I think it is practical to review the material by providing a straightforward question related to the material for that day. It makes me learn and invest myself in the material. Also, peer checking is somehow a great thing to do to learn. And I would expand my words-usage, such as using more academic or sophisticated words based on the context. This means I have to read more literature and references. I would improve all the grammar too in my essay. At least I won’t have any minor grammar errors anymore. (Student 8)

Maybe I’ll study the material again if I have free time, and then I can discuss it with my friend. If my friend and I still know nothing about the material, I’ll ask personally to the teacher. (Student 3)

I might want to ask for more explanations from the teacher outside the class period. I also want to make sure that I understand the right points. It is also good for the teacher to share the explanation outside the class period with other students so all of us would get the same level of comprehension. (Student 7)

Other classroom preparation may include notetaking, memorizing, and reading more, as student 9 and student 2 said in their interview, respectively as follow:

“Taking notes and memorizing are the two things that are important in online learning as a preparation before entering the class.” (Student 9)

“Reading more references will help me in getting through the writing class, I think. So, the process of writing will be so much easier.” (Student 2)

Learning Attitude

Learning attitude is the basic thing that each student needs to own to be successful in the learning process. Through the questionnaire, students found that they need to be responsible for their learning. Likewise, some students in the weekly journal stated that:

Being able to focus during online meetings is also helping. When I talk to my friends, some don’t like online classes because they can’t concentrate or understand anything. I think it is partly because they don’t try to participate. Our attention is there when we’re interacting with the lecturer by answering. Hence, we get to understand. (Student 4)

An increase in discipline can be seen. However, it depends on the individual. Personally, I’m still struggling with this. (Student 5)

Meanwhile, student 9 share her opinion during the interview as follows:

“Maybe, for next semester, I will do the assignments as soon as possible I receive them because writing task always takes time to finish.” (Student 9)

Efficient and Flexible Classroom

Although online learning causes some limitations to students, they also argue that it positively impacts their learning, especially regarding its flexibility. In the questionnaire, students said that online learning allows them to attend class without any distance and time constrain. Students 8 in the journal also state a similar thing as follows:

In terms of learning, I think the good thing is that online class is pretty flexible, giving us a lot of freedom and opportunity to learn about the material. We can search and look up the material anywhere on the Internet. (Student 8)

Other students also share different opinions during the interview as follows:

“I think the good side of online learning is it is efficient. Students can google something they don't know about the material while the teacher explained.” (Student 9)

“The one good thing in an online class is it is flexible. We can do other things at the same time when we have a class. But, because of it too, we tend to procrastinate.” (Student 5)

“I feel more comfortable in an online class because it doesn't require us to see our many people directly. Somehow, I can be more relaxed and don't need to see my peers' expressions when I try to answer the teacher's question. It was so different from face-to-face classes. I felt like a stupid student when I answered the teacher's question in front of clever students.” (Student 4)

DISCUSSION

Students' Perspective Toward Teacher's Instructional Practices

One of the initial objectives of this research was to explore students' perspectives toward teachers' instructional practices in an online writing class through reflective journaling. Very little was found in the literature on the effectiveness of reflective journaling in identifying and analyzing teachers' instructional practices from students' points of view. Thus, this study offers this new perspective as an attempt to improve teachers' instructional practices, especially online writing classes, holistically. Marsh (2007) argues that students' feedback is multidimensional: they are reliable and stable, relatively valid and objective to benefit the teacher to inform their teaching practice.

The current study found that integrating technology into online learning is essential. Hampel & Stickler (2005) mention that technological preparedness is a prerequisite for teaching in an online language classroom. From the finding section, students elaborate that two technology-based teaching media, i.e. video presentation and Padlet session provided by the teacher, have encouraged them to learn better due to several reasons: (1) video presentation fosters students to master the topic first before they record themselves into a video; (2) video presentation helps them to practice their speaking skill; (3) Padlet session allows students to learn interactively and fun since it connects them with their classmates and teacher in real-time, and (4) Padlet session is a hands-on practice after students received materials from listening to the video presentation. The teacher's supportive condition of technology-mediated learning can increase students' satisfaction with the courses (García Botero et al., 2021). Likewise, Gallien & Oomen (2005) stated that students need to communicate with their classmates could be fulfilled by providing a sense of connectedness in the online classroom. Anggeraini (2018), in her study about the use of technology in EFL classrooms, stated that multimedia technology promotes students' activities and initiatives as well as the teaching process in English classes.

Further, these two learning activities represent the point of social constructivism, i.e., emphasizing collaboration with teachers or peers in learning. From social constructivism's point of view, collaboration improves an area of potential development called a zone of proximal development (ZPD). Through the partnership, students can learn something beyond their current level of development from peers with a higher cognitive ability to construct knowledge and understanding. Vygotsky believed that interaction during learning leads to cognitive development (Idaresit Akpan et al., 2020). Thus, it can be assumed that this finding confirms the social constructivism theory about the crucial role of collaboration in learning to foster cognitive development, which in this case, refers to writing skills.

In her study, Katz (2021) revealed a need to establish the same quality of face-to-face learning environment in an online classroom to create a positive relationship between teacher and students. This positive relationship has enhanced students' satisfaction and persistence during the course (Pollard et al., 2014; Rovai, 2002). This positive rapport can be constructed when the teacher shows a positive attitude to students. Rovai (2002) discovered that teachers' positive attitudes could be illustrated when they show socio-emotional-driven interaction. Likewise, Pollard et al. (2014) stated that a teacher's social presence affects students' positive perception of their online class and develops the classroom community, allowing for an enhanced learning

process. Based on the finding, the teacher demonstrated her socio-emotional driven interaction and social presence because she always greeted her students to start the class and told jokes to maintain students' moods. Additionally, the teacher often asked active and passive students to participate in the discussion. In Sher's (2009) study, it is observed that encouraging students to participate in the discussion and treating them somewhat are essential to building positive teacher-student relationships.

Regarding comprehension checking, the teacher gave corrective feedback to each student's assignment via zoom. Ellis (2009) elaborated that in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), corrective feedback can support and increase students' motivation in learning. Besides, personalized feedback signifies the teacher's support and connection with students (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020). However, students said that the teacher's feedback was not enough since it was only shared at the beginning of the semester. (Swan & Shih, 2019) observed that constructive and timely feedback is prominent during online learning because students may feel isolated and need more encouragement. Also, it can maintain a positive teacher-student relationship, which Hawk et al. (2002) discovered motivates students to achieve higher academic performance.

Concerning the impacts of peer assessment on students' development in learning, this study confirms that peer assessment can foster students' general learning autonomy, supporting previous research findings (Shen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2006). In their study, Shen et al. (2020) exerted that a significant effect of peer assessment is enhanced learners' confidence in their research, meaning that they no longer hesitated to take control of their learning process and start developing their self-efficacy. Students in this study have shown this self-efficacy, i.e., they must improve their writing skills before checking classmates' errors to prevent giving a lousy score. This finding shares the same vein with what Bandura (1977) states: self-efficacy means learners' belief in their ability to perform necessary behaviours to attain particular. In other words, this result conforms to the recent outcome of Alqarni & Alshakhi (2021) that peer assessment allows students to show their responsibility toward their learning, meaning that they will be more aware of assessment criteria so that they can implement those criteria to find their mistakes. These positive impacts of peer assessment are also applied in online situations. Seifert & Feliks (2018) argued that online peer assessment could improve students' assessment skill and encourages students' engagement in the peer-assessment process (J. Liu et al., 2019). In some studies, toward the use of peer assessment in a web-based program, Tsai & Chuang (2013) found that it can motivate students to improve their writing skills and develop critical thinking in their writing. Likewise, X. Liu et al. (2018) proposed this kind of assessment helps students improve the scores of their reviews. Further, peer assessment can be said to exemplify the instructional strategy in social constructivism because it involves collaboration between students and peers, provides meaningful and problem-based thinking, and targets both the actual level and potential development (Palit, 2018). As discussed earlier, collaboration is the highlighted point of social constructivism theory so that students achieve their learning objectives.

Nonetheless, some studies discovered that students' relationships might influence peer assessment, resulting in the friendship-bias tendency (Lee et al., 2013; Saito & Fujita, 2004). Thus, some studies suggest that students need to be informed about the point of responsibility in peer assessment, reflected in their positive attitude and behaviour in class, resulting in avoiding friendship bias (Alqarni & Alshakhi, 2021; N. F. Liu & Carless, 2006). This is in line with what students propose about adding a comment section on each assessment criterion so that they get an explanation of their mistakes.

In addition to teachers' instructional practices, teaching material in the form of a textbook has been fruitful in helping students understand the lesson. This finding signifies some scholars' view about the use of textbooks in the EFL context that it has positive impacts on both teachers and students, such as it is used to assess students' progress and achievement correctly (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; O'Neill, 1982; Sheldon, 1988). However, some students also shared their feedback to improve this aspect, i.e., using authentic materials. The benefit of authentic materials has been widely known in many EFL classes, as it offers more active and stimulating intrinsic parts than a textbook. Further, in a study about authentic materials to foster the writing skill of college EFL learners, Chamba et al. (2019) discovered that authentic materials help learners to perform better by understanding the main idea of most authentic resources, which allows them to have increased self-confidence and motivation.

Another important finding is that the pre-writing activity in accomplishing the assignment helped students immensely. This result conforms to the recent research by (Suharti et al., 2019) about pre-writing activities in teaching EFL writing. Their study found that pre-writing activities encourage students to generate ideas and inspire them on what and how to write on their task. Specifically, in this class, the pre-writing used is outlining. Among other pre-writing activities, sketching is the cognitive learning activity which affects students to write better. However, the teacher lacked to give students the freedom to decide on the topic in their assignments. Students declared that chosen and unfamiliar topics often made it difficult to compose the essay. Students' opinion is similar to some studies by Qiu & Lo (2017) that found students had more positive perceptions toward familiar topics. Likewise, McDonough & Crawford (2020) also observed that the students found it easier to use linguistic resources when they wrote using the case they had personal experience, resulting in more highly scored paragraphs and effective use of target structures.

Referring to the findings, it is worth highlighting the benefits of an online reflective journal. There is no difference between online and conventional reflective journaling but between the media. Reflective journaling, traditionally, uses a written form of journaling, whilst online reflective journaling uses any media accessed via the Internet, for instance, email. Reflective journaling can promote students' writing skills (Hussein et al., 2020; Ni'ma et al., 2019; Wahyuningsih, 2019). These studies found that students' opportunity to practice writing becomes more exciting, enjoyable, and motivating through reflective journaling. This excitement was seen through students' active participation, positive classroom responses, and interest in writing.

Students also improved each writing component, writing tests, and scoring test. Besides students' improvement in writing, other benefits of reflective journals were exploring students' difficulties in writing (Avarzamani & Farahian, 2019) and increasing students' motivation (Amirkhanova et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the reflective journal encourages teachers to improve teaching practices since they become more reflective (Altalhab et al., 2021; Davut Göker, 2016; Jones, 2016; Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). Reflective teachers allow teachers to identify and avoid repetition mistakes and encourage them to implement new methods to improve their teaching practice. Also, the reflective journal encourages teachers to have higher awareness and self-esteem to make better decisions about what is going on in the class. Last, teachers can explore the characteristics, beliefs, and values they find in a classroom. In other words, teachers' reflective journaling can foster professional development (PD).

Some researchers also used reflective journaling to investigate problems or challenges during teaching practice. (Donyaie & Afshar (2019) examined the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers were familiar with reflective journaling and identified its barriers. Thirty Iranian teachers were asked to write two reflective journals (one individual and one collective) before attending a workshop on reflection and two others after the event. An interview was also administered to the participants to gain a better understanding. The result showed improved participants' familiarity with reflective journaling after the event. Besides, Iranian teachers' barriers to the reflective journal were found as institutional issues, teacher issues, and educational system issues. Also, Yoshihara et al. (2020) discussed the reflective journals of two novice EFL instructors in Japanese universities to find the practical difficulties and challenges experienced when they used communicative language teaching (CLT) in class. Data collection covered reflective journals, a background questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and follow-up interviews were conducted. The result identified novice Japanese teachers' struggles with CLT as unwillingness from students to engage in group activities, instructors' problems with L1 (first language) use, instructors' difficulty in balancing the course goals, the students' English proficiency, and a CLT approach. This study also highlighted how reflective journaling could promote teachers' professional development (PD).

Students' Challenges and Lessons During Online Writing Class

Addressing students' difficulties in their online learning, this study found that virtual interaction was the most significant factor that prevented students from understanding the materials well. Participants in this study said that the lack of direct social interaction makes them demotivated. Online classroom indeed allows interaction to happen but through a screen. Having direct interaction with teachers and peers during the learning process allows for more excitement for students to learn than in an online setting. During the interview, one of the participants said that the hesitation in asking or giving a response in online learning is higher than in a conventional environment. Besides, due to screen interaction, most students stated that they lacked focus in listening to the teacher's explanation. Referring to social constructivism theory, social interaction is the main factor causing learners to develop cognitive thinking (Idaresit Akpan et al., 2020). Social constructivism believes that interaction with others and the use of conversation can help students achieve learning objectives. This finding matches the observed results in an earlier study by Barrot et al. (2021), Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2020), and Rawashdeh et al. (2021). Their studies revealed that the lack of communication and social interaction between teachers and students could cause students to feel unmotivated to gain success; they experience anxiety, stress, and depression.

The second challenge that the student had was internet access. Following the present result, previous studies have demonstrated that online learning cannot be conducted successfully if internet access is limited due to economic issues (Barrot et al., 2021; Mardiah & Anastasia, 2020). Although each student receives an internet allowance from the government, they claim that the amount is inadequate to meet their needs. The third obstacle was the learning environment, especially in the home learning environment. In their study, Barrot et al. (2021) explained that the learning environment in a developing country has distractions at home, such as noise, as one of the most significant challenges.

Additionally, learning from home weakens students' commitment to learning because they have less control and guidance (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020). They state that this factor can make students lazier to learn and distracted easily to accomplish the tasks. Further, they also found that learning materials can be challenging to be understood due to the loss of feedback students understand. Their finding is consistent with the last result of this current study about the misinterpretation of materials.

However, this study also investigated what students gained as lessons from previous online learning to improve the next online classroom. Most students advance the following suggestions to overcome any challenges or difficulties in online education. First, time and priority management are vital to ensure the online learning process runs accordingly. This finding agrees with Mardiah & Anastasia's (2020) and Brewer & Stout's (2001) findings, which showed that online learning needs online digital skills, meaning that students should be aware of using technology. If technology undermines students' learning process, they are likely to face failure in the future. Likewise, Picciano (2017) and Wang et al. (2018) admitted that online students who tend to be organized, have initiative, and are highly willing to finish the task are considered successful learners.

Second, students mentioned that technological literacy could support their online classes better. This finding corroborates the ideas of Farrah & Al-Bakry (2020), who considered that technology is a prominent part of online learning and understanding how to use it can provide a semi-real interaction between students and teachers in creating a well-organized classroom. Likewise, Hariadi & Simanjuntak (2020) also suggested that students must adapt to technology settings during online classes to achieve a better learning process.

Then the other two findings of this study were classroom preparation and learning attitude. Both findings highlighted the importance of students' readiness and orientation to welcome, recognize, and participate in the classroom's activities, aiming to understand the materials holistically since students tend to learn independently in the online classroom. These results agree with the findings of earlier studies conducted by Joshua et al. (2016), Mather & Sarkans (2018) Rahmawati (2016), in which online learning encourages students to be more independent in gaining knowledge by being more actively to be involved in the learning process, meaning that instructors are no longer the absolute source of knowledge but rather as advisors. In short, students gain more confidence and self-reliance due to online classrooms. As participants in this study argue, these two learning aspects help them improve their writing skills. This is in line with a study by (Sarrab et al., 2013), who claimed that successful students have strong motivation, high self-responsibility, and high self-organization skills.

The last lesson students experienced during online learning was the flexibility and efficiency of the class, meaning that learners can learn anywhere and anytime. The present finding seems to be consistent with other research, which found flexible and efficient classroom allows students to access the materials without any barriers, such as place and time (Delahunty, 2018; Rawashdeh et al., 2021) and to get information and give response toward the classroom activities that are carried out through interactive video media punctually (Gautam & Tiwari, 2016; Martínez-Caro et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study yielded some significant findings about teachers' instructional practices in the online situation through students' lens at the university level, particularly in an online writing classroom. Through reflective journaling, students advocate the importance of interactive teaching as students claimed video presentations and Padlet sessions were helpful to make them engaged during the learning process. Additionally, supportive teaching methods, i.e., the teacher's positive attitude, regular teacher's comprehension checking, peer assessment, teaching materials, and free-topic-used-students' assignments, are essential to enhance students' motivation. However, students also observed challenges during online learning, i.e., virtual interaction, internet access, misinterpretation of materials, and learning environment (home). Nevertheless, there are some lessons learned that students received to improve their learning strategies in the future. They are time and priority management, technological literacy, classroom preparation, learning attitude, and efficient and flexible classrooms.

There are a few limitations to the present study that should be addressed in future studies. First, the number of participants of 24 undergraduate students is relatively small. Moreover, only nine were willing to write weekly reflective journals and be interviewed. Second, the scope of this study is limited to a single writing class only. More studies using more university EFL students from other courses, particularly those with different teachers, will aid in understanding students' struggles and challenges with specific reference to teachers' instructional practices. Third, the reflective journaling session is relatively short, only three weeks, as students had final tests during that period.

Meanwhile, in the process of reflective journals, students revealed that they enjoy the process because they are allowed to share their opinions about how a writing class should be conducted. This enjoyment may engage students in writing activities, increasing their motivation and grade. The role of reflective journals in improving students' writing skills also requires further investigation.

The current study's findings are essential to teaching in the EFL context, especially at the university level. Through students' evaluation, the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practices and exactly what the students need. Therefore, this study suggests that teachers or educational institutions take students' feedback seriously to improve and develop more effective teaching practices to fit students' learning needs, particularly in online writing classrooms. Teachers can maintain instructional practices in which students share positive impacts on their learning and modify those with negative feedback. Facilitating students' needs is one of the teacher's priorities to ensure students achieve their learning goals.

Meanwhile, in the process of reflective journals, students revealed that they enjoyed the process because they were allowed to share their opinions about how a writing class should be conducted. This enjoyment may bring students to be more engaged in the writing activities which further increase their motivation and grade. The role of reflective journals to improve students' writing skill also requires further investigation.

The findings of the current study are important to the field of teaching in the EFL context, especially at the university level. Through students' evaluation, a teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practices exactly what the students' need. Therefore, this study suggests teachers and/or educational institutions for taking students' feedback seriously to improve and/or develop more effective teaching practices so that they can fit with the students' needs in learning, particularly in an online writing classroom. Teachers can maintain instructional practices that students shared positive impacts to their learning and modify those which have negative feedback. Facilitating students' needs is one of the teacher's priorities to ensure students achieve their learning goals.

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