

# IMPACT OF REFLECTIVE JOURNALS ON STUDENTS' LEARNING AUTONOMY AND SEMANTICS KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** Although writing reflective journals proves to have been an effective activity for theoretical courses and professional training, the emphasis on writing reflection is not frequently applied in teaching English studies at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law. Qualitative data from email interviews and evidence from students' papers reveal that writing reflection in the semantics course facilitated students' learning of the subject. Reflective writing was viewed by students as an efficacious way to enhance their understanding of the learnt concepts. The results, moreover, show a range of tasks students did to complete their journals, indicating that students' autonomous learning would increase during the course. The findings suggest a need for teachers to consider reflective writing as a method for reinforcing and enhancing students' understanding of English semantics, as well as promoting their independent learning.

**Keywords:** Reflective journal; English semantics; learner autonomy

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of writing creates opportunities for students to learn and discover a subject area in English studies. Writing reflections appears to have a positive effect on students' outcomes. Although the advantages of writing reflective journals seem to be obvious in assisting students in making learning progress, lecturers at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law have not used this tool frequently. Despite the fact that the balance between theoretical and practical courses is one of the concerns in education in general (Burdina, 2013), Nguyen Thi Minh Tam (2018) found that students' motivation to learn linguistic subjects is low because these subjects were theoretical and far from practical for students. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), Klimova (2015), Loosen (2014) mentioned that writing reflection is one of the tools applied in teaching to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical components in the curriculum. Reflective writing provides insights into the learning process, enables learners to understand what, why and how they learnt (Klimova, 2015). Reflective writing as a way of strengthening the connection between the learning experience and the follow-up activities is the most vital way to develop and reinforce learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Furthermore, reflective writing practice is also considered as a way to enhance students' learning autonomy (Cooke, 2013).

Writing reflective journals helps learners enrich their learning experiences. Previous studies have pointed out the effectiveness of reflections in developing students' knowledge of English linguistics (Light, Chen, & Ittelson, 2011; Loosen, 2014; Morrison, 1996; Muhammad, 2017; Nguyen Thi Minh Tam, 2018) as well as in promoting learning autonomy (Hashemian & Fadaei, 2013; Ivanova, 2017; Tezci and Dikici, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research

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into the impact of reflective journals on semantics courses, focusing on students' perceptions of their knowledge and learning autonomy development. In this study, those issues will be addressed.

### **1.2. Purposes of the study**

The purposes of the study are to explore (1) students' perspectives on the use of reflective writing in developing their learning autonomy and (2) the extent to which reflective practice aids and enhances their knowledge during the semantics course.

### **1.3. Research questions**

To achieve the purposes of the study, this research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are students' views on the effectiveness of reflective journals in the development of their semantic knowledge?
2. How do writing reflections enhance students' learning autonomy?

## **2. Literature review**

Linguistics instructors have employed different approaches to teach general linguistics and linguistic subjects such as morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. They require learners to reflect on what they are learning, what they have learnt, and how they solve the problems that arise in their learning process (Loosen, 2014; Muhammad, 2017; Nguyen Thi Minh Tam, 2018). According to Nguyen Thi Minh Tam (2018), in order to facilitate students' learning of linguistics, a problem-based learning approach should be applied. In the process of solving problems, students think, reflect, and ask questions that result in their developments; therefore, they practice using higher-order thinking skills and figure out what and how to learn, and solve the problems. Loosen (2014), in a discussion about the pedagogy of teaching linguistics course, employed a facilitative and experiential approach. The material is presented through lectures and discussions. Loosen's (2014) engagement with students encourages them to reflect on the lessons, facilitating students to dive deeper into the topics by doing more extensive reading, connecting the topics to their personal experience, and debating with their classmates. Students' language experience and observations are utilized later for their research projects with their peers at the end of the course.

Regarding teaching English semantics, Muhammad (2017) applied a learner-directed approach to teaching semantics as he argued that this approach was the best way to reach the aims of the course. During the course, learners completed various tasks that were either their actions or their representations of the tasks given. Muhammad (2017) explained that task performance could be demonstrated in many ways such as acting, speaking, or writing. Writing journals is used as a tool that students can manifest their learning performance. This type of writing gives students chances to learn not only inside but also outside the classroom settings. Students also built a connection to course materials as well as transfer their knowledge among the academic contexts of learning (Light, Chen, & Ittelson, 2011, as cited in Muhammad, 2017, p.845).

The previous studies have shown that it is important to provide students with opportunities to think about what they learn, how to learn, and why they learn. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, thus enhancing the connection of the learnt concepts as well as improving the retention of knowledge. Therefore, reflection is seen as one of the vital parts of their learning process. As defined by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985, p.18), “reflection is a form of response of the learner to experience.” Writing reflection is a productive experience, reflective activities in a learning context create opportunities for learners to understand the aims of their learning activities, to explore their experiences, and to analyze the learning process; and individuals, therefore, can explore new understandings, and be prepared for tests and written work (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

According to Bolton and Delderfield (2018), reflective writing is not considered as the recording of thoughts, but as the process of reflection. This reflective process structures and explains events, individuals, feelings, thoughts and values at the time of study or immediately thenceforth. Reflective practitioners focus on learning through exploration and self-illuminatory instead of creating a product (Bolton, 2010; Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). By writing reflections, learners not only learn from experiences about themselves but also their work. This type of writing creates opportunities for learners to ask themselves what they know but are not aware that they know, what they want to know, what they think, believe, feel, and understand. Reflective practitioners also inquire about how their actions correspond to their beliefs and their feelings (Bolton, 2010).

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) assert that different practitioners develop different stages in the ability of writing reflection; Moreover, this capacity may characterize those who learn from their experience effectively and those who do not. The stages of reflective writing listed by Bolton and Delderfield (2018) include planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The very first stage requires the practitioners to complete the problem identification, hypothesis formulation, theory identification and action planning. The next step is to accomplish the planned action, observe and collect data. In the final stage, learners reflect on the meanings, theories, and practices. The model of the reflection process developed by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) focuses on the starting points and objects of reflective writing, in which the learners make use of their experiences, behaviour, ideas, and feelings. The three stages of writing reflections processes are returning to experience, attending to feelings, and re-evaluating experience. The reflection process assists practitioners in learning; the outcomes contribute to learners’ changes in their emotions and attitudes and facilitate them to continue learning in the future.

Loosen (2014) concludes that reflection assists students with conflict resolution and develops their critical thinking; students develop their inquisitive minds, become more sensitive, and less judgmental. In terms of guidelines and training, Cheng and Chan (2019) state that the use of rubrics enables students to develop their levels of writing reflection. Teachers can provide learners with guidance on how to self-assess their writing. Self-evaluation will help learners become responsible for their learning, developing their judgement, and enabling extensive self-reflection.

In terms of self-directed learning, bringing reflective practice into the education curriculum facilitates autonomous learning (Morrison, 1996) while portfolio assessment fosters learners’

self-reflection and awareness. Learners have, therefore, become more independent in their learning; and they also cooperate with peers and teachers better (Tezci and Dikici, 2006, as cited in Hashemian & Fadaei, 2013, p. 136). Moreover, Hashemian and Fadaei (2013) conclude that independent learning increases when students' written performances are regarded as a formative process instead of a summative one. Asmari (2013), in the discussion about self-directed learning, points out that students need to control and manage their learning in different methods including reflecting on what they learn, evaluating their performance, and making decisions.

Different results found from the above-mentioned studies have proved the necessity of applying reflective journals. These findings set the foundation for the present study, which will gain insights into students' accounts of how their knowledge develops and how autonomous learning is fostered through reflective writing.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology to gain insight into students' perspectives on their learning autonomy and the development of their semantics knowledge. Qualitative research aims to present a natural picture of the phenomena, investigating participants' thoughts and behaviors in the activities they take part in (Friedman, 2012).

#### **3.2. Participants and course information**

Nineteen students majoring in Legal English at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were at upper-intermediate level of English; they were in the second semester of year three and on the way to completing all the linguistics courses. Before taking a semantics course, students were required to complete the course of Introductory Linguistics.

English semantics is a compulsory subject for third-year English majors at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law. The course aims to equip students with fundamental notions of semantics and methods of semantic analysis. On completing this course, students will be able to identify and explain the key terms of semantics, establish the relationship between different terms. Also, students will be able to describe and analyze the semantic features and relationships between different linguistic expressions. The course covers four chapters which are reference, sense, logic, interpersonal and non-literal meaning. The course is taught in English.

#### **3.3. Data collection methods**

Data were collected through document review and interviews. The document reviewed was the students' reflective writing during the course; the researcher utilized students' reflective journals to analyze their development of semantics knowledge. The participants worked in pairs to complete the collaborative writing. Writing in pairs encouraged students to communicate and exchange their ideas; they helped each other in the process of reading materials, discussed what they have acquired, and contributed their ideas to complete the journals. Before writing reflections, the lecturer gave students detailed instructions on what they needed to do. Reflexivity introduced to students was the combination of practical descriptions and personal development plans and portfolios. Practical

descriptions require learners to do a lot of literature review, while personal development plans and portfolios encourage practitioners to look back and reflect on their own learning and performance as well as to make a plan for their personal and professional development (Bolton, 2010). To complete a reflection, students had to cover four main parts, including what they learnt, how they acquired the knowledge, and why they learnt.

The second tool used was semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to explore students' reactions and perspectives on writing reflective journals in the semantics course. The email interviews were conducted in English. The interview questions were adapted from Asmari (2013), Ivanova (2017), Morrison (1996), and Muhammad (2017). The interview questions included three parts. The first part aimed to find out the impact of reflective journals on students' personal and professional development; the second part was to investigate students' views on their semantic knowledge development, and the last part aimed to seek information about learner autonomy.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Findings from Interview data**

#### ***4.1.1. Students' personal and professional development***

Students asserted that writing reflective journals in semantics classes was new and different from what they knew; the semantics lecturer had given them some leeway to approach this type of writing. Scott, Cherry, Zen, Anna, Sam, Becky, and Angela reported that they did not have prior experience of writing reflective journals before enrolling in the semantics course. The others, however, stated that they did write reflections before in English skills courses. Nevertheless, what students had to do was summarizing the knowledge they learnt in the previous semesters and expressing their expectations for the next class.

According to Anna, reflective journals were similar to keeping a diary. The interviewees believed that writing reflection was an effective tool helping them review and organize the knowledge they have learnt in class. On the other hand, the participants admitted that they experienced some frustrating parts during the writing process. One of the most frequent thoughts among participants was time-consuming because completing a reflection made students do lots of things from reading, organizing to writing. Also, Zen and Zac stated that they had to carefully consider what to put into their writing to fulfill all the requirements.

In terms of writing difficulties, the participants mainly focused on three different aspects. The first issue was researching the information they needed for their writing. Secondly, students found it hard to organize and present their ideas clearly and concisely. Thirdly, students struggled with meeting the writing requirements, including how to paraphrase and cite the information. To tackle these problems, students emphasized that they better started writing rather than waiting and rushing when the deadline came. As stated by Scott, Lucy and Tim, it was necessary to read more materials, including reference books and other related articles. Moreover, Cherry and Emily posited that they sought help from peers who got good results and asked for advice. Comments from the instructor were also vital for students to improve their journals.

*(Henry) The only two things I struggled with the most were reading and organizing the ideas. When writing a reflection, I read a lot from the coursebook and reference books. I also had to find a way to put the knowledge into an easy-to-read essay.*

*(Scott) The most problematic matter I met during the process of writing reflection was to get the hang of all the criteria included in reflective writing. But when you realized the drill, it became easy and stimulating.*

*(Zen) My biggest problem arose when I exposed myself to a variety of sources. Reading helped me deepen my knowledge of the relevant concept and make a comparison between different sources. Copious as they were, I usually found myself in the middle of nowhere.*

#### **4.1.2. Students' semantics knowledge development**

Reflective writing contributed to learners' semantics development by forcing them to read more and review the lessons. The participants revealed that they did many tasks to complete one reflection; they had to review and consolidate all the learnt concepts. Reading was also one of the most crucial parts of this process; therefore, students could deeply understand the lessons and remember the knowledge longer. While reviewing and reading, students also gave many examples related to the terms they had learnt. The participants emphasized that writing a reflective journal assisted them to learn semantics more effectively. Students could broaden their knowledge, apprehend the core of the lessons, and keep up with all the knowledge before moving on to another brand-new horizon.

*(Alex) Reflective writing was an effective way to revise the lessons, which helped me understand semantics better. Whenever I got confused with the notions, I tended to do more research on my own. Therefore, I learnt many new things that I did not understand in class.*

While writing a reflective journal, students tried to connect the learnt concepts. This connection could be between the knowledge in other courses with the knowledge in the semantics course, or the link between all the semantic terms they acquired. Joey, for example, attempted to figure out the relations among the concepts of semantics, thereby making it easier to remember and distinguish them from each other. Regarding the link with other subjects, students believed that this would help them distinguish different definitions of the same terms. For instance, Anna stated that she could clarify the definitions of the term “predicate” in grammar and semantics. Furthermore, in the case of Sam, she could understand the new subject content better by recalling and using her background knowledge.

Regarding the useful parts of reflective writing, the participants pointed out that reading, rewriting the definitions, and giving examples are the tasks that help them most in their learning process. Anna, for instance, believed that by explaining the terms in her own ways and giving her own examples, she could explore how the theory was applied in reality. Among these activities, students emphasized that giving examples was the most beneficial. As Zen, Grace, Lucas, and Becky stated, to provide correct examples, they had to review the lesson carefully. They tried to provide similar examples like those in the coursebook, then created their own ones later. If the examples were incorrect, they would go back to the lessons to figure out what they misunderstood. Talking about another helpful part, Sam expressed that she could note some questions for the lecturer, questions which she “*hesitated to ask in class or arose when she self-studied.*”

In terms of the least useful parts of reflective writing, interviewees explicitly mentioned that all parts in the reflective journals were important. Nevertheless, some participants revealed that some parts needed to be excluded. Alex and Lily stated that teachers should omit the part that required them to express their feeling about the course and the concepts. They thought that part did not make a significant contribution to their knowledge development. Furthermore, Tim expressed that he did not enjoy writing about how he learnt because “*each reflection contained different pieces of Semantics knowledge, but the learning method was the same. Therefore, it was unnecessary to write that part in all reflections*”.

In the discussion about the effectiveness of writing reflection in developing and broadening students’ semantics knowledge, the participants reconfirmed that by completing multiple tasks, they had opportunities to dig deeper into the newly acquired concepts. Without reflective journals, students only learnt the terms by heart. Reflections required the participants to think critically when they acquired a new piece of knowledge, creating the link between the concepts, making connections between past and present knowledge, and examining different definitions given by different authors from various sources. Students figured out and clarified some parts of the lessons that they did not fully understand in class; they can also expand the knowledge on their own. Because reflective writing helped students review, systematize and extend their understanding, the interviewees posited that they would perform better in the tests. As Alex indicated:

*Researching on my own was also a great way to engrave the information in my head. Writing reflection helped me understand semantics in my own way and apply the knowledge to the test in my own words, which was better than learning the whole textbook by heart.*

#### **4.1.3. Learner autonomy**

Answering the question about learning goals, all the participants reported that their goals were trying to grasp and understand the course knowledge and pass the subject. Some students asserted that reflective writing motivated and provided them opportunities to approach their goals of understanding the subject and practicing it in reality. These students expressed that they did not explore the semantics concepts by themselves. Almost all of the participants wanted to learn by listening to their lecturers. One reason for this, according to Cherry and Lilly, was that they were afraid of making mistakes and having incorrect understandings of the concepts. Emily asserted that when students attempted to clarify the new knowledge at home, they found it “*difficult and vague*”, which led to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Furthermore, as mentioned by Anna, the knowledge they learnt from their teacher was delivered in a logical order and easy to follow. Nevertheless, Emma, Becky, Joey, and Sam stated that they did read the materials as well as watch some videos online before the lessons. Ashley and Scott also discovered the terms on their own to catch up with their peers due to the fact that they were sometimes absent in semantics classes.

Regarding the students’ learning responsibility, Grace believed that writing reflections was “*a solution to cure her laziness*”, motivating her to take more responsibility for her study. Cherry, Emily, Ashley, Sam, Joey and Tim also reported that they had to take the subject more seriously, paying attention to the lecturers in class and practicing more at home. Scott said that reflective

writing provided students “*a second chance to construct their knowledge and a detailed guidance for their studying.*” The students noted that being responsible for their study also depended on other factors such as students’ learning priority and their learning styles; with reflective journals, students mainly had a chance to revise their knowledge, and teachers could track students’ learning progress.

Being reflective practitioners, the students were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses; as a consequence, they could improve and develop themselves. As Scott pointed out, during the writing process, he could find out if he missed something as well as checked what he was learning. Zen asserted that “*more weaknesses were revealed*” when she completed her reflection. Regarding the students’ self-evaluation of their learning, Lucy emphasized that writing a reflection after each chapter helped her organize and control what she had acquired. Consequently, she would not become overloaded and demotivated when confronted with a large amount of knowledge. Lucas gave his opinion on this question:

*By writing reflection essays, I realized what concepts I lacked, where I did wrong. From that, I could know how far I was going on and modified the ways of absorbing knowledge to be well-prepared for the last exam.*

Answering the question related to learning motivation and responsibility, two main ideas can be seen from students’ responses. On the one hand, the students reported that they got encouragement to take responsibility for their learning. Emily and Zen posited that if they did not try and neglect their study, they would face more difficulties when writing reflective journals; being responsible for their own learning would help them reduce the pressure of their learning process. Moreover, as Grace stated, writing reflection “*created invisible motivation*” for her to search and read more semantics materials. On the other hand, other participants stated that reflections were just the obligatory part of the course that they had to complete. Anna explained that if students did not have enough time and passion, reflective writing became “*a burden rather than a motivation*” because students might have to cover a lot of subjects. Lucas asserted that “*students studied hard not only to write reflections but also to expand their knowledge and to take exams as well*”. He emphasized that just only writing reflections was not enough to encourage him to concentrate on his studies. Lily noted that “*there were still other ways to motivate students to study semantics. For instance, mini-tests during lessons were also a good idea*”. Some students also talked about the grading. As Zac and Emma mentioned:

*(Zac) It was the grading that dictated me to commit myself to the fullest yet was also what ruined the fun.*

*(Emma) Without grading, reflections were not enough to make learners take responsibility for their studies.*

The participants admitted that writing reflections stimulated them to implement extensive reading in semantics topics. Zac said: “*Were you to say that a fresh newcomer to the subject can thoroughly understand the lesson core and creates his/her distinctive approach without going through books, you would be in an asylum.*” Agreeing with Zac’s statement, Alex, Anna, Ashley, Lucy also noted that they had to read more because sometimes knowledge from the coursebook was insufficient. However, students did not want to read all the topics of semantics; they

emphasized that they just read more about selected parts that they found interesting. For example, Tim stated “...*there were quite interesting contents that I wanted to read more but not all of them. Due to my career orientation, I am not completely interested in topics of Semantics; I just read enough to support my learning.*” Some opposite responses from the participants revealed that they did not want to find more information about semantics. Lily believed that the coursebook itself gave her abundant information, and that “*further readings seemed out of her league.*”

The interviewees believed that they become more independent in their learning by practicing writing reflections. Emma stated that reflective journals promote learning autonomy. She had opportunities to self-study, review the lesson, find materials, and evaluate her learning progress. Becoming reflection practitioners, Emma could learn at her own pace as well as be free to choose her own learning approach. Similar to Emma’s statement, Lucas asserted:

*I could not always catch up with and understand everything the teacher talked about in class. Hence, the period of writing reflection down was the time for me to sit back and reviewed the previous lectures, figuring out what main points I had not grasped yet.*

#### 4.2. Journal review

Data collected from students' reflective journals showed that the students made a significant improvement in their writing. In the very first reflective writing, students made a lot of mistakes regarding how they paraphrase, and the examples they provided. Some students did not know how to rewrite or cite an idea; they also tended to copy the examples from the books they read. This made their reflective writing become a copy and combination of writing versions of various sources. Moreover, students did not cover all parts of a reflection. Most of the students only focus on the lesson content, which means they just finished reviewing what they had learnt. Other crucial parts including their learning process and how the semantic knowledge helped them in their professional, personal and academic development were missing. After the first reflection, students could compose better writing products. They learnt how to paraphrase and cite properly. The reflective practitioners also tried to give their own examples to illustrate their understandings of a specific term. Through students' explanations and examples, the lecturer could track their learning progress, being aware of whether students understand deeply the newly acquired concepts. Comments would be given when students made mistakes in their writing content.

Students’ reflective journals also revealed how they learnt and their thinking about the concepts in particular and the semantics subject in general. This proved that students did take this writing activity seriously and try hard to review, explore and expand their knowledge. Some notes from students reflections:

*(Tracy).... I used the coursebook to review the lesson, realizing that reading the book would be very much beneficial....I believe it is a good idea to read different clarifications of a concept in different books as other references could provide a more straightforward version.*

*(Lucy) The concepts in this chapter are more challenging. In particular, opaque contexts did cost me over twenty minutes to understand.... Nevertheless, passing all these difficulties means I had taken one more step towards my goal. This thinking has been keeping me on track throughout the units... The definitions on the internet are somehow confusing and might be incorrect.... Despite the early struggles, the benefits I have gained from these lessons are precious.*

*(Mary and Mia) What we appreciate in this subject is the ability to apply understanding of the basics of semantics to be able to initially study professional problems as well as apply them to language learning in general... We are provided with a better understanding of multi-meaning words, which is a great way to spice up a story or give a highlight to a conversation.*

*(Angela and Alex) What thrills us the most in the chapter on sense relation is the fact that we got to learn the terms of the phenomena which we use regularly in our daily lives and that the in-depth analysis of them makes Semantics more mind-boggling to study.*

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Students' semantics knowledge development**

Writing reflective journals created an opportunity for students to improve and develop their knowledge. Reflections were compared to learning diaries, where students could review what they acquired. Being reflection practitioners, students were required to complete a variety of tasks including finding materials, researching, giving explanations and illustrations, giving examples, summarizing and consolidating the knowledge. These findings correspond with Morrison's (1996) position that a learning journal enables students to connect and integrate personal, intellectual, and professional spheres of themselves.

As the results of this study show, writing reflective journals provided students with opportunities to learn, review, and practice. Not only did students remember the concepts learnt, but also had chances to dig deeper into that area and link all the concepts. The results reconfirm Muhammad's (2017) conclusions that learning journals foster students' creative ability in their achievement, improving and making noteworthy progress research. Chou and ChanLin (2015) indicate that reflections assist students to re-organize their learning, showing their understandings about the concepts learnt through the course. Moreover, as students composed their reflective writing, they had to go back and forth to make sure that they perceived correct understandings and gave accurate examples to illustrate their points. This finding is in line with Jadallah's (1996) remark about constructivist learning, which focuses on learners' understanding and cognitive development. A linear process of learning is no longer exists; instead, learning nature is viewed as a complex and nonlinear process.

### **5.2. Learner autonomy**

The findings from students' interviews show that although not all students tried to discover the knowledge themselves before listening to the lectures, they did review what they have learnt systematically as well as explore more aspects of what they acquired in class. Being reflective practitioners, students became more active and responsible. The findings correspond with Hashemian and Fadaei's (2013) assertion that the act of finding relevant and appropriate learning materials and lectures proves that reflections encourage more responsible learning. Moreover, this active learning process helped students evaluate their learning. Students became aware of what they needed to improve, then found ways to increase their understanding of the course content. This goes in line with Ivanova (2017), who contends that reflective writing enables students to make suggestions and plan for their improvement.

## **6. Conclusion and implications**

This paper provides strong evidence that reflective journals enrich students learning experiences. Being reflection practitioners required them to read more and go deeper into the knowledge; students, therefore, had opportunities to review and comprehend the newly acquired subject content thoroughly. Students can self-teach, assess themselves, be more responsible, become more independent in their learning. The findings can lead to many positive effects on the learning strategies of students taking semantics courses. The paper concludes with suggestions for teachers to utilize reflections as a pedagogical tool to help students develop their academic knowledge and skills.

This study has direct implications in evolving individual students in various aspects through writing reflective journals. The results also provide a foundation for further research of teaching and learning approaches. However, the findings of this research may only generalize to similar types of students who take semantics courses. Future research can investigate the use of reflections in other language and linguistics courses to determine whether similar findings will ensue.

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## TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA VIẾT NHẬT KÝ SUY TƯỞNG ĐẾN NĂNG LỰC TỰ HỌC VÀ SỰ PHÁT TRIỂN KIẾN THỨC NGỮ NGHĨA HỌC CỦA SINH VIÊN

**Tóm tắt:** Mặc dù viết nhật ký suy tưởng (reflective journal) được chứng minh là một hoạt động hiệu quả áp dụng cho các khoá học lý thuyết và đào tạo chuyên nghiệp, nhật ký suy tưởng chưa được sử dụng một cách thường xuyên trong giảng dạy các môn lý thuyết tiếng Anh tại trường đại học Luật thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Dữ liệu định tính từ các bài phỏng vấn qua email, cùng với bằng chứng từ bài viết của sinh viên cho thấy hoạt động viết suy tưởng áp dụng trong môn ngữ nghĩa học tiếng Anh hỗ trợ việc học của sinh viên. Viết nhật ký suy tưởng được sinh viên xem như một cách hiệu quả để nâng cao sự am hiểu của họ về những khái niệm được học. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra nhiều nhiệm vụ sinh viên cần làm để hoàn thành bài nhật ký, từ đó chỉ ra năng lực tự học của sinh viên tăng trong suốt khoá học. Kết quả của bài báo đề xuất sự cần thiết cho giảng viên xem xét áp dụng hoạt động viết nhật ký suy tưởng như một phương pháp củng cố và nâng cao kiến thức về ngữ nghĩa học tiếng Anh, cũng như thúc đẩy tính tự chủ trong việc học của sinh viên.

**Từ khoá:** Nhật ký suy tưởng; ngữ nghĩa học tiếng Anh; năng lực tự học