Utilizing Reflective Writing in Reading Proficiency Class

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Abstract

Reflection has long been thought to be a viable technique for dealing with issues in various fields. This paper aims to investigate the difficulties in reading tasks, and the strategies used by the students shown in reflective writing in reading proficiency class. A qualitative method using narrative inquiry was used in this study. More specifically, the participants of the study consisted of 14 postgraduate students from a university in Jakarta. They were required to make reflections after they finished doing reading tasks that had different levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), namely B2 and C1. Four reflective writings focussing on the B1 CEFR standard from four different participants were taken purposively as they contain a complete explanation. It can be revealed that there are some difficulties in reading tasks, such as unrelated theme, identical keywords, and a lack of lexical knowledge. Besides, there are strategies used by the students, such as guessing the unfamiliar vocabulary, finding keywords, and understanding the context.

From the findings, students and educators can plan better for students' higher level of reading proficiency.

Keywords: English language teaching, CEFR, reading proficiency, reflection, reflective writing

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INTRODUCTION

Reflection is a frequent practice in a wide range of fields, including education. Portfolios, summaries, notebooks, and other writing styles were employed by scholars to reflect on their experiences (Roskos, Vukelich, & Risko, 2001 as cited in (Chang, 2019)). Therefore, reflective writing (RW) has gained considerable attention from educators.

Reviewing some previous studies confirmed that students who were asked to create reflective writing did considerably better in reading comprehension than those who were not (Chang and Lin, 2014) as cited in (Cheng, 2017). A study by (Sharif & Zainuddin, 2017)on nineteen ESL students in an entry-level medical program suggested that one student described the experience of writing reflection as "something unique and exciting," and four others said the reflective writing assisted them in learning more from their site visits. However, few studies have investigated the difficulties and the strategies used by students shown through the utilization of reflective writing in reading proficiency.

There are several reasons why this issue must be investigated. First, reflection is used extensively and has been proven to give a positive impact on their disciplines. Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) as cited in (Murphy Odo, 2021)proposed that expertise in a variety of professions (e.g., architecture, medicine,

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education, etc.) is gained gradually over time by reflective practice. Moreover, in education not only students, both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers utilize reflection to enhance their work. Reflective teaching, according to Richards and Lockhart (1996) as cited in (Murphy Odo, 2021), encourages student teachers to collect data on their teaching to assist them to reflect critically on their thought processes and teaching approaches. They can build the abilities to improve areas of their teaching by engaging in critical reflection.

Furthermore, (Olaya Mesa, 2018) conducted a content analysis of the 23 research articles and found that incorporating reflective teaching practices into daily teaching practice has a considerable impact. Teachers' consistent reflection, understanding of the extent of their motivation—including their attitudes and perceptions about language education—and self-examination would lead to a better understanding of English language education and compliance with a broader understanding of how students can become better language users.

Second, reflection in learning benefits students in many ways such as understanding numerous knowledge. A study on the impact of reflection on learning in an online learning environment was conducted by (Chang, 2019). It can be concluded that reflection encourages students to take a step back and look at the entire learning process, rather than simply individual pieces of knowledge, to understand the worth of knowledge as a whole. Align with this,(Salim et al., 2021) found that students can create their thoughts and then reflect on various sources of knowledge, as evidenced by the results of a survey.

Besides, reflective writing is also considered a part of higher-order thinking skills as it involves cognitive, affective, social, and meta-cognitive characteristics. (Williams, Woolliams, & Spiro, 2012 as cited in (Salim et al., 2021) states that students express and articulate their emotional experiences in writing, and they reflect their beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge into one written notion, therefore, affective features occur in the reflective writing process. Moreover, it helps students get closer and more focused on a topic or issue,

allowing them to process their thoughts and ideas more deeply and boost learners' self-esteem and cognitive ability at the same time. ((Salim et al., 2021)).

Third, in terms of reading, it has long been recognized that strong reading skills are essential for academic achievement (Bernhardt, 1991 as cited in (Nourdad & Asghari, 2017)) in this globalized world, as the English language is a medium for the advancement and diffusion of science and information technologies (Fitriati & Rata, 2020). Therefore, top-down and bottom-up processing are two reading processes that should be thoroughly grasped before being able to apply them effectively Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008 as cited in (Bagus Suryawan et al., 2020). Word recognition, spelling and phonological processing, morphological and syntactic processing, and lexical recognition and access are all part of bottom-up processing (Hinkel, 2006). Hirsch (2006), on the other hand, works from the top-down, focusing on the reader's prior knowledge (Kim, 2019).

Numerous academics have undertaken previous studies on maximizing reflective writing in the context of general learning. Nevertheless, only a few scholars appear to be interested in researching utilizing reflective writing in a reading proficiency class. Therefore, this gap prompted the researcher to look into this study. According to the problems stated previously, two research questions are formulated:
1) What are students' reading task difficulties?
2) What are the reading strategies used by the students?

METHODS

This study used the narrative inquiry method to investigate the use of reflective writing for reading tasks in the English Proficiency for Teacher course. A narrative study provides practical, particular insights for educators seeking personal experiences in actual educational environments (Creswell, 2012 p.502). Qualitative data provide well-supported, detailed descriptions and explanations of human processes. With qualitative data, it is possible to maintain

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chronological flow, understand which events lead to which outcomes, and develop useful explanations (Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (2014). Besides, this qualitative investigation is concerned with recognizing and comprehending the experiences of a single person or a group of people in the past, present, and future. Hence, the researcher is able to gather information on what difficulties the participants experienced when doing the reading task, as well as how they utilized reflective writing for the tasks ((Creswell, 2012 p.516).

Field notes, diary entries, interview transcripts, one's own and others' observations, narrative, letter writing, autobiographical writing, documents such as school and class plans, newsletters, and other texts, such as rules and principles; and photographs are all examples of data (1990, Connelly & Clandinin as cited in (Moen, 2006)). To this list, reflective writing is also one example of a school document that can be regarded as data. Using a guideline given by the lecturer, students made the reflection. Next, the participants were required to upload their reflective writing to a designated cloud drive.

The participants of the study consisted of 14 postgraduate students from a university in Jakarta. These participants were required to make reflections after they finished doing reading tasks which were different levels of CEFR, namely B2 and C1.

Qualitative researchers frequently work with small groups of people who are researched in-depth and nested in their surroundings. Besides, purposive rather than random sampling is common in qualitative research (Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (2014)). Therefore, four reflective writings focussing on the B1 CEFR standard from four different participants were taken purposively as the four reflective writings contain a complete explanation.

The first step taken was that the researcher retrieved the reflective writing from the cloud drive, read each article one by one, and analyzed the key elements that could provide insight into the topics being investigated, then put them into themes, as suggested by ((John W. Creswell (2007), p.148). In qualitative research, data

analysis entails preparing and arranging data (such as transcripts or images) for analysis, then reducing the data into categories through coding and condensing the codes. Qualitative researchers create codes or categories and sort text or visual pictures into categories as part of the describing, categorizing, and interpreting process (Wolcott, 1994b as cited in (John W. Creswell (2007), p. 152)). Codes are largely, but not entirely, used to obtain and identify similar data chunks so that the researcher may easily locate, extract, and cluster segments related to a specific research question, hypothesis, construct, or subject.

Therefore, the researcher named the reflective writing from each participant as follows:

Table 1. Reflective writing code

Reflective writing	Code
Student 1	RW 1
Student 2	RW 2
Student 3	RW 3
Student 4	RW 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are several parts in the reading task. Each part has different types of questions. The details are as follows:

Table 2. The reading task description

Part	Number of Questions	Type of Questions	Reading process needed
1	7	Matching sentences to four short texts	Top down
2	6	Text with sentences missing	Top down
3	6	Answering questions based on the text	Top down
4	15	Filling in the blanks	Bottom up

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	with the correct option

From table 2, we can see that the reading task consists of four parts with a different number of questions. Part 4 has the greatest number of questions, which are more than twice of parts one to three. Besides, from the types of questions, it can be inferred that parts one, two, and three need top-down processes, as the text must be read and understood to answer the questions. While part four necessitates a bottom-up process, as it can be done by spotting directly the word (s) around the blanks.

The different types of questions brought various challenges for the students. Below is the explanation of the parts which include mistakes as well as the percentage of the mistakes made:

Difficulties faced by students

Table 3. The questions on participants got wrong

Code	Part including mistakes	Number	Percentage of mistake
RW 1	1	1, 5	29 %
	2	2	17 %
	3	6	17 %
	4	14	6,7 %
RW 2	1	1, 2,5,7	57 %
	2	4,6	33 %
	3	6	17 %
	4	4,5,7,9,12,14,	40%
RW 3	1	4, 6, 7	43 %
	2	4	17 %
	4	4, 5, 8, 13	27 %
RW 4	1	1	14 %
	3	1	16 %
	4	7, 9, 12, 14	27 %

Table 3 shows that no one was able to answer all of the questions correctly. Out of the four sections, part one was the most commonly misinterpreted, with the highest percentage among all, indicating that this section contains greater problems. Besides, part four is also recorded as the second section in which students have the most mistakes.

Below is the reading task 1 illustration:

Figure 1. Reading task 1

Looking deeper, part one consists of multiple extracts regarding branding, which is a topic that is unrelated to the students' interests. The participants are from an English department whose majority of the texts are academic. Besides, some students explained that the main ideas are challenging to find due to similar keywords. Important information can be obtained from keywords, which are considered critical for comprehending a text. When the keywords are identical, however, the reader is likely to mix up the points stressed in a text.

*It was a little bit hard to define the main idea because several paragraphs have provided almost similar keywords on the thesis statement. It made me confused about choosing the right one (*RW 2)

One question in part 1 deals with a list of brand identity. However, texts A and C clearly

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indicated brand identity. Therefore, this creates a lot of confusion.

*I mistook the list of items meant in the paragraph. (*RW 4)

The first one was wrong because I mistook another text which also mentioned features in brand identity; while the second one was wrong because the statement was quite general, and I once again mistook another text which I thought contains this information. I personally think that this type of activity is tricky and requires detailed attention as the answer is very specific. (RW 1)

Only one of the four extracts in the text did not refer to the listing when examined more closely. As a result, the referenced list necessitates careful observation which can be done by looking at the keywords.

Another most common wrongly interpreted is part 4, which covers filling in the blanks with the appropriate option. Participants must examine several words rather than the entire text.

This part is examining vocabulary knowledge. I could only answer 9 of 15 questions correctly. The options of each number have almost similar meanings and contexts. I still couldn't define the appropriate vocabulary to be chosen for filling the spaces. It is also tricky and confusing due to the same meaning. (RW 2)

The questions in part 4 require an understanding of lexis. Some of the questions are about collocation, while others are on content, structure, and expression. Part 4 covers adverbs for connecting clauses, and correct adverbs for modifying adjectives, collocation, and vocabulary knowledge. As a result, it is clear that this section necessitates lexical expertise.

This reading practice was quite challenging as it acquires knowledge about lexis (term in linguistics referring to all the words in a language, the entire vocabulary of a language). Many of the questions' options are also tricky. (RW 4)

By looking at the words before and after the blank space, we could have guessed the answer. however, this number got me doubtful as I was not familiar with the type of sentence or expression. (RW 1)

From the extracts of RW 1 and RW 4, knowledge of lexis, sentence or expression is the

key to doing part 4. However, the students find them difficult as there are some unfamiliar lexes.

Dealing with all the questions need some strategies. The following are strategies recorded in reflective writing based on the parts:

Part 1

Some students named summarizing the content when they do part 1. They even have to read more than twice to understand the text.

To do this (part 1), we need to be able to summarize the content of each text so that we can see whether the statements in the questions match with the text. (RW 1)

In this reading practice (part 1), what I did was reading the text two to three times before I went to the questions. Once done, I tried to do the question one by one by referring to the text again. Then, when all the questions were answered, I did the checking to make sure that my choices matched with the statement in each number. Finally, I clicked the check answers (RW 4)

Part 2

Understanding context is also crucial to comprehending a text.

To do this task (part 4), we need to understand the text as well as the context since it is the key to answer the questions. The gap can be filled by referring to the sentences before and after the gap. Then, we can see which statement best replaces the gap. (RW 1)

The strategies that I used to do this part is by analyzing the context and finding keywords from the sentences before and after the missing sentence (RW 2)

As the second part is about filling in the missing sentences with the provided ones, students had to connect one sentence to another to be able to match with the correct ones.

This reading practice (part 2) allowed me to connect one to another sentence, it is important to find clues and references which match. What I did first was reading the options as they were provided in the beginning, before the text. Then, I went to the questions one by one, trying to find clues or references that might help. (RW 4)

Clues play important role in answering this model of question.

Part 3

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The strategy for this reading task (part 3) that I used is by reading the question first before going to the reading text. Therefore, we would know what to expect and what to find in the text. This type of reading text also has pattern in which every question is always sequential. We are able to save time by looking for the answer in the exact paragraph based on the sequence. (RW 1)

Part 4

As the only part that needs micro-skills in reading, the bottom-up process is applied here. Unlike other parts, this part does not need an understanding of the whole text. The students can go directly to the words around the blank.

This reading practice was quite challenging as it acquires knowledge about lexis (term in linguistics referring to all the words in a language, the entire vocabulary of a language). Many of the questions' options are also tricky. (RW 4)

This part is examining vocabulary knowledge. I could only answer 9 of 15 questions correctly. The options of each number have almost similar meanings and contexts. I still couldn't define the appropriate vocabulary to be chosen for filling the spaces. It is also tricky and confusing due to the same meaning. (RW 2)

The two excerpts, reflective writing four and two have the same opinion regarding this part. It requires one's knowledge about lexis.

According to the findings, the participants had various difficulties with the reading comprehension task, specifically:

1. Unrelated Theme

Out of the four parts, the majority of participants made errors in almost every part. This suggests that they have difficulty with reading comprehension tasks. Because the participants are English department students, their academic texts and lectures do not cover branding, which is a branch of economics, they are inexperienced with the topic. In other words, they are lack of background knowledge which is critical in many models of reading (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007 as cited in (O'Reilly et al., 2019). When a reader has more knowledge about a topic, reading texts on the topic causes more activation of related knowledge (or knowledge schema), which contributes to

differences in comprehension between high- and low-knowledge readers through mechanisms such as inference making (McNamara & O'Reilly, 2010 as cited in (O'Reilly et al., 2019)).

2. Identical keywords

Keywords play important role in helping a reader to comprehend a text. Texts in which learners can produce keywords with a high level of fluency are deemed to be more comprehended than texts in which learners cannot generate keywords with a high level of fluency (Waldeyer & Roelle, 2021). Keywords that fully capture the main content of the text should indicate "full" comprehension, while keywords that capture only two-thirds of the main topic should imply that only two-thirds of the main content is understood, and keywords that do not correspond to the main content of the text should indicate that learners have not understood the respective content at all (see Dunlosky and Rawson 2012). This theory suggests a reciprocal between keywords and reading comprehension. Therefore, as several keywords in different parts are found similar, this leads to confusion to comprehend the text and locate the main idea in particular.

3. Lack of lexical knowledge

Lexis was a concept used by Plato and Aristotle to describe how a language's words might be employed effectively. (see p. 571), Similarly, Jackson and Amvela (2000 as cited in (Caro & Mendinueta, 2017)) claim that vocabulary, lexis, and lexicon are interchangeable terms. However, others distinguish between vocabulary and lexis. When most people think of vocabulary, they think of words and their definitions. Lexis, on the other hand, is not just about words; it also encompasses additional layers of lexical knowledge. The depth of lexical knowledge is one of the important dimensions, according to Rashidi and Khosravi (2010), because it improves reading comprehension. Because lexical knowledge breadth and depth are important in moving learners forward in their overall competence development, instructional planning should explicitly address lexical knowledge instruction, providing ample opportunities for lexical growth

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and depth to ensure language development and learning (Qian, 1999 as cited in (Caro & Mendinueta, 2017)). The participants had issues with vocabulary and collocation, leading to the conclusion that they need to learn more about lexis.

There are several strategies applied by the participants, namely:

1. *Guessing the unfamiliar vocabulary*

"Vocabulary knowledge is typically seen as a vital tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication," writes Alqahtani (2015). (p. 2) as cited in (Caro & Mendinueta, 2017). Guessing the vocabulary from the words around the unknown term from the context can help readers to deduce meaning from context clues. They can also search for portions of the unknown term that they are already familiar with, such as under in underneath (Moreillon, 2007). Besides, replacing unfamiliar terminology with more familiar ones can aid comprehension of a work. This is possible if the reader has a wide range of vocabulary. However, understanding a text with a lot of unfamiliar words will be problematic for them.

2. Finding keywords

Further, finding keywords can help a reader to comprehend a text, as it will locate the main ideas of a text. When a reader is failed to tell the difference between main ideas and supporting details, it's a sign that they're becoming overwhelmed by the text. Besides, reading the text several times, summarizing the text, and finding clues are also believed as ways for a reader to help comprehend a text. The applied strategies align with what was suggested by (Moreillon, 2007). He proposed several strategies for reading comprehension, one of which is using fix-up options for recovering meaning, such as rereading, reading ahead, or deciphering unfamiliar words.

3. *Understanding the context*

The elements of an event, whether fictitious or real, which can be found in the surrounding sentences in the text are known as context. A person's perspective on a topic is typically formed in reaction to the context that is made available, therefore, reading context is important to help students comprehend a text.

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension necessitates the use of various strategies. Understanding the context can assist the reader in activating background knowledge, either vocabulary or content, to aid comprehension of the text. Furthermore, the focus is determined by the reader's goal for reading. If a reader's primary goal is to comprehend what they are reading, they will certainly go back over their steps and apply one or more fix-up options to get back on track. With this in mind, even if the reading text's theme is uninteresting, the reader will be able to overcome it if the project's success is the priority.

Furthermore, understanding lexis is considered one of the most important factors in a reader's ability to grasp a text. When reading comprehension, the reader might choose to replace a new word with a more familiar term from his current knowledge vocabulary or try to guess based on the context.

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