



# Fostering Self-Regulated Learning (SRL): Higher education students' insights on formative online reflective journals

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## ABSTRACT

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Journaling serves as a documented account of the thoughts and emotions experienced in daily life. This term has also been analyzed in the educational context, especially in language learning. In addition, online reflective journals have been the subject of multiple studies, but these studies have all involved teachers rather than students. Thus, the effect of formative online reflective journals on SRL among college students is investigated in this research. The data was evaluated using central tendency measurement after fifty-two students were asked to provide quantitative data on their perspectives on using reflective journals. Subsequently, five students were interviewed using a semi-structured interview to gather additional qualitative data. Additionally, document analysis was used in this investigation. The results show that students' SRL abilities may be significantly improved by using online reflective journals, which contribute to students' motivation, self-awareness, and metacognition. During this research process, educator administration, an appropriate method and the empowering of student learning environment are elements that affects reflective journals being active properly. The results of this study are anticipated to offer important insights on the use and efficacy formative online reflective journals, as one intervention tool for SRL among higher education students in a well-established university setting. More precisely, the outcomes guide us on responding to this research question: What are the key components of formative online reflective journals that support the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) among higher education students?



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## INTRODUCTION

In today's classrooms, encouraging students to think critically is becoming increasingly popular (Elder & Paul, 2020). Proponents of the idea argue that teaching students to think critically can help them make better decisions and provide them the tools they need to identify and assess environmental variations. In the context of this research, critical thinking is a crucial part of self-regulated learning (SRL) since it helps students to reflect on their own learning, track their development, and adapt their approaches accordingly. An excellent tool for encouraging this kind of critical thinking is the usage of formative reflective journals kept online. Students develop their critical thinking and self-regulation skills as they write reflectively about their learning experiences, which includes challenging assumptions, drawing connections between theory and practice, and evaluating their own learning objectives. Meanwhile, Dwyer (2023) highlighted that many students find it challenging to grasp critical thinking, feel unsure about applying it, do not know how to build those skills and have a hard time showing them in their assessments. As the consequence, the educators should initiate a critical thinking environment. Excellent teachers are supposed to find suitable and better ways to improve the teaching-learning process in the class continuously. Therefore, teaching is not simply the process of exchanging information between teachers and students. The teacher can actually make a difference when it comes to helping students develop their higher-order thinking skills in school. Learning requires classrooms that are more interactive, where students are viewed as active participants rather than passive recipients of information, and where instructors guide, support, and inspire students to reach their full critical thinking potential (Terblanche & De Clercq, 2020). Moreover, students need to be exposed to critical thinking skills, but importantly, they need a learning environment that encourages and helps them think critically (Mbato, 2019).

Various methods and approaches in critical thinking process can be adopted and implemented in the students' learning environment. One method, which is not used significantly even though it influences critical thinking learning, is reflective practice (Aryal, 2024). Reflective practice in educational environments may facilitate the enhancement of critical thinking skills within teaching and learning (Dymoke et al., 2008; Moyo, 2019) as well. As Dewey (1933) notes, thinking at least amounts to considering ideas that we have, the things we know and experiences that has presently been

experienced or acted upon. This process encourages them to question their assumptions, reconsider their ideas and act more effectively. In addition to these tenets, Dewey also emphasized that students should unconsciously and continually reflect on their own learning as necessarily arising from attending classes. Reflective writing journals offer a real-world outlet to develop these theoretical frameworks, and make reflective practice a bit more digestible. They bridge the gap between theory and practice, giving students a chance to monitor, evaluate and report their achievement. It is a digital space for students to engage in reflection, self-assessment and critical analysis of their learning throughout the semester. Such an approach would foster the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) as well metacognitive awareness, while uniquely translating Dewey's philosophy to a practical application: make even bird-bean-counting academic tasks mean much deeper insight and growth.

Due to the implemented formative online reflective journal as a tool of doing reflection, such type of learning exercise contributes in students. Exercise by studies claim that students learn more easily on their own when asked to submit reflective journals as part of formative assessment (Chang, 2019). Moreover, it improved students writing skills and their critical thinking on the material of the class as well (Penggabean see Cendana & Ani 2023). According to a study, reflective journal writing has been found to be a valuable instructional approach (Hendricks & Atteberry, 2021) because it provides students with an opportunity to share thoughts and emotions more openly than they normally would, providing for increased personal growth and insight into how well their mind works. Although reflective journals provide a lot of benefit, it is important to begin the process by examining why students are writing for teachers to evaluate growth and adjust as necessary. Some, (such as the study by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei from 2008) say that if there is no inner motivation of a person, their brilliant abilities will be absolutely not interesting to him. Therefore, it is very important that teachers understand how students view and feel about the classroom activity.

Students' perspectives on formative online reflecting journals as a means to cultivate self-regulated learning (SRL) have been understudied, despite the growing interest in reflective journaling as a tool for education. Without thoroughly investigating students' experiences and interpretations of reflection in an online, formative context, previous research has mostly concentrated on reflective writing's outcomes, such as better critical thinking, writing skills, and emotional development. There is also a lack of data on the effects of reflective practices on students' motivation, self-monitoring, and metacognitive awareness in Indonesian higher education. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to contribute to that area by investigating how

formative online reflective journals are perceived in higher education among students along with examining its role influencing self-regulated learning.

This paper examines the potential of formative online reflective journals as a learning tool, in which students engage deeply by asking and reflecting on their way to the knowledge learned. The purpose of this study was to explore the affordances and constraints presented by formative online reflective diaries as part of a pedagogic strategy in higher education, examining their effect on students' learning. The following question is also intended to be answered by this research: What are the key components of formative online reflective journals that support the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) among higher education students? This study focuses on formative online reflective journals, where students elaborate and critically reflect their learning journeys in greater detail. This research investigates the advantages, and difficulties of formative-based online reflective diaries for higher education learners to enhance their learning. The following question is also intended to be answered by this research: In order to help college students build SRL, what are the most important aspects of formative online reflective journals?

In the current digital learning environment, there is a growing need to help students become independent and self-regulatory learners, which further highlights the relevance of this study. University students are struggling to stay motivated, supercharge their study time and take full responsibility for their learning as they navigate the rapid shift towards full or blended online delivery. Online reflective practice as a formative application has not been extensively investigated, and particularly from the perspectives of students (although it is said to provide deeper learning). It is important to understand the perspective, experiences and reactions of students towards using formative online reflective journals in a view for creating learning interventions that promote better metacognition awareness among student as well long-term self-directed learner habit. This research is timely and critical (relevant to higher education in the 21st-century) as it discovered demands for educational tactics that can prepare students with advanced skills including critical thinking, deep learning reflection process and self-regulation of autonomous leaning mode.

### **Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)**

According to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulated learning refers to students' intentional efforts of controlling, monitoring, and regulating their cognition under particular circumstances. This includes planning for actions, tracking the write-up of our work and how we execute what is written. He also addressed how SRL helps students become leaders of their own learning and growth academically self-directed, successful learners. The first

conceptualization of SRL was proposed by Schunk and Zimmerman (2012), who argued that the three core components to participant succeed to utilize self-regulation effort are preparation or forethought, performance monitoring, and reflection. Activity: After students have identified what they want to learn and where it belongs within the scope of their unit, this portion follows through during those task-centric monitoring behaviors in which kids may or perhaps will not be doing the tasks at all effectively. Self-reflection is the last step. This is the point where students take inventory of how they did, and then alter their plan in accordance with that information. As Kong and Lin (2023) put it, SRL is the necessary first step to student academic excellence; they argue that students who do not display any self-regulation in their studying are those uninterested in learning or making an effort to distil core fundamental truth throughout a course. There are also ways to improve SRL through interventions that target motivation and metacognition. So, the success of this idea to bring out more students who want to learn and change has shown in many classrooms (Theobald, 2021).

The nature of the learning environment and topic of study determine the manifestation of SRL in various classroom scenarios. To promote SRL in more conventional, in-person classrooms, teachers typically have students use tools like goal-setting activities, self-assessment checklists, and guided reflections to track their own learning and development. The lack of teacher supervision and the greater student autonomy in online and blended learning settings necessitate more self-regulation on the part of students. Studies have demonstrated that SRL can help students in language classes acquire new words on their own, develop better methods for revising their writing, and keep tabs on themselves while they communicate (Susanti & Pratama, 2020). Meanwhile, SRL helps college students with the organization of study schedules, evaluation of academic progress over time, and managing complex workloads. Thus, in order to create learning activities, like formative online reflective journals, that may successfully foster students' motivation, autonomy, and metacognitive awareness, it is crucial to comprehend how SRL functions in many learning situations.

### **Formative Assessment**

Checking for learning is what formative evaluation is. It gives teachers and students the right kind of feedback, it is an important part of both learning and teaching. Panadero and Lipnevich (2022) claimed that this tool helps teachers change the way they teach to meet students' needs and reach their goals. Students are able to build their knowledge via formative evaluation when they analyze their teachers' feedback and evaluate their progress using informed scaffolding. In order to assist students learn to self-regulate, formative assessment is used (Chen & Bonner, 2019). Students' attitudes,

motivation, cognition, and ability levels may all be enhanced via feedback. It helps educators and students both improve where they are lacking while highlighting their best qualities (Iqbal et al., 2023). Moreover, the cognitive and motivational capacities of students are favorably impacted by formative evaluation, according to Xiao and Yang (2019).

Formative reflective journals, as opposed to standard summative assessments that usually take place only at the end of a unit or course and seeks to sum up final performance assess learner continuous process throughout learning. They can easily adapt the posture of study with more patience and continuously get their feedback which makes them to take a good decision due, gradually turned into knowledgeable person from traditional way. By reflecting regularly after each learning session (Daff et al., 2024), students are able to monitor their progress, determine which areas require further understanding and set realistic goals for improvement. Alternatively, teachers might use these ongoing reflections to adjust lessons and provide individualized support based on evolving student needs. This formative online reflective journal provides an ongoing feedback tool and learning experience, that replaces the traditional measurement of performance at the end of semester by fostering engagement, reflection, and self-awareness through participation in dialogue. In this way, it's used to improve students' Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) ability and the quality of learning.

### **Reflective Journals**

It is the process where students reflect on their educational practices to promote continuous evolution in them. Reflective practice was defined a long time ago by Schön (1983) as an initial idea. Their reflection on performances in class serves to improve by identifying their strengths. Reflective teaching can be done using more tools with students, which Duchesne & McMaugh (2016) elaborately discussed in their text. The tools mentioned are:

#### *1. Reflective Journal*

The reflective journal allows students to reflect deeply on their learning. They definitely push them to actually think about what they are doing and why instead of going through the motions, then, they recapture their thoughts to digest/absorb what is working and not. Reflective journals, meanwhile, are seen as an excellent means of helping students gain some control over their learning processes and raise metacognitive awareness. Metacognition is the capacity to monitor, evaluate and plan one's learning (Tobias & Everson, 2002). Consequently, students who struggle with pedagogical revisions (Pritchard et al., 2014), past experiences (prior learning or international education anxieties) that limit their active participation

during the anticipation period through self-reflective journal writing have developed an interaction between SRL and reflective journals (Dutta et al., 2023). This is outlined by the theoretical models highlighting that reflective journals form a nexus betwixt learning self-regulation and reflection, respectively. Organizational reflective journals, which derive from Schön's notions of reflective practice (1983), also encourage students to undertake continual reflection and self-evaluation as part of their learning. These journals are practicing a component of self-regulated learning (the awareness by students of their cognitive processes) consistent with the metacognition construct as explained by Tobias and Everson. This study also refines these theoretical principles by using a formative online reflective journal when students receive continuous feedback on their own ideas as they enter the academic conversation and progress through it throughout the semester. This continual reflection-in-practice is a powerful instructional form for SRL in higher education contexts where independence and critical thinking are key, actively shaping students' motivation, goal-setting and learning strategies alongside archiving experiences.

These ideas ultimately conclude that the only effective way to bridge this gap between learning self-regulation and reflecting is through reflective journals. Schön (1987) further argues that the meaning of experience can be understood through its examination as a reflective discourse; hence, several techniques such as reflective journals and projects have been designed to help students transform life into learning. The journals also promote students' knowledge of their thoughts (i.e., cognitive processes), which is an integral part of self-regulated learning, and aligns closely with Tobias & Everson's theory of metacognition. The theoretical concepts of this are elaborated in the context of this study through formative online reflective journals; which provide students with an ongoing and systematic digital space to contribute, record their ideas, monitor academic achievement against course content requirements (in a credit bearing activity), see how others might interpret or understand these perspectives on initial contribution. These continued self-reflective engagement experiences are a powerful pedagogy in fostering SRL within higher education ripe for greater student autonomy and critical thinking, as it drives students' motivation, goal-setting (abundant with documented planning) and learning practices.

## *2. Mentors, critical friends, and colleagues*

Both mentors and colleagues provide different types of feedback. Mentors are the professionals within their craft who mentor by sharing their experience and knowledge. On the other hand, a student has emotional and professional support from peers throughout their learning experience. Peer evaluation can promote the quality of teaching-learning. Asking for and

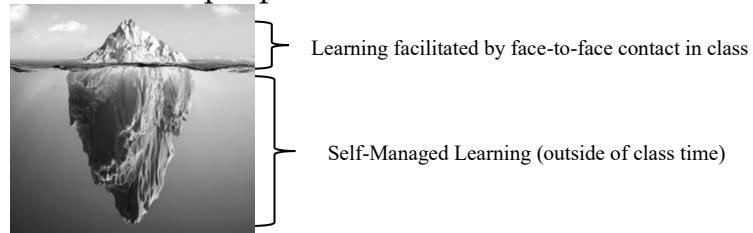
considering feedback from others, on the other hand, provides additional perspectives about our own approach to learning and instruction. Students and educators with similar new thoughts will see one another in a more positive way, focusing on finding common grounds for problems solutions. Therefore, critical conversations and constructive recommendations contribute to greater professional understanding and ongoing development, and feedback from mentors and peers encourages progress.

### 3. *Observations*

The concept of watching is simply a mentor or coworker insightfully looking at what emerges and offering their feedback. This is something students practice by having someone else with more experience (a mentor, colleague) watch and give feedback. Observing is how students can understand what their strengths are, where they need to improve and learn from other people's experiences. In addition, observation acts as a reflective mirror as well, assisting students to bring theory into practice and gain an understanding of their own pedagogical/academic practices. Teachers and students would benefit from receiving objective input in areas such as classroom participation, communication styles, time management, or class relations when they were observed. Further, learning by seeing other individuals in action is a great way to gain insight into what works and how to apply it in one's own situation. This is especially true when one is witnessing more experienced practitioners or peers. So, observation does double duty: it fosters professional discourse and shared learning while simultaneously bolstering self-regulated learning (SRL) through the promotion of goal setting, self-assessment, and continuous self-improvement built in evidence-based classroom practice.

In this study, one of the reflective practice tools to be analyzed is the reflective journal, particularly the online reflective journal. According to May-Melendez et al. (2019), reflective journals are personal records in which students document what they have learned. Teachers require students to write down important learning milestones and it can be done while the students are learning or after class as a way to reflect. In the reflection part, students are asked to explain their thoughts, and it does not limit the possibility that the students can also paraphrase the lessons and put them together as an informative summary. Research indicates that online reflective journals can enhance student engagement and motivation. Lee (2024) found that the accessibility of online platforms encourages students to engage more frequently with their reflections. Additionally, the interactive nature of online journals can support a sense of community among students. It can further enhance the students' motivation to participate (Awidi & Klutsey, 2024). This activity is conducted through online learning, where access to the online

reflective journal can be opened every time and everywhere and the significance of online learning accessibility has influenced students' performance. Acemian (2013) pointed out that learning outside the class derives more time and a deeper part of the students' time.



**Figure 1. The Iceberg of Learning**

A Learning Management System (LMS) was employed for the formative online reflective journal, as used in this study. The LMS is used for managing and tracking learning process and includes a grade book to store the results. The LMS allows learners to access courses, submit work, and download resources from start-to-finish. The LMS also creates a dynamic space in which students can regularly write down their own thoughts and feelings, respond to those of teachers and classmates, follow up on these as would-be experts themselves. This is advantageous since entries remain in chronological order and offers students a continuing record of reflection for student improvement, growth as well as teachers to monitor actual progress.

Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are software tools that facilitate the management, creation, and dissemination of educational programs and courses (Sakova and Chevereva, 2021). It integrates multiple learning tools into one user-friendly platform, including assignments, quizzes, discussion boards, and reflection tasks. Thus, a reflective journal within an LMS is more efficient and adaptable than traditional journaling in person since it allows for real-time feedback, consistent documentation, and learner control. As seen in Figure 1, the learning iceberg idea, most students acquire significant knowledge through self-directed learning, which frequently happens outside of class time. Thus, a more comprehensive and interesting learning experience that encourages SRL and more in-depth reflection can be achieved by integrating reflective journals based on learning management systems (LMS) with independent learning outside of the classroom.

This study investigates the students' perceptions about the formative online reflective journal. Numerous studies have examined reflective journals' roles in SRL practices, but mostly the subjects are pre-service teachers (Jado, 2015; Ortube et al, 2024). Another study that has a relation to formative journal reflection and SRL was conducted, but the participants were sixth-grader students (Alabidi et al, 2022). Hence, less is known about the students' point of view towards formative online reflective journal as most of the studies done previously focused on the reflective journals' impacts for teachers. Moreover,

some previous studies with the students' perceptions towards online reflective journal examined the novice level. Furthermore, additional study on the impact of journal writing on self-regulation in different educational contexts and with different demographics is needed, according to Xiao and Yang (2019). The effect of learning journals on self-regulated learning is also an area that needs more investigation, according to Nückles et al. (2020). Therefore, in order to fill in this knowledge gap, this study aims to investigate higher education students' perspectives on using formative online reflective journals as a tool to foster self-regulated learning (SRL). In particular, this research aims to determine which factors impact the effectiveness of formative online reflective journals in fostering SRL in an online learning setting and how these journals help students build skills in areas such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflective practices.

It should be mentioned that the majority of LMSs come equipped with evaluation tools that automatically record student involvement and progress. These tools include activity analytics, submission logs and participation tracking. Therefore, this data automatically generated by the system can illustrate how much students contributed to classes. Hence, beyond the hypothesis, this study moreover utilized additional instruments (questionnaires, interviews and document-analysis) for a more multifaceted insight into how students perceive and experience the usage of formative online-journals to fostering SRL. So, SRL development-promoting reflective practices and LMS behavior were explored in-depth by a researcher using both qualitative as well as quantitative methods.

## METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed-methods research design, this study examined the perspectives of higher education students regarding reflections on formative online journal writing to improve self-regulation in learning (SRL). Ballantine (2009) regarded perceptions as a state of readiness to act or think about an information or event. This study uses the example of formative online reflective journaling to measure what advanced understanding students' learning and incites their thoughts about these lessons.

The researchers employed triangulation to ensure validity and trustworthy results by integrating interview data with surveys and document analysis. This strategy is based on the idea that there are many data sources and each one provides unique or complementary information to help understand what we want to study. The interviews provided insights into students' experiences, motivations, and barriers in utilizing formative online reflective journals which were rich in qualitative data; whereas the survey yielded broader quantitative patterns of their perceptions. Additionally, document analysis of students' reflective journal entries validated their use

of self-regulated learning processes and reflectiveness in the context of portfolio assessment. By combining all three research methodologies, the researcher could have a more inclusive understanding of how formative online reflective journals assist in scaffolding self-regulated learning among higher education students.

The survey involved fifty-two respondents, consisting of both undergraduate and graduate students in Central Java, Indonesia. This was a survey online done in Google Forms and using 4-Point Likert Scale. After that, the data was tested using SPSS by using a central tendency measurement. Additionally, five participants were selected and completed semi-structured interviews to provide a richer insight into their experiences with recordings of reflective journals. Then, thematic analysis, using the Braun and Clarke (2006) approach was used to identify, analyze and interpret themes from qualitative data. It comprised six stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes (similar or contrasting) and then naming them before writing this report. In addition, student reflective journal entries were examined in order to explore how students engaged with these resources to support their learning strategies, self-reflection and goal-setting.

To identify patterns in the SRL behaviors, thematic analysis was performed on reports provided by students through their reflective journals. In terms of it, researchers coded the transcripts from interviews and records kept in journals which would help them interpret the emerging themes. The research focused on motivation, awareness of one's metacognition and self-regulated learning strategies (goal-setting, monitoring, and evaluating). On the basis of forgoing result, reflective journaling is one most effective tool in promoting students to involve into critical thinking and to acquire more self-awareness how they learn, which fulfills learning style. To uphold ethical standards in subject research, each participant is assigned an alias (e.g., P1). All participants provided informed consent and their anonymity was preserved throughout the study to ensure transparency and confidence in data collection.

## FINDINGS

### The students' insights regarding the preferences in the formative online reflective journal

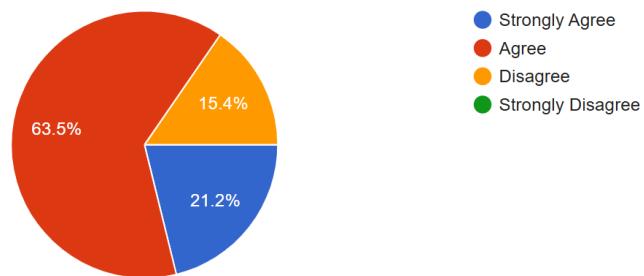


Figure 2. Pie chart of students' preferences

In order to measure the effectiveness of formative online reflective journals as a tool for student learning, 52 students were surveyed on their interest in and preference for the practice. The majority of respondents had a good attitude about the activity, as seen in the pie chart. 63.5% of respondents agreed and 21.2% strongly agreed that they enjoyed the reflective journaling experience. It indicated that the journals were functioning as a reflective reminder of earlier learning and development for most students. Quantitatively, the findings demonstrated that students perceived reflective journaling in a positive manner overall. However, qualitative data provided specificity as to the kind of experience they actually had. The researchers saw it when students expressed mixed feelings about the experience through open-ended responses and interviews.

As one participant noted:

*"So, the reflective journal I have to write comes with a bunch of parameters including a certain number of words. I find it unsettling to have included unnecessary phrases, as the result." (P4)*

Another participant added:

*"Sometimes, I already understood the lesson well, but still needed to write a reflection. It felt more like a task to complete rather than something that helped me learn." (P2)*

Most of the students are motivated to write reflectively in their journals but not all, factors that can be influenced by workloads and assignment design. When reflection is perceived as a duty or overly managed, students will focus on completing the task rather than engaging in authentic self-reflection. Despite these barriers, none of the responses demonstrated to a full range that there is also agreeing but generally favorable sense from all parties that having such reflections are actually useful and happening. All aligned with the concept of formative assessment, permitting students to monitor their progress and recalibrate as they go by reviewing what is learned and provided feedback. It implies that students may benefit from clearer direction,

more room to express themselves, and reduced workload so their reflective journaling can better support their development.

Additionally, several students identified reflective journaling as well in "tracking their own growth." Many more mentioned revisiting earlier entries and being fascinated to see how their understanding had changed. For instance, one participant said that keeping a journal helped them feel more secure and open in expressing themselves after just some weeks. This enabled students to reflect on their learning and development during the activity, developing self-awareness and metacognitive skills.

The qualitative component also suggested that the online approach requires students to be more self-reliant and consistent. Journals were loaded via an LMS, so students could write whenever and wherever they desired. This one tool has increased their engagement massively. Still, the digital nature of the work meant some students found it less personal, particularly when reflections were graded publicly or shared with classmates. Although students saw value in reflective journaling, they also articulated the discrepancy with a more adaptable and emotionally secure process of implementation.

### **The students' insights into the advantages of online reflective journals**

**Table 1. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown**

Statistics			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
N	52	52	52
Valid	52	52	52
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	3.4615	3.4423	3.4038
Median	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000
Mode	3.00	3.00 <sup>a</sup>	3.00

The table summarizes the answers to three questions about using formative online reflective journals for learning: Q1, Q2, and Q3. The mean, median, and mode were determined from the replies of fifty-two participants for each question.

Q1: This first inquiry focuses on using formative online reflective journals to grasp better concepts covered in class. At 3.4615, the mean score is relatively favorable, suggesting that people have a pleasant impression. The median and the mean are 3, indicating that most participants considered the journals beneficial.

Q2: How do formative online reflective journals affect students' ability to self-regulate their learning? That is the issue in question 2. Again, the mean score of 3.4423 indicates an optimistic outlook. Both the median and the mean are

3, which supports the hypothesis that participants usually think journals help with self-regulating learning.

Q3: This question examines how formative online reflective journals might be used to better comprehend and share viewpoints with classmates. The average score is 3.4038, which indicates a favorable impression. The median and the mean are 3, indicating that participants generally think that journals help them understand and interact with students.

**Table 2. Q1. A formative online reflective journal helps me to understand more about the lesson in class**

	N	%
Agree	28	53.8%
Strongly Agree	24	46.2%

According to the data, formative online reflective journals help students understand classroom information. In a survey of 52 participants, 53.8% (28) agreed, and 46.2% (24) strongly agreed. All students agreed that keeping a reflective journal is helpful. The significant level of agreement indicates students' capacity to acquire material and to critically evaluate their understanding through reflective practice.

*"When we write reflections, we keep coming up with questions, which helps sharpen our critical thinking as well, not only grasping the materials." (P2)*

**Table 3. Q2. Formative online reflective journals have significantly enhanced my ability to become a self-regulated learner by fostering metacognitive awareness, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.**

	N	%
Disagree	2	3.8%
Agree	25	48.1%
Strongly Agree	25	48.1%

Students' capacity to self-regulate their learning through the development of metacognitive awareness, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation is greatly enhanced by using formative online reflective journals, as indicated by Q2. With 48.1% (25 students) selecting Agree and another 48.1% (25 students) choosing Strongly Agree, 96.2% of the 52 respondents indicated agreement. The results show much agreement on how reflective journals might help

students develop their ability to study independently, exactly as seen in Figure 3.

After learning metacognition, I also learned Self-regulated learning (SRL). SRL is the ability to manage my own learning by setting goals, monitoring progress, and adjusting strategies as needed. SRL is about taking control of the learning process, which helps me become more independent and motivated. SRL consists of several stages, including goal-setting, where I define clear objectives for what I want to achieve. For example, if I have a project or an assignment, I will break it down into smaller part. Next is monitoring, where I check my progress and reflect on whether the strategies I'm using are effective or not. If I found out that something isn't working, I'll make adjustments, such as changing my learning techniques or finding additional resources. **Self-reflection** is a key part of SRL. After completing a task, I evaluate what worked and what didn't, which helps me for future learning. By practicing SRL, I've developed a sense of accountability for my learning, and it has greatly enhanced my confidence and ability to stay focused on achieving my learning goals.

**Figure 3. Document excerpt from the LMS**

**Table 4. Q3. Formative online reflective journal helps me to understand my colleague's point of view by reading his/her reflection and sharing our thoughts by replying/their reflection.**

	N	%
Disagree	2	3.8%
Agree	27	51.9%
Strongly Agree	23	44.2%

The third question's results show that students generally support using formative online reflecting journals to gain insight from other people's points of view. Reading the views and responses of colleagues helps one comprehend their perspectives, according to a vast majority of respondents who either agreed (51.9%) or strongly agreed (44.2%) that these journals provide. A tiny percentage of people (3.8%) disagreed with this assertion. This finding suggests that colleagues see formative online reflective journals as helpful in promoting compassion, comprehension, and communication.

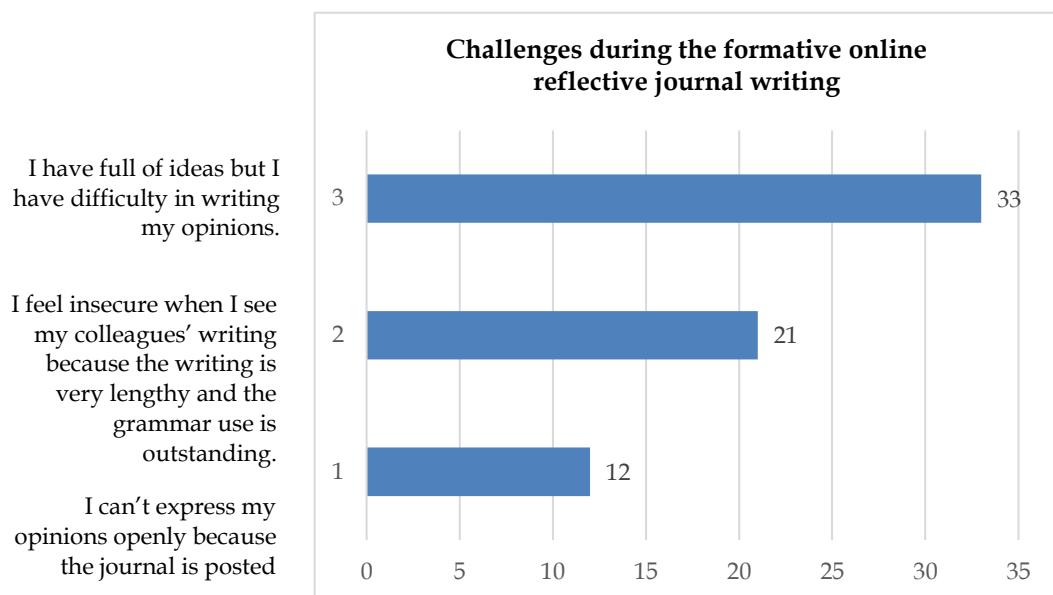
*"Engaging with other individuals' reflective journals enhanced my ability to listen and comprehend their perspectives prior to offering comments, a process that matches closely with psychological principles." (P5)*

Additionally, Alt et al. (2022) said that reflection helps people develop critical thought, self-awareness, and empathy, all of which are necessary to understand other people's points of view.

Research shows that students used reflective journals for more than just reviewing class material; they also utilized them to assess how well they were learning. For instance, a number of respondents said that they documented their weekly strategies for time management, motivation, or concentration in writing. Essential components of self-regulated learning, this approach promoted goal setting and self-correction. The ability to learn from fellow users was another great advantage of the internet platform. Reading the reflections of other students was a great source of comfort and new ideas

for how to study, according to many students. One respondent shared that "I feel inspired when I read how my classmate solved her speaking anxiety." This collaborative reading and commenting process fostered empathy, broadened perspectives, and built a supportive learning community. These results are in line with the sociocultural theory that says people learn best when they work together to construct a meaning from the surroundings.

### The challenges in writing a formative online reflective journal



**Figure 4. Bar chart of challenges in writing**

This bar graph shows the problems that were encountered while writing in a formative online reflective journal. The most common problem, according to 33 responders, is having a lot of thoughts but not being able to put them into words. A big number of them (21%) also said they felt nervous when they compared their brief pieces to their peers' long, well-written ones. The least common problem, noted by 12 students, is that it's hard to give honest views because the journal is open. The results show that students want to share their ideas, but the main problems are their writing skills and feeling good about themselves compared to their peers. In addition to experiencing insecurity regarding the work of peers, there exists a possibility of uncertainty about what to express during the feedback session.

*"I chose to discontinue the reflective journal that was intended to be written weekly due to the excessive requirements, including the necessity to comment on peers' work, as I don't know what to say."*  
(P4)

Time constraints were cited by a few participants as a major obstacle, alongside language and self-confidence issues. Exams and other academic tasks frequently occupied students' time, making it difficult for them to produce insightful observations, as students themselves recognized. Some said it was "rushed" or "something to finish before midnight," which made it sound shallow and superficial. Therefore, the takeaway here is that reflective journaling has educational potential, but it might be wasted if seen as more a chore than a place to examine critically and develop personal understanding.

Additionally, a few respondents expressed worries around emotional openness and privacy. Some students avoided being open and honest about their emotions or struggles because their classmates may see their entries. As one wrote, "Sometimes I don't tell my real struggle because everyone can read it." This concern shows that while collaborative reflection can foster empathy, it must be carefully moderated by teachers to maintain a psychologically safe and supportive environment.

## DISCUSSION

It is clear from the data that the response was mostly positive with little resistance. Improving performance requires an individual's motivation to succeed, according to the principle of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation occurs when people enjoy what they are doing; this leads to higher levels of commitment and effort. An interview is conducted further to see the students' insights toward the disagreement. P1 stated that writing online reflective journals in the form of formative assessment was debilitating.

*"To be honest, this is really time-consuming for me. Plus, we have so many other things to do." (P1)*

Some of the students felt exhausted due to the overloaded tasks. Yet, they had to write the online reflective journals after class in response to the lesson or feeling or comment of what the students acquired after the teaching learning process. Various strategies are needed to help students feel more comfortable with this overwhelming assignment. Hammad (2022) conducted research and came to the following conclusion: The research discovered that students often experienced anxiety and a lack of motivation when it came to working on reflective tasks because they felt unprepared for it. In order to be successful in reflective writing, students need to possess abilities such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and diction. However, not all students may feel qualified to manage these abilities. Therefore, Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) is needed.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that students understand the significance of reflective activities in developing SRL abilities, such as goal-setting, progress monitoring, and performance evaluation.

*“Writing reflective journals as a kind of formative evaluation is a great way to monitor our progress in learning. We can see how much we have learned and how far we have come.” (P3)*

As shown in the literature review chapter that self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to the capacity to systematically organize, observe, and assess a student's academic progress, with a strong emphasis on the process of monitoring. Zimmerman (2002) identifies three distinct stages of self-regulated learning: planning, execution, and reflection. For this reason, SRL requires its participants to assess their progress regularly (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012).

In summary, the findings indicate that engaging in a formative online reflective journal offers learners several advantages.

#### *1. Enhance Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)*

A reflective journal Reflective journals are a self-reflection device well-suited to formal and informal learning environments (Alt et al., 2022). Self-reflection journals also enable one to introspect and self-reflect on experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This kind of self-reflection helps shape a person's identity while revealing their inner qualities. It serves as an essential foundation on which future strengths and accomplishments can develop.

#### *2. Development of critical thinking skills*

Ahmed (2019) discovered that reflective journals are helpful in improving students critical thinking skills as the journal enables them to reflect on their experiences, identify patterns and draw conclusions from these events. Critical reflection allows students to think more deeply and carefully about things, moving beyond the superficial understanding of analyzing assumptions in context or seeing them from perspectives other than their own.

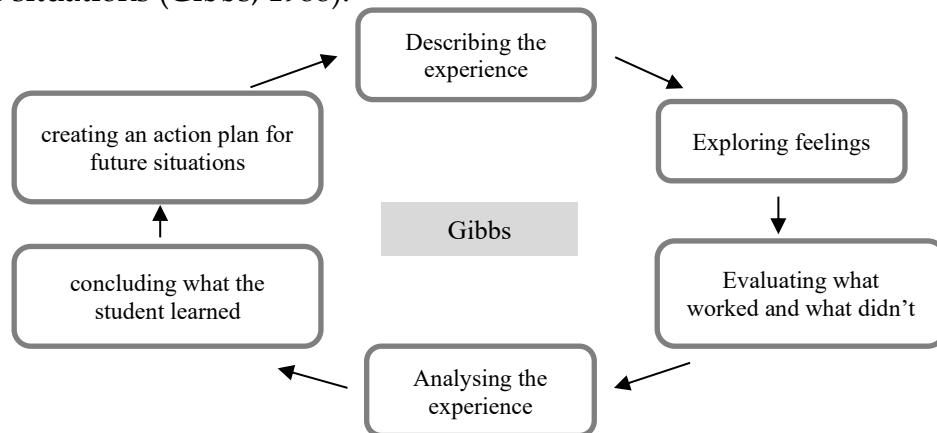
#### *3. Deeper learning*

Writing into a reflective journal enables students to relate course material with their experiences, values, and aspirations in life. Integration of both frameworks into the individual makes for sustained learning along with real-world applications (Sudirman et al. al., 2021).

#### *4. Promoting emotional well-being*

Reflective journals are a great means for processing your emotions, notably accompanied with tough or stressful time. It can help the students during difficult periods, relieve stress, and develop emotional robustness (Daff et al., 2024).

Despite the advantages, research indicates that students may need help with the depth of their reflections in online journals. Without any rubrics or guidance from the lecturers, the students perform a superficial reflection on their writing. Moreover, many students also reported that they were feeling pressured to complete the task as soon as possible before the due date. This pressure might hinder deep engagement with the reflective process (Suphasri, 2021). Therefore, teachers are supposed to give guidance to the students when writing in online reflective journals. As an outstanding framework used in many classrooms, Gibbs' Reflective Cycle can help teachers foster student reflection by prompting them to think critically about how they would respond in a similar circumstance (Sibson, 2008). Gibbs' Reflective Cycle consists of six stages: describing the experience, exploring feelings about it, evaluating what worked and what did not, analyzing the experience, concluding what the student learned, and finally, creating an action plan for future situations (Gibbs, 1988).



**Figure 4. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle**

In order to assist students organize their ideas and emotions about their learning experience, formative online reflective journals are designed using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as a guide. The six-stage cycle of description, feelings, assessment, analysis, conclusion, and action plan is designed to help students delve into their ideas and emotions, identify key learning points, and develop methods for future progress.

Finally, based on the findings, the following are the key components of formative online reflective journals that support the development of SRL among higher education students.

### **1. Sequential guidance**

Providing students with more organized instructions on how to approach reflective journaling might help relieve emotions of worry and fatigue. Also, cognitive overload may be mitigated through the use of

structured reflection tasks that allow students to focus on specific learning objectives (Warrick, 2021). With clear expectations for each journal admission, the task may seem easier and students may feel more confident in their skills.

## 2. Adaptable timelines

According to study by Hammad (2022), students were often nervous and unmotivated when they thought that self-reflective tasks would take too long or be too hard. As an alternative, teachers could let students pick their own due dates or limit how often the journals are due, especially if students already have a lot of other work to do. It is possible that making these tasks seem less difficult will help students feel less stressed and push them to do more thoughtful practice.

*“There isn't much time for me to write meaningful reflective journals since I also work sometimes.” (P2)*

Unexpectedly, this issue prompted an increased utilization of AI among students due to the overwhelming amount of their tasks. They rely on AI to complete their reflective journals.

*“Initially, I approached the task with careful consideration and thoroughness. However, after noticing the recurring tight deadlines each week and the requirement for minimal word count, I started to use AI. It provided significant help to me.” (P1)*

Consequently, to maintain the fundamental value of a reflective journal, it is recommended that educators have flexibility in setting deadlines and avoid imposing excessive obstacles.

## 3. Progressive practices

Another strategy is to assist students in their first stages of reflective journal writing if they are unfamiliar with them. Machost and Stains (2023b) stated that surface reflection is the first actual level of reflection. So, the writing process appears to be gradual. Students may build confidence and improve their reflective thinking abilities by beginning with shorter, simpler reflections before gradually working their way up to longer, more complex ones. However, a problem arises when the teachers set ‘word count’.

*“It's hard to be creative and think critically when teachers tell us to write by counting the number of the words.” (P1)*

This might lead to issues with originality, critical thinking, and flow of expression. This quote from a student illustrates point 1 well that putting word count on the journal being about learning and critical thinking promote the wrong things, due to promoting quantity over quality in this example which then discourages students engaging further.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) is a crucial component of effective higher education. Learning to set and track their academic goals, as well understanding how they performed afterwards helped them gain a newfound sense of agency over learning. Incorporation of formative blogs facilitated the development of SRL skills by encouraging students to continuously evaluate their progress, strategically plan for learning and monitor performance/results. In addition, their self-awareness of their cognitive ability led to increases in both intrinsic motivation and metacognitive awareness for the students. Zimmerman (2002) explains that effective self-regulated learning involves three key processes: planning ahead, carrying out the task, and reflecting on how well one has performed. The results of the study suggest that encouraging students to engage in SRL through ongoing formative activities can better prepare them for lifelong learning during their studies.

Moreover, the results underscore the necessity of continuously fostering SRL through structured reflection, timely feedback, and a supportive learning environment; it does not develop automatically. My students became more proactive and demonstrated greater initiative in improving their oral grammar skills. The findings suggest that maintaining a balance between independence and guidance is essential for developing successful SRL strategies. Through goal-setting, self-reflection, and adaptive learning techniques, the students cultivated core attributes associated with higher educational motivation, such as discipline and resilience. Therefore, teachers should embed explicit SRL instruction in their lesson plans to help students not only complete tasks but also understand their learning preferences and why certain strategies are effective.

This study also highlights the value of incorporating online reflective journals as a pedagogical technique for enhancing reflection and personal development in higher education. Students reported that writing about their thoughts and feelings helped them understand the material more deeply, become more discerning critical thinkers, and strengthen their emotional intelligence. However, some students noted that their interest and creativity were reduced by heavy workloads, poorly designed tasks, or overly strict technical requirements. Therefore, educators are encouraged to design reflective journal tasks with features such as explicit yet flexible instructions, appropriate scaffolding, and realistic timelines. When embedded thoughtfully, reflective journals become more than an assessment tool. They serve as a process-based, ongoing learning experience that helps students take ownership of their journey and reflect critically on every aspect of it.

It was also found that reflective journaling helps students deepen their understanding of academic material by integrating personal reflection and

scaffolding theory into practice (Yap et al.). Reflection, in essence, is the process of making sense of what would otherwise remain passive learning. Through this process, students move beyond memorization and begin to generate ideas, questions, and personal insights about their own learning, which reinforces the content. Similarly, peer-supported online reflective blogging can foster empathy and collaborative learning. Therefore, teachers should view reflective journaling not merely as a tool for developing cognitive skills but as a meaningful approach to expanding students' emotional intelligence, social awareness, and critical thinking.

Lastly, although this study provides meaningful insights into the role of formative online reflective journals in fostering SRL, it is limited to the perceptions of a relatively small group of students in one regional context. Additional research should expand the sample as well in relation to both who participates and what they study, making it easier to generalize beyond this initial cohort. Studying this further through teachers' perspectives or by comparing the reflection practices using different technology platforms in LMS is recommended to have a comprehensive understanding of reflective learning supports for SRL. More research is also needed investigating the long-term effects of reflective journaling on students' self-regulation and academic performance with longitudinal study designs.

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