

Self-Reflection Journal in Action: A Case in English Syntax Class in Higher Education

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Abstrak

Pengetahuan tentang ilmu linguistik terutama analisis kalimat sangat penting sebagai keterampilan dasar bagi calon guru bahasa Inggris. Namun, calon guru bahasa Inggris di universitas swasta di Kalimantan Barat menemukan berbagai tantangan dalam mempelajarinya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis realisasi jurnal refleksi dan mengeksplorasi sudut pandang mahasiswa dalam mata kuliah Sintaksis Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini melibatkan 20 mahasiswa calon guru bahasa Inggris semester 5 dari dua kelas mata kuliah Sintaksis Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan pendekatan studi kasus. Metode purposive sampling digunakan untuk menentukan partisipan yang representatif dan komunikatif. Mereka menulis jurnal refleksi berdasarkan tiga topik pembelajaran English Syntax. Hasil penelitian ini menguatkan temuan penelitian sebelumnya bahwa jurnal refleksi membantu mengevaluasi kemajuan mahasiswa pada tiap topiknya. Jurnal refleksi merangsang kepedulian dan perkembangan diri mahasiswa dalam proses pembelajaran. Berdasarkan sudut pandang siswa, mereka senang dapat mengevaluasi proses dan menemukan solusi bagi permasalahan yang ditemui dalam pembelajaran. Hasil penelitian ini juga memberikan paradigma baru tentang penggunaan jurnal refleksi dalam perkuliahan English Syntax selain keterampilan menulis. Penelitian selanjutnya perlu mengembangkan instrumen jurnal refleksi untuk menggali refleksi yang lebih otentik dari siswa.

Kata kunci: English Syntax, Pendidikan Tinggi, Calon Guru Bahasa Inggris, Jurnal Refleksi

Abstract

Students' linguistics knowledge, especially on sentence structure, is urgently needed for English Pre-Service teachers as an essential skill. However, English pre-service teachers in a private university in West Kalimantan faced various challenges in learning it. The present study aims to analyze self-reflection journal realization and students' views in English Syntax courses in higher education. This study included 20 English Pre-Service teachers from semester 5 who were enrolled in two classes of the English Syntax course. It utilized a qualitative method and a case study approach. The purposive sampling method was employed to select representative and communicative participants. They wrote self-reflection journals on three topics in the English Syntax syllabus. The result showed that self-reflection journals were useful for the students in evaluating their progress on each topic. Self-reflection journals triggered the students' self-awareness and self-development, which benefited the teaching and learning process. According to the students, they were delighted to evaluate their process and find a new solution for their future learning strategy. Moreover, the present study might provide a new paradigm for the use of self-reflection journals in English Syntax courses other than Writing skills. Future research is recommended to develop the self-reflection journal instrument to gain a more authentic reflection entry.

Keywords: English Syntax, Higher Education, Pre-service Teachers, Self-Reflection Journal

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on grammar learning has revealed that grammar is one of the challenging skills for English as foreign language learners as they develop the language during the learning process (Akbar & Ahmad, 2017; Syafryadin et al., 2022). The process proceeds until grammar improvement is attained at a higher level. In the context of English Pre-Service teachers (EPST), grammar is an essential skill as the primary language skill in teaching English to their future students (Ölçü Dinçer, 2022; Zhou, 2017). EPSTs are required to master English well as they are prepared to be teacher candidates. Grammar skills enable them to write and speak English in some genres and contexts. Despite its urgency, research also found that EPSTs face difficulties learning grammar. Students' grammar difficulties

relate to making sentences using proper tenses, parts of speech, modals, auxiliaries, and so on (Paputungan et al., 2022; Puspitaloka, 2019; Wati & Wahyuni, 2019). Those challenges in learning grammar can be solved through some learning strategies, such as cognitive, affective, socio, and metacognitive strategies (Putri et al., 2017; Ramdayani et al., 2020).

One of the linguistics subjects in the English education study program that requires students' grammar competence is English Syntax. English syntax is one of the linguistics branches focusing on sentence structure (Agustini et al., 2020; Ekundayo, 2021). The students must properly combine words into phrases, clauses, and sentences in English. Those competencies will be applied to other English subjects such as speaking skills, reading comprehension, translation, English education, and writing a thesis. Therefore, English Syntax is pivotal yet challenging for EPSTs.

However, the result of the pre-research shows that EESs of semester 5 in a private university in Landak Regency found difficulties in grammar, although they had been taught grammar subjects since semesters 1 to 4. The lecturer conducted a pre-teaching test containing ten items related to analyzing parts of speech and kinds of phrases before delivering English Syntax materials to portray the student's grammatical competence in the earlier stage of the course. The main problem is the ability to determine part of speech. For analyzing clauses and phrases, the students should be able to decide on parts of speech. Moreover, based on the focus group discussion conducted in pre-teaching revealed that most students need more confidence in their grammatical knowledge. They were afraid of making mistakes. Given the empirical results of the students' grammatical competence, the lecturer provided the students with opportunities to develop their self-awareness of their goals and needs in the learning process. One of them is by implementing self-reflection (SR). SR requires students to evaluate their understanding and proficiency in addressing concepts or issues in a given field, in this case, English Syntax.

Several scholars are interested in introducing SR into the classroom because they want their students to take ownership of their learning and develop a sense of responsibility. In recent times, SR has garnered considerable attention due to its growing emphasis on learner autonomy, independence, and significant pedagogical value. SR sticks to the view that students who regularly evaluate themselves are not only encouraged to think critically about their performance but also to seek out solutions to the problems they face in their learning process (Andrade, 2019; Parveen et al., 2022). Scholars believe that students who excel in metacognition, critical thinking, monitoring, and self-regulated learning attain a high degree of self-assessment (Aldosari et al., 2023; Dutta et al., 2023). Moreover, studies on SR in higher education revealed that self-reflection helps students understand a concept, broaden their horizons, and make thoughtful decisions for upcoming activities better (Aldosari et al., 2023; Coertjens et al., 2021; Lesmana & Rokhyati, 2020). Moreover, from the teachers' view, SR could improve classroom management skills, evaluate teaching strategy, nurture teachers' professional growth, and enhance teachers' confidence (Jamil & Hamre, 2018; Karlinawati, 2014; Ruslin et al., 2022; Xiaojing et al., 2022).

There are various types of self-reflection activities, such as student feedback, peer observation, peer coaching, video or audio recording, learning journals, etc. Students' feedback provides new insights into the teaching and learning process. Besides, it can build a good relationship among students and teachers (Iqbal et al., 2016; Mathew et al., 2017). Meanwhile, other study conducted a study highlighting EFL teachers' optimistic outlook regarding classroom peer observation despite their limited experience (Merç, 2015). Since teachers can learn much from their peers, the study also affirms that classroom observation has more benefits than drawbacks.

On the other hand, peer coaching is defined as a collaborative process among two or more people reflecting current educational practices together. It aims to cultivate a solid

working rapport amongst colleagues. Peer coaching can support students' personal and leadership development. Another reflective practice tool is video or audio recording. It is used to evaluate the classroom learning activities. Student-teachers can increase their awareness of teaching by watching audio and video recordings of themselves or other peer members (Eriksen et al., 2020; Mathew et al., 2017). Teachers may engage in a variety of activities in the classroom, but they may not always be aware of everything that is going on there. A classroom video can provide a clear picture of the entire teaching process. It can encourage teachers to think critically, help them identify their areas of weakness, and provide them with ideas and inspiration for improving their instruction (Hennessy et al., 2022; Tosriadi et al., 2018).

The present study used a learning journal as a tool for self-reflection practice. Regarding EFL classes in higher education, reflective journals are considered effective in enhancing students' writing skills. Moreover, it can develop students' ideas and grow students' writing motivation (Apsari, 2018; Siahaan et al., 2021). The reflective journal was also applied in English education subjects as a professional development tool for pre-service teachers (Agustin, 2019; Karlinawati, 2014; May-Melendez et al., 2019). Pre-service teachers could evaluate their performance in teaching through the journal and promote long-life learning skills (Alt et al., 2022; Sudirman et al., 2021). While previous research highlights the effectiveness of reflective journals in various educational contexts, such as in the teaching process and instruction, there remains a gap in exploring students' reflections, specifically within English Syntax courses. Therefore, the novelty of this study includes addressing this gap by investigating the EFL pre-service teachers' perspectives on the role of self-reflection journals in enhancing their grammatical skills and learning experiences in the classroom. By focusing on pre-service teachers' viewpoints and reflections on the English Syntax course, this study provides insights into how self-reflection can be effectively integrated into EFL classrooms to improve students' learning outcomes.

Studies have indicated that a self-reflection journal is an effective tool to enhance students' skills. It facilitates students' critical thinking to evaluate their learning experience. Given that the pre-service teachers in a university in Landak had problems with their grammatical knowledge, the self-reflection journal is expected to enhance students' Syntax skills and improve their learning, especially grammatical issues. As previously stated, English pre-service teachers are also equipped with English sentence structure analysis skills, essential in teaching grammar. Therefore, an investigation into this area is crucial. The result of the study is expected to contribute to the practice of English Syntax course and self-reflection study, especially in the context of English as a foreign language classroom.

2. METHODS

The present study employed a qualitative approach. This approach can depict the realization of the self-reflection journal in English Syntax class using a learning journal and reveal the students' views on the reflection. Qualitative methods are most appropriate when the aim is to describe the phenomena in the natural background through participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The students from the 5th semester of the English Language Education Study Program at a private university participated in the study. Twenty English students participated in this study in two English Syntax courses. This study employed purposive sampling to select the participants. The researchers selected the most representative and communicative participants to gain the data from their self-reflection journal and their viewpoints. Before teaching English Syntax materials, the lecturers conducted the pre-teaching test to map the students' grammatical knowledge. Figure 1 illustrates the students' profile revealed from the pre-teaching test.

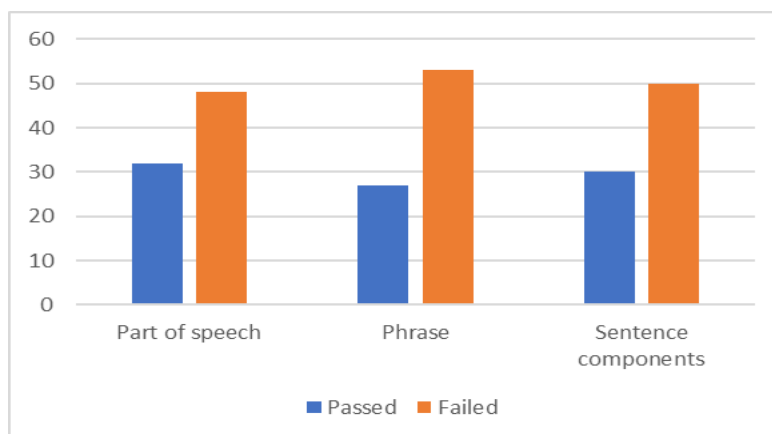


Figure 1. Pre-teaching Test Result

Base on [Figure 1](#), the pre-teaching test results in the first meeting of the English Syntax course indicated that only 32 students (40%) could identify part of speech, 27 (34%) were able to recognize phrases, and 30 students (38%) could determine the sentence components. The result led the lecturer to design the teaching program by inserting a self-reflection on each course topic. English Syntax was designed to provide students with the concept of English sentence construction. Students are provided with fundamental syntactical rules covering basic sentence patterns and expanding basic sentences, phrases, and parts of speech. At the end of the course, the students are expected to develop their abilities to identify and analyze the proper English sentences with their elements. The topics of the course are Syntax concept, part of speech, sentence structure, and tee diagram of syntax. The data were obtained through documents from students’ reflection journals. In writing the reflection journal, the students were guided with some prompts. [Table 1](#) provides the prompts for the self-reflection journal.

Table 1. Self-Reflection Journal Prompts

No	Topic	Prompts
1	Part of speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You already learned about part of speech, describe what you did when you had to categorize the part of speech of each word! Did you find any difficulties in understanding the material of part of speech? What were your strengths and weaknesses when you did the part of speech quizzes?
2	Phrase Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You already learned about phrase analysis; describe what you did when you had to differentiate kinds of phrases. Did you find any difficulties in analysing English phrases? Was the material of part of the speech useful for this topic? Elaborate your answer! What were your strengths and weaknesses when you did the phrase analysis quizzes?
3	Sentence analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You already learned about sentence analysis, describe what you did when you had to analyze sentences. Did you find any difficulties in analysing English sentences? What do you think you have improved the most in your English Syntax knowledge up to this point?

No	Topic	Prompts
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helped you improve it? • How did you notice your improvement?

The prompts were intended to help students become aware of their learning process and their growth in the English Syntax course. Next, the data were analyzed using interactive models (Miles & Huberman, 2014). It involves data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The present study sought to depict the realization of self-reflection assessments taken by English education students at a private university in Landak Regency, especially in the English Syntax course. Moreover, it also attempts to explore the contribution of SRA from the students' view. The English Syntax materials consisted of four main topics: English Syntax 101 (Introduction), part of speech, phrase, and sentence analysis. The SRA was given to the students at the end of each topic. The first topic consisted of two (2) learning indicators namely students understand the concept of Syntax study and identify the elements of sentence structure. The result of self-reflection assessment revealed that 5 students felt that they understand enough on the Syntax concept and 6 students did not understand the Syntax concept well.

The present study sought to depict the realization of self-reflection practice through students' learning journals in the English Syntax course. Moreover, it also attempts to explore the students' views on self-reflection. Students received reflective prompts in each self-reflection journal, which they wrote at the end of each topic. The English Syntax materials comprised four main topics: part of speech, phrase, and sentence analysis. In this topic, the students were asked to identify English parts of speech such as verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, etc. The purpose of this material is to emphasize basic knowledge of analyzing English sentences. Initially, the students wrote it in English mixed with Bahasa Indonesia to make them feel free to write their learning reflection. Here are a few examples of students' reflective journals is show in Table 1.

Table 1 Students' Entry Reflective Journals on Part of Speech Topic

The prompts	Students' writing
You already learned about part of speech, describe what you did when you had to categorize the part of speech of each word!	<p>Student A: <i>"I got two assignments that require me to categorize the word into its parts. Firstly, I read the words carefully. Then, I analyze it based on the meaning of Bahasa Indonesia to its part. It was challenging because I forgot some words. Fortunately, I got feedback when the answer was different from mine."</i></p> <p>Student B: <i>"I noted the lecturer's explanation. When I had to analyze the word, I looked at my notes. I'm merely sure about nouns and verbs, but I need to look at the notes to determine it."</i></p>
Did you find any difficulties in understanding the	<p>Student A: <i>"The most common problem I faced when I analyzed part of speech was my lack of vocabulary. The first thing to do is</i></p>

The prompts	Students' writing
material of part of speech?	<i>find the meaning in Bahasa Indonesia. Then, I can guess the part of speech. Additionally, I found difficulty in distinguishing adjectives and adverbs. They seem like the same. However, some of my friends helped me to differentiate it".</i>
What were your strengths and weaknesses when you did the part of speech quizzes?	Student B: <i>"No, I just need more practice."</i>
	Student A: <i>"I learned many kinds of parts of speech. It helps me improve my vocabulary at the same time. I can easily differentiate between verbs and nouns. However, I found difficulty in determining whether it is an adjective and adverb".</i>
	Student B: <i>"I think I paid attention to the explanation and took a note. However, I still need help when I find difficult words, whether it is adjectives or adverbs."</i>

Most students wrote the journal straightforwardly, following the prompts given. They elaborated on their learning experiences during the "part of speech" topic in quite detailed descriptions. The journal covered the learning experience description, their learning barriers, and their strengths. Regarding learning problems, the students could analyze the barriers to analyzing words into their categories, such as lack of vocabulary and problems with part of speech.

The second topic was phrase analysis. In this topic, the students were required to identify phrases based on their heads and modifiers. The topic lasted for three meetings. Table 3 shows the students' self-reflection journals during the phrase analysis topic.

Table 3. Students Entry Reflective Journals on Phrase Analysis Topic

The prompts	Students' writing
You already learned about phrase analysis, describe what you did when you had to differentiate kinds of phrases.	Student C: <i>"As the lecturer explained, first we need to analyze the head of the phrase and then look at the modifier to determine the kinds of the noun phrase."</i>
Did you find any difficulties in analyzing English phrases?	Student D: <i>"I will look at the words and try to translate it first. Then, I will identify the head of the phrase."</i>
	Student C: <i>"I just need several seconds to analyze the phrase."</i>
Was the material of part of the speech useful for this topic? Elaborate your answer!	Student D: <i>"I need to find the meaning in Indonesian first before I identify the phrase."</i>
	Student C: <i>"I learned a lot from the previous topic. I found that that was very useful when I have to analyze the phrase".</i>
	Student D: <i>"The previous topic was related to this topic. If we know part of speech, then we can analyze the phrases."</i>

The prompts	Students' writing
What were your strengths and weaknesses when you did the phrase analysis quizzes?	<p>Student C: <i>"I think I can easily identify phrases with 2 word combinations. However, I still found difficulty if it is more than 2 word combination. I can do it, anyway, but I need more time."</i></p> <p>Student D: <i>"Probably my problem is vocabulary mastery. I need to identify the meaning first. Then, I can identify the head of the phrase."</i></p>

Base on [Table 3](#), the students commented positively on their learning experience and the teaching process. As topics 1 and 2 were related, the students assumed that their learning experience during topic 1 led them to understand more about topic 2. Thus, they thought that their knowledge improved during the second topic. The students' writing revealed that they started to identify their learning process fluently. They could describe their strengths and weaknesses in detail and comprehensively during the phrase analysis topic.

The third topic was sentence analysis. This topic lasted for 3 meetings. The first 2 meetings required the students to analyze English sentences covering identifying parts of speech and phrases. A sentence analysis quiz was given in the third meeting. [Table 4](#) shows the students' learning experience in the self-reflection journal on the third topic.

Table 4. Students Entry Reflective Journals on Sentence Analysis Topic

The prompts	Students' writing
You already learned about sentence analysis, describe what you did when you had to analyze sentences.	<p>Student E: <i>"First, I identify the subject and predicate. Then I identify the phrases and their part of speech."</i></p> <p>Student F: <i>"I learned about sentence analysis, and it was challenging. I need to identify the sentence elements first. Then I identify the phrases, whether they belong to noun phrases, verb phrases, or adverb phrases, to complete the syntax tree."</i></p>
Did you have any difficulties analyzing English sentences?	<p>Student E: <i>"Sometimes I find difficulty when the sentence is complex. It makes me confused, and I need help. I used to ask my friend. So, we had a discussion, and it was nice".</i></p> <p>Student F: <i>"Yes, especially the complicated one."</i></p>
What have you improved the most in your English Syntax knowledge up to this point?	<p>Student E: <i>"From the three topics I've learned, I think I can identify the phrase well. I can easily determine the kinds of phrases".</i></p> <p>Student F: <i>"Now, I can determine the part of speech of each word. It helps me a lot in analyzing phrases and sentences."</i></p>
What helped you improve it?	<p>Student E: <i>"I think my skill was improved as I learned from my</i></p>

The prompts	Students' writing
How did you notice your improvement?	<i>mistakes. I studied more from quizzes and the mistakes I made</i>
	Student F: <i>"I think my friends helped a lot. I used to ask her about how to differentiate phrases. She explained more about part of speech and how it works."</i>
	Student E: <i>"I realized my progress when I got good scores on sentence analysis quizzes. It's so amazing for me."</i>
	Student F: <i>"When I got 70 in noun phrase quizzes, that's the moment I realized that I made progress."</i>

Base on Table 4, the self-reflection journal on the third topic revealed that the students had expressed their feelings and thoughts fluently. They could analyze their progress and the factors influencing their achievement. Moreover, the prompts triggered them to correlate all variables related to their progress, such as learning strategies, media, and future learning plans. Thus, the self-reflection journal helped them improve their self-awareness.

At the end of the course, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire about their views on the self-reflection journal. The majority of the students tended to like writing self-reflection journals. The result of students' perception is displayed in Figure 2.

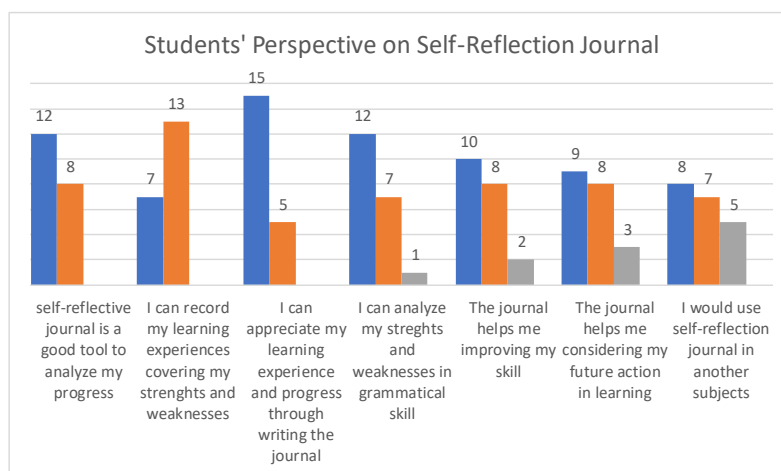


Figure 2. Student's Perspective

Base on Figure 2 revealed that 15 students claimed that the self-reflection journal helped them appreciate their learning experience and progress. The 12 students felt that it became a good tool for obtaining their learning process and simultaneously evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. The data also shows that 10 students said that they were able to evaluate their learning strategies, especially when analyzing sentences. All participants or students thought that self-reflection journals were beneficial for them. They would be glad if other subjects required them to write reflection journals. They could arrange their plan based on their learning experience dealing with students' achievement.

Discussion

The findings revealed that the self-reflection journal used in the English Syntax course raised students' self-awareness. The students were able to look into their learning

experience and progress. The findings strengthen the evidence that when students write reflection journals, they record the concepts they have learned, the significant events that occurred in the class, and conversations that happened with teachers or other students (Cheng, 2017; Oktama et al., 2023). Therefore, writing a self-reflection journal improves self-awareness (Wicaksono et al., 2020; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). Moreover, the result also showed that the students were able to evaluate their grammatical knowledge during the process. The result aligns with other study who said that self-reflection journals enable students to think critically about their learning activities and produce an evaluation result (Peñaflorida, 2011; Sudirman et al., 2021).

After having self-reflection journals, the students explained that they helped them review their learning experiences and find strengths and weaknesses. Other study state that reflective journals are an effective and recommended learning tool to help both teacher and student reflecting the teaching and learning process (Rhodes & Brook, 2021). Additionally, the students have a better understanding of the topic being discussed through reviewing the process in a self-reflection journal (Bosica et al., 2021; Jarvis & Baloyi, 2020). Therefore, writing a self-reflection journal enables students to share their progress and enhance their understanding simultaneously.

The present study's findings correspond to previous studies who state that self-reflection journals benefit students by promoting idea development, improving textual coherence, and improving competence (Apsari, 2018; Siahaan et al., 2021). Although their study focuses on teaching writing skills, the findings are in line with those of the present study in terms of improving students' engagement in classroom activities. The present study may introduce a new strategy for improving students' awareness and engagement in EFL grammar classrooms.

Regarding the pedagogical implications, the present study implies that a self-reflection journal provides a particular time for the students to write regularly to support grammatical knowledge. Self-reflection journals act as effective media to help students express ideas and experiences and review the teaching and learning process. The activities can be a model of best practice for English pre-service teachers in their future professional development.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study corroborate the function of self-reflection journal as a tool to enhance the quality of learning process. The students can independently evaluate their learning process in the English Syntax course. As it is a learning diary, the students can express their honesty and learning experience while gaining their strengths and weaknesses. Self-reflection journals also promoted students' self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-improvement. Given the comprehensive result, the present study is limited to describing the realization and students' views. Hence, future studies are recommended to develop the self-reflection journal instrument with deeper prompts and strategies to obtain authentic students' reflection entries.

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