



The declining engagement in journaling: Exploring barriers to reflective learning in an Economic Management module

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ABSTRACT

Integrating journaling as a pedagogical strategy is a valuable and viable approach to enhancing critical reflection and self-assessment. Reflective practice, a cornerstone of professional growth, involves a deliberate process of self-assessment, allowing individuals to retrospectively examine their learning to foster continuous improvement. This study investigates the use of journalizing to foster deeper reflection on the understanding of academic content within an economic management sciences module, while exploring the factors contributing to students' reluctance to engage in self-reflection through this method, and investigating the factors which influence students' choices to engage. The study followed a mixed-methods design, which incorporated an analysis of responses to the journal activity submissions ($n=81$) after completion of study units, with sequencing enabled, allowing students to go through certain content requirements before they could journal their learning experiences. The results indicated that only 30% of the students followed through with journaling as part of their learning engagement, with a noticeable decline as the course progressed. Furthermore, most of the students simply made journalizing statements which were vague and showed a lack of understanding of the units covered. It is recommended that the importance of writing journals in an academic context be emphasized, and lecturers should look for ways of motivating students to do self-reflection through meaningful journalizing.

Keywords: Journalizing, Assessment, Willingness, Education, Barriers, Reflection.

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of journaling into pedagogical approaches has become increasingly prevalent in higher education, especially within disciplines that require critical reflection and self-evaluation.¹ For scholars, journaling offers an effective means of addressing theoretical deficiencies by linking abstract principles to practical observations. At a South African University of Technology, students in Economic and Management Sciences are urged to adopt journaling as an active learning method that

¹ Tim K Blake, "Journaling: An Active Learning Technique," *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship* 2, no. 1 (April 15, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.2202/1548-923X.1116>.

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fosters reflective practices through assessments of their encounters and perceptions.² Reflective practice, a fundamental element of professional development, encompasses a purposeful self-appraisal mechanism that allows individuals to review their learning retrospectively and promote sustained advancement.³ The core justification for embedding journaling in an Economic Management course resides in its capacity to nurture a more profound grasp of intricate economic principles and sharpen analytical competencies,⁴ especially amid expanded tertiary access that favours communal achievement over personal cultivation.⁵

This research probes the application of journaling to stimulate deeper contemplation of course material in a third-year Economic and Management Science university module, while scrutinizing elements underlying students' hesitance to participate in self-reflective exercises via this approach.⁶ In particular, it assesses the determinants shaping students' choices to participate in or abstain from self-reflection tasks, using data from four journaling assignments. A mixed-methods approach was used, entailing analysis of entries from journals submitted after each unit, under a sequential protocol that required prior unit proficiency prior to journaling.

From a qualitative vantage, self-reflection facilitates the amalgamation of novel insights with established knowledge, engendering comprehensive understanding for self-appraisal and issue resolution.⁷ Nonetheless, numerous submissions proved superficial, emphasizing compliance over genuine learning. This suggests motivational impetus for tasks persists, yet is insufficient for profound comprehension. Though esteemed for self-evaluation and knowledge attainment, student propensity fluctuates; deployment absent grading, coupled with rigid sequencing, plausibly intensified disengagement.⁸ Subsequent inquiries should include incentives to gauge their efficacy.

Research of this nature yields substantial value to academia by furnishing empirical evidence for refining reflective methodologies amid declining student involvement, empowering instructors to optimize ungraded evaluations for superior metacognitive benefits. It delivers practical guidance on motivational hurdles in resource-limited milieus such as South African universities of technology, advising curriculum architects to embed adaptable, incentive-compatible journaling that elevates critical reasoning and employability without augmenting cognitive demands. In essence, such inquiry propels pedagogical advancement⁹ across fields, cultivating extensible experiential learning paradigms attuned to worldwide shifts in active pedagogies.¹⁰

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflective journaling has been extensively acknowledged as an effective pedagogical strategy across various educational fields, including economic management, to facilitate students' integration of theoretical concepts with practical applications, thereby promoting a more comprehensive and

² Jon Anderson, "Reflective Journals as a Tool for Auto-Ethnographic Learning: A Case Study of Student Experiences With Individualized Sustainability," *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 36, no. 4 (November 2012): 613–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2012.692157>.

³ Dina Ramadhanti et al., "The Use of Reflective Journal as a Tool for Monitoring of Metacognition Growth in Writing," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 15, no. 11 (June 12, 2020): 162, <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i11.11939>.

⁴ Aliana Shazma Amir Binti Amir and Shafawaty Mohamad Shabri, "Accounting for Non-Accounting Students: Determinants and Academic Performance," *JURNAL AKUNTANSI DAN BISNIS : Jurnal Program Studi Akuntansi* 8, no. 2 (November 28, 2022): 104–13, <https://doi.org/10.31289/jab.v8i2.7885>.

⁵ Fatemeh Haji Seyed Abolghasem, Juliana Othman, and Shanina Sharatol Ahmad Shah, "Enhanced Learning: The Hidden Art Of Reflective Journal Writing Among Malaysian Pre-Registered Student Nurses," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 5, no. 1 (January 30, 2020): 54–79, <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol5iss1pp54-79>.

⁶ Michael L. Arter, Lacey N. Wallace, and Thomas L. Shaffer, "The Use of Reflective Journals to Stimulate Critical Thinking in the Academic Internship," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 27, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 140–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2015.1109132>.

⁷ Arter, Wallace, and Shaffer, "The Use of Reflective Journals to Stimulate Critical Thinking in the Academic Internship."

⁸ Keith Morrison, "Developing Reflective Practice in Higher Degree Students through a Learning Journal," *Studies in Higher Education* 21, no. 3 (January 5, 1996): 317–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079612331381241>.

⁹ Amanda Matheson, Laura Wood, and Scott V Franklin, "Guided and Unguided Student Reflections," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:1710.05259*, 2017.

¹⁰ Wachira Serah et al., "A Qualitative Analysis on the Clinical Experiences of Undergraduate Nursing Students in Kenya," *Saudi Journal of Nursing and Health Care* 3, no. 11 (November 9, 2020): 293–98, <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjnhc.2020.v03i11.003>.

profound comprehension of challenging topics.¹¹ International patterns underscore this utility, as discussed briefly below.

Kenyan undergraduate nursing students employed it to contemplate clinical encounters, discern knowledge deficiencies, and cultivate critical thinking skills; Malaysian pre-registered nursing students leveraged it to augment knowledge acquisition and professional identity formation. In South Korea, medical students in a longitudinal investigation demonstrated elevated self-reflective capacities in their writings compared to undergraduate marketing students on the USA's west coast utilized handwritten journals to heighten engagement and attain advanced Bloom's taxonomy outcomes.¹² However, academic interns in the central USA progressed critical thinking sequentially through Bloom's levels through journals, whereas Israeli undergraduates enhanced metacognitive awareness with semi-structured journaling.¹³

In the European context, Spanish nursing students incorporate affective and self-critical elements during international practicums,¹⁴ alongside Swedish entrepreneurship programs employing diaries to develop judgmental abilities amid uncertainty.¹⁵ Australian curricula contrasted reflective models to advance clinical judgment.¹⁶

These nation-specific methodologies vary according to cultural-educational frameworks; for instance, the USA's individualistic focus prioritizes personal metacognition, Europe's Bologna process emphasizes structured integration, and Australia's vocational emphasis favours comparative model analysis; adapting reflection to regional priorities such as examination-driven versus experiential paradigms. A validated, generic reflective framework,¹⁷ which differentiates transient academic reflections from enduring professional or personal growth while nurturing metacognition¹⁸ and lifelong learning,¹⁹ provides a unifying structure for these global inquiries into self-reflective journaling, extending seminal paradigms like Kolb's²⁰ experiential learning cycle.²¹ This approach advances metacognitive proficiency, empowering learners to oversee and assess their cognitive operations, thus bolstering self-directed learning capabilities. Rooted in seminal theories, including Dewey's view of reflective thought as a mechanism for deriving judgments from inquiries into inquiries²² and Kolb's cycle encompassing concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation; the technique impels students toward substantive self-assessment, transcending rote

¹¹ Carrie J. Boden et al., "Five Perspectives on Reflective Journaling," *Adult Learning* 17, no. 1–4 (January 1, 2006): 11–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950601700105>.

¹² Ori Berezan, Anjala S. Krishen, and Sara Garcera, "Back to the Basics: Handwritten Journaling, Student Engagement, and Bloom's Learning Outcomes," *Journal of Marketing Education* 45, no. 1 (April 8, 2023): 5–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02734753221075557>.

¹³ Dorit Alt and Nirit Raichel, "Reflective Journaling and Metacognitive Awareness: Insights from a Longitudinal Study in Higher Education," *Reflective Practice* 21, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 145–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2020.1716708>.

¹⁴ María Teresa Murillo-Llorente et al., "Using the Reflective Journal to Improve Practical Skills Integrating Affective and Self-Critical Aspects in Impoverished International Environments. A Pilot Test," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 16 (August 23, 2021): 8876, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168876>.

¹⁵ Gustav Hägg, "The Entrepreneurial Diary – a Reflective Learning Activity to Enhance the Judgmental Abilities of Student Entrepreneurs," *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* 27, no. 5 (July 23, 2021): 1142–65, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-07-2020-0496>.

¹⁶ Shannon Dhollande, Carmen Barnard, and Jayde Shephard, "Comparing Reflective Models within Nursing Education: Are They Fit for Purpose?," *Teaching and Learning in Nursing* 20, no. 4 (October 2025): e1290–95, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2025.05.017>.

¹⁷ Dorit Alt, Nirit Raichel, and Lior Naamati-Schneider, "Higher Education Students' Reflective Journal Writing and Lifelong Learning Skills: Insights From an Exploratory Sequential Study," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (January 7, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.707168>.

¹⁸ Anselmus Sudirman et al., "Reinforcing Reflective Practice through Reflective Writing in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no. 5 (May 30, 2024): 454–74, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.5.24>.

¹⁹ Anselmus Sudirman, Adria Vitalya Gemilang, and Thadius Marhendira Adi Kristanto, "Harnessing the Power of Reflective Journal Writing in Global Contexts: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 12 (December 30, 2021): 174–94, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.12.11>.

²⁰ David A. Kolb and Linda H. Lewis, "Facilitating Experiential Learning: Observations and Reflections," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 1986, no. 30 (June 18, 1986): 99–107, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.36719863012>.

²¹ Léonie Sugarman, "Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning: Touchstone for Trainers, Students, Counselors, and Clients," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 64, no. 4 (December 23, 1985): 264–68, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1985.tb01097.x>.

²² Eugene G. Bugg and John Dewey, "How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process," *The American Journal of Psychology* 46, no. 3 (July 1934): 528, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1415632>.

understanding to achieve deeper subject immersion, as evidenced in internships where journaling facilitated ascent through Bloom's taxonomy, and converting lived experiences into valuable educational insights.²³

Nevertheless, despite these merits, reflective journaling has encountered substantial critiques concerning its deployment and effectiveness. Detractors note that absent grading or motivational incentives, engagement often wanes precipitously, with students favouring evaluated assignments over unassessed reflection; furthermore, inadequately designed prompts may engender undue cognitive burden or elicit perfunctory, task-completion-focused responses instead of profound learning.

Overall, subdued participation²⁴ in journaling could be attributable to demotivation²⁵ arising from obligatory prompts and sequential mandates.²⁶ Anticipated contributions encompass pedagogical tactics to amplify involvement and meaningful reflection in Economic and Management Sciences to the wider educational spheres, pinpointing obstacles which could elevate learning outcomes.²⁷ Anchored in motivational systems theory that outlines drivers, orientations, and maintainers of learning conduct, the investigation advocated optional journaling.

METHODOLOGY

During the module offered at a university of Technology in South Africa, one of the unassessed online learning procedures required students to provide a reflective journal at the end of each learning unit. A total of 7 learning units were conducted during the semester, each requiring a reflective journal. The journals were followed by a questionnaire on student experiences regarding the incorporation of reflective journals as a learning method. Interestingly, research around reflective thinking spans back to Dewey in the 1930s, positing reflective thinking as a process aimed at developing judgments or conclusions about one's understanding, perceptions, perspectives, and beliefs formed from experiences of the world by examining them carefully against existing facts and knowledge. More recent research has widely recognized reflective journals across diverse educational disciplines, including nursing, medicine, and business faculty, for their efficacy in enhancing experiential learning, enabling students to gain a more profound comprehension of experiences, critically engage with knowledge acquisition processes, foster metacognition, and develop lifelong learning skills. A model for reflective practice based on the cycle of experiential learning developed by Kolb uses an experiential learning cycle involving four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation; Kolb advocated this structured cycle to facilitate iterative learning from experience, promoting deeper cognitive processing over passive absorption. These four stages were implemented during the module to enhance the learning process, with evaluation of feedback to ascertain the effectiveness of reflective journals as a pedagogical tool to foster deeper engagement and critical thinking within the economic management curriculum.

To fully understand the dynamics of student engagement with journaling, a mixed-methods approach was used, integrating quantitative and qualitative data analysis.²⁸ Draissi opted for this mixed-methods design combining reflective journals, surveys, and interviews to robustly examine doctoral students' engagement in a learning sciences course, providing nuanced insights into perceptions and behaviours that single methods might overlook. In this study, no interviews were held, with the survey providing room for preferred additional comments. The analysis of journal activity responses provided

²³ Ikin Syamsudin Adeani, R. Bunga Febriani, and Syafryadin Syafryadin, "Using Gibbs Reflective Cycle In Making Reflections Of Literary Analysis," *Indonesian EFL Journal* 6, no. 2 (August 11, 2020): 139, <https://doi.org/10.25134/iefllj.v6i2.3382>.

²⁴ Lesley Noel Seccia, "Developing a Global Engineer: Study Abroad Experiences of Engineering Majors in One University System" (University of California, 2018).

²⁵ Hendrik Sebastiaan Jacobs, "A Strategy to Optimise the Contribution of Work Integrated Learning towards the Employability of Students of the Central University of Technology, Free State" (Central University of Technology, 2016).

²⁶ Seccia, "Developing a Global Engineer: Study Abroad Experiences of Engineering Majors in One University System."

²⁷ Gummaluri Venkata Surya Subrahmanya Sharma et al., "Bridging the Industry–Academia Gap: An Experiential Learning for Engineering Students," *Journal of Formative Design in Learning* 7, no. 2 (December 6, 2023): 139–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41686-023-00086-4>.

²⁸ Zineb Draissi, Zhang BaoHui, and Qi ZhanYong, "Reflective Journals: Enhancing Doctoral Students' Engagement," *Reflective Practice* 22, no. 3 (May 4, 2021): 381–400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2021.1893166>.

qualitative insights into the depth and nature of student reflection, while the quantitative assessment of response rates revealed patterns of engagement over time.

Qualitative data was collected from Blackboard Ultra, where students were encouraged to complete a reflective journal at the end of each study unit. Reflective journals had no desired format or rules embedded, but were open-ended areas where students could write almost anything related to their experiences and observations for each study unit. For this study, the feedback from the journals for each of the 7 units was divided into four categories to distinguish levels of student effort: ‘Own work’, ‘One-liners’, ‘AI-responses’, and ‘not attempted’. This categorization approach, assessing reflection quality from superficial to substantive, aligns with methodologies by scholars like Park et al., who longitudinally scored students' journals for self-reflective depth to track growth, and Boden et al., who outlined multiple perspectives on journaling to differentiate engagement levels.

In terms of the questionnaire, the quantitative data were gathered online, anonymously, with four response options per question across three sections aimed at capturing students' perceptions of the utility and challenges associated with integrating reflective journals into their learning process. Although most of the questions were based on the Likert scale, there was room for open-ended questions to address Draissi's idea that interviews are valuable for effective data integration. Returning the focus to Blackboard Ultra, it must be mentioned that although no particular format for journaling was requested, a specific sequencing was enforced, requiring students to navigate through multiple prompts before accessing the journal entry. These prompts included a summary of the chapter and certain topic-related videos to prepare and guide the student into the course content before their reflection activity. Only after completing the reflective journal were students granted access to study notes and answers to chapter questions as intrinsic motivation.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings will be discussed in two sections, starting with journaling, followed by feedback from the questionnaires.

Journaling: From the data gathered related to the response rate, it was noticeable that many of the students did not participate in the reflective journaling task, with a significantly low number of journals that were submitted, with a noticeable decline in participation observed as the semester progressed.

Table 1: Response rate per journal

	(n = 127)	
Journal 1	44	35%
Journal 2	43	34%
Journal 3	35	28%
Journal 4	39	31%
Journal 5	26	20%
Journal 6	23	18%
Journal 7	20	16%

Source: Own source

From a module with 127 registered students, the highest response rate for any journal was 35%, which was the first study unit, closing off with a mere 16% by the final unit, highlighting a pervasive disengagement.

Although the researcher felt hard done by the small number of responses, it was still worthwhile investigating the quality of work from the students who had attempted the journal as part of their learning. Throughout the semester, the total number of submissions indicated a steady decline overall - including own work, one-liners, and AI responses. The graph below indicates the percentage breakdown of how the response type has changed, if any.

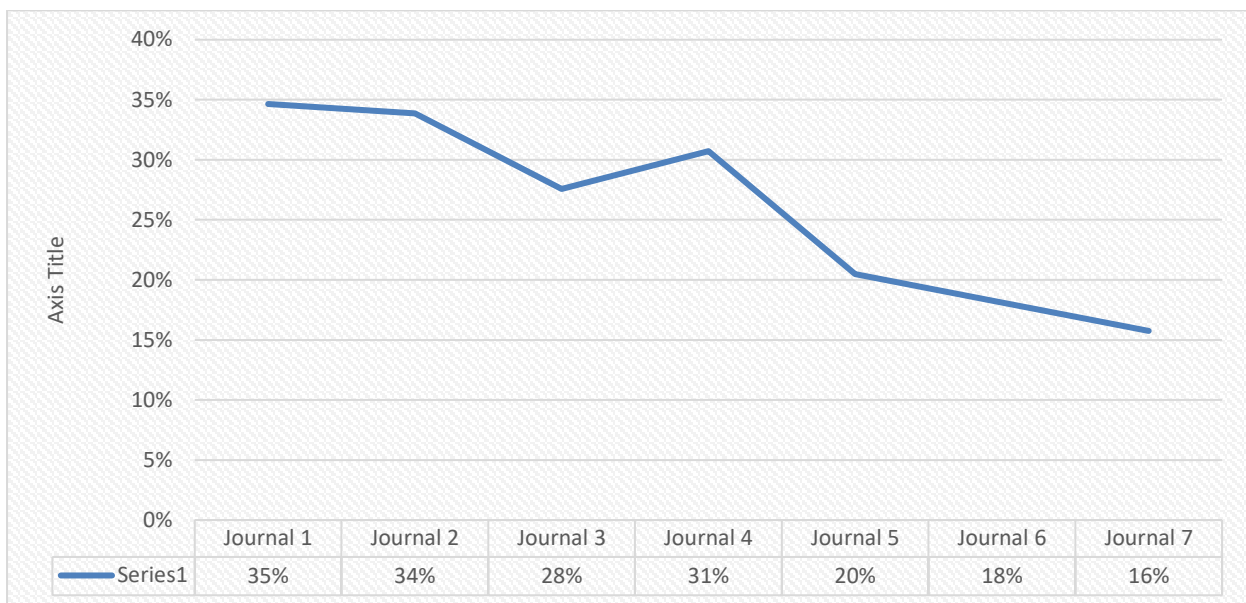


Figure 1: Journal responses summary

This graph showed the most fluctuation, and maybe the best indication of how students have approached the journals. Whether it be time constraints or laziness, one-liners soared from journal 5 onwards, where it was the least for journal 1. On the other hand, “Own work” showed the steepest decline, with a mere two students attempting it in journals 6 and 7, with only one student completing journal 6, which was noted as the same individual completing all journals.

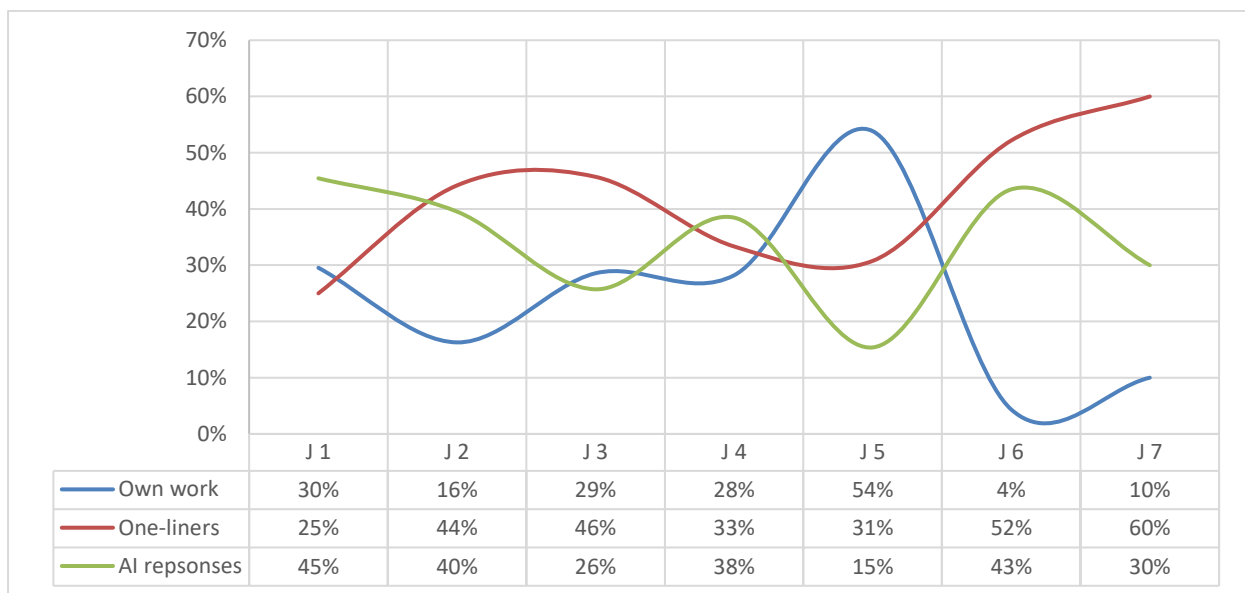


Figure 2: Response type breakdown in percentage per journal

The initial analysis of journal submissions revealed a significant discrepancy in the quality and depth of reflection, with a noticeable trend towards perfunctory or AI-generated responses rather than genuine introspective engagement, with the cumbersome truth that 80% or more of the entire class did not even attempt the last 3 journals. It was noted that only one increase on graph x is visible, which was before their first assessment.

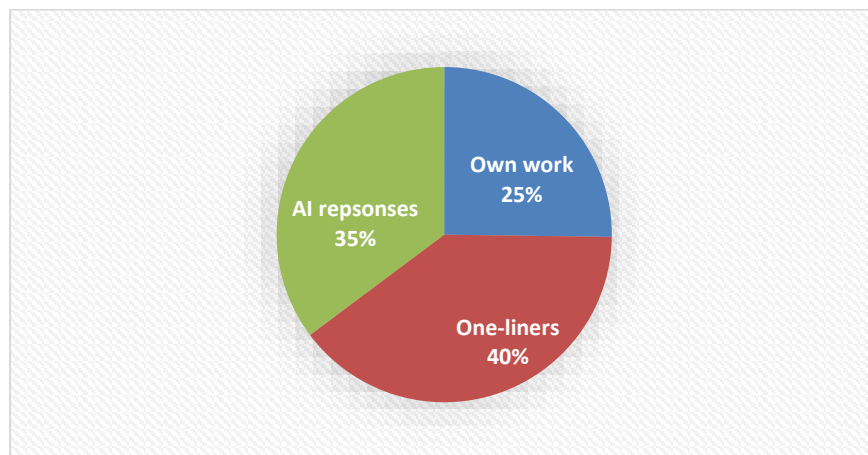


Figure 3: Journal response type aggregate average

Questionnaires

The questionnaire data provided additional context by illuminating student perceptions of perceived value and challenges associated with reflective journaling, particularly in the absence of direct academic incentives. A total of 81 of the 127 registered students completed the questionnaire, which was surprising compared to the number of students who actively engaged in the journaling task, indicating a willingness to share feedback even if they did not participate in the activity.

Only 5% of the students indicated that they were not aware of the self-reflective journals that had to be completed, of which 4% indicated that the lecturer did not inform them as such. This suggests that awareness was not the primary barrier to participation; instead, other factors, such as perceived relevance or integration into graded coursework, likely influenced engagement.

Of the respondents, 17% suggested that they have not attempted at least one journal, which guided them to five dedicated questions for non-completers. The main reason students indicated a hindrance to attempting the journals was stated as a lack of time due to other academic commitments, supported by Draissi as significantly influencing student engagement.

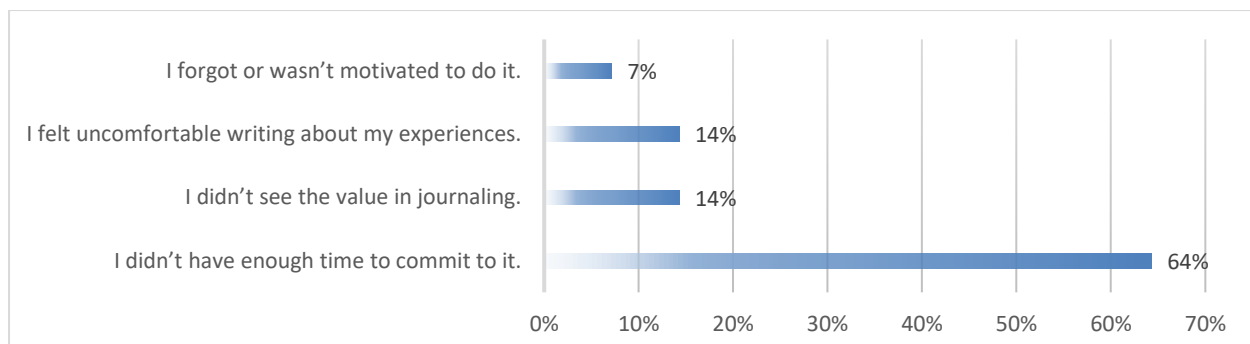


Figure 4: Main reasons not to engage

Interestingly, 50% of non-attempters indicated that they felt uncomfortable sharing their reflections in a public or semi-public forum, as well as experiencing difficulty putting their thought into words; 21% indicated uncertainty about where to start, and 14% each cited privacy concerns and not being interested at all.

Enquiring about the possible external factors, 57% suggested a lack of time, 29% forgot about the activity, and the remainder of the students were unsure about the expectations from the journals, hence decided not to do it.

Students were asked if an alternative self-reflection method could be introduced to engage them in future. Responses did not really give clarity, as students preferred group discussion with the other 50% suggesting they are unsure whether anything will really motivate them. When asked what changes could be made to engage students in general to participate in journaling, 50% suggested more guidance is needed, 29% suggested a reduction in frequency, 14% indicated different formats, and the remaining students opted for more engaging and relevant prompts in the process.

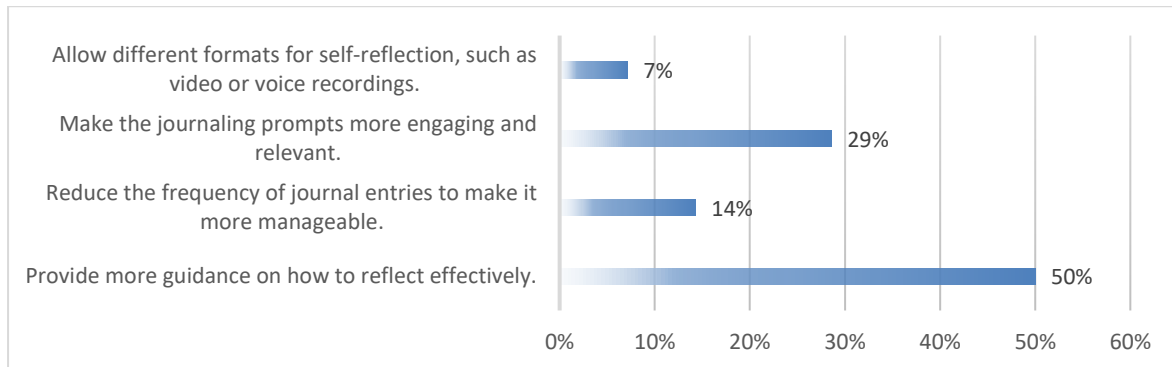


Figure 5: Changes to be made to encourage more participation

When returning to the feedback from the 67 students who have attempted the journals, it was clear that curiosity and the need for personal growth guided them to journal.

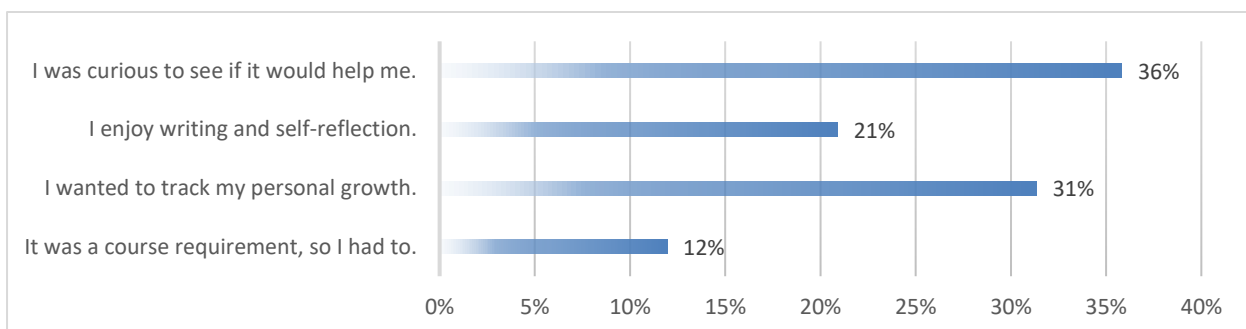


Figure 6: Motivation to participate

On a positive note, it seemed nearly half of the students who had attempted journaling felt more connected to their learning and personal development, with 41% attributing journaling to enhancing their processing of experiences and thought patterns. Only 10% indicated that journaling had no difference in their thoughts and experiences. Regarding journaling as a beneficial self-reflection tool, 96% suggested that it proved to provide insight, although 39% struggled to be consistent throughout the process.

Challenges experienced were argued that 31% suggested they did not really know what and how to write, 27% found the consistency challenging, 10% found it difficult to be honest with themselves, and the rest felt no real challenges.

The last question explored the perceived benefits of integrating journaling towards personal and academic growth, with 82% suggesting that it has helped them significantly. Other responses indicated they felt more in control of their thoughts, had no impact and improved self-awareness scored 7%, 6% and 4%, respectively.

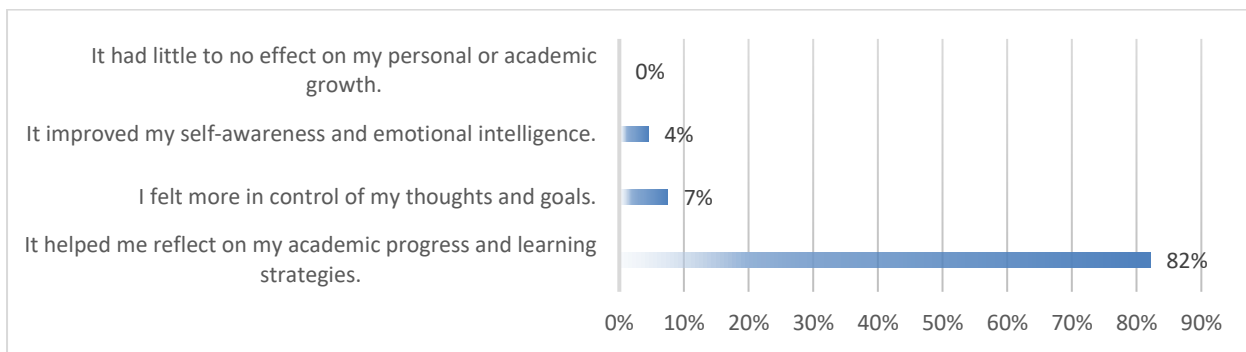


Figure 7: Influence on personal or academic growth

These are the findings from both the journal feedback and the questionnaires, which will be discussed briefly in the following section. This discussion will synthesize these empirical observations with existing literature on reflective practices and pedagogical strategies to delineate the implications for designing effective learning interventions.

DISCUSSION

Following the same pattern in moving from journaling to the questionnaire, the observed decline in journaling engagement prompts a critical evaluation of factors that may impede students' willingness to participate, as mentioned by Anderson, in reflective activities. With a steady decline from the first to the last journal, apart from *journal 4* before the first main assessment, it was evident that students did not find value in completing the journals. The slight increase in *journal 4* was noted as a week before the main assessment, suggesting that the students thought that writing the journals could benefit them. Having this feedback, it seems that if there is little benefit in completing the journals, students would probably not feel the urge to complete them.

Apart from the steady decline, another worrying factor might be the mere quantity of students who opted against completing the journals. From the onset, 65% of students did not attempt the journals, increasing to 84% not attempting the last journal. This aligns with established theories of motivation from Arter in educational settings, where perceived utility and direct relevance to academic success often drive student engagement. The researcher opts to argue that there was no academic benefit to the students in addition to personal gain in their understanding, and with a possible academic reward, the situation could have been different.

In terms of the types of responses, although the numbers themselves do not share great detail, the ratio between 'own work', 'one-liners' and 'AI responses' tells a different tale. On average, the responses for each category on their 'own work', 'one-liners' and 'AI responses' totaled 25%, 40% and 35%, respectively, indicating that one-liners were the favored response option for students. It is an important fact to consider that these 'one-liners' included one-word responses as well, suggesting that a mere tick-box activity for students to gain access to the notes could be a possibility. 'AI responses' started with a high frequency, decreased as the semester went on, but showed a slight resurgence towards the end, possibly as students sought efficient ways to fulfill requirements without genuine engagement, but were still moderate towards 60%, for 'one-liners' in the last journal. This observation suggests that students prioritize minimal effort completion, especially as academic pressures most probably mounted with increased assessments, rather than engaging in deep, meaningful reflection, which can be seen with a range from 4% to 10% of individual work for journals 6 and 7. This aligns with findings that students may opt for less effortful tasks or superficial engagement, particularly when perceived benefits for deeper cognitive processes are unclear or lacking.²⁹ Data from the questionnaire

²⁹ Nitza Geri, Amir Winer, and Beni Zaks, "A Learning Analytics Approach for Evaluating the Impact of Interactivity in Online Video Lectures on the Attention Span of Students," *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Skills and Lifelong Learning* 13 (2017): 215–28, <https://doi.org/10.28945/3875>.

further illuminated the underlying reasons for the observed disengagement and the perceived purpose of journalizing as a reflective practice, indicating that students often weigh the effort done against expected academic advantage, as students mentioned procrastination, little interest, or forgetting about it or not being motivated to complete it. In terms of numbers, 127 students were registered for the course, with an average submission of 33 students per journal, indicating that only a quarter of the class engaged in journaling, indicating a lack of interest expressed. With 67 (83%) students providing feedback, this suggests that almost half of the students who completed the questionnaire did not actively participate in the journaling activity.

This discrepancy highlights a critical challenge in pedagogical design: motivating widespread participation in activities perceived as auxiliary to core academic requirements mentioned by Smyth, especially when the benefits are not immediately apparent or directly linked to grades.³⁰

Having time constraints, especially towards the end of the semester, definitely has merit as the majority of assessments do take place during that period, but the researcher does find it interesting that 85% of respondents (not attempting) either did not see the value in journaling, did not feel motivated to do it, or stated they felt uncomfortable writing about their experience. The researchers find the argument uncomfortable and disturbing, as these students are at the third-year level, soon becoming teachers, and still not comfortable putting thought into words. It certainly does not paint a pretty picture for the education sector. This observation underscores a fundamental pedagogical challenge: fostering self-reflection and critical thinking skills in an environment where students may prioritize tangible academic rewards over deeper personal and professional development, as discussed by Haberlin in prior research.³¹

Figure 8 displays some of the perceptions the entire cohort held regarding journaling. Although around 53% of students indicated journals were not introduced to keep them busy, it was somehow disturbing that 32% felt that it was the case. However, focusing on the impact journals had, on both occasions, more than 80% of the students felt positive that journaling could be recommended as self-reflective as well as a viable method of learning.

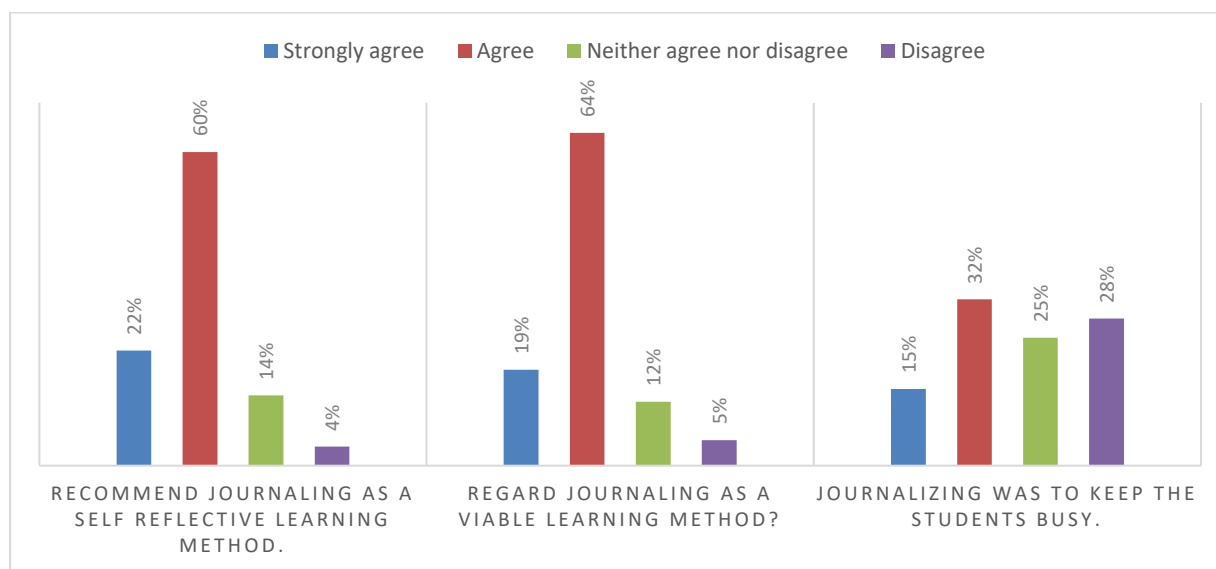


Figure 8 – Perceptions about journaling

³⁰ Joshua M Smyth et al., “Online Positive Affect Journaling in the Improvement of Mental Distress and Well-Being in General Medical Patients With Elevated Anxiety Symptoms: A Preliminary Randomized Controlled Trial,” *JMIR Mental Health* 5, no. 4 (December 10, 2018): e11290, <https://doi.org/10.2196/11290>.

³¹ Steven Haberlin, “Something Always Works: A Self-Study of Strengths-Based Coaching in Supervision,” *Journal of Educational Supervision* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.2.1.3>.

Feedback from the attempters, students did benefit from the journaling process. Many students mentioned how it helped them think and interpret the content. Some students even suggested it assisted with their individual experiences as well, focusing some of their emotions towards the module. From this group of students, time constraints and uncertainty on what to write did pose challenges as well, although the motivation to drive through the challenge was expressed in the reflection time they had on academic progress and learning strategies, supported by a study by Sudirman, stating that students find it valuable to consolidate understanding and promote a deeper engagement with the economic management content.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarizing the feedback from both the journals and questionnaires, the researcher identified a clear disparity between the perceived value of journaling among engaged students and the widespread disengagement observed across the larger cohort. It seems that the absence of academic benefits poses a great obstacle in student motivation to embrace the use of self-reflective journals. The researcher does support the notion that action should result in reaction and will probably follow up on this study, implementing it as part of a measured assessment where students could benefit from completing journals, comparing the frequency of submissions and the quality of reflections. Consequently, without clear academic weighting or direct integration into summative assessments, the intrinsic motivation for sustained reflection through journaling appears to wane among a sizable portion of the student cohort. This trend aligns with findings from other studies that indicate that sustained self-reflection often requires intrinsic motivation or perceived direct academic utility, which may decrease without explicit integration into the assessment.³²

CONCLUSION

Self-reflective journaling is a valuable learning method, but without intrinsic motivation, students will not need to follow through on time spent without academic benefit. Although the purpose of drafting these journals was noble, the researcher realizes that without academic benefit, the activity might be fruitless, as well as having a negative impact on how students regard journaling. In conclusion, the study highlights the complexities inherent in leveraging journaling as a tool for fostering reflective learning in a higher education setting. Addressing these challenges and adopting evidence-based strategies, educators can harness the full potential of journaling to cultivate critical thinking, self-awareness, and lifelong learning skills among students.

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³² Jaypee M. Limueco and Maricar S. Prudente, "Improving Students' Reflections in Physics Class Using Video-Based Journals," in *Proceedings of the 2020 11th International Conference on E-Education, E-Business, E-Management, and E-Learning* (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2020), 218–22, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3377571.3377591>.

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