

Digital Journaling as A Mirror of Learning: Emotional and Cognitive Reflections from Language Learners

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Abstract

Reflective activities is important to measure students' engagement and understanding of the learning process (Zatalini & Assassi, 2025). In the digital age, journaling has become a valuable tool that allows students to express their thoughts, emotions and evaluation of classroom experiences (Bingöl, 2025). Digital journaling offers learners an accessible platform to articulate emotions, perceptions, and evaluations of their learning journey (Phetsut & Waemusa, 2022). Despite its potential, the use of digital journaling to capture students' post-class reflections remains unexplored (Yaacob et al., 2020). digital formats will allow to give an immediate expression, integration of multimedia and greater flexibility, which can increase students' motivation and authenticity in reflection (Yunus et al., 2023). This study aimed to investigate students' perspectives on the teaching and learning process through digital journaling and to identify emotional and reflective themes from their entries. Using qualitative descriptive design with 20 students enrolled in the Pusat Bahasa course submitted weekly digital journal reflection over 4 weeks. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes namely emotional responses, instructional perceptions, self-reflection on learning and suggestions for improvement (Riyanti, 2021). The findings showed that students frequently experienced positive emotions, enjoyed interactive and visual activities and become more aware of their learning progress. Many feedback also included ideas to enhance engagement such as incorporating games and small group activities. Digital journaling is a powerful reflective tool that fosters student's introspection, metacognitive growth and contributes to more adaptive, learner-centered teaching practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reflective activities are increasingly recognized as important aspect to increase students' engagement, self-awareness and also metacognitive growth in learning process (Mueller & Pentón Herrera, 2025). Reflection may help students make sense of classroom experiences, identify their own challenges and also monitor their progress especially in language learning setting (Hwang & Loewen, 2025). Differ with traditional reflection which has been facilitated by classroom discussion or by handwritten journals, digital journaling provides a new avenues for students to express and process the students' learning experiences specifically in learning English at Pusat Bahasa Program (Widiastari & Fithriani, 2024).

Digital journaling offers learners an accessible platform to articulate emotions, perceptions, and evaluations of their learning journey (Tuan, 2010). Unlike conventional methods, digital formats will allow to give an immediate expression, integration of multimedia and greater flexibility, which can increase students' motivation and authenticity in reflection (Chen, 2023). Despite its potential, research on digital journaling as a structured reflective practice in language learning contexts remains limited, particularly in Indonesia (Wulandari & Irfiani, 2023).

A number of study suggests that digital journaling provides unique benefits for both learners and educators. From the learner perspective digital journaling may creates a private yet flexible space to express emotions and explore cognitive processes without fear of judgment (Dorji & Sakulwongs, 2024). From the teacher or lecturer perspective, it provides feedback, student engagement & motivation record (Soleimani & Aghazadeh, 2024). Moreover, studies in higher education contexts have found that digital journals could increase students' emotional intelligence, improve critical thinking and encourage students to connect between the theory they leant with the real world setting (Adijaya et al., 2023). Despite these promising findings, the use of digital journaling specifically within English language learning at higher education particularly at ITEKES Bali remains underexplored.

This study was conducted at Institute of technology and Health Bali (ITEKES Bali), in Pusat Bahasa Program to explore how language learners engage in digital journaling after classroom sessions. This study specifically investigated students' emotional responses, cognitive reflections on instruction and also gather the students' suggestions for improving classroom practices. By analyzing digital journal this study contributes to the growing body of literature on reflective learning while offering insights for more student-centered teaching approaches.

2. METHOD

Given the growing importance of reflective practices in higher education and the limited study related to exploration of digital journaling in language learning contexts, this study sought to investigate how students use digital journals as a medium for post-class reflection. The research focused on capturing both emotional responses and cognitive evaluations, offering insights into learners' engagement with classroom activities, their perceptions of instruction, and their own learning progress. By analyzing weekly digital journals from students enrolled in the Pusat Bahasa program, this study aimed to generate themes that illustrate the potential of digital journaling as a reflective tool. To achieve this, a qualitative descriptive design was employed, supported by thematic analysis of students' reflections. The following section describes the methodological approach in detail, including participants, instruments, data collection, and procedures of analysis.

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to capture students' reflections on their learning experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes within the students' digital journals.

Participants

A total of 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the Pusat Bahasa beginner-level English course participated in this study. All participants voluntarily submitted weekly digital journal reflections over four consecutive weeks.

Instruments & Data Collection

The primary instrument was a digital journaling template provided through an online platform. Students responded to prompts that encouraged them to describe their emotions, perceptions of teaching methods, difficulties encountered, and suggestions for improvement. Data collection generated both numerical ratings (Likert scale responses)

and open-ended reflections, allowing for a combination of descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation

Data Analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with data, (2) coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The data were organized into four overarching themes: emotional responses, instructional perceptions, self-reflection on learning, and suggestions for improvement.

3. RESULT

Emotional Responses

Students consistently reported positive emotions, including excitement, motivation, and enjoyment of classroom activities. The Likert scale results showed that most students rated their emotional engagement at 4 ("agree") or 5 ("strongly agree"), reflecting a generally positive affective climate. Journal entries revealed that interactive and visual activities were particularly appreciated, helping reduce anxiety and increasing classroom confidence. In addition to numerical ratings, the qualitative reflections provided richer insights. Students frequently mentioned that interactive activities, such as group discussions, games, and digital quizzes, made learning feel more dynamic and enjoyable.

Instructional Perceptions

Students expressed favorable views of teaching strategies, noting that explanations, multimedia use, and classroom discussions supported their understanding. However, some entries acknowledged moments of confusion or difficulty, which were often balanced by teacher support and peer collaboration. Students generally valued the teaching strategies used in the classroom because they found that clear explanations, the integration of multimedia, and active classroom discussions supported their comprehension of the material. Explanations provided a structured pathway for understanding complex concepts, while multimedia elements such as videos, slides, or digital tools helped them visualize abstract ideas and maintain engagement. Classroom discussions, in turn, encouraged interaction, allowing students to test their understanding, exchange perspectives, and learn collaboratively.

Self-Reflection on Learning

Many students reported becoming more aware of their own progress and challenges through digital journaling. They frequently highlighted areas where they felt confident, such as vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, and speaking in pairs or small groups. These strengths gave them a sense of achievement and motivated them to participate more actively. At the same time, students openly acknowledged weaknesses, particularly in grammar accuracy, spontaneous communication, and maintaining fluency during longer conversations. By identifying both their strong points and their struggles, students demonstrated the ability to critically monitor their learning journey.

Suggestions for Improvement

Students provided constructive and practical suggestions for enhancing the learning experience. Among the most frequently mentioned were the integration of games to make lessons more enjoyable, small group activities to encourage peer interaction and reduce speaking anxiety, and interactive media such as videos, online quizzes, and digital flashcards to diversify learning modes. Some students also suggested more real-life simulations, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks that reflect authentic professional

contexts, particularly those related to healthcare communication. These ideas reflect students' growing awareness of what supports their learning and their preference for activities that are both meaningful and engaging.

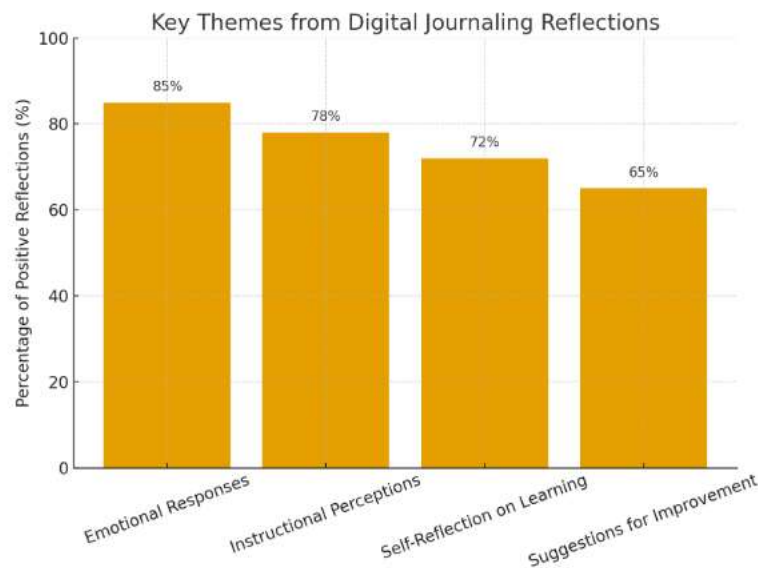


Figure 1. *Percentage of Positive Reflection*

The figure titled “Key Themes from Digital Journaling Reflections” illustrates the distribution of positive reflections across four major themes. Emotional responses recorded the highest percentage (85%), showing that students strongly associated journaling with positive feelings such as motivation, confidence, and enjoyment. Instructional perceptions followed at 78%, highlighting that teaching strategies, multimedia use, and class discussions were well received by most learners. Self-reflection on learning accounted for 72%, indicating that many students used journaling to track their strengths and weaknesses, particularly in vocabulary and communication skills. Finally, suggestions for improvement, while still high at 65%, reflect students' constructive engagement by recommending more interactive and collaborative learning activities. Overall, the figure demonstrates that digital journaling effectively supported not only emotional engagement but also critical awareness of learning processes and instructional practices.

ITEKES Bali helps prepare its students to thrive in dynamic healthcare environments. Encouraging students to view English language mastery as an ongoing process ensures that they remain confident, competent, and responsive to the evolving needs of international healthcare practice throughout their careers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore students' reflections on the teaching and learning process through the use of digital journaling in a beginner-level English course. The findings demonstrated that journaling provided a meaningful space for learners to articulate both their emotional experiences and cognitive evaluations of classroom activities. Four key themes emerged: emotional responses, instructional perceptions, self-reflection on learning, and suggestions for improvement. Collectively, these themes reveal that digital

journaling fosters positive emotions, supports metacognitive growth, and empowers learners to actively shape their educational experiences.

The results highlighted that students consistently reported positive emotions such as enjoyment, motivation, and confidence, particularly in response to interactive and visual activities. Journals also reflected favorable perceptions of instructional strategies, while simultaneously identifying occasional areas of confusion that could inform teachers' adjustments. Furthermore, students engaged in self-reflection on learning progress, becoming more aware of both achievements and challenges. Importantly, their suggestions for improvement including calls for games, group activities, and interactive media demonstrated a strong desire for participatory, learner-centered approaches.

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