

Metacognitive Strategies and Reflective Practices in EFL Writing: Insights from Arab Bedouin Learners in Jordan's Desert Context

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to investigate the impact of metacognitive and reflective thinking skills as a modern teaching method on the dimensions of the basic writing among sixth-graders at a Bedouin school in Jordan, and to measure whether using the Kember's levels (2008) of reflection which are habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection can improve students' writing performance. A quasi-experimental research design was employed, and the study consisted of 70 female sixth-grade students from a Bedouin school in Jordan that are divided into two comparable groups (according to their classrooms) as purposive sampling for the academic year 2025. A pretest and a posttest with Analytical Marking Scale and writing rubrics will be conducted on both groups to provide the quantitative data to show the significance difference between the experimental group and the control group in the study. The study indicated that there is a significant difference in the performance of the students' writing between the experimental and control groups at $P < 0.000$. The results indicate that students in the experimental group, who received reflective thinking treatment, were able to write a better draft than those in the control group, who followed a regular teaching plan without the benefit of reflective thinking. This means that reflective thinking is an effective tool for enhancing writing skills. The research highlights the incorporation of reflective thinking models as a means of overcoming teaching challenges in rural schools.

Keywords: Writing Skill; Reflective Thinking; Bedouin; Jordan

INTRODUCTION

English has become the common language that people use globally. It is necessary not only for furthering one's education or career but also for talking with other people. Due to the fact that English is very important in Jordan, it is used as a means of instruction in major university programs, for instance, engineering, business, and medicine. The Ministry of Education in Jordan realizes the importance of English language, so students start learning its basic rules and communicative skills at an early stage from the primary level across the basic education stage. However, students especially those from desert Bedouin areas face difficulties in developing sufficient writing skills which is a basic skill

necessary for both academic success and lifelong learning (Malkawi et al., 2023; Khasawneh, 2022).

In Bedouin desert communities in Jordan, socioeconomic limitations, inadequate resources, and traditional instructional practices aggravate these difficulties. Families usually depend on agriculture and face financial crisis, hindering students' access to supplementary learning opportunities and practice of English outside the classroom. Classroom teaching itself is restricted: English is often allocated a single 45-minute lesson per day, during which Arabic is frequently used. Due to the lack of real interaction students have very few chances to practice and get used to the English writing structures. As a result, the students are unable to create sentences, maintain the flow of their text and use vocabulary appropriately, and their general written expression is weak (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019; Mashoor & Abdullah, 2020; Salem Almahasneh & Abdul-Humid, 2019).

Different from language and grammar issues, the lack of metacognitive and reflective abilities in Jordanian students has also been emphasized by research. Students are usually engaged in shallow memorization and simple repetition of the language that they have learnt, instead of a deep and meaningful engagement with the content. For example, Al-Jarrah et al. (2018) observed that the students in Irbid were using brainstorming skills inefficiently which consequently prevented them from generating and organizing ideas. This is evidence that the problem is not just about language and vocabulary but actually it involves complex cognitive processes that are the basis of effective writing.

Despite the fact that the government has introduced curriculum reforms that are still ongoing, a considerable number of students from the Bedouin desert communities in Jordan are still not capable of meeting the expected standards in English writing. According to the recent data from the Unified Admission Coordination Unit (2024), in some of these communities, no student had succeeded in the national secondary exams in 2023 or 2024, thus they were not eligible for higher education. This scary emergence of the situation pinpoints huge systemic problems in the methodology of teaching and learning of English. Particularly writing continues to be a major problem. Past research consistently indicate that Jordanian EFL learners encounter difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and elaboration of well-structured paragraphs (Rababah et al., 2018; Alsariera & Alsaraireh, 2024; Almahasneh & Abdul-Hamid, 2021).

Traditional teaching methods that involve the teacher doing most of the talking, students mainly rote learning, and individual learning needs hardly getting any attention have failed to solve these old problems of education. The problem is worse in Bedouin desert schools. Some schools have such a learning atmosphere that students find it difficult to acquire and develop strong writing skills. Many of these schools are plagued with problems like overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated educational materials, and the lack of enough teachers' refresher training sessions (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). Considering such obstacles, it becomes obvious that the demand for radical student-centered approaches which in fact can raise students' language skills and help them become autonomous learners is very high.

Reflective thinking has been instrumental in a number of ways. From a teaching point of view, it is brought in as a contemporary educational method that engages the students' participation in the class. Students become aware of their strong points and weak points with the help of it, enabling them to address issues such as grammatical errors and weak arguments. Reflective thinking also encourages students to think critically about

their writing process, allowing them to identify both strengths and areas for improvement. This, in turn, can address persistent writing difficulties in Jordanian EFL classrooms, particularly in desert Bedouin areas. Theoretically, reflective thinking can contribute to the expanding literature on metacognitive skills and reflective practices by applying established frameworks such as Kember's (2008) Four-Category Scheme to a new context. On the one hand, the results may guide the Ministry of Education, particularly the teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers, in understanding the role of reflective thinking as a possible way of closing the rural urban Bedouin divide and raising students to become more independent, innovative, and self-assured writers.

Reflective thinking provides an advantageous route to work through these difficulties. Reflective thinking, which is based on the philosophical traditions of Dewey (1938) and Schön (1983), is a process by which one actively considers one's experiences in order to obtain understanding, increase self-awareness, and be led by the insight gained to future action. When applied to writing instruction, reflective thinking enables learners to critically analyze their thoughts, evaluate their progress, and express ideas with greater clarity and depth. Reflective practices—such as journaling, peer feedback, and mind mapping that can enhance students' ability to organize ideas, make meaningful connections, and identify personal strengths and weaknesses in writing (Ahmed, 2019; Cummings, 2019).

In Jordan, reflective practices have not been systematically incorporated into writing instruction, especially in the Bedouin desert schools. Research has shown that educators mostly prefer to use conventional methods, which emphasize correctness, grammar, and rote learning, rather than creativity and the development of learners' metacognitive skills (Alsariera & Alsaraireh, 2024; Shedefat, 2017). Consequently, students rarely engage in reflective activities that could help them build self-awareness, creativity, and resilience as writers. Given the unique challenges in rural settings—ranging from resource shortages to limited exposure—reflective thinking may be especially beneficial, as it empowers students to utilize internal cognitive strategies rather than relying solely on external supports.

Reflection as a concept in education was for the first time associated with the work of John Dewey (1938) and it was characterized as "active, persistent, and careful consideration" of one's experiences with the aim of extracting the sense of it and using it for the future. In his book "How We Think" John Dewey (1938) stated that reflection is the process through which the students change their direct raw experiences into real learning ones by making interconnections between the past and the present so that they can use it to guide their future conduct. The work of Dewey acknowledged that education should have student-centered learning instead of just rote learning. Donald Schön (1983) elaborated Dewey's concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is when learners modify their tactics on the spot, whereas Reflection-on-action is their reflective thinking after the incident, where they consider what happened, why it happened, and how it could be improved. Schön's framework has been a major factor in the development of the present-day school system which, among other things, lays stress on the flexibility of ethical judgment in various circumstances. Both concepts of reflecting on the written are real as students are required to assess their choices not only during writing but also afterward.

Reflection is an integral part of life as explained by Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning. According to him, critical reflection enables an individual to

question those things that are usually accepted without any questioning or doubt, so eventually, this may result in changing the person's views and even behavior. This profound type of reflection involves not only the mind but also the emotions as it asks learners to rethink their values, opinions, and even feelings. In relation to writing, a transformative reflection brings the students to the point where they cannot help but critically evaluate the issue, the audience, and the purpose. Kember's Four-Category Scheme (2008) provides an educational framework for the reflective practices that can be implemented in schools. Kember et al. (2008) invented a four-level classification system of reflective thinking that has the two functions of assessing and enhancing students' reflective writing abilities. The model depicts a gradual hierarchy going from non-reflective to highly critical thinking. The categories (Habitual Action, Understanding, Reflection, and Critical Reflection) aim to guide teachers and students toward deeper metacognitive engagement and thinking skills in learning.

San, Kurniawati, and Nurwanti (2018) stated that the four schemes developed by Kember et al. (2008a) serve as a rubric to evaluate students' reflection levels. These levels start with the lowest one which is non-reflection or habitual action and move on through the understanding level, the reflection level, and, at last, the highest level, that is, critical reflection. For each level, there is a set of indicators that accompany it as a means of finding out to what extent a student's reflection is. The initial two categories, Habitual Action and Understanding, are considered non-reflective levels. Habitual Action is about automatic answers without the involvement of conscious thought, whereas Understanding is a grasping of concepts without giving them a critical evaluation. In contrast, the higher categories, Reflection and Critical Reflection, demonstrate deeper cognitive engagement. Reflection is about being mentally engaged with one's learning experiences and problem-solving strategies, while Critical Reflection is about challenging the most basic assumptions and may even result in a change of one's point of view or behavior (Kember et al., 2000; Kember et al., 2008).

Reflection has been used as one of the methods in teaching writing in different situations and has brought a lot of positive effects. One of the ways students can do this is through keeping reflective journals in which they express their ideas, evaluate their learning, and keep track of their progress over time. Cummings (2019) showed that the use of reflective journals led to the development of EFL students' skills in arranging ideas, making arguments, and recognizing the statements in which they were weak. Wegner (2017) pointed out that reflective writing gives students the opportunity to link their personal experiences with academic tasks.

Another reflective practice includes peer review, portfolios, and self-evaluation. Reflective portfolios, as per Roberts, Maor, and Herrington (2016), were a means for students to incorporate feedback, which led to the improvement of coherence and content growth. Besides, peer feedback is reflection prompting since students enhance their analytical skills when they critically evaluate not only their own but also their peer's work. In his paper, Williamson (2015) pointed out the importance of goal-setting in reflective writing as it is a source of students' motivation to be accountable for their own development. Reflective practices especially help in EFL situations. Escorcia (2017) states that more focus is required for the main aspects when writing in English as a foreign language, i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and coherence. In her book, Moon (1999) said that reflective abilities are a great support for learners to measure their growth, become aware of the same type of mistakes, and invent ways of solving them.

Though multiple reforms were made to the curriculum, students in Jordan, who take English as a foreign language, still encounter difficulties with their writing. According to Al-Jarrah, et al. (2019), the most frequent errors were those that primarily involved the incorrect use of connectives, poorly structured sentences, and lack of idiomatic expressions. Also, Rababah, Alshehab, and Melhem (2018) pointed out that the problems were in the areas of coherence, unity, and providing details. These weaknesses are rooted not only in limited mastery of linguistic structures but also in interference from Arabic as the learners' first language and insufficient opportunities for authentic English use.

Bedouin children in desert schools may be affected by the same challenges which include a lack of resources for learning such as access to the internet and supplementary materials, however, due to their harsh geographical environment, they are less exposed to English than urban students who live in cities and therefore have more learning opportunities. Salah (2021) brought out the fact that these kinds of unfairness lead to extreme differences in the opportunities of learners in different regions. The OECD's (2023) PISA report goes on to say that the majority of the students in Jordan are getting less than a basic score in reading and writing. Schools in the desert for the Bedouin are not only doing poorly, but even when compared to other rural schools, they are still at a disadvantage. The scores in creative thinking were far less than the average scores for the countries included in the study, which means that these students do not have the necessary opportunities to acquire the skills for reflective and critical engagement.

Shedefat (2017) mentioned that grammar drills through rote memorization were the focus of the teaching methods, and thus little or no process writing or creative expression was practiced, in the sixth-grade level that students are regularly exposed to, as a consequence, students are found to be unable to write a paragraph. In the same vein, Alsaria and Alsaraireh (2024) found that teachers' methodologies usually ignore the differences among students and do not encourage the students' enthusiasm. In desert schools, these problems are intensified by larger class sizes, scarce teacher training, and limited pedagogical resources. The excessive use of Arabic in class, which was also a major point of Khasawneh's (2022) observation, limits considerably the development of the students' command of the English language as they are only exposed to short, teacher-centered interactions. In the case of Bedouin students especially, this leads to an atmosphere where the students are not engaged in the meaningful practice of their writing skills and a low level of reflective and metacognitive strategies is observed.

Even though reflective thinking has been acknowledged as a worthwhile faculty, the practice of it in Jordanian schools is still very limited. Gheith (2018) found that teachers in private schools in Amman generally engaged in reflection and that they put less than average effort in the practice of responding to criticism. Similarly, Bawaneh, Moumene, and Aldalalah (2020) documented that the overall level of teachers' reflective practices in the country of Jordan was from low to medium, notwithstanding the reforms made by the ministry to promote creativity. The evidence presented here points to the fact that reflection as a method to be used in training and teaching has not been fully integrated in the instructors' practice. Professional development programs in Jordan have begun to emphasize modern instructional approaches, but reflective teaching remains underutilized (Shaheen, 2012). Traditional lecture-based methods persist, particularly in Bedouin desert schools where teachers face larger class sizes and limited resources. Consequently, students have few opportunities to engage in reflective writing tasks, peer collaboration,

or metacognitive activities that would enhance self-awareness and independence in learning.

Reflective practices have been a subject of numerous international studies, however, local empirical research from Jordan, specifically the Bedouin desert schools, remains scarce. Most of the existing research concentrate on the conditions of the urban or private schools and thus, the rural students are less spoken about. Quantitatively, just a few studies have revealed the influence of reflective practices on the writing of EFL students in Jordan. Besides, the usage of Kember's scheme is very limited in the classrooms of Jordan, especially in the educational setting of the Bedouin community, where it is considered a means for developing reflective thinking. Here, the research utilizes Kember's scheme as an essential theoretical framework to help the school sixth graders to improve their writing skills and raise their levels of reflective thinking. By focusing on an under-researched population, the study contributes both to the local context and to broader debates about the role of reflection in EFL pedagogy.

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of reflective thinking skills on specific dimensions of writing particularly within a Bedouin desert community in Jordan. By applying reflective thinking practices in the classroom, the study investigates whether these skills can improve students' ability to plan, organize, and assess their writing. This study addresses the following research question how does reflective thinking influence specific dimensions of students' writing proficiency, such as content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar?

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design using pretest–posttest measures with a non-equivalent control group which is efficient in educational environment where random task is impractical yet comparison across groups is necessary (Gopalan, Rosinger, & Ahn, 2020). Two intact classes of sixth-grade female students were selected, with one serving as the experimental group (Kember's model) and the other as the control group (traditional teaching methods).

The participants were 70 female students (aged 11–12) from a Bedouin desert government school in Jordan. The students' first language was Arabic, and English was studied as a foreign language. Socioeconomic conditions in the community were challenging, with many families engaged in pastoral and nomadic traditions and limited access to educational resources. Both groups were taught by the same English teacher.

Data were collected by using Pretest and Posttest Writing Tasks which were designed in alignment with the Grade 6 curriculum (Action Pack 6), these assessed grammars, spelling, punctuation marks, and content. Reflective Thinking Questionnaire (RTQ): Adapted from Kember et al. (2008), this instrument delineated the four reflective levels of students as follows: Habitual Action, Understanding, Reflection, and Critical Reflection. Teacher Field Notes and Class Records: Additional qualitative observations facilitated the descriptive depth of the study.

On the second week of the plan, both groups did a pretest. Kember et al. (2008) came up with a four-level classification system of reflective thinking that can both be used for figuring out the extent of and improving the students' reflective writing skills. The system represents the stages of levels going from no reflection to very critical thinking. After the eleventh week, both groups decided to take the posttest. The research was approved in terms of ethics by the school administration.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) summarized student performance. Independent samples t-tests compared posttest results between groups, while paired samples t-tests assessed pre- and posttest differences within groups. Cronbach's alpha measured the reliability of the RTQ. Frequencies were also used to classify shifts in reflective levels (Habitual, Understanding, Reflection, Critical Reflection).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to research question how does the use of reflective thinking strategies influence specific dimensions of students' writing proficiency (content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar)?

Table 1. The Results Of The Post-Test Between The Control Group And Experimental Group

		Group Statistics			
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttest	experimental	35	10.86	1.801	.304
	control	35	6.63	1.457	.246

Table 1 illustrates the post-test scores for the control and experimental groups after the intervention. The students of the experimental group who received the instruction through Kember's model of reflective thinking scored a mean of 10.86 (SD = 1.801). Whereas the control group, which was taught through a regular writing curriculum, only managed to get a mean score of 6.63 (SD = 1.457) significantly lower.

The standard error of the mean for the experimental group (0.304) was a bit higher than that for the control group (0.246), which is consistent with the considerable improvement of the experimental group's writing performance. These results are thus a very convincing argument in favor of the proposition that the incorporation of reflective thinking practices lead to the improvement of students' writing proficiency. The huge mean difference of 4.23 points is, therefore, a clear indication of the effectiveness of Kember's Four-Category Scheme (2008) in fostering the production of more coherent and well-structured writing by sixth-grade students.

This finding is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the impact of reflective thinking skills on students' writing proficiency. For instance, Cummings (2019) found that reflective thinking significantly improved students' ability to organize their ideas more effectively and reflect on their personal experiences with greater clarity. Similarly, Wegner (2017) stated that reflective thinking skills, such as Kember's model significantly improved students' critical thinking and writing skills. The research carries the theoretical framework of the Kember's scheme established by Kember et al. (2008) that reflection is a process in which students transition from routine actions to the advanced level of reflective thinking, for instance, critical reflection, thereby deepening their learning outcomes.

The greater scores of the test group implied that students could involve themselves at more profound levels of reflection, comparing their writing tasks to their own experiences and real applications. This is consistent with Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, which highlights the importance of critical reflection in improving deeper understanding and personal progress. The findings contribute to bridging a significant gap in the literature by indicating the influence of reflective thinking

skills in improving basic writing skills among sixth-grade students in rural Jordan. Most of the research has been concentrated on cities, consequently, there has been little investigation into how reflective thinking might be practiced in tough socioeconomic situations with limited educational resources. This research provides real-world data showing that reflective thinking is not only possible but also an effective contemporary way to enhance writing skills in those areas, which is a local problem of students and teachers in the countryside (Aljaraideh, 2020; Gheith, 2018).

Table 2. T-test for Equality of Means

Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
One- Sided p	Two- Sided p		
.000	.000	4.229	.392

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the t-test which compared the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. The t-test produced a very significant p-value of 0.000, indicating that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The average difference of 4.229 (SE = 0.392) pointed out even more the considerable effect of the reflective thinking intervention on students' writing skills. The data obtained here were in line with the hypothesis concerned that reflective thinking skills would lead to a significant improvement of students' writing proficiency as compared to the use of conventional teaching methods. The significant p-value ($p < 0.000$) indicated that the differences found between the groups were not due to random chance, thus giving strong evidence for the effect of reflective thinking applications.

This finding aligns with previous research that has highlighted the importance of Kember's reflective thinking model in education. In fact, Antonio (2020) for instance, discovered that reflective thinking activities had a major impact on students' capacity to analyze and evaluate their writing. Likewise, Greer (2023) found that reflective practices led to the development of students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which in turn resulted in improved academic performance. The findings corresponded with Kember's (2008) four-category scheme of reflective thinking as well that recognized reflective practices as a means for students to move from unreflective habitual actions to critical reflection. The experiment group's higher post-test scores definitely reflect that the students have gone through such a deep level of reflection that they were able to connect writing tasks not only with their personal experiences but also with the broader application of life. This finding corresponds to Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory, which argues that the primary role of critical reflection is to acquire deeper understanding and experience personal growth.

The findings offer empirical evidence and thus help to establish the effectiveness of reflective thinking practices to improve writing skills of sixth-grade students in a rural area i.e. Jordan. This research works towards filling a major void in the scholarly texts because most of the prior studies have only focused on urban or well-resourced educational environments. The results indicate that one of the most effective methods to enhance students' basic writing skills in underprivileged contexts is through reflective thinking. The findings breathe out valuable implications for teachers and policymakers (Bawaneh, Moumene, & Aldalalah, 2020; Shedefat, 2017).

The first point research suggests for future study is that subsequent researchers may investigate the impact of different reflective thinking activities in various educational contexts. The study could cover the influence of teacher training, curriculum

development, and student motivation on the application of reflective thinking skills by students. Secondly, research directions may include pondering over the issue of the deep-rooted effects of reflective thinking tasks on students writing skills and their academic performance, to be more precise, they may consider conducting longitudinal studies that follow students' progress over time and identify the factors that influence their accomplishments. Third, future research could expand the sample size and include several schools from different locations to enhance the external validity of the findings. It could involve comparing the effectiveness of reflective thinking practices in urban and rural settings. Lastly, future research might employ more objective methods like standardized tests for measuring students' writing skills and levels of reflective thinking. It could assist in lessening bias and yielding more precise outcomes.

CONCLUSION

A research has been done to prove the point that reflective practices have a positively significant impact on the writing skills as well as the metacognitive growth of rural sixth-grade students learning English as a foreign language in Jordan. Through planned reflection, learners changed their language use from mere repetition towards more understanding, reflection, and critical evaluation. Their progress was evidenced not only by better exam scores but also by the qualitative changes in their reflective thinking. Reflective thinking is a strong educational tool that can be used to solve firmly established problems in EFL writing. The power of this comes from the fact that it is not just about language improvement but also about the development of personal awareness, creative thinking, and emotional strength in the students thus giving them the necessary skills for lifelong learning.

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