



REFLECTIVE LEARNING AS A PATHWAY TO DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT THINKING IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: The text emphasizes the importance of developing independent thinking in English language education, particularly in secondary school EFL classrooms where learners often focus on rote learning. It introduces reflective learning as a solution to promote analysis and decision-making among Grade 7–8 EFL learners. Reflection is defined as a structured process that includes experience, self-observation, analysis, evaluation, and improvement. The paper highlights various reflective techniques, including self-assessment, learning journals, peer feedback, and post-task evaluation. It advocates integrating reflection into all aspects of language instruction rather than treating it as a separate activity, and provides a framework to gradually shift responsibility from teacher to learner, which is crucial for fostering learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness in this age group.

Key words: reflective learning; independent thinking; learner autonomy; metacognition; EFL education; secondary school learners.

Introduction

The study discusses the importance of independent thinking in contemporary English language education, emphasizing that effective language learning involves more than just memorization and grammar mastery. It highlights the necessity for pedagogical approaches that foster both linguistic competence and independent thought. [1]

In secondary education, learners develop cognitive maturity, making it crucial for classroom instruction to provide opportunities for questioning, reasoning, evaluating, and self-reflection. In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, independent application of language knowledge often poses challenges for students.[2]

Reflective learning is suggested as a method to address these challenges, encouraging learners to assess their experiences and decisions. It is connected to learner autonomy, which involves taking responsibility for one's learning. The



relationship between reflection and self-regulated learning is also noted, emphasizing planning, monitoring, and evaluating tasks.[3]

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) supports this approach, focusing on interaction and reflection. For Grade 7–8 EFL learners, reflection should be structured and directly related to classroom tasks. Questions aimed at fostering awareness of their thinking processes are suggested to enhance their reflective practices. The paper aims to explore reflective learning as a means to develop independent thinking in this age group and propose practical techniques for English lessons.[4]

The paper addresses the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between reflective learning and independent thinking in EFL education?
2. Which reflective techniques are appropriate for Grade 7–8 English language learners?
3. How can reflection be integrated into ordinary English language activities?
4. What methodological principles should teachers consider when developing learners' reflective and independent thinking abilities?

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The research discusses the interplay between reflective learning, metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, and independent thinking in secondary EFL classrooms. It emphasizes that:

- 1. Theoretical Framework:** The foundation involves a progression from reflective learning to metacognitive awareness, leading to learner autonomy and culminating in independent thinking.
- 2. Reflection and Metacognition:** Metacognitive awareness helps learners understand their thinking processes, with reflective questions transforming standard tasks into opportunities for deeper learning.
- 3. Reflection and Learner Autonomy:** Encouraging learners to take responsibility for their learning fosters autonomy. This shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered questioning promotes independent thought.
- 4. Reflection and Independent Thinking:** Genuine independent thinking goes beyond memorization; it involves critical evaluation and decision-making. Reflective learning aids this process by encouraging learners to analyze their choices and outcomes.



5. Techniques for EFL Learners: Practical reflective learning techniques, such as self-assessment, are recommended to enhance language lessons for Grade 7-8 students. [5]

For example, after a speaking activity, Grade 7 learners can complete:

Statement	Yes	Partly	Not yet
I expressed my opinion clearly.	✓		
I gave a reason for my opinion.		✓	
I used new vocabulary.	✓		
I can improve my answer next time.		✓	
I listened to another opinion.	✓		

The research outlines strategies for fostering reflective learning in secondary EFL classrooms. Key points include:

1. *Purpose of Reflection:* Focus on helping learners identify their strengths and weaknesses rather than assigning final grades.
2. *Reflective Journals:* Use brief reflections to promote metacognitive awareness among learners.
3. *Error Reflection:* Encourage learners to analyze selected errors instead of correcting all mistakes immediately to discover grammatical patterns.
4. *Reflective Questioning:* Incorporate higher-order questions to deepen learners' understanding and explain their thought processes.
5. *Peer Reflection:* Allow learners to exchange feedback after tasks, fostering communication and evaluation.
6. *Reflective Learning Cycle:* Implement a five-stage cycle (Experience, Reflection, Analysis, Evaluation, Reapplication) to guide learners through independent discovery.[6]
7. *Pedagogical Implications:*
 - Integrate reflective learning into routine activities.
 - Scaffold reflection with initial support that decreases over time.
 - Create a learning environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities.
 - Assess cognitive processes alongside linguistic accuracy.
 - Connect reflection to authentic communication for greater engagement.[7]

Conclusion

Reflective learning offers a valuable method for fostering independent thinking among Grade 7–8 EFL learners by transforming standard learning into opportunities for critical analysis and improvement. The proposed reflective learning cycle includes experience, reflection, analysis, evaluation, and



reapplication, shifting responsibility for learning from teachers to students. Techniques such as self-assessment, reflective journals, and peer feedback enhance students' awareness of their learning processes. This approach is especially beneficial in language education, as cognitive and language development occur concurrently. The paper advocates for the systematic incorporation of reflective learning in secondary EFL methodology to support learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness. Future research could explore the effectiveness of this cycle and its impact on communicative competence, motivation, and language-learning autonomy.

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