

# Reflective Writing through the Use of Guiding Questions

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Reflections can be seen as powerful tools for growth and intellectual development. It is no surprise that the writing of reflections is common practice at a Federal Institute in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The research presented sought to explore possible differences in reflective writing once guidelines were presented to a group of interns in the College of Education. Text analysis of written work samples were used to determine possible differences in reflective writing. Results showed that most students preferred to use the guiding question while writing their reflections. There was also a significant improvement in the quality of written reflections after reflection guiding questions were presented and used. This study contributes to the knowledge base of reflective writing of Emirati students and emphasizes the importance of support in the form of guiding questions. Educational implications and future research direction are also discussed.

## Introduction

A desirable teaching goal is to have students write reflections because reflections are considered effective tools of intellectual development. Tertiary students are consistently encouraged and often required to reflect on their learning experiences because it is believed to help them learn (Davis, 2006; Maclellan, 2004; Mair, 2012; Tsang, 2011). In the field of education, reflection has now become of high interest, but as Mortari (2012) highlights in her analysis of the literature, a variety of approaches on how to help foster reflection is available, but little evidence shows how effective these reflective approaches are. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand the meaning of reflection before any attempts are made to help the fostering of reflection and reflective writing.

Generally, the research question this study attempted to answer related to how faculty could support students in becoming deeper reflective writers. More specifically, can—and to what extent are—written reflections enhanced when students are provided with reflection guiding questions? The research presented will attempt to broaden the literature on how to foster the writing of reflections which may in turn benefit higher education institutions both internationally and also within the context of the UAE since tertiary students are requested to write reflections in order to improve their learning and practices.

## Literature Review

### The Nature and Purpose of Reflection

When reflection is being defined, the conceptual elements and theoretical perspectives put forth by Dewey (1933) are often referred to. Reflection, according to Moon (1999, 2004), is a form of mental processing with a specific purpose and/or predicted outcome that is applied to relatively complex or even unstructured ideas. Moon (1999, 2004) states that for

students to engage in deep learning, reflection is required, whereas surface learning may occur because of a lack of reflection. Others have defined reflection to be a mental activity in which an individual attempts to make sense of an experience (Seibert & Daudelin, 1999). Dinkelman (2003) argues that reflection is conceptualized as a self-study, in which one engages in intentional and systematic inquiry in one's own practice. In the education profession, reflection is recognized as a complex and deliberate process of thinking about and interpreting an experience in order to learn from the experience (Atkins & Murphey, 1995). Imel (1992) also points that one reflects to improve practice. This is especially true if reflection is considered to be productive rather than unproductive (Davis, 2006). In this paper, reflection is understood to be consistent with Moon (1999, 2004) and with Atkins and Murphey's (1995) definition as a form of mental processing and deep thinking about a specific experience for the purpose of improving one's own practice. The type of reflective activity under investigation and discussion in this paper is that of reflective writing.

### Taxonomies of Reflection

How one comes to evaluate the quality of a reflection can be quite difficult (Yost, Sentler, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Consequently, hierarchies of reflective thinking have been formed. Van Manen (1977) formed the basis for this type of hierarchal framework indicating three levels of reflection, namely; empirical-analytical, hermeneutic-phenomenological and critical-dialectical. At the empirical-analytical level emphasis is on effectiveness, efficiency and productivity. The hermeneutic-phenomenological paradigm stresses that experiences are regarded as intentional and that knowledge is conditionally practical. At the critical-dialectical level, emphasis is on the ability to acquire social wisdom and to test social situations while considering social roles, equity dominance and social

justice. Several frameworks have been built on Van Manen's (1977) framework (e.g. Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton, & Starko, 1990), but of particular relevance to this study is that put forth by Hatton and Smith (1995) because of its ability to capture the depth of a reflection.

At the lowest level, Hatton and Smith (1995) talk about *descriptive writing*, which is simply reporting events and interpreting these events as personal worries. With *descriptive reflection*, some effort is made to analyze reasons for events or situations, and this can also include the students' own interpretations. A higher level of reflection is the *dialogic reflection* in which a student engages in a dialogue with himself or herself. This type of reflection is characterized by an exploration and consideration of different reasons. Dialogic reflection is "hearing one's own voice...exploring alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation" (Moon, 2004, p. 45). It is argued that only through dialogic reflection can students move into the highest form of reflection known as *critical reflection*. Critical reflection is "thinking about effects upon others of one's actions..." (Moon, 2004, p.45), and this is based on social, political and/or cultural considerations. A notable strength of Hatton and Smith's (1995) taxonomy of reflection is that it offers specific characteristics of reflective writing that allow one to determine whether or not and at what level reflection is being achieved. In addition, the taxonomies of reflection can offer students guidance to writing higher-level reflections in areas where students are required to reflect.

### Reflective Writing

The writing of reflections can be considered a somewhat complex and deep process. Several education programs require students to reflect in written form as part of their learning experiences (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Tsang, 2003). Students engage in reflective writing because it is believed to trigger and prompt learning (Davis, 2006; Maclellan, 2004; Mair, 2012; Tsang, 2011). Mair (2012), for example, showed that students' learning was enhanced through an online resource that facilitated the retrieval of reflections, which in turn facilitated reflective writing. Reflective writing focuses on experiences that are attached to its context, hence reality is constructed while considering complexities of this context. Based on this, it has been argued that reflection involves cognitive, critical and narrative elements (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1991). While reflecting on her own narrative experiences, for example, Akin (2002) stated that reflective writing helped her in developing a better understanding of her own teaching practice which in turn assisted her in the conceptualization of herself as a teacher.

Reflective writing may come in various forms such as reports, portfolios, journals and more recently emails, to name a few. Ward and McCotter (2004) believe that a reflective journal is the most effective and meaningful form of written reflection. There are several advantages to writing a reflection. When written effectively, reflections can act as a bridge of communication between the writer and the reader, allowing the reader an inside look into the experience the writer is writing about. This is especially relevant for faculty who serve as supervisors for interns out in the field. Supervisors may get a closer look and deeper understanding of their interns' experiences through their written reflections, especially if the written reflections are of high quality. But writing quality reflections is not something that accidentally occurs. This notion has been historically pointed out by Dewey (1933) when he specified reflection to be a learned process requiring encouragement, reinforcement, supervision and training. More recently, it has also been highlighted that reflection is not gained through mere experience. Valli (1997), for example, says reflection should be encouraged intentionally and also points out that it requires much supervision. In support of this, Glazer, Abbott and Harris (2004) further claim that a supervisor should act as facilitator, and Gelter (2003) stresses that reflection should utilize social and personal values.

The feedback one receives also greatly influences the quality and development of reflective writing. In fact, as indicated in the literature, instructor feedback is considered one of the most effective methods that may help in fostering reflective writing. In a study that investigated instructor feedback on journal entries, when feedback related to the level of reflection was provided rather than feedback related to the experiences mentioned in the reflection, a positive impact on the quality of the written reflection was later observed (Bain, Mills, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2002). Students felt challenged through instructor questions and comments as they were guided to consider other viewpoints. Moreover, it is not uncommon for faculty to provide guidelines to their students to help them reflect upon their experiences (Moon, 1999, 2004). Many guidelines may be orally provided, while others may be in the form of written questions. This brings us to the research questions. The general research question this study attempted to answer related to faculty support to students in becoming deeper reflective writers. Specifically, can written reflections be enhanced, and if so, to what extent, when students are provided with reflection guiding questions?

For students who are challenged by not being able to critically reflect, this paper argues that when such students are provided with reflection guiding questions prior to writing a reflection, the quality of a low level

reflection may be positively impacted. In other words, challenged students are more likely to write higher level productive reflections if guidance in the form of reflection guiding questions is provided.

### **Significance of the Study**

In a time when reflection in education is considered an effective approach to learning, the current study provided a closer look at a group of students' internship experiences and then inquired about possible changes in written text once guidance was provided. Furthermore, as open-ended questions were utilized in this study, this allowed for an alternative lens through which the researcher could better understand the interns' views regarding writing weekly reflections without guidance and writing weekly reflections with guidance. On a general note, this study reinforces efforts to help faculty devise ways to promote and enhance the writing of reflections.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants and Study Context**

A group of eleven female interns from the UAE specializing in the Child, Youth, and Family (CYF) services program offered by the College of Education at Zayed University (ZU) were selected to participate in this study. Though Arabic was the participants' native language, the main language of instruction at ZU is English, and so all reflections were written in English. The internship experience was in an Arabic speaking environment. The CYF program is offered on ZU's two campuses (Abu Dhabi and Dubai); the participants were all enrolled in an internship program on the Abu Dhabi campus. During this internship, students engaged in field work related to their area of specialization. The interns were identified because they were all required to write weekly reflections. All participants had previously written reflections for a variety of classes they had taken prior to their internship experience. The mean age for the participants was 23.6 years. Ages ranged from 22 to 26.

#### **Research Design and Procedure**

The study consisted of two phases. A mixed method approach in the form of action research was utilized, analyzing students' textual material obtained from internship experiences and employing a survey design to investigate how students felt about writing reflections with or without guiding questions. During phase 1 of the study and at the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester, a reflection question was introduced which simply requested interns to write weekly reflections related to their internship experiences. During phase 2 of

the study and following the first five weeks of internship, the participants were then provided with a reflection guideline which consisted of seven guiding questions (see Table 1 below) with the following instruction: "The following questions are reflection guidelines that you may use while writing your weekly reflections." The questions were only a guide, and the interns could choose not to respond to them without any penalty. After five weeks of internship, students had written five reflections: one reflection for each week of internship. The reflection guideline was posted on Blackboard, a virtual mobile learning environment, at the beginning of week 6, and students were then sent an email requesting them to visit Blackboard in order to access the reflection guideline. The email was sent out to ensure that all students were informed of the Blackboard posting. No further instructions were given, and this was intentional in order to warrant that reflections were personal and not driven by a specific set of questions. In other words, there was no indication that students were obliged to answer any or part of the guiding questions, and neither was there a specified word count or page limitation. Throughout the study, the students did not receive any feedback (written or oral) related to the reflections they had submitted. This again was intentional given that the instructor's feedback could have impacted the quality of the reflections (Geyskens, Donche, & Van Petegem, 2012). By doing this, the researcher was able to ensure that minimal variables, such as instructor feedback, had impacted and played a role on the quality of the written reflections.

Participants were informed that the only action required on their behalf was to write and submit their weekly reflections as usual. The participants were also asked to complete the questionnaire after their internship experience was completed, and they were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary, though the writing of the reflections was still a part of their internship, hence weekly reflections still needed to be submitted whether or not participants consented to participate in the study. Participants were ensured that no risks were associated with this study that their grades would not be influenced by their participation, and that confidentiality would be maintained.

#### **Instrumentation and Data Analysis**

The study utilized a mixed method approach and sought to investigate differences in reflective writing when guidance was presented. To achieve this, a consent form, a 7-item questionnaire, and reflection guiding questions made up the instruments. The questionnaire was designed specifically for internship students who were required to write reflections as part of their weekly internship experience. The questionnaire included both

Table 1  
*Reflection Guiding Questions*

Number	Question
1	Think about what you learned today. How has this changed your way of thinking?
2	What will you do with this information?
3	What surprised you the most about your experience this week?
4	What disappointed you the most about your experience this week?
5	If you had a chance to make a change (task related), what would that change be?
6	What might some obstacles be?
7	What do you plan to investigate further (task related)?

structured and open-ended questions, and this allowed for an in-depth analysis of (a) students' feelings towards writing reflections, and (b) the quality of written reflections once guiding questions were presented. Some of the questions that were asked after interns had completed their internship experience included the following:

- "How beneficial were the reflection guiding questions?"
- "How often did you refer to the reflection guiding questions when writing your reflections?"
- "Would you have preferred to have written your reflection without the reflection guiding questions?"

In addition, participants were asked to provide some recommendations for future interns regarding the writing of reflections. Data obtained from the survey and the written reflections were reviewed, coded and transcribed. The data was used for interpretation of the central practice under study. Text analysis was possible by utilizing Hatton and Smith's (1995) taxonomies of reflection. Analysis of the data was reviewed by an additional evaluator for inter-reliability and cross-validation purposes. The second evaluator is an active researcher with a doctorate degree in the field of education.

## Results

### Survey Analysis

When asked about how beneficial they thought the reflection guiding questions were when presented, most participants agreed that they were either beneficial or very beneficial (70%). Regarding how often students referred to the reflection guiding questions, 70% responded that they referred to them either often or very often as shown in Figure 1.

Guidance in the form of guiding questions that was used throughout the participant's internship seemed to be valued. It was viewed as a contribution to self-

development. For example, one intern said that "It helped me understand and evaluate my weekly experiences" (Candidate 9). In addition, some of the recommendations by current interns for future interns related to time management and not so much to the actual content or quality of the reflection itself. Some of the recommendations included, "Stay-up to date with writing" (Candidate 2); "Write reflections on time because one can easily forget important situations" (Candidate 8); "Write notes throughout the week in order to remember" (Candidate 10). Other recommendations related to the use of the reflection guiding questions, which were consistent with the survey results, for instance, "Request reflection guidelines" (Candidate 6) and "Refer to the reflection guidelines because they are very helpful" (Candidate 3).

### Reflection Text Analysis

At the end of the semester and after completing all internship requisites, text analysis was obtained for participants' weekly reflections written during their internship experiences. As part of the text analysis process, comparisons were made to the reflections that were written before and after the presentations of the reflection guiding questions using Hatton and Smith's (1995) taxonomies of reflection described earlier where level one (L1) indicates descriptive writing, level two (L2) descriptive reflection, level three (L3) dialogic reflection, and level four (L4) critical reflection. As such, the data was systematically analyzed through comparing the available pieces of data to produce meaning (Creswell, 2012). To address the question of what scaffolds the four levels of reflections, the transcripts were read a third time to look at all points where students moved from the lowest level to higher levels. In addition, the developmental process of reflective writing was analyzed in a developmental sequence over time (Pultorak, 1996). Table 2 below shows some extracts of the weekly written reflections before the guiding questions were presented. The extracts illustrate that a significant number of reflections were at the lower levels of reflective writing; namely 77% were at the L1 level

Figure 1  
*Student Responses*

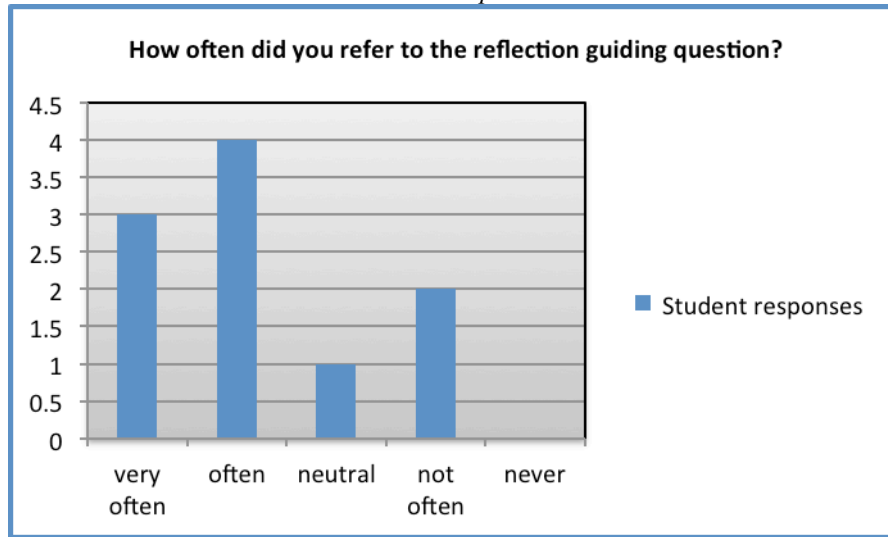


Table 2  
*Extracts Prior to the Presentation of Reflection Guiding Questions*

Candidate Number	Week	Level	Extracts
1	2	L2	After the session I left the center and then I started thinking about the case...I was happy because I felt I'm able to apply what I have learned in the work
	3	L1	The most interesting event this week was when I attended...the aim was to help us understand the client which would enable us to deal with them easily
2	4	L1	I dislike the place because it was small room and there is a lot of people come in. In the end, I get a lot of benefits from this workshop and learn many things that will help me in the future.
3	4	L1	Attendance a workshop is very important step to develop my skills and qualification...the workshop that I attended "psychological skills" was very organized
4	1, 2	L1	She prepares for big event...She asks me to communicate with public... Actually, it is a new experience for me.
5	2, 5	L1	I have to be neutral and listen to all of the sides before judging them...we tried our best to solve the problem...when we told the mother...she started praying for us
6	2, 3	L1	We had to present some of the outcomes...It was a great chance to experience a new type of work than what I learnt in the university...She told us about her experience in the center.
7	1, 4	L2	This experience taught me...there are many problems that need to be solved...I should be strong and keep myself very calm
		L1	Was very interesting and very informative and I felt that I learnt a lot from it.
8	1, 5	L1	I was really shy...and uncomfortable...from this experience I learned that we should not feel shy. I hope they will fix this problem as fast as they can because it is necessary.
9	2	L1	The case that I have read was about a separated family who suffered financially.
10	3, 4	L1	I learnt two different ways of consulting with cases and learn several ways that they communicate with people...the information was not new except small part
11	2, 3	L2	I learnt how to write a report...but I feel I need to practice it more and be more professional...I believe that if people don't have somebody to listen to them, they start telling anybody

indicating descriptive writing, and 23% were at the L2 level indicating descriptive reflections. There was no indication of higher-level reflective writing during the first five weeks when students did not have access to the reflection guiding questions.

Table 3 below shows some extracts of the weekly written reflections after the guiding questions were presented. The extracts illustrate that a significant number of reflections were at the higher levels of reflective writing; namely about 73% were at L3 indicating dialogic reflections, and less than 27% at L4 (critical reflection) and L2 (descriptive reflection). A significant change in the level of the written reflections is evident after the presentation of the reflective guiding questions.

### **Discussion**

Guidance in the form of reflection questions was seen to be of value as reflective writing moved from lower levels of reflection (L1 and L2) in weeks 1 to 5 to higher levels of reflection (L3 and L4) in weeks six to ten as demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4 above. When comparing students' statements before and after the presentation of the reflection guiding questions, there are evident differences in the level of reflective writing. In fact, an improvement in the level of reflective writing was seen almost instantly after the presentation of the reflection guiding questions during phase 2 of the study. Students written reflections went from writing statements like "I was happy..." (Candidate 1); "I like this place" (Candidate 2) to "What surprised me the most about my experience this week..." (Candidate 1), "If I had a chance to make a change it would..." (Candidate 2), "I was disappointed about many things actually" (Candidate 3). These differences in the reflective statements imply that students had an opportunity to use their knowledge of guiding questions and write higher-level reflections. Though just a few statements were at the dialogic and critical reflection level prior to the presentation of the reflection guiding questions, most statements were at the descriptive writing and descriptive reflection level. Henceforth, most of the statements were at the dialogic level after the presentation of the reflection guiding questions. Given that one can only move into the critical reflection level through the dialogic level (Hatton & Smith, 1995), the fact that most of the statements after the presentation of the guiding questions were at the dialogic level (L3) generates no concern, but is indeed somewhat promising.

Furthermore, because students were not obliged to answer all seven of the reflection guiding questions that were provided following the first five weeks of internship, some students who referred to the guiding questions only responded to some questions and not all.

Candidate 1, for example, chose to leave Q6 and Q7 unanswered. A possible explanation for this could be the very fact that students could choose not to respond to any or all of the guiding questions as indicated in the instructions. In addition, students may have not thought about specific responses that related to the questions they did not respond to, hence they provided no response. This, of course, does not pose any concern, as reflections are very personal (Gelter, 2003) and should not only be guided by a set of questions. The quality of the reflection, however, may have been further enhanced by providing consistent feedback. This is consistent with the literature in that feedback is a powerful tool in the quality and progress of reflective writing (Bain, Mills, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2002). Nonetheless, the written reflections allowed for the analysis of the reflective writing which provides clear evidence of reflection occurring, though arguably perhaps not always at the critical reflection, but mainly at the dialogic level even after the presentation of the reflection guiding questions. It can also be highlighted that even after the second phase of the study there was no indication of issues related to social, political and/or cultural consideration in the reflective writings. Given the study context, a lack of consideration to political issues within the written reflections was not surprising as Emiratis do not openly discuss politics and neither are they encouraged to do so at the personal or social level, hence the written reflections were not burdened. Arguably, one is still capable of writing high-level critical reflections while considering personal, social and cultural issues only.

### **Educational Implications and Recommendations**

Some educational implications can be drawn from the results of this study. For instance, faculty who assign written reflections as part of their course assessment or assignments should consider providing students with reflection guiding questions as they prove to help students write better quality reflections. In addition, even though students may not be under any obligations to use the reflection guiding questions, students should be encouraged to at least read them prior to deciding whether they want to use them or not. One way of ensuring students at least read the reflection guiding questions is to have faculty review the questions in class prior to posting them or sending them electronically.

From an educational standpoint, more emphasis on critical reflection should be given before and during practicum and internship experiences. This may be achieved through critical discussions in class where possible scenarios are formulated, discussed and reflected on. This may be further achieved by explicitly teaching students about the different levels of reflection

Table 3  
*Extracts After the Presentation of Reflection Guiding Questions*

Candidate Number	Week	Level	Extracts
1	6, 8	L3	I realized that I should learn how to interrupt the client nicely without upsetting him/her...I asked one of my professors about how to limit clients time...in the future. I'd try to implement these steps in order to manage my time. What surprised me is that they don't have a rule. If I had a chance to make a change I would set a boundary with my clients by limiting the time..." What surprised me the most about my experience this week was when I heard about Wadeema's law...Why this law was not issued before...? Do we have to wait for something to happen to issue such a law? Many women get abused by their husbands, so why don't we have a similar law for protecting wives rights.
2	8	L3	I learn many things about guiding a conference such...I will apply this experience in my future career. If I had a chance to make a change it would that put one employee...I will do that to avoid the little issues...
3	7	L4	I learnt that any job or organization needs a leadership to manage it. I'm going to discuss the situation or the idea that I have with my classmates and friends to see their own points of view...Some adults do not have the responsibility to finish their work by themselves, they are like children you have to force them to do their own works. I will give employee each several month a workshop to improve and develop their way of working to be professional at work...I plan to observe employee each weekly to see their weakness and strength to try avoid these weakness and improve the strength side.
4	10	L3	This week showed me how there are some strategies, and skills should the social workers have...The things that surprised me...is a hardworking, and it has a lot of responsibilities. In addition, you should know how to deal with the cases, what you should say and what you should not...I was disappointed about many things actually...How you should controls your emotion in front of the cases which is very hard to me...I want to investigate more about the place that I am on now.
5	8	L3	I think this experience will help me a lot in future when if I involve in an event like this because I will...and I will try to avoid or reduce the mistakes that we faced.
6	6, 10	L3	I need to be prepared for more than what I expect of an event, because things happen without our knowledge. I will also try to learn more new things in my field about dealing with children. What disappointed me the most was the school managing system. I would like to experience more ways of how to deal with cases. I would like to invent new ways. The question is what if they affected the case negatively? This will make it difficult to deal with the problem...I would like to attend more meetings with my mentor, to understand more about the nature of work.
7	9	L2	I felt I was living in a small world and didn't know that such cases could happen in the UAE community.
8	7	L3	I have learned that I should be aware that some of the cases...What surprised me is when I asked the...To overcome this problem, I would suggest that someone would be responsible. However, the shortage of employees might affect this suggestion...I would read more about the best way to deal with people in different situations.
9	7	L2	My only challenge is dealing with different types of personalities as you might be working with people...these processes make me realize how hard planning an event is.
10	7	L3	I was dissatisfy with the writing the reports only with my mentor computer inside the job and this stress me with my work. If I had the chance to change this case I will ask the head office to provide special iPad...to investigate this idea I will make a survey for the mentors
11	7, 9	L3	This week I really was surprised from myself how confident I was when I talk to clients...and the signs that show me that I am doing a good job and being effective with clients...here I start thinking did I develop? How much is that? Can I help people? Can people trust me...every question has been asked; a voice inside me said, "Yes"...I realized that building a relationship is hard but destroy it is much easier.

so as to be explicit about expectations and goals when it comes to writing high-level reflections. In doing so, education faculty may help students to further bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The research findings demonstrate that students moved from lower levels to higher levels of reflective writing after the introduction of reflective guiding questions. Future research can perhaps test various types of guiding questions to determine whether or not specific guiding questions may have a stronger impact on reflective writing than others. Further, in contexts that have strong religious (or political) ties, one can present reflection guiding questions that may also take into account religious (and/or political) considerations, another approach through which dialogic and critical reflections may be achieved. Future research may also consider using control groups (e.g., a class with no guiding questions vs. a class with guiding questions) to further investigate the impact of guiding questions on reflective writing.

The study showed that guidance in the form of questions can improve reflective writing, but it did not demonstrate what role feedback played in the improvement of the reflective writing since no feedback was provided throughout the duration of the study. The importance of feedback should not go unnoticed as it can make a significant difference on student performance (Geyskens, Donche, & Van Petegem, 2012). Feedback given on weekly reflections that focus on how a reflection is written rather than on the content and what the student is actually writing about should also help students write higher-level reflections. It is believed that by providing on-going critical reflection discussions and reflection guiding questions along with effective feedback, reflections may be moved from being descriptive to critical in nature. Consequently, future research can perhaps investigate the impact of reflection guiding questions on reflective writing with and without feedback and critical discussions. Furthermore, since some students did not utilize the guiding questions, perhaps guidance through class discussions prior to field experiences which students are expected to reflect on could guarantee that all students receive guidance of some kind, whether or not they choose to make use of the reflective guiding questions. A longitudinal study of a similar design could be conducted to further investigate and gain a deeper insight into the developmental processes of reflective writing. Implications of cultural foundations merit further examination as well.

Even though this research was merely intended to be a starting point investigation on how to enhance the quality of reflections, it has provided a snapshot of the importance of guidance in the form of guiding questions during reflective writing. The results presented warrant further exploration in larger studies and across a variety of disciplines within the university before any

generalized conclusions can be drawn from the study. Given the UAE context, the fact that many issues cannot be discussed openly may have also impacted students' ability to reflect critically on some issues.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sample size of interns used was lower than desired, and this somewhat limited the analytical strength of this study. Providing guiding questions after a few weeks of internship may have been perceived as feedback, and this is a limitation. Another plausible limitation worth noting is that students had five weeks of practice prior to the presentation of the guiding questions. Thus, this experience could have attributed to the student's enhanced written reflections.

The findings of this study allow education faculty to consider other means through which reflective writing can be enhanced. This is especially true for students who require language support during their learning experiences, as was the case in this study. As previously mentioned, the participant's native language was Arabic, and the language of instruction was English. The participants in this study were not fluent in English, and the fact that reflections were to be written in English may have impacted their ability to write critical reflections even after the presentation of the reflection guiding questions. Therefore, difficulty in expressing oneself in a second language may in fact have impacted the quality of the written reflections as well.

### **Conclusions**

The study was designed to investigate how university faculty could provide guidance to students when it came to writing reflections. The research presented specifically aimed at exploring possible differences in written reflections when reflection guiding questions were presented to students. The results that emerged supported the stated argument that when provided with reflection guiding questions prior to writing a reflection, the quality of a reflection would be positively impacted. The quality of students' reflections was indeed enhanced, and this was measured using Hatton and Smith's (1995) taxonomies of reflection. Very few students' (Candidates 7 and 9) reflections were not impacted, but it is important to note that these were the same students who chose not to refer to the reflection guiding question. It can be contended that the presentation of the reflection guiding questions did not pose any negative impact on the reflections because students were under no obligation to use them, as indicated in the instructions that accompanied the reflection guiding questions. The majority of the students agreed that the reflection guiding questions



were beneficial, and the findings revealed that the reflective writing was a developmental process, which was impacted by the presentation of reflection guiding questions. On a general note, there was a significant improvement in terms of reflective writing detail and quality, and this implies that at least some student's reflective writing will be positively impacted when reflection guiding questions are presented.

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