

## **ENHANCED LEARNING: THE HIDDEN ART OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING AMONG MALAYSIAN PRE-REGISTERED STUDENT NURSES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background and Purpose:** Although the impact of reflective journal writing (RJW) on enhanced learning has a long history, studies on this pedagogical tool for enhanced learning are never exhausted. This study attempts to highlight enhanced self-directed learning through the use of reflective journal (RJ) among Malaysian diploma nursing students.

**Methodology:** For this study, eight purposefully selected pre-registered student nurses (PRSN) from a public college contributed over 54 reflective journal entries over two months. Through a qualitative content analysis, the journals were analyzed using a model devised by Mezirow (1990) that was previously used by Kember (1999), Chirema (2007), and Kear (2013) to identify the students' levels of reflection of content/descriptive, process/practical, and premise/critical reflection resembling Transformative Learning Theory (TLT).

**Findings:** The findings suggested that RJ helps learners become in control of themselves from the early stage of a clinical environment. They expressed their appreciation towards collaborations and are grateful to be able to express their feelings and emotions of "fears" and "trust". Further, they indicated their mindfulness to appreciate their levels of knowledge and skills through reflection upon the nursing tasks as they make themselves ready to be a future nurse. Furthermore, it was highlighted that feeling competent and being able to work independently and to make sound decisions would not be realized if they could not think critically from the initial stage of clinical environment.

**Contributions:** This research confirms that PRSN become more self-directed and highly motivated to develop critical thinking to dispose for their better lifelong learning through the use of reflective journals.

**Keywords:** Content reflection, levels of reflection, premise reflection, process reflection, reflective journal writing.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Writing reflective journals to reflect on the clinical practice is now officially considered an indispensable element of nursing education in a number of countries. Since nursing education has incorporated the concept of 'reflection' in nursing programs in the 1980s, a plethora of literature has advocated the combination of experiential learning with critical thinking for better and long-lasting knowledge. The prospect of Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education indicates that the core competency of nursing is critical thinking and the application of knowledge into practice. There is a clear correlation between the growth of clinical performance and the learners' ability to possess higher order of thinking (Taylor-Haslip, 2010). In other words, nurses are required to have the sound knowledge base of theoretical facts; then, make use of this tacit knowledge to practice in clinical environment (Schon, 1984). They are also required to be able to apply their ability of the core critical thinking skills such as make interpretation to make meaning out of the new situations, do analysis and evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation. Moreover, due to the nature of their profession that greatly relies on practice, nurses should be equipped with the ability to apply academic knowledge into practice, construct sound clinical judgment, make effective decisions, and have a critical mind to solve problems. These abilities in the literature are known as the ability to reflect (Schon, 1984; Mezirow, 1990; Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). Accordingly, Bjerkvik and Hilli (2019) emphasized that keeping journal could help the student nurses to reflect-on-action and could develop analytical and critical thinking skills. They asserted that writing may create some distance from the clinical environment; this distance could cause awareness for their academic professional development.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The relationship of reflection and reflective practices and their advantages in the learners' academic life has been widely discussed in the literature. It is through reflection that learners take active responsibility for their own learning and RJ is the medium to demonstrate this ability. In their study on learners' perception on reflective journal writing (RJW), Seyed Abolghasem, Othman, and Ahmad Shah (2019) demonstrated the learners' high-quality dimension of their perception to maintain the use of RJ as a strategy for their learning assessment. In this regard, Allan and Driscoll (2014) argued that by integrating reflection and reflective practices into existing coursework, learners can improve their learning through connecting and analyzing an event, experience, or thought; creating a bridge between their thoughts and actions. They reiterated that reflection is a powerful ability that allows learners to make connections to prior, present and future learning situations. To recap this point, reference could be made to a study done by Paterson and Chapman (2013). They acknowledged that reflection is important for the educational tradition of self-cultivation. They provided evidence that reflective practices are part of continuing professional education that encourages a deeper level of understanding. In another study in Malaysia by Rodzalan and Mohamed Saat (2015), the role of gender and academic disciplines on the students' perception on their ability of critical thinking and problem-solving skill was sought. The finding of this study emphasized how implementation of critical thinking and problem-solving can assist the students in better understanding and reflection on what they have learned in the classroom.

Writing has been known as a socio-cultural approach rather than a psycho-cognitive discourse functions as a meaning-making process in a variety of educational and professional contexts. According to constructivist, if we wish to have a student-centered environment, the comprehension and retention of information as well as reflections on ideas and conceptions can be done through writing (Boldrini & Cattaneo, 2014). They asserted that the writing to learn approach is a powerful learning tool that allows thoughts and experiences to be re-examined in a way of thinking objectively, making connection between thoughts, and monitoring the trace of learning process. Thus, reflective writing has been valued as an educational tool for nurses in providing opportunities in reflective practices that could be beneficial in promoting professional skills and lifelong learning and to promote reflective learning (Chapman, Dempsey, & Warren-Forward, 2009; Jasper, 1999; Mezirow, 2000; Tashiro, Shimpuku, Naruse, & Matusani, 2013). When

dealing with learning, Allan and Driscoll (2014) have proven that reflection and reflective practices are used for the development of reflective thinking skills. They reiterated that reflection can be a way to bridge the gap between thought and action as well as to describe inner satisfaction through valuing the challenges the learners had faced. Likewise, Mann et al. (2009) recapped that reflection means a critical examination of one's beliefs for self-monitoring and awareness; in Mezirow's words, reflective practices facilitate autonomy among learners (Mezirow, 1981).

According to Mezirow (1997), transformative learning (TL) is a process of perplexing and challenging one's preconceptions, assumptions, and behaviors; a concept that is demonstrated in reflective journaling among PRSN in this study. Under the influence of Habermasian critical theory, Mezirow has made his interpretation and developed his ideas on the theory of transformative learning fundamentally in the field of adult education (Wang & King, 2006). According to Kitchenham (2008), Mezirow's early theory of transformative learning was influenced by Kuhn's (1962) paradigm, Freire's (1970) conscientization, and Habermas (1971, 1984). The most significant element of transformative learning is the importance of the strategies that adults use to make meaning from their experience and validate their decisions to be autonomous thinkers. In the same vein, adults are able to think for themselves, able to trust themselves, they can build confidence; and then, they experience self-empowerment. Mezirow (1991), thus, highlighted that it is through three levels of content, process, and premise reflection that knowledge is constructed and learning was established. As a suitable framework for coding the journals, Mezirow's (1991) levels of reflection was used in this study; which was previously used by Wong et al. (1997), Kember (1999), Thorpe (2004), Chirema (2007), and Kear (2013).

According to Mezirow (1991), reflective actions can be explained in three levels: content, process, and premise. Content reflection concerns what we feel, perceive, or act upon. Content reflection is an assessment level when the learner examines a problem and describes the situation at a surface level, and tries to answer the "what" of their assumptions. Whereas process reflection addresses how a person performs the tasks and how well they are performed; that is, the learners involve in verifying the problem at this level. Premise reflection is believed to be at a higher level of reflective thinking that entails the actual reasons for the practices. Learners continually reflect upon their experiences and skills to reach the stage that enables the individual to solve the problem and make decisions and make learning part of his/her own (Jasper, 1999; Plack & Greenberg, 2005). Furthermore, premise reflection occurs when the learners question the problem itself. The

ability of reflection upon the incidence they have experienced in the clinical setting can be detected in the reflective journal writing. In respect to the above discussion, the following section discusses the methodology that guiding this study.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study was undertaken to explore RJW through the lens of qualitative interpretive research design; the case of RJW was investigated by qualitative data collection and content analysis. In this study, “case” is the exploration of the RJW in its real context as a single activity that involves multiple methods of in-depth inquiry. Chirema (2007) suggests that a case study is “an appealing design for the applied fields such as education and nursing” (p. 193).

#### **3.1 Participants and the Site**

A group of eight Pre-Registered Student Nurses (PRSN) who were in their second year, second term of their three-year nursing program participated in this study. The participants had similar characteristics of gender, age, and educational background. According to Polit and Beck (2012), this group is homogeneous, that confounding variables were controlled and internal validity was maintained. This group of PRSN had been familiar with RJW and had their exam on this subject a month prior to the data collection.

The Diploma School of Nursing Program is a part of a larger establishment of The College of Health Sciences under the management of the public university Medical Centre. This college is managed and follows the particulars according to managerial policies given by the state university. This state university has its own curricular framework according to the Ministry of Higher Education.

This study has warranted an approval from the Medical Ethics Committee (MEC) that provided permission to the researcher to collect data from the participants. In order to observe the matter of confidentiality pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ privacy. Moreover, informed consent letters were collected from all participants to represent the trustworthiness and they were assured that their names and information would stay confidential.

### **3.2 Reflective Journals**

The RJ entries were contributed by eight PRSN which mounted over 54 guided reflective journal entries consisting of 144 pages. For this study, participants were instructed to write two RJ or at least one journal in a period of four weeks during March and April 2014 when the academic semester was in progress. These reflective journals are considered private records of real-life events experienced by the participants. Creswell (2012) calls them ‘private documents’ that provide valuable sources of information in helping the researcher understand focal points in qualitative studies. These journals were representing a unique real-life event or situation that the participants had observed, participated, or performed during their practicum. Although the use of the guideline was not mandatory, it is used by almost all the participants. Although reflection is a private act, it can be explicated in what the learners write in their reflective texts.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

Each piece of RJ entries was examined in details to explore participants’ levels of reflection. The journals were analyzed manually to avoid confusion of computer software and not to sense of being in the distance from the data. And it appeared to be easier to process manually since the journals were counted for less than 500 pages.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the first stage of analysis is data reduction. The researcher subjectively disregarded unassimilated and uncategorized data that appeared throughout the RJ entries to identify the meaningful units of data. In the process of deductive and inductive investigation, a series of concepts were developed; a combination of generated open coding to be ready for the emerging meaningful categories or themes. The next stage was the data display. The open coding was grouped to form the analytical coding that reflects the repeated statements appeared in the texts. The more prominent ones showed regularities that could be subsequently formed categories. With the research objectives in mind, the process of coding raw data and constructing categories involved capturing relevant ideas especially the frequency of messages and the number of times a certain phrase is used (Merriam, 2009).

Finally, through the inductive content analysis procedure, those categories and themes that showed regularities in the intra and inter-case examining subsequently form the categories representing the levels of reflection. These pieces of RJ were considered unique writing and were organized according to identified units of thought to shape the emerging themes. These segments,

then, were classified into larger categories; a more valid and accurate classification of units of thought that repeated, rather regularly, by the participants in their RJ. The following section will discuss the results of analysis according to the analytical framework of TLT proposed by Mezirow (1991).

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the content analysis of the RJ, it was noted that themes from the data were interrelated, overlapped, and were not independent from each other. That is, different components were not isolated from each other, but influencing one another that indicate internal homogeneity of the findings (Figure 1). As the theory of TLT is directing this study, the most noticeable recurrent themes and sub-themes were identified within the journals. Then, the themes were classified as content, process, and premise reflections within which the major subthemes were classified and grouped.

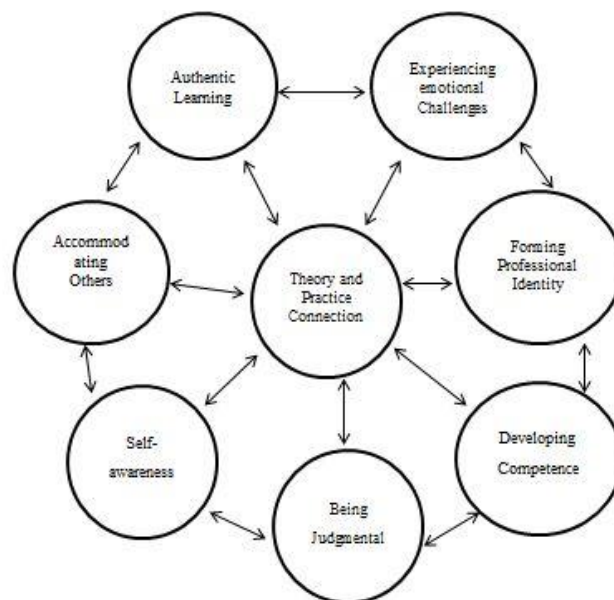


Figure 1: Interrelated thematic categories of reflective journal writing

#### **4.1 Content Level of Reflection**

According to the nature of the content reflection as being descriptive, the subthemes that fit this category were identified and the following sub-themes placed accordingly: authentic learning experience, collaboration and emotional reactions.

##### ***4.1.1 Authentic Learning Experience***

The content analysis of the journals revealed that PRSN perceived clinical posting as an effective and useful practice for their knowledge and skills. They revealed that the situation of the clinical environment could provide opportunities for real and authentic learning through active involvement in performing on the real patients that is very encouraging as well.

....when I reported to the staff nurse that the vital signs of the patient under ventilator were dropping, the code for CRP was called and I saw how the doctors and staff nurses are trying to save the patient. Then, the Sister asked me to do the resuscitation to learn. Although the patient couldn't be saved, I did CPR to a real person for the first time. I did my best in giving CRP with correct skills and techniques which helped me to improve my knowledge and experience (Yun, RJ1).

The above excerpt implied that the participant described the situation of performing Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitations (CPR) as an authentic learning experience where she actively involved in this nursing task; and she could use her knowledge on CPR to a real person for the first time. This educational situation had provoked her ability of reflection upon her performance that contributed to her self-knowledge in nursing profession. In this sense, her being away from the context of clinical practice and during writing her RJ, she has reflected on her experience in practicum. The RJ, now, helped her in the recollection of the experience of CPR to a real patient. According to Schon (1984), using reflective journal writing is the application of 'reflection-on-action' for the student nurse (SN) to process real-life events they experienced as novice SN to promote their learning. Thus, they can gain a better understanding of their own learning through reflection. Seyed Abolghasem et al. (2019) found that RJ allows the SN to view clinical posting from a different perspective. With the help of the qualifiers of Importance-Performance matrix, the results demonstrated that RJW was perceived highly important and the writing as their performance has a great impact on their learning. It was acknowledged that RJW can empower the



learners for their future profession either from recalling their past experience to relate to the current one or learning from their mistakes. Similarly, research suggests that RJ encourages the process of self-efficacy and empowerment among learners (Mann et al., 2009).

I knew what dementia is but dealing with a patient with dementia was something else, it was difficult to communicate with her. Since I was with a real person with such a problem for the first time, I used every opportunity to learn from this situation (Siti, RJ4).

In the above instance, the participant admitted in her RJ how her familiarity with a patient with dementia has impacted her to engage her related theoretical experiences. RJ enabled learners to express her true feeling towards active involvement in practicum that ended in learning during clinical posting. Various studies have documented that the primary role of RJ is to improve the learners' content knowledge (Schon, 1984; Chirema, 2007; Mann et al., 2009). This content knowledge could be constructed as a professional self-development through integrating the theory and practice in RJW (Jasper, 1999).

#### **4.1.2 Collaboration**

Nursing is considered a teamwork profession that relies on the competence of each individual. For novice SN, the presence of others in clinical posting plays a significant role in their learning and professional knowledge development. In their journals, the role of their tutors, staff nurses, peers, doctors, and even the patients were reflected as substantial sources of authentic learning. In fact, in collaboration with others in practicum, SN engaged in various authentic learning experiences that motivated them toward giving nursing care more professionally.

.....when staff nurses and a doctor was trying hard to save a patient, I offered my help. A staff nurse accepted and let me help them in such a critical condition. She shared her knowledge by saying what I could do at that time. This incident had highlighted in my mind because her openness on using other's hands and how working in a group could decrease tensions and increase productivity toward nursing care. I really appreciated her that I could help and learn (Anna, RJ8).

This excerpt implied that in a practicum, working with other significant individuals could be a source of developing knowledge and skills. At initial stage, the positive role of others in the process of learning was also reflected in the study by Seyed Abolghasem et al. (2019) as well. They found that the PRSN place high importance on their mentors' role and they can keep up with the good work and get involved in their students' effective reflection and reflective journaling.

The RJ aided recollection of observational knowledge through working with other significant individuals that could be a source of developing and internalizing knowledge and skills. For novice SN the clinical posting is overwhelming with multi-layer activities of nursing tasks that are being performed by competent members of the health group. This competency could not be acquired without the cooperation of other health team members. Studies on RJW have proven the impact of significant positive effects of others on student nurses' learning (Mann et al., 2009; Bjerkvik & Hilli, 2019).

.....in a clinical posting, supportive staff nurses in a time of crisis could provide learning condition, and well cooperation and effective communication could make the situation conducive for Student Nurses (Siti, RJ3).

In their journals, as in the above excerpt, there was some evidence on how the student nurses looked at others as role models who can provide a supportive environment for novice student nurses.

...When we are in the clinical environment, we are supported by health care members. We observe their activities in this environment, reflect upon it, and we learn from it. We reflect on real-life incidents, for health education, and when we learn, we feel good about it. Everything is real (Safura, RJ2).

This type of observation indicates that SN can see the nursing profession deals with the life of people and it is considered highly teamwork. Kim (2013) stated that RJ is to provide opportunities to learners "with more flexible choice in the content and process of reflection on the learning experiences" (p. 256). Accordingly, RJ enables students to challenge themselves with new ideas, values and insights through assessing and evaluating their tacit experience and knowledge on the

true side of nursing. By cooperating and observing others in the workplace, SN has chances to make a connection between what they were familiar and overlook their learning needs.

#### ***4.1.3 Emotional Reaction***

Novice SN experiences waves of emotions that do not know how to control and express. Bjerkvik and Hilli (2019) stated that “SN reflected on their own limitations, including time constraint, fear, and anxiety” (p. 37). Besides a variety of learning opportunities of real-life incidences of practicum, controlling their emotions were commonly described in their RJ as overwhelming experiences. So, novice SN experience emotional challenges when observing an event that is contradicting their views and learning.

The patient seemed very tired and wanted to rest. Then the staff nurse asked us to take his vital signs; then, we were scolded by the patient. I was in tears. Moreover, it was not the time for taking the vital signs. I hold my tears but surprised why the staff nurse neither pay attention to the patient’s condition at that moment nor to us as SN. This incident stayed in my mind because I know I don’t want to be like her [staff nurse] in the future (Yun, RJ2).

This fragment indicated that the SN was conscious and mindful towards the behavior and the attitude of the staff nurse. She expressed her opinion without any fear in her RJ saying in future she will be a better staff nurse. Paterson and Chapman (2013) mentioned that novice practitioners have “propositional knowledge” from books and classroom attendance but they lack experience. Therefore, they have to rely on their theoretical knowledge and their limited practical experience. It was frequently stated that being firm and have a friendly attitude seemed very challenging.

When I heard the mother of one of a patient was scolding the staff nurse of why she couldn’t see her son’s Case Note. I wondered of her shouting and speaking in a loud voice. But the staff nurse and doctor told her about her son’s progress and the hospital policy. It was challenging for me to see how the staff nurse behaved calmly. Nurses encounter such a situation that is not medical, but social, and they need to be firm and friendly (Yun, RJ).

In this excerpt, the participant had emphasized that how nursing profession is challenging and tough. She had reflected on this simple incident to express her emotions on the variety of roles that a staff nurse must play.

As the above discussion indicates, the participants were not only descriptive at the content level of reflection in their RJ, but also they had touched the process level of reflection and show their ability of practical knowledge while they wrote about certain procedures. If at the content level of reflection they expressed about the environment, people and their emotions, they also get into the process level of reflection and they wrote about “how” certain task being performed and how well it was done.

In the category of levels of reflection stated by Mezirow (1991), knowledge acquirement came as a by-product of reflection that improved and materialized through reflective journaling. In this study, the fact is that the pre-registered student nurses’ knowledge improvement was initiated at the level of content or descriptive level of reflection; however it is very limited. It could not be the learning per se as they were new to the environment and the situations of real-life events in clinical posting; as Mezirow called it ‘disorienting dilemma’. Moreover, as the student nurses advanced in their knowledge, at the process or practical level, they used their everyday experiences and practice in a more professional way. Throughout the time, participants gained more competence in their knowledge and practice with less psychological stress. It can be argued that this development has actually occurred, not simply being claimed to have occurred as it was reflected in their reflective journals as well. The discussion of overlapping concepts of content and process reflections was demonstrated in Figure 2.

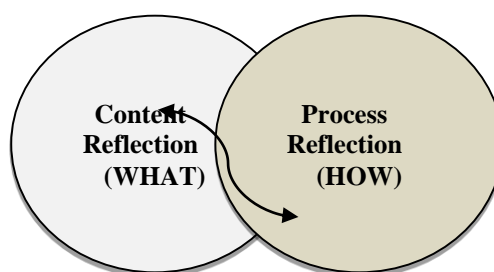


Figure 2: Content and process reflection overlapping

## **4.2 Process Level of Reflection**

Another major qualitative category was the process or practical level of reflection in which the appropriate subthemes were positioned. At this level, the learners mainly wrote about their familiarity with the practical aspect of ‘how’ certain nursing tasks were being performed in real situations with real persons. Process level of reflection is a cognitive ability on transforming, connecting with, and analyzing an experience, or an event from classroom or simulation lab to a real environment of the hospital. This connection is reflected in the RJ that provides a chance for PRSN to describe their internal processes and recognize their value in the process of learning (Allan & Driscoll, 2014). Accordingly, the following themes have emerged: reflection-on-action, self-awareness, and forming professional identity.

### ***4.2.1 Reflection-on-Action***

According to Donald Schon (1984), the capacity to reflect on-action is the key characteristic of professional practice that is a part of professional development to become skilled practitioners. It was commonly stated by the participants that in practicum they had developed a sense of awareness towards their own practice as becoming tactful and achieving self-efficacy. That is, their involvement in a range of experiences in the clinical posting helped them to develop their knowledge and skills required for the nursing profession as well as towards their own practice.

.....when I realized that the patient is having active bleeding, I knew why the staff nurse told me I need to wear surgical gloves and gown. I could see what the doctor and the staff nurse were doing, and I knew now what immediate actions to take to save a patient (Ayesha, RJ4).

The above excerpt implies that the participant’s awareness of her knowledge reflected in her practice. She was able to self-observe her own knowledge and skill and be aware of others’ practices for the sake of learning. During clinical practice, other participant was not content about her practice and demonstrated a sense of low self-efficacy in her practice. Similarly, other participants reported her awareness of her practice in her report.

When I failed to calculate the drops correctly and the drip finished fast, I knew this is my mistake. I felt guilty and immediately took action to prevent further medical complications to the patient. So, I checked O2 saturation, the patient's breathing rate,..... . When, I reported to the staff nurse, and observed what she was going to do, I reflected back on my mistake and learned from it ..... . The great lesson I learned from this real-life event was that I should never hide my mistake, accept it and learn from it (Anna, RJ1).

The above excerpt is a clear example of reflection-on-action when making mistakes was demonstrated as an opportunity to increase knowledge and improve self-efficacy in one's professional life. All together her awareness helped her to handle a similar situation in the future. Another participant reported an event that challenged her self-efficacy:

Patient with an open fracture, hard of hearing, and the language barrier didn't allow me [student nurse] to apply s/c injection of pain killer. When I reported to the staff nurse, she talked to her and asked me to perform the injection in front of her. I did administer the injection without any problem and the patient had no complaint. I was aware of the reason for the patient's refusal and reflecting and analyzing how the staff nurse solved the problem that both sides were happy. This incident enabled me to assess my self-efficacy. I realized about my lack of competence and confidence to persuade the patient. I was aware that it is the patient's right to choose her nurse, but I was a Student Nurse who needs to learn the nursing practice in a situation. This event reminded me that I need to learn many things academically and emotionally (Lena, RJ1).

In this excerpt, the participant described the situation in details and emphasized on the challenging situation that targeted her confidence. However, through her awareness, she got the opportunity to learn from the staff nurse and improve her sense of self-efficacy.

#### ***4.2.2 Self-Awareness***

Another major finding from RJ refers to increase the sense of awareness among the participants. Conte (2015) described this awareness a "by-product" of reflection that leads to learning. This awareness refers to the ability to analyze the situation critically, an ability to be in power of solving problems and even making sound decisions (Duffy, 2009). In many instances, participants stated

that RJ helps them realize the area lacking knowledge; which they need to improve. In this regard, one of the participants' statements was that RJ is an effective way of increasing their knowledge upon realization of the areas of knowledge which required more practice. For instance, self-awareness was explained as reflecting on their observation of a nursing task being performed by other members of the health team. This realization of their strengths and weaknesses would contribute to their learning.

... when I realized patient's temperature is high. Immediately, the staff nurse and I applied a warm sponge on the patient's head. The patient was shivering. Shortly, the temperature dropped, and the patient looked better. When the doctor arrived, the temperature was already down. The doctor said to us "well done, .....". I felt grateful and happy and proud of myself. When I reflected back to this incident, I feel blessed in working as a nurse (Safura, RJ3).

A plethora of literature on reflection emphasizes the sense of self-awareness toward nursing practices that initiated from reflection (Chirema, 2007; Mann et al., 2009; Conte, 2015). Mann et al. (2009) maintained that the formal requirements of reflective practice are a part of the licensing and validation process for the practitioners. That is, effective learning from experience is the offspring of developing critical thought upon the practice throughout the lifetime. Thus, the practical level of process reflection identified in the participants' journals representing this idea that effective reflection from experience leads to deep learning. Likewise, Bandura (1986) pointed out that the ability to associate new knowledge to the prior knowledge and integrating learners' beliefs, attitudes and values with professional culture can lead the learners toward the development of self-awareness and self-regulation in their learning. Thus, it can be strongly advocated that SN at practical level demonstrated self-awareness and self-identity as the results of reflection and reflective journaling.

...when I heard the machine for intravenous therapy is ringing; I went to check. I moved my eyes along the line of the tube to see any abnormality, nothing was wrong, and then I noticed the client's chest is not moving. I called the staff nurse in charge, when the doctor arrived, shortly after he announced that the patient had passed away (Yun, RJ2).

In this fragment, the participant stated that the clinical posting helped her associate her tacit knowledge acquired in the classroom and used it in real practice. Participants have noticed that their ability to reflect effectively is vital to their developing professional knowledge and skills.

#### ***4.2.3 Forming Professional Identity***

Identity is a process of frequent evolving and becoming and enacted in frequent practices. The concept of forming self-identity can be considered a journey within oneself; a micro-interaction or an intrapersonal reality that makes it possible for the student nurses to observe, feel, and understand what their future profession brings for them. During the practicum, this journey within oneself is very decisive for their future, and whether they want to be a nurse in future is a constant predicament. These student nurses were well aware of other members of medical team who are more knowledgeable. As they were assigned with staff nurses upon their arrival in the ward, they knew their nursing care was being monitored by them, and they should go to them in time of difficulty, and be part of this small community of practice as SN (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

SN is well aware of the fact that their professional identity depends on their coordination with the staff nurses, a well-coordinated interpersonal behavior for their sake of learning. Benner (1984) stated that seeking professional identity drives novice student nurses be mindful of other's practices and behaviors. In fact, they implicitly and explicitly explained in their RJ that they were in the process of constructing their professional identity.

In the future, I will aim to develop my assertive skills when working with colleagues. I will work out strategies for how I can achieve this in order to be an excellent staff nurse in future (Lena, RJ5).

The above excerpt implies that reflecting on a situation signifies the exact purpose of forming her identity and improving her knowledge and skills in the process of professional development. The concept of role modeling implies that their awareness in clinical posting could lead to a self-professional identity. Either upon reflection on other's behavior in clinical posting or on their inner-self, they make plans for the future and decide on what type of staff nurse they would like to be.



In future, I will handle the situation more perfectly and faster; in future, my plan is to perform with confidence, calm heart, and mind. I must build my confidence to take care of my patients. In the future, I should not be afraid or ignore the patient, I should use a smooth and soft voice when talking to a client; moreover, I will use my knowledge and help my patient in her condition (Safura, RJ5).

The above excerpt implies that the student nurse's determination of being a member of a health community is positive and indicated how she wanted to initiate from the reflection on others and the learning that has taken place in practicum. During clinical posting, the SN has come to the level of understanding that gaining knowledge and implementing it considered two different entities. They must be equipped with the knowledge and related skills required in clinical posting to the extent of being a competent staff nurse to be a member of a community.

I need to be open-minded in receiving any advice. I need to prepare myself physically & mentally before starting my career as a nurse. I need to control my feeling of anger that is affecting my job. I should be a good SN and show that I can be an excellent staff nurse one day. I should be more alert and careful. I must be mentally and physically prepared before going to clinical posting. I need to improve my knowledge and skill to handle the medical situation fast and effectively. I want to be a skillful nurse (Nouri, RJ3).

Upon the reflection in the practicum, they realized to be a member of the health team requires a lot of efforts. A participant wrote about the significance of proper communication in the process of gaining a professional identity. She believed that effective communication is 'a' must be acquired ability for every novice student nurse and other members of health team in order to be efficient in giving medical care.

.....when I become a staff nurse, I would appreciate the importance of good communication, being compassionate and acquire basic nursing skills. ....Effective communication and listening skills are the key to do effective care to support families through their loss. As a staff nurse in the future, I have to sharpen my communication skills. .... I need to educate myself ..... In order to provide proficient care in the future, I should keep myself aware of the policies & procedures of nursing care in any clinical setting (Siti, RJ5).

In the above excerpt, it is implied that professional identity would be formed through effective communication with the patient. And in order to give patients proper nursing care, the caregiver must be familiar with the devices to make their communication as smooth as possible. In general, the SN often stated about improving their knowledge and skills and become competent enough to work more independently if they want to be a member of the community of nursing practice. They believed that they need to be reflective thinkers on how things being done in the practicum to enhance their learning. Therefore, they can gradually reduce their reliance on the more experienced ones and increase their knowledge of the culture of hospital setting. Lave & Wenger (1991) named this phenomenon the process of legitimate peripheral participation, an active mind makes a proficient nurse.

Furthermore, in the process of learning, participants challenged their knowledge with their practice in actual real-life situations. At this level, they demonstrated some signs of criticality as they reflect back on their classroom theory and actual practice of themselves and other members of the health care community. Schon (1984) reiterated that reflection on the action is the sign of learning among nursing students. Reflectivity was limited to a certain aspect during the process or practical level of reflection. In this study, demonstration of poor or no attempt of critical reflection at this level was less obvious from the participants. The scenarios were reflected in their journals as they admitted that ‘what is right when they observe wrong practice’. This statement showed that the attempt for criticality is not far away; yet they gave importance to the understanding of their nursing practice and very much alert to incorporating their competence into nursing practice. The discussion of overlapping concepts of process and premise reflections was demonstrated in Figure 3.

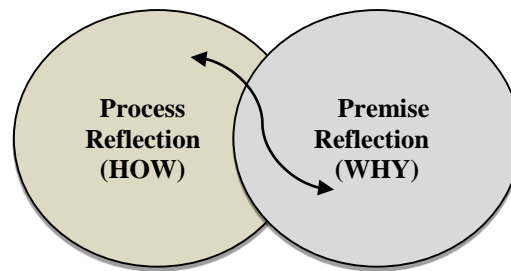


Figure 3: Process and premise reflection overlapping

### 4.3 Premise Level of Reflection

Through the entailed content analysis attention was paid to understand how pre-registered student nurses reflected on their concerns, dilemmas, and thoughts within the context of reflective journals. The results of journal analyses revealed the following sub-themes that could be classified as being judgmental, developing competence; both fit the premise level of reflection.

#### 4.3.1 Being Judgmental

In writing their RJ, the participants are encouraged to state their opinions on the quality of work they have done during their clinical posting. The purpose is to draw their attention to their nursing practices to improve in future similar incidences. From the initial stage in their RJ, they demonstrated their sense of criticality on different aspects of their knowledge, their nursing care, as well as being mindful of others' performance and behavior. Moreover, reflecting at a higher level and show judgments is strongly encouraged in their reflective journals. Therefore, the evidence of being judgmental towards self, others, and nursing practice, in general, was prominent among almost all the participants. This attitude of being judgmental was elaborately expressed in their writings.

..... when I remembered that I left my patient having a blood transfusion and complained of discomfort in her arm, I felt very guilty. I should have listened to her and take immediate action by informing the staff nurse. I should have stopped the flow immediately to avoid swollen hand (Siti, RJ5)

The above excerpt revealed that she reflected on her misconduct and criticized herself for her lack of attention to the patient. Tanner (2006) pointed out what influence clinical judgment is evaluating

personal performance. Due to being judgmental towards self, the student nurse could learn and never forget the incident. In another instance the participant reflected back on the action and showed her thinking process that influenced her clinical judgment and making decisions.

....while I was taking the BP machine out of the room, it sounded and made the patient wake up. His wife complained and asked me if her husband's disease is serious. I was speechless and couldn't apologize accurately. After this incident, patient that was cheerful was quiet and unhappy. I will not repeat this foolish mistake again because I hurt my patient's feeling. Since then, I think before taking action becomes my habit. I must think of a good rationale for my action, and then I should explain to him about my action (Anna, RJ5).

In this excerpt, it is revealed that reflecting back on the task makes her think of a rationale for her action. Having a rationale for anything you do was a positive sign of being accountable. Moreover, writing about routine practices in nursing, she realized that in order to avoid automation and routine work, there must be some thinking about it in advance. Seyed Abolghasem et al. (2019) came up with interesting results. They found out that PRSN thinks that automation can be avoided with RJ practice. And this can be avoided if educators assist the learners in handling the daily routine of clinical situations by encouraging them to be reflective practitioners. Chirema (2007) asserted that act autonomously and make appropriate clinical judgments is the nurses' daily work which can be achieved through reflection. Being judgmental towards oneself helped them to avoid making the same mistakes when they would encounter similar circumstances in the future. It is believed, however, that in the process of learning, making mistakes is inevitable. Making mistakes and reflecting on them is a part of the process of self-discovery.

There are times that the mistakes committed by other members in practicum and they are being judged by the SN. With theoretical knowledge in hands, and being new in the environment, often time novice student nurses witness an incident that impacted their mindset.

...when I saw that doctor touched my patient's wound before changing his gloves; I become alert for my patient's wellbeing. But I was not brave enough to tell the doctor or stop him from checking the wound. I was surprised to see that he didn't even use the disinfectant liquid. On another similar occasion, I noticed that the doctor visiting a patient with an open wound without washing his hand and he even had long sleeves coat on. I was alarmed but conscious enough not to say anything to embarrass the doctor in front of the patient. However, we told him, he responded positively. I learned the importance of acting assertively with colleagues for the sake of the patient's health (Lena, RJ2).

The above excerpt clearly demonstrates how the incident caused alertness in the SN. From her personal knowledge and experience, the novice SN makes judgments on professional team member for the sake of patient's health. Self-criticism leads to evaluating personal performance that influences clinical judgement (Tanner, 2006).

#### ***4.3.2 Developing Competence***

In the process of reaching competency, the student nurses highlighted what they had discovered about their shortfalls in their RJ. These shortfalls were identified as insufficiency of knowledge and skills in nursing practice that they need to avoid in all accounts. Therefore, the attitude of being self-critical could help them to develop adequate knowledge in the process of professionalism.

.....when I was assigned to take care of a patient under a ventilation machine, I was shocked and didn't know how to handle this case. Patient had all kinds of tubes and I was responsible to assess the patient's general condition regularly. I was happy the staff nurse was very helpful. However, I realized I need to know a lot about the patient under ventilation machine (Fatin, RJ1).

This excerpt reveals that from the initial stage of being in the clinical posting, the novice SN experiences a sense of disorientation; yet, she appreciated the opportunity for learning. Moreover, she realized the insufficiency of her knowledge in the workplace through clinical practice. And through self-awareness, her lack of knowledge was the reason for her disappointment. In this regard, Chirema (2007) maintained that "reflective journal writing in health-related courses can enhance self-awareness, interpersonal understanding, critical analysis, cognitive learning, and

clinical reasoning skills” (p. 193). It is believed that student nurses must keep in their mind that developing competence requires attending to their strength and weakness of their practice.

Due to a busy day, the staff nurse responsible for antibiotics didn't finish on time. She asked me to administer Morphine to three patients. I knew the only one who should administer this medication is the registered staff nurse, but I said ok due to her busy schedule. I checked everything before administering the medication. Then the Sister of the ward saw me and asked what I am doing. Then, she reminded me of my line. It was wrong of me doing something I shouldn't do. Although she told me comforting words, I would not do anything to put the patient's life in danger. I know as a SN, I shouldn't handle this type of injection (Anna, RJ6).

The above excerpt reveals that in the process of learning at the level of competency, the SN has done everything to project her knowledge. She knew that to administer Morphine, she must be extra careful and must check Patient's Case Note and medication chart not to make any mistake. She considered it as a strong point of her practice, whereas as for a weak point, as a SN she shouldn't administer this drug. It is clear that through premise reflection when being critical is the dominant action, learners can develop competency in themselves.

There were times that the participants examined and evaluated their own performance but had difficulties in verifying appropriate actions. They, then, reflected on how to use their tacit knowledge through self-assessment. In their reflective journals, they declared that they learned from their mistakes through self-development and engaged in self- reflection and self-evaluation by recognizing the sources of knowledge. Consequently, over time, student nurses acknowledged that the process of reflective journaling made them feel responsible for their own learning. At this stage, sharing and comparing experiences with other learners and through interaction with staff nurses, enhanced and more liberating learning has occurred. This type of learning happened when learners were experiencing overlapping of process or practical level of reflection. Moreover, the result is self-directed learning from the cyclical and yet overlapped of these levels of reflections. It is through reflecting on their levels of learning that the student nurses are encouraged to understand the complexity of reflective journaling. The above discussion was summarized in Figure 4.

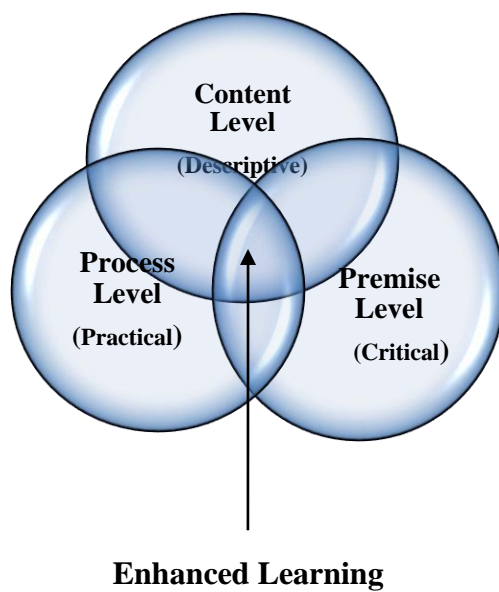


Figure 4: Thematic categories of participants' levels of reflection

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Pre-registration nursing students found reflective journaling to be very good in providing evidence of their improvement in clinical practice providing an awareness of their weakness and strengths to develop their independent self-directed learning. RJ is perceived as a source of learning as they encourage reflection, self-knowledge and the expression of feelings. Participants pointed out for RJ to be successful, they should receive feedback from their tutors and peers, and have clear guideline. Then, they can develop and sharpen their reflective critical thinking skills. By analyzing their student's RJ's, nurse tutors can guide the student's ability to deliver and manage responsible, decent, and empathic patient care. Therefore, because of the time and commitment that the activity requires, nurse tutors must be highly motivated and well trained on the subject. From the perspective of transformation theory, there are ideal conditions for the full realization of adult learning through realizing the content, process, and premise levels of reflection discussed in this study. These conditions can function as principles for judging the quality of self-directed learning and the conditions that facilitate or impede learning. Nurse tutors can use a pedagogy that integrates workplace study with reflective journaling as a way to assess their student's knowledge, confidence, and competence.

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