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In the Mirror of Teaching: Exploring Teachers' Reflective Journeys in Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This study explored the reflective journeys of elementary school teachers at Nabas Elementary School, Aklan, Philippines, focusing on how reflective journals influenced instructional decision-making, responses to learners' assessment results, teaching practices, professional growth, and pupils' learning experiences. Anchored in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design involving seven female teachers representing kindergarten through Grade 6, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed, validated semi-structured interview guide and examined through narrative and thematic analyses. Findings revealed that reflective journals helped teachers evaluate classroom experiences, identify instructional challenges, modify teaching strategies, and develop learner-responsive lesson plans. Assessment-based reflection supported the identification of learning gaps and the implementation of remediation, enrichment, and differentiated instruction. Participants reported increased professional self-awareness, instructional flexibility, and confidence, alongside perceived improvements in pupils' participation, engagement, understanding, and classroom interaction. However, limited time, heavy workloads, diverse learner needs, and difficulties interpreting assessment results challenged sustained reflective practice. The findings were based on teachers' experiences and observations and did not establish a causal relationship between reflective journaling and pupils' academic performance. The study recommended manageable reflection periods, Learning Action Cell sessions, mentoring, coaching, constructive feedback, and professional development activities, which informed a proposed school-based action plan. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting reflective, learner-responsive instruction and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through collaborative professional learning. Its contribution to educational and institutional sustainability lies in providing a practical framework for continuous teacher development, instructional improvement, and sustained school-based reflective practices.

Keywords: Assessment-Informed Instruction; Elementary School Teachers; Experiential Learning Theory; Instructional Decision-Making; Professional Development; Reflective Journals; Teacher Confidence

1. Introduction

Reflective practice enables teachers to examine classroom experiences, evaluate instructional decisions, and improve teaching and learning. Reflective journals document these experiences and support informed responses to learners' needs. This study explores the reflective journeys of seven teachers at Nabas Elementary School, Aklan, focusing on instructional choices, assessment responses, teaching practices, professional growth, and pupils' learning experiences. It also seeks to develop an action plan for strengthening reflective practice.

Reflective practice involves systematically examining classroom experiences to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Suphasri and Chinokul (2021) described it as a cyclical process of gathering evidence, analyzing experiences, and applying insights to teaching. Reflective journals support this process by documenting instructional decisions, classroom observations, and professional realizations. Cole et al. (2022) emphasized the relationship between reflection and classroom assessment, while Pang (2022) highlighted its role in improving assessment practices. These perspectives demonstrate how reflective journaling may strengthen instructional decision-making and professional development.

Research emphasizes the contribution of reflective practice to teacher development, professional identity, and instructional improvement. Cole et al. (2022) and Miulescu and Tacea (2023) associated reflection with professional awareness and critical examination of teaching practices. Saif and Safdar (2023) and Naseem et al. (2023) identified workload and time constraints as challenges to sustained reflection. Reflective journaling also supports professional learning and pedagogical competence. Barham (2023), Almutawa and Alfahid (2024), Gläser-Zikuda et al. (2024), Diseth (2025), Sun and Ahmad (2025), and Li (2025) highlighted its contributions to self-awareness, critical thinking, confidence, and instructional development, while emphasizing the need for guidance and meaningful engagement. Regarding instructional decisions, Kılıç (2022), El Souefi (2022), Hummes and Seckel (2024), Cirocki et al. (2024), and Vattøy and Gamlem (2025) demonstrated the relevance of structured reflection to lesson planning, teaching strategies, and professional learning. Pang (2022), Gulhane et al. (2022), Fadli and Ibrahim (2022), and Wylie and Lyon (2022) further connected reflection with formative assessment and evidence-informed instructional adjustments. Meanwhile, Maharjan et al. (2025), Faez et al. (2025), Rai (2025), Tzotzou et al. (2024), and Agnihotri et al. (2024) emphasized its relationship with teacher confidence, professional identity, self-efficacy, and continuing development.

International studies recognize reflective practice as an important component of instructional improvement and teacher development, although implementation may be affected by limited time, workload, and institutional support. In the Philippines, reflective practice aligns with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers established through DepEd Order No. 42, s.2017 (Department of Education, 2017) and reinforced by DepEd Memorandum No. 008, s. 2023 (Department of Education, 2023). These policies emphasize teacher competence, performance improvement, and continuing professional development. Philippine studies by Castaño and Litao (2021), Cadiz (2021), Cagumbay-Kadile (2025), and Oriel and Estrellan (2025) examined reflective inquiry, teaching practices, professional development, and challenges associated with professional standards. However, limited research has explored how elementary teachers use reflective journals to guide instructional choices and respond to learners' assessment results in their everyday classroom experiences.

The study is anchored in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which explains learning through four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Applied to teaching, these stages involve classroom experiences, reflection on instructional outcomes, development of insights, and implementation of improved teaching strategies. The conceptual framework examines three interconnected dimensions: reflective journals in instructional decision-making, responses to learners' assessment results, and their influence on teaching practices, professional growth, and pupils' learning experiences. Narrative inquiry is appropriate for understanding these experiences, as demonstrated by Maharjan et al. (2025), Cole et al. (2022), and Li (2025), who explored reflection through teachers' personal and professional narratives.

Although reflective practice has been widely studied, much of the literature focuses on pre-service teachers, teacher educators, and general professional development. Limited attention has been given to the reflective journeys of in-service elementary teachers, particularly how their journals inform instructional decisions, assessment responses, and professional growth. To address this gap, the study explores the experiences of seven purposively selected teachers at Nabas Elementary School, representing kindergarten through Grade 6. Specifically, it examines how reflective journals guide instructional choices, support responses to assessment results, and influence teaching practices, professional growth, and pupils' learning experiences. The findings will serve as the basis for a proposed school-based action plan.

The study primarily supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by examining reflective practices that may improve instructional quality, teacher competence, and responsiveness to learners' needs. It also relates to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through opportunities for collaboration among teachers, school administrators, and educational stakeholders in strengthening professional development. These contributions emphasize the potential value of reflective journaling in supporting educational improvement.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by exploring how reflective journals support continuous instructional improvement, assessment-responsive teaching, and professional growth. Its findings may help teachers identify instructional challenges, strengthen classroom practices, and address learners' needs. From an institutional perspective, the proposed action plan may guide school administrators and educational stakeholders

in developing manageable reflective journaling activities and professional development support. Overall, the study provides localized insights into sustaining reflective teaching practices and strengthening the quality of elementary education in Philippine public schools.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry design to understand how teachers interpreted their classroom experiences through reflective journals. It examined how reflection informed instructional choices, responses to learners' assessment results, teaching practices, professional growth, confidence, and pupils' learning experiences. Individual narratives were analyzed to identify common and contrasting experiences, providing insights into teachers' reflective practices and serving as the basis for a proposed action plan.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Nabas Elementary School in Nabas, Aklan, Philippines, a public elementary school in Region VI with School ID 114887. The school was selected as the setting for exploring teachers' experiences with reflective journaling in classroom instruction and professional development. The geographical illustration of the study locale identifies Nabas Elementary School and its surrounding communities, providing context for the institutional setting where the participants conducted their teaching and reflective practices.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study involved seven female teachers from Nabas Elementary School, representing kindergarten through Grade 6. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 24 years, and their positions included Teacher I, Teacher III, and Teacher VI. The participants were identified as Participants A–G to maintain confidentiality. As presented in Table 1, one teacher represented each grade level. Participant A was a Teacher I with three years of experience, while Participants B–F were Teacher III educators with 8–24 years of experience. Participant G was a Teacher VI with 11 years of teaching experience. This variation provided perspectives from teachers with different levels of professional experience.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select seven teachers with direct classroom teaching experience and familiarity with reflective journaling. Participants were required to be currently teaching at the elementary level, have at least three years of teaching experience, and possess experience using reflective journals. One teacher from each grade level, kindergarten through Grade 6, was selected to capture reflective experiences across different elementary teaching contexts.

2.5 Research Instrument

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide served as the primary research instrument. It consisted of two parts: demographic information covering sex, teaching position, grade level, and years of teaching experience; and open-ended questions aligned with the four research questions. These explored instructional choices, responses to learners' assessment results, teaching practices, professional growth, pupils' learning experiences, and recommendations for an action plan. The interview guide was reviewed and validated by the research adviser and a school administrator to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was obtained from the principal of Nabas Elementary School before selecting qualified participants. Following validation of the interview guide, the researcher explained the study objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality procedures. Seven teachers participated in semi-structured interviews describing their reflective journal experiences and classroom practices. Participants were given sufficient time to respond, and follow-up questions were asked when clarification was necessary. Their responses were collected, reviewed, and organized according to the research questions. Individual accounts were reconstructed and compared to identify shared and contrasting experiences relevant to the proposed action plan.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Narrative and thematic analyses were employed to interpret the participants' responses. Narrative analysis organized each teacher's experiences into individual accounts covering classroom situations, reflections, instructional decisions, assessment responses, professional realizations, and challenges. Cross-narrative thematic analysis identified significant statements, recurring patterns, and differences across the seven participants. Triangulation involved comparing responses across interview questions and participants to strengthen the consistency of the identified themes. Relevant participant quotations supported the interpretations and preserved the teachers' perspectives. The findings were interpreted in relation to the research questions, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and related literature. The resulting themes, challenges, and recommendations informed the proposed action plan.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and research integrity. Permission was obtained from the school principal, and participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to decline participation or questions. Participant identities were protected through assigned codes, and responses were used for academic research purposes. Data collection, analysis, and reporting were conducted with honesty and respect for participants' dignity and privacy.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Role of Reflective Journals in Instructional Decision-Making

3.1.1 Reflective Journals as Tools for Reviewing Teaching Experiences

The participants used reflective journals to evaluate lesson effectiveness, learner participation, classroom challenges, and areas requiring improvement. Participants A, C, E, F, and G emphasized reviewing instructional experiences to identify successful strategies and necessary adjustments. Participant A explained, "Writing my reflections helps me think about what went well during the lesson and what I can improve the next day." These findings indicate that reflective journals supported systematic examination of classroom experiences and instructional effectiveness. This supports Suphasri and Chinokul (2021), who described reflection as a cyclical process of examining experiences and applying insights to improve teaching. Similarly, Miulescu and Tacea (2023) emphasized the contribution of structured reflection to teachers' awareness and critical evaluation of instructional practices.

3.1.2 Reflective Journals as Guides for Learner-Responsive Lesson Planning

Participants A, B, C, E, F, and G reported using previous classroom experiences to guide lesson planning, activity selection, instructional materials, and learner support. Teachers adjusted their approaches based on pupils' interests, participation, and learning difficulties. Participant C stated, "It guides me in selecting appropriate teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessments based on my pupils' needs." These findings suggest that reflective journaling encouraged instructional planning based on actual classroom experiences rather than predetermined activities alone. This is consistent with Kılıç (2022), who emphasized the contribution of reflective practice to instructional planning and strategy modification. Hummes and Seckel (2024) similarly highlighted the importance of evaluating previous lessons when determining appropriate instructional improvements.

3.1.3 Reflective Journals as Bases for Modifying Teaching Strategies

Participants described modifying teaching strategies after identifying low participation, limited interest, or difficulties understanding lessons. Participant A introduced shape-hunting activities and group work, Participant C adopted guided reading and the Waling-Waling Reader Tracker, Participant D incorporated presentations and games, Participant E used hands-on mathematics activities, and Participant G reconsidered teacher-centered science instruction. These experiences demonstrate how reflective journals helped teachers connect classroom challenges with instructional adjustments. The findings support Cole et al. (2022), who emphasized reflection in addressing instructional concerns, and Cirocki et al. (2024), who associated reflective practice with improved understanding of classroom instruction. The process also reflects Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, in which teachers examine experiences, develop insights, and apply alternative strategies.

3.2 Reflective Journals in Responding to Learners' Assessment Results

3.2.1 Assessment Results as Evidence for Instructional Reflection

The participants used assessment results to determine whether learning objectives were achieved, identify pupils' strengths and difficulties, and evaluate teaching effectiveness. Participants A, C, F, and G emphasized using assessment evidence to recognize learning gaps and determine necessary instructional responses. Participant C stated, "Assessment results help me determine learners' strengths and learning gaps. They guide me in modifying my teaching strategies and planning appropriate interventions." These findings indicate that assessment results served as evidence for examining instructional effectiveness rather than merely recording pupils' performance. This supports Pang (2022), who emphasized assessment information in improving teaching, and Wylie and Lyon (2022), who highlighted the relationship between formative assessment evidence and reflective instructional decision-making.

3.2.2 Reflective Journals as Guides for Remediation and Instructional Support

Participants documented pupils' achievements, common errors, learning difficulties, and possible interventions. Their reflections guided decisions involving remediation, enrichment, additional practice, and differentiated instruction. Participant G explained, "I also write the next actions to be done, such as reteaching difficult lessons, enriching activities, and applying various strategies in the next session." These findings demonstrate that reflective journals connected assessment findings with specific instructional responses. This is consistent with Vattøy and Gamlem (2025), who associated reflective logs with improved formative assessment practices, and Fadli and Ibrahim (2022), who emphasized formative assessment as a means of improving instruction.

3.2.3 Assessment-Based Modification of Teaching Strategies

Participants described changing instructional strategies after identifying specific learning difficulties. Participant A introduced alphabet-matching games and puzzles, Participant B provided additional examples and practice, Participant C implemented reading drills and a reading tracker, and Participant E used guided problem-solving activities. These adjustments addressed difficulties identified through classroom assessments. The findings suggest that assessment-based reflection helped teachers select instructional strategies responsive to learners' demonstrated needs. This supports Wylie and Lyon's (2022) discussion of using assessment evidence, feedback, and learning outcomes to guide instructional decisions.

3.2.4 Challenges in Interpreting Learners' Assessment Performance

Participants identified limited time, large class sizes, diverse learner abilities, and competing teaching responsibilities as challenges in interpreting assessment results. Participants A, F, and G also reported difficulty determining whether low performance resulted from developmental readiness, instructional strategies, assessment difficulty, or individual learning needs. These findings indicate that meaningful assessment reflection requires sufficient time and careful consideration of learners' circumstances. Naseem et al. (2023) similarly identified workload and time constraints as barriers to sustained reflection, while Almutawa and Alfahid (2024) emphasized limited time as a challenge in reflective journal writing.

3.3 Influence of Reflective Journals on Teaching Practices, Professional Growth, and Pupils' Learning Experiences

3.3.1 Reflective Journaling and Professional Self-Awareness

Participants reported that reflective journaling strengthened their awareness of professional strengths, limitations, and areas requiring improvement. Participants A, C, F, and G described becoming more reflective about instructional decisions, classroom management, teaching effectiveness, and professional responsibilities. Participant C stated, "Reflective practice has strengthened my teaching skills, improved my decision-making, and encouraged continuous professional learning." These findings indicate that reflection supported teachers' understanding of their professional development needs. Suphasri and Chinokul (2021) emphasized the relationship between reflection and awareness of teaching beliefs and practices, while Cole et al. (2022) connected reflective practice with professional identity development.

3.3.2 Reflective Practice and Learner-Centered Instruction

Participants described using reflective insights to create more engaging, differentiated, and learner-centered lessons. Participant A selected activities appropriate to kindergarten pupils' interests, Participant C emphasized differentiated instruction, Participant E modified teaching approaches based on learners' needs, and Participant G reported improved responsiveness in science instruction. These experiences suggest that reflective practice encouraged teachers to consider pupils' learning needs when selecting instructional strategies. This is consistent with Barham (2023), who associated reflective journaling with professional awareness and teaching development, and Sun and Ahmad (2025), who emphasized its role in examining instructional approaches.

3.3.3 Perceived Improvements in Pupils' Learning Experiences

Participants reported improvements in pupil participation, classroom interaction, understanding, confidence, routines, and assessment performance following reflective instructional adjustments. Participants A and D emphasized improved classroom engagement, while Participants B, C, and E described increased participation and confidence. Participant G reported improved science assessment results and learner motivation. These findings suggest that teachers perceived positive classroom changes associated with their reflective practices. However, the results were based on participants' observations rather than statistical comparisons and do not establish causality. Kılıç (2022) similarly associated reflection with improvements in classroom teaching, while Maharjan et al. (2025) emphasized its role in identifying instructional weaknesses and guiding improvements.

3.3.4 Reflective Journaling and Teacher Confidence

Participants described increased confidence through recognizing professional progress, learning from classroom experiences, and preparing more effectively for future lessons. Participants A, B, C, E, and G associated reflection with improved decision-making, greater awareness of strengths, and increased preparedness. Participant E explained, "It has increased my confidence because it allows me to learn from successes and mistakes." These findings indicate that reflective journaling helped teachers recognize professional growth and approach instructional challenges as opportunities for learning. This supports Faez et al. (2025), who identified a positive relationship between reflective practice and teacher self-efficacy, and Li (2025), who connected constructive reflection with confidence, adaptability, and pedagogical development.

3.3.5 Challenges in Sustaining Reflective Journaling

Participants identified limited time, heavy workloads, lesson preparation, checking pupils' outputs, documentation, and other school responsibilities as barriers to consistent reflective journaling. Participants A, C,

E, F, and G emphasized difficulties maintaining regular and meaningful reflection alongside their teaching responsibilities. These findings indicate that sustained reflective practice depends on manageable workloads and institutional support. Naseem et al. (2023) similarly identified time constraints and workload as barriers to reflection, while Almutawa and Alfahid (2024) highlighted limited time as a challenge in reflective journal writing. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating reflection into existing professional activities rather than treating it solely as an additional requirement.

3.4 Proposed Action Plan for Strengthening Teachers' Reflective Practice

3.4.1 Teachers' Recommendations for Sustaining Reflective Journaling

Participants recommended allocating regular reflection time, strengthening mentoring and coaching, incorporating reflective discussions into Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and providing constructive feedback through classroom observations. They also emphasized professional learning activities, assessment analysis, and supportive environments where teachers could share experiences without fear of judgment. Participant D stated, "School leaders can promote reflective journals as a tool for professional growth rather than for compliance." These recommendations suggest that meaningful reflection requires institutional support, collaboration, and opportunities for professional learning. Tzotzou et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of integrating reflective practice into professional development, while Gläser-Zikuda et al. (2024) highlighted the need for guidance in developing deeper reflective writing.

3.4.2 Development of the School-Based Reflective Practice Action Plan

The proposed action plan incorporated orientation on reflective journaling, brief weekly reflection periods, monthly LAC-based sharing, mentoring and coaching, collaborative assessment analysis, classroom observations with reflective conferences, professional development workshops, and quarterly monitoring. Implementation responsibilities were assigned to school heads, master teachers, LAC coordinators, mentors, and participating teachers. The activities were designed to address identified challenges and strengthen the connection between reflection, instructional decisions, and professional development. The action plan reflects the participants' expressed needs for manageable reflection opportunities, collaborative learning, constructive feedback, and sustained professional support. It also aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory by connecting classroom experiences, reflection, professional insights, and instructional adjustments. Overall, the proposed activities provide a structured approach to strengthening reflective journaling as an ongoing process of professional learning and instructional improvement.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that reflective journals played an important role in the instructional decision-making, assessment practices, and professional growth of seven elementary teachers at Nabas Elementary School, Aklan. Reflective journaling enabled teachers to evaluate classroom experiences, identify instructional challenges, and modify teaching strategies according to learners' needs. Assessment-based reflection supported the identification of learning gaps and the planning of remediation, enrichment, and differentiated instruction. Participants also reported increased professional self-awareness, flexibility, confidence, and more learner-centered teaching practices. They observed improvements in pupils' participation, engagement, understanding, and classroom interaction, although these observations did not establish a direct causal relationship with academic performance. Despite these benefits, time constraints and heavy workloads affected the consistency of reflective practice, highlighting the importance of manageable procedures and institutional support.

Teachers are encouraged to maintain concise, purposeful reflective journals that document classroom experiences, assessment findings, instructional challenges, and planned improvements. Reflective practices should guide remediation, enrichment, differentiated instruction, and learner-centered activities based on pupils' demonstrated needs. School administrators should provide manageable reflection periods, integrate collaborative reflection into Learning Action Cell sessions, and strengthen mentoring, coaching, classroom observations, and constructive feedback. Curriculum developers and the Department of Education may support these efforts through practical reflection guides, professional development activities, and assessment-informed instructional resources. The proposed school-based action plan should be implemented and regularly monitored according to available resources and teachers' professional needs. Future researchers are encouraged to examine reflective practices across different educational settings using additional data sources to strengthen understanding of their relationship with teaching practices and pupils' learning experiences.

The study was limited to seven purposively selected elementary teachers from Nabas Elementary School, Aklan, whose reflective experiences were examined through qualitative narrative inquiry. The findings were based primarily on participants' self-reported experiences, perceptions, and classroom observations, limiting their generalizability to other educational settings. The study did not statistically measure pupils' academic performance or establish a causal relationship between reflective journaling and learning outcomes. Additional evidence from actual reflective journal entries, classroom observations, lesson plans, learner outputs, and follow-

up interviews could provide a more comprehensive understanding of reflective practice and its influence on instructional decision-making and classroom experiences.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this study. The research involved seven elementary school teachers from Nabas Elementary School, Aklan, Philippines, with the necessary permission obtained from the school principal. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and data were collected through non-invasive, semi-structured interviews, with confidentiality maintained and no identifying information disclosed. The researchers acknowledge the participating teachers and school administration for their cooperation and support throughout the study.

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