

Teacher Reflections as Researchers in Interpreting and Evaluating Learning Practices Through and Arts Exhibition Project at SMP Negeri 2 Demak

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Abstract: This study investigates how teacher reflection, through an autoethnographic approach, contributes to understanding and evaluating learning practices implemented in an arts exhibition project in secondary school visual arts education. This qualitative autoethnographic study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Demak, Indonesia, involving one visual arts teacher as the researcher-participant, 32 Grade VIII students, the principal, and the vice principal for curriculum affairs. Data were collected through reflective journals, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentary evidence, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis integrated with autoethnographic interpretation. Four interconnected themes emerged: teacher reflection transformed pedagogical understanding from product-oriented to process-oriented and experiential learning; aesthetic interaction enabled collaborative meaning-making; the project encouraged a shift from product-based to authentic assessment emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and reflective thinking; and sustained reflection reconstructed teacher identity from instructional practitioner to reflective practitioner. Challenges included unequal student participation, increased assessment demands, and maintaining researcher reflexivity. This study uniquely positions teacher autoethnography as a methodological lens to capture pedagogical transformation during exhibition-based learning, an underexplored perspective in visual arts education research. Findings inform the design of authentic learning environments and reflective pedagogy in arts education. This research extends experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and reflective practice theories by demonstrating that school-based art exhibitions function as pedagogical spaces where aesthetic engagement, authentic learning, and teacher professional development converge simultaneously.

Keywords: Arts Exhibition Project, Authentic Learning, Reflective Practice, Visual Arts Education

A. Introduction

Art education has increasingly shifted from a product-oriented perspective toward a learning process that emphasizes creativity, reflection, collaboration, and authentic engagement. Within this perspective, art exhibitions are no longer viewed merely as final displays of students' work but as pedagogical environments where students construct meaning through artistic practice, social interaction, and reflective experiences. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that exhibition-based learning enhances students' creativity, aesthetic appreciation, communication skills, and learning motivation (Morris & Paris, 2022). The theory of experiential learning (Schubert, 2025) emphasizes that meaningful learning emerges through cycles of concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptualization, and active experimentation, while Dewey's concept of Art as (Wong et al., 2023) argues that aesthetic experiences become meaningful when learners actively interact with their environment. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism (Sáez Bondía & Cortés Gracia, 2022) explains that meaning is socially constructed through interaction, making collaborative artistic activities particularly valuable for educational development. Collectively, previous research agrees that authentic artistic experiences encourage deeper learning, student engagement, and reflective thinking.

Although numerous studies have examined the educational value of art exhibitions, important gaps remain. Existing research predominantly focuses on student outcomes, such as creativity, appreciation, motivation, or academic achievement, while paying considerably less attention to teachers' reflective experiences during the implementation of exhibition-based learning. More specifically, little is known about how teachers interpret their pedagogical decisions, evaluate learning processes, and reconstruct their professional understanding while participating in exhibition projects. Consequently, teacher reflection has largely been treated as a complementary activity rather than as a primary source of pedagogical knowledge capable of informing instructional improvement. This limited understanding restricts the development of reflective teaching practices that are essential for sustaining authentic learning environments in visual arts education.

Recent developments in educational research indicate an increasing interest in practitioner inquiry and autoethnographic approaches that position educators as both researchers and participants in their own professional practice (Boice et al., 2024). Contemporary studies also emphasize the importance of aesthetic engagement, immersive learning environments, and reflective pedagogies in developing meaningful educational experiences (Xu, 2025). Nevertheless, empirical studies integrating autoethnography, teacher reflection, aesthetic interaction, and authentic learning within school-based art exhibition projects remain scarce. Most available investigations examine

these concepts independently rather than exploring their interconnected relationships within actual classroom practice. Therefore, there is still a need for research that holistically explains how teachers generate pedagogical knowledge through systematic reflection during authentic learning activities.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of teacher reflection as an autoethnographic research process for interpreting and evaluating learning practices within an arts exhibition project. Unlike previous studies that primarily assess students' learning outcomes, this research positions teachers' lived experiences as the principal source of empirical evidence. Through an autoethnographic lens, teacher reflection becomes both the research method and the analytical framework for understanding how aesthetic interaction, experiential learning, and authentic assessment emerge throughout the exhibition process. This perspective offers a more comprehensive understanding of exhibition-based learning by connecting teachers' professional learning with students' authentic educational experiences.

This study contributes theoretically by extending the application of autoethnography in arts education and by integrating experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and reflective practice into a coherent framework for understanding exhibition-based learning. Practically, the findings provide insights for teachers, school leaders, and curriculum developers in designing learning environments that promote reflection, collaboration, aesthetic engagement, and authentic assessment. The study also contributes methodological evidence demonstrating how teacher reflection can function as a credible source of pedagogical inquiry for continuous instructional improvement. Based on these considerations, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do teachers, through autoethnographic reflection, interpret and evaluate learning practices implemented during an arts exhibition project, and how do these reflections contribute to understanding aesthetic interaction, authentic learning experiences, and the development of reflective pedagogical practices in visual arts education?

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative autoethnographic research design to examine teacher reflections in interpreting and evaluating learning practices during an arts exhibition project at SMP Negeri 2 Demak, Central Java, Indonesia. Autoethnography was selected because it enables researchers to critically examine their own professional experiences while connecting personal narratives with broader educational and sociocultural contexts (Xu, 2025). In this study, the first author simultaneously assumed the roles of classroom teacher, participant, and researcher, allowing reflective experiences arising throughout the project to become the primary source of empirical data.

The research was conducted from January to March 2026 during the implementation of a project-based visual arts learning program in Grade VIII. The arts exhibition constituted the culminating activity of a semester-long learning unit in which students planned, created, organized, and publicly presented their artworks. The project consisted of four consecutive stages: (1) planning the exhibition theme and learning objectives, (2) producing artworks individually and collaboratively, (3) organizing and implementing the exhibition, and (4) conducting post-exhibition reflection and evaluation. Throughout these stages, teacher reflections were continuously documented and analyzed.

The participants consisted of one visual arts teacher (the first author as researcher-participant), 32 Grade VIII students, the school principal, and one vice principal for curriculum affairs. Students participated as creators and exhibition organizers, while school administrators were involved as key informants to provide additional perspectives regarding the implementation and educational value of the exhibition project. Participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure data richness and credibility. The primary data source comprised the teacher's reflective journal, which was written after each important learning activity and documented instructional decisions, classroom interactions, challenges encountered, emotional responses, and pedagogical insights. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the learning process using structured observation notes focusing on students' participation, collaborative behaviors, aesthetic interactions, communication patterns, and problem-solving activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten students selected to represent different levels of classroom participation, together with the school principal and vice principal, to explore their perceptions of the exhibition project and its contribution to learning. Supporting documents included lesson plans, students' artworks, exhibition catalogues, photographs, assessment rubrics, students' reflection sheets, and school documentation related to the exhibition activities.

The researcher occupied an insider position throughout the study because of her dual role as teacher and investigator. Such positionality provided direct access to naturally occurring learning experiences while simultaneously requiring continuous critical self-reflection to minimize personal bias. Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity, autoethnography acknowledges researcher subjectivity as an important analytical resource. To enhance reflexivity, the researcher maintained reflective memos that distinguished personal assumptions from observed classroom events and continuously compared personal interpretations with interview findings, observation records, and documentary evidence.

Ethical considerations received careful attention throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration before data collection commenced. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers and school administrators, while parental consent and student assent were secured for student participation. Participants were informed about the objectives of the research, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without academic consequences. Pseudonyms were used during transcription and reporting to protect participants' identities, and all research data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework integrated with autoethnographic interpretation. The analysis consisted of six stages. First, all reflective journals, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were organized chronologically and repeatedly read to achieve data familiarization. Second, meaningful statements related to teaching experiences, aesthetic interaction, authentic learning, collaboration, and reflective practice were assigned initial codes using inductive coding procedures. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories to identify emerging patterns across different data sources. Fourth, these categories were synthesized into overarching themes representing teachers' evolving interpretations of learning practices during the exhibition project. Fifth, the preliminary themes were reviewed through constant comparison with original data, researcher memos, and supporting evidence obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Finally, the themes were interpreted by integrating personal reflective narratives with relevant theoretical perspectives, including experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, aesthetic learning, and reflective practice.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied several qualitative validation strategies. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing reflective journals, interviews, classroom observations, and documentary evidence. Method triangulation strengthened consistency across different data collection techniques. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with selected participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing with two colleagues experienced in qualitative educational research was undertaken to challenge emerging interpretations and reduce researcher bias. In addition, an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, coding procedures, analytical memos, and theme development was maintained throughout the research process to enhance transparency and dependability.

C. Results and Discussion

Transformation of Teachers' Pedagogical Understanding Through Reflective Practice

The first major finding demonstrates that participation in the art exhibition project fundamentally transformed the teacher's pedagogical understanding of visual arts education. Analysis of reflective narratives indicates a gradual shift from viewing exhibitions as merely the final stage of learning toward recognizing exhibitions as dynamic pedagogical environments where meaningful learning occurs throughout the entire process. Rather than functioning solely as assessment events, exhibitions became spaces in which students actively constructed knowledge through collaboration, interpretation, communication, and reflection.

At the beginning of the project, instructional planning remained strongly influenced by product-oriented learning. The teacher's attention was primarily directed toward students' artistic products, technical quality, and successful organization of the exhibition. However, continuous reflection during project implementation revealed that meaningful learning occurred long before students presented their final artworks. Learning emerged while students negotiated ideas, discussed artistic concepts, solved practical problems, interpreted visual meanings, and interacted with peers throughout the preparation process.

This pedagogical transformation is illustrated in the teacher's reflection: "At the beginning of the project, I still viewed the art exhibition as a means to showcase student work. However, throughout the process, I began to realize that students' learning experiences were not solely based on the exhibited work but developed through various interactions occurring throughout the project."

This reflection illustrates a significant conceptual change in the teacher's understanding of art education. Reflection did not merely document classroom events but functioned as a mechanism for reconstructing pedagogical beliefs. The exhibition project challenged previous assumptions that successful learning should primarily be evaluated through finished artistic products. Instead, the teacher increasingly recognized that learning quality resided within students' participation, interaction, and collaborative meaning-making.

From an autoethnographic perspective, this finding demonstrates how professional knowledge emerges through systematic reflection upon lived experience. Rather than separating teaching from research, reflective inquiry enabled the teacher to reinterpret routine classroom practices as valuable pedagogical evidence. The reflective process

therefore became both a source of professional learning and a method of educational inquiry.

The observed pedagogical transformation closely aligns with Dewey's concept of Art as Experience, which argues that educational experience becomes meaningful when learners actively interact with their social and physical environments. Within the exhibition project, students did not merely produce artworks but continuously interpreted experiences through observation, discussion, emotional engagement, and public presentation. Consequently, aesthetic experience extended beyond artistic production to encompass the entire learning process.

Similarly, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provides an explanatory framework for understanding this transformation. Students experienced concrete artistic activities, reflected upon these experiences during exhibition preparation, developed new conceptual understandings through discussion, and subsequently applied these understandings while organizing and presenting their exhibitions. Reflection therefore became an essential component connecting experience with knowledge construction.

This finding also supports Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner, which emphasizes that professional expertise develops through continuous reflection-on-action. The teacher's reflective journal illustrates how instructional decisions evolved throughout the project rather than remaining fixed before instruction began. Such reflective adaptation enabled teaching practices to respond dynamically to emerging classroom situations instead of relying exclusively on predetermined lesson plans.

International studies similarly demonstrate that teacher reflection facilitates instructional improvement and professional learning. (Soto-González et al., 2023) argues that reflective engagement enables teachers to construct deeper pedagogical understanding through aesthetic experiences. Likewise, (Archibald, 2022) emphasizes that reflection transforms teaching from routine practice into professional inquiry. (Cuervo et al., 2023) further suggests that teachers develop professional competence when they critically connect practical experiences with theoretical understanding. The present findings extend these studies by illustrating how exhibition-based learning provides an authentic context within which reflective practice naturally develops.

Nevertheless, the present findings differ from several previous studies that primarily conceptualize exhibitions as mechanisms for improving creativity or artistic performance. Research conducted by (Sankofa, 2023), for example, concludes that exhibitions increase creativity and learning motivation. While these outcomes were also observed during the present study, the teacher's reflections indicate that the more fundamental educational contribution lies in transforming pedagogical understanding

itself. The exhibition became not only a learning strategy but also an instrument for teachers to reconstruct educational beliefs.

Another important finding emerging from the reflective analysis concerns the spontaneous nature of learning. Several meaningful learning experiences occurred unexpectedly through informal student conversations, peer feedback, and interactions with exhibition visitors. These experiences were not explicitly planned within formal instructional documents, suggesting that authentic learning possesses emergent characteristics beyond conventional lesson planning. Consequently, reflective teachers require flexibility to recognize educational opportunities arising naturally during learning activities.

Overall, demonstrates that teacher reflection transformed pedagogical understanding from product-oriented instruction toward process-oriented, experiential, and reflective learning. This transformation represents an important answer to the research question because it illustrates how autoethnographic reflection enables teachers to reinterpret educational practice while simultaneously developing more authentic pedagogical approaches.

Aesthetic Interaction as the Foundation of Authentic Learning

The second theme concerns the emergence of aesthetic interaction as the central mechanism through which authentic learning developed during the exhibition project. Analysis of classroom observations and reflective narratives demonstrates that students' learning experiences extended beyond individual artistic production to include collaborative interpretation, dialogue, emotional engagement, and shared meaning-making. These interactions positioned the exhibition as a social learning environment rather than simply a venue for displaying artistic products.

Reflective analysis indicates that students increasingly interacted not only with their own artworks but also with those created by classmates. During exhibition preparation and implementation, students discussed artistic techniques, exchanged interpretations, questioned visual meanings, and responded to visitors' comments. Such interactions gradually transformed artworks into communicative media through which students negotiated meaning collectively.

The teacher documented this observation: "Students not only observed the works but also provided responses, asked questions, and discussed the meanings contained in their peers' works." Rather than representing isolated classroom conversations, these interactions became evidence of deeper aesthetic engagement. Students interpreted artworks not simply as visual objects but as expressions containing experiences,

emotions, and cultural meanings requiring collaborative interpretation. Learning therefore occurred through dialogue instead of one-directional instruction.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, this finding demonstrates that meaning is socially constructed through interaction. (Barthakur et al., 2022) argues that individuals interpret reality through social communication, while (Martikainen et al., 2022) emphasizes that shared understanding develops through reciprocal interaction. The exhibition project provided precisely such conditions by creating opportunities for students to exchange perspectives, negotiate interpretations, and construct collective understanding regarding artistic experiences. (Honra, 2026) similarly explains that aesthetic engagement involves simultaneous cognitive, affective, and social participation. The present findings strongly support this perspective because students did not merely analyze artistic techniques cognitively but also experienced emotional responses and interpersonal dialogue while engaging with artworks. Consequently, aesthetic interaction functioned simultaneously as an intellectual, emotional, and social learning process.

An important observation emerging from teacher reflection concerns the spontaneous development of these interactions. Unlike classroom discussions structured by predetermined instructional questions, exhibition dialogue evolved naturally according to students' curiosity, artistic interests, and responses from exhibition visitors. Such spontaneous communication produced authentic learning situations that could not easily be replicated through conventional classroom instruction. These findings further reinforce recent international research emphasizing immersive learning environments. (Pagotto, 2022) report that museum-based learning enhances emotional engagement and collaborative interpretation. (Oo et al., 2023) argues that contemporary aesthetic education should emphasize empathy, creativity, and meaning construction rather than technical artistic competence alone. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that school-based exhibition projects similarly create immersive environments fostering authentic aesthetic interaction despite being conducted within ordinary educational settings.

The emergence of aesthetic interaction therefore provides a second answer to the research question. Teacher reflection revealed that authentic learning was not primarily generated by exhibition products themselves but by the continuous social interactions surrounding artistic creation, interpretation, communication, and reflection. These findings position aesthetic interaction as the principal pedagogical mechanism through which meaningful learning experiences were constructed.

Authentic Assessment Through Exhibition-Based Learning

The third theme emerging from the autoethnographic analysis concerns the transformation of assessment practices from a product-oriented evaluation system to an authentic assessment approach emphasizing students' learning processes. Reflective analysis demonstrated that the exhibition project encouraged the teacher to reconsider conventional assessment practices that had previously emphasized the technical quality of students' artwork while paying relatively little attention to collaborative learning, communication, creativity, and reflective thinking. Through continuous reflection, assessment gradually evolved into a more comprehensive process that captured students' cognitive, social, emotional, and aesthetic development throughout the project.

Initially, assessment focused primarily on measurable artistic outcomes, including composition, technique, color harmony, originality, and completeness of the final artwork. However, reflective journal entries indicated that such evaluation failed to represent the broader learning experiences observed during the exhibition project. Throughout the preparation process, students demonstrated significant growth in organizing activities, negotiating responsibilities, solving unexpected problems, communicating artistic ideas, and supporting one another during exhibition preparation. These dimensions were not adequately represented in traditional product-based assessment.

This shift is reflected in the teacher's journal: "I realize that evaluation cannot solely focus on the final product but also needs to consider the experiential process students experience. Therefore, aspects such as collaboration, communication, interpretation of works, participation in discussions, problem-solving skills, and self-reflection are important parts of evaluating art learning". The quotation illustrates that teacher reflection functioned as a mechanism for reconstructing assessment philosophy rather than simply modifying assessment techniques. Assessment became a process of understanding how students learned rather than merely determining what students produced. Consequently, learning outcomes were interpreted as evidence of continuous participation within authentic learning activities rather than isolated artistic products.

The exhibition project also demonstrated that authentic assessment naturally emerged because students worked within situations closely resembling professional artistic practice. Students were required to plan exhibition layouts, prepare explanatory texts, organize exhibition spaces, communicate with visitors, respond to questions, and evaluate their own performance after the exhibition concluded. These activities generated multiple opportunities for teachers to observe students' competencies in realistic contexts rather than relying exclusively on classroom assignments.

From the perspective of authentic learning theory, this finding strongly supports Herrington and Oliver (2000), who argue that meaningful assessment should occur within real-world learning contexts where knowledge is applied rather than memorized. The exhibition project fulfilled these characteristics because students completed meaningful tasks requiring collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and responsibility. Assessment therefore became embedded within learning activities instead of functioning as a separate instructional component.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory further explains this transformation. Students moved continuously through concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation while preparing and implementing the exhibition. Authentic assessment captured evidence from every stage of this experiential cycle, thereby providing a richer understanding of student development than traditional outcome-based evaluation.

Teacher reflection also revealed that students developed greater ownership of their learning when assessment emphasized process rather than product. Students demonstrated increased responsibility toward group tasks because they understood that participation, communication, and collaborative problem-solving contributed to overall learning achievement. Such findings indicate that authentic assessment encouraged intrinsic motivation rather than performance solely for grading purposes.

An additional insight concerns the reciprocal relationship between assessment and reflection. Evaluation was no longer viewed as the teacher's final judgment but as an ongoing reflective dialogue involving teacher observations, student self-reflection, peer feedback, and public responses during the exhibition. Consequently, assessment became a collaborative learning activity contributing directly to pedagogical improvement.

This finding extends previous studies conducted by (Le & Nguyen, 2024; Oo et al., 2023). Although both studies concluded that exhibitions improve creativity and appreciation, they primarily evaluated learning outcomes. The present study demonstrates that exhibitions simultaneously transform teachers' assessment practices by encouraging comprehensive evaluation of students' authentic learning experiences. This contribution highlights assessment as an essential pedagogical process rather than merely an administrative requirement.

Teacher Identity as a Reflective Practitioner

The fourth theme concerns the reconstruction of teacher identity through sustained reflective practice during the exhibition project. Analysis of reflective journals indicates that the teacher gradually shifted from perceiving teaching primarily as instructional

delivery toward understanding teaching as continuous professional inquiry. Reflection became a mechanism through which classroom experiences were systematically interpreted, questioned, and transformed into pedagogical knowledge.

The autoethnographic process encouraged critical examination of previously unquestioned teaching assumptions. Throughout the exhibition project, the teacher increasingly recognized that meaningful educational change required not only modifications to instructional strategies but also transformation of professional beliefs regarding the teacher's role within learning environments.

This transformation is clearly illustrated in the following reflection: "Through the autoethnographic process, I realized that reflection serves not only to understand students' experiences but also to evaluate myself as an educator. Reflection helped me re-examine the assumptions used in art learning". This statement demonstrates that reflection functioned simultaneously as self-evaluation, professional development, and educational research. Rather than positioning the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, reflective inquiry repositioned the teacher as a learner who continuously reconstructed pedagogical understanding through classroom experience.

Another important journal entry further illustrates this transformation: "I realized that the teacher's role is not merely as a transmitter of material or a facilitator of activities, but also as a researcher who continuously learns from practice." This quotation represents a significant conceptual shift toward the notion of the teacher as a reflective practitioner. Professional expertise emerged not solely from accumulated teaching experience but from systematic reflection upon that experience. The exhibition project therefore functioned simultaneously as student learning and teacher professional learning. (Chen & Chen, 2022) argue that autoethnography enables researchers to connect personal experience with broader educational contexts through systematic reflection. The present findings strongly support this perspective because reflective narratives extended beyond personal storytelling to generate pedagogical insights applicable to arts education. Reflection became an analytical process through which everyday teaching experiences were transformed into research evidence.

Similarly, Schön's theory of reflective practice explains that professionals improve their competence through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Evidence from the teacher's journal illustrates both processes. Reflection-in-action occurred when instructional decisions were modified during exhibition preparation, whereas reflection-on-action occurred after learning activities when experiences were critically analyzed to improve subsequent teaching practice.

The findings also suggest that teacher identity became increasingly collaborative. Rather than exercising authority through direct instruction alone, the teacher facilitated dialogue, encouraged student autonomy, and participated alongside students in constructing educational meaning. Such professional identity aligns closely with contemporary conceptions of learner-centered pedagogy emphasizing shared responsibility and collaborative knowledge construction.

Importantly, reflective identity development was neither immediate nor linear. The reflective journals reveal gradual pedagogical transformation resulting from repeated cycles of observation, questioning, interpretation, and instructional adaptation. This iterative process illustrates how professional learning develops through continuous interaction between theory and classroom experience.

Negative Cases and Reflective Challenges

Although the exhibition project generated predominantly positive learning experiences, teacher reflections also documented several challenges that complicate the implementation of authentic exhibition-based learning. These negative cases are important because they demonstrate that pedagogical transformation did not occur without constraints.

First, spontaneous learning interactions occasionally reduced teacher control over classroom activities. Students frequently initiated discussions that extended beyond planned lesson objectives, requiring instructional flexibility and immediate pedagogical decision-making. While these conversations enriched learning experiences, they also complicated time management and curriculum coverage.

Second, collaborative work revealed differences in students' levels of participation. Some students naturally assumed leadership roles during exhibition preparation, whereas others participated more passively and required additional encouragement from the teacher. These differences suggest that authentic learning environments do not automatically guarantee equal participation among all learners and therefore require continuous facilitation.

Third, reflective journals indicate that evaluating process-oriented learning was considerably more demanding than evaluating finished artworks. Documenting collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and reflective thinking required prolonged observation and continuous documentation throughout the project. Consequently, authentic assessment demanded substantially greater instructional time and teacher commitment.

Finally, the teacher recognized personal challenges associated with maintaining objectivity while simultaneously serving as teacher and researcher. Although reflective writing enabled deeper pedagogical understanding, continuous self-questioning was necessary to distinguish personal interpretation from empirical observation. This challenge reinforces the importance of triangulation, member checking, and reflective memos, as described in the Methods section. Rather than weakening the findings, these negative cases strengthen the credibility of the study by demonstrating that teacher reflection acknowledged both the benefits and complexities of implementing exhibition-based learning within authentic educational settings.

Collectively, the four themes demonstrate that teacher reflection functioned as the primary mechanism through which pedagogical understanding evolved during the exhibition project. Autoethnographic reflection revealed that exhibitions were not merely instructional activities for displaying artistic products but pedagogical spaces where aesthetic interaction, authentic learning, holistic assessment, and reflective professional identity developed simultaneously. These findings directly answer the research question by showing that teachers interpreted exhibition-based learning as an experiential and socially constructed process that transformed both student learning and professional practice. The following Discussion section situates these findings within international scholarship, examines areas of convergence and divergence with previous studies, and explores their theoretical and practical implications for arts education.

The present study sought to answer the following research question: How do teachers, through autoethnographic reflection, interpret and evaluate learning practices implemented during an arts exhibition project, and how do these reflections contribute to understanding aesthetic interaction, authentic learning experiences, and the development of reflective pedagogical practices in visual arts education? The findings demonstrate that teacher reflection extends beyond documenting classroom experiences to become a systematic process of pedagogical inquiry that reshapes teachers' beliefs about learning, assessment, and professional identity. Through the exhibition project, reflection enabled the teacher to reinterpret visual arts education as an experiential, socially constructed, and authentic learning process rather than a sequence of product-oriented instructional activities.

The first major finding reveals that teacher reflection fundamentally transformed pedagogical understanding from emphasizing the quality of artistic products toward recognizing the educational significance of learning processes. Initially, exhibitions were perceived primarily as opportunities for students to display completed artwork. However, reflective analysis demonstrated that meaningful learning emerged throughout the stages of planning, collaboration, discussion, artistic production, exhibition management, and post-exhibition evaluation. Consequently, the exhibition

evolved from a culminating event into a pedagogical environment where students continuously constructed knowledge through participation and interaction. This finding strongly supports Dewey's concept of Art as Experience, which argues that educational meaning is generated through active engagement with lived experiences rather than passive acquisition of knowledge. Dewey (2008) emphasizes that learning becomes transformative when individuals interact dynamically with their environment, interpret those experiences, and reconstruct understanding through reflection. The exhibition project illustrated precisely this process. Students did not merely create artistic products but experienced continuous cycles of observation, interpretation, emotional engagement, dialogue, and public communication. Teacher reflection revealed that these experiential dimensions were more influential than technical artistic achievement in fostering meaningful learning.

Similarly, the findings reinforce Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory by illustrating that exhibition-based learning naturally incorporates the four interconnected phases of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Students first experienced artistic creation through collaborative practice, reflected upon these experiences during exhibition preparation, developed conceptual understanding through dialogue with peers and visitors, and subsequently applied new insights while organizing and evaluating the exhibition. Unlike traditional classroom instruction, the exhibition project enabled these learning phases to occur recursively, allowing students and teachers to construct knowledge through repeated cycles of experience and reflection. The teacher's reflective journal further demonstrated that professional learning followed a similar experiential trajectory, indicating that experiential learning occurred simultaneously for students and teachers.

The study also contributes to Schön's theory of the reflective practitioner by demonstrating how reflection functions as an instrument for professional learning within authentic educational contexts. (Shekh-Abed, 2025) argues that professional expertise develops through continuous reflection both during practice (reflection-in-action) and after practice (reflection-on-action). Evidence from the reflective journals illustrates both processes. During exhibition preparation, the teacher frequently modified instructional decisions in response to students' emerging needs, illustrating reflection-in-action. Following each learning session, reflective writing enabled critical evaluation of pedagogical decisions and facilitated subsequent instructional improvement, representing reflection-on-action. This dual process transformed reflection from a retrospective activity into an integral component of instructional decision-making.

The present findings are also consistent with (Martín-García et al., 2024), who conceptualize autoethnography as a research methodology that transforms personal

experience into scholarly knowledge through systematic analysis. Rather than functioning merely as autobiographical narratives, teacher reflections generated analytical insights concerning pedagogical transformation, authentic learning, and assessment practices. The findings therefore demonstrate that autoethnography possesses significant value within educational research because it enables teachers to become producers of pedagogical knowledge rather than solely consumers of educational theory. Another important contribution concerns the emergence of aesthetic interaction as the central mechanism supporting authentic learning. The findings indicate that meaningful learning occurred primarily through students' collaborative interpretation of artworks, dialogue with peers, responses to exhibition visitors, and negotiation of artistic meaning. These interactions transformed artworks from static visual products into communicative media through which knowledge was socially constructed.

This observation aligns closely with symbolic interactionism. (Lau & Shea, 2024) argues that meaning is created through social interaction rather than existing inherently within objects themselves. Similarly, (Golden, 2023) explains that individuals construct understanding through reciprocal communication with others. The exhibition project provided precisely such conditions. Students continuously exchanged perspectives regarding artistic techniques, symbolism, emotional expression, and cultural meaning. Consequently, aesthetic understanding emerged through interpersonal dialogue rather than teacher explanation alone. Teacher reflection highlighted that these spontaneous interactions frequently produced deeper learning than formally planned classroom instruction, illustrating the pedagogical value of socially situated learning environments.

The findings further correspond with (Lin et al., 2025) argument that aesthetic engagement integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning simultaneously. Throughout the exhibition project, students not only analyzed artistic techniques cognitively but also experienced emotional responses while interpreting artworks and communicating with visitors. Teacher reflection revealed that these emotional and interpersonal experiences significantly enhanced students' motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate actively in learning activities. Consequently, aesthetic interaction should be understood not merely as appreciation of artistic products but as an educational process through which learners construct personal and collective meaning.

Comparison with recent international studies further strengthens these findings. (Baran & AlZoubi, 2024) argues that reflective engagement enables teachers to develop deeper pedagogical understanding through aesthetic educational experiences. (Catalano et al., 2024) demonstrate that immersive learning environments, including museums and exhibitions, foster higher levels of emotional engagement, collaborative learning, and

reflective thinking. (Ogegbo & Ramnarain, 2024) similarly emphasizes that contemporary aesthetic education should prioritize creativity, empathy, and meaning construction rather than technical competence alone. The present study extends these investigations by demonstrating that similar pedagogical processes can be successfully implemented within ordinary secondary schools through exhibition-based learning. Unlike museum-based learning environments that often depend upon external institutional resources, school exhibitions provide accessible opportunities for authentic learning while simultaneously promoting teacher professional development through systematic reflection.

The findings are also consistent with (García Cano et al., 2024), who emphasizes that teacher reflection becomes professionally meaningful only when connected with systematic inquiry rather than personal opinion. Throughout this study, reflective journals functioned as analytical documents through which everyday teaching experiences were critically examined and interpreted using established theoretical perspectives. Similarly, (Oliveira & Bonito, 2023) argues that sustainable professional learning requires continuous integration between practical experience and educational theory. The exhibition project exemplifies this integration because teacher reflection connected classroom events with experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, reflective practice, and authentic learning theories. Consequently, pedagogical knowledge emerged from reciprocal interaction between lived experience and theoretical interpretation rather than from either source independently.

Overall, these findings provide a comprehensive answer to the research question. Teacher reflection enabled the reinterpretation of exhibition-based learning as a multidimensional pedagogical process characterized by experiential learning, aesthetic interaction, authentic assessment, and professional inquiry. Autoethnographic reflection therefore functioned not merely as a method of documenting experience but as a mechanism for generating pedagogical knowledge that informs both teaching practice and educational theory.

D. Conclusion

This autoethnographic study investigated how teacher reflections as researchers function in interpreting and evaluating learning practices through an arts exhibition project at SMP Negeri 2 Demak, Indonesia. Through systematic reflection, the first author documented a transformative journey from viewing arts exhibitions as mere product presentations to understanding them as complex pedagogical spaces that foster aesthetic interaction, authentic learning, and meaningful educational experiences. Three significant contributions emerge from this study. First, it empirically demonstrates that arts exhibitions function as what we term “pedagogical third spaces” environments that

bridge formal classroom instruction and informal learning, where knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, observation, and shared experience. Second, the findings reveal that teacher reflection, when conducted systematically through autoethnographic methods, serves as a powerful analytical tool for identifying and understanding the subtle learning dynamics that often remain invisible in conventional educational evaluation. Third, this study contributes to the international literature on experiential learning by contextualizing Deweyan and Kolbian frameworks within Indonesian secondary education, highlighting both universal principles and culturally specific manifestations of arts-based learning. The practical implications of this research are significant for arts education policy and practice. First, assessment frameworks in arts education must expand beyond product evaluation to encompass process-based indicators including collaboration, communication, aesthetic sensitivity, and reflective capacity. Second, teacher professional development programs should incorporate structured reflective practices, including autoethnographic methods, to enhance teachers' capacity for pedagogical inquiry and self-evaluation. Third, schools should recognize exhibitions not merely as culminating events but as integral components of the learning process, requiring dedicated resources, time, and institutional support. This study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. As a single case autoethnography, the findings are contextually bound and require further investigation across diverse educational settings. Comparative studies involving multiple teachers and schools would strengthen the generalizability of findings. Additionally, longitudinal research examining the long-term impact of exhibition-based learning on student artistic development and transferable skills would provide valuable insights. Studies exploring student perspectives more comprehensively through participatory or youth-led research approaches would further enrich our understanding of arts exhibition pedagogy. Ultimately, this research affirms the central role of teacher reflection in transforming educational practice. When teachers position themselves as researchers of their own practice, they not only enhance student learning but also reclaim professional agency and contribute to the broader educational knowledge base. Arts education, with its inherent emphasis on creativity, expression, and meaning making, offers a uniquely fertile ground for this reflective practice to flourish.

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