



Article

# Autoethnography as a Tool for the Achievement of Deep Learning of University Students in Service-Learning Experiences

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**Abstract:** This exploratory study was carried out within the framework of a pilot learning and service experience in the subject of Qualitative Research Tools in Social Work, where the autoethnographic field journal was used as a tool for the development of deep learning competency in a group of third-year university students undertaking a degree in Social Work and fourth year students undertaking a double degree in Social Education and Social Work in the Social Work, at the University of Deusto. The authors hypothesized that this qualitative research tool could help students develop their ability to critically reflect on their experiences, identify their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to deep learning competency, and establish goals to improve their learning. The service-learning methodology experience proposed for the students involved to participate in a program aimed at the transition to adulthood of young people in situations of vulnerability, where they were required to record in a field journal the emotions, interpretations, and contradictions that the experience of meeting and living with unaccompanied migrant minors using the program could evoke. The results of the qualitative study showed that the autoethnographic field journal was an effective tool for developing deep learning competency in the students participating in the pilot service-learning methodology experience. The results concluded that the autoethnographic field journal could be a valuable tool for promoting reflection, self-awareness, and critical thinking.

**Keywords:** autoethnography; qualitative research; service-learning methodology



**Citation:** Segú Odriozola, María Isabel. 2023. Autoethnography as a Tool for the Achievement of Deep Learning of University Students in Service-Learning Experiences. *Social Sciences* 12: 395. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070395>

Academic Editors: Gianina Estera Petre and António Pedro Costa

Received: 3 May 2023  
Revised: 21 June 2023  
Accepted: 29 June 2023  
Published: 6 July 2023



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## 1. Introduction

The evaluation of competencies related to the acquisition of deep thinking by students is a crucial aspect in university education. Nowadays, simply measuring theoretical knowledge is no longer sufficient in a constantly changing world, where graduates need to develop broader and deeper skills to tackle the challenges of the work and social environment.

Professors face the challenge of seeking effective strategies to assess these competencies and enable them to observe and measure the development of deep thinking in students. In this regard, the use of techniques based on qualitative research in Anthropology, such as field journals, can be a valuable option. The autoethnographic field journal is a tool used by anthropologists to record their observations and reflections during fieldwork. The potential of this tool lies in its ability to capture the complexity of deep thinking. Through the field journal, students can express their ideas in a freer and more personal format, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of the topics studied and reveal the evolution of thinking over time, as well as the connections and interrelationships students establish between different concepts and experiences.

Assessing the competency of deep thinking is inherently challenging, as it cannot be objectively measured as with theoretical knowledge. However, the field journal can offer a pathway to observe and evaluate this type of competency in a more holistic manner.

By reviewing students' field journals, professors can identify patterns, recurring themes, strong arguments, and the level of reflection achieved by each student.

It is important to note that the objective of providing strategies such as the field journal to university professors is not simply to evaluate students, but also to foster their personal and academic development. By using this tool, students are encouraged to delve deeper into their thinking and to self-assess and self-regulate their learning. Additionally, the field journal can serve as a platform for dialogue and constructive feedback between professors and students, promoting more meaningful and collaborative learning.

The good practice presented is the result of the evaluation of an exploratory pilot experience that was developed as a strategy for the acquisition of the competence "Deep Learning" in students of a degree in Social Work and a double degree in Social Education and Social Work in the third year of the University of Deusto, and the objectives set out were as follows.

### 1.1. General Objective

Evaluate the suitability of the autoethnographic field journal as a tool for the development and achievement of deep learning competency in individuals engaged in service-learning methodologies.

### 1.2. Specifics Objectives

- Identify the potential of the autoethnographic field journal for the development of deep learning competency.

The possibilities offered by the tool for the development of deep learning competency should be analyzed. To do so, aspects of the competency that can be addressed through the use of the journal can be identified, such as critical reflection, self-regulation of learning, information management, and teamwork.

- Identify the limitations of the autoethnographic field journal for the development of deep learning competency.

The limitations or difficulties that may arise when using the autoethnographic field journal to develop deep learning competency should be identified. For example, there may be difficulties with self-evaluation and feedback, or there may be problems with the practical application of knowledge acquired through the journal.

- Evaluate the suitability of the tool from the perspective of the teacher and the students.

Based on the information gathered, an evaluation of the suitability of the autoethnographic field journal for the development and achievement of deep learning competency in university students should be carried out. This evaluation should take into account both the pedagogical perspective of the tool and its pragmatic perspective, including its potentialities and limitations for teachers and students.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The deep reflection that can be generated by deep learning derives from Dewey's (1933) reflective paradigm, according to which "human beings learn from interaction with their environment based on their functional adaptation capacity, through trial and error" (Ruiz 2013, p. 108). Learning by doing is an active learning methodology that is based on experience to assimilate concepts through actions. It also encourages students to learn from mistakes and draw conclusions after analyzing practice in a clear spirit of continuous improvement. Deep learning as a university competence is understood as the development of values and competences for professional insertion and active and responsible citizenship. Deep learning focuses on promoting heuristics, research, discussion, and participatory teaching with the main aim of helping students learn how to learn (Álvarez Cedillo et al. 2019). It was first used by two American academics, Marton and Säljö (1976).

Following Sabariego Puig et al. (2019), deep learning involves in students the acquisition of the ability for self-reflection, asking questions and seeking answers beyond what

is presented in the classroom. The information received is critically examined rather than assimilated as absolute truth. The same author indicates that “To produce deep and active learning, academic or professional reflection typical of Higher Education requires access to the ultimate critical level (critical or transformative reflection) for the (re)incorporation of new qualities into the acquired knowledge and skills of the learner” (Sabariego Puig et al. 2019, p. 816). This critical capacity will allow the student to recognize their own personal and professional strengths and weaknesses, as it provides a space for reflection where biases and stereotypes, strengths and weaknesses of themselves that can influence their future thinking and behavior, emerge.

In addition, this deep learning allows students to recognize complexity: the student, from achieving deep learning, understands that problems and situations can be complex and multidimensional and strives to understand all the aspects involved.

The proposal of reflection connected to the practice and theory of experiential learning (Dewey 1933; Kolb 1984) has shed light on the value of experiences and reflection through narrative as central axes of the learning process in the university context (Montagud 2015).

### *2.1. Service-Learning Methodology (SLM): Qualitative Research Tools in Social Work and Social Education*

As we have just indicated, from the university environment and with the conviction that the university must be at the service of society and train people who transform the world, more and more subjects are being developed in which the development of formative knowledge and skills is linked to the experience of providing a service to the community. SLM is a methodology that integrates the learning of content, skills, and values and service to the community in the same educational project with the aim of offering a direct service to society to transform and improve it (Ferrán and Guinot 2012). All subjects and courses can be approached with this type of focus from involvement with the social needs of the environment.

The SML is a shared experience between different actors (university, students, and third sector entities) where a service to be provided is detected. This need can be detected by any of the three participating actors, and it will be the person responsible for the subject, the teacher, who facilitates and enables the demand to be adapted to the academic purpose so that the need is satisfied (Uruñuela 2018).

On the other hand, students will obtain learning through the practical application of theoretical contents received in the classroom, obtaining a response from their academic environment to the needs raised by the third sector entity (Perrenoud 2003). The evaluation system of the competencies acquired by the students through the SML experience will be carried out through autoethnography (Baz and Febrero 2013). According to Tapia (2006), there are three essential characteristics of SML:

- Active protagonism: the activity is actively led by the students.
- Solidary service: aimed at addressing real and felt needs of a community. Specific activities are planned, appropriate and limited to the age and abilities of the protagonists, and oriented to collaborate in the solution of specific community problems.
- Intentionally planned learning in relation to solidary activity: the project explicitly articulates the learning of curricular contents, in the case of educational institutions, or formative contents, in the case of social organizations.

### *2.2. Autoethnography as an Educational Toolkit*

Autoethnography is a research approach that seeks to systematically describe and analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al. 2015; Holman 2005). Autoethnography places the person who experiences the phenomenon at the center of interpretive practice (Custer 2014). From there, the person addresses their own experiences and relates them to the social phenomenon they are studying, establishing a dialogical relationship between their individual experience (which can also be collaborative) and the object of their analysis. The scope in which autoethnography unfolds allows for

the interweaving of experiential practice with deep learning (Kumar 2021). The purpose of autoethnography is to provide a deep and engaged look at a complex social phenomenon that the researcher has experienced firsthand and that they also address in their research work. In this way, autoethnography proposes to eliminate the distance between observer and observed, in an exercise whose result is an interpretation of the social phenomenon of the meanings they acquire (Arcila Mendoza et al. 2010).

It is relevant to consider how meanings are constructed; in this regard, Bruner (2003) states that the construction of meaning is a fundamental activity that arises from the continuous act of updating our history. Language will provide a system of symbols and interrelational rules that facilitate the thought process to the extent that it provides a categorical system that allows for the embodiment and organization of thought content. Hence, when talking about meanings, the narratives in which each subject relates their history or experiences must be considered; in this sense, a meaning is “a continuous process of being in which the subject updates their notions of the world, others, and themselves in symbolic terms, according to the evolutionary stage through acts, images, and signs” (Vergara and Margarita 2011, p. 78).

### 2.2.1. Autoethnographic Field Diary

The autoethnographic field diary is a qualitative research tool that allows researchers to reflect on and record their personal experiences while conducting ethnographic research (Chang 2013). This approach is based on the premise that the researcher is an active participant in the context being studied and, therefore, their experiences, reflections, and emotions should be included in the analysis. It was developed by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner in the 1990s. These authors promoted the use of autoethnography as a tool to understand the subjective experiences of researchers and to explore cultural and social themes from a personal and reflective perspective (Bochner and Ellis 2002). This tool enables obtaining a deeper and richer understanding of the cultural context in which the research is conducted, as well as the ability to include the researcher’s personal reflections and emotions in the analysis. It can also help researchers discover new research questions and themes as they progress in their work (Custer 2014).

The autoethnographic field diary has several phases that must be followed for its proper use as a research tool. These phases, as indicated by Aguirre-Armendáriz (2012), are detailed below:

- Participant observation: The first phase of the autoethnographic field diary consists of participant observation. This involves the researcher’s immersion in the cultural or social context being studied. During this phase, the researcher must take detailed notes on their experiences, reflections, and emotions, and how these are related to the culture or society being studied.
- Recording of notes and reflections: In this phase, the researcher records their notes and reflections in a field diary. It is important that the diary is detailed enough to allow for later reflection on the experiences and emotions that the researcher experienced during participant observation.
- Reflexive analysis: The reflexive analysis phase involves the review and reflection on the notes and reflections recorded in the field diary. During this phase, the researcher should look for emerging patterns and themes in their notes and reflections. They should also consider how these personal experiences are related to the cultural or social themes being studied.
- Writing the autoethnographic diary: The final phase of the autoethnographic field diary involves writing the autoethnographic diary. In this document, the researcher must use their notes and reflections recorded in the field diary to tell a story about their personal experience in the cultural or social context being studied. The writing of the autoethnographic diary may include detailed descriptions of the researcher’s experiences, as well as reflections and analysis on how these experiences are related to the cultural or social themes being studied.

### 2.2.2. Autoethnography in Service-Learning Methodologies

The autoethnographic field journal is an analytical tool that can be very useful in courses that use service-learning methodologies in universities. This qualitative research tool allows students and teachers to reflect and record their personal experiences while carrying out a service task in the community (Dubé 2017). This enables them to better understand the complexity of the situation and how it affects the people seeking the service, as well as how their participation in the service task affects their own learning.

One of the main reasons why the autoethnographic field journal is useful in these courses is that it allows students and teachers to record their experiences and emotions while carrying out the service task. Through reflection on these experiences, they can better understand how they relate to the objectives of the service task and how these experiences can contribute to their personal and professional development. In addition, the autoethnographic field journal can help students and teachers identify problems and areas for improvement in the service task, which can be very useful for future service tasks in the same or other communities. The autoethnographic design is presented in this practice as a tool in the teaching-learning process of students that allows for deep reflection from Dewey's (1933) reflective paradigm. It should be noted that from the literature review, we found Dubé (2017) who also used the toolkit for service-learning purposes, but apart from this author, there is no evidence of other experiences of using the toolkit for learning purposes in higher education; so, apart from this author, it can be said that its use is new in this area.

With the application of this tool, it is possible to eliminate the distance between observer and observed, in a self-analytical exercise, whose result is an interpretation of the social phenomenon in which they are participating, and they can acquire perspectives of reflective thinking that would otherwise remain in the dark. Montagud (2016, p. 132) points out the benefits of narrative reflective thinking:

- Seeks to describe and analyze a problem or situation from one's own personal experience by connecting it with the social environment.
- Combines artistic and scientific language to produce a creative text that values personal experience.
- As an essential feature, it brings together the researcher, the researched, and the narrator in the same narrative.
- As a method, it combines features of autobiography and ethnography.
- As a product, it consists of an aesthetic and provocative text.
- As a process, it shows multiple layers of consciousness.

Another reason why the autoethnographic field journal is a valuable analytical tool in these courses is that it allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural or social context in which the service task is carried out. By recording their experiences and reflections in the journal, students and teachers can identify emerging patterns and themes in their interaction with the community and individuals they seek to serve. In this way, they can have a better understanding of how the culture and social norms of the community influence the service task and how the service task can impact the community and their own learning.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Epistemological Approach

The constructivist approach and meaningful learning provide theoretical and methodological support for the characteristics and strategies that facilitate the development of competencies, to achieve autonomous learning and independent work, fundamental foundations in deep learning processes. This theoretical and methodological approach is based on the idea that knowledge is not simply transmitted from a teacher to a student, but is constructed by the student through their interaction with the learning context and their reflection on their own experiences and thoughts (White 2001). In this sense, learning is conceived as a social process in which students construct their own knowledge from

practical experience and interaction with the real world (Piaget 1952; Bruner 1960; Ausubel 1967; Vygotsky 1978).

Within this theoretical framework, evaluation is understood as an integral part of the learning process and should be constant throughout the experiential process. In this way, students have the opportunity to assess their own progress and receive constant feedback to improve their understanding and competencies.

One of the most effective methods to promote meaningful learning and the development of competencies in students is through the implementation of activities that involve the provision of solidarity services in their community. These activities are integrated into the curriculum and planned systematically so that students can develop values and attitudes of commitment and improvement of their social environment (Martín-García et al. 2021).

The Application of Professional and Solidarity Practices (APPyS) is an example of this type of activity. The implementation of APPyS generates an experiential transformation in students, as it allows them to come into contact with the real needs of their community and generates processes of deep service-learning to the community. This methodology is based on the idea that training becomes meaningful when it connects with the motivations and vital experiences of students (Ferrán and Guinot 2012).

### 3.2. Description of the Good Practice

The practice was developed within the framework of the course called “Qualitative Research Tools in Social Work” of the academic year 2022–2023, from September to January (4 h/week). The sample consisted of 32 students from the 3rd year of the degree in Social Work and the 4th year of the double degree in Social Work and Social Work and Social education at the University of DEUSTO in Spain. The entity where the experience took place was a third sector entity, GAzteOn SareLan, an organization that works with young people in situations of vulnerability and/or exclusion in their transition to adulthood. During the experiential practice, students had to carry out an analysis of the emancipation needs of these former wards based on professional accompaniment in context.

The specific competences of the course were the realization of a diagnostic report of the group based on a qualitative research design, and the transversal competence: deep learning of the students. The methodology developed for this purpose was that of service-learning.

When it comes to evaluating the experience, two levels of analysis can be observed, since on the one hand we want to evaluate the acquisition of deep learning, based on the autoethnographic diary, while they are performing the service, and on the other hand, a second questionnaire needs to be developed for the students to evaluate the validity of the autoethnographic diary toolkit.

In terms of the methodology of this design, one could consider a mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. On the one hand, the questionnaire guiding deep learning during the service activity focuses on open-ended, qualitative questions to capture students’ experiences and perceptions. The qualitative tools for the acquisition of competences were accompaniment, observation, in-depth interviews, and the self-ethnographic field diary. Regarding the self-ethnographic field diary tool, in order to achieve the transversal competence, deep learning, the students had to submit a self-ethnographic field diary where they had to answer these questions weekly throughout the duration of the service-learning experience. Self-reflexive guiding ad-hoc questionnaire, based on questions used to encourage introspection and growth in educational and developmental settings (Deeley 2016):

1. How do I feel about the experiential practice and what aspects of it have challenged me or taken me out of my comfort zone?
2. How do I feel about the people I interact with during this experience and what are my feelings about it?

3. What personal values have been reflected or challenged during this experiential practice, and what do I like most about myself and why?
4. What are my goals and expectations in participating in this experiential practice, and how have they evolved over time?
5. What is costing me the most and why?
6. What am I learning from the experience, and what specific skills or knowledge have I developed or strengthened?
7. What would I like to improve about myself as a future professional, and what do I think my role is in this experience?
8. How do I think I can contribute to this experiential practice, and what changes or improvements can I implement in my approach or attitude to maximize my learning and personal growth?
9. How has this experience impacted my perspective on the world and my future professional path, and what connections can I establish between this experience and the concepts or theories I have learned in my studies?
10. How can I apply what I have learned in this experiential practice to other situations in my personal or professional life, and how can I use this experience to build a network of contacts or expand my professional network?

### 3.3. Questions and Items for the Tool Evaluation

On the other hand, the autoethnographic diary evaluation questionnaire, in addition to open-ended questions, includes closed-ended questions and rating scales to collect quantitative data on the effectiveness and perception of the toolkit itself. This combination allows for a more complete understanding of the outcomes and effectiveness of the service-learning design using the autoethnographic diary.

The students must carry out an evaluation of the self-ethnographic field diary tool and its usefulness for achieving deep analysis by answering the following questions:

1. What positive aspects would you value about the self-ethnographic field diary tool?
2. What limitations have you seen?
3. What overall assessment would you make of the implementation of this reflection tool?
4. What improvement aspects would you propose?

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Potential of the Autoethnographic Field Journal for the Development of Deep Learning Competency

Autoethnography has provided students with a sense of construction in the moment of being able to self-analyze the way they approach problems that have brought to light personal conditioning factors for action. Based on what was recorded in their journals, students have been able to construct meaning for several reasons. First, autoethnography involves reflection and critical analysis of one's own experience, which can help students understand and make sense of their personal experiences and environment. By reflecting on their own experiences and emotions, students can identify patterns and emerging themes in their lives and environment, allowing them to construct deeper meaning and understanding of their experiences. The academic time allocated for introspective analysis of themselves and their professional performance in the field has been valued, as can be seen in the following accounts:

*"I have enjoyed having time to reflect in this course. Everything goes very fast, and I have appreciated being able to have time to think and reflect. The fact that I am "obliged" to write daily and think about how I felt in each intervention has helped me to pause. Action with reflection seems silly, but we act without reflecting, and I think that thinking about how I have been functioning has given me perspective on how I act, how I am, and how I behave as a professional." (E31)*

In addition, reflexive experience in the context of intervention allows students to simultaneously integrate theoretical and practical knowledge in professional practice (Perrenoud 2003), which allows them to become aware of how they generate their personal/professional relationships in order to accept and improve them. This is explained by the following student:

*“I had never stopped to think about the influence we generate in others. [ . . . ] We had connected a lot, and on the days when I was sick and couldn’t go to Amelia’s center, she missed me, at least that’s what my classmates told me, and she was distressed just thinking that she wouldn’t see me again. I think the responsibility we have as professionals when establishing links with the people we work with is enormous, and it is an element that I have realized by having to stop and think and write about the emotions I have been feeling.” (E22)*

Self-reflection has provided a resignification of emotions in students, understood as the process of giving a new meaning or interpretation to an emotion that is being experienced. Instead of simply accepting the emotion as it presents itself, resignification involves reevaluating it and seeking a more positive or useful meaning. The student experiences it this way:

*“I had always felt rejection towards people without a home, now I think that rejection was nothing more than a shield to not delve into the causes, empathize with them, and not suffer if I couldn’t do anything.” (E30)*

In the inductive analysis of the evaluation, there is also the sense of construction that students generate when analyzing their own and others’ experiences, as they have been able to identify the social and cultural norms that influence their environment, which allows them to construct a deeper sense of the society in which they live (Arcila Mendoza et al. 2010).

*“Now I understand that the use of the veil can be voluntary for Muslim women and an option. In Salma’s case, her family allows her not to wear the veil, but she wants to wear it even though she is the only one in her school who does.” (E19)*

The autoethnographic field journal can generate interest and curiosity in learning for several reasons. First, autoethnography involves a personal and reflective exploration of one’s own experiences, which can be very motivating and stimulating for students. By reflecting and critically analyzing their personal experiences, students can discover new ideas, perspectives, and knowledge that can be very interesting and challenging. Autoethnography has generated interest and curiosity in learning among students by allowing them to explore the culture and society in which they live in a deeper and more authentic way. By analyzing their own experiences and those of others, students have been able to discover patterns and emerging themes in their environment and in society. The fact that it has allowed for creative expression to narrate their experiences and emotions in a personal and meaningful way, through texts, drawing, photography, video, among others, has been a creative way for them to acquire knowledge in students. The fact that they were allowed to express themselves creatively in data collection for subsequent analysis, such as writing, drawing, photography, and video, among others, has been a discovery that has motivated them, as they were unaware of these practices to communicate their experiences and emotions in this symbolic, personal, and meaningful way Montagud (2016).

*“I have enjoyed being able to capture elements for analysis in images . . . I didn’t know that this could also be done this way.” (E22)*

*“It has been a different course that has allowed me to write poems to express my feelings.” (E5)*

The students have demonstrated that they have been able to apply their own skills and knowledge to solve real problems and needs in the real world, more specifically by collaborating directly with a group of people who share a series of more or less common needs that identify them as a group. In resolving practical cases in the classroom and



solving “paper” problems, the problem situations are easily resolved by applying the required intervention model methodology, in the same line as indicated by [Tapia \(2006\)](#). However, real-world experience allows them to become aware of the real difficulties that may arise when working with real people, and through reflective practice, knowledge, and expertise emerge from their own experience. They explain it in the following way:

*“The practical cases that are solved on paper always have a ‘Disney ending,’ they always end well, paper can withstand anything. But when you’re face-to-face with a young person who has crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in a dinghy and is telling you about everything that has happened to them, you see the harshness of their story, the traumas they have . . . That’s not going to be solved in two hours.” (E13)*

*“Thinking about my personal and professional weaknesses has helped me identify areas for improvement. I think I have a lot to learn, even though I have always achieved very good results in resolving practical cases in class, but when I was in the center, there were situations in which I didn’t know how to respond, what to say . . . I felt like crying, and that’s not professional, I can’t cry in front of them, they have enough to deal with.” (E4)*

#### 4.2. Limitations of the Autoethnographic Field Diary for the Development of Deep Learning Competence Had Been

The limitations of the autoethnographic field diary for the development of deep learning competence lie in the subjective nature of this toolkit, as the learner interprets and records their experiences. This inevitably introduces personal biases and prejudices into the reflection, which may affect the validity and reliability of the findings. To effectively engage in self-criticism, as [Sabariego Puig et al. \(2019\)](#) mentioned, it is important for the student to adopt a critical and reflective attitude towards their own work and be able to identify their own starting biases and personal prejudices. In addition, the student must consider the limitations of their own perspective and consider multiple viewpoints.

*“I don’t know if what I’m saying is a product of my experience. The truth is that in the past, I had an altercation with some Moors who threatened me and my friends with a knife to rob us, and now I don’t believe everything they say.” (E15)*

To minimize the impact of this bias, complementary research techniques can be used that allow for data triangulation and validation of the findings. In addition, it is important to receive feedback and constructive criticism from other researchers and experts in the field to help identify possible biases and areas for improvement. Furthermore, difficulties were observed in interpreting the data collected in the diary, which limited the understanding of the results and made it difficult to identify relevant patterns and trends.

Another limitation to mention was centered on the writing of narratives, as writing to produce autobiographical accounts students have found the time dedicated to writing somewhat cumbersome. On average, they have spent more than two hours per week on the analysis, and the fact that they had to write it in the field notebook has been considered to slow down their work. They propose being able to do it on a computer.

*“[ . . . ] it should be allowed to do it on the computer. Writing by hand takes a long time, and besides, the written document can get lost or damaged, whereas if you do it on Drive, it’s always saved and accessible.” (E12)*

#### 4.3. Suitability of the Tool from the Perspective of the Teacher and the Students

The assessment of the experience has highlighted the effort to create ambitious and meaningful tasks that reflect how knowledge is used in the field. The teacher, in their role as process facilitator, involves students in the context of active learning, so that they can apply and test their social skills and professional competencies acquired in the university setting ([Sabariego Puig et al. 2019](#)). The function of the facilitating teacher in this practice is to provide students with clear procedural standards, provide constant feedback, offer opportunities to review the work being completed, and accompany them in their personal processes.

As a facilitating professor, it is necessary to continuously evaluate the experience and students' learning, and to adapt to the needs they present.

This learning dynamic in the Service, accompanied by the reflection generated in the autoethnographic journal, helps to understand and internalize theoretical knowledge and promotes strategic and metacognitive thinking so that students learn to evaluate and guide their own learning (Perrenoud 2003). In this autoethnographic exercise, the role of the student-researcher-narrator is vital because it allows for experiential interaction with the sociocultural processes in which they are immersed, leading to processes of self-analysis, self-introspection, and self-observation, structuring their emotions around their own sociocultural journey in a deep reflective practice:

- Emotionally, in the development of this proposal, autoethnography assumed as a research method, challenging ways of accessing knowledge, uses narrative collection techniques from students that allow them to reflect, understand, and face their own emotions, perhaps not identified previously. Reflective practice involves introspective and critical reflection on our actions and decisions. In this sense, awareness of how we generate our personal and professional relationships is fundamental to reflective practice, as it allows us to evaluate how we are interacting with others and how our actions affect others. Through awareness of our relationships, we can identify patterns of behavior that may be dysfunctional or unhealthy, and seek ways to improve them. This allows us to develop more effective interpersonal skills, such as clear and respectful communication, active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- Pedagogically, the tool of the autoethnographic field journal has generated interest and curiosity in learning, as it has meant a personal and reflective exploration of their own experiences. By reflecting and critically analyzing their personal experiences, students have discovered new ideas, perspectives, and emerging patterns and themes in their environment and in society in general, which has been very stimulating. In future, due to the fact that it allows for creative expression to narrate their experiences, it is anticipated that the expression of emotions in a personal, meaningful, mixed method, through texts, drawing, photography, and video, among others—as a triangulation design that also combines complementary techniques of a self-administered reflective thinking questionnaire and the realization of discussion groups to deepen the narrative of the process—would be beneficial and could obtain more complete results in creative way for students to acquire knowledge.

In the professional field of social work, awareness of our relationships can have a significant impact on our ability to work in teams and collaborate with other professionals. It can also help us establish healthy and productive relationships with service users.

## 5. Conclusions

The acquisition of the “Deep Learning” competence is gaining importance in higher education, but its practical application and the methods for its acquisition are still under development. This study specifically focuses on exploring how the autoethnographic tool can facilitate the development of indicators related to student learning outcomes in the university context, which can be a valuable contribution to the field of higher education.

The application of this tool in the context of service-learning is an innovative and underexplored approach in the academic literature, as observed through the conducted literature review. Most previous studies have focused on more traditional evaluation methods, such as surveys or structured interviews. Thus, this study presents an original perspective by proposing the use of autoethnography, beyond its common association with the field of anthropology, as a means to acquire this competence.

The exploratory approach of the study opens up new lines of research in the academic field and can provide a starting point for future investigations, inspiring other researchers to delve deeper into this topic.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval of this study was waived because at no time did it involve third parties or violate the sensibilities of any individual as it was limited to an experimentation in how to evaluate an educational experience in a university setting.

**Informed Consent Statement:** This study was waived because at no time did it involve third parties or violate the sensibilities of any individual as it was limited to an experimentation in how to evaluate an educational experience in a university setting.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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