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REFLECTION AS A MECHANISM OF PERSONALISATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The study examines reflection as a mechanism of personalisation in foreign language learning. Its purpose is to theoretically substantiate the regulatory role of reflection in the continuous adjustment of learners' goals, strategies, activities and learning pathways. The analysis distinguishes reflection from related processes, particularly self-assessment, and considers its relationship with self-regulation and learner participation in personalised learning. It is argued that reflection acquires regulatory significance when information derived from learning experience is interpreted and used to inform subsequent learning decisions. On this basis, a reflective cycle of personalisation is proposed, connecting the identification of individual needs and goals, learning activity, monitoring and self-assessment, reflection, recognition of progress and changing needs, and subsequent adjustment of learning. The study also considers self-assessment, portfolios, reflective journals, structured reflective tasks and improvement planning as practices that can support this cycle. It is concluded that reflection enables personalisation to function as a dynamic and continuously adjustable process rather than as a one-time adaptation to an initial learner profile.

Keywords: *personalisation, reflection, foreign language learning, self-assessment, self-regulation, reflective practices, personalised learning.*

Introduction

The growing emphasis on learner-centred education has changed the way foreign language learning is understood and organised in higher education. Learners enter the educational process with different language backgrounds, learning experiences, professional interests, goals and expectations. These differences become particularly significant in foreign language learning, where progress depends not only on the content and methods offered by the teacher but also on how learners engage with them, what strategies they use, what difficulties they encounter and how they perceive their own progress. Consequently, the same learning environment may produce considerably different experiences and outcomes for individual learners.

Personalisation provides one way of responding to this diversity. In foreign language learning, it involves more than varying the level of difficulty or offering learners different tasks. It requires attention to individual educational needs, interests, motives and learning experiences, while also encouraging learners to participate actively in the learning process and gradually assume greater responsibility for it [11]. In this respect, personalisation differs from approaches in which adaptation remains primarily the responsibility of the teacher. The learner is not merely the recipient of

individually selected learning opportunities but an active participant in determining what is relevant, difficult or effective in their learning.

However, identifying individual needs and preferences at the beginning of a course is not sufficient to make learning genuinely personalised. Learners' goals may change as their language competence develops, strategies that are effective at one stage may prove less useful at another, previously unnoticed difficulties may emerge, while new academic or professional priorities may influence what learners expect from foreign language learning. Personalisation should therefore be regarded not as a single act of adapting instruction to a learner profile, but as an ongoing process that requires regular reconsideration and adjustment.

The dynamic nature of personalisation raises an important question: what can inform its continuous adjustment? For changes in a personalised learning pathway to be meaningful rather than arbitrary, learners need opportunities to examine their learning experience, relate outcomes to previously established goals, recognise progress and difficulties, and consider whether the strategies and activities they use remain appropriate. These processes bring reflection to the centre of personalised foreign language learning. Research in this area has already linked critical reflection with the identification of learning needs, self-assessment and the development of personalised language learning skills [5]. The connection is important, but it also invites a broader consideration of the function that reflection performs throughout the learning process.

In the present study, reflection is approached not only as a component or a particular stage of personalised learning, but as a mechanism through which personalisation can be continuously reconsidered and adjusted. Reflection allows information gained from learning experience to inform subsequent decisions: whether a goal needs to be revised, a strategy retained or replaced, additional support sought, or a learning activity approached differently. In this sense, reflection connects experience with further action and enables personalisation to develop in response to the learner rather than remain based on an initial set of assumptions about their needs.

The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate the role of reflection as a mechanism of personalisation in foreign language learning and to explore how reflective processes contribute to the continuous adjustment of learners' goals, strategies, activities and learning pathways. Particular attention is given to the relationship between reflection and related processes such as self-assessment and self-regulation, as well as to reflective practices that can support personalisation in foreign language education.

Personalisation in education is closely associated with recognising learners as active participants in the learning process rather than treating individual differences merely as factors to be accommodated by the teacher. In foreign language learning, learners' goals, previous experience, interests and ways of approaching learning influence how they engage with available learning opportunities and perceive their own progress.

Previous research on personalisation in foreign language education indicates that the concept cannot be reduced to adapting teaching materials or varying the difficulty of tasks. K. Kugai views foreign language learning personalisation as a complex pedagogical process that takes learners' individual needs, cognitive interests, motives and other personal characteristics into account. Among its essential components, the author identifies learners' active involvement in the educational process and the promotion of independence and self-regulation, including the setting of their own learning goals [11, p. 95]. From this perspective, the learner is involved not only in performing assigned activities but also, to varying degrees, in making decisions concerning the purposes, content and organisation of learning. Personalisation thus changes the relationship between external pedagogical support and the learner's own contribution to the educational process.

The importance of learner participation is also evident in research connecting personalised language learning with autonomy. Yu. Lavrysh and I. Lytovchenko, analysing educational strategies used to intensify personalised autonomous language learning, draw attention to practices that encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their learning and evaluate its results [4]. This does not imply transferring responsibility for personalisation entirely to the learner, but points to their active participation in understanding their needs, progress and difficulties.

An important consequence of this understanding is that personalisation cannot rely on a fixed learner profile. L. Tetzlaff and colleagues emphasise the dynamic nature of personalisation, arguing that learners and their relevant characteristics change over time and in interaction with the instructional process [8]. Information collected at the beginning of a course may therefore provide a useful starting point, but it cannot fully predict how a learner will respond to particular tasks, strategies or forms of interaction. Needs, preferences and difficulties may change as learners gain experience and achieve previously established goals. The learner profile underlying personalisation should therefore be treated as developing rather than predetermined.

The same applies to learning strategies. In her study of vocabulary learning among students of computer specialties, K. Kugai identified considerable variation in the strategies learners used when dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary [3]. From the perspective of personalisation, identifying such variation is only the first step. Learners also need to recognise which strategies are effective in a particular situation and when an alternative approach may be required. Personalisation therefore concerns not simply the availability of choice but the learner's capacity to make increasingly informed choices.

Taken together, these considerations shift attention from matching instruction to relatively stable learner characteristics towards responding to changes that emerge during learning itself. Continuous adjustment is therefore not an additional feature of personalisation but follows from the fact that both

the learner and their learning experience develop over time.

The question then becomes how the information necessary for such adjustment can be generated and interpreted. Neither initial diagnostics nor teacher observation alone can provide full access to the learner's experience of learning. Learners themselves need to consider what they have achieved, where difficulties remain, how their actions have contributed to particular outcomes, and what should be retained or changed in subsequent learning. It is at this point that reflection acquires particular significance. By connecting learning experience with its interpretation and with decisions about further action, reflection creates the possibility for personalisation to respond to the learner's developing needs rather than remain tied to an initial understanding of them.

Understanding the role of reflection in this process requires closer consideration of what reflective activity means in foreign language learning. Reflection is concerned with learners' experience, but its function is not limited to looking back at completed work. Research on reflective foreign language learning shows that learners may use reflection to examine different elements of their learning, including their purposes, difficulties, ways of approaching particular tasks and the relationship between the effort made and the results achieved [10]. Such examination may also reveal that an established goal, a familiar strategy or a particular way of working needs reconsideration. Reflection thus introduces an interpretative dimension into learning: experience becomes a source of information from which learners can develop a better understanding of how they learn and what may need to change.

I. Zadorozhna also emphasises the ongoing character of reflection in university foreign language learning, arguing for its integration not only at major points in the learning process but also after individual tasks or groups of tasks [10]. This regularity makes reflection especially relevant to personalisation, which likewise requires revision in response to changes occurring during learning.

The relationship between reflection and personalisation is addressed more directly by Yu. Lavrysh, O. Korbut and S. Buha. Their study of personalised foreign language learning places critical reflection alongside learners' capacity to examine their learning results and make informed decisions about subsequent activity [5]. The authors' interpretation is particularly valuable because it connects reflection with the use of previous learning experience and with changes in what learners subsequently do. Their findings suggest that reflective work can help learners identify educational needs and make sense of successful and unsuccessful experiences before determining further actions [5]. The significance of reflection, therefore, lies not only in producing greater awareness of past performance. Previous experience can acquire a new function when the learner draws on it in deciding how to approach further learning.

At this point, it is important to distinguish reflection from self-assessment. The concepts overlap, but they describe different aspects of learners'

engagement with their own learning. Y. G. Butler distinguishes two broad functions of self-assessment in second language learning, including foreign language learning: evaluating learners' language knowledge or performance and supporting the learning process [1]. The second perspective is particularly relevant here. When self-assessment is incorporated into an ongoing learning process, the information it produces can help learners monitor their progress and orient themselves towards future goals. Research reviewed by Y. G. Butler also shows that self-assessment has increasingly been examined in relation to self-regulation and self-efficacy rather than exclusively in terms of the accuracy of learners' judgements [1].

From the perspective adopted in the present study, self-assessment may therefore be understood as one of the sources of information available for reflection rather than as its equivalent. A learner may judge a piece of written work against specified criteria, estimate their ability to perform a speaking task or compare current performance with an earlier result. Reflection begins to perform a broader function when the learner considers what such information means: why a particular result was obtained, how their actions may have contributed to it, whether the chosen approach should be maintained and what might be done differently in the future. The distinction is relevant to personalisation because information about performance becomes pedagogically useful only when it can contribute to subsequent decisions.

Personalisation requires information about the learner, but such information cannot remain limited to an initial profile or externally observed performance. As learning proceeds, experience generates new information about progress, difficulties, strategies and changing priorities. Reflection enables this information to enter the process of personalisation and become a basis for reconsidering what should happen next. In this sense, reflection begins to reveal its regulatory potential.

Such an understanding of reflection is particularly relevant when personalisation is viewed as a dynamic rather than a one-time adaptation of learning. The framework developed by L. Tetzlaff and colleagues is based on recurrent assessment: information about the learner informs instructional design, subsequent learning progress provides new information, and the learner model is updated accordingly [8]. The researchers also acknowledge learner participation in selecting goals and tasks while cautioning that greater learner control does not necessarily result in appropriate learning decisions. In foreign language learning, reflection can provide a basis for such decisions by allowing learners to draw on their experience when reconsidering goals, strategies, activities or the support they require.

From this perspective, reflection may be conceptualised as a mechanism through which information emerging from learning experience is converted into grounds for subsequent adjustment. The term *mechanism* is used here to emphasise function rather than merely presence: *reflection does not constitute*

personalisation by itself, but it enables changes in the learner's experience to influence what happens next. A difficulty encountered repeatedly may indicate that a strategy should be reconsidered, unexpectedly successful performance may suggest that a learner is ready for a more demanding goal, changing academic or professional priorities may alter the relevance of previously selected content or activities. In each case, personalisation depends not simply on the existence of individual differences but on whether changes that become apparent during learning can inform subsequent decisions.

Evidence from foreign language education supports the importance of this transition from information to action. In their study of self-regulated speaking, E. De Vrind and colleagues organise the learning process around an iterative relationship between learners' perception of their current performance, a desired level of performance and action intended to reduce the discrepancy between them [2]. Their self-evaluation procedure requires learners not only to examine a speaking performance but also to formulate and implement an improvement plan, after which performance can be reconsidered in a new cycle. The procedure also allows learners to indicate the kind of assistance they need, providing the teacher with information that can be used to adapt feedback and further activities. Although this model is concerned specifically with self-regulation of speaking rather than personalisation as such, it illustrates an important principle for the present argument – information about current learning becomes useful when it leads to a considered response and when the effects of that response can subsequently be examined.

The connection between reflective information and subsequent action also helps clarify the respective roles of learner and teacher in reflective personalisation. Reflection should not be interpreted as transferring responsibility for all pedagogical decisions to the learner. L. Tetzlaff and colleagues caution against assuming that learners will invariably select the most appropriate options when given control [8]. At the same time, Yu. Lavrysh and I. Lytovchenko identify self-assessment, portfolios, peer learning and feedback, pedagogical dialogue and self-access provision among practices associated with personalised language learning [4]. Personalisation can therefore be viewed as a shared process in which reflective information may inform decisions made by the learner, the teacher, or both.

Viewing personalisation as a shared process also clarifies the role of reflection within it. If reflection were confined to retrospective evaluation, its contribution would end with a better understanding of what had already occurred. Its regulatory function emerges when this understanding affects a subsequent stage of learning. The relationship can be represented as a recurring movement from learning experience to its examination and interpretation, followed by decisions about what should be maintained or modified and by further learning under the adjusted conditions. The next experience then provides new grounds for reflection. Personalisation consequently develops

through successive adjustments rather than through a single correspondence between an established learner profile and a predetermined learning pathway.

On this basis, the reflective cycle of personalisation in foreign language learning proposed in the present study comprises the following interconnected processes: *identification of individual needs and goals → engagement in learning activities → monitoring and self-assessment → reflection on experience and outcomes → identification of progress, difficulties and changing needs → adjustment of goals, strategies, activities or support → further personalised learning.* The cycle is not intended to prescribe a rigid sequence that every learner must follow in exactly the same way. Its purpose is to show how information generated through learning can return to the process and influence its subsequent direction. Reflection occupies a pivotal position in this cycle because it connects evidence about what has occurred with decisions concerning what should follow.

The proposed cycle differs in emphasis from the general personalisation loop developed by L. Tetzlaff and colleagues, which demonstrates how repeated assessment and the updating of a learner model can support instructional adaptation [8]. The present study focuses specifically on the learner's reflective engagement with their foreign language learning experience. The two perspectives are complementary: assessment provides information about changes in the learner, whereas reflection contributes to interpreting experience and determining its relevance for subsequent learning decisions. The reflective cycle thus foregrounds the learner's participation in the continuous reconsideration of goals, strategies, activities and support.

Reflection can thus be regarded as *a mechanism of personalisation when it brings changes emerging during learning into the learner's awareness, supports their interpretation in relation to goals and previous actions, and connects this interpretation with decisions about further learning*.

For reflection to perform this regulatory function, it needs to be incorporated into learning through practices that connect evidence from learning with subsequent action. Self-assessment is particularly valuable when it is connected with decisions about subsequent learning rather than treated as an end in itself. Its contribution to personalisation becomes more substantial when learners use this information to reconsider goals, recognise areas requiring further attention or decide what kind of practice is needed. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) provides a useful example of such integration. D. Little explains that the ELP incorporates recurrent goal setting, monitoring and self-assessment and enables learners to use proficiency descriptors both to identify learning targets and to follow their progress [6]. In the language biography, these processes are combined with consideration of learning styles, learning and communication strategies, and other aspects of the learner's language experience [6]. The value of the portfolio for personalisation therefore lies not simply in documenting achievement. Used reflectively, it can create continuity between previous

experience, the learner's present understanding of their learning and the formulation of further priorities.

Reflective journals and learning logs provide another means of making developing learning experience available for examination. Their usefulness is illustrated by Y. Zhang and colleagues, who investigated reflective journal writing among Chinese EFL students and traced learners' use of self-regulated writing strategies over a semester [9]. The study revealed changes over time in several strategies, including self-monitoring and evaluation, planning, peer learning and resource management, while also showing differences associated with learners' proficiency levels [9]. The authors further found indications that journal writing increased learners' awareness of their strategy use and could support more individualised guidance. These findings are particularly relevant to personalisation because they show that written reflection can reveal not only what learners do, but also how their approaches to learning develop and differ from one learner to another.

At the same time, the use of a reflective journal does not automatically make learning reflective or personalised. Its regulatory value increases when learners examine relationships between their actions and outcomes and consider what should be retained or changed in subsequent learning. Such records may also give teachers access to aspects of the learning experience that cannot be inferred from task performance alone.

The transition from reflection to subsequent action is particularly visible in structured self-evaluation followed by improvement planning. E. De Vrind and colleagues developed a procedure in which foreign language learners examine their speaking performance, identify areas for improvement, formulate a plan and subsequently repeat the same or a similar speaking activity [2]. The procedure also allows learners to indicate whether they prefer to work independently, with a peer or with teacher assistance, while teachers can use learners' evaluations and plans when adapting feedback and learning activities [2]. This arrangement is significant for personalisation because reflective information serves two purposes simultaneously. It supports learners in determining their next actions and gives teachers access to the learner's perception of current needs. Adjustment can consequently concern not only *what* is learned, but also how further work is organised and what level of support is appropriate.

The findings reported by E. De Vrind and colleagues also caution against equating reflective activity with completely independent learning. Their intervention was deliberately supported: learners were provided with criteria for examining speaking performance, possibilities for improvement and differentiated forms of assistance. This kind of guidance becomes particularly relevant when learners have limited experience of reflection or find it difficult to interpret their own performance. Personalisation therefore does not require the teacher to withdraw from reflective decision-making. On the contrary, the

teacher may initially need to structure reflection through questions, criteria, feedback or dialogue and then adjust this support as learners become more capable of making informed decisions about their learning.

Recent longitudinal evidence provides an additional reason for linking reflection with action rather than treating it as a separate educational outcome. J. Przybył, A. Poźlewicz and J. Duch-Adamczyk examined reflection and performance control across an academic year in university courses in L2 English and L2 German [7]. Their results showed that reflection was associated with performance control, whereas performance control predicted attainment. Once performance control was included in the model, reflection did not show a direct association with attainment [7]. The finding is important precisely because it discourages an overly simplified assumption that reflection itself necessarily produces better learning outcomes. The pedagogical significance of reflection may instead depend on whether the insights it generates become connected with learners' subsequent engagement and learning behaviour.

The practical implication is that structured reflection should be connected with behavioural engagement rather than treated as an isolated instructional target [7]. This finding reinforces the present argument that reflection acquires regulatory significance when it influences what learners subsequently do. Reflective personalisation therefore requires more than providing learners with opportunities to think about their learning. The quality and timing of reflection, as well as its connection with subsequent action, need pedagogical attention. Questions such as *What was difficult?* or *What did you learn?* may initiate reflection, but on their own they provide limited support for adjustment. More productive prompts direct attention to relationships: between a goal and the result achieved, between a strategy and its effectiveness, between a difficulty and the way it was addressed, or between the support received and the learner's ability to perform independently. The purpose is not to prescribe the same reflective procedure for every learner, but to help learners generate information that is relevant to their particular learning situation.

The integration of reflection into the ongoing adjustment of learning also affects the teacher's role in personalised foreign language learning. Reflective evidence can supplement information obtained through observation, assessment and task performance by providing access to aspects of learning that are not always externally visible: perceived difficulties, reasons for particular choices, changing priorities, uncertainty about strategies or a learner's perceived need for assistance. Such information can inform teacher decisions concerning tasks, resources, feedback, pacing and support. At the same time, teacher feedback can challenge learners' interpretations when these are incomplete or inconsistent with evidence from their performance. Reflection thus creates a space for dialogue between the learner's perspective and pedagogical judgement rather than privileging either one as the sole basis for personalisation.

The extent and form of reflective support should consequently remain flexible. Learners who are beginning to engage in reflection may benefit from explicit prompts, criteria, checklists or guided discussion, whereas more experienced learners may require less structured forms such as learning journals, individual goal reviews or portfolio entries. The same learner may also require different degrees of support at different stages or for different language activities. This variability is consistent with the dynamic understanding of personalisation developed earlier: reflective support itself can be personalised and adjusted as the learner's capacity to analyse and regulate their learning develops.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that reflection can be embedded at different points in foreign language learning without being reduced to a single technique. Self-assessment can provide evidence of current performance, journals and learning records can make changes in experience and strategy use visible, portfolios can connect progress with goals over longer periods, structured reflective tasks can direct attention to particular aspects of learning, and improvement planning can translate reflection into further action. Their contribution to personalisation depends on the connections established among these processes rather than on the use of any particular instrument. When reflective information is revisited and used to modify what follows, the reflective cycle becomes part of the continuing organisation of learning.

Conclusion

The study has shown that reflection can perform a regulatory function in personalised foreign language learning when information derived from learning experience is used to reconsider and adjust subsequent learning. Its significance therefore extends beyond retrospective evaluation or increased awareness of completed work. Reflection becomes a mechanism of personalisation when it enables learners to interpret changes in their progress, difficulties, strategies and needs and to relate this interpretation to decisions about further learning.

The analysis also indicates that reflection should not be equated with self-assessment or treated as an isolated reflective activity. Self-assessment can provide information about current performance and progress, while reflection allows learners to interpret this information in relation to previous actions, established goals and possible alternatives. Its contribution to personalisation depends on whether such interpretation has consequences for subsequent learning behaviour and pedagogical decisions.

On this basis, a reflective cycle of personalisation in foreign language learning has been proposed. It connects the identification of individual needs and goals, engagement in learning activities, monitoring and self-assessment, reflection on experience and outcomes, recognition of progress, difficulties and changing needs, and the subsequent adjustment of goals, strategies, activities or support. The cycle emphasises the dynamic nature of personalisation: learning experience continuously generates new information that can modify the direction of further learning.

Reflective practices such as self-assessment, portfolios, learning journals, structured reflective tasks and improvement planning can support this process when they establish a meaningful connection between evidence of learning, its interpretation and subsequent action. Their effectiveness for personalisation does not depend on the use of a particular instrument but on the way reflective information is incorporated into further learning. Teacher guidance remains important in this process and may itself be adjusted according to learners' developing capacity to interpret and regulate their learning.

Reflection thus transforms personalisation from adaptation based primarily on an initial understanding of the learner into a dynamic process capable of responding to changes that emerge during learning. Further research may examine the implementation of the proposed reflective cycle in different contexts of foreign language education and investigate how particular forms of reflective support influence learners' participation in personalised learning.

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