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Utilising online survey for personalised feedback: first-year law students' reflections on their studying

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences and reflections of first-year law students regarding research-based personalised feedback obtained from the HowULearn online survey designed to enhance their studying and learning processes. A total of 101 students provided open-ended responses about their experiences after completing the survey. The research-based feedback was delivered through online software and supplemented with additional online material. The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis. The findings indicated that research-based feedback on learning and studying offered a structured and guided opportunity for reflection, increasing students' awareness of their learning processes and study practices. The students focused on organising and time management skills, recognising the connection between these and their overall well-being. Most students found the feedback beneficial, and many provided concrete examples of how they planned to improve their study practices. The results suggest that research-based feedback on learning processes is an effective tool for enhancing students' awareness of their studying and learning processes. Furthermore, guided reflection is necessary to help students benefit fully from personalised feedback.

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Research-based personalised feedback; reflective practice; study practices and learning processes; higher education

Introduction

Recent research on higher education has underscored the need for university students to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning and engage in deep learning processes (Räisänen et al., 2021; Tuononen et al., 2020). This challenge is particularly pronounced for first-year students transitioning from upper secondary school to university studies as they often struggle to acquire the study skills required for university-level work and adapt to new teaching and learning environments (Crisp et al., 2009; Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2011, 2017). These students would benefit from feedback that highlights both strengths and areas for development in learning. Emerging evidence indicates that students' awareness of their learning and ability to assess and modify their learning strategies could be supported by encouraging them to reflect on their learning processes, such as their approaches to learning (Tuononen et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to encourage students to reflect on their study practices within their learning environments (Bentley-Williams, 2017; Biggs, 1987) and provide them with reflective practices and activities that support this reflection (Heymann et al., 2022; Rogers, 2001). Offering students dedicated time and space for reflection, along with concrete tools to monitor and approach their learning processes, is essential (Chan & Lee, 2021). Online tools, such as online learning platforms (e.g. Adobe Connect and WhatsApp), have been used to support reflective practice related to subject matter and skills acquisition (e.g. Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Heymann et al., 2022; Keramati et al., 2024). However, evidence on how online feedback tools support students' reflection on their learning processes and study practices is still limited. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the impact of feedback from the HowULearn online tool, which focuses on students' learning and studying and provides theoretically solid feedback for students (Parpala & Hailikari, 2021). HowULearn is grounded in research on higher education pedagogy and student learning. Consequently, both the survey content and the feedback

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provided are strongly supported by research and evidence (Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012), allowing them to focus on relevant and significant factors that support student learning in the higher education context.

From feedback to reflection on learning processes

Feedback is widely recognised for its powerful impact on student learning, achievement, and the development of lifelong learning skills (e.g. Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008; Wisniewski et al., 2020). It is defined as information provided to the students concerning their skills or understanding of the task or their performance in completing a task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The primary aim of feedback is to support the development of student learning based on their performance (Sadler, 1989). Effective feedback should be clear, meaningful, timely, and appropriate to the student's prior knowledge (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback can be delivered in various forms, including audio, video, or computer-assisted instructional feedback (Wisniewski et al., 2020).

Feedback influences students' conceptions of learning and motivation, and how they engage with their studies (Brown et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Tuononen et al., 2022). Feedback can increase students' awareness of their learning processes i.e. their approaches to learning (Tuononen et al., 2022). Moreover, using learning processes as a basis for student feedback and reflection offers an opportunity to use research-based instruments to provide feedback for students. Learning processes, specifically students' approaches to learning, reflect on students' learning aims and study practices, e.g. how they can relate ideas and search for evidence or organise their time and effort management (Entwistle, 2009). Numerous studies have recognized that these learning processes are related to academic achievement (e.g. Gijbels et al., 2005), also in the field of Law (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2017). Furthermore, they provide a solid foundation for implementing concrete study practices that support effective learning as these processes are supported by a theoretical framework and validated in various contexts (Parpala & Hailikari, 2021). Consequently, instruments focusing on student learning processes, i.e. their approaches to learning, can reliably measure different study practices and offer theoretically sound feedback on student study practices based on the inventory responses. Moreover, the use of research-based instruments is important as they can be critically evaluated and examined, for example in reliability and validity (Parpala & Hailikari, 2021).

The importance of feedback is influenced by students' individual characteristics and experiences (Hattie & Gan, 2011; Hattie et al., 2016; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), affecting how students engage with the feedback process (Hargreaves, 2013). Furthermore, feedback can evoke a range of emotions, from positive to negative, and it can be accepted, modified, or rejected (Lipnevich et al., 2021; Pekrun, 2006). Reflecting on emotions and experiences and considering one's actions in the learning process requires metacognitive skills (Hall et al., 2015) which refers to students' ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, deepen their knowledge of learning processes, and understand how, when, and why to use them (Tuononen et al., 2022). Indeed, studies have found that effective self-regulators are committed to the feedback they receive and possess the ability to process and reflect on it (Jönsson & Panadero, 2018).

Feedback is also crucial in fostering reflection among students (Crichton & Valdera Gil, 2015). Reflection has been extensively explored by scholars such as Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984), and Mezirow (1981). However, it is variously defined, and researchers also use variations of the concept itself, such as reflective thinking, reflective process, reflective skills, and self-reflection (Kember et al., 2008; Rogers, 2001). In this study, reflection is seen as a process of thinking, evaluating, and making sense of previous experiences (Dewey, 1933; Grant et al., 2002; Lew & Schmidt, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Schön, 1987). The essence of reflection lies in actively and consciously examining experiences, emotions, and actions (Dewey, 1933). Building on Dewey's (1933), Schön (1987) proposed two levels of reflection: reflection-in-action, which occurs during practice, and reflection-on-action, which takes place after practice. Reflection-on-action allows students to review their previous learning experiences and evaluate them for ongoing development and effective learning. This process of evaluating past actions and outcomes is crucial for continuous improvement and effective learning (Cowan, 2020). It must also be acknowledged, that while experiences help students understand the significance of learning (Boyd & Fales, 1983), reflection alone does not necessarily lead to learning or plan of action (Loughran, 2002). Through reflection, individuals are encouraged to learn from their experiences and

prepare for future action to improve their knowledge and skills (Heymann et al., 2022). However, students' capacity for reflection varies, and there is growing interest in enhancing students' reflective skills in higher education (Veine et al., 2019).

Reflective practices aim to enhance learners' understanding, skills, and performance (Rogers, 2001). Linking reflection with practice is essential (Schön, 1987), encompassing activities such as examining, thinking, understanding, problem-solving, analyzing, and evaluating various aspects like practice, knowledge and experiences (Collin et al., 2013). Reflective practice, as a structured approach to reflection, involves a series of these activities and stages (Chan & Lee, 2021; Guo, 2022; Heymann et al., 2022). An example is Heymann et al. (2022) five-stage reflection practice, which facilitates active, experience-based learning. The stages consist of becoming aware, analysing the current state, drafting and planning a solution, taking action, and reflecting on the action. Reflective practices involve intentional and systematic methods to engage students in reflection, providing feedback that supports students' reflective process. In the context of law reflective practices are crucial for law students as they help students to develop essential legal reasoning and ethical considerations (Noakes & Cody, 2022). By critically evaluating their understanding of legal concepts, students can improve their ability to construct well-reasoned arguments and solve legal problems effectively (Steel, 2019; Wallace, 2018). However, engaging in reflection and reflective practices is not automatic; students require assistance and support (Wedelin & Adawi, 2014), highlighting the importance of self-regulation in learning. Hence, reflective activities such as writing exercises, group discussions, journaling, role-playing, and creative expression are used to encourage individuals to critically examine their experiences, explore diverse perspectives, identify strengths and weaknesses, and discern patterns or insights that inform future actions or decisions (Guo, 2022; Heymann et al., 2022; Waters, 2016). The use of online tools like logs and chat platforms to facilitate reflective activities has increased (Heymann et al., 2022). Similarly, in higher education, guided reflection is used to encourage learners to derive meaning from their experiences (Husu et al., 2008). Guided reflection is a structured process that offers individuals prompts, questions, or frameworks to facilitate critical contemplation of their experiences, promoting learning, personal development, and enhanced decision-making (Husu et al., 2008). The current study examines student experiences of guided reflective practice using a research-based online survey and feedback. This process is described in greater detail in [Figure 2](#).

The current study

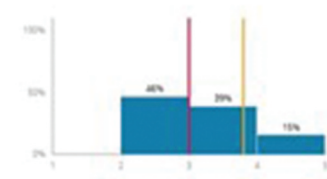
Every year, approximately 200 first-year law students enroll at a multidisciplinary university in Finland. Many of these students lack prior experience in studying law, which poses challenges in adapting their study activities to the legal context (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2011, 2017). This underscores the need to enhance first-year students' awareness of their study practices and support the development of their study skills. The Faculty of Law has thus incorporated the HowULearn questionnaire into its curriculum since 2005. The HowULearn online tool is a research-based instrument (Parpala & Hailikari, 2021) that provides valuable data to faculties for quality improvement and offers personalised feedback to students (Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012; Parpala et al., 2010; Ruohoniemi et al., 2017). The research-based instrument was developed using valid and robust research instruments, while the feedback was constructed based on research on student learning. Questionnaire and feedback have been updated over the years and are now a mandatory component for Bachelor's and Master's level students in their first, third, and fifth years.

The HowULearn questionnaire in this study included three key measurements:

- (1) **Learning processes:** Students' aims and study practices. Representing dimensions of organised studying, deep learning, and unreflective learning (Entwistle & McCune, 2004; Hailikari & Parpala, 2014; Lindblom-Ylänne et al., 2019; Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012).
- (2) **Self-Efficacy:** Assessing students' confidence in their ability to succeed (Bandura, 1982; Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012).
- (3) **Risk of Study-Related Burnout:** An indicator of students' well-being (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009).

After completing the online questionnaire, students receive personalised feedback, which only they can access (see example of the feedback on [Figure 1](#)). The system also offers cohort feedback for comparison.

Organised studying



3.8 | YOUR AVERAGE **3 | GROUP AVERAGE**

In this dimension you scored, which is higher than the average score of the whole group. This indicates you are very organised in your studying.

This dimension describes the systematic and organised approach to learning (focus on planning and time management). According to the research on student learning this learning approach, when combined with the deep approach (focus on reflection and intension to understand) produces the best learning results. In order to improve your learning skills and to perform better in your studies, it would be useful for you to review the scores you received in those two dimensions (Organised studying and Deep approach to learning). Consider how you study, and how you reflect and assess the material to be learnt, and how you integrate new knowledge into previous knowledge, and apply it in practice.

Improvement suggestions

Your score indicates that you are a very systematic and organised learner. It seems to be important for you to plan your study schedule and monitor your own progress. Moreover, you seem to be dedicated to your studies, and strive to achieve the goals you have set for yourself. If this is the dimension where you scored highest, it shows that studying in a systematic and organised way is of importance to you and assists you to do well in your studies. However, it is good to acknowledge that according to the research on student learning organised studying and deep approach to learning is usually the combination supporting successful studying. It might be good to check what was your score in Deep approach to learning.

Figure 1. Example of student feedback.

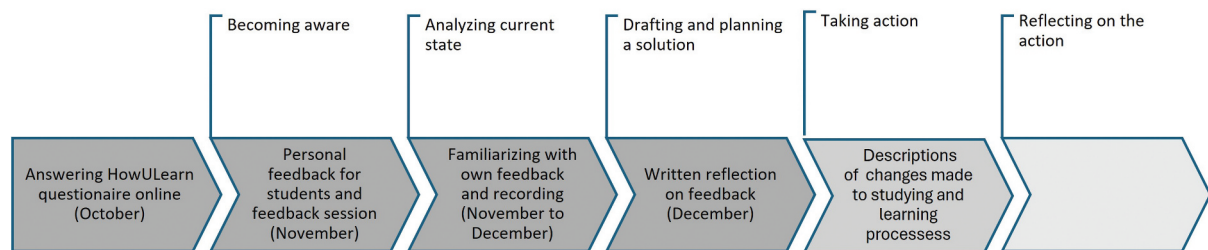


Figure 2. The HowULearn reflective practice process, classified according to Heymann et al. (2022) stages of reflection practice.

Since autumn 2017, administrators have been able to track how many students have accessed their feedback files. The rate of first-year students accessing feedback has increased from 12% to 17% to 98%. However, how many students have utilised the feedback to improve their learning remains unclear. To encourage students to reflect on the feedback received, the HowULearn four-stage reflective practice was implemented. It follows a previously reported (Heymann et al., 2022) five-stage reflective practice (see Figure 2).

Aims

The present study aims to investigate the experiences and reflections of first-year law students regarding the research-based feedback they received from the HowULearn online questionnaire, which focuses on their studying and learning practices and supportive online material provided through recording. This guided reflection practice seeks to gather evidence on the potential utility of research-based feedback in enhancing students' learning processes.

More specifically, our research question and sub-questions are:

How does reflective practice, utilizing research-based online survey including feedback on learning, encourage students' reflection regarding their studying?

- How do students experience the feedback regarding their learning processes?
- Which specific areas of the feedback do students pay attention to?
- What strengths and areas for improvement did students identify in the feedback?
- What development actions are students planning based on the feedback received?

Method

Data collection

In autumn 2021, the HowULearn questionnaire was electronically sent to 199 first-year law students, who were given three weeks to respond. Thereafter, students received personalised online feedback and cohort-wide statistics on three key measures presented before. The feedback included guidance on improving study practices and supporting well-being (Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012). A high response rate of 98.5% (196 students) was achieved, with 91.8% (180 students) reviewing the feedback. To facilitate interpreting the results, the first author provided all students with a tailored, research-based recording that highlighted best practices for studying law (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2011), focused on HowULearn feedback, time management (including procrastination, personal reading speed, time planning and monitoring), and stress management (covering sources and symptoms of stress and strategies for regulating stress) (e.g. Contrada & Baum 2010; Skead et al., 2020). The recording also included independent exercises, such as measuring student reading speed and tracking their time usage throughout the week. This recording was made available in the Moodle course area. Subsequently, students were asked to write a reflective assignment based on structured questions designed to prompt contemplation of the feedback. The questions included: *'What thoughts did the feedback evoke about studying? What has gone well in studying? How could you improve your own studying? What could be a concrete study-developing thing or tip that you could bring to your own studies?'*. A total of 153 students submitted the assignment by the beginning of the spring term.

The current study includes 101 first-year law students who (i) answered the questionnaire, (ii) were verified to have reviewed their feedback via HowULearn software, (iii) completed a written reflection based on the feedback, and (iv) provided permission for their data to be used in research. Thus, 50.8% of the cohort was included in the study. Ethical review and approval were not required for this study on human participants in accordance with local legislation and institutional requirements (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2019: <https://tenk.fi/en/ethical-review>).

Analyses

Students' reflections on their feedback were analysed using qualitative content analysis. This approach followed the structure and phases established in previous research on qualitative content analysis integrating insights from the following sources: Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), Elo and Kyngäs (2008), Hsieh and Shannon (2005). All personal information was removed before the analysis phase and replaced with codes. The answers were transferred to Atlasti.ti Windows (Version 23.4.0.29360) for the analysis.

The analyses proceeded as follows: (1) Familiarization with the data: Immersion by two authors in the entire written reflection material; (2) Generating initial codes: Identifying the initial codes of material, including discussing the initial codes until full agreement between all authors was reached. The unit of analysis was the experiences and themes of the research-based feedback, and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement; (3) Generating codes: Independent coding of data by two authors. The coding was generated mainly inductively, based on issues in studying raised by students in their reflection. However, the theoretical background of the HowULearn questionnaire and the structure of feedback may have influenced the generation of codes, making this phase partly abductive; (4) Searching for themes: Testing the establishment of initial five main categories by two authors; (5) Reviewing themes: Discussion on main and subcategories until full agreement was reached among all three authors; (6) Defining and naming themes: Refinement, labeling, and cross-checking of final categories in relation to the coded extracts and entire dataset through in-depth discussions with all authors. The Finnish citations were translated into English. Each analysis unit was coded only once for each respondent, even if it was mentioned repeatedly.

Results

First, the correspondence between students' responses to the research-based feedback was checked. Most students' (92/101) responses were clearly related to the feedback received. Most of the students (65/92) provided detailed reflections with concrete descriptions and examples related to their own studying and learning. However, some students (28/92) responded superficially, merely repeating the feedback without

Table 1. The experiences and themes of the research-based feedback, and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement classified into categories and sub-categories, and the number of responses (f) for each sub-category is provided.

Main category	Sub-category	f	
Experience of research-based feedback	Experience of individual feedback		
	Useful	64	
	Not useful	5	
	Not possible to indicate from response	32	
	Experience of year cohort information		
	Positive comparison	16	
	Neutral comparison	26	
	Negative comparison	2	
	Not possible to indicate from response	57	
Themes of research-based feedback	Approaches to learning		
	Organised studying	85	
	Deep learning	38	
	Surface, unreflective learning	24	
	Self-efficacy	23	
	Study burnout	25	
	Motivation	45	
	Procrastination	20	
	Learning skills	11	
	Organised studying	8	
Identification of own strengths	Self-regulation	2	
	Motivation	4	
	Determination	1	
	Time management	14	
	Planning and scheduling studies	67	
	Procrastination	4	
Identification of improvements	Reading speed	6	
	Familiarisation with legal cases	2	
	Group work and discussion with other students	10	
	Learning strategies	54	
	Wellbeing	10	
	Other	22	
	Self-criticism	11	
	Self-compassion	25	
	Themes not directly included in the research-based feedback	Self-criticism	11
		Self-compassion	25

personal reflection. Sixty percent (61/101) of the students explicitly mentioned the supportive recording. Only 9% (9/101) of the students did not use the feedback in reflection, instead, focusing on personal life situations.

A total of 101 students provided 713 descriptions of research-based feedback, which were organised into five main categories. The first four categories focused on aspects related to the students' experiences, themes of the research-based feedback, and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. The fifth category included themes that were not directly related to feedback. The categories and subcategories, along with the frequency of comments, are presented in Table 1.

Becoming aware of one's own studying at the Faculty of law

The results showed that feedback helped students become more aware of their learning skills, with many stating that it was their first time reflecting on these. Some students also shared their experiences and feelings about the feedback: 64% found it positive and useful, 5% found it useless, and 31% did not indicate their experience. Additionally, many students spontaneously compared their responses to those of their peers. Of these, 16% found the comparison useful, 2% found it negative, and 26% were neutral. The following extract illustrates how feedback made a student more aware of his/her study skills and the feelings it evoked:

I found answering the HowULearn survey a very meaningful experience, where I stopped to examine my own study habits and thoughts about studying. It was interesting to get feedback on the survey and compare other students' responses with my own. I liked that the survey separated the questions into different categories and the feedback was graphically formatted clearly. The recording was interesting, and the speakers clearly explained

issues such as time management and stress, which I had not thought of before. One slide that stuck out to me from the recording was the one on the Best Practice Model [of studying law]. (Student 87)

Analysing the current stage of studying with the themes of the online feedback and supportive recording

The online feedback and supportive recording prompted students to focus on the themes of the HowULearn questionnaire in their reflections. The subcategories of the second main category in [Table 1](#) illustrate the themes addressed. Most students (85%) reflected on their approaches to learning, particularly organised studying. They acknowledged the importance of planning and time management, providing practical examples. Some students also connected organised studying to well-being and stress management. The following excerpts showcase the varying reflections on organised studying:

The first thing that comes to mind is the systematic nature of learning. I've never been very good at planning and scheduling my studies in advance but have rather forged ahead in controlled chaos. (Student 34)

My grade [score] for planned study was slightly higher than the course average, which is good, as planning is likely to reduce stress and lead to better results on average. (Student 99)

Clearly fewer students (38%) focused on deep learning. About half of these simply noted, 'Based on HowULearn feedback, I emphasise understanding'. However, 12% reflected more concretely, stressing the importance of seeing the big picture, logical structuring, and making connections in their learning.

I scored well in the study section, which emphasises reflection and understanding, and I see this as my strength. I am naturally curious and often find myself combining things in different ways and creating whole ideas. I've also found from my work that I really value the bigger picture - I even find it hard to understand the details if I don't understand the big picture. (Student 41)

Motivation, briefly discussed in the recording, prompted many students to reflect on its importance for their studies. Although compassion and self-critique were not explicitly mentioned in the feedback, they emerged spontaneously in students' reflections. Students valued comparing their responses to peers, finding relief in knowing that they were not alone in facing challenges like unorganised studying and fragmented knowledge. This realisation helped them be compassionate to themselves and focus on improving their learning skills. A few students expressed concern for peers' coping. Overall, students paid little attention to self-efficacy and unreflective learning processes in their reflections.

Students' strength and development areas of learning and studying

Students tended to focus more on their areas for development rather than their strengths, despite being asked to reflect on both. Most (67%) identified specific issues, often including detailed improvement plans. The most common challenges were time management and organising studies, prompting students to allocate more time for independent reading, schedule reading time in their calendars, and set daily reading goals. For example:

I could improve my studies by putting more effort into planning, for example, in the way mentioned in the feedback, by scheduling my studies to fit in with the daily rhythm. It would also be good to plan a realistic study schedule before the course starts. I could also familiarise myself with the course content and objectives before or at the beginning of the course to get an overview of what is important to study in the course. (Student 60)

As there were some weeks between HowULearn's feedback and the return of the reflection (see [Figure 2](#)), a few students reported that they had already taken action to improve their own studying and learning processes:

Now that the spring [semester] has started, I have taken a different attitude and improved my practices. I've made a preliminary reading plan, in which I've written out the entire course material. The aim is to chop the whole thing up into suitable chunks, progressing at a steady pace while doing some monitoring. This has already been useful! (Student 76)

Discussion

Our study analysed how guided reflective practice helped students reflect on their learning processes and become more aware of their study practices. We investigated their experiences with the personalised feedback they received and sought evidence on the usefulness of research-based feedback in enhancing their learning processes. Recognising that students' ability to reflect can vary (Veine et al., 2019), we implemented a step-by-step guided reflection practice with specific questions (Husu et al., 2008), which aligned well with the model by Heymann et al. (2022). The relevance and usefulness of guided reflective practice was clearly highlighted in our findings.

Students were encouraged to use the feedback to reflect on their own study skills and their current state in law studies by asking '*What thoughts did the HowULearn feedback evoke about studying?*'. The results show that the feedback triggered students to *become aware* of their own learning processes. This supports the findings of Tuononen et al. (2022), suggesting that feedback can increase students' awareness of their learning processes, i.e. their approaches to learning. The feedback got several students to think, perhaps for the first time, about their own study skills and about the functionality of their learning processes in a law school environment. Further, most students experienced the feedback they received positively. This is significant because feedback has been shown to elicit various emotions in students, which can affect their engagement and intention to improve their learning (Hargreaves, 2013; Lipnevich et al., 2021; Pekrun, 2006). It can be inferred that the students were satisfied with the personalised online feedback and found it fair. Previous studies have also emphasised the importance of self-level feedback for the recipient (Hattie & Gan, 2011; Hattie et al., 2016; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), which generates positive emotions, motivating the learner and boosting confidence and self-efficacy (Mandouit & Hattie, 2023). In addition, the findings highlight the importance of utilizing a theoretically robust survey, which offers numerous benefits, such as clearly delineated items and dimensions that emerge from them. Most importantly, the feedback provided is evidence-based, thereby offering relevant and specific guidance for students (Parpala & Hailikari, 2021). In our study, the students also mentioned the benefits of the supportive recording. While it did not include self-level feedback, it aimed to further concretise the feedback to the student within the context of law and present research-based best practices for law students (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2011). This linking of personalised feedback with the specific teaching and learning environment likely contributed to the students' positive experience and was valuable to the guided reflection practice. This aligns with previous research indicating that effective feedback is related to the students' teaching and learning environment and should offer information and support, particularly from the faculty's perspective (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Moreover, our research showed that students put effort into analysing the current state of their own study practices. Our results imply that engaging in the reflection-on-action process enables students to review their previous learning experiences and evaluate them for ongoing development and effective learning (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Cowan, 2020; Schön, 1987). The results showed students focusing particularly on the organised studying of approaches to learning. The importance of organised studying and planning in the study of law has been identified in previous studies (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2017; Parpala et al., 2010), presumably because of the knowledge-intensive nature of the discipline. Law students must allocate time for a lot of independent reading of legal literature. Students also identified a connection between organised studying and well-being, highlighting the importance of good planning, particularly in reducing stress. Awareness of this connection and taking the planned actions would help students cope with their studies. In previous studies, students' learning processes have also been found to be related to wellbeing (Asikainen et al., 2020, 2022) and there is some evidence that students' wellbeing could be supported by self-reflection on their learning (Wang et al., 2017). In addition, participants raised issues outside the feedback, such as self-compassion and self-criticism, which indicates the students' involvement in the reflection process.

To identify strengths and areas for development, students were guided by questions on '*What has gone well in studying?*' and '*How could you improve your own studying?*' In our study, the students expressed a discrepancy between their study skills and the teaching and learning environment of Law. This is not surprising, as novices often struggle to interpret and meet the course requirements expected by their teachers (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2011; Pitrich & Boekaerts, 2000). Students identified planning and scheduling as the key area for improvement. Thus, the study shows that online survey and feedback on learning encourages the evaluation of one's own studying, ability to

identify strengths and weaknesses in studying, and knowledge of strategies as well as understanding how, when, and why to use such strategies. Therefore, the process of reflection and feedback increased the students' metacognitive awareness which includes the forementioned elements (Harrison & Vallin, 2018; Schraw & Dennison, 1994).

Research-based online feedback included suggestions to *draft and plan a solution* to improve study practices. In addition, students were activated to set goals and plan activities with the question '*What could be a concrete study-developing thing or tip that you could bring to your own studies?*'. Numerous students identified the development of study planning skills as a general goal. Additionally, some students outlined specific activities they intended to employ, such as determining their reading speed to create a personalised reading plan. Some students also reported that they had already tested new activities in their studies. This clearly shows that this kind of process, online survey on learning processes and feedback based on them, can support the reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987) and plan of actions which is not self-evident in reflection (Loughran, 2002). However, *take action* phase (Heymann et al., 2022), was not included in this reflection practice, and thus, there is no clear evidence how the plans were implemented in practice. As the importance of experimentation in evaluating established goals has been stressed by both Dewey (1933) and Schön (1987), we recommend that a *take action* step be incorporated into the guided reflective practice. By doing so, students can better translate their reflective insights into practical actions that enhance their academic performance and personal development.

Limitations

We acknowledge the limitations of this study. Firstly, the mandatory nature of the reflection practice could have introduced selection bias, as only just over half of the respondents consented to share their data, likely skewing our sample towards more motivated students. Secondly, the research-based questionnaire and the feedback guided the students' reflection, although they also raised other perspectives on their own initiative. Further, we do not know how many people watched the supportive recording and whether it affected the results. Thirdly, our analysis was based solely on the students' written reflections; thus, we could not ascertain the underlying reasons for their choices. Gaining insights into how students think about the feedback could significantly enhance our understanding of the learning processes. Neither do we know what activities the students had carried out since their reflection, other than those few who reported already having started new activities. To address these issues, further research is essential.

Conclusions

Overall, our study found that the HowULearn reflective practice process was effective in helping students to become aware of their learning processes and find their development areas of learning processes. The findings underscore the importance of using research-based instrument as a reflection tool as it enables the feedback provided for the students to be evidence-based, profound and specific for each dimension measured. This supports the conclusion that the ideas derived from research-based feedback have a solid foundation for implementation in study practices. The reflective practice provided a structured framework for reflection, and the activities inspired students to engage with research-based feedback, maximising the benefits of their personal feedback. For future improvement, we recommend integrating an action step that allows students to evaluate their planned actions and assess their impact on academic progress. Additionally, it would be beneficial to engage students in reflective practices by using guided reflection tools at relevant points throughout their studies. Peer discussions about feedback could also help students identify effective study practices and improve time management. As the students were also concerned about their peers and their well-being, such peer discussions could provide opportunities for peer support on well-being issues. Organised studying could be supported by paying more attention to the sequencing of the content to be studied and the allocation of time for independent study. Finally, a longitudinal study that follows the same cohort of law students from entry to graduation could offer valuable insights into how learning processes evolve over time, providing a more comprehensive view of the development of their studying and learning processes.

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