

Portfolio System in Teaching Writing: EFL Students' Perceptions

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Abstract: The portfolio system appears as one alternative answer for such a challenge encountered by an English teacher. The research about the portfolio system that focused on students' perception is quite necessary since it helps the teachers and students of the English language find a proper way of learning writing skills. This study aimed to investigate the students' perception of using a portfolio system to improve writing ability in teaching writing skills in English as a foreign language to high school students. The participants of this research were four students of high school. In conducting this case study, the researcher collected data from the interview. This research found that the students favored implementing a portfolio system to improve their English writing skills. This research stands as a contribution to teaching English writing skills. This study suggests that a portfolio system is a useful tool for teaching English writing skills in secondary education. It can use the teacher to facilitate the students by giving feedback on their writing to encourage their writing performance.

Keywords: *EFL Students, Portfolio system, Writing, Writing Portfolio.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing English skills as a foreign language (EFL) is a key factor in professional development in general, both while the students are still in school for learning. They work, which is important in a competitive field of jobs. Writing is also a major tool for transmitting and disseminating knowledge in a globalized world where English is considered the universal language used in many aspects of life that later the students encounter when they get into the jobs. On the other hand, it becomes a challenge for the English teacher to effectively teach the students, which means they understand the teacher's learning materials.

Writing skills in English are still considered a difficult skill to learn. As explained by (Wati 2019 in Ying, 2018), English writing is still perceived as the most difficult skill among language skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading. Therefore, sufficient advanced understanding of all matters regarding writing skills in English is needed to understand students' challenges and their solutions further.

Moreover, in EFL writing practice, the students still have difficulties arranging the draft in writing. Several obstacles encountered by the students in learning English writing, such as the inability to fluently pouring their ideas into a written form or the students' problem of

writing grammatically, cohesion, coherence, paragraph organization, diction, and spelling errors in essay writing (Toba et al., 2019 in Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). In line with this idea (Toba et al., 2019 in Brown) stated that the writing problems are not caused by the students only, but they can also be caused by the teachers who used some uninteresting teaching writing techniques. Therefore, In EFL writing, practicing is needed to support learners while they work through the various stages of planning, drafting, and revising a text for a specified audience (Alshahrani & Windeatt, 2012).

Hadfield & Hadfield (2004) mentioned three difficulties related to writing learning to get a closer perspective. Firstly, there is psychological difficulty in which the writer has to decide what the reader needs and express it. The second one is that there is linguistic difficulty in that the language used in written language is different from that used in speech. Thirdly, there is a cognitive difficulty in which the students have to organize their thoughts on paper. It is becoming not uncommon for students to struggle to think of what words they need to express certain English points. It looks like such a struggle comprised steps of thinking the word in the source language, and they need to find the English translation of said words and then finally utter the words in English the way they mean it in the source language. It surely takes some time even in non-active communication like in written form or in writing everything but in English as a foreign language, not to mention that they are expected to make their sentence sounds English. Besides, students are also required to put the words to explain their ideas well since the idea can be delivered in a wrong composition of words that greatly affect the sentence's meaning, like putting wrong grammatical vocabularies that the reader of their writing can be misunderstood the writing.

Regarding EFL writing practices, the

teachers can support the students' control of the learning process in more social and authentic contexts and serve as a learning tool to support the writing process (Alshahrani & Windeatt, 2012). As an alternative way to teach English writing skills, the portfolio system comes as the answer as explained by (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000) that portfolio assessment is an alternative method for writing an assessment underlines the composing process, student independence, and self-reflective capability. Through portfolio assessment, which is commonly also called a portfolio system, the students are taught to write independently without any other party intervention, such as a teacher. The students can also have reflective capability, which helps them recognize their mistakes and conduct the correction act. Not to mention, the use of portfolios as a classroom-based assessment emphasizes the significance of students' hard work, improvement, and accomplishments made in their writing improvement (Genesee, F., & Upshur, 1996). However, there is not enough evidence about how students in EFL contexts perceive this kind of alternative assessment or how well they perform when it is used (Hamp-Lyons, 1996). This study investigates students' first-hand perception of using portfolios as a learning technique that helps them to learn English writing.

Writing Portfolio in EFL

In writing studies, portfolio assessment is generally regarded as a possible alternative for product-based writing assessment (Belanoff, P & Dickson, 1991). Its applications in EFL contexts are observed as productive and beneficial to students' writing performances. While there are studies about teacher implementation of various portfolio models for instructional and assessment purposes, research into student ideas and experiences of using portfolio assessment in

the EFL context has been low or insufficient (Lam & Lee, 2010). The use of portfolios in writing instruction has been well documented in the L1 and L2 writing literature, yet their use as an assessment tool is under-researched to a certain extent (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1996). (Hamp-Lyons, Liz & Condon, 2000) outlined a theoretical framework of portfolio assessment that underscored the significant role of student writers in the portfolio process and how their active participation in the assessment process might improve writing learning. Four prominent features in their model were collection, selection, reflection, and delayed evaluation. For collection, portfolio assessment typically requires students to produce multiple drafts in more than one genre over time. Selection refers to student-selected entries that showcase their best ability during the portfolio compilation, and reflection involves the development of self-regulatory capacity in reviewing their learning progress. Delayed evaluation is to give grades only to the final products of writing. In Hong Kong, there are few unpublished studies that explore how students, from primary to tertiary levels, experience and respond to the use of portfolio assessment effectively and linguistically. Using a case study approach, Wong (2006) investigated students' perceptions of portfolio assessment directed in four Grade 10 writing classrooms in one suburban secondary school. The findings showed that after the study, it is shown that the students were more confident in creating texts with richer ideas and decreasing start-up time for writing although they did not think the alternative method could help improve the overall quality of the texts. While these studies exemplified or giving an example about the impact of portfolio assessment on students' effect, they did not address the issues about the connection

between portfolio assessment and writing ability and how certain feedback types in portfolio assessment might be productive in facilitating text revision. While the scholarship of portfolios suggests that students performing correction in the portfolio process could positively perform to writing development (Hamilton, 1994), other theorists contend that the act of revising might not automatically result in the production of longer and better texts (Sengupta, 1998). Portfolio assessment may not necessarily promise writing improvement, given that the relationship between revision and text improvement is problematic (Sengupta, 2000). Some studies report that underachieving L2 students might fail to revise the drafts independently, and correction might lead to more worries in student writers' minds (Porte, 1996). No study has proven that the same text's intense rewriting was of significant benefit for the writer (Clark, 1993). Although the result of portfolio assessment on writing ability remains questionable, research investigating EFL advanced students' perceptions of portfolio assessment as a learning tool shows a positive conclusion (Aydin, 2010). This study's implication is to promote self-regulation in writing and reveal the students' perception of writing skills through portfolio assessment.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach. This present study used descriptive methods, a method used in the fact-finding status of a group of people, an object, a condition, a system of thought, or events in the present with the right interpretation. As for this research population, the researcher took four students of the eleventh grade of Senior High School in Indonesia.

The data collection for this case study research was using the interview. The

researcher conducted some interviews to uncover precisely the students' perception of the portfolio system.

In analyzing the data, this research used the interactive data analysis model of Miles & Huberman (1984), whose method consisted of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study will present the results in the following section to answer the research question set out for this study: "what do the students perceive their writing improvement after experiencing a portfolio system?" Almost all respondents' names were converted into initial. The respondents were A, B, C, D, and E was an interviewer. Four students became respondents with six questions to dig deeper into understanding or whatever the students thought about implementing a portfolio system on writing improvements in English subjects, which will be discussed in this section.

Research Question 1. How do you feel about teaching and learning the writing process?

The students stated that they had positive feelings that they were comfortable and not depressed, which made them enjoy English lessons, namely writing skills, with an atmosphere that supported them.

(A) *Enjoyable.* The interviewee found that the weekly English teaching and learning process was enjoyable, meaning that the interviewee positively felt about the English teaching and learning process.

(B) *I felt Relaxed.* The interviewee found that the weekly English teaching and learning process was relaxed, meaning that the interviewee could engage in an English class environment in a relaxed way, not in a pressured, stressed, or

intimidating form of interaction with the English teacher. Hence, the interviewee's feeling was positive toward the English teaching and learning process in writing skill teaching.

(C) *I was relaxed.* The interviewee found that the weekly English teaching and learning process was peaceful, meaning that the interviewee was able to engage in an English class environment in a relaxed way, not in a pressured, stressed, or intimidating form of interaction with the English teacher. Hence, the interviewee's feeling was positive toward the English teaching and learning process in writing skill teaching.

However, one respondent expressed different opinions. This respondent assessed that learning and teaching writing in English did not motivate him to become enthusiastic in education, making him unable to enjoy and understand lessons and needed help from various parties. From himself, teachers, and friends, and parents.

(D) *Boring.* The interviewee found that the English teaching and learning process was boring. The English class activity did not give the interviewee a positive feeling or not give a positive environment that led the interviewee to enjoy the whole English teaching and learning activity or process. Thus, it can be concluded that the interviewee was demotivational in the English teaching and learning process.

The researcher found that this interviewee needed further help from the interviewee herself and the teacher, as a person

responsible for the English teaching and learning process in the classroom. The classmate and her parents were expected to be able to support the interviewee in an activity of the study group.

The students mostly considered the application of the portfolio system as beneficial in learning English. It is in line with the statement from (Lam, 2013) which says that the portfolio system's implementation is perceived as productive and beneficial to students' writing performances. It can be stated that the implementation of the portfolio system itself shows that there are tangible benefits in guiding students to be productive in their writing performances. In addition to the students themselves, who certainly benefit significantly from the implementation of the portfolio system, the teacher also becomes trained and skilled in teaching students how to write in English, which will improve the teacher's ability to provide teaching. Studies reporting that portfolios can promote autonomy and language awareness in writing (Aydin, 2010). It is also demonstrated by the study that shows that the implementation of portfolios to students can teach them to learn individual where students can take their initiative to learn, with or without the help of teachers or other people, in addition to students also being able to understand their learning needs, learning goals that make it move to learn, identify sources of material for learning, to evaluate the results of their own learning.

Research Question 2. How is writing taught in schools?

Some respondents reported that the writing class activities focused on the explanation of the material only. The teacher had some steps in teaching writing. The respondents, for instance, commented:

(A) English lesson, especially in writing skill being taught by firstly the teacher writes on the whiteboard;

secondly, the teacher explains the materials, thirdly the teacher asks the students to copy and write the materials down to their books, and for the last sequence, the students given the questions and answers session.

(B) English lesson, especially in writing skill being taught by firstly the teacher writes on the whiteboard; secondly, the teacher explains the materials, thirdly the teacher asks the students to copy and write the materials down to their books, and for the last sequence, the students given the questions and answers session.

(C) English lesson, especially in writing skill being taught by firstly, the teacher writes on the whiteboard. Secondly, the teacher explains the materials. Third, the teacher asks the students to copy and write the materials down in their books. For the last sequence, the students are given the questions and answers session.

(D) English lesson, especially in writing skill being taught by firstly the teacher writes on the whiteboard; secondly, the teacher explains the materials, thirdly the teacher asks the students to copy and write the materials down to their books, and for the last sequence, the students given the questions and answers session.

For how writing in English is taught in school, all interviewees had a similar opinion that English lessons, especially in writing skills being taught by firstly, the teacher writes on the whiteboard. Secondly, the teacher explains the

materials. Third, the teacher asks the students to copy and write the materials down in their books. For the last sequence, the students are given the questions and answers session. In a part of what they like about the portfolio system, most of them had similar opinions. They thought that through the portfolio system, the interviewees felt that they could increase vocabularies, knew better grammatical order, and knew the wrongs in English writing. The next point is about what way did portfolio system improved their writing performance. The Portfolio system offered them a better understanding of grammatical order and vocabulary extensiveness. It proves that the result of the portfolio's implementation enriched the quality teaching for all students as stated by Kim & Yazdian (2014) that to some extent, the students experience the increasing of vocabularies and a better understanding of grammatical order.

Research Question 3. In what way did the portfolio system improve your writing performance?

The respondents reported that their previous learning experiences in writing class using a portfolio system affected their performance. Respondents, for instance, commented:

(A) she could increase the English vocabulary and improve grammar, and she said that she knew how to write in English correctly.

(B) She could increase the English vocabulary, she got correction and could learn from it, especially in English writing, and she claimed to know how to write correctly.

(C) She could increase the English vocabulary, she got correction and could learn from it, and she claimed to know how to write correctly.

(D) The interviewee had a correction in learning English that the interviewee was able to learn the correct from wrong in learning English, especially in writing skill.

The results were supported by the French (1992) statement that a portfolio provides a chance for students to reflect on their learning gains from the course. It exhibits a learner's development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Learners are actively involved in the decision-making process while the instructor is negotiating with them the portfolio's contents. At a glance, French was delivered because a portfolio is a tool that can help the students better learn about writing by understanding their capabilities in said skill.

Research Question 4. What do you think about the relation between text revision and writing improvement?

By learning from the text that the English teacher revised in class, the respondents' writing ability was getting better. The respondents knew that a particular way of writing in English was wrong and that another certain writing way was correct. So, the respondents managed to avoid the same mistake in learning English, especially in writing skills. Respondents, for instance, commented:

(A) By learning from the text that the English teacher revised in class, the interviewee's writing ability was getting better. The interviewee knew that a particular way of writing in English was wrong and that another certain way of writing in English was correct. So, the interviewee managed to avoid the same mistake in learning English, especially in writing skills.

(B) She could increase the English vocabulary, she got correction and

could learn from it, and she claimed to know how to write correctly. That means that her vocabularies increased that the interviewee managed to communicate, especially writing in English in more various words, not just using the same words over and over again. In English learning, especially in writing skills, the interviewee received corrections from the English teacher that led the interviewee to learn from the interviewee's mistakes and how not to make mistakes again or avoid them.

(C) *By the text revision, her performance in writing was improving. By the text revision provided by the English teacher, especially in writing skills, the interviewee could manage to perform better in writing skills by having correction from the English teacher when the interviewee made mistakes in the English lesson.*

(D) *In learning English, the teacher commented that the writing improvement based on text revision was dependent on the repetition. It means that the interviewee managed to repeat English learning in writing, but with the note that the interviewee was also making the corrective move on her wrong part of writing.*

The correlation between text revision and writing improvement showed that the respondents had a positive opinion or impact. The portfolio system gave them writing improvement by learning from their own mistakes through text revision. In line with Lam (2013), implementing the portfolio systems could improve their writing abilities,

such as they experienced substantial improvement in producing texts with clearer and richer ideas or in general and the overall quality of texts in particular. Finally, for the last point, that is being the kind of feedback considered constructive in English writing. It is in line with Bader et al. (2019) Bader et al. (2019) opinion that students' positive attitudes towards the portfolio process suggest that students would benefit from more opportunities to revise and resubmit their work and interpreting and implementing feedback in general.

Research Question 5. What kinds of feedback do you consider constructive in improving your writing after one semester?

The combination of oral and written feedback from the English teacher was considered as constructive feedback by the interviewee. Individual interviewees prefer one kind of feedback, such as written kind of feedback only, but others like the combination of both types. They have different preferences related to their favorite way of learning. It is the right way of knowing the student's preferred method of learning because it makes it easier for teachers to determine what type of feedback is suitable for students according to their favorite course. Respondents, for instance, commented:

(A) *The written feedback as the interviewee could learn directly from the mistakes she made in her writing, and also she could keep the wrong or rejected portfolio as a reminder of how to write correctly.*

(B) *The combination of oral and written feedback from the English teacher was considered as constructive feedback by the interviewee. It shows to the researcher that the interviewee prefers the two kinds of feedback, named oral feedback and*

written feedback since the interviewee herself was not only able to learn from the teacher's explanation about the incorrect writing and how to be correct, but also learn by herself from her mistakes on her paper of portfolio which she could keep at home.

(C) Oral feedback was the kind of feedback that was considered by the interviewee as constructive feedback. The interviewee explained that out of all of the two feedback, the interviewee prefers the teacher's oral feedback since the interviewee directly learns corrects and incorrect writing in English.

(D) The interviewee was still trying to find a preferable kind of feedback that the interviewee considered constructive. It seems that all of the kinds of feedbacks were doing good to the interviewee.

All of the interviewees had different preferences in the kind or type of feedback given by the teacher. There was one interviewee that considered the written feedback only was constructive enough for her. The interviewee considered the dual combination of oral and written feedback was preferred and needed for better learning. One interviewee only considered oral feedback as constructive feedback, and the last interviewee considered that there was no kind of feedback that was considered constructive. Lastly, as Lam (2016) claims, the feedback promotes the students with metacognitive awareness of the composing process to recognize their own mistakes in writing.

CONCLUSION

This study is a small-scale classroom investigation that involves EFL students in a high school in Indonesia, with the data collection mostly concerns with students' perception of the portfolio system. The study results showed that EFL students highly preferred the portfolio system for all the benefits. It shows that the portfolio system helps the students to write incorrectly.

The result shows that the portfolio system is quite essential to be applied since it contributes broadly positive in teaching writing for teacher and especially for the students themselves to answer the obstacles the students encounter on their daily learning of writing in English. It also proved that students tend to choose a portfolio system to learn writing in English. For the matter that the portfolio system can help them to be better at writing clear content, proper organization of idea, appropriate grammar, effective choice of vocabularies, and also correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. It becomes an alternative to choose portfolio assessment to be an approach of teaching writing, which suggests that the application of portfolio system is necessary since the application of portfolio system leads the teacher and especially the students to improve their writing capacity. For further research, the more specific but different subject of study is beneficial to work.

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