A study on teachers and students' perspectives on using portfolios in writing class for first-year english-majored students

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Abstract: *One way to teach writing that involves process writing and collaborative learning is through the creation of portfolios. Although there are many books and papers that review the use of that strategy, it hasn't been implemented extensively yet in Hai Phong University's Foreign Language Department. This essay will focus on the viewpoints of the students and teachers regarding this approach being used in their writing classes. It is intended that the results of this study would promote the use of writing portfolios in EFL instruction and learning on a larger scale in Vietnam.*

Keywords: *Portfolio, writing, foreign language, students' perspective.*

1.Introduction

Writing is an effective means of self-expression and thought-sharing that enables writers to communicate with others. Using portfolios to track students' development and provide ongoing corrections is one of the many aspects that affects how well pupils write. One of the alternate evaluation methods is portfolio assessment, a developing technique that has generated interest in the field of language instruction. It is called a portfolio evaluation technique because it does not employ traditional timed paper-and-pencil tests to gauge student achievement or provide teachers a brief window of time to evaluate their students' work. It's a continuous evaluation process.

This research paper examines the impact of students' self-evaluations before outlining the challenges and answers for using a portfolio to evaluate the written pieces. The outcomes of the first-year students' three question document analysis were crucial in confirming the conclusions drawn from their self-evaluation.

2. Content

2.1. Literature review

In the literature on language instruction, numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate the attitudes or viewpoints of language learners. The use of portfolios for EFL students has, however, received relatively little attention, according on a review of the literature. "In retrospect, what was urgent and growing pressure for assessment: test everything and everyone for a score; don't trust teachers," as Elbow

and Belandoff (1997) highlighted (pp. 22-23). As a result, numerous scholars started looking for other methods of evaluating student writing to the one-time, timed exam that is often given at the conclusion of a writing course.

A portfolio is "a collection of texts the writer has produced over a defined period of time" (Hamp-Lyons, 1991, p. 162) and can include "selected but not necessarily polished or finished pieces" (Privette, 1993, p. 60) in the context of writing instruction and assessment. There are many benefits of using portfolios in writing as they stimulate student interaction with peers and student ownership in the learning process (Genese and Upshur (1996)) and can be used to encourage students to reflect on the pieces they write and on the processes they use to write them (Murphy (1994).

A fair amount of research has been done on the subject of portfolios within the framework of HaiPhong University's Foreign Language Department. Nevertheless, no research has been conducted that provides an understanding of how students evaluate their own writing skills after completing a portfolio writing process that is directed by those standards.

2.2. Methodology

The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of integrating portfolio as a measurement instrument from students and teachers' perspective with two research questions:

Question 1: What are the students and teachers'

perceptions of the benefits of using portfolios as a mean of assessment in their writing developments?

Question 2: What obstacles do students meet when they compile their portfolios?

Question 3: What are respondents' solutions to obstacles in using portfolios?

Freshmen were in focus in the current study since they have experienced traditional assessing method and therefore, with the new method. In addition, an advantage is that all the participants have chances to get access to both product and process writing, so first-year students would be able to give more objective answers when comparing portfolios and other product-oriented assignments.

The study employs a survey questionnaire. The portfolio survey included 18 statements that students and teachers rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5), and two open-ended questions to gather additional opinions from the students.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Data were collected using a 20-item survey. Sixty students from HaiPhong University's K24 Foreign Language Department were among the participants. A questionnaire was the primary tool used in the data collection process. It was expected that the administration would take a total of 20 minutes. During their normal Writing Skills class hour, the researchers and the course instructors gave the survey forms to the subjects. The application of this methodology demonstrated the fusion of qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, the information gathered from this source was sufficient and impartial enough to offer the highest level of assurance regarding the survey's validity and reliability. Regarding the second research question, students' responses to the open ended questions were categorized as positive and negative towards the use of portfolio and then the frequency of the responds was calculated.

2.4. Results and discussions

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how instructors and first-year students felt about using portfolios in writing classes.

Students' knowledge of portfolios was still lacking prior to their implementation. But 70% of the students (42 out of 60) had a clear idea of how

to create the portfolios after using them as a tool to evaluate their learning process. Most of the students (84.9%) enjoyed using portfolio in their learning process. Only 15.10% (9 out of 60 responses) of the subject did not find it interesting to make portfolios. According to the portfolio survey, among the 60 students who answered the survey anonymously, the majority of the subjects felt that portfolio sharing activities contribute to their English learning process. When students were asked whether they put a lot of effort in this subject during implementing the portfolios, only 3.40% (2 out of 60 students) stated that they did not put effort in this subject. 91.60% (55 out of 60 students) agreed that one of the benefits of using portfolios as a means of assessment was helping students become more aware of autonomous learning while 8.40% was uncertain about this item.

Especially, portfolios also helped students monitor their learning goals and could present their learning results. 91.70% of the students (55 out of 60 responses) acknowledged this benefit. In item 9, 56.70% (34 out of 60 students) of the participants stated that the portfolios helped them promote mutual interactions with the teacher. Meanwhile, 25 out of 60 students (41.70%) were uncertain about this advantage of portfolios and 1out of 60 students (1.60%) didn't agree that. More importantly, more than half of the students (56.70%) believed that the portfolios could enhance classmates' cooperative learning as well as mutual progress in English, while other students thought that such activities didn't promote cooperative learning in the classroom. Additionally, students' responses indicate that 76.70% (46 out of 60 students) of the subjects thought that the portfolios helped them improve their abilities to organize academic information. In the total of 60 students, 14 students (23.30%) were uncertain about this statement. Another benefit of using portfolios is to help students improve their abilities to search for academic information on internet. 61.70% (37 responses) affirmed this benefit of portfolios meanwhile only 23 out of 60 students (38.50%) were uncertain and disagreed with the statement. 80% approved that the portfolios helped them reflect about what they have learnt, more than the number of uncertain students (16.70%) five times. Fewer than 5.0% (2 out of 60students)

disagreed with the fifth item.

It is clear from the results that one-fourth of the survey strongly agreed that the portfolios helped them include references on their work. 29 out of 60 participants (47.70%) agreed again whilst slightly over 20% (12 out of 60 students) was uncertain about this effectiveness of portfolios. Being aware of the importance of using portfolios in the learning process, two-first of the students (45 out of 60 participants) asserted that they would recommend that other students take this course and only one-fourth of the survey did not know that definitely. In the last item, a great number of students (85.0%) agreed to use the portfolios as a useful tool in the next semester. Only 1 out of 60 subjects (1.70%) did not want to continue using it as a useful additional tool in their future learning.

Regarding the second question on students' obstacles when they compile their portfolios, it is clear from the data that time-consuming was the greatest difficulty. However, it should be noted that the majority of respondents still favored the benefits of receiving feedback and revising during portfolio's constructing process. In addition, many students felt difficult to find suitable materials for portfolios because of the lack of sources. Furthermore, the new method was also an effort-consuming method. More than half of students recognized that using portfolio required more effort than traditional lessons. Last but not least, the lack of objective grading standard when assessing other's works is a problem of the majority of subjects.

Regarding their solutions to obstacles in writing portfolios, the students suggested that time-management was the golden key, which was then specified into several hints such as making a time-line, writing the first draft carefully or setting a deadline for each version. The second way to solve this is by working in group and divide task equally among members of group to reduce word load.

3. Conclusion

For educational practice, my study firstly indicates the crucial role of feedback: more precisely, the students acting on the feedback. This implies the importance of teachers encouraging students to make explicit how they used feedback to reorient, or reshape, their learning activities. Secondly, portfolio assessment can support student learning when it is an integral part of the learning environment, and it is communicated to and discussed with students as a tool for learning.

In short, from the outcomes presented above, it is strongly recommended that ESL teachers should employ portfolios in teaching writing. It is worth noticing that in order to take full advantage of this method; teachers should put learners' characteristics as their prior concern. Other factors such as design of portfolios, peers' feedback and assessment are also of great importance in promoting the success of writing portfolios. As for teachers, writing teachers should notice peers from the very beginning both about the quality and quantity of feedback. Not only writing pieces but also peers' comments need to be assessed so that peers will be more responsible for their giving feedback.

Last but not least, writing teachers are advised to offer (students) writer specific guideline for self-correction after receiving comments, which will be discussed more thoroughly in implications for writers. As for peers, first and foremost, they need to be provided with specific marking criteria from the beginning, which acts as a guideline for giving comments. Additionally, peers should follow carefully the teacher's instructions and be responsible when giving comments so that both they and the writer can benefit from this activity. Besides, in accordance with the implications for teacher above, students had also better focus on correcting mistakes in different aspects for different versions.

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