

An Implementation of Portfolio System in Writing Class: Middle Education Teachers' Experience

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Abstract

The portfolio system exists as one alternative answer for a challenge encountered by an English teacher. The research about the portfolio system that focused on middle education teachers' 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 middle education teachers' perception of using a portfolio system to improve writing ability in teaching writing skills in English as a foreign language to junior high school students. The participants of this research were four junior high school teachers. In conducting this case study, the researcher collected data from the interview. This research found that the teachers favored implementing a portfolio system to improve students' 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 middle education. The teachers were to facilitate the students by applying the portfolio system and giving feedback on their writing to encourage their writing performance.

Keywords

EFL students; middle education; portfolio system; writing portfolio



I. 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. According to Kristyanawati (2019) One of the competencies taught in Indonesian language learning is writing skills. Writing is the ability to express ideas, opinions, and feelings to other parties through written language (Saragih, 2019).

On the other hand, it becomes a challenge for the English teacher to effectively teach the students, which means they understand the teachers' 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 like the 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 importance of students' hard work, improvement, and accomplishments made in their writing improvement (Genesee, F., & Upshur, 1996). However, on the other hand, Hamp-Lyons (2007) proposed that more study on how portfolio system might impact teaching and learning of writing in EFL settings was unquestionably needed.

This study investigates teachers' first-hand experience of the implementation of portfolio as a learning technique that helps them to learn English writing. Thus, the researcher hopes that by conducting the research, it can be explained clearly about teachers' first-hand experiences of using the portfolio system in the teaching and learning process.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 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. 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 important 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 finding 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 of the implementation of the portfolio assessment. On the other hand, Hamp-Lyons (2007) proposed that more study on how portfolio system might impact teaching and learning of writing in EFL settings was unquestionably needed.

Along with developing types of evaluation, a number of so-called alternative assessment approaches (e.g. peer assessment, portfolio assessment, self-assessment, etc.) have emerged as evaluation strategies that allow learners to become "a part of the comprehensive learning process" and "to create a product that demonstrates what they can do" (Sajedi, 2014). Thus, such assessments have introduced techniques such as portfolio assessment technique, which is an alternative method of presenting an evaluation that highlights the composition process, student autonomy, and self-reflective capacity (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Portfolios facilitate education in many disciplines by offering student portraits presenting multidimensional viewpoints, enabling students to participate, and integrating teaching (Genesee & Upshur, 1996; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). In terms of learning and teaching foreign languages, they are an effective evaluation method used both to offer opportunities to authentically and successfully acquire language and to measure student success (Delett, Barnhardt, & Kevorkian, 2001).

Cohen (1994), on the other hand, also draws attention to the state of which portfolio holds a number of limitations. Portfolios, for instance, take a great deal of effort from both teachers and students, and it is difficult to grade portfolios. In addition, as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (1993) emphasize, perceptions and attitudes on portfolio assessment should be taken into consideration, and the shortcomings and problems should be systematically

evaluated in terms of students' perceptions of portfolio system in foreign language learning. In Prasad's (2003) study, she investigated if portfolio content negotiation and portfolio compilation process could influence the willingness of students to write and affect their own attitudes towards learning in a Grade 12 secondary classroom. The results showed that most students liked the concept of portfolio assessment and believed that due to the achievements and improvements they made throughout the portfolio program they could boost their motivation to write. Then, by conducting a case study approach, Wong (2006) studied students' viewpoints of portfolio assessment in one suburban secondary school in four Grade 10 writing classrooms. The results revealed that, after the research, students showed greater confidence in constructing texts with richer concepts and decreasing start-up time for writing though they did not believe that the alternative approach might help improve the overall performance of the texts. In addition, Aydin (2010) conducted a study discussing about EFL writers' perceptions of portfolio keeping which involved 204 EFL students of a university in Turkey. To grasp the whole data needed for the research, he used a portfolio contribution questionnaire and a portfolio problem questionnaire in order to collect quantitative data. As the results, two important facts were obtained from the study. First, the portfolio assessment in EFL writing class was considered beneficial for enhancing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, reading, study, and writing. And, the second point, during the portfolio keeping periods, EFL students experienced some problems.

By acknowledging the need for a study related to the implementation of the portfolio system for teaching writing in English, the researcher wants to put an effort to contribute to that domain by conducting a novel research that focused on the teacher of English as a foreign language in regard of the implementation of portfolio system that put into process of his/her teaching of English in writing skill since such research is still quite limited. This study's implication is to promote the application of portfolio system in writing and reveal the teachers' experience of writing skills through portfolio system.

III. Research Methods

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 teachers who had the experience of teaching junior high school students..

The data collection for this case study research was using the interview. The researcher conducted some interviews to uncover precisely the teachers' perception of the application portfolio system in the class.

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.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study will present the results in the following section to answer the research question set out for this study: "How did the teachers' implementation of portfolio system in writing class for middle education?" Almost all respondents' names were renamed into initial. The respondents were A, B, C, D. Four teachers became respondents with three

questions to dig deeper into their experience about the implementation of portfolio system on writing improvements in English subjects, which will be discussed in this section.

a. Research Question

1. How was the Implementation of Portfolio System for Junior High School (JHS) Students?

From all responses collected from respondents through interviews, various responses were obtained which indirectly showed teachers' opinions related to the implementation of portfolio system for junior high school students.

1. I usually applied project-based learning for the purpose of implementing the portfolio system. For example, I asked students to make a procedure text of how to make pancakes. At first, I distributed papers with pictures of the pancakes making. Yet, the steps were incorrectly ordered. Then, I had the students arrange the pictures in a good order and asked them to make 1/2 sentences describing the pictures. Afterwards, they needed to swap papers with a pair and had the pair check whether the order was correct or not. The ones with correct order would get better score. At last, I collected all the papers and filed them in a binder. I would use the binder as the evidence for scoring if I had parent-teacher meeting.
2. The implementation of portfolio system for Junior High School (JHS) students depends on the effectivity of learning activities.
3. It is well implemented in my students (JHS students). It can help me to assess not only their knowledges but also their skills and attitudes (responsibility, discipline, and seriousness). It also helps me to give feedback to the students so they can improve their next project.
4. The teacher gives assignments, students do it on sheets of paper.

Based on the varied responses from the respondents, it can be concluded that the respondents, the teachers, had several kinds of answers for the given question. The respondent A put the steps of teaching into detail about how the teaching was carried on, even it was included with peer-learning where the students swap their work to another students to learn and correct their peers' work whether the work was appropriate with the teacher's instruction or not. The respondents B tried to put into general understanding which more or less says that the implementation of portfolio depends on the learning effectiveness. The respondent B tried to explain the benefit of the portfolio which was helping the teacher to assess students' skills and attitudes, not to mention the knowledge. While the last respondent, D, explain the instruction of the implementation of portfolio system which relates to the syllabus of the learning.

2. Was there any Obstacle in the Implementation of Portfolio System?

Variously given the answers, the respondents put into understanding about the obstacles they encounter in teaching activities. The answers quite various since all of them had different place of teaching which represents the reality of different students condition in the class. The respondents, for instance, commented:

1. I guess if teachers organize the portfolio filling system neatly, it would help them easily assess their students' writing skills. However, it's still bit challenging to practice the portfolio system in a class with a large number of students.
2. Of Course. The main obstacle is the students achievement (understanding) in learning the material.
3. (C)Yes. It is. Since the teaching learning process is held by online, the portfolio system is not easy to implement. As the teacher, I cannot guide the students directly

in doing the project, so some of them do it carelessly. Also it's difficult to receive their project on time. Many of them submit it so long time after the deadline.

4. Students who have not mastered grammar make so many mistakes in writing answers that it takes a long time to correct them. Beside that, there are students whose writing is difficult to read.

The respondents' view on the obstacles they encounter had similarities one with one another. The respondents A and C had the obstacles on the technical matter such as the organization of the portfolio paper works by the teacher and the handling of the large class which was challenging and the defiance of pandemic-era teaching activities which happened by online-remote teaching which affect the teacher's control of teaching leading into a inevitable loosened one where the students and teacher attended the class by online, not in an actual class-meeting in a school. While the respondents of B and D had their obstacles centered on the students' lack of ability in understanding the teaching material such as grammatical order.

3. How did/do you Deal with the Obstacle in the Implementation of Portfolio System?

The respondents showed varied viewpoints in responding the interview highlighted on current condition of teaching writing. Eventually, the respondents had their own solution for the obstacle the encounter. The variations of answers and reasons followed are represented by transcripts below.

1. I used group work activities to implement the portfolio system in a large classroom.
2. As a teacher, I always try to make the learning activities fun and understandable. For students, do more practicing in writing and correcting the errors and also improve them.
3. [For the students who do the project carelessly] I send the feedback while ask them about their careless project. [For the students who submit over the deadline] I message them or their parents personally.
4. The teacher asks students to draft the answer first on another sheet before writing it on the answer sheet.

By the different of teaching and learning place they were in, all of the respondents got several different solution for all of the challenges but it can be broke down into some meaningful and clear explanation such as all of the respondents were managing the students to be more active in learning like direct instruction to draft the writing of their work into a draft paper before put it into final paper work and the utilization of group work activities for the large classroom. Not only that, the other respondents also giving the feedback while manage the class to be kept in discipline order while giving the teaching in an understandable and fun way so that the students be more interested in learning activities.

4.2 Discussion

From the findings in this study, researcher can provide an overview of the application of the portfolio system in the field by English teachers, learning can be done in schools offline, online, and can even be done in English language course institutions that are not tied to schools.

Researcher found that the application of the portfolio system in the field was very simple and concise, more or less according to the syllabus used in schools, such as the teacher giving directions for students to write on a piece of paper or two, then a little corrective action, then collected to the teacher to be given a grade. Such an implementation model is not suitable for the ideal portfolio implementation as described by Hamp-Lyons,

Liz, & Condon (2000) such as the stages of collection, selection, reflection, and delayed evaluation.

Instead of applying the four stages, the respondents generally only applied several combined stages, starting with giving directions for writing assignments, then moving on to reflection and delayed evaluations, followed by scoring. However, it is not ideal if the application by the respondents can be understood because in general the time that the teacher has to teach the learning material is very limited according to the syllabus they use as a reference for providing learning material and therefore this is understandable.

Regarding the challenges or obstacles encountered by respondents, it varies widely, such as those related to technical matters faced by respondents, students' incomprehension of teaching material, online classroom management which is new and respondents need to get used to this challenge. This challenge is in line with what Wati (2019 in Ying, 2018) explains that English writing is still perceived as the most difficult skills 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. In addition, students also have their own challenges which were also realized by the respondents, namely the students' lack of understanding regarding teaching material and students' lack of understanding regarding the correct use of grammar, which is in accordance with the statement by Toba et al., (2019), namely 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. Not only that, as it inline with Hadfield & Hadfield (2004) that says about 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 clearly elaborated that the students faced such one or more type of difficulties and the teachers were expected to come giving the solution.

The impact of the problems faced by respondents is that they are required to be competent and nimble in finding solutions for any problems faced by students because this is their responsibility as educators. From here the teacher tries their best to find answers to any problems they encounter in various ways as the respondents put forward such as the use of study group activities for large classes, the application of fun learning methods and understandable elaboration of learning materials, giving general feedback such as advice to practice , errors correction, to giving directions to be careful in writing before students' paper work being collected.

The solutions offered by these respondents are quite reasonable and deserve attention because they are the direct responses of teachers who face the teaching challenges they face in the field. Such as providing motivation and reminders to practice, this is in line with what Alshahrani & Windeatt (2012) explained, namely 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). In addition, as a way for self-introspection, teachers can make learning activities fun which is in line with the answer to the statement from Toba et al., in Brown (2019) that 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. This is also supported by Alshaharani & Windeatt (2012) that said 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. Furthermore with Delett et al. (2001) that define portfolio as a way to improve the participation of students in the learning process; outcomes rely on the academic interest of teachers in terms of the needs of students. It means that the teachers stand as a facilitator to help the students learn the writing skill in fun, understanding, humane, and with great impact so the students can grasp the knowledge in a better way at all aspects.

V. Conclusion

This study is a small-scale investigation which involved EFL teachers that were teaching junior high school students, with the data collection mostly concerns with the teachers' experience of the implementation of portfolio system. The study results showed that the implementation of portfolio is not ideal as explained by the expert but hence, this can be argued that the teachers' implementation of portfolio system is more adaptive to the field where they implemented it in a simpler way since they have far more limited time and syllabus to follow to catch up with national education standard.

The application of the portfolio system varies from one teacher to another, but among the similarities, they carry out a portfolio system to monitor student progress in the areas of expertise, attitudes, and of course science that reflects the extent to which students understand the learning material. The obstacles faced by teachers also vary from teacher to teacher, such as students' lack of understanding of learning materials and technical matters such as online classes, which are new challenges in themselves which will cause variations in the solutions they offer teachers to answer various challenges in learning such as provide fun and easy to understand teaching activities so that teachers carry out their function as facilitators properly.

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