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## Enhancing Writing Skills Through Portfolios

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College going students who are non-native speakers of English enrolled in English language programmes are not acquiring the needed academic writing skills. Many of these students do not have positive attitudes towards writing, thus forcing language instructors to look for ways of motivating students to write in order to improve writing skills. This action research project investigates the use of portfolio writing to improve writing ability among pre-university students. Research on the use of portfolio writing suggests that it is a useful way for developing interest in writing and for developing effective writing skills over a period of time. Portfolios support the best thinking in composition pedagogy in that it encourages process writing. Although the portfolio is considered a writing product, as a whole it is evidence of the students writing process. An important feature in using portfolios is that students are able to focus on their writing without constantly worrying about grades. Instructors have noticed that students make greater improvement in their writing when their focus is shifted from punitive feedback through letter grades to constructive feedback in the form of suggestions for further revision. This paper describes the use of writing portfolios as an effective means of teaching writing. The findings revealed that writing portfolios helped develop confidence in writing and decreased anxiety towards writing. (217 words)

[writing/portfolio writing, 쓰기/포트폴리오 쓰기]

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that writing in English for non-native speakers of English can be a very difficult task. Many students find that writing can be the most difficult skill to master compared to reading, listening or speaking and they are aware that writing skills are important and useful for college or pre-university student. These students know that they are required to write reports, assignments and essays in the English language and that most prospective employers consider good writing skills an asset. However, many students find writing to be a difficult skill to master and therefore, many has negative attitudes towards writing. Those who recognize the importance of writing and genuinely want to improve their skills, often come to the writing class with an expectation that it will be boring. Mentioned the word writing and students eyes will roll over!

Students difficulties in writing may due to their inability to put down ideas on paper or because of poor language proficiency. Often students do have some ideas in their mind, however, since many of them think and develop ideas in their first language, they encounter difficulties in identifying appropriate words due to lack of vocabulary, and often fail to translate their ideas to English. Some do not even know how or what to write about as they lack knowledge and do not know how to write essays well.

Other problems encountered by students in their writing classes are that of organization. Most non-native speakers of English find it difficult to put ideas down coherently and to organize their thoughts systematically. Furthermore, writing teachers appear to be more interested in the final written product. Less focus is given to the difficulties faced by students in completing the writing task. In addition the process pedagogy in the teaching of writing is often ignored. Most writing teachers mainly concentrate on the product without paying attention to the writing process and to the writers themselves. Writing teachers need to create the right kind of environment and approach for teaching writing to non-native speakers of English in order to develop confidence in writing.

Writing teachers can help non-native speakers of English to overcome negative perceptions and attitudes towards writing by introducing portfolio writing.

This article provides some background on the writing process, the use of portfolios in the educational context, describes the portfolio assignment and presents

the outcomes of using portfolio writing.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. The Writing Process

The most important principle of the process approach to writing is that writing is the result of a very complex process and it differs from individual to individual.

The process approach to writing emphasized the idea of writing as problem solving with a focus on thinking and process. It involves five main stages known as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading. They can be further grouped into early and later stages.

These stages will lead to the first complete draft, the point where the writer has all the raw materials and is ready to work on it. Revising, editing and proofreading are the later stages. During these stages, the writing is clarified and made ready to leave the writers hands (Morais, 2000, p. 4).

This approach helps students to give attention to the development of ideas first and not focussing on the grammatical aspects, which can be clarified as they write, and rewrite.

### 2. Portfolio Writing and Concept

The term portfolio is borrowed from the concept of samples of an artists work, which are compiled to gain admittance into an art school (Paulson, Paulson and Mayer, 1991, p. 61). A portfolio therefore is a compilation of papers that represent the quality of ones work (Powell & Jan Kovich, 1998, p. 72)

In the educational context, a portfolio is defined as a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the students efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas (Paulson, Paulson & Mayer, 1991, p. 60). The portfolio concept has been further adapted for use as an alternative form of assessment and is seen as a form of assessment that allows students to actively participate with teachers in the evaluation process.

The advantages of portfolios as an instructional and assessment tool, which allows students the opportunity to reflect on their work, are well documented (Ballard, 1992; Ford, 1993; Arter (1995). Frazier and Paulson (1992), for example, report that preparing portfolios offers fourth grade students a way to take charge

of their learning, encourages ownership, pride, and high self-esteem, and most important makes them want to write. Paulson, Paulson and Mayer (1991) point out that portfolio writing provides a forum that encourages students to develop the abilities needed to become independent, self-directed learners (p. 63). Portfolio assessment is also well established and accepted as an efficient and effective way to evaluate student work because it takes into account a writer's work over time rather than grading a writer on an individual piece, thus providing a more equitable and sensitive portrait of what students know and are able to do (Herman and Winters, 1994. p. 48).

According to Arter (1995), the process of assembling a portfolio can help develop student reflection, critical thinking, responsibility for learning, content area skills and knowledge. Portfolio is often a concrete way for students to learn to value their own work.

### 3. Portfolios and Writing Process

Portfolio writing incorporates what we know about how students develop as writers. It emphasizes process, multiple drafting and collaborative learning. In addition to that portfolio assessment encourages instructors to become respondents to students writing rather than error-seeking proofreaders.

One possibility for student involvement in portfolio writing is to encourage students to arrange evaluate their written products from most to least effective and to answer a series of questions about the writing. Questions such as what qualities separate the best piece of writing from the others, what processes was followed in generating the written products, what difficulty was encountered in writing the different pieces or drafts, why do they think that some of their written work are not so effective and how do they differentiates effective writing from least effective writing.

In other words, the compilations of work such as essays, interviews, editing checklist or resources are required for evaluation. What is important is the process that takes place when students keep portfolios. Although there is no simple formula for good writing, most successful writers view writing as both a means of communication and a process involving several stages of development involving pre-writing, writing and revision.

In the first stage, students should make sure that they understand the task. Then, they should limit the subject by considering the essay length, purpose, and audience,

as well as what they know about the subject, which may be very broad, to a manageably narrow topic. When the students have settled on a topic, they need to gather and organize ideas and facts until they are prepared to formulate a thesis or the main idea of the essay.

The next stage is to begin writing. They have to decide how to arrange the material into an organized essay. The last stage is to begin drafting the essay. At this point, students should not worry about sentence proportion or word choice. Later, when they have to write the second or third draft, they can polish their writing, making sure as they revise that each part does what it should do. Revision is not the final process. It is a continuing process during which they consider the logic and clarity of their ideas. Thus, revision is more than proofreading and editing.

An important feature of the portfolio is that it not only presents the finished work but also shows the process by which the writer arrived at the finished product. The evidence of that process is their drafts and revised work. The drafts should show substantial revision, and real development of ideas.

Burham (1986) points out that portfolio writing and evaluation reinforces a programmes commitment to the teaching of writing as a process involving multiple drafting, and emphasizes the need for revision. It establishes a writing course as an organic sequence of assignments developing into the whole process where writers become aware of what and how they are writing. It also establishes a writing environment rather than a grading environment in the classroom. Portfolio evaluation encourages students to assume responsibility for the quality of their work, which creates independent learners and writers. Furthermore portfolio writing establishes an evaluation system that encourages teachers to focus on specific aspects of writing and to develop responsive skills.

The writing process through the use of portfolios establishes a writing environment where the development of ideas is more important than grammatical correctness. This encourages instructors to become respondents providing feedback about the content and idea development especially in the early stages of writing. Portfolio writing encourages students to assume responsibility for the quality of their work and ultimately they develop and apply a critical sense to their writing, fostering the development of their own potential and avoiding the problem of depending on the instructor for approval. This reflective critical sense may be the

most valuable skill they gain during the writing course as it leads towards the creation of independent writers and learners.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 1. Subjects

The subjects were 40 intermediate level English language learners and 10 English language instructors of a pre-university matriculation centre. The students are all Malays and were first year pre university science students between the age of 17+ and 19 years. Their mother tongue is Malay. English is a foreign language for all of them.

#### 2. The Portfolio Assignment

Students in this writing class were asked to produce a specific kind of portfolio instead of a stand-alone writing task: a set of related documents for a single hypothetical organization.

Students assume that they were consultants working for a consultancy and were asked to research a project involving the buying of Four Wheel Drives suitable for use in oil Palm plantations. They were asked to identify three different types of make and to compare, contrast, classify and recommend the best.

This project was the main assignment for the course (40 percent of course work) and this was an extended exercise where students were given two months to complete it. The portfolio writing assignment consisted of:

- a) A memo to the instructor outlining details of their project
- b) Instructions from the instructor with a set of checklist
- c) A dossier about the oil palm plantation
- d) Brochures about the different types of Four Wheel Drives.

Students submitted their documents individually at different times throughout the two months. The writing portfolios were analysed qualitatively and assessed according to the content, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics.

#### 3. Questionnaire

Two types of questionnaires were designed (see appendix). One set of questionnaires was for the students in the writing courses and another for the language instructors who were teaching writing. All the subjects (both students and language instructors) were required to fill in a questionnaire, which was designed to discover general perceptions towards portfolio writing. These were analysed quantitatively using frequency counts.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether portfolio writing encourages independent learning and improved students knowledge and writing ability.

##### 1. Analysis of Students Questionnaire

The questionnaire analysis revealed that all the subjects had a positive attitude towards portfolio writing (see table 1 in the appendix).

In the analysis of the first four questions, students maintained that portfolio writing encouraged independent learning and promotes students involvement in assessment of their own work besides helping to evaluate their own work critically. The analysis also indicated that students gained more confidence. This is mainly because portfolio writing and assessment does not focus on the students weaknesses, as language instructors become respondents to students writing rather than error seeking proofreaders.

Question 5 to 11 looked at students perception of their writing ability. The students indicated that portfolio writing and assessment helped them to develop clear and effective writings, understand the process of writing, recognize basic conventions of sentence construction and mechanics besides providing them with the encouragement to use the same process and procedures for other similar writing assignments. It is interesting to note that twenty-seven students felt very strongly that portfolio writing helped them to understand the process of writing (from draft, revising and editing). This clearly shows that giving students individual portfolio writing assignments promotes a real writing environment rather than a grading environment and the collection of work from time to time improved writing ability.

The findings also suggest that portfolio writing enhances students knowledge in

writing. Students responses show that portfolio writing encouraged them to read more in English, do research in English, allows them to see gaps in their own knowledge besides promoting creativity. Further, the study showed that students had to use multiple resources to ensure good content development. This is consistent with Ballards (1992) study where he found that portfolio provided an opportunity for students to assume responsibility for their own learning and to become more independent.

## 2. Analysis of the Language Instructors Questionnaire

Based on the analysis in table 2 as shown in the appendix it appears that on the whole the ten language instructors involved in this study agree that portfolio writing encourages independent learning and promotes students involvement in the evaluation of their own work. The language instructors felt that portfolio writing helped the students to not only gain confidence in writing but also helped them to improve their overall writing ability, thus, helping them to develop clear and effective essays.

The findings clearly indicate that the teachers find portfolio writing time consuming. However, the teachers maintain that portfolio writing and assessment has a positive impact on learning besides promoting more student- instructor interaction.

The analysis of both the students and teachers questionnaires clearly show that both the students and teachers agree that portfolio writing encourages independent learning, enhances students writing ability and develops students confidence in writing thus reducing anxiety.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study suggest that portfolio writing should be encouraged in the English as a second or foreign language classroom. The study has shown that portfolio writing improved students writing ability over time, encouraged independent learning and enhanced knowledge in writing. An analysis of the students portfolios shows that students became better at understanding the process of writing - the outlining process, drafting, proofreading, editing and revising. Students also showed improvement in content development, organization,



vocabulary, language use and mechanics of writing.

In addition, portfolio writing promoted students involvement in assessing their own work and better collaborative work between the student and the language instructors.

Further the findings show that the majority of the students and language instructors agreed that portfolio writing and assessment has a positive impact on the teaching and learning of writing. Although it is time consuming, it has helped students and language instructors to not only understand the writing process but also encourages students to put in a lot of thought and effort into each piece of writing and allows instructors to concentrate on the feedback process. The amount of collaboration between students and language instructors increased and students actually made more effort to meet their instructors frequently to work on their drafts besides developing skills for refocusing between drafts. Finally, students developed a higher level of enthusiasm, became more focused and more motivated to write.

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## APPENDIX

**TABLE 1**  
**RESULTS OF STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**(IN FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE)**

Item	Portfolio Assessment	Strongly Agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
1	Encourages independent learning	17	42.5	20	50	3	7.5	-	-	-	-
2	Promotes students involvement in the assessment of their own work	17	42.5	20	50	3	7.5	-	-	-	-
3	Encourages students to evaluate their own writing/work critically	9	22.5	25	62.5	4	10	2	5	-	-
4	Gives students more confidence in writing assignments in English	17	42.5	19	47.5	4	10	-	-	-	-
5	Helps students develop clear and effective essays	16	40	21	52.5	3	7.5	-	-	-	-
6	Help students understand the process of writing (from invention to rough draft, revising and editing)	27	67.5	13	32.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Help students to recognize the basic conventions of sentence construction and mechanics	14	35	22	55	4	10	-	-	-	-
8	Promotes the assessment of higher order thinking skills (synthesis, analysis and evaluation)	12	30	15	37.5	9	22.5	3	7.5	1	2.5
9	Encourages students to attend English writing classes	4	10	18	45	13	32.5	2	5	3	7.5
10	Encourages students to use the processes in writing when writing assignments in their core course	8	20	23	57.5	9	22.5	-	-	-	-
11	Provides incentives for continuous improvement	12	30	23	57.5	5	12.5	-	-	-	-

12	Creates interest in learning English	15	37.5	17	42.5	8	20	-	-
13	Encourages students to read more in English	16	40	14	35	9	22.5	1	2.5
14	Encourages students to do research in English	15	37.5	17	42.5	8	20	-	-
15	Helps measure what students really know and are actually able to do	14	35	22	55	2	5	2	5
16	Provides more evidence of learning	8	20	22	55	6	15	4	10
17	Promotes creativity	13	32.5	20	50	5	12.5	2	5
18	Is time consuming	6	15	21	52.5	10	25	2	5
19	Promotes more student-centred learning and teaching approach	11	27.5	24	60	4	10	1	2.5
20	Has a positive impact on learning	22	55	15	37.5	3	7.5	-	-

**TABLE 2**  
**RESULTS OF STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE (IN FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE)**

Item	Portfolio Assessment	Strongly Agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
1	Encourages independent learning	9	90	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Promotes students involvement in the assessment of their own work	-	-	10	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Encourages students to evaluate their own writing/work critically	4	40	6	60	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Gives students more confidence in writing assignments in English	2	20	8	80	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Helps students develop clear and effective essays	-	-	10	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	Help students understand the process of writing (from invention to rough draft, revising and editing)	3	30	7	70	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Help students to recognize the basic conventions of sentence construction and mechanics	5	50	5	50	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Promotes the assessment of higher order thinking skills (synthesis, analysis and evaluation)	2	20	6	60	-	-	2	20	-	-
9	Encourages students to attend English writing classes	3	30	6	60	-	-	1	10	-	-
10	Encourages students to use the processes in writing when writing assignments in their courses	3	30	6	60	-	-	1	10	-	-
11	Provides incentives for continuous improvement	2	20	8	80	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Creates interest in learning English	2	20	7	70	1	10	-	-	-	-
13	Encourages students to read more in English	9	90	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-

14	Encourages students to do research in English	10	100	-	-	-	-
15	Helps measure what students really know and are actually able to do	5	50	5	50	-	-
16	Provides more evidence of learning	-	10	100	-	-	-
17	Promotes creativity	-	10	100	-	-	-
18	Is time consuming	9	90	10	100	-	-
19	Promotes more student-centred learning and teaching approach	7	70	2	20	-	-
20	Has a positive impact on learning	6	60	4	40	-	-
21	Promotes more student-teacher interaction	2	20	7	70	1	10
22	Is an effective way for teachers to monitor students progress	1	10	8	80	1	10
23	Provides a more authentic method of assessment	1	10	8	80	1	10
24	Has a positive impact on teaching		10	100	-	-	-
25	Has a positive impact on learning	1	10	9	90	-	-

## STUDENTS PORTFOLIO WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Please respond to all items. For each question, put a cross (X) in the columns provided using the given scale that best reflects your opinion. Your responses will be kept confidential.

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = Not Sure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

Item	Portfolio Writing	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Encourages independent learning					
2	Promotes students involvement in the assessment of their own work					
3	Encourages students to evaluate their own writing/work critically					
4	Gives students more confidence in writing assignments in English					
5	Helps students develop clear and effective essays					
6	Help students understand the process of writing (from invention to rough draft, revising and editing)					
7	Help students to recognize the basic conventions of sentence construction and mechanics					
8	Promotes the assessment of higher order thinking skills (synthesis, analysis and evaluation)					
9	Encourages students to attend English writing classes					
10	Encourages students to use the processes in writing when writing assignments in their core course					
11	Provides incentives for continuous improvement					

12	Creates interest in learning English						
13	Encourages students to read more in English						
14	Encourages students to do research in English						
15	Helps measure what students really know and are actually able to do						
16	Provides more evidence of learning						
17	Promotes creativity						
18	Is time consuming						
19	Promotes more student-centred learning and teaching approach						
20	Has a positive impact on learning						
End of Questionnaire Thank you for your time							

INSTRUCTORS PORTFOLIO WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please respond to all items. For each question, put a cross (X) in the columns provided using the given scale that best reflects your opinion. Your responses will be kept confidential.

- SA = Strongly Agree
- A = Agree
- N = Not Sure
- D = Disagree
- SD = Strongly Disagree

Item	'Portfolio Writing	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Encourages independent learning					
2	Promotes students involvement in the assessment of their own work					
3	Encourages students to evaluate their own writing/work critically					
4	Gives students more confidence in writing assignments in English					
5	Helps students develop clear and effective essays					
6	Help students understand the process of writing (from invention to rough draft, revising and editing)					
7	Help students to recognize the basic conventions of sentence construction and mechanics					
8	Promotes the assessment of higher order thinking skills (synthesis, analysis and evaluation)					
9	Encourages students to attend English writing classes					
10	Encourages students to use the processes in writing when writing assignments in their core course					
11	Provides incentives for continuous improvement					
12	Creates interest in learning English					
13	Encourages students to read more in English					
14	Encourages students to do research in English					
15	Helps measure what students really know and are actually able to do					
16	Provides more evidence of learning					
17	Promotes creativity					
18	Is time consuming					
19	Requires more commitment and time on the teachers part					



Item	Portfolio Writing	SA	A	N	D	SD
20	Encourages student-centred learning and teaching approach					
21	Promotes more student-teacher interaction					
22	Is an effective way for teachers to monitor students progress					
23	Provides a more authentic method of assessment					
24	Has a positive impact on teaching					
25	Has appositve impact on learning					
End of Questionnaire Thank you for your time						

**예시 언어(Examples in): English**  
**적용가능 언어(Applicable Languages): English**  
**적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): College/Higher**

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