

# IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING ENGLISH WRITING

By  
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## ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to investigate whether the implementation of portfolio assessment improved students' writing skills and responses. The method used in this research is pre-experimental with a one-group pre-test and post-test design and descriptive analysis of the students' responses after the implementation of portfolio assessment for teaching English writing. The population for this research was all students from grade X at SMKN 1, in Banda Aceh and the sample was 30 students chosen by a purposive sampling technique. The data was collected through tests (a pre-test and a post-test) and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed after the post-test to find out the responses of the students after the teaching-learning process using portfolio assessment for writing. The data collected from the tests was analyzed using a *t paired sample test* through SPSS 16. The results showed that implementation of portfolio assessment improved the' writing skills and the responses of the students. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study were accepted. There was a significant improvement in the students' writing skills and their responses after teaching by using portfolio assessment. It was concluded that the use of portfolio assessment can increase students' writing skills and their responses.

Keywords: *Portfolio Assessment, Writing, Students' Responses.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important things in communication and it is used as a tool of communication among nations all over the world. As an international language, English is very important and has many interrelationships with various aspects of life (Lester, 1978). In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language which is taught from junior high school up to university level. In elementary school, English may be taught as an additional subject. Based on observations of students in Grade 1, year 10, at SMKN 1, Senior Technical School, in Banda Aceh and interviews with them and their English teachers, the writer found that the students' ability in writing English was low. This was caused by many factors such as the students' results of writing not being given attention, low motivation, little or no feedback from the teacher. Also no portfolio assessment was used by the teacher as required

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in the 2013 Curriculum. The writer gave the students a pre-test to find out their ability, and found that they were confused about how to begin writing. They had problems in elaborating their ideas, they lacked adequate vocabulary, and they lacked consistency. When they wrote sentences, most of them were confused about vocabulary. They used the dictionary to find words and then put them into their sentences. Therefore, the grammatical structure was often incorrect. This was caused by their difficulty in using proper grammar as the students did not know how to apply it appropriately. Overall the various aspects of writing such as content, organization, elaboration, consistency, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were all low.

On the other hand, the teacher did not fulfill her responsibilities well as a teacher to evaluate the students' writing ability in the classroom; she only gave scores on the students' writing and seldom gave feedback. In fact, teachers have a responsibility to assess students' achievements at school. Consequently, the students were unable to realize their mistakes and errors in writing, and therefore the teacher and her students could not see any progress in their writing. In many disciplines, portfolios help learning by providing portraits of students, offering multidimensional perspectives, encouraging students to participate and linking student efforts to teaching (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). In terms of foreign language learning and teaching, they are an alternative assessment tool used to offer opportunities for both recording language authentically and actively and for evaluating a student's progress. Furthermore, in the 2013 Curriculum, the teacher is expected to measure each students' ability by using portfolio assessment, which means that the teacher has to apply authentic assessments to evaluate the students' ability in writing. Based on this fact, the teacher was expected to assess students by using authentic assessment (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional/Ministry of National Education of Indonesia, 2013). This can be done by implementing portfolio assessment, by which the teacher is able to evaluate each student's work comprehensively.

Finally, the researcher concluded that portfolio assessment is a method for continuously gathering information or evidence of work done and progress made from each student to evaluate their English language writing. The application of portfolio assessment should increase their motivation for writing in the English language.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the background of this study, the research questions are as follows:

1. Can the implementation of portfolio assessment improve the English writing skills of students?
2. How will the students respond to the teaching of writing with the implementation of portfolio assessment in the teaching-learning processes in the classroom?

### **Research Objectives**

Based on the research problems above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate whether the implementation of portfolio assessment will improve the writing skills of the students?
2. To investigate the responses of the students towards the teaching of writing with the implementation of portfolio assessment in the teaching-learning processes in the classroom?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Development of an Assessment Process**

Assessment of progress in school is an important part of education which affects students, parents, teachers, administrators and even educational policy makers. Students are administered tests and other assessment tools to monitor their progress and provide feedback. At this point, it is important to point out how portfolios have become a tool of assessment in education. In addition, assessment is an essential component of the instructional process. Carter and Nunan (2001) has stated that the term assessment refers to the different systematic ways of collecting data about a student's performance. It can also be defined as the process of finding out who the students are, what their abilities, talents, skills, and interests are, what they need to know, and how they perceive learning will influence them.

Hancock (1994, p. 3) has written that "assessment should be viewed as an interactive process that engages both teacher and student in monitoring the student's performance". No doubt, when teachers and learners are involved together in the assessment process, a good relationship can develop between them. Students should be involved and play an active role in the processes to assess them. They can do this through various practices. They can follow the improvement in their work over time, create assessment criteria for a product, discuss the strategies they should follow, work with peers to revise work, evaluate peers work, and identify difficulties they encounter during performing a required task (Wrigley, 1992).

### **The Origin of the Portfolio Concept**

The concept of portfolio development is adopted from the field of fine arts where portfolios are used to display illustrative samples of an artist's work. The purpose of the artist's portfolio is to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the work as well as the artist's interests and abilities (Jongsma, 1989). Many educators perceive the intent of educational portfolios to be similar to that of portfolios used in fine arts, to demonstrate the depth and breadth of students' capabilities through biographies of students' work (Wolf, 1989); descriptions of students' reading and writing experiences, literacy folders, collections of pieces of writing (Jongsma, *ibid*).

Portfolios have not only been used in developing fine arts to illustrate students' work but have also been expanded to accommodate informational needs and assessment requirements of schools in assessing the ability of students to achieve teaching-learning goals. A portfolio used for educational assessment must offer more than a showcase for work produced by students; it should be the product of a complete assessment procedure that has been systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated. A portfolio should be a collection of a student's work, experiences, exhibitions, and self-ratings. While portfolio assessment is the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio. A portfolio based on a systematic assessment procedure can provide accurate information about students' capability in many domains of learning.

Actually, portfolios have been used for many years in many areas such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, teacher training, and language learning to document individual progress and accomplishment. As for the assessment of language skills, the use of portfolios is a

growing trend and has been of significant interest to teachers for the past few decades (Farr & Tone 1998; Douglas, 2000).

### **Types of Portfolios**

According to Columba and Dolgos (1995), there are basically three types of portfolios to be considered for classroom use.

#### ***Showcase Portfolios***

This type of portfolio focuses on the student's best and most representative work. Therefore, in this portfolio the student selects what she thinks is representative work. This folder is most often seen at open houses and parent visitations (Columba & Dolgos, *ibid*).

#### ***Teacher-Student Portfolio***

This type of portfolio is often called the "working portfolio or working folder" (Columba & Dolgos, *ibid*, pp. 174-176). This is an interactive teacher-student portfolio that helps in communication between a teacher and her student. The teacher and student make agreements to add or delete material within the contents of the Teacher-Student Portfolio (Columba & Dolgos, *ibid*).

#### ***Teacher Alternative Assessment Portfolio***

All items in this type of portfolio are scored, rated, ranked, or evaluated. Teachers can keep individual student portfolios solely for the teacher's use as an assessment tool. This is a focused type of portfolio and a model of the holistic approach to assessment (Columba & Dolgos, *ibid*). Moreover, according to Epstein (2005, p. 2), portfolios can be divided into two categories:

- *Process-Oriented Portfolios*: which tell the story of a students' growth over time.
- *Product-Oriented Portfolios*, which are a collection of a student's best work.

In conclusion, both types of portfolios are used in all grade levels. However a process-oriented portfolio is of more common at elementary levels as individual growth is of more concern than determining specific levels of performance. A product-oriented portfolio, on the other hand, is more common at advanced levels as older students generally have higher thinking skills necessary to select their best work wisely as well as to engage in deep self-reflection processes (Sweet, 1993; Epstein, 2005).

### **Portfolio Assessment**

Popham (1994) has explained that portfolio assessment is a continuous assessment method, gathering information or data systematically on the results of work done by students over a certain period. In a portfolio assessment system, teachers create a file for each individual learner, which contains a systematic collection of the results of their learning achievements during the educational process. Portfolio assessment is currently a very popular alternative assessment method where instruction and assessment are integrated (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2007 in Cummins & Davison, 2007). One significant aspect of the portfolio assessment is student self-reflection. It can encourage students to become more active and enables students to understand where they are in their learning, by which means they have reached that position, and where to go from there (McKay, 2006).

Hebert (1998) has stated that portfolio assessment gives teachers and students the opportunity to make decisions about what will be assessed and how assessment will occur. When students collaborate with teachers about portfolio criteria and contents, and reflect and set learning goals, they are supported to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning. Portfolios have the ability to build ownership, pride, and students' confidence in their ability as learners.

### **Models for Developing and Implementing Portfolio Assessment**

In using portfolios as a tool for assessing students' learning development, there are several steps that have to be done by the teacher. Birgin and Baki (2007, pp. 78-79) propose three steps in developing portfolio assessment. These include:

- (1) determining the purpose of the portfolio,
- (2) the evidence to be included in the portfolio, and
- (3) the assessment criteria for the portfolio.

Following on the three steps for developing portfolio assessment above, Brown (2004) has proposed more steps in developing portfolio assessment. These steps are:

- (1) deciding the purpose of the portfolio,
- (2) considering the evidence to be included in the portfolio,
- (3) communicating the assessment criteria,
- (4) determining the time for portfolio development,
- (5) determining regular schedules for review and conferencing,
- (6) deciding a place to keep the portfolio,
- (7) giving positive feedback, and
- (8) final assessment.

### **Portfolio Conferences**

Conferencing is an important step in the portfolio assessment strategy for development and guidance as it is an effective strategy for the portfolio philosophy of sharing active assessment. Conferencing commonly takes the form of a conversation or discussion between the teacher and (a) student(s) about their work to collaboratively discuss progress and set goals for the future. Farr and Tone (1998, p. 27) have stated that "the portfolio conference is a regular time for a student and her teacher to sit down one-on-one and discuss what they believe the collection shows". Questions are asked about the collection and about the learning process.

Again, Farr and Tone (ibid) emphasize the importance of portfolio conferences as teaching and assessment strategies. As the main focus of conferences is progress, they communicate not only how students are doing but also what students have to say about how they are doing and why. Such organized conferences help the teacher to learn more about her students.

### **Portfolio Assessment and Writing Instructions**

Writing is the process of documenting thoughts and experiences. It is viewed as a communicative social activity through which one can communicate a variety of messages to a close or distant, known or unknown reader (Olshtain, 2001 in Celce-Murcia, 2001; Reid, 2002 in Carter & Nunan, 2001). Rather than being merely one of the language

skills, writing is one of the major skills in language acquisition (Sebranek, Meyer, & Kemper, 1992). Portfolio assessment as an innovative alternative strategy for assessment provides a means of assessing not only the writing products but also the processes of writing that went into the creation of such products. Unlike traditional tests, portfolios can showcase the processes of producing pieces of writing as “students include not only their final polished pieces but also their planning as well as brainstorming notes, mapping, webs, chats, and drafts showing revisions and re-writes” (Clemmons, 1993, p. 63). Thus, portfolios show the stages of the writing process a text has gone through and the stages of a students’ growth (Coombe & Barlow, 2004). The knowledge of the stages of each text type is important in writing process (Fitriani, 2014, 2015).

In brief, the most important point concerning the portfolio assessment strategy is the assessment. It is not just based on the quality of the final written products; rather the portfolio creation process allows students to experience the different stages of the writing process necessary to create a good product and thus portfolio assessment, as Weiser (1992) in Yancey (1992) has asserted supports the notion that writing is a process which involves development, growth, and learning on the road to a final product.

### **Previous Studies on Using Portfolios in Teaching English Writing**

With regard to the use of portfolio assessment to improve students’ writing skills, many researchers have conducted studies on portfolios. They found that portfolios were an effective authentic assessment for teaching-learning languages as well as an effective way to improve writing skills. Khodadady and Khodabakhshzade (2012) conducted a study at Tabaran University with 59 TEFL students as the participants. The study investigated the effect of portfolios and self-assessment on the students’ writing autonomy as well as their writing ability. Portfolio assessment successfully improved the students’ writing skills. Bowie, Taylor, Zimitat, and Young (2000) have stated that portfolio assessment can improve students’ ability in writing English in the learning process. It made the students practice writing more in the classroom. They also had more opportunities to revise their writing.

Furthermore, Sabrina (2012) conducted action research with the purpose of improving her students’ writing skills by using portfolio assessment. Her research was conducted for two months with 31 students of grade VIII of SMP N 14 Yogyakarta as the sample. The result was that the portfolio assessment improved five aspects of the students’ writing viz.: content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Based on these previous studies, it can be concluded that the implementation of portfolio assessment can improve the ability of students in writing skills.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study using an experimental design was aimed to improve the writing skills of grade XI accounting students of SMKN 1 Banda Aceh through the use of portfolio assessment. The sample for this study were 30 students, 7 male and 23 female, from SMKN 1 Banda Aceh.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data collected, the researcher employed quantitative analysis. The data from the pre-tests and the post-tests was processed using statistics.

### Students' Writing Products

The data was analyzed to answer the two research questions. In assessing the students' writing of recount text, the researcher employed a three category analytical scoring rubric as suggested for assessment and evaluation for grade 6 by McGraw-Hill (2000, p. 14). Those were focus/organization, elaboration/support/style, and grammar usage/mechanics. It can be seen in Table 1. After that all the students' papers were assessed using SPSS 16.

### Students' Ability in Writing Recount Texts

To increase the students' ability and skill in writing recount texts after the implementation of portfolio assessment was based on the *N-gain* score normalization. This was meant to avoid a mistake in interpretation of G-gain for each student. The formula used for the *gain* score normalization was proposed by Hake (1999, p. 1):

$$Ngain = \frac{S_{posttest} - S_{pretest}}{S_{maks} - S_{pretest}}$$

In which:

$S_{posttest}$  = *Post-test Score*

$S_{pretest}$  = *Pre-test Score*

$S_{maks}$  = *Maximum Score*

#### Criteria N-gain Score

| Limits                       | Criteria |
|------------------------------|----------|
| (N-gain) > 0.7               | High     |
| $0.3 \leq (N-gain) \leq 0.7$ | Average  |
| (N-gain) < 0.3               | Low      |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To find out the students' initial writing ability before the implementation of the portfolio assessment process, the researcher asked the students to write a recount text with the title "Unforgettable Holiday". The pre-test was given to find out the initial standard of the students writing before giving the treatment in the teaching-learning process. The result of the students' pre-tests showed that most of them made mistakes in writing the recount text, which mainly consisted of mistypes, misuse of the present participle, miscapitalization and iteral transliteration from Indonesian.

Furthermore, during the pre-test activities, the students were active in writing the recount text by questioning the researcher about how to change words into the past participle, how to start writing and how to connect their ideas with their other sentences. Furthermore, the scores presented here were the results of pre-test and post-test in the experimental class with an experimental design through the implementation of portfolio assessment in writing, in this case writing recount text. The first result is the pre-test which was conducted at the beginning of the research before the treatment was given. The second result is the post-test which was given after the treatment.

**Table 1. Results from Tests of the Students**

| No              | Type    | Result    |           | N-Gain Students | Interpretation |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|----------------|
|                 |         | Pre Test  | Post Test |                 |                |
|                 | Highest | 76        | 94        | 0.87            |                |
|                 | Lowest  | 35        | 65        | 0.33            |                |
|                 | Spread  | 41        | 29        |                 |                |
| <b>Averages</b> |         | <b>58</b> | <b>82</b> | <b>0.58</b>     | Average        |

**Paired Sample T-test**

Paired *t-test* was used to analyze the significance level of both pre-tests and post-tests; it was also used to describe the improvement in one group with the same variable. The analysis of paired t-test was carried out by using SPSS 16.

Table 2 shows the result of the paired t-test sample. It compares the average score between the pre-test and the post-test. After the students had a lesson of recount text, the researcher concluded that he analyzed by means of descriptive statistics to both variables as shown in the table below.

**Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics**

|        |           | Mean | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|-----------|------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | Pre-test  | 58   | 30 | 8.82           | 1.61            |
|        | Post-test | 82   | 30 | 7.64           | 1.39            |

From Table 2, it can be seen that the mean score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test mean score, which means there was an improvement of the students' writing of recount texts after the implementation of portfolio assessments for teaching English writing using the scientific approach method.

**Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |                          | N  | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|--------------------------|----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | Pre-tests and Post-tests | 30 | 0.67        | 0.00 |

The correlation shows a probability of 0.67, sig. 0.00 between the improvements of the students' writing ability with the implementation of portfolio assessment in writing recount text after the treatment in the teaching-learning process: The students' skills improved step by step during the teaching-learning process.

**Table 4 Paired Samples T-Test from Pre-test and Post-test**

|                             | Paired Differences |                |                 |   |        | T      | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|--------|--------|----|-----------------|
|                             | Mean               | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |        |        |    |                 |
|                             |                    |                |                 | Lower                                     | Upper  |        |    |                 |
| Pair 1 Pre-test – post-test | -2.410E1           | 6.71           | 1.22            | -26.61                                    | -21.59 | -19.66 | 29 | 0.00            |

Based on Table 4 we can see that t-score was 19.66 with 29 levels showing the significance 0.000. If sig 0.00 < 0.05 then Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted. Hence, it was concluded that the implementation of portfolio assessment in the teaching of writing of recount text improved the writing abilities of the students.

**Response to the Implementation of Portfolio Assessment**

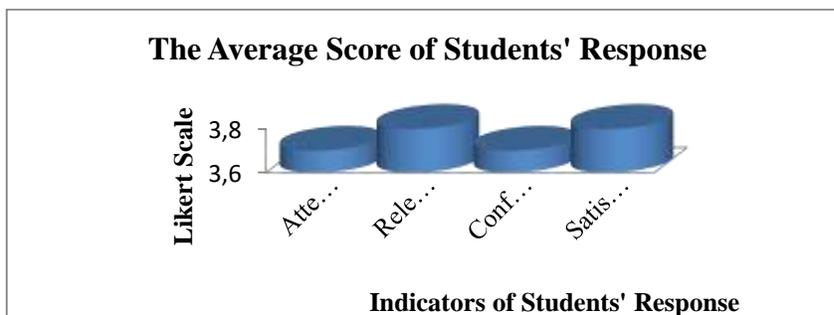
A questionnaire, with 13 questions, was distributed to find out the response of the students to the implementation of portfolio assessment. Table 5 shows the results.

**Table 5. Responses to Questionnaire**

| No           | Indicators          | Questions     | Average Scores | Categories  |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1            | <i>Attention</i>    | 1, 3, 9, 10   | 3.70           | Good        |
| 2            | <i>Relevance</i>    | 2, 11         | 3.80           | Good        |
| 3            | <i>Confidence</i>   | 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 | 3.70           | Good        |
| 4            | <i>Satisfaction</i> | 12, 13        | 3.80           | Good        |
| <b>Total</b> |                     |               | <b>3.70</b>    | <b>Good</b> |

Scores: 1.00–1.69 (Not Good)      1.70 – 2.59 (Average)  
 2.60 – 3.50 (Good)                3.51 – 4.00 (Very Good)

The indicators of the students’ response from the above data are described in the graph below.



**Figure 1. Responses of Students**

## **Discussions**

Portfolio assessment challenged the students to improve their writing and correct their own errors. Gallagher (2001) has noted that reflection is a major component of portfolio as it helps students to learn from experience and to practice correcting errors. He said through the reflection process students are able to identify their own errors in writing. Moreover, they can review their own writing over time so they can see their progress in writing and have a better understanding of their own needs for improvement. The implementation of portfolio assessment gave positive results toward the students' attitudes. It could be proven by the result that the students became more interested and motivated in writing. It also aroused their self-confidence in writing. Moreover, the reflection activities in portfolio assessment could show their progress in achievement.

The first discussion is concerned with the students' ability in writing after the treatment. It was found that after the treatment, the students' ability in writing recount text improved, although they still made some mistakes in grammar. From the study it was found that there was a significant improvement in their ability to write recount text after the treatment ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This means that the hypothesis which was proposed was accepted. The improvement can be seen from the mean of the pre-test and post-test scores. The mean of the pre-test score was 58 and the mean of the post-test score was 82. The improvement from pre-test to post-test was 24 points. Thus, the implementation of portfolio assessment helped the students improve their ability in writing recount text.

The second discussion is related to the students' responses toward the implementation of portfolio assessment where it was found that the students' motivation in writing increased when portfolio assessment was implemented to assist their writing. Besides that, they also responded to the implementation positively. Based on Table 4, it can be seen that their attention score was 3.70, relevance was 3.80, confidence was 3.70, and satisfaction was 3.80. Thus, it can be concluded that when the students have good attention, relevancy, confidence and satisfaction in writing, it influenced their ability to achieve the goal/target of the learning. Based on the discussion, it can clearly be seen that the implementation of portfolio assessment for teaching-learning writing in English can help students to increase their ability in writing, in this case recount text. Besides, it also helped to motivate them more highly to improve their ability in writing.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of the research on the implementation of portfolio assessment in teaching writing in English at SMKN 1 Banda Aceh, there are some points to make. First, the students could improve their ability in writing and they were more interested to learn writing recount text when assisted by portfolio assessment because it could improve their writing step by step. Second, Portfolio assessment could improve the students' motivation in learning because the teacher corrected their mistakes directly so they were able to learn better. Last, Motivation is very important in achieving a goal; the researcher found that the students were more highly motivated in their study when portfolio assessments were applied in teaching English writing, which could be seen from the results of the students' responses to the questionnaire.

## **Suggestions**

Here are some suggestions for teaching English writing, especially for writing recount text. First, when the teacher implements portfolio assessment in the teaching-learning process, the teacher pays more attention to the students' writing process inside and outside the class. Second, when the teacher implements portfolio assessment in the teaching-learning process it motivates the students to improve their writing with immediate correction of students' mistakes and more attention given during the writing process. Last, the teacher not only teaches English but also has to motivate students in the learning process because student motivation is very important for reaching teaching/learning goals/targets.

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