

The Influence of Portfolio Assessment in Improving the Quality of Teaching English Foreign Language (EFL) Writing

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Abstract— The focus of teaching English Foreign Language (EFL) writing has undergone a great change in the past few years, from writing products to writing processes, due to the complexity of skills involved in writing. This paradigm requires writing instructors to be able to make writing processes become a meaningful learning to their students which then affect their teaching quality. Related to the teaching quality of EFL writing, a portfolio is an alternative assessment that the writing instructors can use to improve the quality of their teaching activity since it reflects students' progress towards instructional goals. The students' progress reflects the teaching quality as well. Portfolio, in this case, is samples of students' works which are used not only to assess students' writing skill but also to create a more communicative teaching of EFL writing. By using portfolio assessment, the writing instructors have the opportunity to look in depth their students' needs, want, and lack which can be used as an input for a better teaching. Therefore, this article which is derived from the results of the research conducted in 2016 discusses the influence of portfolio assessment in improving the quality of teaching English Foreign Language (EFL) writing in the 3rd semester students of English Education Study Program of University of Maritim Raja Ali Haji in academic year 2016/2017.

Keywords—*portfolio assessment; English Foreign Language (EFL) writing; teaching writing*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is regarded as one of the language skills English Foreign Language (EFL) students have difficulty to deal with. To be able to communicate ideas through writing, EFL students need to be aware of many interrelated skills and knowledge; writing as a process, the readers, the reason for writing, word choice, organization, mechanics, grammar, syntax, and the content of writing [1]. The writing process is the stages a student go through in order to produce something in its final written form. It is from getting ideas, getting started with the ideas, drafting, revising, up to the final product of writing. In this process, those interrelated skills and knowledge play absolutely important roles. The skills and the knowledge work hand in hand at the same time in the production of a piece of writing.

For EFL students, writing is used as evidence of successful learning or as a means of learning. Because writing leads to a

product that can be examined and reviewed immediately, it provides feedback to the teacher and learner on what has been understood [2]. The students' ability and skill related to English can be measured through their writing performances since writing involves many interrelated language skills as it was stated previously. Then, as a means of learning, writing helps EFL students survive in their learning process. In other words, writing is the students' primary need.

The writing of EFL students is affected not only by their first language (L1) but also by the educational context where they learn to write. This socially and culturally characterized context provides meta-knowledge about writing (i.e. the view of audience and goals of writing) as well as linguistic and textual knowledge, affecting the ways in which students process and produce writing [3]. In relation to this, EFL students need to have knowledge about basic rules of writing. One of them is brevity. In writing, the students should exclude every nonessential word. Another rule is logic and clarity. What the students want to express through writing should be so arranged in order that the readers can follow their argumentation step by step. The sentences the students use should also be clear and easily understood that can make readers forget that they are reading and know only that they are absorbing ideas. The last rule is clean typing or writing [4].

Due to the complexity of writing, the way it is taught is of utmost important. In relation to this, to have a more effective teaching, the writing instructors have to put learners as the main concern since writing is learned, not taught. When the students are actively involved in the process, the teaching quality will improve as well. Therefore, the biggest challenge for the writing instructors is to make the students learn. To deal with this, they have to seriously think of what aspects of writing to teach to a particular student and how the aspects can be learned effectively.

A portfolio is one of assessment tools that can be used in the teaching of writing to make learning more meaningful for students. It is a purposeful collection of students' works that tell the story of the students' efforts, progress, or achievements [5]. Portfolio assessment refers to the practice of writing courses where the students write their writing by using some useful information sources as references, revise, and resubmit it

after getting feedback from the teacher and peers [6]. In addition, portfolio combines instructions with an assessment that follows self-reflection and self-evaluation [7]. Through portfolio assessment, the students can assess their own success so that they know their strengths and weaknesses and are more motivated to become a better learner.

Moreover, portfolio assessment gives students an opportunity to select two or three of their best papers to be evaluated. Then, the students' keep the rest of their works in their individual files stored in the classroom [8]. This situation has a positive impact on both students and writing instructors. Students can see their progress toward the learning goals. Then, writing instructors can use students' portfolio to see their success in teaching as well.

There are a number of potential benefits of the portfolio. First, portfolio fosters the students' motivation, responsibility, and ownership. Then, it promotes student-teacher interaction with the teacher as facilitator, individualizes learning and celebrates the uniqueness of each student. Besides, the portfolio provides tangible evidence of a student's work, facilitates critical thinking, self-assessment, and revision processes. Last but not least, the portfolio also offers opportunities for collaborative work with peer and permits assessment of multiple dimensions of language learning [9].

Nowadays, there are a large number of publications and studies on the teaching of writing for EFL students. Most studies show that portfolio assessment is effectively implemented in the teaching of EFL writing to assess and to improve students' writing skill. The students writing proficiency can be improved by using portfolio assessment since they are motivated to be actively involved in assessment and learning [10] [11]. The improvement of the students writing performance includes the writing sub-skills of focus, development, organization, conventions, and word choice [12]. On this basis, portfolio assessment improved the students' writing achievement [13] which finally can be seen through the students' scores.

From the previous studies, there is a missing point that portfolio assessment can do more than just as an assessment tool. In my class at English Education Study Program Of University of Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH), I used to implementing portfolio assessment. It not only helps me in assessing the students' writing skill but also tells me about what to do with my class to have a better teaching and learning process. Therefore, throughout this article, I would like to share the influence of portfolio assessment in improving the quality of teaching EFL writing.

II. METHODS

The research was conducted at English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Maritim Raja Ali Haji, from August to December 2016. The participants were 30 students in the third semester who took *Essay Writing* course at the same schedule. The course consists of 16 meetings with 13 effective meetings out of introduction, mid-semester test, and final semester test. During the 13 meetings, portfolio assessment was employed. In each meeting, the students' portfolios were analyzed soon after

the class to see the weaknesses of the teaching and learning process. In other words, the analysis of the students' portfolios of a meeting always finished before starting the next one. The analysis was based on the indicators of the course objective the students have to achieve. Then, the students' weaknesses got from the analysis became aspects of teaching and learning process on which the writing instructors need to focus. These focuses were listed. Finally, focused aspects provide a description of the influence of portfolio assessment in improving the quality of teaching English Foreign Language (EFL) writing.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The research results showed that by using the students' portfolios as a main consideration in taking action in the teaching and learning process, writing instructors could improve their teaching quality which could be seen from the number of successful students of each meeting. The following table illustrates the description of the improvement of the teaching quality of EFL writing.

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE TEACHING QUALITY OF EFL WRITING

Week	Course topics	Number of Successful Students in Portfolio-based Four Week Treatment			
		1	2	3	4
2	Independent and dependent clauses	20	27	30	30
	Clause connectors	23	30	30	30
	Simple sentences	21	26	28	28
	Compound sentences	18	26	27	27
	Complex sentences	18	24	26	27
	Complex-compound sentences	16	26	26	27
	Analyzing sentence problems	18	25	26	27
3	Noun clauses	17	22	25	25
4	Adverbial clauses	15	22	24	25
5	Adjective clauses	16	25	26	28
6	Introduction to essay	24	27	28	28
7	The thesis statement	17	20	25	27
9	The introductory paragraph	16	18	22	25
10	Body paragraphs	15	16	19	23
11	The concluding paragraph	17	20	24	27
12	Process essay	16	22	24	27
13	Classification essay	17	23	24	28
14	Cause-effect essay	15	22	23	24
15	Comparison & contrast essay	15	21	23	25

The table illustrates the students who are successful in achieving the learning goal on time without portfolio-based treatment and those who are successful in achieving the goal with portfolio-based treatment. The third column of the table is the number of successful students without portfolio-based treatment while the others (column 5 to 6) are with portfolio-based treatment. For example, in meeting 2, there were 20 students who could achieve the course objective on time. 10 others couldn't. By considering the students' portfolios of the

meeting, the instructors could find out some solutions for overcoming the students' problems which were applied in the meetings after. Therefore, the number of students who could achieve the course objective was improved. The same way was implemented in the next 12 meetings and gave the same impact. Moreover, based on the students' portfolios, it was found that the writing instructors should weigh several elements of course materials in which most students made mistakes. It was done by continuing the difficult materials in the next meetings.

B. Discussion

The writing instructors can use language tests as valuable sources of information about the effectiveness of learning and teaching, and as sources of information in evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches to language teaching [22]. On this basis, the writing instructors may also use portfolio assessment to improve their teaching quality. In addition, by reviewing the related theories stated previously, the following are the influence that portfolio assessment gives to the improvement of the teaching quality of EFL writing.

Portfolio assessment helps EFL writing instructors ascertain their teaching goals. In higher education, writing instructors are given authority to design their own class. Through the implementation of portfolio assessment, the instructors can analyze the students' needs which can be used as a consideration in designing the next instructional goals. The instructors will be able to see in which parts of writing the students get difficulties with. It seems that portfolio assessment contributes to the evaluation of context in improving the teaching quality.

That writing instructors have authority in designing their own classes gives impact to the syllabus and the textbooks used in the teaching and learning process. Then, in planning the contents of the course, the instructors refer to the types of the syllabus they arranged. The contents should meet the learning goals stated in the syllabus which has been arranged by taking portfolio as a consideration. In the process of designing the course syllabus, the instructors should think of weighing the elements of the course that is which ones will be the most important for the students. In short, the instructors need to form priorities and weight the elements according to the students' needs reflected by the portfolios.

Then, portfolio assessment may also influence the selection of writing course materials. Besides considering the goals, principles, content, and weighing the course elements, the course instructors should also consider the topics the students are going to write about. The instructors should provide the students with topics they are interested in to make them more enthusiastic in writing. In relation to this, the implementation of portfolio assessment gives the opportunity to the instructors and the students to have the discussion on it.

The last is portfolio assessment gives positive impact to students as well. By implementing portfolio assessment in EFL writing class, the students' may have higher motivation in learning because they can minimize their weaknesses that can be seen in their portfolios. Then, portfolio assessment improves the students' critical thinking and pushes students to be

independent learners. Finally, classroom interaction between instructors and the students and between the students will be better.

IV. CONCLUSION

Portfolio assessment has several influences in improving the quality of teaching EFL writing since it provides the instructors and the students with feedback that can be used as self-reflection and self-evaluation. The instructors can measure their success and see their weaknesses in teaching. In this case, the implementation of portfolio assessment gives the contribution to the improvement of the quality of the learning goals, the theoretical principles, the content, the elements, the syllabus, and the materials of the course. In line with this, for EFL students, portfolio assessment influences positively their motivation, learning styles, and thinking quality. Moreover, the implementation of this assessment improves classroom interaction. In short, the result of portfolio assessment can be used as one of the considerations in evaluating the context, the input, the process, and the product of EFL writing course.

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