The Use of Portfolio Assessment in English Writing Classes

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Abstract: The research goals were to (1) identify the teacher’s perspective about the characteristics and practices of portfolio assessment in English writing classes, and (2) investigate the enactment of portfolio assessment in English writing classes. The research design was a case study, and it was conducted at a junior high school in Jember. Moreover, the data were obtained from observation, interview, and document analysis. In analyzing data, Miles and Huberman’s model was considered to be used through data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The research findings indicated that (1) assessing writing by using portfolio assessment is good and useful and (2) it gives good effect to the quality of teaching learning process in English writing classes. Therefore, portfolio assessment brings some benefits which can be addressed to both students and English teachers.

1. Introduction

In Indonesian curriculum development, Indonesia has issued the latest curriculum called 2013 curriculum. All schools were supposed to use all the rules in that curriculum including the application of assessment. The assessment used in the curriculum is authentic assessment. One of the authentic assessments is portfolio assessment. This is the main reason of this research to know more about the enactment of portfolio assessment in Junior High School as the policy of government in education field.

To know about the development of learners’ ability and capability in writing, English teachers should administer a certain assessment. There are three kinds of authentic assessments, and one of which is portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is commonly used by English teachers to collect learners’ writing product. According to [1], one of the most popular alternatives in assessment, especially within a framework of communicative language teaching, is portfolio assessment. A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas of the curriculum. The collection must include (1) the student participation in selecting contents, (2) the criteria for selection, (3) the criteria for judging merits, (4) evidence of a student’s self-reflection. It should represent a collection of students' best work or best efforts, student-selected samples of work experience.
related to outcomes being assessed, and documents according growth and development toward mastering identified outcomes.

A portfolio is a tool that shows about the evidence of achievement of learning outcomes. It is a collection of various forms [2]. A student portfolio is a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects [3]. Applying the portfolio must have a purpose. According to [4], it is just a folder of student work if a portfolio is without a purpose. A collection of student work with a common theme and purpose is called portfolio. Process and product portfolios represent the two major types of portfolios.

There are some advantages that are stated as follows: (1) promoting student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking, (2) measuring performance based on genuine samples of student work, (3) providing flexibility in measuring how students accomplish their learning goals, (4) enabling teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress toward meeting those goals, (5) giving students the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process, (6) facilitating cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing, (7) providing a process for structuring learning in stages, (8) providing opportunities for students and teachers to discuss learning goals and the progress toward those goals in structured and unstructured conferences, and (9) enabling measurement of multiple dimensions of student progress by including different types of data and materials.

Besides, the disadvantages of portfolio assessment are as follows: (1) requiring extra time to plan an assessment system and conduct the assessment, (2) gathering all of the necessary data and work samples can make portfolios bulky and difficult to manage, (3) developing a systematic and deliberate management system is difficult, but this step is necessary in order to make portfolios more than a random collection of student work, (4) scoring portfolios involves the extensive use of subjective evaluation procedures such as rating scales and professional judgment, and this limits reliability, (5) scheduling individual portfolio conferences is difficulty and the length of each conference may interfere with other instructional activities.

2. Method
The used research design was qualitative research which was focused on case study. In this case study, the emphasis was on understanding deeply about the implementation of portfolio assessment in the English writing classroom as assessment tool used by the English teacher. Thus, the data were taken from both the English teachers as the research respondent especially in explaining, implementing, and giving instructions and the artefacts of portfolio assessment as a document analysis.

The procedures for conducting this research were designed as follows: (1) determining the research area purposively, (2) determining the research respondents, (3) constructing the research instrument for classroom observation, (4) observing the English writing classroom process through portfolio assessment by filling in the observation checklist and taking notes, (5) analyzing the obtained data which includes data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification of the data gained during the observation qualitatively, (6) discussing the result compared with indicators of good portfolio assessment, (7) drawing conclusion by describing the result of the analysis, (8) reporting the result of the research.

This present study was conducted at one of Junior High Schools in Jember. The school was chosen purposively because of two reasons: (1) the school implements the curriculum that consists of portfolio assessment in it, and (2) English teachers have been using portfolio assessment in their English writing classroom since the government asks all school to use 2013 curriculum. The research source of data in this research were English teachers, students of a Junior High school in Jember, documents, and activities / events. The present study required qualitative data. In this present study, the data were in the form of (1) teacher’ and students’ information, perception, attitude, and behavior, (2) portfolio documents, and (3) classroom situation.
The data collection methods were observation, interview and documents analysis. The researcher took some steps: (1) playing as participant observer that was participating the classroom activities but not really involved in the activities of the class [5], (2) observing the situation which was the way the teacher implementing the portfolio assessment and teaching writing in the class, (3) observing the students’ responses, participation, attitude, and behavior in involving the process of implementation of portfolio assessment, (4) taking notes about all situations in the classroom observation, (5) cross-checking and coding with the requirements of implementation of portfolio assessment issued by the government, and (6) making the conclusion. The purpose of this classroom observation was to get a complete description on to what extent to which the teachers implement portfolio assessment in English writing classroom.

The aspects observed are: (1) the influences of portfolio assessment for both teachers and students; and (2) the effect of portfolio assessment to teaching and learning process of writing. Classrooms observations are conducted in three classrooms. Taken randomly as the representatives, those classrooms represent each grade: class 7D represents the first grade, class 8A represents the second grade, and class 9C represents the third grade.

In this qualitative specifically case study, it was used a focused interview. The reason for using this focused interview was that it was more flexible and open than other survey interviews in which the teacher was free to answer and in his words and either briefly or at length. There are 26 questions delivered to English teachers, and 20 questions delivered to students. The aspects observed are: (1) The teachers’ understanding about the enactment of portfolio assessment, (2) the reasons the teachers enact portfolio assessment, and (3) The teachers’ technique in enacting portfolio assessment.

In this present study, one of the documents was the students’ writing product that was collected in one folder which was called students’ portfolio. The portfolio was analyzed and investigated in the aspects of (1) students’ writing style, (2) product quantity, and (3) product quality. The other document that was analyzed and investigated was the document of syllabus and lesson plan. The document of curriculum was analyzed and investigated in the aspects of (1) practicality, (2) availability, and (3) connectivity. It functions to know the teachers’ way to enact portfolio assessments in their English writing classes. From that analysis and investigation, the information was gained whether portfolio affected the students writing ability or not.

3. Result and Discussion

The English teachers assume that assessing writing by using portfolio assessment is good and useful, and so portfolio assessment is enacted in English writing classes based on some parameters such as (1) documenting the students’ writing, (2) scoring by using clear scoring rubric, (3) giving feedback and encouraging students’ self-reflection, (4) giving chance to students to revise, and (5) keeping the portfolio document as the document model, and it gives good effect to the quality of teaching learning process in English writing classes.

English teachers are well-informed about the enactment of portfolio assessment in English writing classes. It is supported by [6], who states portfolios are an important mechanism through which teachers come to a deeper understanding of their professional practices, and Rodrigues (2012) states that teachers consider portfolios as a comprehensive assessment tool that widen their repertoire of assessment strategies, encourage collaborative learning, promoted thinking in learners and develop pupils’ and parents’ interests in English writing.

It can be concluded that teachers begin to recognize changes in classroom practice and school-wide responsibilities and to identify organizational structures and professional development opportunities. Actually, portfolio is not only beneficial for students but also English teachers, as the English teachers are the supervisor, the leader, and the guide to enact the portfolio assessment itself. In this present study, the English teachers know about the characteristics and the practices of portfolio assessment since they have got some workshops about portfolio assessment, which is included in the latest curriculum (2013 curriculum) as the policy of Indonesian government. The characteristics of portfolio that can be identified are: (1) clarity of goal, (2) explicit criteria for evaluation, (3) creating the product based on the goal, (4) students’ participation in the process of selection and decision, (5) teachers and students involvement in the assessment process, (6) self-reflection. Those elements of portfolio indicating the whole
characteristics enhance the learning experience and the self-understanding of the students. Just as students learn by being involved in the portfolio process, so do teachers.

Portfolio assessment is an evaluation tool used to document student learning through a series of student’s writings. It is supported by [7] [8] who suggest that portfolio assessment has the potential to help students to improve their learning in English, develop their ability to self-evaluate and understand their strengths and weaknesses. A portfolio might comprise an ‘alternative assessment program where pupils’ best work and achievements are documented; teachers might use portfolios to document their pupils’ learning processes while others might use it to promote pupil reflection [9]. Moreover, it is evidenced that the process of making a portfolio is also a learning tool that promotes students’ improvement in academic achievement, achievement motivation, critical thinking, self-directed learning, self-confidence, and creative thinking [10] [11] [12] [13] [14].

More importantly in this present study, it shows that teachers can adapt the government’s order sufficiently well to new assessment techniques in order to implement portfolio assessment successfully through appropriate planning and preparation. Portfolio assessment gives both teachers and students a controlled space to document, review, and analyze content learning. In this case, in the content learning is writing skill learning, it is believed that portfolios encourage students to think critically, become active, self-regulated and independent learners. In short, portfolio is a collection of student’s writings that allows assessment by providing evidence of effort and accomplishment in relation to specific instructional goal.

It can be concluded that there must be a selection of content in portfolio document that should demonstrate students’ accomplishment over time. All selections are authentic in that the included pieces provide evidence that the goals and objectives of the curriculum have been met. The use of portfolio as an assessment tool gives benefits to teachers as they are able to improve their teaching practices, allow them to see new developments and directions in teaching and learning and as a result they can better facilitate their students’ learning. Besides, reflection reviews the process and product of learning. To get that benefit, the English teachers enact the steps of portfolio assessment, which can show the progress of students’ writing skill, the students’ problem in writing, and the solution of the obstacle faced in teaching learning process of English writing. The English teachers invite the students to be involved in the process of enacting portfolio assessment in English writing classes. The English teachers also give direct feedback to their students by giving or noting the mistakes made by their students. In this way, their students know their mistakes that should be revised by them.

The English teachers also understand the benefit of portfolio assessment, which comes from the process and the product of portfolio assessment. Relating to the quality of teaching learning process of writing, portfolio assessment brings some benefits, which can be addressed to both students and English teachers. The use of portfolios will benefit and assist ESL/EFL students to monitor their own learning [15]. Moreover, keeping a portfolio has several benefits in terms of overcoming writing anxiety; and the experience with portfolios may affect the participants’ future teaching practices positively. [16] [17] [18] [19] [20].

In this present study, as a benefit of keeping portfolio, students represent how well they have learned subjects as well as what they haven’t learned yet and what they still need to improve. The collection must include students’ participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging value and evidence of students’ self-reflection. Within the context of this definition, a portfolio frequently grows and accumulates as the students’ progresses in the particular learning task. The portfolio assessment develops students’ language competence, and enhances their cross-cultural knowledge and promotes their learning autonomy and motivation. Furthermore, teachers’ observations also revealed that students benefited from the portfolio system in terms of the development of English use and confidence, learning ownership, versatile talents, and critical thinking. The greatest value from enacting portfolio assessment is that the students become active participants in the learning process and assessment. The sense of ownership on the part of the students that goes with portfolio assessment makes it quite attractive to the learners in general.

In the more thoughtful portfolio assignment, students are asked to reflect on their work, to engage in self-assessment and goal setting. [21] states reflection quality will affect achievement
test, work and attitude; therefore it is necessary to reinforce the students’ reflection writing capabilities, and students may write reflection based upon assessment rubrics of reflection. [22] reveals that portfolio assessment empowers students’ learning of English writing and emphasizes the formative potential of portfolio assessment in EFL classes. Students have their own experience in writing; especially make some products of writing. They know their own mistakes and how to revise the mistakes. This finding is also supported by [23] who states portfolio also encourages students to revise and improve their work, and they are judged on their best performances at the same time. [24] suggests that one strategy teachers can explore in assessment for learning is to provide students with a clear vision of the learning target from the beginning of the learning.

Actually, portfolio assessment can promote a dialogue between teacher and students about the individualized nature of work. Too often, students may have papers or projects returned with a number or letter grade only and fail to understand what might be necessary for improvement. Required reflection in conjunction with conferencing reduces the possibility that students will be unclear about the assessment or what must be done to make improvements. This aspect is additional bonuses for those students who may be too shy to initiate conversations with instructors as well as for those who enjoy speaking about their work and may better understand what worked and what did not through a verbal exchange.

For optimum learning, students need to be involved in the classroom assessment process. When students are involved in the assessment process they are motivated to learn. This appears to be connected to choice and the resulting ownership. When students are involved in the assessment process they learn how to think about their learning and how to self-assess; it is the key aspects of metacognition. Learners construct their own understandings therefore, learning how to learn, becoming an independent, self-directed, life-long learner, involves learning how to assess and learning to use assessment information and insights to adjust learning behaviors and improve performance. Students’ sense of quality in performance and expectations of their own performance are increased as a result of their engagement in the assessment process. When students are involved in their learning and assessment they have opportunities to share their learning with others whose opinions they care about. Involving students in every part of the portfolio process is critical to its success as a learning and assessment tool. Choice and ownership, opportunities to select evidence and reflect what it illustrates while preparing evidence for an audience whose opinion they care about are key aspects of portfolio use in classrooms. Giving students choices about what to focus on next in their learning, opportunities to consider how to provide evidence of their learning (to show what they know), and to reflect and record the learning the evidence represents makes it more possible to learn successfully.

Portfolios provide an excellent vehicle for consideration of process and the development of related skills. Hence, portfolio focuses on a meaningful collection of student’s performance and meaningful reflection and evaluation of that work. The portfolio documents combine the students’ writings. The English teachers collect and document all students’ writings in order to know the students’ performance in writing. Moreover, that document can be used as a future reference and as a record of students’ achievement over a specified time. Because a portfolio contains a variety of artifacts that provide evidence of completed work, it is particularly useful in assessment circumstances. Portfolio offer a way of assessing student learning that is different from the traditional methods. [25] states portfolio assessment have significant influence on students’ writing skills; portfolio assessment is a fair method; compared to traditional applications of assessment, it is a more down-to-earth approach; it increases responsibility of students and motivates them. Portfolio assessment, therefore, has the potential to create positive wash-back on students’ writing [26] [27]. The adoption of a portfolio approach in EFL writing classrooms may empower students’ active participation in self-evaluating their own work within the writing process.

Actually, clear criteria for evaluation, including what must be included in the portfolio and rubrics for evaluation are vital to successful portfolio assessment. When portfolios are accompanied by criteria that are written in language students can understand, describe growth over time, as well as indicate what is required to achieve success they can be used by students to guide their learning with on-going feedback as they create their portfolios. [28] found that using criteria and rubrics affect student’s desire to learn in a positive way and expand their ability to
assess and monitor their own learning.

Understanding the criteria help reduce or eliminate criticism about subjectivity or unfairness of grading. The English teacher can use the scoring rubric for writing which consists of indicators of good writing. Hence, the English teachers should know obviously about the students’ writing difficulties. Unfortunately, in this present study, the researcher finds that the English teachers sometimes use scoring rubric and sometimes not. They use common scoring system by giving number grading directly. This aspect has not been implemented maximally yet. However, the English teachers argue that they use common scoring system because of the students writing ability. Common scoring system makes the English teachers easily score the students writings.

The findings in this present study also indicate some weaknesses of portfolio assessment, particularly in a way that it is time consuming for most students (as well as instructors) and boring to some students. Moreover, portfolio studies take time and self-evaluating, reviewing and correcting students' works is a difficult task. In this present study, the English teachers also admit that the weaknesses of enacting portfolio assessment are (1) portfolio assessment needs some criteria (related to scoring rubric); (2) a class consists of lots of students, while portfolio needs some students only; (3) portfolio assessment needs lots of time to be done.

4. Conclusion

Based on the result of data analysis and discussion, some conclusion can be drawn as follows: (1) English teachers have good understanding about the characteristic and the practices of enacting portfolio assessment in English writing classes. They enact portfolio assessment because they understand the benefit of portfolio assessment and know the progress of students’ writing skill, the students’ problem writing, and the solution of overcoming the obstacle faced in teaching learning process. They have been applying some steps of portfolio assessment in their writing classes as the government orders stated in the document of 2013 curriculum, (2) Product portfolio is chosen as the type of portfolio used in the school. The English teachers also make preparations such as planning, implementing, and making scoring rubric. The English teachers enact the portfolio assessment as what the government orders stated in the document of curriculum 2013, and (3) relating to the quality of teaching learning process of writing, portfolio assessment brings some benefits which can be addressed to both students and English teachers.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Jember University for awarding the research grant, without which the research accomplishment will be impossible.

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