

A WASHBACK STUDY ON PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The latest developments in the field of learning English as a foreign language have encouraged language teachers to use more authentic and realistic assessments. This situation makes portfolios as alternative assessments increasingly popular. As the popularity of the portfolio grows, questions among assessment developers have also arisen. They question whether the portfolio really is a proper assessment. In this study, the researcher investigated the wash-back effect of portfolio-based assessment. She observed the instructional process in a translation and a writing class to see how the two types of portfolios were used. This qualitative analysis study also studies by triangulating the data with the support of data from interviews and questionnaires. Researcher then classified the opinions and reflections of students and lecturers obtained from the interview and questionnaire responses. The findings suggest the use of a portfolio is indeed appropriate for use in writing and translating subjects. Portfolio-based assessments generate positive washback effect on the learning process.

Keywords: *portfolio; wash-back effect; alternative assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is designed by teachers to measure student competence and performance. By looking at an accurate picture of students' competence and student performance, teachers could have a correct reference to make decisions related to learning, such as appropriate forms of feedback, design of the ongoing language program, and others. However, in reality, assessment forms which are used extensively in the learning process are the traditional ones, for instance, multiple choice and matchmaking; examples of assessment which are not in accordance with the principles of language learning. Such assessments only emphasize the final product of learning regardless of each stage

of language development experienced by the students. This makes students only focus on pursuing grades which are the final product of the learning process. Increasing their language ability is not their target.

The use of assessments like this has raised concerns for language teachers. Recent developments in the field of learning English as a second language and foreign language have encouraged language teachers to modify the way they conduct assessments. They are required to use more authentic and realistic assessments to be able to express the students' actual competence. Students need to be assessed through procedures in which they can have more space to process the information learned, reflect on their

shortcomings, and finally be able to advance their competencies gradually.

Alternative assessments are considered to be the problem solver of the heavy use of traditional portfolios. Coombee (2012) argues that alternative assessments focus more on student development over a particular time rather than on comparing students to other students. Furthermore, Coombe (2012) also mentions that alternative assessments are authentic because they are based on activities that show student development and represent typical tasks found in real life. Portfolios, as alternative assessments in this case, eventually became increasingly popular. The portfolio is considered to be one way out for educators who are looking for ways to assess student competencies authentically and realistically. As the popularity of the portfolio grows, questions among assessment developers have also arisen. They question whether the portfolio is a proper assessment. Agustina (2011) says that reliability and validity are weaknesses of using portfolios. She further explained that unlike traditional assessments such as multiple-choice, it is tough to measure the reliability of portfolio assessments. The validity and length of time spent is also an issue thought by language test developers. Therefore, researchers intend to research by reviewing the use of portfolios in language learning. In the research, the washback effect in portfolio-based valuation applications investigated.

Portfolio

A popular alternative form of assessment is the portfolio. The term portfolio itself is not only used in the field of education. This term is commonly used in various fields, such as art, banking, and education. In education, portfolio refers to the collection of physical evidence of student work that shows the effort, progress, and achievement of students. Combee (2012) explains that a portfolio is

a collection of student work. So the portfolio is a collection of student work collected in a certain period of time used to track student progress. Students can find out their weaknesses and strengths by looking at their previous work collections which can be easily accessed by opening a portfolio. Furthermore Shackelford as quoted by Cain et al (1996) explained:

“As assessment tools portfolios are an integral element of “authentic” and “performance” assessment systems for enhancing and evaluating hard to measure skills. Unlike traditional forms of assessment designed to evaluate isolated facts and skills, portfolios effectively, efficiently and meaningfully capture student learning over time and across disciplines. (p.79)

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the portfolio has advantages compared to traditional assessment. First, portfolios can be used to improve and assess skills that are difficult to measure. Second, portfolios are practical and efficient assessment tools for capturing student learning over time and across disciplines. The key to a portfolio is student reflection and self-monitoring. Hympe-Lyons and Condon (2000) describe nine features of a good portfolio, namely:

1. Collection: portfolios assess more than one performance.
2. Range: students can use more than one genre to show different expertise (in writing skills).
3. Context: students can include personal experiences in their assignments (in writing skills).
4. Evaluation is delayed: students can go back and check the results of their performance.
5. Selection: students participate in the selection process.
6. Student-centred control: students are responsible for the success of their learning.

7. Personal reflection and assessment: students can measure what they have mastered.
8. Grow along with specific parameters: portfolios give a detailed description of student progress.
9. Progress in a certain period of time: each development of student progress can be tracked.

Moya and O'Malley (1994) argue that there are five characteristics of the portfolio, namely:

1. Comprehensive: the portfolio provides a comprehensive collection of data and analysis so that the description of students' abilities can be seen more broadly and deeply.
2. Predetermined and systematic: planning for the use of a portfolio is made before implementation begins. Planning includes the objectives, contents, data collection schedule, and student assessment criteria.
3. Informative: information obtained through a portfolio is very useful for all stakeholders, such as teachers, students, staff, and students' parents/guardians.
4. Adapted: portfolios are adapted to how the portfolio will be used, class goals and objectives, as well as the needs of each student.
5. Authentic: portfolios must provide information to students regarding their progress in work on assignments that reflect authentic activities during the learning process in class.

Another type of portfolio that is now widely used is the e-portfolio. The e-portfolio allows students to include their assignments or work in a multimedia format. The similarity between e-portfolios and traditional portfolios lies in the reflection activities that must exist in the learning process using a portfolio. As according to Dudney & Hockley (2007,

p.119): "The e-portfolio may also include reflections on the learning itself". However, e-portfolios can be considered superior to traditional portfolios. Amid rapid technological advancements such as now, the e-portfolio can provide long-term benefits compared to traditional portfolios. Some of the advantages of the e-portfolio include: e-portfolio, with wider internet coverage, making it easier for students to learn and discuss anywhere and anytime; e-portfolios can be used by students to apply for jobs as authentic evidence of the works they created while studying in college; e-portfolios are environmentally friendly because they do not use paper. With several advantages of the e-portfolio as described, researchers assume that this media is very good to be developed as a form of assessment.

Washback

Tests are believed to affect the learning process in various ways (Taylor, 2005). Usually, learners will adjust the way they learn, as well as what they learn according to what the test asks. They will learn well things that they think will appear in the test. Berry said that the impact of the test is the effect of the test in stages of teaching and learning practice in the classroom (1994: 31). The impact of the test refers to how the instruments measuring the ability of learners affect teaching and learning activities. The impact of the test can be either positive or negative.

Taylor said that the negative impact of a test occurs when the format and content of a test are based on a narrow definition of language ability and therefore, will limit the context of learning and learning. For example, English national exams in Indonesia can influence students in various regions in Indonesia in terms of the use of learning methods and learning content in the classroom. Those who teach in the final grade at the primary, secondary and senior high school provide learning to students by being dominated by the

practice of answering national exam questions. Such teachers do not focus on developing their students' language competence, they focus on teaching students how to pass the test instead. This negative washback effect lead the teachers and students to adapt their learning and teaching process according to the test. Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) found that the English national exam has had an impact on both learners and learners. For learners, the implications are seen in the regulation of learning activities in the classroom, teaching materials, teaching content, teaching methods, and measurements. For students, the English national exam impacts attitudes, test-taking strategies and so on.

Alderson and Wall (1996) proposed several hypotheses related to the possible influence of the test on various aspects of the learning and learning process, which are:

1. The test will affect learning
2. The test will affect teaching
3. The test will affect what the teacher teach
4. The test will affect how the teacher teach
5. The test will affect what the learners learn
6. The test will affect how the learners learn
7. The test will affect the rate and sequence of teaching
8. The test will affect the rate and sequence of learning
9. The test will affect degree and depth of teaching
10. The test will affect degree and depth of learning
11. The test will affect attitudes towards content, methods and others from learning and learning.
12. Tests that have an important impact

will have a test effect

13. Tests that do not have a significant impact will not have a test impact
14. The test will affect the impact of the test on learners and learners
15. The test will affect the impact of the test on certain learners and learners but not on other learners and learners.

METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative is conducted using a qualitative approach. Flick (2007) in Boyd (2009, p.3) said that "qualitative research is used to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena from the inside in some different ways". However, we also need to refer to quantitative calculations when needed. The researcher reviewed the application of portfolio assessment in language learning at the university level.

Research Site and Participant

The participants of this study were students who took writing and translation classes in English education study program at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, which were randomly selected and their lecturers. The writing class uses traditional portfolio, and the translation class uses e-portfolio.

Data Collection Techniques

The researcher used three instruments in this study. First, she observed the instructional processes. The **observation** was carried out twice in which the researcher did not participate in learning activities in the classroom (passive participatory observation). Then, she took five students from each class to be **interviewed**. To get more in-depth findings, the researcher used an open-ended interview. Last, the researcher gave the **questionnaire** to all of the students so

that she could get abundant answers.

Data analysis

All data used in this study were analyzed using a qualitative approach to discover the wash-back impacts in the application of the assessment portfolio. The responses obtained from observations and interviews were reviewed by classifying the opinions and reflections of students and lecturers. Then researcher correlated them to findings from observational data.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results discovered positive wash-back. The opinion and reflections gathered from interview and questionnaire results proved that all of the participants support the use of portfolio assessment in writing and translation class. The teachers of those classes were also happy that they used portfolio assessment in their classes.

Positive Washback of portfolio assessment

In the study, the students and the teachers argued that the portfolio assessment did support their learning process. Using portfolio gave them the following benefits.

1. Assessment results were used as a learning tool in class

Every form of the error made by students both in the subject of translation and writing is used by the lecturer as a discussion material in class. Every mistakes of students discovered through the process of making a portfolio is discussed and corrected together in teaching and learning activities. It is aligned with the interview result.

"... mistakes in the assignments that we made will be discussed and corrected together in the following meeting. ... I think it is very useful

because I am able to know what is wrong and what is right. We know what is missing from our assignment. "

2. Feedback received is adequate.

Unlike traditional tests, portfolio-based assessments provide room for lecturers to provide extensive, thorough, and detailed feedback. Both of the teachers were very happy that they could give support as much as possible to help students improve their competence. They usually were worried if the students read and reviewed the feedback given at the end of the regular summative test. However, the portfolio-based assessment helped them to solve the problem. Fortunately, the satisfactory feedback given not only from lecturers, but students can also get feedback from their peers. Below is the snippet of interviews with students.

"I strongly agree with the use of portfolio-based tests in the writing class because my writing gets better thanks to the feedback given at each meeting. I can find out my mistakes at every stage of the process. The feedback given was very thorough. Not only grammar but also vocab, cohesion, and other aspects. "

3. Students find it easier to make study plans.

Because they can find out the mistakes made by them in each task, it is easier for them to plan things that need to be repaired further in order to produce a good portfolio. Using e-portfolios makes it easier for students to get a picture of the progress they have achieved. They more easily plan appropriate learning by following their shortcomings and feel more confident because they know exactly what must be done to improve their abilities. By knowing personal shortcomings and proper learning planning, students certainly more easily relate it to learning targets. In the end, students can develop their abilities step by step until the end of learning.

The availability of feedback also supports the positive washback of the assessment received more adequately. Mussawy (2009) argues that portfolios can improve communication between peers and between students and educators. The feedback given is more and more thorough. Besides, the positive impact of the test is also caused by students who find it easier to make study plans, like the opinion of Nemati (2006), that the use of portfolios can give an idea of more prosperous student activities. Portfolios help learners get involved in reviewing their weaknesses and learning plans that fit their abilities.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to review the use of portfolio assessments in the learning process. This study looked at how the principles of language assessment, washback effect, in traditional and e-portfolios. Based on the results of the analysis, it is discovered that the use of a portfolio is indeed appropriate for use in writing and translating subjects. Portfolio-based assessments are considered to have a positive impact on the learning process in the classroom. In accordance with Shackelford's thoughts as quoted by Cain et al. (1996) which states that the portfolio is an authentic form of assessment to measure student learning from time to time, this study shows that the use of portfolios is indeed suitable for use in translation and writing courses that assess skills learners that involve a series of processes that need to be scrutinized at each stage.

Further research can be done by using a more significant number of research subjects so that the data obtained is more reliable. Other principles of language assessment, such as validity, practicality, can also be further investigated.

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