

ESL Learners' Perception on Portfolio: An Effective Learning Activity

M.S.M. Rizwan

Department of English, Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Institute (SLIATE), Hardy Advanced Technological Institute (HATI), Ampara, Sri Lanka.

msmrizwanjp@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the portfolio as a learning activity to improve the professional writing skills of the first-year students of Higher National Diploma in English conducted at Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education. This study was carried out on 150 students and categorized into experimental and control groups of 75 students each. The samples were the students of the Department of English. To identify competence in writing, a diagnostic test was conducted on both groups. The portfolio technique was deployed for the experimental group whereas the conventional method was for the control group. Samples were instructed to submit all the learning activities assigned in professional writing contexts as a portfolio at the end of the semester. To distinguish whether there was a statistically notable difference between the groups, the independent samples t-test was administered. In order to compare the differences within the group, a paired samples t-test was directed. As per the performance in the post-test, there was a statistically notable difference among the samples due to the deployment of the portfolio which induces the students to writing skills. After the intervention program was over, a questionnaire was administered to the samples to obtain their perception of the portfolio in the context of professional writing. Using descriptive statistics, data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed. The results demonstrated that ESL learners have active involvement in the portfolio for the assigned learning activities in the context of professional writing.*

Keywords: ESL, Learning Activity, Portfolio, Professional writing, Writing skills

Introduction:

Portfolio is a form of assessment used in the context of higher education which comprises learning activities assigned to students during the particular academic period to monitor the progress and achievement of the students. Portfolio induces the students to notice their gradual improvement of learning and enforces as a productive tool to assess the learning activities of the students. The portfolio developed on paper-based heads in assessing language skills. It creates positive atmosphere towards the improvement of writing skills, stimulates active participation of students, increases the testing process of writing context, upgrades the autonomous learning of the student and build lifetime learning scenario (Barrot, 2015).

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the portfolio as a learning activity to improve the professional writing skills of the students of the Higher National Diploma in English conducted at Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education. In general, many academics use portfolio in the higher education as an effective learning activity. As per the findings of the previous studies, portfolio is advantageous in the learning teaching process. It eases the language learners to have peer feedback, helps the professional development of learners, and boosts the critical think of the learners. Since many studies revealed the benefits of portfolio, this study explored the ESL learners' perception on portfolio as an effective learning activity to improve the writings for professional purposes in the higher education context. Students' attempts, attainment, and progress in a certain subject can be revealed throughout the portfolio that consists of students' learning activities (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). In addition, portfolio helps the students to assess their learning attainment and experience along with their individual goals. Students hold the responsibility of their learning to be evaluated by themselves and to get the reflection of the learning. Consequently, students are to be accountable and induced in learning (Akçil & Arap, 2009). As portfolio is advantageous in many angles in the learning and teaching process, most of the academics implement it in the higher education as an effective learning activity. Since portfolio used as a platform in the context of writing, the study focused on the effectiveness of portfolio as an effective learning activity to improve the professional writing skills of the students of HNDE Programme.

Materials and Methods:

Quantitative experimental research approach was deployed to collect, analyze, and interpret data gathered from the samples. Researcher deployed portfolio learning activity as a strategic move to minimize the grammatical errors and to give a conducive atmosphere for professional writing contexts. A pre-test in line with the professional writing context and students' portfolio were the instruments for the collection of data. Portfolio was used to collect the learning activities carried out by the samples during the intervention programme. As samples were instructed at the beginning of the intervention programme, the content of the portfolio included the following texts such as writing paragraphs, letters (informal/formal), invitation card, notice, memo, fax, email, agenda, and dialogues (imaginative/creative) to boost their professional understanding in minimizing grammatical errors in the module of

professional writing. Further, the prescribed area of texts was included in the pre-test to identify the existing level of the students' professional writing skills. Portfolio as a technique, the samples were asked to include all the learning activities assigned on the above areas of writing. All the self-corrected, peer-corrected and revised drafts of LA were included in the portfolio. Date for the submission was noticed by the researcher. The collected portfolio as a primary data was analyzed to observe the remarkable changes and improvements in the professional writing areas. The samples were so curious to design the portfolio using their artistic capacities. This practice was very competitive among the samples to produce the pieces of the writing tasks free from grammatical errors and thought of showcasing their hidden talents to their peers. Portfolio learning activity played a prominent role in minimizing the grammatical errors in the demarcated areas of professional writing module.

Portfolio functions as an influencing element for the administration assessment and evaluation process in learning teaching context in order to give the students hands full of activities to improve their writing performance (Meeus & Petegem, 2006). In addition, the portfolio is accessible to the best potential in order to pursue the learning process of students. It provided students to exhibit their long-term learning activities. Reading students' portfolios becomes labour-intensive (Meeus & Petegem, 2006), but this was verifiable with the other elements used in this context. Further, different materials can be enclosed within the portfolio as questionnaires for evaluating by others or self. The goal of deploying portfolios in writing classes is to encourage the self-directed learning of students for the betterment of their academic advancement. Students' engagement towards portfolio learning activity promoted the evaluation and monitoring process in an amicable manner. Based on the above fact, it matches with the writing development. Generally, learning competence to be improved is the main objective of applying portfolio in the context of higher education rather than promoting particular competence in relation to profession (Onderwijsverslag: De Staat van Het Onderwijs, n.d.)

Portfolio varies in type among the programmes conducted in higher education. It is to remark that though there are numerous types, there is no such specified portfolio accepted around the globe. To promote the creativity of the students with regard to professional writing, the portfolio has been assigned to different educational programmes. Since students commit grammatical errors in the written professional communication, portfolio as to display, it motivated the students towards error-free construction of sentences. Based on the accomplished portfolio of the students, it can be concluded that the portfolio gave hands to students towards improving written communication in an effective manner. The portfolio learning activity is hereby recommended to make the diploma or degree holders to be competent enough in the process of life-long education.

First-year students of Higher National Diploma in English conducted at Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education were the samples of the study. This study was carried out on 150 students randomly selected and categorized into experimental and control groups of 75 students each. 85% of female and 15% of male were among the samples. The samples were the students of the Department of English. IBM SPSS statistical software version 21 was used to analyse the data. To distinguish whether there was a statistically notable difference between the groups, the independent samples t-test was administered. In order to compare the differences within the group, a paired samples t-test was directed. After the intervention program was over, a questionnaire was administered to the samples to obtain their perception of the portfolio in the context of professional writing. Using descriptive statistics, data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed.

Results:

This study was carried out to examine the effectiveness of the portfolio as a learning activity to improve professional writing skills and to find out whether the portfolio has a statistically significant effect on ESL students' professional writing. To find out the difference between the controlled and experimental groups, the independent samples t-test was administered. The following table shows the statistical analysis.

Table 1
Independent samples t-test analysis for pre-test scores of groups

	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Pre-test	Control Group	75	41.4400	5.90520	-.963	148	.337
	Experimental Group	75	42.3067	5.09099			

Since there are 75 samples in each group, namely, the control group and the experimental group. A portfolio learning activity was deployed for the experimental group while the conventional method of teaching was conducted for the control group. As per SPSS output, the mean value of 41.4400 is for the control group, whereas the mean value of 42.3067 is for the experimental group. In addition, the standard deviation of the control group is 5.90520 while 5.09099 has been depicted for the experimental group. Further,

the t-value is negative -.963 with 148 freedoms while .337 has been shown as the p-value. Considering the statistics, there is a slight difference in the mean value between the control group and the experimental but mostly equal. The finding produced non-significant results. As per the results, there is not a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of pre-test scores of HNDE students' overall writing performance ($t(148) = -.963, p=.337$). Thus, it is concluded that participants in each group were equal with regard to their professional writing performance. In addition, a paired samples t-test was administered to detect the statistical differences between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups, and the analysis is given below.

Table 2

Paired samples t-test for the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Pair 1 Overall scores of pre-test	75	42.3067	5.09099	-53.464	74	.000
Overall scores of post-test	75	86.5733	7.86744			

A paired-samples t-test was also conducted to compare the mean scores of the pre-test and post- of the experimental group. Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test ($M=42.3067, SD= 5.09099$) and post-test ($M=86.5733, SD=7.86744$) scores of the experimental group with regard to their professional writing performance ($t(74) = -53.464, p< .005$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the instruction through the portfolio learning activity was found to be significantly affecting HNDE students' overall professional writing performance.

Table 3

Paired samples t-test for the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of the control group

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Pair 1 Overall scores of pre-test	75	41.4400	5.90520	-48.075	74	.000
Overall scores of post-test	75	70.9200	2.60851			

Table 3 demonstrated the results of paired samples t-test analysis for the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group. Table 3 indicates, there is a significant difference between the pre-test ($M=41.4400, SD=5.90520$) and post-test ($M=70.9200, SD=2.60851$) scores of the control group in terms of overall professional writing performance ($t(74) = -48.075, p<.005$). It can be concluded that the instruction in the control group also has a significant effect on HNDE students' professional writing performance.

Table 4

Comparison of post-test scores of control and experimental groups

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Pair 1 Control group	75	70.9200	2.60851	-16.951	74	.000
Experimental Group	75	86.5733	7.86744			

Table 4 indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the control group ($M=70.9200, SD=2.60851$) and experimental group ($M=86.5733, SD=7.86744$) with respect to the type of treatment ($t(74) = -16.951, p<.005$). Therefore, it can be said that those who received instruction through portfolio learning activities showed significantly higher performance in their professional writing performance to those who received the instruction in the control group.

Discussion:

The intention of this study is to examine the differences between the control group taught through the conventional method and the experimental group taught through the portfolio learning activity with regard to HNDE students' overall performance in professional writing subject. The collected quantitative data from the pre-test and the post-test were used to administer eventually. After the

intervention, the results gained from the post-test revealed that the experiment group who were taught through a portfolio learning activity showed a significant performance in the professional writing context rather than the students who received the instruction through the conventional method. As per the results, this study is consistent with the previous studies that there is an impact of portfolio on improving writing accomplishments over conventional method (Uçar & Yazıcı, 2016). A study was conducted to investigate the impact of portfolio assessment on listening, reading, and writing skills of students of secondary school language preparatory class in Turkey (Yurdabakan et al., 2009). Their findings pointed out that portfolio assessment had a significant effect on writing skills. According to Ghoorchaei & Tavakoli, n.d., his study proved that portfolio assessment provided a significant impact on the performance of students' writing not only in general but also in the subskills such as content, purpose, vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and sentence structure.

Conclusions:

The present study highlights the academic crucial implications in the context of professional writing. Portfolio contributes to students' ability in order to create clinical skills and engage in a reflective mode of learning. Academics in HNDE classes can deploy portfolio learning activities to increase the student's performance in writing. In addition, academics were involved in an active and enthusiastic evaluation process. Since portfolio shows the collective efforts and learning of a student over a period of time, it gives beneficial data about students' mastery of writing skills along with the improvements in line with professional writing areas. Further, the necessity of learning writing could be found in the data and they can be utilized in the process of learning writing. Since this study aimed to examine the effectiveness of portfolio, the results revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test scores of the experiment group as portfolio learning activity learning activity deployed to improve the professional writing skills of HNDE students. Students in the experimental group exposed substantial improvement in Professional Writing subject when compared to the control group. As per the finding of the study, it was concluded that portfolio is an effective learning activity to improve professional writings in the context of higher education among ESL learners.

References:

- Akçil, U., & Arap, I. (2009). The opinions of education faculty students on learning processes involving e-portfolios. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(1), 395–400. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.071>
- Barrot, J. (2015). A sociocognitive-transformative approach to teaching writing. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v4i2.692>
- Genesee, Fred., & Upshur, J. A. (1996). *Classroom-based evaluation in second language education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ghoorchaei, B., & Tavakoli, M. (n.d.). *The Impact Of Portfolio Assessment On Iranian EFL Students' Essay Writing: A Process-Oriented Approach*. 10(3), 2010.
- Meeus, W., & Petegem, P. Van. (2006). *Portfolio in Higher Education: Time for a Clarificatory Framework Investigating the gap between teachers' beliefs and practices about Education for Sustainable Development*. View project STEM@school View project. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279091571>
- Onderwijsverslag: *De Staat van het Onderwijs*. (n.d.).
- Uçar, S., & Yazıcı, Y. (2016). The Impact of Portfolios on Enhancing Writing Skills in ESP Classes. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 226–233. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.001>
- Yurdabakan, İ., Erdogan, T., & Yurdabakan, I. (2009). The effects of portfolio assessment on reading, listening and writing skills of secondary school prep class students Self-peer assessment View project Self-regulation View project THE EFFECTS OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT ON READING, LISTENING AND WRITING SKILLS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PREP CLASS STUDENTS. In *Uluslararası Sosyal Aratırmalar Dergisi The Journal of International Social Research* (Vol. 2, Issue 9). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/40426315>