STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USAGE OF WRITING PORTFOLIO IN EFL CLASS ROOM

ALI DOĞAN[1], AZAMAT AKBAROV[2]

[1]ZirveUniversity, Gaziantep, Turkey

[2]International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Email: ali.dogan@zirve.edu.tr, azamatakbar@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Portfolio presents the collection of student's work which has been selected by the student in the presence of the teacher's guidance to give their learning experiences. Just like an artist gathers his or work in a portfolio that is presented to the prospective clients, the writing portfolio involves the students selecting besides collecting the sample of their work to show parents, peers or teachers. Hence, the scope of the present study is to examine whether students have a positive perception of writing portfolio in learning English, a gender difference in their attitudes, students understanding about the communication and metacognitive of writing portfolio and last though not the least if portfolios are stressful to students with lower English knowledge. For this purpose, we conducted a survey comprising of 92 preparation school students of the Turkish nationality. Their mean age was M = 19.48, and the standard deviation of their age was SD = 1.85. The youngest participant was 18, whereas the eldest one was 26 years old. Our sample consisted of 38 males (41.30%) and 54 female students (58.70%). The findings indicates that students attending preparation schools in Turkey reported a positive perception about writing portfolios while learning English. Nevertheless, there were no gender differences in perceptions of writing portfolios. However, pre-intermediate and intermediate students showed a high level of stress compared to upper-intermediate level students. We thus concluded that at the next English level, writing portfolio has a significant relationship with the students' attitudes towards writing portfolios and their ability to monitor their learning objectives. Therefore, these metacognitive skills suggestively interrelated with the positive impression of writing portfolios to their written communication skills.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the context of writing assessment and instruction, a portfolio is defined as a collection of the texts that the writer has offered over a specified period. The group comprise of chooses but not necessary finished or polished pieces.   Learning portfolio is flexible and an evidence-based process that brings together documentation and reflection. Indeed, portfolio engages this student in an ongoing collaborative and reflective analysis of learning. It concentrates on particular outcomes and positive outcomes for both enhancing and the assessment of learning. A solid portfolio system comprises of the following features.

1.   It is the collection of work though it is a collection which is a subset of a bigger archive. Hence theoretically, the file means a whole of the student's work and more practically it is a subset that involves writing completed in the class, school or a program.
2.   It is processed in which a subset is generated in one section that is the second principle of the portfolio. The manner in which the entries are selected depends according to the rhetorical situation that contextualizes the portfolio.
3.   A portfolio is a reflection where the students explain their learning.
4.   The fourth principle is communication where the writing portfolio will communicate something about the student or the writer, his or her value and context in which the student has worked

Thus, regardless of the context, portfolio share one essential feature. Portfolios are longitudinal where the instructor sets explicitly to create periods needed for the student to develop or finish a particular work. Thus a piece initiated on a Tuesday need to be handed in a week. One merit of the portfolio, especially in literature, is the notion that students have authority and ownership that is enabled by the opportunity they have to review their progress. The learner has the autonomy to choose which piece they will present to the teachers besides what they like the teachers to see in their writing. Additionally, another cited merit is that portfolio can be utilized to motivate the students in reflecting on the pieces that they write.

In the study on "Portfolio assessment and reflection: enhancing learning through active practice" (Fernstena & Fernstenb, 2005) maintain that portfolio assessment is improved by the addition of important reflective pieces. The article review several guideline that guide the process which included; creation of a safe Besides a supportive environment for the candid reflection, design and development of strategic prompts that enhance the learning process. Thus, it moves the student towards the metacognitive independence. Indeed, the use of shared disclosure enables the student and the teachers to create a reflection of the common understanding and the construction of rubrics that ensure and enhance the knowledge of the needed task.

YANG (2003) claims that what the teachers can do to facilitate the students learning has been the primary concerns in the second language learning. YANG (2003) explores the utilization of portfolio as the tool that facilitates the students learning besides it develops the students' autonomy. In the study, the data about the learner's attitude about the use of portfolio was collected. The finding indicates that portfolios raised the students' awareness of learning strategies and enhanced their process of learning.

Chan (2004) describes the e-portfolio at Hong Kong Polytechnic University prompted to provide the students with the e-learning tool that showcase their cumulative and multi-model confirmation of the linguistic endeavors over time. The author concluded that despite the challenging journey in the implementation of e-portfolio such as practical issues and higher-order concerns, e-portfolio has a powerful learning mechanism for diverging learning through ICT.

Research questions

Taking into account the findings from the previous studies on this topic, we made a list of the following questions to be answered through the present study:

1.   Do participants have positive perceptions about writing portfolios, while learning English?
2.   Are there gender differences in students' perceptions about writing portfolios?
3.   Is writing portfolios more stressful for those students whose English knowledge is at the lower levels?

ALI DOĞAN, AZAMAT AKBAROV

4. Are students' perceptions about metacognitive and communication benefits of writing portfolios related to their perceptions about including portfolios in every preparation school and in the next English level?

Method

Participants

This study included 92 preparation school students of the Turkish nationality. Their mean age was *M* = 19.48 and the standard deviation of their age was *SD* = 1.85. The youngest participant was 18, whereas the eldest one was 26 years old.

Our sample was consisted of 38 males (41.30%) and 54 female students (58.70%).
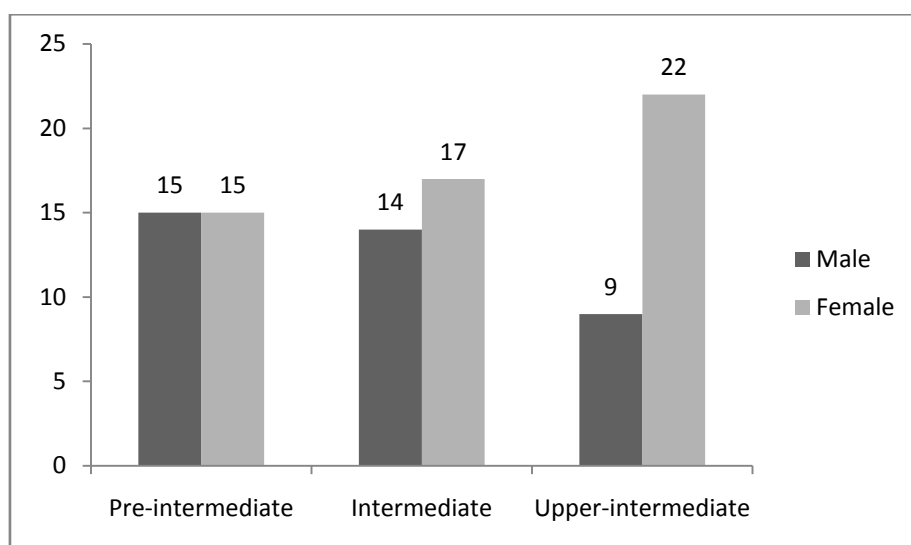

Figure 1. English level and gender of participants

Our sample can also be divided into three groups, based on three different levels of English: pre-intermediate (*N* = 30, or 32.60% of the whole sample), intermeditate (*N* = 31, or 33.70%), and upper-intermediate (*N* = 31, that is 33.70% of the total number of participants). Some of these data are shown in Figure 1.

As can be noticed (Fig. 1), there was the same number of males and females in pre-intermediate group of participants (each *N* = 15). However, there were more females than males in the second (*N* = 17 vs *N* = 14) and third group (*N* = 22 vs *N* = 9).

Instruments

First, we ask our participants to provide some personal data: their age, gender, and level (pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate).

Second, we applied *Students' perceptions about writing portfolios scale.* This scale is consisted of 11 items, given in the form of the six-point Likert's scale. Participants had to choose one out of six answering options for each of the items. These answering options were: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 –disagree, 3 – somewhat disagree, 4 – somewhat agree, 5 – agree, and 6 – strongly agree. One part of our analysis considered each of the items separately. Another part was based on average results of participants on all items. We tested the reliability (more precisely, the internal consistency) of this scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was α = .720, which indicated its fairly good reliability.

Research procedure and data processing

This research was conducted among students of preparation schools in Turkey. It takes them five to ten minutes to fill out the scale and to provide us with some of their personal data.

Their answers were coded and entered into SPSS v. 16.0 for *Win.* In this program, we performed the following analyses: calculation of arithmetic means, frequencies and percentages, t-test for independent samples, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson's coefficient of correlation.

Results

In the table below, we showed some descriptive values for each of the items (frequencies and percentages). Looking at Table 1, we can notice that participants have positive perceptions about writing portfolios while learning English, because none of them strongly disagreed nor disagreed with the content of every item. Furthermore, lots of them agreed and strongly agreed with the content of each of the items.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of participants' answers on each of the items

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I can appreciate that my written communication has improved.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (17.4%)	28 (30.4%)	48 (52.2%)
2. Writing the portfolio is a stressful process.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.3%)	19 (20.7%)	30 (32.6%)	39 (42.4%)
3. The portfolio should be part of every Prep. school.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.3%)	20 (21.7%)	31 (33.7%)	37 (40.2%)
4. The portfolio is a useful additional learning tool.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	23 (25%)	27 (29.3%)	39 (42.4%)
5. I usually read the relevant chapter in books before I write the portfolio.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.3%)	24 (26.1%)	27 (29.3%)	37 (40.2%)
6. The portfolio writing has changed my approach to learning.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	21 (22.8%)	24 (26.1%)	44 (47.8%)
7. Writing the portfolio has helped me to monitor the learning goals.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	22 (23.9%)	24 (26.1%)	43 (46.7%)
8. Writing the portfolio has helped me to revise my work.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.2%)	18 (19.6%)	27 (29.3%)	45 (48.9%)
9. I want to have this system in my next level.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	23 (25%)	23 (25%)	43 (46.7%)
10. I am proud of myself because I did a good job in my portfolio.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	22 (23.9%)	24 (26.1%)	43 (46.7%)
11. The feedback after I wrote the first draft helped me a lot to improve my writing skills.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)	23 (25%)	27 (29.3%)	39 (42.4%)

However, most of the students who attend preparation school think that writing portfolio is a stressful activity/process: 39 of them (42.4%) strongly agreed with the content of this item, 30 (32.6%) agreed with it, 19 (20.7%) somewhat agreed that it is a stressful process, whereas only four participants (4.4%) somewhat disagreed with it.

The item that greatest number of participants strongly agreed with was the following one: ''I can appreciate that my written communication has improved'' (*N* = 48,which is 52.2% of the total sample).

ALI DOĞAN, AZAMAT AKBAROV

In Figure 2, we displayed arithmetic means for every item. The items were given in their original order, so their contents can be found in Table 1.
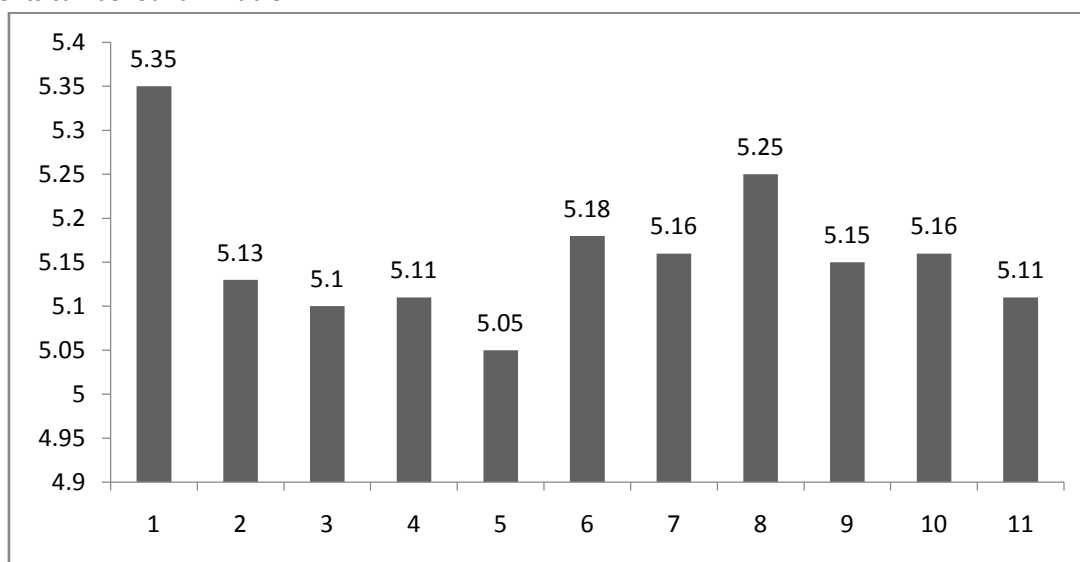

Figure 2. Arithmetic means of the scale items

By inspecting Figure 2, we can notice that the highest mean value was that of the first item (''I can appreciate that my written communication has improved''), and it was equal to *M* = 5.35. We can also notice that mean values of the 4th item (''The portfolio is a useful additional learning tool'') and the 11th one (''The feedback after I wrote the first draft helped me a lot to improve my writing skills'') were the same (*M* = 5.11). On the other hand, the lowest mean value was that of the fifth item (''I usually read the relevant chapter in books before I write the portfolio''), and was equal to *M* = 5.05. Hence, all arithmetic means were very high. This finding is in accordance with the previous one (see Table 1).

We were interested in examining gender differences in perceptions about writing portfolios. For this purpose, we calculated arithmetic mean of participants' results on all items and compared males and females by t-test for independent samples (Table 2).

Table 2 : Gender differences in perceptions about writing portfolios

Gender	N	M	SD	$SE_{\Delta M}$	t	df	p
Male	38	5.18	0.43	0.097	0.299	90	.766
Female	54	5.15	0.47				

Legend: N – sample size of males/females, $SE_{\Delta M}$ – the standard error of the mean difference; df – degrees of freedom

We can see (Table 2) that males, on a average, scored *M* = 5.18, whereas females scored *M* = 5.15. However, this difference was not statistically significant (*t*(90) = 0.299, *p*> .05). Thus, males' and females' perceptions about writing portfolios are almost the same.

We assumed that writing the portfolio is more stressful process for those students who were at the lower levels of English. To test this assumption, we conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). English level was the independent variable, and the second item (''Writing portfolio is stressful process.'') was the dependent variable. The results were shown in Table 3.

Table 3 : English level differences in the stress perceived while writing portfolios

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	7.058	2	3.529	4.804	.010
Within groups	65.376	89	0.735		
Total	72.435	91			

Legend: SS – sum of squares, MS – mean square

ALI DOĞAN, AZAMAT AKBAROV

Based on Table 3, we can conclude that English level influenced the level of stress among participants (F(2, 89) = 4.804, p< .05). However, we have to perform a *post-hoc* test in order to find out which differences were statistically significant. We showed the results of the *Scheffe's post hoc test* in Table 4.

Table 4 : The results of Scheffe's post hoc test

The pairs of levels		ΔM	$SE_{\Delta M}$	p
Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	0.011	0.220	.999
Pre-intermediate	Upper-intermediate	0.591	0.220	.031
Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	0.581	0.218	.033

Legend: ΔM – the difference between arithmetic means (the first level minus the second level), SE_ΔM – standard error of this difference

The difference between arithmetic means of students on pre-intermediate and intermediate level was not statistically significant (ΔM = 0.011, p> .05). On the other hand, the last two pairs of differences were statistically significant: the difference between pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate level students (ΔM = 0.591, p< .05) and the difference between intermediate and upper-intermediate level students (ΔM = 0.581, p< .05). Because these two differences were positive and significant, we can conclude that students who were at the pre-intermediate or intermediate level had higher stress levels compared to those at the upper-intermediate levels.

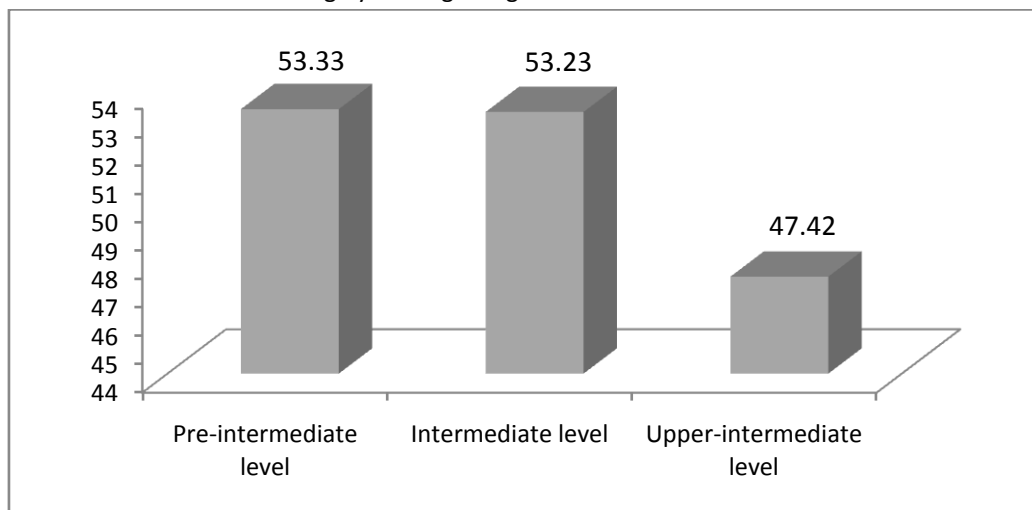We can better understand this finding by looking at Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Stress perceived while writing portfolios (by levels)

On an average, pre-intermediate level students scored M = 53.33, intermediate level students scored M = 53.23, whereas upper-intermediate level students scored M = 47.42 (Fig. 3). Hence, the last group had the lowest mean value for their levels of stress while writing portfolios.

Finally, we examined correlations between four variables, that were represented by the following items: item no. 1, item no. 3, item no. 7, and item no. 9.

Table 5 : Correlations between metacognitive skills, written communication, and writing portfolios in every preparation school as well as at the next level of English

	Writing portfolios in every prep. school	Metacognition (monitoring)	Writing portfolios at the next level
Written communication	.063	.220*	.034
Writing portfolios in every prep. school	1	.157	.306**
Metacognition (monitoring)		1	.488***

*Legend: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001*

ALI DOĞAN, AZAMAT AKBAROV

Looking at Table 5, we can see that the improvement of students' written communication (by writing portfolios) was in a low, positive, and statistically significant correlation with monitoring their learning goals (*r*(90) = .220, *p* < .05). Next, many students who thought that portfolios should be written in every preparation school had positive attitudes towards having this system in their next level (*r*(90) = .306, *p* < .01). Finally, monitoring learning goals (with the help of portfolios) was in a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation with writing portfolios at the next level (*r*(90) = .488, *p* < .001).

Conclusion

Taking into account the main results of this study, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Students who attend preparation schools in Turkey had positive perceptions about writing portfolios while learning English.
2. There were no gender differences in perceptions about writing portfolios.
3. Students who were at the pre-intermediate and intermediate level reported higher levels of stress while writing portfolios, compared to those at the upper-intermediate level.
4. Writing portfolios at the next English level is in a significant relationship with participants' attitudes towards writing portfolios in every preparation school, as well as with their ability to monitor their learning goals. This kind of metacognitive skills significantly correlated with the positive impact of writing portfolios to their written communication skills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Yu-Ju Chang, Chun-Te Wu and Heng-Yu Ku. (n.d.). The Introduction of Electronic Portfolios to Teach and Assess English as a Foreign Language in Taiwan. *Association for Educations Tomuncation & technology* , Volume 49, Number 1 30-35.

Juliana Chau. (2007). A developer's challenges on an e-portfolio journey. *Proceedings ascilite Singapore* , 146-148.

Linda Fernstena & Jeffrey Fernstenb. (2006). Portfolio assessment and reflection: enhancing learning through effective practice. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, Volume 6, Issue 2, 303-309.

NAE-DONG YANG. (2003). Integrating portfolios into learning strategy-based instruction for EFL college students∗. *Research search and Teaching in Developmental Education*, 1, 293–317.

Taejoon Park. (n.d.). An Overview of Portfolio-based Writing Assessment. *Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics,* , volume 1, number 4, 1-2 .

ALI DOĞAN, AZAMAT AKBAROV