SELF-ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION IN PORTFOLIOS ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Can self-assessment and reflection as a part of the writing process make EFL students enhance their writing? This article presents the findings of a semester-long study conducted at four universities in Medan, North Sumatera where writing portfolio including self-assessment and reflection practices were implemented to support students make their progress. Using pre- and post- test design, it was found that the writing performance of students who used portfolio mainly focusing on combination of self-assessment and reflection for their essay writing process over a semester more increased than students who did not. The growth of writing performance corresponded to students' ideas of improvement in writing. EFL writers who were usually concerned with correcting surface-level errors (mechanics and vocabulary) rather than global errors (organization and content), in this study, partially focused on global errors.

Keyword: self-assessment, EFL students

INTRODUCTION

To help EFL students become better and successful writers, teachers need to help them have knowledge and skills in assessing their own writing. In writing research, studies on self-assessment, which is sometimes dealing with the revision in the writing process, started to get attention in the late 1970s when the Flower and Hayes (1981a) model of the composing process pervaded composition studies. It was also the time when cognitivism was in vogue. The view of self-monitoring, which belongs to the domain of behaviorism, was out of fashion. Hence, studies of self-monitoring were gradually replaced by studies focusing on writing coping strategies and their effects (Flower and Hayes, 1981b; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987). According to the Flower and Hayes's (1981a) model, revision is one component of the cognitive writing process, and modifying writing strategies or texts is due to the constant evaluation and reevaluation of the text. Nevertheless, in the 1996, Hayes proposed that a new framework for understanding cognition and affect in

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writing was needed. In Hayes's new model, revision was reorganized and subsumed under a new category, reflection, which is a function that requires writers to problem-solve and make decisions (Hayes, 1996).

Portfolio assessment, therefore, has the potential to create positive washback on students' writing (Biggs & Tang, 2003; Hughes, 2003). Traditionally, students have been asked to write in a "one-draft, one-reader" context (Arndt, 1993). A grade and minimal feedback were received by students from the teacher, and they may make corrections on their drafts. Next, the learning process is seemingly accomplished, and students write on another topic. The product approach of writing encourages students' dependence on a teacher's summative perceptions rather than supporting students to assess their own drafts before submission. The using of a portfolio approach in EFL writing classrooms may enable students' active participation in self-evaluating their own work in the

A pre-test and post-test design was used. The study was conducted at four different universities in Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia. There are English department at University of

writing process (Weigle, 2007; White, 1994; Yancey, 1998).

Process portfolios involving self-assessment and reflection were used as a standardized way to support students put more emphasis on the learning process rather than the final outcome and relate to the processes of keeping their progress monitoring, goal setting, reflection and self-evaluation. As part of the support to improve students' writing performance, this study implemented process portfolios as well to students at four different universities in Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia. They are students of English department at University of Sumatera Utara, students of English department at State University of Medan, students of English study program at University of Harapan, and students of English study program at Islamic University of Sumatera Utara. The study attempted to answer the following research questions: a). Can self-assessment and reflection as a part of the writing process get EFL students improve their writing? b). What are students ' ideas of self-assessment and reflection.

METHOD

Sumatera Utara, English department at State University of Medan, English study program at University of Harapan, and English study program of Islamic University of Sumatera Utara.

The participants of the treatment group were 120 fifth semester English department students of four universities in Medan over one academic semester (January 2018–June 2018). A total of 158 fifth semester students who were part of four classes in different universities where portfolios including have not been conducted named as a control group for the study and they did the self-assessment and reflection instrument twice, as a pre-test and as a post-test, at the beginning and at the end of the academic semester.

Consent forms were dealt by teachers and students. Confidentiality was were applied instead of the real names of all guaranteed and pseudonyms participants. In general, the treatment of participants was in accordance with the ethical standards.

Students' Taught in Implementing Portfolios Involving Self-Assessment and Reflection

Participants

An effort was conducted to label control classrooms who would get as closely as possible the experimental classrooms. All teachers were advised to meet the curriculum requirements of composition course. Therefore control group students produced the same amount of writing pieces over the semester in the same genres (one of them is an argumentative genre) but without following the process approach. Experimental teachers used portfolios, while control teachers did not.

All experimental students obtained teaching on the use of portfolios and cconduct a self-evaluation as well as give peer feedback. Specific explanation were conducted in the teaching as students did not have any previous experiences with portfolio. Templates were applied to teach all experimental students: (a) on providing peer feedback, (b) on conducting a self-evaluation of their writing.

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Rubric 1

Grading students' writing performance

	5 Exemplary	4 Understanding	3 Competent	2 Developing	1 Beginning
Focus:	The student's writings fit the prompt and went beyond with additional readings and experiences that brought new light to the paper.	The student wrote a paper that followed all the guidelines given but did little to add more to the work.	The student covered most of the requirements and did so in a way that suggested they understood the prompt.	The student wrote a paper that had the subject, but did not follow the prompt or did not meet the requirements in another way.	The student did not turn in a paper or did not attempt to meet the requirements.
Development:	The student came in to talk with the instructor about the paper and took suggestions to heart through the rest of his paper.	The student came in and talked about his paper, but only worked on some of the problems that were noticed in the paper.	The student may have come in once, but there was at least one rewrite created to improve the piece.	The student could recognize mistakes during the time with the instructor, but was unwilling to correct them or work beyond the first draft.	The student did not turn in a paper or did not attempt to meet the requirements.
Audience:	The paper was written in a way that was easy to read and was clearly written to benefit the correct audience, both in word choice and in experiences shared.	The work was written in a way that covered the prompt and allowed the audience to understand what was being communicated.	The audience had difficulty relating to the work because of word choice or the way experiences were shown to them.	The audience felt alienated by the piece because of word choice and experiences shared. The author clearly did not take the audience into consideration.	The student did not turn in a paper or did not attempt to meet the requirements.

The data was comprising students' self-assessment forms and reflective journals, which were part of the demanded portfolio items. Students were asked to fill in a self-assessment form and complete a writing journal during the semester. In other words, self-assessment was conducted over the semester. The self-assessment process included students returning back to their drafts, determining which item was the best, and judging why they thought it was well-written. Self-assessment forms and reflective journal items were submitted by the students. The reflective journal items chosen for use in this study named the strengths of self-assessment.

RESULTS

Students' Composing Enhancing by Combining Self-Assessment and Reflection in the Writing Process

To better comprehend the progress in students' writing performance over the semester, scoring was done by using the rubric. There were ten students from the experimental and control groups selected regarding to the results of selection in order to cover three students with low, three students with average and four students with high writing achievement for each group. Students were graded based on their pre-portfolio performance score on writing achievement. The three students with the lowest writing achievement scores (A, B, C), the four students with the highest writing achievement scores (G, H, I, J) and three students from the middle of the spread of scores (D, E, F) were chosen. Pseudonyms were applied to substitute students' real names to support the findings report.

Table 1 shows students' writing achievement scores pre- and post- portfolio application. Regarding to methodology, students' writing achievement ranging between the minimum possible score of 3-7 was labeled as ''low''. Students' writing achievement with the score of 8-11 was labeled as ''average''. Students' writing achievement with the score higher than 11 and lower than or equal to 15 was labeled as ''high''.

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Findings presented that three experimental group students with low scores (A, B, C) in pre-portfolio application obtained higher scores in post-portfolio application. Two of the three students received the same label, the low code, while one of the three students did receive the better label, from the low to average label. Three experimental group students with average scores (D, E, F) in pre-portfolio application got higher scores in post-portfolio application. One of the three students got the same label, the average label, whereas the better label was received. by two of the three students, from the average to high label. There were three experimental group students with high scores (G, H, J) in pre-portfolio performance obtaining higher scores in post-portfolio performance and the same score was earned by one student (I). The same score label (the high code) before and after the portfolio performance were applied to all students in the group..

The control group students, the other group students, displayed contrast findings. The students with low scores (A, B, C) in pre-portfolio performance obtained the same label (low) in post-portfolio application. Two of the three students received the same scores, and surprisingly one of the three students

got lower score. There were three experimental group students with average scores (D, E, F) in pre-portfolio performance receiving the same label level (average) in post-portfolio implementation. Lower score was earned by one of the three students, and two of the three students received the same scores. There were three experimental group students with high scores (G, I, J) in pre-portfolio implementation receiving the same label (high) in post-portfolio performance and lower code (from high to average) was earned by one student (H).

The study result presented that students' writing achievement enhanced over the semester with the meaningful progress happening between pre- and post-portfolio performance. The finding was strengthened by the fact that a control group that did not use portfolios including self-assessment and reflection did not make a meaningful progress regarding to writing achievement when this was measured at the beginning and at the end of the semester. In term of the interpretation of these findings, it is necessary to figure out some possible explanations. Experimental teachers may have been more flexible to innovative teaching performance than control teachers. In addition, support was given to experimental students in

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the form of teaching on how to use portfolios and how to engage in portfolio processes. These are possible explanations to the effect of involving self-assessment and reflection in writing portfolio of EFL writers.

Received Effect of Self-Assessment

There are three main answers given by the students regarding to the things of writing they could enhance better which is shown in Table 2 below. The answers are grammatical mistakes, inadequate content, and lack of vocabulary. The first thing was not to make grammatical errors. The second thing was to have a lot of ideas and develop them in writing. It was unpredictable, for this kind of error was one of the global errors that EFL writers were often not dealing with. The third thing was to use a great scope of vocabulary to express thoughts. It is important to give attention that students usually centralize on surface-level errors such as mechanics and vocabulary, but in this finding some students thought revising global errors, such as content and organization, as an area of potential improvement.

Teachers taught students how to respond to both local and global errors when returning to their own drafts and their peer drafts. Their ideas of enhancement in writing were , if it could be said, mainly dealing with correcting surface level errors rather than global errors. However, the result presented that some students focused on global errors. It was regarding to the previous finding in term of the writing enhancement as the result of students gaining knowledge and skills in conducting self-assessment and receiving help of reflections. Students successfully implemented the methods in their writing portfolio including self-assessment and reflections so that they conducted great change between pre-portfolio performance and post-portfolio performance.

CONCLUSION

The study supported that students' writing performance increased over time with the significant progress happening between pre- and post-portfolio implementation primarily focusing on self-assessment and reflection. The finding was strengthened by the fact that the group not conducting self-assessment and writing reflection journals did not experience a significant progress with regard to writing performance when this was measured at the beginning and at the end of the

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semester. Students' incapability of self-assessing was the result of their were usually concerned with fixing surface-level errors rather than errors. However, in this study, students at four universities in Medan, North Sumatera were partly concerned with global errors.

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