Portfolio as an Assessment Tool and Its Implementation in Malaysian ESL Classrooms: A Study in Two Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This research presents the findings of a study relating to portfolio as an assessment tool and its implementation by English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in two secondary schools. Participants included nine lower and upper secondary school classroom ESL teachers. The research design was qualitative in nature as there was a need to immerse in the classroom to witness and observe the portfolio assessment process carried out by the ESL teachers. The interviewing technique was used for triangulating data obtained during classroom observations. Data collected through both techniques were transcribed and analyzed manually. The nine ESL teachers involved felt that the current assessment methods were insufficient for measuring student learning as students focused on memorization and studied merely for examination rather than the acquisition of knowledge. Significantly, the teachers divulged that when students are engaged in portfolio assessment, they become less examination oriented and are able to take charge of their learning. The teachers reported that although the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool involved major investment in time, they proved to be valuable and conducive tools for individualizing the learning process and in documenting student progress and achievement over time. Findings from this study recommend that portfolios drive instruction by assisting teachers to identify student needs by matching instruction to needs and assessment to instruction. The results have clear implications for assessment, and the teaching and learning of second language learning.

Keywords: Portfolio, ESL instruction and assessment, alternative assessment

INTRODUCTION

Opponents of traditional forms of assessment, specifically standardized multiple-choice tests have expressed a need for alternative forms of assessment.

Traditional assessments involving one-shot and indirect tests with no feedback provided to students, and decontextualized test tasks, cannot test the whole spectrum of knowledge, skills, and cognitive operations learned by the students (Abdul Samad, 2004, p.100). These traditional tests have neglected to evaluate the kinds of competence expressed in "real-life" milieu beyond school such as those experienced by writers, scientists, community people, businesspeople and craftspeople (Archbald & Newman, 1988; Shepard, 1989; Wiggins, 1989). In other words, traditional assessments are inaccurate and not fair enough to improve student learning as they provide no feedback. According to Tunku Mohani Tunku Mohtar (2010), traditional assessments are not always favored because the type of examination implemented examines students' performance at one point within a given time frame, encourages guess work and the results cannot reflect the students' actual language competence. Furthermore, ranking according to the performance of others in the class is not a good enough indicator of individual performance.

In response, the portfolio is selected as an alternative form of assessment in view of the shortcomings of traditional forms of assessment. The wide literature on use of portfolios confirms the great potential of portfolio to be utilized as an assessment tool and a learning tool. Coombe (2004) supports the use of portfolio assessment as a leading alternative assessment approach. The use of portfolio as an assessment tool

benefits 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 (Tunku Mohani Tunku Mohani, 2010 & Knight, 1992). Azam & Iqbal (2006), in their study, reported the dual role played by a portfolio: tool for assessment and tool for learning ito help teachers to better understand their teaching practices, and as a result, better monitor their student's learning. It is believed that portfolios enable students to think critically, become active, self-regulated and independent learners (Bergman, 1994). This reflects authentic student learning (Klenowski, 1998). Berry and Lewkowicz (2000) found that portfolios also encourage students to revise and improve their work and at the same time they are judged on their best performances. They propose that portfolios require reflection on student's individual performance and their improvement, encouraging continued efforts throughout their studies and reflect authentic contexts both within and outside the classrooms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is interesting to note that in Malaysia, much emphasis is given to the centralised public summative examination which focuses on students studying only for examination purposes rather than learning for the sake of exploring and gaining knowledge. The current assessment system for Malaysian schools, however, will soon change from centralised examinations, to

a combination of centralised examination, and school-based assessment as a move to improve the quality of education and also to provide greater opportunities for students in terms of assessment for learning.

Assessment is an integral aspect of teaching and learning and has always been part of the education curriculum in Malaysia. At present, centralised public examinations are still practiced in Malaysia. Such standardized examinations as UPSR (Primary School Evaluation Test), PMR (Lower Secondary Assessment), SPM (Malaysian School Certificate) and STPM (Malaysian School Higher Certificate) reveal that assessment in the Malaysian context is very much examination oriented and can result in students being passive recipients in the classroom. The centralized examinations influence teachers to narrow the curriculum by giving students previous tests and focus on examinations which naturally motivates students to prepare solely for the examinations. It should be noted, however, that the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education emphasizes "developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious". Greater emphasis, therefore, must be placed on the role of assessment to promote learning. Stiggins (2005), for example, 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. It is crucial for teachers to

provide students with continuous access to descriptive feedback which can give students an idea on how to improve the quality of their work. As a result, students will learn to generate their own descriptive feedback in their learning and take the responsibility in monitoring their own success (Stiggins, 2005). Thus, some researchers suggest that the use of portfolios will benefit and assist ESL/EFL students to monitor their own learning (Delett *et al.*, 2001; Hamp-Lyons, 1995; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Song & August, 2002).

Today, teachers no longer advocate the traditional paper and pencil approach. Instead they have started to modify and use alternative assessment to improve the teaching and learning process (Tunku Mohani Tunku Mohtar, 2010). Assessment has always been an issue in all educational institutions where one form of assessment or another is used. The question of administering the right assessment strategy to the students is of great concern. The role of assessment has been to ascertain the extent of student learning. Black and William (1998, p.7) refer to assessment as activities used by teachers and their students to assess themselves. These activities provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.

The impact of constructivism has revolutionized teachers' and experts' opinions and has brought about in depth changes in assessments (Hashemian & Azadi, 2011). In constructivist classrooms, students are given a chance to learn from

active participation and have opportunities to discover their own ideas via discussion, debate, discourse and inquiry (Anderson and Piazza, 1996; Bufkin & Bryde, 1996; Davydov, 1995; Duckworth, 1987; Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996; Gruender, 1996). Teachers play the role of a facilitator and students assume responsibility for their learning (Fosnot, 1996). In short, behaviors and skills are not the main aims of instruction; instead, the focus is on concept development, deep understanding, and construction of active learner reorganization (Brooks, 1990).

Unfortunately, traditional assessment does not evaluate this form of instruction (Anderson, 1996). In contrast, several researchers and theorists (Johnston 1989; Short & Burke, 1991; Wolf, 1990) argue that the purpose of alternative assessment is to enhance students' learning through the development of learning skills. When students receive feedback about their learning, they gain new direction and are able to progress in their learning (Anderson, 1998). Therefore, it is understood that the purpose of assessment is not to classify or rank the students. Both the teacher and student are able to share the power to make decisions about what they learn and to determine how well they are learning. Heron (1988) asserts that alternative assessment embraces a democratic decision-making process.

PORTFOLIO USE IN GENERAL

A portfolio is actually a collection of documents kept for specific purposes. It is a purposeful collection of work sample made by students over a period of time. In education, students keep a collection of their work in a folder or a file. Each piece of work is then checked and marked by the teacher. At the end of the semester or term the teacher will add up the marks obtained by each student from selected samples of work. The role of the teacher is to identify students' weaknesses, discuss their problems with them, and provide sufficient exercises for them to do to improve their performance. Portfolio assessment entails the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyse the various types of products kept in the portfolio (Tunku Mohani Tunku Mohtar, 2010).

PORTFOLIO USED SPECIFICALLY FOR ESL/EFL PURPOSES

A study conducted by Ghorrchaei *et al*. (2010), revealed that portfolio assessment empowers students' learning of English writing and emphasized the formative potential of portfolio assessment in EFL classes. The study showed that portfolio assessment affected the students' achievement in their overall writing as well as their achievement in terms of focus, elaboration, organization and vocabulary. Their findings were consistent with Elahinia's (2004) and Yurdabakan and Erdogan's (2009) findings that portfolio assessment significantly improves students' overall writing ability. The researchers also made an attempt to generate the 'portfolio culture' so that students can be engaged in process-based reflection which would allow them to perceive the value of writing portfolios in assessment. Another interesting

theme that emerged from their study was the awareness of writing. Students were able to identify their weaknesses in writing and seemed to be determined to solve their writing problems.

Chen (2006) investigated and evaluated the implementation of portfolio system at secondary English classrooms in Taiwan. The study found that students favored the portfolio system because the learning tasks were beneficial to their learning as it allowed them to examine their own learning process and thus improved learning. 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. This is in line with Belanoff (1994) as cited in Hassaskhah & Sharifi (2011), that portfolio assessment promotes participation and autonomy by allowing students to select the work on which they will be evaluated, to reflect on their work, to take control of revisions and have the opportunity to produce substantive revisions. According to Genesee & Upshur (1996), portfolios can boost students' involvement in and ownership of their own learning. Portfolios have positive effects on student learning as it allows students to take charge of their own learning and become active learners.

Interestingly, a study conducted by Nezakatgoo (2011) specifically addressing the development of EFL students' mechanics of writing in portfolio-based assessment revealed students whose work was evaluated

by a portfolio system (portfolio-based assessment) had a significant reduction in their errors in mechanics compared to those students work evaluated using the more traditional evaluation system (non portfolio-based assessment).

METHOD

Since the main objective of this study was to investigate ESL teachers' implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in ESL classrooms, the use of a qualitative research method offers greater opportunities for conducting exploratory and descriptive research as it uses the context and setting to search for a deeper understanding of what is being studied (Troudi, 1994, Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Maxwell, 1996; Silverman, 2000; Radnor, 2001). In this study, the learning context is the Malaysian secondary school ESL classroom. The study embarks on a case study which is descriptive in nature and the focus is on a natural setting which is the classroom. It is interested in meanings, perspectives and understanding by investigating the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool by the ESL teachers in Malaysian classrooms. The primary data for this study are interviews and classroom observations which are used to complement the interviews. The major research question addressed in this study was:

1. How has portfolio assessment been implemented in the teaching and learning of ESL in Malaysian classrooms?

In this study, nine ESL teachers who are familiar with portfolio assessment and were using portfolio assessment in their classrooms on a voluntary basis were the main respondents. Their unique experiences will contribute to the understanding of the essence of the phenomenon as it will reveal how teachers implement and carry out the portfolio assessment process in the classroom when conducted out of their own volition. Participants were purposefully selected through "snowball" or "chain" sampling (Patton, 1990). This approach "identifies cases of interest from people who know, that cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects" (Patton, 1990, p. 182). For this study, a snowball sampling technique was employed to choose a sample. This technique was seen most suitable because the researcher could not determine which teachers had carried out portfolio assessment as at the time of the study, portfolio assessment was not a compulsory form of assessment in Malaysian secondary school ESL classrooms. The snowball sampling technique involves asking a participant to refer the researcher to other potential participants (Merriam, 1998).

OBSERVATION

Observation seems to be one of the most appropriate techniques for getting at 'real life' in the real world. It provide an opportunity to the researchers to record, describe, analyse, interpret and investigate an ESL teacher's implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classrooms.

According to Robson (2002), observation permits the researchers to watch and listen to the interaction between the teacher and the students.

Permission from all the nine teachers was sought before the researchers entered the classroom. The teachers were observed four times due to the tight schedule of the teachers and school activities. All the teachers were also made to understand that the observation was done to discover the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool. The teachers' teaching in the classroom was deemed crucial as it would enable the researchers to discover the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool. By doing so, the researchers would be able to identify the processes involved in implementing portfolio as an assessment tool. The teachers' instructions and explanations to the students were made without any intervention by the researchers. The researchers did not provide any comments about their lessons as had been promised to them. The main intention of the study was to observe the implementation portfolio as an assessment tool by the nine ESL teachers.

Students in the classes were of mixed abilities. There were some average students who could write very well but unable to speak confidently. There were also some students who were really weak at English in spite of the teachers' attempts at conducting a variety of activities to make them speak and write in English. The teachers attributed the problem to the students' negative attitude towards learning in general

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The interview sessions was carried out with all the nine ESL teachers. The interview was carried out in the school staffroom and consisted of questions and answers pertaining to the teachers' experience in implementing portfolio as an assessment tool in their respective classrooms. The interviews with the ESL teachers were carried out twice in a month for a period of two months. The duration of the interviews was between fifteen to thirty minutes due to the teacher's workload and other commitments in the school. The aim of the interview sessions was to obtain the overall picture and experiences of teachers on the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool. As stated by many researchers, the advantage of having semi-structured interviews is that it will help the researcher to stay alert to the focus of the study and at the same time be open minded to encounter spontaneous and new ideas that will emerge during the interview sessions (Kvale, 1996; Gillham, 2000; Radnor, 2001; Silverman, 2006). Basically, the interviews in this study focused on one main area which was the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool.

FINDINGS

Responses were obtained from nine ESL teachers from two secondary schools in Perak and Selangor. The findings presented below are divided into (i) the teachers' understanding on the use of portfolio and portfolio as an assessment tool, (ii) how portfolio assessment was implemented in the classroom, and (iii) the portfolio assessment process.

i. Teachers' understanding on the use of portfolio and portfolio as an assessment tool

The teachers mentioned that they carry out the portfolio assessment once in a week in the classroom. The teachers set and prepare the assessment tasks based on the learning outcomes to be achieved. Data obtained from the teachers' interviews revealed that they started using portfolio assessment for several reasons as shown in Table 1.

Teachers disclosed that one way of attracting students to learn English was via portfolio assessment because it involved marks. So, students were determined to take part in the classroom activities as they knew marks would be awarded for each activity they answered and submitted. Each student's portfolio carries 20% based on the following: (personal, 2%), (academic, 2%), (assessment/worksheets, 14%) and (appendix, 2%).

Each teacher teaches five periods of English language which consists of 40 minutes each. Each week the teachers would distribute 2-3 assessment tasks to the students. The assessment task with the highest marks will be compiled into the student's portfolio for grading purposes while the assessment tasks with fewer marks will be compiled in the assessment section in the student's portfolio. The students' portfolios are kept by the teachers in the staffroom and are evaluated by the teachers at the end of the week to record each

TABLE 1
Reasons for using Portfolios assessment

Teachers	Portfolios
Teacher A	help students to score high marks for year-end examination, create interest to learn English Literature
Teacher B	facilitate students' in writing & sentence construction
Teacher C	help weak learners
Teacher D	improve students' speaking
Teacher E	improve students' communication skills
Teacher F	exposed students to more activities and not just text books
Teacher G	to get familiarized with the school-based assessment
Teacher H	to get familiarized with the school-based assessment
Teacher I	to get familiarized with the school-based assessment

student's progress. The learning outcomes of each lesson were identified to ensure that the assessment tasks were carefully designed. Teachers used the assessment tasks to evaluate student performance at the end of lesson.

Next, the teachers would distribute student self-assessment forms to enable the teachers to know what the students had learned and problems they faced in doing the tasks. From here, the teachers were able to identify problems students faced while doing the tasks. Finally, the teachers would ask the students to write their reflection about the lessons at the end of the week. The students' self-reflection informed teachers about problems students faced in learning. Teachers would then improve their teaching based on the students' reflection.

All the nine ESL teachers agreed that implementing portfolio as an assessment tool would not be successful without having an understanding of what portfolio is all about. The teachers mentioned that a portfolio is merely collecting of materials, information or just notes on topics studied but portfolio

assessment requires a procedure in which students will be assessed on what they have discussed and learnt in the classroom.

The teachers disclosed that after each lesson, they would distribute extra worksheets to their students to test their understanding on the topic which they have taught. Each worksheet answered by the student would be assessed and checked to see if the students had answered them correctly. The teachers were interested in knowing how the students answered the questions and from here, marks would be awarded. Grading is an essential element of portfolio assessment as it records students' progress and achievement over a period of time as mentioned by the teachers below:

['Yes, I grade the students at the end of each lesson to see if I have achieved the learning outcome', teacher C]

['I assessed students' understanding on what they have learnt', teacher F]

['Yes, I assessed students by giving extra exercise based on what I have taught', teacher G]

With grading the teachers were able to track students' development in learning. The teachers felt that they could understand the students' strengths and weaknesses in learning a particular topic or lesson of the day.

Apart from this, the teachers pointed out that it was crucial to explain to students specifically about the contents of a portfolio before they could proceed to the specific segments of the portfolio. At the beginning, all the teachers faced some difficulties in explaining about portfolio to their students. The teachers solved this problem by giving the students some examples of portfolios and also some guidance. It was found that a clear set of instructions given by the teachers to the students facilitated students' understanding of portfolios.

Another key element of portfolio assessment the teachers shared was about collecting evidence of their learning. The teachers explained to students that there was a need to collect evidence of learning in their files which would indicate and support their understanding and mastery of a topic. Some students are very apprehensive, nervous and afraid to approach the teachers to share about the problems they encounter in learning or even understanding a topic in the class.

In order to solve this problem, the teachers prepared a self-evaluation form for each student to fill in to indicate what they have learnt, whether they understood what they have learnt and how they have learnt it. Teacher A, C and E shared that by using portfolio as an assessment tool for

their students; they could improve their own teaching to bring about effective results in student's learning in the classroom as shown in the examples :

['to do something different for students & to motivate students to have more interest to learn English', teacher A]

['My students are very weak. I want to help them. So portfolio assessment will enable me to see progress students make in English', teacher C]

['to improve my own teaching', teacher E]

As Slavin (2003), reiterates, "learners must individually discover and transform complex information if they are to make it their own, a more active role for students in their own learning than typical in many classrooms" (Slavin, 2003, p. 257-258). The function of teachers in this view is to construct a learning environment that provides opportunities for an analysis of learning. They are now known as facilitators rather than teachers who serve as a mediator to facilitate learning, as well as group and peer discussion among students.

Fundamentally, the teachers concurred that purpose is another key ingredient in developing a portfolio for assessment. In other words, the portfolio as an assessment tool is developed for the student to demonstrate and provide evidence that he or she has mastered a given set of learning objectives. The assessment purpose for the portfolio is developed via the learning outcomes based on the syllabus. In other

words, the learning outcomes of each lesson were identified to ensure that assessment purposes were appropriately constructed.

Another essential aspect that the teachers shared with the students was the self-reflection which contained statements accompanying how students feel about the lesson which took place in the classroom. The teachers conceded that the self-reflection produced by the students was another dominant evidence demonstrating student mastery of learning in the classroom. Through self-reflection, all the teachers were able to improve their approach to instruction to cater to student needs in the classroom. The teachers were able to make some changes to their teaching approach based on information from the self-reflection. The teachers admitted that they had to make their teaching interesting from time to time to attract students' attention in the classroom. The teachers would also decide how to help students who have problems in learning once they received feedback from students' self-evaluation and self-reflection.

ii. How portfolio assessment was implemented in the classroom.

The classroom observation allowed the researchers to record the portfolio assessment process and its implementation in the class. Basically we have summarized what the teachers did in the classroom during the portfolio assessment process. First, the teachers provided constructive feedback to students after reading their self-reflection in the following class. They spent some time with students explaining thoroughly on ways students can improve learning based on the topics the teachers had taught.

Students were given many opportunities to speak and share their ideas about the assessment activities the teachers gave them in the classroom. The teachers returned the portfolios to the students and asked the students to check the documents compiled and insert their self-reflection into the portfolio. Students started discussing with their friends and showing their portfolios to one another.

The teachers began their lesson by teaching and after teaching, the teachers distributed the assessment activities to the students. All the students knew that they have to answer the activities independently without having a discussion with their friends. The teachers collected the assessment activities from the students and kept them on the table. The teachers distributed self-assessment forms to students after completing the assessment activities. The students filled in the forms meticulously to inform their teachers about the learning outcomes they have understood. Some students raised their hands and asked the teachers' for assistance. The students submitted the self-assessment forms to their teachers. Then, the teachers reminded the students about the next lesson and the materials they were supposed to bring in class for discussion and compilation in the portfolios. The students returned the portfolios to their teachers.

A pattern that emerged among all the nine teachers when they started teaching in

the classroom refers to the distribution of worksheets by the teachers to their students after teaching the lesson. All the teachers distributed worksheets after they finished teaching and instructed students to answer them in order to test their mastery of the topics taught. The teachers brought their portfolios together when they stepped into the class. The portfolios were then given to the students and collected by the teachers after the lesson to evaluate and record each student's progress.

Before the teachers started the lesson, they provided feedback to students based on the self-reflection which they had read. There were so many questions posed by the students for example, some students were absent and they could not do the worksheets and some students did not compile materials required by the teachers. These students were asked to collect the worksheets from the teachers after the lesson and were reminded to compile materials to get marks.

After answering the worksheets, the students filled in the self-assessment form to enable the teachers to know if students understood the lesson taught. Then, the teachers reminded students to submit their self-reflection the following week. The teachers evaluated the worksheets completed by the students and provided feedback to help students improve their work. The students' work was then returned and kept by the students in their files. Table 2 is a summary of how the nine teachers conducted their lessons based on the researchers' observations.

Despite the generally similar manner in implementing portfolio assessment, the classroom observation data revealed that all the nine teachers conducted their lessons in a different manner as they used their own creativity to start and end the lesson. This may imply that the teachers were actively evaluating how best to implement portfolio assessment in their classrooms.

Overall, the researchers were able to observe how teachers implemented portfolio as an assessment tool via worksheets given to the students, student's self-assessment and self-reflection. The portfolio assessment is an on-going assessment which the teachers use to track progress students make in learning. From the observations made, it was found that teachers awarded marks based on what students have scored in their record books. The teachers identified 14 worksheets for students to complete. For each task a student completed, the teacher awarded one mark and for students who did not accomplish the assessment activity, a reminder was given for them to complete the task. The teachers distributed a lot of worksheets to the students to help them master the topic/skill taught for the specific week. Students were involved in group discussions, role-plays, and dramatizing act in the classrooms. Students showed interest in learning English as they participated enthusiastically in all the classroom activities. This was the teachers' strategy to make students involved in group discussions and provide opportunities to speak and answer the assessment activities as the students were aware marks would be awarded if they participate.

TABLE 2
Summary of how the nine teachers conducted their lessons based on the researchers' observations

Teacher	Lessons
Teacher A	Did some explanation about the topic & had two-way communication with her students. After teaching she distributed worksheets to her students. Did not do self-assessment with her students. She reminded the students to write self-reflection.
Teacher B	Used questioning technique, mind-mapping & power-point slides to conduct her lesson. She distributed worksheets to the students. Students filled in self-assessment form. She asked her students to submit self-reflection. Students did peer-assessment and were guided by the teacher.
Teacher C	She read the text aloud followed by the students. The teacher did the activity together with the students. Teacher gave self-assessment form to students.
Teacher D	She drew some pictures before she started teaching.
Teacher E	The students put up an acting and the whole class guessed what the lesson was all about. Then, the teacher started with her explanation about the lesson. The teacher asked students to present. The students worked in groups of four. The teacher distributed worksheets to the students. The teacher distributed self-assessment form to students. She reminded the students to write self-reflection.
Teacher F	Did not do any explanation. She distributed some notes to the students. The students read. The students were asked to get into groups of four. They discussed and the teacher gave out the self-assessment form to the students. She reminded students to write self-reflection.
Teacher G	She taught her class by giving some explanation. Then, worksheets were distributed. Students copied learning outcomes from the board and the teacher asked students if they had understood what she taught.
Teacher H	She taught her class by giving some explanation. Then, worksheets were distributed. Students copied learning outcomes from the board and the teacher asked students if they had understood what she taught.
Teacher I	She taught her class by giving some explanation. Then, worksheets were distributed. Students copied learning outcomes from the board and the teacher asked students if they had understood what she taught. Did not do self-reflection with the students.

iii. Portfolio Assessment Process and its Implementation

Based on the observation and interview data, five major stages in implementing portfolio assessment in the classroom can be identified as follows:

1. Assessment purpose
2. Collection of evidence
3. Evaluation of evidence
4. Reflection on learning
5. Assessment decision

Assessment purpose- All the nine teachers agreed that they were involved in deciding the assessment purpose before they could start implementing portfolio assessment for their students. The assessment purpose is developed based on the learning outcomes in the syllabus as shared by the teachers below:

['Yes, I follow the syllabus and learning outcomes', teacher C.]

['Must be based on the syllabus and learning outcomes', teacher E]

The teachers discovered that there were many weak students and to improve their learning in English, the teachers prepared worksheets to monitor students' progress in learning. The teachers scrutinized student's learning in English by recording marks obtained in each worksheet. Furthermore, the teachers noticed that good students who were good at writing were not able to speak confidently because they were too dependent on their teachers for translation and lacked the confidence to share their thoughts in the classroom. All the nine teachers prepared the types of assessment task or activity based on the learning outcomes to be achieved and the scoring criteria as shown in the samples below:

['I designed the assessment purpose based on the syllabus and learning outcomes. Next, I prepare worksheets based on the lesson that I'm teaching', Teacher A]

['The syllabus and the learning outcomes and from here I can come out with the assessment purpose', Teacher I]

In short, the teachers designed the activities or tests that would be used to evaluate student learning based on the assessment purpose and syllabus learning outcomes.

Collection of evidence- The teachers reported that there was a need to collect evidence to monitor students' progress and achievement in learning. Teachers allowed students to contribute some materials and through this manner they get to hear students exchange ideas verbally with one another

and identify students' needs and problems in learning so that they can modify their teaching styles to make learning more meaningful and interesting.

In a similar vein, portfolios orient the students to produce various types of more authentic work and urge them to be more creative; also portfolio assessment gives the learners more freedom and contributes to development and improvement of their higher order thinking skills and meta-cognitive strategies Erdogan (2011).

The teachers distributed extra activities to the students which they have to compile in their portfolios. The students were allowed to choose the best work with the highest marks which display their ability in a certain topic. Next, the activities had to be evaluated by the students and students had to write in their self-reflection to indicate how much learning has taken place and the problems they encountered while doing the activity. Students were required to collect and compile other activities which reported on their development in learning from time to time.

At the same time, the teachers permitted students to compile notes or other related information for the specific lesson of the day. This revealed that the students were also given an opportunity to be involved in the decision making specifically in collecting materials from the internet, magazines and other sources to make learning more meaningful. Homework was also considered as a part of collecting evidence for the portfolio as one of the teachers had taught writing found that her students took longer time to write.

So, the students were allowed to take the writing back as homework and they had to submit their work the following day. As a result, the teacher started giving personal attention and more feedback to students who had difficulties in grammar, constructing sentences and writing the introduction of an essay to improve their marks. The positive results obtained in this study agree with the results of many researchers (Alabdelwahab, 2002; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 1999; Spencer, 1999; Tiwari, 2003; Slater *et al.*, 1997; Liu, 2003; Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Calfee & Perfumo, 1993; Korkmaz & Kaptan, 2002; Morgil et al, 2004; Deveci *et al.*, 2006; Birgin, 2008; Bekir *et al.*, 2009) who reported that portfolio assessment improves students' motivation in learning, self-respect and responsibility towards learning. Based on the teachers' feedback and interviews, the researchers were able to come up with the contents of portfolio for collection of evidence. There were four main sections in a student's portfolio: personal, academic, assessment/worksheets and appendix. Students were allowed to put in their personal information, photos and learning goals in the personal section. As for the academic, students included samples of best worksheets with the highest marks collected to show their progress in learning. In the assessment/worksheets section, students compiled the self-assessment and self-reflection forms. For the appendix, students brought together their homework, notes, internet resources, newspaper cuttings and additional collection of materials.

Evaluation of evidence- The portfolio provides criteria for the identification of student achievement in learning which will improve the teaching and assessment process for the teachers. The teachers will interpret each student's ability based on the marks given for each activity in the portfolio, students' individual performance, and also their personal contribution in terms of delivering and sharing of ideas during discussion in the classroom. The evaluation form provides some valuable information in terms of how students learn in the classroom.

Teachers revealed that students' involvement in self-assessment provided an opportunity for students to evaluate their own learning process, identify their own weaknesses and strengths and inform teachers so that they could design their teaching based on students' needs and then match instruction to needs and assessment to instruction. This is in line with Karababa and Suzer (2010) who believe that the portfolio is to illustrate and report student personal language learning strategies, which enables the development of the student's of self-control and self-actualization in the whole learning process.

Reflection on learning- All the teachers did self-reflection with their students except for [teacher I] who did not carry out the self-reflection with her students due to time constraint and students' inability to write well in English.

Student's self-reflection help teachers understand and observe their problems

in learning. The teachers concurred that the majority of their students were able to express their difficulties in learning English and agreed that portfolio assessment had motivated them, made them more responsible and had made them more confident. The teachers, however shared that students reflected that they still needed teacher's assistance in explaining and giving more information about topics that they have learnt in the classroom.

The teachers admitted that they realized that the examination-oriented system had placed great emphasis on students being so dependent on teachers and students focus purely on how to answer exam questions and pay less attention on daily lessons. Therefore, teachers felt there is need for students to reflect on the lesson taught and also the activities given so that teachers can identify student strengths and weaknesses and provide some necessary feedback to overcome their problems in learning. This sentiment is displayed in the comments below:

> ['They do the reflection and peer-evaluation to see their strengths and weaknesses', teacher D]

> ['Students share what they know and what they don't know while learning English', teacher H]

Reflection is reckoned as an important element in the use of portfolio, 'with reflection, the portfolio can become an episode of learning; without reflection, the portfolio may be little more than an exercise in amassing papers' (Wolf & Dietz, 1998, p. 14). Portfolios must exhibit some features to be considered as a good example of alternative assessment (Khodadady & Khodabakshzade, 2012). Students' reflection is one of those features which have been highlighted (Lynch & Shaw, 2005). Moreover, teachers felt that they have to provide constructive feedback to students based on their reflection so that students can be engaged in the assessment process. Khodadady & Khodabakshzade (2012) assert that making students conscious and reflective about their learning is a complicated task which should be made more practicable by means of a criterion-referenced and a pre-determined organized self-assessment plan.

Assessment decision- Teachers disclosed that they were able to make decisions about students' learning based on the self-evaluation, self-reflection and feedback obtained from the students. The teachers reported that students have to participate actively during the portfolio assessment process in order to assess student performance but the teacher is the key to the successful use of such a strategy.

Portfolio assessment transforms the role of teacher away from generating comparative rankings of achievement and toward improving student achievement via evaluation, self-evaluation and feedback (Tabatabaei, 2012). Teachers were able to make decisions not only about the assessment of their students but they were able to improve their teaching. The assessment assists teachers to evaluate their own teaching and help them with

instructional decisions. Similarly, the assessment activities provided by the teachers for students allow them to be engaged in evaluating their own learning, and help them reflect on and understand their own strengths and needs. These benefits are mentioned by the teachers:

> ['Students want to improve their writing, sentence construction, vocabulary, grammar. I am able to see the improvement now, with portfolio I have created interest in students to write', teacher B]

> ['Students are able to give feedback about what they prefer to learn and I do this by giving them extra activities, students are free to express their opinions and ican improve my own teaching'. Teacher F]

> ['I give activities to students and they are assessed based on the bands, this is the latest assessment, school-based assessment', teacher G]

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the current study, portfolio as an assessment tool and its implementation in ESL classrooms assisted and offered ESL teachers some invigorating experiences in assessing their students' learning. The teachers in the study are able to utilize portfolio assessment to scrutinize student progress in learning and use the information for decision making regarding future instruction. The portfolio assessment technique enabled the teachers to identify students' weaknesses, discuss their learning problems with them, and provide adequate exercises and activities exercise for them to improve their performance. The teachers also demonstrated a generally common procedure in implementing portfolio assessment which consisted of several major stages as described earlier.

In sum, the findings of this study 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. More importantly, it shows that teachers can adapt sufficiently well to new assessment techniques in order to implement portfolio assessment successfully through appropriate planning and preparation. Additionally, the study indicates that the portfolio has the potential to increase teacher professionalism through continuous and meaningful collaboration in student assessment.

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