



The Impact of using Writing Portfolio in Developing EFL Students Writing Skills: A Case study of the First Year Students at Tabuk University- Faculty of Shariaa and Law

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Abstract— *This study aimed to analyze the inclusion of physical writing portfolios among developing EFL learners writing skills and follow its impact. The study raised the following questions: To what extent does the portfolio help students of Shariaa and Law at Tabuk University develop their writing skills and encourage academic progress? Is this progress evident within their writing? Is the portfolio design easy and clear to follow? Does the content of the portfolio match the students' needs to develop their writing skills? Does teacher feedback help students regarding skills development? Providing answers to these questions by examining the results of the targeted audience, this study demystifies the degree of portfolio effectiveness and its relationship with how developing learners focus their skills at the foundation program for Shariaa and Law students at Tabuk university. The study revealed that keeping a consistently updated writing portfolio has a great impact on the progress of EFL students' writing skills. Moreover, the content, design, writing stages, and feedback given to students, complete with pre-writing vocabulary exercises, plays a vital role in clarifying writing assignments to students and offers them an effective solution to become more engaged with their own self-improvement. The study also concluded that face-to-face interaction between students and their instructor proves to be vital towards improving guidance strategy, benefitting both parties as this method allows instructors to exchange information more acutely regarding how each student can individually improve.*



Keywords— *assessment, criteria, feedback, portfolio, progress*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering writing skills is always challenging as it depends on developing all aspects of any particular language. Consequently, assessment of learners' writing progress can be a complex matter. A *portfolio* has been defined by the University of Hawai'i at Mandaia as "*a systematic collection of student work that represents student activities, accomplishments, and achievements over a specific period of time in one or more areas of the curriculum*". It is also defined by Miriam Webster as "*a selection of a student's work (such as papers and tests) compiled over a period of time and used for assessing performance or progress*". Based on these definitions, usage of a writing portfolio to assess students' writing skills progress is a crucial tool

during their journey of language acquisition. Writing skills and development depends on many factors, but a writing portfolio can benefit students whether or not they have previous writing experience.

Using portfolio is important for the progress of the students' writing skills. A such role is discussed in Utama's study which reflected that applications of portfolio are useful and productive to students' writing performance (Utama 2020).

All components of writing portfolio work jointly form a road map of sorts that acts to guide learners towards a specific major goal. Therefore, writing portfolios should be tailored according to the student's needs followed by a comprehensive assessment and guidance. In his book *Writing Skills Assessment*, states that "There can be little

doubt that a carefully designed writing portfolio is a reliable and valid assessment of writing skill. Moreover, such a portfolio should have a positive impact on the curriculum". This statement puts emphasis on the importance of designing portfolios that keeps in mind the fact that teachers depend on them for reliable assessment. The goal from the outset should be to build up tools for language progression and provide tools for assessment simultaneously.

In term of content, one must bear in mind that the content of the writing portfolio is an important tool that paves the way for goal creation and follow through, structured with linguistic stepping stones to support goal accomplishment.

Students who attend the University's foundation program who are majoring in English language studies, may find it necessary to exert extra effort on language acquisition. Contrary to that, any non-English majors will comparatively find English fluency a challenge in addition to their major emphasis. They may feel *forced* to deal with an English language course as part of their foundation mandatory courses, interpreting the class as an additional burden rather than an opportunity. Hence, assigning extra tasks to the regular curriculum is a challenge for students and teachers alike. Success in this challenge requires a different approach that will attract interest and result in productivity. The ultimate goal is one that encourages students to become more involved in the process of language learning, with the hopes that interest will produce and effort that reflects in their work.

This study aims at measuring the effectiveness of using writing portfolios in developing student writing skills during the preparatory year at Tabuk University, faculty of Shariaa and Law. The study sought to find answers to the following questions:

- To what extent does the portfolio help the Shariaa and Law students at Tabuk University develop their writing skills?
- Is the portfolio design easy and clear enough to follow? Does this reflect in the stages of writing progress?
- Does the content of the portfolio address the students' needs to develop their writing skills?
- Does teacher feedback impact student awareness regarding the skills students need to develop the most?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable number of studies have been conducted on the subject of developing language learners' writing skills. In addressing this issue, it became necessary to focus on how writing skills develop in both physical and electronic

versions of writing portfolios. However, the majority of those studies focused on electronic versions. Other studies relating to this category were conducted to measure students' attitude towards using portfolios and their impact on writing skills development such as the study of Abbas et. al (2021). This study measured the effects of using a portfolio in developing writing skills amongst Iranian upper- intermediate and advanced level EFL learners with the implementation of an additional research questionnaire. They concluded that using a portfolio as an assessment tool not only helps to develop writing skills; portfolios also boost students' self-confidence and act as a motivational factor. They also reflected the positive role of instructor feedback as it relates to fostering language acquisition through writing. Another study pertaining to this issue, by Huong and Minh (2018), was conducted on second-year students at Hanoi Law University thorough both experimental and control groups. Their post-test revealed that students using portfolios to develop their skills obtained higher scores than those that didn't and it has a positive effect of the developing their writing performance. In their study "The Impact of Portfolios on Enhancing Writing Skills in ESL Classes", conducted on 52 Turkish students, Serpi Uçara and Yeliz Yazıcı concluded that using a portfolio has an overall positive effect on students' writing skills development. In addition, Serpi Uçara and Yeliz Yazıcı showed the implications of using writing portfolios for teachers themselves. They concluded teachers gain much in terms of professional experience when evaluating and actively promoting their students' writing performance.

Another study conducted by Kalra et.al.(2017) used pre-testing and post-testing methods to measure the effectiveness of portfolio usage on writing skill development for Thai undergraduates. In their study, they concluded that using portfolios can serve as an effective tool for ESL teachers when comparing the scores students earned before and after implementation of classroom writing portfolios.

A study conducted by Taib et.al (2024) investigating writing difficulties and writing stages faced by 267 participants concluded that there is a strong positive correlation between pre- writing tasks and writing stages.

The most important aspect in writing portfolio is giving feedback to learners. A study was conducted by Wulandari (2020) focusing on giving feedback to students on their writing tasks to improve their writing capabilities. In this study, the focus was on receiving effective feedback from instructors and how this can help learners judge the level of improvement they achieve and define their level of proficiency and weaknesses. a such step supports learners appreciate their work for better writing. Wulandari goes

further and puts emphasis on the importance of defining the objectives of the writing assignment, the writing approach used, and how to give balanced feedback.

III. METHOD

The researcher used the quantitative method to evaluate the effectiveness of using writing portfolios to develop writing skills amongst the Shariaa and Law students at Tabuk University.

Participants

The targeted participants of this study were first-year students enrolled in the Shariaa and Law College at the University of Tabuk. The total number of students representing their department was 99 out of 120; all of them were students who used the portfolio understudy at the Shariaa and Law College.

Instrument

An autonomous questionnaire was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of using the portfolio in developing the students' writing skills. The questionnaire covered all aspects of the portfolio, addressing all levels of student learning needs and serving to assess the students' writing skills and subsequent progress.

Procedure

A link was sent to participants in their e-mails and WhatsApp group, as each group has a

Portfolio goal and structure

The major goal of the portfolio, along with other similar programs, is to assist both teachers and students in setting up long term goal creation by inculcating a sense of independence and embracing a higher level of naturalized language usage. It's a tool to achieve the target of learning outcomes as set by the Institute of Language at Tabuk University.

The portfolio under study has been designed in a way that allows the students go through specific, clear and gradual stages that help them make slow but steady progression in their writing skills. Portfolios reflect and record the process of learning experience in real time. This particular portfolio consists of 42 pages distributed between the following components:

Table of contents: Shows the students where to find all relevant components.

Components Description: Consisting of three pages, this section provides for the students a comprehensive background and sufficient explanation about writing as a process, the instructor's responsibility, and the student's reciprocal responsibility. Each of these descriptions is

explained thoroughly and clearly. Students are provided with a pre-writing vocabulary list to use in their writing tasks. In the first section, a selection of vocabulary words is chosen and assigned for which students are requested to transcribe the written definitions as well as indicate which parts of speech they can be classified under (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). Next, three writing tasks are assigned to acclimate students towards writing goals. Each task has three preparatory stages: brainstorming, outlining, and drafting (first and final drafts). Students receive a face-to-face feedback session from their instructor for each task to help them perform better with each progressive step. A page is provided at the end of each writing task for each student to self-evaluate their own progress based upon how well they meet the rubric qualifications as well as their instructor's evaluation, which is based on the module's writing requirements.

Nature of tasks

Students are requested to write three separate topics of their choice. They are given five school days to complete the four stages of each task.

Research question 1: The purpose of the portfolio was clear to me from the beginning.

Overall, about one third of the students' responses (33.3%) shows that they are neutral on whether or not they had clarity regarding the portfolio's purpose, while 20% agreed they had clarity and 23.7% strongly agreed. The remainder of responses either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Research question 2: I used the vocabulary provided in the first part of the portfolio in writing the topic.

The majority of the students (40.4%) agreed that they used the vocabulary provided to them in the first part of the portfolio. 25.3% responded that they strongly agreed, 20.3% responded they were neutral on the subject, while the remaining 9% did not agree to this statement.

Research question 3: The steps for writing the topic were clear.

Regarding the steps to be followed in writing the portfolio, 23.2% of the respondents strongly agreed to having clarity, 27.3% agreed, and 20.2% were neutral on having clarity while 23.2% strongly disagreed they had clarity regarding the steps and 6.1% strongly disagreed they had any clarity.

Research question 4: The time allotted to complete the written assignments for each topic was sufficient.

29.3% of respondents replying to this question strongly agreed they had enough time and 27.3% agreed that the time given to them to complete writing tasks was sufficient. The rest of the responses varied between 16.2% (neutral), 13.1% (strongly disagreed) and 13.1% disagreed.

Research question 5: The feedback I received from my instructor regarding my first draft writing was clear and objective.

Over half of the respondents (50.5%) strongly agreed that the feedback was objective and clear, 30.3% agreed, and 13.1% were neutral. Only a small minority disagreed (2%) or strongly disagreed (4.4%) over feedback objectivity and clarity.

Research question 6: I followed my instructor's feedback and instruction to better write the final draft.

The majority of respondents revealed instructor feedback had a positive effect on the final draft. 46.2% of the students agreed it helped whereas 34.4% strongly agreed that their instructor's feedback on the first draft helped them improve their performance in writing the final draft. 11.8 were neutral on feedback leading to draft improvement and 7.5% disagreed while no one strongly disagreed.

Research question 7: I used machine translation in writing the first and the final drafts to translate some phrases.

The majority of the respondents used machine translation to assist them in writing their first and final drafts. 34.3% strongly agreed and 33.3 agreed whereas 20.2% were neutral on machine translation and 19.1% disagreed they used machine translation to assist with their final draft and 3% strongly disagreed to using machine translation at all.

Research question 8: The portfolio was helpful to me in developing my writing skills.

In regards to what extent students felt they benefited overall from their portfolio in terms of developing their writing skills, over half the respondents viewed them positively. 22.2% strongly agreed it helped and 31.3 % reported it helped them develop their writing skills, 23.2% felt neutral, and a minority responded negatively. 14.1% disagreed, and 9.1% strongly disagreed.

Research question 9: This question addressed the linguistic problems that the participants encountered while writing their first and the final draft. The question stated:

The linguistic problems I encountered while writing the topic are:

- a. Writing correctly in terms of grammar
- b. Sentence structure in terms of the correct order of words
- c. Choosing vocabulary relevant to the topic
- d. How to write the topic in a sequential manner
- e. Linking ideas together

For the purpose of clarity and to help the participants understand exactly what the researcher was asking about, the researcher avoided using linguistic terminology (syntax,

semantics, cohesion, coherence) as the participants have no background on those terms.

The greatest challenge that the participants faced with linguistic problems encountered in their portfolio was writing grammatically correct sentences (23.3%), while 19.2% reported problems related to syntax, vocabulary and cohesion and 13.1% had a problem in writing coherently.

Research question 10: My teacher helped me choose the words related to the topic.

Nearly half of the participants (47.8%) strongly agreed that they received help from their instructor in choosing suitable vocabulary related to the topic, 33.7 % agreed, and 15.2% were neutral about how much help from the instructor impacted their word choice and only 3.3% strongly disagreed.

Research question 11: I recommend continuing to use the same portfolio design and content in the future.

A minority of students recommended keeping the design. 15.2% strongly agreed and 12.1% agreed whereas 29.3 were neutral on the design. 14.1% disagreed on keeping the same design and 29.3% strongly disagreed to recommending the design.

Research question 12: The criteria used to evaluate my writing were clear and address my needs

33.3% of the respondents agreed that the criteria used to evaluate their writing was clear and addresses their needs, 29% strongly agreed, 20.4% were neutral, 8.6% disagreed and the same number strongly disagreed, respectively.

Discussion and implications

This study targeted the students of the Faculty of Shariaa and Law at Tabuk University which aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using portfolios to develop student's writing skills by conducting a questionnaire- based survey.

Form the analysis of the responses obtained from the questionnaire, it is clear that using portfolio for developing students' writing skills supported by criteria used for evaluating the student's progress is of a tangible usefulness and positivity on the students' writing skills progress. The findings of this study are in agreement with the study of Utama (2020) whose study proved that using portfolio is important as it contributes to student's writing skills capacity development.

The first question revealed that about one-third of the participants felt neutral about understanding the direct goal of the portfolio, which draws attention to the most crucial issue of the portfolio understudy and its goal orientation. Clarifying this goal to students, especially for those who do not intend to use English in their future university courses, centers on encouragement and fostering enthusiasm about

what they can achieve through portfolio writing. According to Acacia University in Arizona website, <https://www.acacia.edu/blog> setting clear goals accomplishes many categories of personal growth all at the same time. Setting goals improves the ability to focus, gives students direction, enhances learners' motivation, prepares learners on time management, and urges self-discipline and accountability. The rest of the responses, more than 50% in total agreed or strongly agreed that the goal of the portfolio was indeed clear, which indicates the content explained this main goal in a sufficient manner.

To enable the students of Shariaa and Law at the University of Tabuk to write about the topics of their choice, the first part of the portfolio provided the students with 230 words including nouns, verbs, adjectives, linking words and adverbs. The results for the second question prove that most of the students (40.4%) used the vocabulary provided to them. Such a benefit and positive use is reflected in the students' writing performance and puts emphasis on the necessity of building up vocabulary competency by targeting the most relevant vocabulary words necessary for their skill level. A percentage of 25.3% strongly agreed that they benefitted from vocabulary lists and this reflects in their work when students are able to convey their ideas more lucidly and effectively.

The results for the third question revealed that the students strongly agreed and agreed (27.3% and 23.2% respectively) that the stages of writing the topic were clear to them. Although those stages are clear for each task: brainstorming, outlining, first draft and final draft, the researcher found that one-fifth of participants responded to this issue of having clarity as being neutral and 23.2% disagreeing they had clarity. These percentages reflected that clarity on the stages of writing will definitely contribute to the students' writing quality as lack of clarity results in less consistency and unity throughout their work. Hence, instructors should directly and clearly explain the stages to students in class rather than only depending on the stages written at the top of each stage.

The fourth question centered on the time allotted to complete writing tasks. Responses were varied. Overall, 56.6% found that the time given to them to finish each task was sufficient, 16.2% were neutral and 27.2% disagreed they had sufficient time. The time allotment for each writing task is 5 school days. Finishing the task during the specified period depends on the student's language ability, familiarity with their chosen topic, and students' commitment level to their academic responsibilities. The data reveals that dealing with a multilevel class may require reconsideration of the time allotment given to the entire class to accommodate lower level students.

Giving feedback to students about their writing in terms of quality and quantity is a crucial process that reflects their performance. Over half (50.5%) of students responded they strongly agreed that feedback was clear and objective. This is an overwhelmingly positive response! Giving students feedback about their first draft allows them to review their strengths and weaknesses in order to build upon their first attempt with an improved final draft. The instructor's feedback goes beyond correcting the students grammatical, syntactical, or semantic errors but it extends to giving advice and a general plan on how to construct the best possible final draft based upon the current work the student has achieved by that time. Therefore, instructor's feedback should be both summative and formative.

Instructors provide students with a summative feedback on their performance in the first stage "draft" along with formative feedback to help them better their performance in the last stage "final draft". An overwhelming majority (80.6%) answered in response to question six that they strongly agreed or agreed that instructor's feedback led to a better final draft after following through on the advice session. This number signifies a direct correlation and drastic perception of improvement in the final draft as being linked with one-on-one feedback with their instructor.

Responses to question seven, which related to the use of machine translation for limited phrases, prove to be more troubling regarding effectiveness and goal orientation. 67.6% of respondents reported that they strongly agreed or agreed to the usage of machine translation in their work. The major impact of using machine translation is that it affects authentic, genuine self-improvement in writing and hinders the instructor from giving evaluation based upon current skill level. Is the instructor giving feedback that will be understood if the student doesn't understand the original translation? The impact and effectiveness of feedback for continuing writing tasks is therefore lessened. Students responding with "neutral", "disagree" or "strongly disagree" might have used machine translation for specific words rather than phrases. These students depended on machine translation far less than their counterparts.

Question eight tackled the major issue of whether or not students benefited from the portfolio in developing their writing skills. More than half of the students' responses were positive while one-quarter of them are neutral and the rest responded negatively. Referring back to the questions that play a vital role in the students' writing progress regarding writing steps and the instructor's feedback, it was found that the responses to those two questions mirror a more positive outlook compared to the percentage of the negative responses regarding overall benefit from portfolio usage. This data reflected the students' authentic feedback

and the need to reconsider key issues relating to the portfolio by the instructors and assessment unit.

For the ninth question the students were asked to define the linguistic problem they encountered. Identical percentages were reported concerning problems with syntax, vocabulary, and coherence problems while the greater percentage reported their main dilemma lay with grammatical errors. These linguistic obstacles represent where students face the most difficult. These are the challenges that can potentially hinder them from developing their writing skills the most, which therefore puts the portfolio at risk of its goals going unfulfilled. The ultimate goal of the portfolio is to encourage and develop syntactic skill, vocabulary building, and conceptualizing how ideas should be placed in sequence to express ideas. Ideally, every student should have a well-built topic that can reflect their real time progress. Understanding the highest rated challenges allows instructors to combat these problems, thus helping students to avoid poor writing and increase the effectiveness of the portfolio as a writing tool.

Providing the students with the vocabulary that addresses their language acquisition level increases productivity and enables expression of perspective. Answers for the tenth question show more than 80% of students found their instructor helped them considerably when it came to selecting suitable words related to their topics. This form of educational guidance builds student confidence and willingness to participate. An important aspect of brainstorming and idea formation is to use these tools as stepping stones towards broader linguistic expression. Those who are neutral or who disagree about how helpful their instructor was in helping them with key words may have personal reasons that kept them from seeking further help when they needed it during the initial writing planning stage. Regardless of the reasons that made those students neutral or disagree, it is important to make sure that all the students get equal treatment and that they receive follow-up from their instructor. The students who do not ask for help directly are more likely to have introverted personalities, and as a result are less likely to become as involved in the writing process without their instructor asking them direct questions about their writing process. Addressing student lack of interest or unwillingness to participate are always challenges for any instructor. The majority of students are far better off for this guided interaction with the instructor.

On the matter of portfolio design, only a minority of students recommended keeping the current model. A greater number of students had reservations about this specific issue. This is important to note for future coursework. One-third of respondents do not recommend reusing the portfolio with its current design and structure

Another one-third remained neutral, indicating a pronounced lack of enthusiasm for portfolio design. This feedback should be deeply considered when it comes to asking how future designs for portfolio structure can be improved, and investigating alternate design strategies to better convey course content.

The last question posed addressed if the course criteria for writing performance were clarified and understood, and whether those criteria adequately addressed student needs. In an article published by Amanda Leary (2025), designing criteria is of a great value for better evaluation and goal achievement. She stated that *“As you’re developing your criteria, you may find it helpful to prioritize your higher-order and lower-order concerns. Higher-order concerns will be more closely aligned with your goals for the assignment”*. More than half of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that the criteria was clear, direct, and constructive. The other half of the participants were divided between neutral responses, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that the criteria were clear and easily understood or that the criteria met their needs. From the researcher’s point of view, revisiting the criteria to review how it assists student performance would be recommended, as well as reviewing how instructors relate the criteria to students clearly and in a detailed manner. The higher the clarity regarding criteria, the more reliable the students will see this information reflecting their needs. If students do not feel the criteria were clear or met their needs, steps should be taken to mitigate lack of clarity as it consequently affects writing performance and quality of work.

IV. CONCLUSION

Judging from the overall results of this study, the researcher found that clarity of goals and writing stages increase awareness about what students can expect from their portfolio experience and the writing tasks assigned to them. Awareness leads to an increase in motivation, and this can be reflected in their final drafts. Moreover, pre-writing vocabulary is crucial in helping students to build a sufficient enough vocabulary to express themselves adequately for their chosen topic. Additionally, allocating sufficient time to each task enables students to write without unnecessary stress, and again this will reflect in the quality of the final draft. Concurrently, providing students with face-to-face feedback with their instructor for key words and pinpointing linguistic challenges makes a dramatic difference towards the goal of increasing students’ performance on their first draft. These actions are interpreted with positive approval ratings and their inclusion in the program directs students in an accurate manner to develop semantic, syntactic and grammatical improvement. On the issues of writing

development and the ability to assess student progress, direct interaction between the instructor and the student is definitely required.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire

Seq.	Study questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	The purpose of the portfolio was clear to me from the beginning					
2.	I used the vocabulary provided in the first part of the portfolio in writing the topic.					
3.	The steps for writing the topic were clear.					
4.	The time allotted to complete the written assignments for each topic was sufficient.					
5.	The feedback I received from my instructor regarding my first draft writing was clear and objective.					
6.	I followed my instructor's feedback and instruction to better write the final draft.					
7.	I used machine translation in writing the first and the final drafts to translate some phrases.					
8.	The portfolio was helpful to me in developing my writing skills.					
9.	The linguistic problems I	Grammar				
		Syntax				
		Vocabulary				

	encountered while writing the topic:	Coherence					
		cohesion					
10.	My teacher helped me choose the suitable words related to the topic.						
11.	I recommend continuing to use the same portfolio design and content in the future.						
12.	The criteria used to evaluate my writing were clear and addresses my needs.						