

Portfolio as a student's assessment tool: lesson learned

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Abstract: The study examined the potential of portfolio as a tool of assessment in the process of final evaluation of students' competence. This empirical study was joined by 29 students taking English Teaching Media subject at the English Education Study Program, the University of Palangka Raya using portfolio to assess the students' activities in the aspects of presentation, exercises, mid-term test and final project. The students' performance in the portfolio was rated by using a rating scale of 1 (below the standard, emerging) to 4 (exceeds the standard, exemplary). The results revealed both the advantages and limitations of portfolio for the students' final evaluation and also the possibilities of optimization as an assessment tool for the lecturers to reflectively think about their practices.

Keywords: portfolio; assessment; student's performance

Introduction

The central purpose for assessing students' learning is to discover whether learning is taking place, where it is being obstructed, and to suggest ways in which students might be helped to attain their maximum potentials. The incompatibility of process and product in assessment and the discrepancy between the information needed derived through standardized testing make it possible to begin to explore alternative forms of student assessment techniques. One of which is portfolio assessment as an increasingly viable alternative (Wolf, 1989, in Sharifi and Hassaskhah, 2011). Portfolio as a common element in assessment is based on a collection of student work done over a period of time, as opposed to timed sit-down exams (Dysthe, 2002). This means that students' learning level can be measured not only by exam tests but also other alternative evaluation tools like portfolio (Leithner, 2011).

Thinking of assessment might lead quickly to curriculum; that is, based on the curriculum, everything of the student's products is a part to be assessed. This means that assessment is not only done at the end, but from the very beginning, through the progress, to the end. Assessment is a

contextualized, complex intellectual challenge, not fragmented and static exercises or tasks done by the students. One of the tools in assessing the student's progress is portfolio (Usadiati, 2017). Portfolio is a collection of work done by the students that may include various student activities, such as student presentations and exercises, mid-term test results, as well as final project of a course, that all reflect the students' progress and learning development (Usadiati, 2014).

The potential of portfolio cannot be denied, it shows not just only the final evaluation but also the processes and development the students have done in learning during a whole semester. This potential is worth investigated for the purpose of having fairer final evaluation.

Literature review

Definitions assigned to the concept of portfolio have been available in numerous numbers since early years. Arter and Spandel (1992, in Mogonea, 2015), states that portfolio is a purposeful collection of student works and progress of the students' efforts to demonstrate competence related to their learning objectives. Similarly, Paulsson (1991, cited by Dysthe, 2002)

holds it as a systematic collection of student work which shows effort, progress and performance. The collection must include student involvement regarding content, selection criteria and evaluation criteria and it must show student self reflection. Other proponents of process-oriented evaluation concur that traditional assessment techniques, including single timed-test, are often incongruent with current ESL classroom practices (McDonald, 2011, Sharifi and Hassaskhah, 2011, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/MDESE, 2014) that portfolio gives the place as an alternative.

As teaching has moved in the direction from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach, testing and assessment have begun to incorporate the measures that reflect the type of tasks which are more learner-centered and authentic (Birenbaum, 1996, cited in Sharifi and Hassaskhah, 2011), that a combination of formal and informal assessment techniques might be applied for monitoring student development. English and Lachlan-Hachè (2016) promote portfolios to review students' improvement in their learning process to to display creative, critical thinking and problem solving skill that cannot be captured by other assessment techniques.

The main concern in assessment is the progress and development of student's learning, which can be described and monitored (Usadiati, 2017). For monitoring student development, any single score almost always fails to accurately report student overall progress. A single measure seems incapable of estimating the diversity of skills, knowledge, processes, and strategies to determine student progress, which might be due to strong influence of traditional and standardized testing as experienced by most Indonesian teachers (Hanifa, 2017). For the previous mentioned problems of single assessment, portfolio provides fairer assessment alternative to consider both the learning product and learning process (Birgin and Baki, 2007) that the students are assessed by what they can do after learning and how they learn to posses after-learning ability or skill.

One of the various disadvantages of portfolio posted by Mogonea (2014) is the difficulties to asses portfolio objectively. For all of these, Belanoff and Dickson (1991) propose that students are allowed to participate in selecting the work which will be evaluated to reflect on their best performance; they may become better learners when they engage in what and how they are learning and evaluated. Eskici (2015), MDESE (2014), and English and Lachlan-Hachè (2016) advise to use portfolio to know students' as well as teachers' reflection, weaknesses and the strengths related to the students' learning.

Method

The descriptive empirical study was joined by 29 students taking a course of English Teaching Media at Semester 5-2017/2018 at the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Palangka Raya. A portfolio as an assessment tool was used, consisting of collection of student work toward the whole course, i.e. the students' performance in four main aspects of presentation, exercises, mid-term test and final project.

The presentation was assessed through scoring rubric by Dysthe (2002) in aspects of organization, content, and fluency in presenting the topic chosen; with the mean score as the sub final score 1. In exercises, the students were asked to summarize the 4 subtopics of the course including the aspects of suitability with the subtopic and complete/elaborated answers; and the mean score was as the sub final score 2. Midterm essay test was to know the mastery of the theories in developing a teaching media, rated as the sub final score 3. The final project asked the students to develop a teaching media for Grade VII of Junior High School students learning writing descriptive text. As the sub final score 4, the project was rated based on the suitability with the theme/topic, implementation, and size of the teaching media based on the tips from Al-Umran (2004).

The assessment criteria of each aspect in the portfolio was determined in a rating scale of 1 to 4, with 4 as the highest score, adapted and modified from Brown (2001) and Pinantoan (2013). Score 1 stated that the students were still

below the standard and needed improvement (poor, emerging), score 2 showed the students' satisfactory performance approaching the standard (developing, fair), score 3 showed students' good performance and they have met the standard (competent, good), and score 4 was for excellent performance. Percentage was computed for the students' achievement in each of the four aspects.

Results and discussion

The following table depicts the accumulation of the students' progress and development in four main aspects. Discussions of the study are based on the number and percentage in each aspect and score obtained by the students.

Table 1 Number and percentage of students in each aspect and score

Aspect	Achievement Score							
	1		2		3		4	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Presentation:								
Organization	0	0	9	31	18	62	2	7
Content	0	0	9	31	20	69	0	0
Fluency	0	0	16	55	11	38	2	7
Exercises:								
Suitability	0	0	2	7	26	90	1	3
Completeness	0	0	10	35	17	58	2	7
Midterm Test:	0	0	10	35	16	55	3	10
Final Project:								
Theme	0	0	9	31	18	62	2	7
Implementation	0	0	16	55	11	38	2	7
Size	0	0	10	35	16	55	3	10

Notes:

- 1 = below the standard, poor, emerging
- 2 = fair, developing
- 3 = good, competent
- 4 = exceed the standard, excellent, exemplary

Results of student's presentation demonstrate that regarding student's organization of presentation, 62% students scored 3. The organization of presentation has almost been appropriate for the topic and audience, i.e. grade VII Junior High School students learning writing descriptive text. Popular celebrity "Agnes Mo" was to be described to make them get more interested. The information was presented in a logical sequence from the social function, generic structure and language feature of descriptive text. For the content of presentation, their introduction was attention-getting by showing the picture of Agnes Mo in action as a judge in popular Indonesia's

Got Talent Show. The use of simple adjectives to clarify the characteristics of Agnes Mo was appropriate for the target audience learning writing descriptive text. However, in fluency only 38% out of 29 students got score 3; the presentation was mostly read, not spoken; their voice was not clear, and many pauses occurred due to low language skills and pronunciation.

Results of student's exercises show 90% of the students got score 3 in terms of suitability of the summary of the topics they have learned. The completeness of their answers in the exercises was considered good or competent, more than half (58%) scored 3.

Results of students' midterm test indicated that they have mastered well the theories of developing media; 90% got score 4. Their answers were complete and elaborated well. Results of the student's final project reveal that there were more than half (62%) of the

students got good/competent score of 3 in pointing out the theme of their final project. The appropriateness of the media for the targetted students' level has been fulfilled. The clarity of the media was rated as good (72%); the size of figures/words using font 22 was mostly visible for all targetted students sitting at the back. Clarity of voice (audibility) in the media has also been fulfilled. Appropriateness has been fulfilled in selecting the media to make the targetted students become more interested in learning that help them comprehend the materials.

From all of the above, questions still arise whether awarding a certain rate is fair enough due to the fact that rating in this study was done by only one rater. The zero percentage of score 1 in all aspects of the scoring rubric is questionable. It reveals a strong indication that the scorer was hesitant and unsure that rewarding a higher than score 1 was 'as a prize for the student's effort for writing something rather than just leaving it blank'. As pointed out by McDonald (2011), being very subjective in assessment is uncomfortable without a perfect grading key or answer sheet.

The subjective evaluation can be a scary task for the teacher who is inexperienced in scoring. To avoid this, inter-rater scoring is underscored to obtain fair judgment for final evaluation. By having multiple raters the reliability of the result can be more relied on (Djiwandono, 2008). The assessment using inter-rater reliability is often necessary for research designs where data are collected through ratings provided by and for trained and/or untrained raters with agreed rating scale. Only one teacher as a single scorer/rater might be subjective as being penurious or lenient (Usadiati, 2017), which means inconsistent in rating, hence, unreliable. As pointed out by Mogonea (2014), the absence of rating scale for evaluation in portfolio makes it difficult to assess objectively the quality of the portfolio, hence, the assessment.

Another important point proposed by Belanoff and Dickson (1991) and McDonald (2011) in preparing portfolio is agreeable, that is, to include students to participate in selecting the work and the scoring rubric. When they are also engaged in what and how they are evaluated, they may

become better learners. This is also one of the possible answers to the question posted by Hanifa (2017) that inclusion of students in preparing portfolio can be most effective to give them opportunities to review and understand what expectations from the teacher they should do. The rubric needs to identify components of portfolio and clearly define how points are awarded for each criteria/aspect in the scoring rubric. Albeit time-intensive and great efforts to prepare portfolio that make it difficult for the teacher and students to sit together, that should not hinder the use of portfolio in assessing the students' progress and development fairer.

To be more optimistic in using portfolio, several advantages can also be obtained from the study. In line with Usadiati (2017), portfolio offers indication of the overall progress to grade the students' work collected. The scoring criteria thoroughly discussed and prepared by the teacher together with the students, might prompt the hidden aspect(s) of the students' strengths or weaknesses; so that from the teachers' view, they might be ready to give the necessary steps for enrichment or remedial. Coombe et.al (2012) and Bataineh and Obeiah (2016) (in Hanifa, 2017), hold that from the students' side, this type of assessment show what points they are evaluated based on what they develop and progress. Because of this, students are acknowledged knowing any evaluation criteria beyond the letter grade that will enable them to reflect upon and make adjustments in their learning.

As also stated by Mogonea (2014), portfolio can serve as an effective tool for self-assessment and reflection on the part of the teachers as well as the students. For teachers, evaluation and adjustment of teaching can be favorized; they can assess both individual as well as collective work, see the possibility of comparing their students' ideas, results, achievement, etc. For the students, their own learning may be done at their own pace, and they can see their own progress and achievement.

Being unsure of the purpose of a portfolio and its uses in the classroom can be avoided by joining a professional learning community (Norahmi, 2015) with common interest. Teachers can take lessons and share experiences to reflect what they

have done and to gain knowledge of what they need and provide others with various benefits.

Conclusion

Lesson learned: by using portfolio, student progress and development could be revealed. The use of portfolio in this study discovers that learning is taking place and where it is being obstructed, and to suggest ways in which students to be helped attain their maximum potential. All these fulfill the central purpose for assessing the student's performance. Portfolio is worth considering to help judge the student's final achievement fairer and encourages students to enhance their reflective skills, since all of the aspects of students' learning are covered in it.

Optimization of teacher's tasks in evaluating the student final work must be based on reflection that mirrors experience, learns from mistakes, repeats successes, revises and plans for better and reliable assessment of student final evaluation. Subjectivity in assessing the student work might be avoided by using inter-rater to obtain reliability and by having a very detail criteria of each rating scale prepared by the teacher together with the students. Further empirical evidence is still needed if full potential of portfolio assessment is to be realized.

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