

# Using portfolio assessment to improve EFL students' expository-writing performance

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## Abstract

The objectives of the research were to find out the extent to which the use of portfolio assessment improves EFL students' performances in expository-writing and to find out the students' responses about the taking of portfolio assessment in improving their performance in writing expository text. The researcher applied classroom action research which was done through two cycles. The location of this research was at one of the secondary schools in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. There were 31 students as a sample in this research and the data were collected using observation, writing test, interview, and analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The result showed that portfolio assessment had improved EFL students' expository-writing performance. The students were better in arranging the words into sentences and paragraph in order to convey their ideas, opinions, and feeling because they had already known the steps in the writing process, and they learned from their previous evaluated portfolios, and their responses on the using of portfolio assessment as a method in writing expository process was positive. They got positive motivation and appreciation to progress their writing performance. They were excited to revise and edit their draft to become the best work in every meeting.

## Keywords:

Portfolio assessment; expository-writing performance; EFL students.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Portfolios are defined as a collection of an individual's work for different purposes over some time into a box or folder for future evaluation by peers, parents, outsiders. In the education area, academic portfolios specifically refer to any procedures that require students to collect samples of their works. Therefore, the use of academic portfolios can allow students to showcase their best works and to demonstrate what they understand of the material (Ling, 2016). Curriculum 2013 that used in Indonesia requires teachers to use authentic assessment as an assessment which reflects students' real-life and not only measure what they know but also measure what they can do or perform (Ministry of Education and Culture Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2013). Portfolio assessment is one type of authentic assessment. Portfolio in terms of writing assessment is a collection of written texts written for different purposes over some time (Weigle, 2002). It was developed as showcases for works done by photographers, painters, and architects so that employers could see their products (Brown, 2005). However, portfolios have been used for educational purposes, especially for language education. As a result, portfolio assessment is an authentic assessment form that students do together with their teacher as an alternative to the classic classroom writing test which contains samples of the students' work and shows growth over time. One of the advantages of portfolio assessment is promoting student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking (Venn, 2004). Besides that, it makes it possible to enable teachers and students to share the responsibility to set the learning goals and evaluate progress toward meeting those goals.

This paper attempts to focus on the EFL students' writing performances by using analytical exposition as the genre. The researcher expected that the portfolio assessment could serve as a platform for students to showcase how much they master English as a foreign language. Analytical exposition to establish linkages between mastering a foreign language and relevantly written performances can also be included as work samples in the portfolio assessment. Based on the previous description, the researcher was motivated to research using portfolio assessment to improve EFL students' performance in writing expository to the eleventh-grade students of one of the secondary schools in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The researcher formulated the research questions as follows:

- To what extent is the use of portfolio assessment improving EFL students' performance in writing expository?
- How are the students' responses toward the portfolio assessment given by the teacher in teaching expository-writing activity?

## 2 METHOD

The researcher used Classroom Action Research (CAR) (Elliot, 1991; Kember, 2000; Yaumi, Sirate, & Patak, 2018). It was done through two cycles including trying out the portfolio assessment method, to test how much the portfolio assessment solves the students' writing problem. The procedure was "scheme of research cycles" which consisted of two cycles, which each cycle followed four phases namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This research was conducted from January to March 2018. The researcher used the first month to research the first cycle. In the second month, she researched the second cycle and collected the data. While collecting data, she also conducted data analysis. In the last meeting of the second cycle, she confirmed her initial findings or the result of all portfolios assessment to all respondents in order to minimize misinterpretation and to avoid manipulation of data. In collecting data, the CAR principle was used to collect the data including test-instrument and observation, and a non-test instrument including interview and documentation. Interview referred to collect information from the students about their responses to using portfolio assessment. Documentation was collecting the documents about the use of portfolio assessment in teaching and

learning expository-writing. The researcher used descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysis to collect the data. Descriptive statistics provide simple summaries about the test-instrument and about the observations that have been made. Processes of analyzing data in qualitative data research include collecting data, preparing for analysis, reading and understanding, and coding text for description and themes in the research report (Creswell, 2015). The researcher attempted to answer the research questions as the description and themes in this research by reading, understanding, and describing data collection.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher presented the results of the research data that were obtained based on the test-instruments, observation, the interview, and documentation as the research instruments. The researcher presented the result of the test and observation, and then she presented the result of the interview and documentation.

#### 3.1 Students' Writing Performance

In the beginning of the research, the pre-cycle meeting was conducted. The purpose of this meeting was to find out the students' performances in writing expository text before they were given treatment through by portfolio assessment. Pre-cycle was conducted in January 2018. Based on the observation in this activity, most of the students still found difficulties in drafting their writing expository text and in developing their main ideas and opinions. They got difficulty in arranging words to write their text and finally, they spent their time only think about the words to write. Because of that, they did not focus on the organization, language use and mechanics of the text. The first cycle was conducted in four meetings. Each meeting was conducted on 80 minutes.

It was still found that some students did not pay attention to. Some students were confused with the portfolio assessment instruction that had been given because that was the first time that the students were given this method. They were also confused in the revision part because that was the first time for them to do writing with the correct writing process. Most students got difficulties in developing the topic into an analytical exposition text and revised their portfolios with few times given by the researcher. Students got more vocabularies in this cycle. However, they were still confused in arranging the words to be able to transfer the ideas and opinions in the text. Besides that, they were still confused with the generic structure of the text. However, students' enthusiasm was high, because the researcher tried hard to stimulate and motivate them in each meeting. The researcher tried to make the students understand all the instructions she had given. After the whole activities had finished, the researcher assessed the students' writing results. From the result, she could calculate the mean of the score students' writing result. The results of the portfolio assessment every meeting in cycle one are presented in the following table.

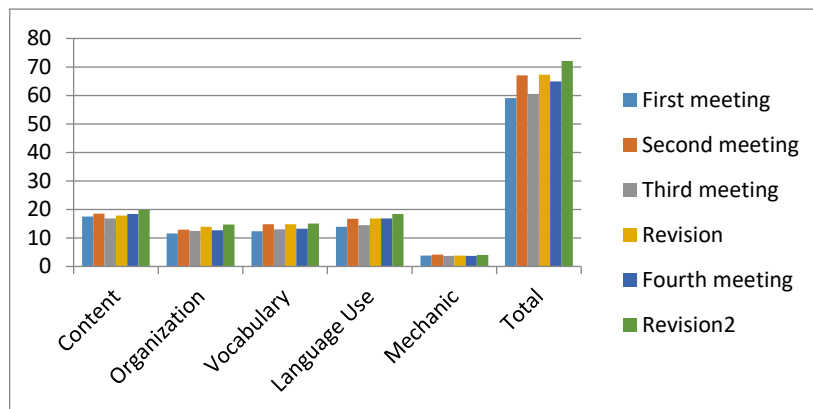


Figure 1. The students' writing performances in the first cycle

At the first meeting in this cycle, the students' activities in the learning process were not maximal because some students still did not pay attention to the instruction given by the researcher. Some students spoke with their friend when teaching learning was progress. It caused almost all the students did not understand the instruction that had been given by the teacher. The students' performances in the learning process were less optimum because the portfolio assessment technique was still new for them. It could be seen from the high of students' interest, respond and questions about the instruction and the method if the teaching-learning process.

The second cycle was done based on the result of reflection from the first cycle. The result from observation and the analysis of writing performances showed that the quality was still low. Hence, it requires another action to make some improvement in quality. In this cycle, the students' understanding of the technique developed. It could be seen that most students rarely asked the researcher about the instruction while writing process. They have already known the steps in the writing process by using the portfolio assessment technique. Their ability in the writing process, using a dictionary, developing a paragraph, and assessing their portfolios and their friends' portfolio developed. Their performances in the writing process could see it. Most students were more confident in the writing process. They were more active to finish their draft in every meeting because they were enthusiastic in editing their drafts or their friends' drafts. The students enthusiastic developed. Even though they rarely asked the researcher, but they were more active in discussing with their friends. They tried hard to edit their portfolios. The development and showcase portfolio which showed their learning progress and the best portfolio in every meeting gave their motivation to make better drafts than before. All the students

focused on writing better analytical exposition text in every meeting. They more focused because the researcher gave them more time in their writing process so they could develop their ideas, opinions, and feelings based on the data or facts related to the topic that they chose.

After whole activities had finished in every meeting, the researcher assessed the students' writing performances as in the first cycle. From the result, she could calculate the mean of the score from students' writing result in every meeting so she could know and show the students' performances progress in writing analytical exposition text. The results of the portfolio assessment every meeting in cycle two is presented in the following table.

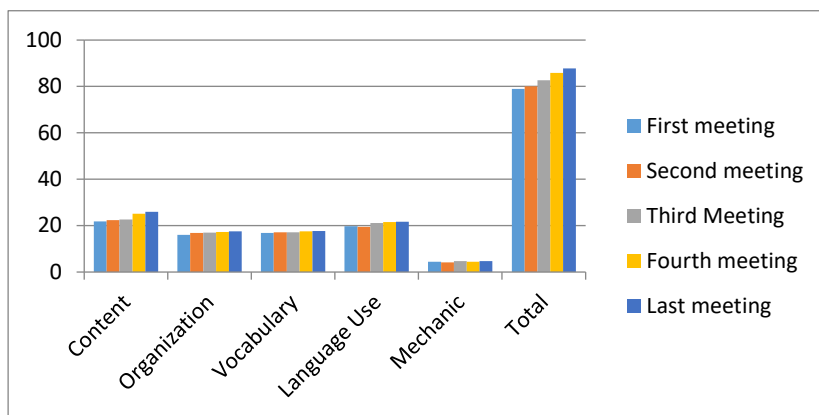


Figure 2. The Students' writing performances in the second cycle

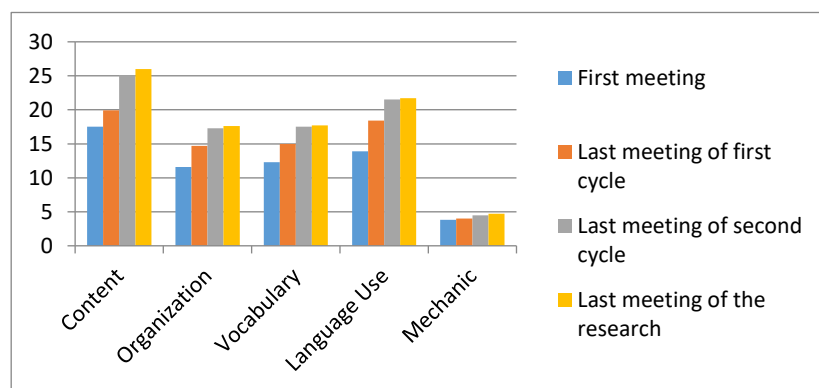


Figure 3. The students' writing performances in the first and last meeting

Based on the table, the mean scores in posttest was greater than the mean scores in the pretest and other meetings. So, there was an improvement of students' writing performance on treatment using portfolio assessment. Not all students can follow the portfolio assessment method in writing the process of analytical exposition until the last meeting of the first cycle. Sometimes it was understandable, and they got good scores for their drafts, but sometimes they were confused in revising and assessing the portfolios. This made the students felt stress at first. However, the researcher tried to give motivation and used reflection time to see the students' feedback if using portfolio assessment. Next, the researcher asked about their responses about the portfolio assessment method in learning analytical exposition and writing process. This question is the main point that the researcher wants to know from the students' opinion. The researcher asked them whether portfolio assessment help them in writing the analytical exposition process.

Student A said:

*"Yes, miss. Mmm, I can see my mistakes in my projects before and try to don't do it again. I can learn from my mistake by seeing my projects before in my portfolios. I know the way to revise and edit my projects before collect it to you by seeing and analyze the assessment in my projects before."*

Student D said:

*"For me miss, portfolio assessment helps me in revising and editing steps miss. Sometimes I see or remember which part of my portfolio before that I did mistake miss. It was I did at revising and editing. At drafting, I would focus on the content of the text that I made miss. Has it already connected with the topic that I chose or not and I also focused on the vocabulary miss."*

The students also agreed to use the portfolio assessment method in writing texts process, not only in learning analytical exposition but also in learning all genres of text.

Student B said:

*"Yes, miss. It can make me and my friends understand the material faster because we practice it every week."*

Student C said:

*"I agree on a miss. I like it, I miss. Portfolio assessment makes all score analysis clear. Our project also is safe. Yes miss, just continue the portfolio assessment."*

Student E said:

*"Yes, miss. You have just continued the use of portfolio assessment. Do not only for teaching analytical exposition text but please continue it in teaching other materials."*

The students also agreed if portfolio assessment used by all teachers. Student A said:

*"I agree about that miss. With portfolio assessment miss, I can know my score directly; I can control it. I mean if my score is still low, I can know where my mistake is and learn more about it. I also can know the way of the teacher assess my project, mmm, the aspects miss. So, I can know the way to revise and edit my projects based on the teacher criteria."*

Student B said:

*"... maybe cannot all teachers use writing process miss but for reflection time and portfolio assessment, yes, I agree. In reflection, we can know where my mistake and it shows that the teacher already checks our portfolio and in portfolio assessment, we can know the way the teacher analyzes our project miss. We know the criteria."*

Students also expressed some problems in the use of portfolio assessment. Most of them felt that the time given was not enough to use a portfolio assessment.

Student B said:

*"40 minutes is enough if only until drafting not with revising and editing. But if 60 minutes or 70 minutes like in the last meeting ehhhh no, like in the two-last meeting, ahhh you give us 60 or 70 minutes, I feel free to do all the writing process because the time is long enough to plan the draft then drafting, revising, asking my friends then edit it to make it better."*

Student C said:

*"If 40 minutes miss like the first, it is too short miss. That is good in 60- or 70-minutes miss. In the writing process, there is four steps that miss. Pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing. If I miss, I need more time in all the steps miss especially drafting and revising. Because I still feel confused and afraid if I have a mistake."*

Student D said:

*"Hmmm, I can do all the writing process at that time miss, but I still feel it is not enough because I still feel hard in all steps of the writing process and if it adds with portfolio assessment again miss, I need more time, more than 70 minutes."*

During the observation and collecting the test-instruments, the researcher also conducted documentation in order to get real proof about the use of portfolio assessment in this research. After finishing the interview activity with some students, she collected and arranged the documentation as the data about the use of portfolio assessment. Some documents that she got were the students' portfolio, the assessment form used by the teachers and students, an example of scoring rubric, teacher's lesson plan, and transcript of the interview. Based on the findings above, the expository-writing performance of the secondary school students improved. The students' frequency supports it, and the rate percentage of the students' portfolio assessment results in pretest and posttest and all meetings in the first and second cycle.

By comparing the frequency, percentage and mean score of all components observed, it was found that there were significant difference effects between the result of students' writing performances in the pretest, first cycle, second cycle, and posttest. The mean score obtained by the students' pretest for expository-writing performances was classified into very poor classification. However, after conducting the treatment, the researcher found significant differential effects between the result of the students' portfolio assessment in the pretest, all meetings in the first cycle and second cycle, and posttest for their expository-writing performance. The mean score of writing performance obtained by students in the last meeting of the first cycle was classified into fairly good classification and good classification in the last meeting of the second cycle, while in post-test was classified into very good classification. Certainly, it can be concluded that using a portfolio assessment was effective in the students' expository-writing performance. Since the percentage gained by the students in two cycles increased and it was higher after conducted the research, it implies that using portfolio assessment in writing analytical exposition class could improve the EFL students' writing performance.

The researcher also depicted the data based on the five components of writing; the results show that the students' pretest in each component was almost the same. There were no significant differences in content, organization, vocabulary and language use which were categorized as very poor and the mechanics were categorized as fair to poor. While the result of students' performance post-test based on five components of writing showed that students' posttest mean scores in each component were no significant differences in content, organization, vocabulary and language use which were categorized as good to average and the mechanics were categorized as excellent to very good. The percentage and mean score gained by the students by content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics in post-test was higher than pre-test. It can be concluded that practicing writing with a portfolio assessment improves all the writing components of students. Furthermore, the detailed information about the students' writing performance in writing based on the writing components; content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics, before and after conducting the treatment is also included.

### 3.1.1 Content

Based on the findings, the students' writing performance in terms of content was categorized as very poor before learning to write analytical exposition text through the writing process portfolios applied by the researcher. The content of the

students' writing did not show knowledgeable of the subject. The students in their writing did not well discuss the topic. Otherwise, after learning through the writing process, the students' writing performance which was practiced using portfolio assessment significantly improved. It changed from very poor (15.30) to good (25.10) at the last meeting of the second cycle and still good (26.00) at post-test.

For these findings, it was concluded that taking portfolio assessment in expository-writing significantly improved the students' writing performance in terms of content in the sense that portfolio assessment makes the students try to develop their ideas which are personally relevant to the topic they chose and interested for them. Therefore, it could be inferred that the students' writing performance at post-test by content was better than at pre-test (26.00>15.30).

### 3.1.2 Organization

In this part, students should arrange their writing with well organized. They should present their ideas and opinions in logical sequencing. Based on the students' portfolio at pre-test, the organization seems a little bit difficult for the students. Most students had confused and made the draft with disconnected ideas in which the ideas were not structured or organized well based on the generic structure of analytical exposition text. As a result, the reader got confused in understanding the students' draft. For this evidence, the students' writing in terms of the organization was only categorized as very poor (9.20). However, after conducting the treatment, the researcher found that the students' writing by the organization at pre-test changed to be good (17.60) at post-test. This explanation showed that portfolio assessment had a good effect on students' organization of writing.

### 3.1.3 Vocabulary

The basic problem faced by the students in writing is the vocabulary issue. It can be seen from the students writing test result at pre-test that most students could not write longer and the paragraph in their draft tend to be short. Consequently, the students' writing in terms of vocabulary was categorized as very poor at pre-test.

After having some meetings in two cycles with the students by practicing writing analytical exposition text used portfolio assessment in the writing process, the students' writing performance significantly improved. It changed from very poor (9.00) at pre-test to good (17.70) at post-test. There was an improvement performance in students' vocabulary after learning through the writing process used portfolio assessment.

### 3.1.4 Language Use

Based on findings, the researcher found that the students' writing performance in terms of the language use at post-test seems better than at pre-test. It increased from very poor (10.00) at pre-test to good (21.70) at post-test. Based on the post-test writing result, it was found that students can make well-formed and complete sentences with the good order of subject, verb, object or complement. Besides that, they also used appropriate tense that usually used in exposition text such as simple present and passive voice. Based on the statement above, it can be concluded that the language use at post-test was better than the language-use at pre-test.

### 3.1.5 Mechanic

Based on the writing test result, the researcher found that the students' writing performance in terms of mechanic also improved from fair to poor level to excellent to very good level. This could be seen from students' writing test result before and after conducting the treatment. Before conducting the treatment, the researcher found that the students' writing performance in terms of the mechanic was still dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. However, after conducting the treatment, the errors of using punctuation, capitalization, spelling and paragraphing made by students in their drafts decreased. The result in students' post-test of their mechanic component of writing (4.70) was higher than the results students got in pre-test (2.70).

Based on the result from all the mean scores of each writing components in pre-test and post-test, it can be calculated that total mean scores of students writing components in the post-test (87.70) were higher than the total mean scores of students writing components in the pre-test (46.20). It is stated that there was a significant differential effect of using portfolio assessment in writing performance.

These findings indicate that providing the EFL students with a method need more their participation in the case. They are more active than the teacher not only in learning but also in assessing the projects would motivate and assist them to struggle for EFL learning. The findings support the idea that providing EFL learners with a portfolio assessment would result in a satisfactory performance on EFL expository-writing. We can refer to the findings of previous studies (Roohani & Taheri, 2015; Tabatabaei & Assefi, 2012; Wang & Liao, 2008). This supports the results of this research which indicates that using portfolio assessment did have statistically significant effects on EFL students' writing performance. Referring to some studies such as Tabatabaei and Assefi, 2012; Wang and Liao (2008), this research finds that there is a strong consistency toward significant positive effects of using portfolio assessment on students' writing performance. The result of studies such as Yurdabakan and Erdogan (2009) indicated that the responsibility and motivation of the students increased on their writing ability because of portfolio assessment.

The teacher is the first one who knows the need to practice, prior knowledge, and points of grammar which appropriate with the students' ability at that time (Jones & Chen, 2012). EFL teacher also should realize that teacher should be a facilitator-not a director of the learning process including the assessment process, letting the students control their papers in the writing process. In other words, teacher should try to give opportunity to the students to have responsibility to keep their own works, to analyze and learn from their previous works, to assess their own works, because some students often need practical, simple and versatile tools for getting started in how to interpret, develop topics, and assess themselves.

### 3.2 Students' Responses on the Portfolio Assessment

Regarding the interviewed with some students, the researcher concluded that the portfolio assessment method gave positive responses to the students' writing performance and their motivation. It is because, at the end of the research, all students were satisfied with completing the writing task efficiently and effectively by using the method. The researcher tried to explain the procedure in the portfolio assessment and give examples and appreciation in reflection time. The more examples given by the researcher gave the students a chance to understand the method because the students have a different level of understanding. The method tried to facilitate them in the writing process. By combining developmental and showcase portfolio in reflection time, the researcher tried to push students' motivation so they can resolve the problem that they faced in writing procedure that made them still confuse. According to the interview, the students said that even they felt nervous in every reflection time, but they always wait for it because they can know their score and learn the way to assess their portfolio. Talking about the students' responses to taking portfolio assessment in the writing analytical exposition process, they said that they like the method because that enables them saving their projects in one folder. They can learn, and they know the way of assessing their projects. The most important that they know that their projects had already checked and assessed by their teacher. It gives them motivation in doing their projects as best as they can do because they know their teacher appreciate what they had already done.

### 4 CONCLUSION

Using portfolio assessment has improved the students' performance in writing exposition text from a minimal extent at the first cycle to a great extent at the last meeting in the second cycle. The way portfolio assessment has improved the students' performance in writing exposition text during this research is through learning the steps in writing process and from their previous portfolios that evaluated by the researcher as their teacher and self-assessment. The students were better in arranging the words into sentences and paragraph in order to convey their ideas, opinions, and feeling because they had already known the steps in writing process and they learned from their previous portfolios that evaluated by the researcher as their teacher and self-assessment. They were motivated to get the progress of their portfolio assessment. They were better in revising and editing their draft to become the best work in every meeting. Using portfolio assessment improved students' performance in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics of their text, so we can see that using portfolio assessment affect students' performance in writing exposition text to a great extent. Besides that, the students give positive responses in the using of portfolio assessment to improve their expository-writing performance. By using portfolio assessment, they get positive motivation and appreciation in the writing process, and it helps them in achieving a higher score in the writing process and writing performance. This research suggests that the English teacher should give motivation, responsibility, and chance the EFL students increasing and assessing the amount of choice in students' writing. The teacher should be a facilitator and have the responsibility to assess all projects given to the students and give an explanation to the students about the way the teacher assesses the students' portfolio. Finally, whatever the method used by the teacher in the writing process, it was important to make clear the explanation, the direction, and the way in assessing the students' draft. The teacher has to show their appreciation on the students' portfolio by assessing it and show them the criteria or the components that are important in assessing the students' portfolio.

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