LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: A STUDY ON ELT AND ELL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

The current study set out to define ELT and ELL students' attitude towards portfolio assessment in academic writing and to define the positive and negative aspects of portfolio assessment along with the aims to define their preferences on choosing portfolios versus traditional pen-and-paper tests. The sample of this study consists of 49 students studying English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language and Literature departments at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the second term of academic year 2021-2022. Study was conducted using survey research design; a Likert scale questionnaire and one-on-one interviews in order to collect data on attitudes towards Portfolio Assessment. The results of the final analysis showed that participants are competent about the content of portfolio assessment and the portfolio sharing activities offer learners the chances to learn good English with the help of acquired technics from their classmates. According to participants, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, active participation and language skills development were considered as advantages of portfolio Requiring much time, reliability and validity issues and neglecting listening and speaking skills were among the disadvantages of portfolio assessment. Moreover, the subject participants of current study mostly prefer to be evaluated by portfolio assessment rather than the traditional paper-pen tests.

Keywords: portfolio, ELT, ELL, language assessment, alternative assessment

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1. Introduction

Students' evaluation throughout the learning has been a subject of interest in language learning procedure. In language teaching it is hard to find an effective way to evaluate all language skills and it is difficult to be objective while trying to see the development with proofs such as production of language. While the traditional methods in assessment focus mostly on multiple choice tests, the social constructivist wave changes the dynamics in evaluation and the interaction between the learner and teacher has gained importance (Brown, 2013). Hence, this requires a new and more collective way of evaluation. Portfolio assessment is a natural outcome of this modern tendency. Learners become a part of the assessment process and learners` works on the target language are proof of what they can do. Portfolios in this sense are crucial and preferred to observe the learning process. The common opinion while choosing the most operative way belongs to experts on the subject, aka teachers in this situation, however learners are the other side of the medallion and their opinions should be credited as well. Portfolio assessment is to select a way to intertwine the learner-teacher roles which enables a unity and harmony in learning-teaching.

When portfolios are handled in a perspective of language teaching, it can be said that language teaching composes of skill-integrated processes and writing skill is the outcome of the process along with speaking. In this study, writing is the main concern because it is the slowest and hardest skill to improve (Nunan, 1999). Writing is used as a tool for effective communication ideas, and as a tool to convey academic ideas. These two factors have been the reasons behind the considerable importance of writing skill.

Langan et al. (2000) claims that students consider writing skill as a natural gift and it is hard to learn if you are not born with it. Besides, while trying to write learners face various problems such as L1 transfer, linguistics, cognitive, psychological and structure. In the struggle between finding the correct form and expressing ideas, learners and writers generally need a side-wheel that provide them feedback and help them to get better. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers/ colleges should move from a product-based approach to a process-based approach for teaching writing skill as the latter may contribute towards activating learners' thinking and creating ideas for a writing task.

One of the major advantage of portfolios, if applied effectively, it combines the learning-teaching and assessment, enrich the education settings and has a collaborative cycle between teachers-students (Smith et al., 2003). Portfolios boost metacognitive awareness in students and teachers (Loughran & Corrigan, 1995). Yet there are challenges in applying them such as being reliable (Coşkun, 2015), time consuming (Sofiah & Pratolo, 2020) and not easy to assess (Cirneanu et al., 2009).

As a result, this study was intended to define ELT and ELL students' attitude towards portfolio assessment in academic writing and to define the positive and negative aspects of portfolio assessment along with the aims to define their preferences on choosing portfolios versus traditional pen-and-paper tests.

2. Literature Review

Portfolios have been recently preferred but at different levels of teaching-learning process yet it is kind a new subject in ELT genre. Portfolio embedded activities has been considered to have some common features. They include: (a) collection, (b) range, (c) context richness, (d) delayed evaluation, (e) selection, (f) giving control to students, (g) following their own development, (h) getting better in terms of pre-defined criteria and (ı) getting proficient that taking time (Underwood, 2003). As one of the alternative assessment techniques in process-oriented assessment techniques; portfolios are preferred for many reasons by teachers such as to identify students' needs (Weigle, 2007), to develop awareness (Brown, 2013), to help in the development of communication between the instructor and learner throughout the process of teaching-learning (Pollari, 2000) and to motivate students' performance (Wang & Liao, 2008).

Another proposal for using portfolios is to prefer them as a complementary assessment along with the pen-paper assessments (Nezakatgoo, 2011). Nezakatgoo (2011) suggested that portfolios help students out of their writing predicament. Since portfolios empower students and students' cooperation, it provides a continuous development. It is the concrete process of students' development and peer assessment (Paulson & Paulson, 1994). Portfolios do not eliminate the 'think and write' adaption of the students completely but it can be said that it cuts way back. Portfolio is a process that all of the learners must go through the following steps (Srikaew et al., 2015); (a) planning, means finding an objective to start the work of portfolio; (b) preparation, means explaining/learning the content and the process of portfolio; (c) collecting, is the production step of the aimed work; (d) progress monitoring, involving all of the parts into evaluation and giving feedback; (e) improvement of performance, preparing the new form of the products in this case writing texts edited forms; (f) reflection, comments on new products and the final step (g) displaying the works, sharing the final product and collecting the final version.

Aygün and Aydın (2016) conducted a qualitative study on usage of e-portfolio in EFL. They searched for the motivational factors in using portfolios while teaching writing. E-portfolios encourage learners to write, help them to develop the reflective skills. Learners consider them effective in showing their improvement in writing. Implementation of portfolios into assessment process not only improve their writing quality but also make them more competitive in classroom settings (Denton, 2012). Having peer- feedbacks at each step of portfolio application, directs learners to become better at each time. That's why they find themselves in an effort of trying to write better and they become more conscientious writers at the end (Jee, 2008).

Yurdabakan & Erdoğan (2009) examined effect of portfolio on all language skills. They conducted an experimental study design and implemented portfolios on lesson content. The experiment lasted for 12 weeks and at the end of the treatment, pre-testing instruments were applied again as post-tests. Portfolios were found to have significant effect over writing skill but not any other language skills. They indicated that portfolios make students consider themselves as a writer and they feel an urge to check their

writings over again until they feel satisfied. Besides their experimental study they evaluate the perspectives of learners towards portfolio. At the end of the experiment students consider portfolios more unbiased method in assessment. They also mentioned that portfolios make them more responsible, motivated and the process aroused interest. It is no surprise for researchers to reach a conclusion that portfolios improved their writing ability compared to traditional assessment methods.

The study conducted by Aydın (2010) investigated the EFL writers' opinions on keeping portfolios. The findings demonstrated that writers developed their writing skills both in structural components of a writing text such as; vocabulary, grammar, cohesion-coherence and they learned how to write while learning their mistakes. Another study was conducted by Tabatabaei and Assefi (2012). It was an experimental design on EFL learners regarding the sub-skills of writing such as; focus, elaboration, organization and vocabulary. According to the results, portfolios were effective in improving writing skill along with sub-skills.

Uçar & Yazıcı (2016) applied an experimental study to examine the effect of portfolios on developing writing skills in ESP classes. The experimental group attended the sessions designed according to the portfolio evaluation methodology throughout the research, whereas the control group continued their traditional way of instruction. The groups were statistically different when the final scores and initial scores were interpreted. This result indicates that portfolios had a statistically significant influence on increasing writing performance and its sub-skills in subject sample of participants. The findings of the attitude survey revealed that students in ESP classes have good views regarding utilizing portfolios to improve their writing abilities.

Saygılı (2021) examined the effects of portfolios on academic writing ability. The study was designed as a pre-post experimental design and also used an attitude test to measure the attitudes of the participants after the portfolio implementation. After 12 weeks of experiment results showed that the writing skills of the participants developed and they got higher scores on the skill test when compared to control group of the study. Although the participants considered the process difficult at first, but through the final phase of the study, Portfolios make pupils active not only in assessment but also in learning process because they had the chance to observe and control their own learning.

Jalilzahed & Yeganehpour (2021) investigated the beliefs on EFL teachers on portfolio assessment. The findings indicated that especially during COVID-19, teachers preferred portfolios to make an overall evaluation. Majority of the participants claimed that portfolios were much more effective in evaluating writing skills rather than other skills. This result was accord with another research study conducted by Gümüş (2019). Gümüş (2019) investigated the effect of portfolios on young learners' writing achievement and their motivation towards writing. Portfolios were found to have a profound effect over writing skills along with increasing their motivation and writing achievement also. The tendency in the literature shows that many of the aforementioned studies are experimental and designed to measure and/or evaluate the perspectives of teachers/instructors. However, learners are the one true explorers of the process and their point of portfolios seem to be underestimated in the field. Although

there were several research papers on EFL students' opinions against portfolio assessment in academic writing, more quantitative analyses on the students' perceptions in English Language Teaching and English Language and Literature departments toward portfolio assessment in academic writing skills are required. As a result, the present study intends to find answers for the research topics listed:

1) What are Turkish ELT / ELL students' attitudes towards Portfolio Assessment in Academic Writing?
2) What are Turkish ELT / ELL students' views on the positive / negative aspects of Portfolio Assessment in Academic Writing?
3) Do ELT/ ELL learners prefer portfolios or traditional pen-and-paper tests in Academic Writing courses?

3. Method

The present study was conducted using survey research design; a Likert scale questionnaire and one-on-one interviews in order to collect data on Pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards Portfolio Assessment in Academic Writing.

3.1. Sample

The respondents of the study were 49 English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language and Literature students at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the fall term of academic year 2021-2022. The descriptives about the participants was given in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptives of the Participants

		N	%
Department	ELT	19	38.8
	ELL	30	61.2
Gender	Female	35	71.4
	Male	14	28.6
Age	18-20	11	22.4
	21-24	35	71.4
	25-28	2	4.1
	29-32	1	2.1
Year of Study	2nd Year	19	38.8
	4th Year	30	61.2
Total		49	100%

2.2. Tools

The attitude questionnaire for Portfolio assessment developed by Yang (1992) was used for the present study in order to reveal preservice EFL teachers' and English Language and Literature students' attitudes towards Portfolio assessment in academic writing. The instrument contains three parts. The first part includes demographic information about the participants such as age, year of study and gender. The second part includes 30 closed-ended items. The items were designed on five-point Likert-type scale ranging

from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The third section of the questionnaire contains 3 open-ended questions to elicit the respondents' comments and opinions about portfolio assessment in academic writing.

The questionnaire was evaluated by three proficient EFL instructors for validity and some revisions were made in the light of feedback received from experts. It was piloted to 15 students for reliability. The Cronbach coefficient for the questionnaire was found as .812

After the questionnaire including closed-ended questions, 4 participants were invited to take part in open-ended questions. To provide the reliability of the qualitative (open-ended questions section) technique, the researcher adopted a 'member checking' procedure, which entails returning data and interpretations to participants to validate their replies. There were three sections to the questionnaire:

1) Demographic information for respondents' background information (gender, age, year of study).
2) Likert scale statements (30 closed-ended items) on respondents' attitudes towards portfolio assessment in academic writing.
3) Open-ended questions section (3 open-ended items) to elicit the respondents' comments and opinions about portfolio assessment in academic writing. Questions were as follows:
   - What are your opinions on the benefits of using portfolios?
   - To your knowledge, what are the drawbacks of applying portfolios?
   - Please compare traditional pen-and-paper tests with portfolio assessment to your opinion which one is better? Please explain your reason of choice.

3.3 Data Analysis

The methodology of this research employed both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative part –questionnaire- was analyzed using mean, standard deviations, frequency and percentages, while the qualitative part is open ended questions.

4. Data Results

4.1. Results concerning ELT and ELL students' attitudes towards Portfolio Assessment

The survey inquired the students' attitudes in four sections; students' awareness about portfolio assessment, students' attitudes towards advantages of portfolio, students' attitudes towards disadvantages of portfolio and students' attitudes towards portfolio sharing activities.

In Table 2, the item 1 is the top-rank item having the highest mean score (M=3.97, SD=.87) in which 65.3 % of the participants are aware that portfolio requires a clear organizing concept. As for the items 4 and 13, Over the half of the participants feel the appearance (M=3.93, SD=.82) and the content (M=3.30, SD=.87) of the portfolio is important. In addition, when assembling the portfolio, the participants reflect and assess their learning in each facet, as evidenced by their replies to item 5. (M=3.62, SD=.78). The

lowest mean score was for the item 9 (M=3.62, SD=.78) in which only 38.8% of the participants know that they complete most of the learning goals.

Table 2: Participants' awareness towards portfolio assessment

N=49	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std
	%	%	%	%	%		
1. Compiling a portfolio requires a clear organizing concept.	0.0	2.0	32.7	30.6	34.7	3.97	.87
4. I feel the appearance of the portfolio (including its cover and art design) is important.	0.0	2.0	30.6	38.8	28.6	3.93	.82
5. I reflect on and evaluate my learning in each aspect when compiling the portfolio	0.0	6.1	36.7	42.9	12.2	3.62	.78
7. I have a clear concept about how to compile portfolio.	2.0	20.4	34.7	28.6	14.3	3.32	1.02
9. I generally complete most of the learning goals I set up in my portfolio.	2.0	12.2	46.9	30.6	8.2	3.30	.87
13. I feel the content of the portfolio (including its organization and details) is important.	0.0	6.1	40.8	22.4	30.6	3.77	.96
17. Preparing a portfolio requires good computer skills and artistic talent	0.0	12.2	42.9	34.7	10.2	3.42	.84
19. I think reflection and self-evaluation is the most important part of the portfolio	0.0	6.1	34.7	38.8	20.4	3.73	.86
23. Looking at previous students' portfolio samples gives me a better idea about portfolios.	0.0	10.2	32.7	32.7	24.5	3.71	.95
24. I add appropriate explanations to the samples or records, which I include in the portfolio.	2.0	8.2	30.6	40.8	16.3	3.62	.93

Participants' attitudes for portfolio sharing activities were given in Table 3.

Table 3: Participants' attitudes towards portfolio sharing activities

N=49	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std
	%	%	%	%	%		
2. The portfolio sharing activities offers me chances to learn good English learning methods from other classmates.	0.0	2.0	38.8	34.7	24.5	3.81	.83
6. During the portfolio sharing activities, I was able to share useful English learning resources with my classmates	0.0	8.2	44.9	30.6	16.3	3.55	.86
14. Portfolio sharing can increase classmates' cooperative learning and mutual growth in English	0.0	6.1	36.7	36.7	20.4	3.71	.86
20. The portfolio sharing activities are helpful to my understanding of the portfolio.	2.0	8.2	34.7	38.8	16.3	3.59	.93

Table 3 shows that, 59.2% of the respondents consider portfolio sharing activities as an opportunity the get better (M=3.81, SD=.83). Another higher mean score was in the item 14 (M=3.71, SD=.86) in which participants think that portfolio sharing could assist the language development mutually and increase classmates' cooperative learning. As for the lowest mean score, the item 6 (M=3.55, SD=.86) reveal that during the portfolio sharing, 46.9% of the participants are able to learn from each other especially when the subject is effective English learning resources.

Regarding the attitudes towards disadvantages of portfolio assessment, the details were given in Table 4.

Table 4: Participants' attitudes towards disadvantages of portfolio assessment

N=49	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std
	%	%	%	%	%		
3. It takes me a lot of time to compile the portfolio	2.0	4.1	51.0	34.7	6.1	3.39	.76
10. The portfolio increases the burden of my study.	0.0	20.4	44.9	22.4	12.2	3.26	.93
15. The goal I originally set up in the portfolio is too difficult and I cannot reach it	2.0	36.7	30.6	18.4	12.2	3.02	1.07
22. I feel some practices (like listening or speaking) could not be easily presented in the portfolio.	4.1	8.2	40.8	30.6	16.3	3.46	1.00
29. I feel the portfolio is not helpful to my learning	20.4	20.4	34.7	16.3	8.2	2.71	1.02

As in Table 4, 46.9% of the participants stated that some listening or speaking practices are too hard to be represented in the portfolio (M=3.46, SD=1.00). As for another disadvantage of portfolio, 40.8% of the participants thought that portfolios take much of their time while theory try to compile one, (M=3.39, SD=.76). Nevertheless, only 24.5% of the participants agree that portfolio is not helpful for learning M=2.71, SD=1.02). Table 5 gives attitudes towards advantages of portfolio assessment.

Table 5: Participants attitudes towards advantages of portfolio assessment

N=49	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std
	%	%	%	%	%		
8. The portfolio helps me organize and arrange my English learning.	0.0	4.1	36.7	36.7	22.4	3.77	.84
11. The portfolio allows me to choose what I like to read or listen to according to my personal interests.	0.0	4.1	42.9	40.8	12.2	3.61	.75
12. The portfolio increases my willingness to learn actively.	2.0	8.2	28.6	44.9	16.3	3.65	.92
16. The portfolio allows me to choose how to plan and learn my English according to my learning style.	0.0	8.2	40.8	36.7	12.2	3.54	.82
18. The portfolio helps me understand my strengths and weaknesses in English.	0.0	10.2	34.7	44.9	8.2	3.52	.79
21. The portfolio will be of great help to my future independent learning	0.0	6.1	38.8	32.7	22.4	3.71	.88
25. I feel the portfolio can present my learning results	0.0	6.1	36.7	49.0	8.2	3.59	.73
26. The portfolio makes me realize that I can learn anytime and anywhere, not just in the classroom	0.0	4.1	34.7	30.6	28.6	3.85	.89
27. Portfolios can show my efforts in learning English outside of the classroom.	0.0	8.2	38.8	34.7	18.4	3.63	.88
28. When compiling the portfolio, I have a chance to reflect on my English learning of this semester	0.0	8.2	42.9	26.5	22.4	3.63	.92
30. The portfolio helps me to keep the habit of listening to, reading, or writing English regularly.	0.0	6.1	46.9	34.7	12.2	3.53	.79

In Table 5, item 26 is the most common answer (M=3.85, SD=.89) in which over half (59.2%) of the participants agree that thanks to portfolio, they become place and time free learners, not bound to the classroom only whereas 53.1% of the participants believe in

the item 18 that the portfolio helps them understand their strengths and weaknesses in English (M=3.52, SD=.79). Another higher mean score was in the item 8 that 59.1% of the participants believe that the portfolio helps them regulate and arrange their English learning. Moreover, the responses to the item 11 revealed that 53% of participants consider that. the portfolio provides them a variety of options in deciding what to read or listen according to their taste of interest (M=3.61, SD=.75). Another lowest mean score belongs to the item 30 in which although 46.9% of the participants think that they can manage to sustain the habit of studying the language skills regularly thanks to portfolio, 46.9% of respondents had no idea of the item. For future learning, 55.1% of the respondents believe that the portfolio will be of great help to my future independent learning (M=3.71, SD=.88).

3.2 Results concerning qualitative section

In order to have a deep understanding of ELT and ELL students' attitudes towards portfolio assessment, the questionnaire included the open-ended section including three open-ended questions. The participants (%34.6, n=17) responded all three questions. Regarding ELT and ELL students' attitudes towards the advantages, participants generally stated that portfolio assessment improves their writing skill and vocabulary retention rather than other skills. One participant declared that:

> *"Portfolio assessment helps us to improve all four language skills, but it helps to enhance my writing skills and vocabulary development more than other skil*ls.*"*

Another advantage stated by participants was to participate actively in language learning and it enables them to notice their weaknesses and strengths in language learning procedure. One of them responded that:

> *"Portfolio assessment might help us to be active participant and to be responsible for my own language learning which leads me to realize my weak and strong sides about the language."*

As for the disadvantages of portfolio assessment, over half of the participants (60%) stated that it requires much time to compile a portfolio and it is not practical. For example, one participant responded that:

> *"It might become a time-consuming activity for students and teachers to organize and evaluate the content of portfolio."*

a) Validity and reliability issues, b) not addressing to the development of speaking and listening skills and c) computer-related problems were considered other disadvantages by the participants in the portfolio assessment.

Regarding the last open-ended question, most of the participants (59%) preferred to be evaluated by portfolios while 41% of the participants preferred to be evaluated by traditional pen-paper tests. For example, one of the participants stated that:

"I think portfolio assessment can be better since you could observe your language level and achievements in the procedure of language learning."

Some participants (32%) emphasized that portfolios offer them opportunities for self-evaluation and peer evaluation although pen-paper tests merely contain the instructor's evaluation.

"Portfolio assessment is better because self-evaluation is one of the most important parts of portfolio assessment, that's why it enables us to assess our own progress."

"Through self-evaluation, I could find out how much progress I have made throughout the year. I can evaluate my weaknesses and strengths and portfolios make me to be in charge of my own development. That's why, portfolio assessment is better."

Participants generally had positive attitudes to portfolio assessment as a result of open-ended questions since it enhances four language skills particularly writing and vocabulary development, and it triggers active participation, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation in language learning procedure.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study set out to define ELT and ELL students' attitude towards portfolio assessment in academic writing and to define the positive and negative aspects of portfolio assessment along with the aims to define their preferences on choosing portfolios versus traditional pen-and-paper tests. The participants of the study were 49 students studying English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language and Literature departments at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the second term of 2021-2022 education period. The study was conducted using survey research design; a Likert scale questionnaire and one-on-one interviews in order to collect data on attitudes towards portfolio assessment. The results showed that participants are acquainted with the content of portfolio assessment and the portfolio sharing activities offer them possibility to learn good English learning technics from other peers. According to participants, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, active participation and language skills development were considered as advantages of portfolio Requiring much time, reliability and validity issues and neglecting listening and speaking skills were among the disadvantages of portfolio assessment. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the respondents of this study prefer to have been assessed with portfolio intertwined techniques rather than traditional paper-pen assessments.

The results were parallel with the research papers in the literature that found out students had positive tendencies towards portfolio assessment (Akçıl & Arap, 2009; Genç & Tınmaz, 2010; Hung, 2012; Kabilan & Khan, 2012; Uçar& Yazıcı, 2016; Sulistyo et. al., 2020); Akçıl & Arap, 2009). The findings of the study demonstrated that the pre-service EFL teachers generally had positive attitudes towards the usage of e-portfolio for educational aims. As per Uçar & Yazıcı (2016), university students in ESP classes had positive thoughts regarding adopting portfolios to improve their writing abilities. Nonetheless, there have been some concerns with portfolio implementation, such as reliability and validity issues (Kabilan & Khan, 2012) and time-consuming activities (Kabilan & Khan, 2012; Lin, 2008). Another outcome of the study indicated that participants prefer portfolio evaluation over traditional paper-pen assessments, which is consistent with earlier research (Yang, 2003). Caner (2010), on the other hand, looked at the perspectives of prep-school students on portfolio assessment in writing classes. Caner's (2010) study also found that, while the subjects of the study had generally favourable thoughts on portfolio assessment, the majority of students prefer to be assessed via traditional paper-pencil assessments.

The pedagogical implications are still needed to be highlighted. AS in the nature of portfolio, it requires an active and meaningful attendance of instructors into the evaluation. That's can be listed as one of the advantages of portfolios that helps instructors to gain professionalism. Yet, this study has some aspects to be developed and needs further examination. Age, gender and affective factors were not considered in the frame of this research paper. To understand whether these elements affect the impact of the portfolio assessment or not could be studied at future researches. Sample size can be considered as one the limitations. Taking more participants into account may help to generalize the results.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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