

## Developing a Growth Portfolio in an English Writing for an Eleventh Grade Student: A Single Case Study

Majid Al Khataybeh

Department of Curricula and Instruction Faculty of Educational Sciences,  
Mutah University, Mutah, Kerak, Jordan

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**Abstract:** This is a qualitative single study research aims at developing a growth portfolio in English writing of an eleventh grader student in one public school in Ma'an. Hence, the basic question of this study is to investigate whether English writing performance made for this study show a significant in ability due to using portfolio. The sample of the study was chosen purposively from one of the eleventh grade classes in Ma'an secondary school for girls in coordination with her teacher. She had to produce five pieces of writings in English which makes about two thirds for her English writing assignments for the first semester. The works were estimated twice: once by the researcher, then by the teacher using the rubric designed for grading Arabic writing rubrics now in use by the ministry of Education, but was adapted and translated by the researcher and juries to achieve the purpose of this study. Generally, the final portfolio showed that there was a progress made against estimation criteria used in the rubric throughout the writing pieces in favor of using this method and through explanation the result was included.

**Key words:** Developing growth portfolio, English writing

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### INTRODUCTION

Schooling mainly concerns with two processes: teaching and learning and it can only be effective if there are any evidences of student's learning. However, to get this evidence, students need to be tested either in the traditional way of giving tests by the end of units and parts of the material, or by any other method of continues assessment producers<sup>[1]</sup>.

A-Khabt<sup>[2]</sup> believes that there are many elements in a school's comprehensive achievement and evaluation and that student's behavior, interaction, achievement and his performance represent a basic part of them. As a result, there should be careful means of assessment based on systematic methods of evaluation.

Brown<sup>[3]</sup> believes that past testing have substantial limitations in sampling the competences that young learners should acquire. Brown also believes that concentration has shifted from summative purposes: which is the report by the end of a course or a period to stress the formative assessment which is simply the use of information gathered gradually throughout the instructional process.

Harlen *et al.*<sup>[4]</sup> state that assessment and feedback received from it makes a good means for improving instruction and suggest that it's now time to vary assessment procedures to more comprehensive, because the procedures that all parties involved in evaluation are benefiting.

There is some confusion about how to improve evaluation techniques and what they are. Suggesting Portfolios as a modern method of evaluation is also debatable. For example Arter<sup>[5]</sup> believes that portfolios are scarcely a new concept, but they are a renewed interest because of perceiving them both as improving assessment and involving students in their own learning. He also, suggests that portfolios have two uses: Instructional that can develop self- reflection within the students and assessment that gives a more- in- depth look at what students know and can do.

"can do" in Arter's explanation agrees with the notion that a fundamental purpose of teaching and assessment is to help students grow and change both socially and intellectually through reading one's portfolio that includes his past and current works.

Jordan's National Team for Evaluation<sup>[6]</sup> defines a portfolio as a file that includes a student's best works that show the progress he/she makes. They also points out that such a technique is a good means to measure high order abilities and thinking, also it may include works that students start at school and finish at home and so the portfolio paves the way for research and knowledge. According to this team, there are many qualities that a portfolio serves :

- It can serve the purposes of individualized learning because each student prepares his portfolio independently.

- Focusing on evaluating outcomes as works included in portfolios which derived from curriculum outcomes and objectives.
- A portfolio is a positive means of evaluation that focuses on students' points of strength as they include their best works.
- it also gets students involved in the evaluation process, which in turn feel them responsible for what they are doing and achieving, considering that they previously know the qualities of the works they should perform and include.
- Using portfolios for evaluation purposes consumes longer time, but this may reduce by time as both teachers and students gain more experience.

The national Team also suggests that to prepare a portfolio we need to put a careful planning that involves knowledge of expected outcomes, activities in the textbooks and the use of different resources such as multi media, newspapers, labs and so on.

It is worth mentioning that discussing the portfolio with the student is a very important final step that may serve in improving future portfolios, or in student's own ability to make judges and build up an authentic feedback. Some points of interest that may be included in a discussion could be the following questions directed to the student :-

- What's the work you are most proud of?
- Which work was the most difficult to do?
- Did you plan for what you did?
- Did you work individually or with others?

Despite the promising advantages of using portfolios, there are still some disadvantages of using them in assessment<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, it can be less reliable, time consuming, having difficulty in creating and developing and evaluation criterion and without a skilful teacher, a portfolio may be difficult to analyze.

Clayton<sup>[8]</sup> adds that another short coming of using a portfolio is that its grading is subjective i.e different teachers may come up with different scores for the same portfolio.

It should be made clear that we can build a portfolio to assess the teacher's performance that can be prepared by the teacher himself. This is called professional portfolio and is used to describe the full range of abilities and documents, the teaching practice over an extended period of time. Such kind of a portfolio helps generate data necessary for decision making concerning teaching performance. It also requires planning and cooperation from others involved in the teaching-learning process<sup>[9]</sup>.

Hopkins<sup>[10]</sup> believes that using portfolios in evaluation pay less emphasis on the traditional paper-and-pencil tests because portfolios are an approach linked to project in which the student is the major decision maker. However, he believes that despite many teachers willing to "throw out" all uniform tests, portfolios can't be made the "stand-alone" method to judge a student's performance and can't make the only alternative for traditional tests, that already have their clearly designed bases of evaluation.

Some sort of assessment that we can't ignore here is using authentic assessment as it's being based on performance and student's own production<sup>[11]</sup>.

Moon *et al.*<sup>[11]</sup> assume that a major characteristic of authentic assessment is that it engages students in real-world like tasks that may take different forms of performance amongst which is writing that's the interest of this study.

Gelfer<sup>[9]</sup> introduce the strategy of "What Have I Learned?" as a way of building the portfolio. They suggest that it gives the learner the opportunity to reflect on how his knowledge has grown using many methods, such as providing testis of new learning strategies, materials, etc. It can be made by presenting graphs indicating real changes. So, the current study aims at developing a growth portfolio in English writing for an eleventh grader student in one public school in Ma'an. Hence, the basic question of this study is to investigate whether English writing performance made for this study show a significant in ability due to using portfolio

## THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

All through the researcher's experience of working in teaching, it has never come to knowledge that writing portfolio have been in use so far. Actually, most writing works have been done to perform lesson three "Focus On Writing" of either AMRA One or AMRA Two; the English language textbooks for the secondary grades in Jordan.

There's not a lot of knowledge available to language teachers in schools and at least the teachers in many school, have not been invited to attend any training courses on portfolios or their design. So, one serious aspect of this problem of this study is the lack of knowledge concerning this area of following up a student's writer works.

Concerning using portfolio dates can be traced back to the eighties in many countries<sup>[12]</sup> and<sup>[13]</sup> in<sup>[14]</sup> and many Jordanian Universities are teaching courses in which portfolios are introduced as a means of evaluation, but much of this knowledge is not widely known despite its importance.

In addition, many language teachers think of writing as a task that difficulty and are still not aware of the ways that makes it easier for them to grade and promote writing works or the ways of making records of their student's best works. Therefore, this study tries to teachers of English language about the importance of having a full record of the writing tasks a student had to make over a period of time. This may help teachers make decisive decisions about their students progress and provides a clear and well-designed resource for feedback students and parents may ask for.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

**This study may be significant in many ways:** First, it introduces some necessary theoretical knowledge about portfolios" their definition, advantages, some way to prepare them and some of their shortcomings that may help teachers prepare their own portfolios, or at least get acquainted with them.

Second, this study may be useful in introducing some emphasis on the fact that writing consists of many components, that should receive enough attention in order to develop portfolios and how to score them. So that the teacher can make a final judgment about his student's over all performance considering the fact that any piece of writing should represent students' knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, skills of organizing and outlining and their ability to write independently.

Third, in addition to the theoretical knowledge teachers may gain out of this study, it may make a practical example that they may refer to while preparing a portfolio.

**The question of the study:** This study aims at answering the following question :

"Does the writing performance included in the portfolio of this study indicate a significant growth in English writing ability?"

**The purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study can be summarized as giving systematic and clearer theoretical knowledge on portfolios for teachers who are interested in them and intend to make their new or additional methods of evaluation.

It also aims at giving a practical example to those teachers of English language who want to develop their own abilities in evaluating the writing skill in away that explains that this particular skill is composed of many areas that need to be taught and tested at equal levels of importance.

### **THE OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE STUDY**

**Portfolio:** In a study introduced for a classroom discussion, a portfolio can be described a limited collection of a student's work that is used to either the student's best work(s) or demonstrate the student's educational growth over a given time span<sup>[15]</sup>.

We add to this definition that the portfolio is not a folder of all the works a student did, but includes a purposeful collection of them that may help in decision making<sup>[5]</sup>.

Portfolio can be described as one component of authentic assessment that share some common characteristics. A basic to them is that they are a collection of materials that reflect a certain performance of the student<sup>[9]</sup>.

The type of portfolios that this study deals with is employing the "growth portfolio" as defined in<sup>[5]</sup> which can be described as the chronological collection that shows how skills, attitudes, etc. have changed within student's performance.

For the purposes of this study, the growth portfolio designed and discussed later represent the works of a student from grade 11 studying English in Ma'an Secondary Comprehensive school for girls, who had to produce the pieces of writings within over a period of three weeks in December, 2005.

**Scoring rubrics:** The scoring rubric that is employed to achieve the purposes of this study was based on the scoring rubric the Ministry of Education now uses to score the writing papers for grade 10. The ministry's rubric was translated and amended so that it fits to use in this study.

**Topics included in the portfolio:** Topics included in this portfolio stem from the subjects of the units included in (AMRA One), the English textbook for eleventh graders in Jordan in the first semester year 2005/2006.

**Limitations of the study:** This study is limited to the following:

- Ma'an Secondary Comprehensive school for girls which is nearer where the researcher works which makes the access for the study sample easier.
- The writing skill because it's viewed by researchers as the mental and mechanical process that requires linguistic skills related to vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling and rhetorical skills related to organization and structure of texts<sup>[16]</sup>. Thus, one

piece of writing may allow checking many language components.

- A sample of one student because in one student's portfolio we have many works. Besides eleven graders are in a level that's supposed to enable them produce highly ordered pieces of writing.

**Design of the study:** This study is a qualitative single case study research.

**Literature review:** Generally, studies agree that evaluation and assessment should go beyond the limits of measuring only the cognitive abilities of students so that they may include measuring their trends, attitudes, thinking and their social and personal growth<sup>[13,14]</sup>.

In this respect,<sup>[17]</sup> carried out a case study on Educational evaluation in Elementary School in Kuwait. The sample of his study included elementary school teachers, who had to answer the question if they are aware of new developments in evaluation process. A questionnaire was the major tools employed to fulfill the purposes of this descriptive study.

A major result indicated in the study is that the results of the student's-over-the-year works can help make a decision about sending and passing him for a higher grade. Also, the emphasis on those indicating growth and development methods of evaluation .

In this study<sup>[14]</sup> that aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using portfolio by science and math's students in Ajman University for Science and Technology in promoting their attitudes and critical thinking skills. The sample of the study comprised (59) female Science and Maths students studying a course in teaching methodology The results of the study showed that the portfolio had a positive influence on promoting student's attitudes toward learning Science and that the same result is introduced in favor of developing critical thinking skills because of using well designed portfolio.

Worth mentioning here is some previous studies agreed on the conclusion that preparing a portfolio helped make students became more actively involved in the learning-teaching process, their ability to make correct decisions had largely improved<sup>[14,18]</sup> and that portfolios provide a convenient means for continual assessment and evaluation<sup>[8]</sup>.

Abu jalalah, Hain, Rosenberg<sup>[14,13,12]</sup> and also, agreed on recommending using portfolios as an additional means of evaluation in institutions of higher education and that educational reform in America now calls for such strategy in evaluation.

**The population:** The population of this study represents all female students in grade eleven in both literary and

scientific streams in one secondary school for girls in Ma'an directorate of education.

**The sample of the study:** For the purposes of this study summarized in detecting a student's growth in the skill of writing, one student from the scientific stream was chosen to be the sample of the study during the first semester 2005/2006.

This choice is built on the rationale that one student can make enough because her progress is compared over her own pieces of writing, not to works introduced by other students. In fact, any judgment or assessment in this area concerns each student individually.

The purposive assignment of the one member of the sample facilitates access, considering the fact that she is not one of the researcher's students but studying in the same school.

The sample's teacher judges her of being an average to good writer and always had scores of about ( 6 or7) out of (10). So, she is expected to make some mistakes that are going to be detected as the portfolio grows.

**The instrument of the study:** Basic tool that was used to achieve the purpose of this study was the writing assignments the sample had to do over a period of three weeks of December which, could make a considerable amount of the works that are usually done a scholastic semester for lesson Three: Focus on Writing "task in (AMRA One).

**Validity of the instrument:** To ensure the validity of these assignments, their titles were introduced to other English teachers teaching eleven graders who decided that they stem from topics introduced in the first semester of (AMRA One) and so do not cause any sort of anxiety to the sample.

The instrument used for doing the scoring was a rubric modified for this study. It was adapted from a rubric already made for scoring Arabic writing tasks that includes areas similar to those usually tested in English writings.

The seven achievement criteria included in this rubric include: Organizing paragraph, organizing themes and ideas, choosing appropriate ideas, using correct punctuation, using correct structure and language, correct spelling and clear handwriting and using varied writing style.

An estimation from 1 to 3 was given to judge each criterion. Zero was excluded so that the sample feels motivated to do the next task. Besides this estimation will not be considered in deciding her overall 70 marks allotted for evaluating a student's achievement in ( AMRA One).

For the latter reason, the ( Results) part of the rubric was given a new title: ( Notes) so that the researcher or any scorer could add his notes.

Again, to check the validity of the scoring study, a group of juries of English teachers and supervisors compared the English and supervisors compared the English and Arabic versions and decided they match and that they include criteria basic to grading writing.

**Reliability of the instrument:** To ensure reliability, each piece of writing was estimated twice: once by the researcher then by the English teacher, but separately. (✓) was used to tell the researcher's estimation and (x) to indicate the teacher's estimation.

**Study producers:** After revising the literature available for the purposes of this study, defining the problem and its basic question and deciding on the appropriate instruments to be employed in this study, the population and the sample of the study were assigned following the producers mentioned earlier in the study.

The sample was told that she was going to produce some pieces of writing based on her school experience and textbook for the purpose of making a portfolio that achieve the aim of this study.

The sample's teacher volunteered to pass the instructions made by the researcher and in making the final judgments.

All the writing pieces were done at school so that it can be guaranteed that all the works are all of the sample's own production. The pieces were performed out of the formal English classes, because they were works not produced to make grades for the English course level one. This information was passed to the sample to create a relaxed atmosphere for writing and to make her fully responsible for the job.

The case received continual feedback about her own works to use for the coming writings. She was also told that grading and estimation will focus on a different criterion.

In order to reduce anxiety and make her focus better on the new criterion wanted for the coming tasks so that progress could be detected.

As explained earlier, both the researcher and the sample's teacher graded the final works using (✓) and (x) marks respectively.

The pieces of the writings included in the portfolio designed for this study, represented almost two thirds of the final writings any eleven grader is supposed to include and produce for the (8) units of the first semester of (AMRA One).

The case's teacher didn't keep any copies of her works to assure that this additional work by the case will not decide her grades for English level one of grade 11.

## RESULTS

### Assignment A

**Task one:** Write about a journey you did to Aqaba: when you did it, who was with you, what you did and other things you like to tell.

**Estimation:** Accept for the second and third, criteria that were estimated 2 and 2, respectively, the researcher estimated all criteria at 1.

The researcher and the teacher agreed in two areas: organizing paragraphs and using correct punctuation. However, it seemed that the teacher estimated the sample's performance higher than the researcher did. The teacher explained that she could not ignore that this student writes better than many of her other students. Examples of mistakes included in assignment A.

- Excessive use of and for the comma and the stop.
- Capitalization : Aqaba for Aqaba.
- Using incorrect past verb: were watched/watched, played and laughing/played and laughed and bought for bough.
- Spelling mistakes : shope, bas, children .....
- using Arabic terms : (انلصو).

### Assignment B

**Task two:** Write about (70) words describing your school. Your composition should include information about : its location, classes, teachers, .....

**Estimation:** Again, teacher's estimation graded better than the researcher at this assignment at most criteria although agreeing concerning the punctuation and the writing styles. In fact, (B) rounded to be the worst piece of writing introduced in this portfolio because it lacks organization and paragraphing.

Choosing appropriate ideas was estimated 2 by the researcher because the writing included many ideas included in the task.

Examples of mistakes in B.

- Using pronouns incorrectly : My school its is ...
- Using third person singular (-s) incorrectly : It haves.
- Incorrectly using the past : My school was ...
- Sentence 3 is irrelevant.

### Assignment C

**Task three:** Rewrite your experience in Aqaba again considering the same ideas you were asked to include.

Note : Before writing, the student received a through feedback about all the mistakes she made in assignment A.

**Estimation:** The student didn't receive any (1) estimation against any criterion neither by the researcher nor by the teacher although the teacher estimated higher at organizing paragraphs and using the correct structure and language. She explained that she would ignore what she called "ting mistakes" for having "a good" writing as is assignment C.

Despite improving from 1 to 2 regarding the first criterion: organizing paragraphs, the researcher believed that assignment c still didn't have clearer paragraphing. Examples of mistakes in C:

- Incorrect tenses : do for did/buyed for bought.

#### **Assignment D**

**Task four:** Write a letter to your friend telling her your opinion about whether should go out to work or not supporting your opinion in good reasons. Your address is P.O.Box 353, Ma'an.

**Estimation:** The student is showing a clearer progress in this assignment because she is using the correct informal letter form as indicated in unit 1, she was committed to the task and making fewer spelling mistakes despite the clear ones around the assignment.

In addition, the student herself sounded to be judging her work that she deleted they ( they), she changed (e) to (i) in opinion, but not sure about (p) or (b) in important.

Examples of mistakes in D.

- Incorrect Subject-verb agreement (How are your family?) ( However, it's the most common mistakes in most student's writing).
- Using because ( becose) for (to).
- Redundency : In my opinion/I believe  
I think/in my opinion.

**Assignment E:** Write about 100 words describing your weekend routine. You may tell about other people in your home. Use as any frequency adverbs as possible.

**Estimation:** For six out of the seven criteria of the rubric, both the researcher's and the teacher's estimations looked identical. It's only for (Organizing themes and ideas) that the teacher scored higher: she supported her opinion by that the student talked then about others.

In E, too, the student sounded to judge and assessment her work before handing it and that she tried to express herself more than she was asked to do Notice sentence one lines 1,2.

Examples of mistakes in E:

- Placing ( always) incorrectly in line 3.
- Using ( go us) for ( take us).

### **DISCUSSION**

Taking into consideration the estimation made by both the researcher and the teacher, we notice that the sample was making on evident progress presented in reducing the amount of mistakes around the different criteria the sample's performance was measured against. The first two assignment can't be very useful to judge progress because they had a different purpose which was detecting all kinds of mistakes the sample was expected to make.

The sample's teacher stated that the mistakes produced in those two assignments go with the average level of most other students in her classes, but time available for grading every writing task prepared by each student was not enough. Besides, she believed that writing assignments were usually were merely performed to add more marks to the overall mark of any exam regardless the quality of the production.

The teacher also clarified that she never used any kind of rubrics because what she mostly cared about was that students were writing in the class.

Generally speaking, it sounded that the student was making a considerable progress all through the assignments following A and B and this may be due to different factors that can be explained in the following ways:

**First:** the sample was told that she was going to build up a portfolio that would include her best works, so she might be trying to do her best while writing.

**Second:** the topics included in the assignments were based on subjected and experiences introduced in the textbook and that might mean that the sample was familiar with what she was writing.

**Third:** at some stages of the study, the sample was allowed to use and ask for some assistance. Foe example, she could use the dictionary while doing one assignment.

**Fourth:** This portfolio was, compared to other portfolios, prepared in a short time. As a result, continual practice might be why there was a continual progress.

**Fifth:** The sample always received an immediate feedback following piece of writing she produced. This probably caused avoiding many mistakes that appeared in the earlier works.

**Sixth:** The sample's teacher introduced her as a "good writer" and that might have reinforced her to try her best while writing despite the mistakes that she couldn't sometimes avoid.

In summary, the action of comparing the estimations made by the researcher clearly show how the sample's writing develop and grow along time when the portfolio was prepared.

This, in fact, answers the question of this study that was detecting a growth in the English writing ability.

On the other hand, the results of this study match with those detected by<sup>[14]</sup> who proved that portfolios were effective in promoting student's attitudes and critical thinking ability.

**Recommendations:** In the light of the results of the study, the following recommendations were elicited and proposed:

- Knowledge about portfolios should be passed to all teachers working in the ministry of Education by all possible means.
- More training courses should be hold to train teachers on how to prepare and assess portfolios.
- Portfolios should be adopted as an additional means of evaluation and that these portfolios make part for the student's overall marks of the courses he studies.

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