PORTFOLIOS ASSESSMENT AS A METHOD OF ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE IN ESL CLASSROOM CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The use of portfolios as an assessment tool probably is unlikely common in Asian countries. Portfolios is commonly considered as a compilation of students' work for a certain period of time. In fact, the portfolios may show the originality of and the nature of students' learning improvement. In this paper, the writer will discuss portfolios as a method of assessment in English as Second Language or English as Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom context from teacher's perspective. This paper is designed with this format order: firstly to explain about the degree of portfolios method to assess content, skills and knowledge in the teaching-learning program in the ESL/EFL context, to correlate portfolios system to model of curriculum planning and policy context. Secondly, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of portfolios method from a theoretical perspective, and analyse the validity, reliability, and fairness. Thirdly, to specify the association of portfolios method and the types of assessment and the correlation of portfolios method with assessment for learning. Fourthly, to evaluate the degree of portfolios method of assessment promoting learning of the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to my teaching experience.

Keywords*:* Portfolios, Assessment, Curriculum, Learning, Knowledge, Skills.

ABSTRAK

Pengaplikasian portfolios diguakan sebagai alat penguji sangat tidak umum di negara-negara Asia, dimana portfolio itu dianggap sebagai kumpulan karya siswa semata. Ternyata, portfolio adalah sebagai bukti asli dan alami atas perkembangan pemnbelajaran dari seorang siswa. Di dalam karya tulisan ini, penulis akan mendiskusikan portfolio sebagai sebuah metode pengujian di dalam konteks kelas ESL/EFL dari sudut pandang seorang pengajar. Karya tulis ini disusun dengan urutan sebagai berikut: pertama, menjelaskan tentang kemampuan portfolio sebagai alat ukur untuk menguji isi, keahlian dan ilmu dan bagaimana sistem portfolio di dalam model kurikulum dan kebijakan pendidikan. Kedua, memaparkan kelebihan dan kekurangan dari portfolio dari sudut pandang teori dan analisa validitas, reliable dan keadilan. Ketiga, menjelaskan hubungan antara metode ujian dan jenis-jenis ujian, diikuti oleh hubungan antara metode portfolio dengan pembelajaran. Keempat, mengevaluasi keabsahan portfolio dalam menguji ilmu, keahlian dan kemampuan yang berdasarkan pengalaman saya mengajar.

Kata Kunci*: portfolios, ujian, kurikulum, pembelajaran, ilmu, keahlian.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching foreign language in developing countries, such as Indonesia, has become a highlighted challenge. Despite English is a compulsory subject started from junior secondary level, there is a gap of teaching method and strategies between small and big cities. Teacher training programs and education development are not equally done in all areas in Indonesia due to human resources, transportation, and technology barriers. As a consequence when students from small cities study at big cities, there is some knowledge and skills gap between them and the local students. To overcome this issue, some universities use ESL/EFL classroom context in English learning program, so that the same understanding about concepts of learning language among students is accomplished. Samuelowicz's (2006) found that overseas students in Australia, particularly Asians, tend to rely on their memory, rather than understand the procedures; and rely on knowledge of content, rather than critical thinking. According to Nuryatno (2006, p. 59) that Freire concept of "Banking Education" which knowledge is a

matter of memorization is still practiced in Indonesia (2006, pp. 59-60). By learning through ESL/EFL classroom context adapting active learning method, students may shift their learning habits in language from passive learners to active learners. Portfolios assessment is suitable for ESL/EFL context because it enables students to be proactive learners and construct their mind to achieve learning outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dewey's philosophy of "experiential learning" has inspired and been used as core teaching approach in ESL/EFL context. Dewey (1897 in Kolb and Kolb, 2005) proposes that education should be continuously built on experience and the learning process should include constructing a learners' beliefs and ideas about a lesson, so that what they learn can be assessed and used as prior knowledge for the next lessons. Furthermore, the learning process not only learns about concepts, but also practices the knowledge and skills through analysis which can be done through discussion, debate, and diversity by incorporating thoughts, sense, observation, and performance (Dewey, 1897 in Kolb and Kolb, 2005). This Dewey's idea is reflected in inquiry-based learning as the foundation of teaching-learning program in ESL/EFL context (Ovando, Collier and Combs, 2003, p. 3). Inquiry-based learning is defined as a learning paradigm which students are encouraged to use any sources to help them to understand problems and find the solution through exploring, investigating, studying, and analysing (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari, 2007 in Inquiry-based Learning). In ESL/EFL context, not only are students introduced to how the language is used in the real world, but also given the opportunity to explore and practice the language interactively. The learning strategies applied in the classroom stimulate students' brain to construct language concepts rather than language memorization. Students, at the same time, obtain knowledge of the language, learn how to use the language content and skills to develop their language competence. In other words, students construct their mind autonomously.

Little (2009) proposes three ways how students may have their learning autonomy through portfolios.

Firstly, students' involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. This idea is supported by Moya and O'Malley (1994) who mention that in such procedure, students participate in portfolios compilation management in which they are encouraged to give comment on each evidence and able to see the process thoroughly. Secondly, learners' continuously reflection leading them to self-assessment habits. Cizek (2010, p. 4) states that portfolios allow students to do self-reflection in terms of evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in learning process. Doing self-reflection helps students to revise their plan to overcome the weaknesses and to maintain from the strengths (Black and William, 1998a in Cizek, 2010, p. 7). Finally, target language to achieve. Regarding this, Klenowski (2002, p. 27) explains that one of the portfolios principle is the cooperation among curriculum, teaching, and learning. The teacher's lesson plans, applied in teaching-learning process and supporting curriculum, are the important guidance to students' learning autonomy. The right direction and instruction with proper teaching methods, as well as strategies help students to construct their cognitive and metacognitive domain which employ their learning autonomy.

Curriculum planning is closely related to the content of subject and types of assessment used in certain learning program. The ESL classroom context is applied differently in each country because culture and purpose of learning give great impacts in learning language. Carter and Nunan (2001, p. 4) explain that teaching English in South America countries is different than in South East Asian countries. Despite the distinction of English as second language or foreign language, the way of delivering material is adjusted with the native culture because culture gives influence to how people think. The other thing is the needs of English language become more specific, such as industry, technology, health, and law. These impacts in learning language determine types of assessment commonly used in ESL/EFL context. Ovando, Collier, and Combs (2003, pp. 332-333) mention several types of assessment most used in ESL context, they are norm-referenced, criterion-referenced and performance-based assessment. Performance-based assessment is

closely associated with portfolios assessments. According to Herman, Aschbacher and Winter (1992 in Ovando, Collier, and Combs, 2003, p.334-335), performance-based assessment leads students to achieve learning outcomes actively by activating their autonomous learning, both cognition and metacognition. This type of assessment supports the portfolios assessment model.

The ESL context implication explained above is relevant to Skilbeck's dynamic model. Skillbeck's model, explained by De Mesa (2014), shows several stages: situational analysis, goal formulation, program building, interpretation and implementation, monitoring, feedback, assessment, and reconstruction. The Skillbeck's model indicates that the situation is the main factor in building a curriculum. Since ESL/EFL context is adjustable to the country, analysing situation is needed to set the right goal formulation in curriculum planning. The formulation is used to construct the program applied which accommodates the interpretation and implementation of the curriculum. In implementation, the curriculum is monitored, reviewed, assessed to adjust with the development in language learning, education policy, or any aspects related to teaching-learning. Thus, the reconstruction is needed and it leads back to the first stage. As the portfolios assessment is assessed with performance-based assessment, it is adapted to the situation and developed to fulfil learning needs.

Curriculum cannot exist without education policy. In the United Kingdom, portfolios assessment is officially used in the Scottish education system to assess language, art and design, technology and computing (Klenowski, 2001, pp. 11-12). Klenowski (2001) explains that the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), incorporating with Scottish Examination Board to design and create the standards of portfolios assessment thoroughly due to selection and certification (p. 11). To reach an understanding of the portfolios assessment system, teacher training is one of important aspect in education policy. In the United States, portfolios assessment is mostly used in teacher education programs. The policy about the use of portfolios as a method of assessment is managed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBTPS)

incorporating with Board certification which organizes the use of portfolios as teaching certification (pp. 18-19). The use of portfolio assessment as teaching certification has been developed for The Extended Teacher Education Program (ETEP) at the University of Southern Main in which the students should set 11 goal areas, including: knowledge of subject matter and inquiry, diversity, and classroom management. These goal areas are relevant with ESL/EFL context which has taken certain attention in education policy in the United States since it was established to overcome the issues of language barrier of immigrants' children (Ovando, Collier, Combs, 2003, p. 55), who had to attend school as part of Civil Rights. This immigration phenomena has led the U.S Department of Education to set a policy in 1995 which is aimed to assist students in reaching fluency and literacy achievements in both their native and English language (p. 62). However, the ESL/EFL context is not uniformly used in the United States because it is managed by state level policy (p. 68) which arranges about the procedures, funding and teacher training. This supportive policy indicates that the portfolio is most likely used as method of assessment as long as it meets the school policy.

DISCUSSION

Portfolios as a method of assessment has some strengths as well as weaknesses. From the theories mentioned above, the strengths of portfolios assessment are firstly, an enduring understanding. Portfolios are managed purposively so that learners are aware of the learning journey, and the teaching-learning process. The structure of portfolios focuses on both process and product of learning which allows learners develop their cognitive as well as metacognitive domains. Secondly, autonomous thinking. Portfolios system tends to be individual, so it allows learners to explore and construct their understanding autonomously. Thirdly, reflection. Portfolios plan encourages learners to review their work thoroughly as it is arranged chronologically; thus, learners have a chance to learn their strengths and weaknesses in learning process which may lift their self-confidence. Fourthly, creativity. Portfolios are not limited to written forms, such as essay, report, and notes; but they can be in forms of audio or

audio-visual recordings, images, and performance. Such learning outcome products motivate learners to use their creativity collaborated with knowledge and behaviour. Finally, authentic; since portfolios are resulted from the process, the information compiled is from the real life from classroom activities.

The weaknesses of portfolios assessment can be found from three aspects. Firstly, policy. The socio-cultural of education perspective is not easy to be changed (Shepard, 2000 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 72) because it involves educational paradigms and is closely related to the teaching-learning process. Secondly, curriculum plan. Curriculum plan is related to the capability of schools to support resources needed for the portfolios assessment system (Stecher, 1998 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 86); one of them is to equip teachers with teacher training. Since the tasks in portfolios are not standardized, the consistency of teacher training is doubtful. (Koretz, 1998 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 81). Thirdly, teaching-learning program. Since portfolios are arranged systematically, teachers are required to explicitly teach learners to apply the general guidelines (Brown and Campione, 1990 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 83). When teachers do not direct learners well, there is an indication that learners tend to treat their portfolio assessment as the other assessment. As a result, learners tend to use strategies to earn high score efficiently, not to gain the essential portfolios assessment itself (Broadfoot, 1996 in Klenwoski, 2001, p. 80).

From the weaknesses above, it may be indicated that the consistency of portfolios as a method of assessment may become the major issue in validity and reliability. Teachers may have various perspective to do portfolios system. This may result different treatment of portfolios system. Since portfolios system is assessed based on holistic paradigm, the assessment result tends to be higher than national standard (Koretz, 1998 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 83). Furthermore, there is no sufficient information about criteria related to stages of development (Supovitz et.al., 1997 in Klenowski, 2001, p. 86). Regarding to fairness, Koretz (1998) mentions that "validity defines as inferences" (in Klenowski, 2001, p. 84). This indicates that learners gain different level of proficiency when they have different level difficulties of tasks. They may get the same score but their result quality is different.

From the type of assessment proposed by Rowntree (1987, p. 119), a portfolios assessment is categorized as informal assessment because the tasks may blend classroom and community activities. However, portfolios could be formal assessment, supported by school policy and organization of board examination. Despite the complexity, the portfolios system has a good purpose to learners' learning awareness. Portfolios are enabled for both formative and summative assessment. In formative assessment, portfolios are used to map and monitor the learners' progress, and learners get feedback. The feedback is used as the next step to reach the learning outcomes, which are assessed in summative assessment. The teaching-learning process is the core idea of portfolios. Thus, the portfolios assessment tends to be continuous assessment regarding the continuation of the learning process. After evaluation process in formative assessment, learners develop their learning to achieve learning outcomes in summative assessment. After the summative assessment, the process still continue to the next learning outcomes based on the result of the previous learning. A portfolios assessment is a course work assessment because it is related to what learners do during the teaching-learning process and what they produce. In other words, portfolios assessment assesses not only the process of learning but also the product resulted from the understanding process. Most of the time portfolios assessment is conducted internal due to school policy. Portfolios as external assessment are most likely happened when the external assessors visit school exhibitions and ask some questions about learner's learning product displayed in school open-house or school annual exhibitions.

Assessment for learning is also an important aspect in learning and teaching process. Klenowski (2009 in William, 2011) defines assessment for learning as "part of everyday practice by students, teachers, and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning." Furthermore, Black et.al (2004 in William, 2011) mention that assessment for learning is any assessments for

which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning. In other words, assessment for learning is very important in teaching-learning practice because it helps learners to improve their learning through teacher-learners collaboration in teaching-learning process. According to Cremin and Arthur (2014), generally there are three kinds of assessment for learning strategies: oral feedback with questioning or dialogue, feedback through marking and peer- and self-assessment. Portfolios assessment facilitates the three strategies mentioned above. Crmin and Arthur (2014) mention that oral feedback either with questions or dialogue motivates learners to construct thinking skills and their self-confidence (p. 317). Feedback through marking facilitates learners with information and advice focused on learning improvement (p. 320). Self-assessment facilitates learners to construct metacognitive skills and may help them to see the learning outcomes deepen; and peer-assessment increases learners' awareness of what they learn, how they learn and what facilitate them to learn (p.318). Not only learners develop their metacognitive skills and self-confidence through discussion and reflection, but teachers also may develop their teaching methods to help learners to meet their needs and have opportunities to do self-reflection through learners' work. Teacher-learners collaboration is crucial because both learn from each other to achieve the main goals in learning (Pedder and James, 2012, pp. 33-48).

CONCLUSION

In her teaching practice in ESL/EFL classroom context, the writer use assessment for learning to check learners' understanding and accomplishment before the formative and summative assessment. Most of the time she has conversations and give some questions to lead them to thinking construction. The learners tend to be unconfident at first, but then they are able to give deeper thoughts and invove creative fantasy (Harris and William, 2012 in Cremin and Arthur, 2014, p.317). She also applies feedback through marking by writing down the learning outcomes and giving notes to points they need to refer to the learning outcomes and compliments to points they have done well. This may help learners to gain improvement.

Based on discussion above, portfolios assessment is one of promising method assessments in education, especially in learning language. Portfolios encourage learners to think deeper which helps them to construct their cognitive and metacognitive domains and practice their critical reflection to understand their both strengths and weaknesses. In this way, self-development may occur and it is a great point to increase learners' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, learning outcomes achievement is most possibly happened. However, there are some issues arise regarding the intention of assessment. Portfolios assessment standard is different from national standard. It happens because both standards use different learning paradigms. Portfolios assessment which is used holistic paradigm tends to assess learners' proficiency above the national standard because it assesses a learning process as a whole. While national standard is focused on content and knowledge which encourage learners to learn some particular parts only. The other issue is the international language tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS still use certain methods of assessment, such as multiple-choice, gap-fill, and open-ended questions which require memorization and focus on content. Portfolios assessment seems not likely to help language learners to improve their language proficiency. However, language learners may find the benefits of portfolios assessment in working field because portfolios allow them to broaden their perspectives and practice their analysis skills.

The writer believes that portfolios assessment is effective method of assessment in learning language because it encourages learners to use language actively and enable learners to improve their language proficiency. Learners are motivated to have autonomous thinking and elevate their self-confidence in learning. However, this method is limited to some types of assessment, such as informal, internal, external, formative and summative assessment. Portfolios assessment is most unlikely used as formal assessment due to policy and education system. The validity, reliability, and fairness of portfolios assessment are still debatable. She suggests that portfolios assessment is used as supporting assessment to facilitate learner's language learning. Regarding its role as supporting assessment,

formative assessment and assessment for learning are the best implication for portfolios method of assessment. This method of assessment is conducted for internal matter, so that it is easier to be monitored. In this case, the validity, reliability and fairness are designed based on the school achievement standard which is set as learning outcomes.

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