



### The Use of Portfolio to Assess Students' Learning Autonomy in Enhancing Their Writing Skill: The Case of MA Madarijul Huda

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#### Abstract

This study aims to analyze and explain self- assessment, peer- assessment, and teacher-student conference implementation to enhance the students' writing skills and explore the effect of the portfolio to explain the development of students' learning autonomy. The subject consisted of the eleventh-grade students of Islamic Senior High School Madarijul Huda in Pati regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Observation, interview, document analysis, and questionnaire were used to collect the data. This study found that the three assessment activities in the portfolio could enhance the students' writing skills. First, the self-assessment reflected the students' learning progress. They were honest in correcting the text and confident in completing the task. Second, the peer-assessment allowed the students to get the new academic experiences from their friends. Besides, the students were encouraged to keep the friendship well, more tolerant, and talkative. Third, the group's teacher-student conference inspired the students to build good teamwork, but passive members hindered the cooperation. Some members sometimes relied on the teacher's explanation. The students had an excellent ability to manage collaboration. Some conclusions can be drawn as follows: a) some high achieving students claimed they were autonomous learner before applying portfolio; b) the self- assessment activity could develop the students' learning autonomy; c) students categorized as proactive learners could play as leaders, problem solvers, and negotiators in the classroom

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Indonesian government encourages teachers to use an authentic assessment. According to the government regulation number 66 years 2013, portfolio is recommended to develop the students' interest, progress, and achievement in a certain period. It allows teachers to understand English language learners to fill the gap between the students' understanding and what they do in learning English. Current educational context emphasizes teachers' roles through portfolio assessment and classroom discussion.

This research focus is portfolio assessment to measure the students' writing skills. Writing skill requires a complex process and takes longer period to produce a qualified text based on the standard criteria of the curriculum. Therefore, an individual may need to do multiple revisions to produce good writing. This activity gives many benefits to the students. The revision sessions take an essential part in the writing process. Several previous studies had trained the students' abilities through revision sessions. It meant the students had many texts as evidence of achievement.

There are several activities for learners to compose written texts during a portfolio assessment. Numerous modifications were designed into several activities, namely, the self-assessment, peer- assessment, and teacher-student- conference. These activities are known as assessment as learning. It means that the students learn to assess themselves, their peers, and discuss their work academically with the teacher.

The first activity was self- assessment. It was an activity to evaluate the writing performances by themselves. They could give grades, marks, or commentaries based on a specific self-assessment form (Lam, 2018). According to Brown & Haris, 2013, self-assessment is needed by the students to fulfill the standard criteria based on a rubric. Andrade and Du (2007, p.160) argue that self-assessment is a formative assessment process. It reflects and evaluates the learners' works based on the given goals. Self-assessment allows students to

understand their strengths and weaknesses. Then they need to revise based on their judgments.

The second activity was peer-assessment. It involved other students' checking their friends' work to comment on that work. This assessment type requires peer-collaboration to respond to the writing's strengths and weaknesses; commenting and correct mistakes force their peer's development in writing ability (Mubarok, 2017 & Mubarok, 2012). Peer feedback allows the creation of a social dimension during classroom writing. The underlying assumption is writing a social process (Hyland, 2005, p.198). Peer assessment enables learners to develop skills in a learning environment and gives them the chance to monitor, analyze, and evaluate their text on both sides of product and process views. Thus, it helps the students to think more cognitively, be more self-centred, active, and flexible learners toward an in-depth approach, and be social students who can make a relationship well with other classmates members easily.

The third activity was teacher-student conference. It was a conference between the teacher and the students, in order to discuss about the students' text. In this activity, the teacher and the students spoke to negotiate the text (McCarthy, 1992, p.1). Teachers can give feedback on student writing through a face-to-face conference. Again, the benefit is that a teacher can reveal the students' misunderstanding about the priority issues discussed in the class (Kroll, 2001, p. 228). Ideally, conferences can make students active rather than passive to just receive the advice from the teacher. In conferences, students are expected to ask questions, clarify meaning, and discuss their papers (Hyland, 2003). It can be applied in several forms, like individual or one by one student, several students in groups, or even the whole class (Vangah, Jafarpour, & Mohammadi, 2017).

During these activities, the learner learning autonomy was also observed. Some studies suggest the importance of involvement, learning process, and goal-oriented. The students' participation is an essential part of building autonomous learning. Students should be taught

to think about the process of learning rather than the result of education (Lo, 2010; Czura, 2013). Portfolio allows students to find the goal of their learning. It helps the students knowing the concept of autonomy in the learning process and managing the available resources (Riichiro, 2016; Lo, 2010). Portfolio enables the students to have specific control over the learning process; they need to control their learning beyond teachers' instruction and beyond the classroom setting. Also, involving the self-assessment could increase awareness of their learning needs and solve the difficulties in writing (Djoub, 2016). In contrast, the portfolio takes much time and requires the patient lecturer to guide students to autonomously learn. A study showed that students were strongly motivated to learn autonomously. It was proven by documenting their learning process into a portfolio and reflecting what they have learned (Mallipa, 2018).

From the explanations above, studies concerning portfolio are still limited and the lack of highlighted process to conduct portfolio. Therefore, further study about how portfolio, including self-assessment, peer- assessment, and teacher-student conference implementation is needed. The reason is that portfolio could enhance students' learning autonomy as well as their writing skill.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative case study. Qualitative research was chosen, as this study focuses on the participants' perspectives, meanings, and subjective views (Cresswell, 2012, p. 38). The data were collected from observation, interview, document analysis, and questionnaire. The research was done in one of the Islamic Senior High School in Pati regency, Central Java, Indonesia, namely MA Madarijul Huda Kembang. The school is one of the favorite Islamic Boarding Senior High School in the Dukuhseti sub-district. There were twenty-three students in this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Enhancement of Students' Writing Skill through the Self-Assessment Activity**

The first finding showed the improvement of students' writing skills when the students were taught by self-assessment with a percentage of 61%. Self-assessment also made them know the students' learning progress. The students knew more vocabularies, because they got a second chance to revise their texts. The self-assessment made them concerned with the little elements in writing text such punctuation or capitalization. They were also aware of the reflecting process importance for their learning. It helped the students revise their essay, starting from the phrase level, the surface level, the content level, and the lexical level (Purwanti, 2015). She found self-assessment also facilitated the learners to revise the text's content, the organization of the text, the vocabulary of the text, the grammar of the text, and the mechanism of the text.

The students' background knowledge also impacted further text revision. Some students did not revise their text, although they wrote their mistakes on the self-assessment form. Here, they found difficulties to revise the texts.

Again, the self-assessment activity was an excellent activity to increase the participation of the students. So, the students' ability would meet the standard criteria as long as they had good attitude. The students' attitude influenced the result of this activity, such as their achievements and soft skills. It meant they had to admit their mistakes, then, revised it seriously.

Another research from Riansih (2017) found that self-editing effectively improved the writing performance of the students. Learners could further revise their errors, support their peers, and learn from each other. This assessment activity allowed them to identify their writing skills gaps and set their short-term goal related to their mistakes. The emerging problems dealt with how the students revised their works. It was due to a lack of English background knowledge. Several of them only re-wrote the text without revising. Most of them could apply how to put capitalized letters, punctuation, and text

organization. Unfortunately, they were not able to arrange the content. Even so, the learners had tried to achieve the maximum results.

By applying self-assessment activity, the students were asked to learn and assess their works autonomously. The more they studied; they would obtain a lot of knowledge. The indicator of self-assessment activity success was developing their achievements and soft skill improvements, such as improving honesty characters and confidence.

### **The Enhancement of Students' Writing Skill through the Peer-Assessment Activity**

The second finding was the result of peer-assessment activity. It allowed new academic experiences from their friends. The students told that they could measure their abilities through comparing their text with their friends' text. Besides, peer as teamwork contributed much to their achievement and their friendship relation. The students also learned how to build communication intensively in order to get the clear explanation about their friends' text. They had to be tolerant about their friends' mistakes. It was wonderful process in this activity. Polite comments and suggestions became valuable thing in this stage.

The peer gave feedback on the peer-assessment form. There were meaningful feedback and meaningless feedback. The meaningful feedback was given by the students with high achievement. They gave suggestions based on the form and comments on the form. Then, their friends revised it. In this case, the feedback was useful because they were used to revise their texts. Reversely, the feedbacks obtained from their friends were merely to complete their tasks. Thus, these students did not pay attention on the given form. Therefore, the feedback became meaningless moreover when their friends ignored it. However, there were twelve students got a better score after revising texts using self-assessment form; in other words 52% of students reached a better score for their improvement.

This finding was consistent with what Mubarak (2017) found. He found two perceptions related to the peer- assessment activity. First, the students had a negative perception before revising; otherwise, they had a positive perception after revising. It was due to the nature of peer assessment. A peer-assessment has real feedbacks, precision, and learning goals.

Similarly, the students were reluctant to do this activity. They worried if they would have insulted their friend's feelings with their comment. However, after the activity, they felt better. The learners got new experiences, such as learning more from their friends' mistakes or observing their friends' texts. They tried to look for the new vocabulary in their dictionary. Assessing the friends' text benefited them. They learned wisely correct their friends' works and to understand their friends' text.

Peer assessment encouraged students to wisely negotiate with their friends' text meanings. They communicated intensively, felt free, and were confident to discuss with their peers (Fatimah & Suharto, 2017). They communicated intensively with their peers to find the clarity of their peers' texts. They could do it orally or by writing their comments and suggestions. However, while giving the feedback, they did not obtain any attention from their friends, for example, investigating the correction and checking the themes.

Almost all students actively participated in discussions with their peers. They discussed academically with their friends. Many valuable things happened, such as writing text skill improvement, understanding, empathy, negotiation about the text's meaning, and their skills to produce readable texts.

### **The Enhancement of Students' Writing Skill through the Teacher-Student Conference Activity**

The next finding was from the teacher-student conference. This activity successfully made all of the students reaching better scores after revising the texts on its basis. The excellent teamwork influenced the process of writing in the teacher-student conference activity. Other

evidence showed that passive members impeded cooperation while the good teamwork determined the achievement of the group. In this case, they had job description. So, it would be easy to finish the work.

Based on the findings, the group consisted of a thinker, a writer, a translator even a dictionary opener. A thinker was someone who gave ideas to compose the text. A writer someone who had good handwriting and it was readable. A translator was someone who constructed the sentences from Bahasa Indonesia and translated into English. A dictionary opener was someone who looked for the words about English term in the dictionary.

The success of this conference depended on teamwork. The students had to finish their given task and solve problems, such as encouraging passive members and having empathy for them. The passive members might have thought they had lower English proficiencies so that they were afraid to speculate. Thus, they only followed their friends' opinions. McTigue and Liew (2011) found that students with the low ability only saw the teacher as an authority figure; thus, the students suddenly accepted the teacher's suggestion. Some students with low writing ability abilities accepted the teacher's suggestion rather than reformulating the teacher's idea into a new concept. On the contrary, students with high knowledge reformulated and revised their written texts. In this research, the activities included reading the text, asking and answering the text, diagnosing the problems, and giving suggestions. However, unfortunately, the teacher often responded to the students' questions rather than allowing the students. It was clear that the teacher dominated the conversation section in the teacher-student conference.

This research found that the students too relied on the teacher's explanation. The teacher dominated the process of assessment activity to present the interactive communication between the teacher and students. The teacher spoke over time to stimulate the students with low ability to state their idea about their texts. Another supportive finding to this statement is from

Isnawati et al. (2019). They found that the students were more engaged enthusiastically in asking more questions related to the feedback. The teacher successfully created a non-threatening atmosphere during the teacher-student conference.

This research also found a non-threatening atmosphere. The teacher gave comments and corrections about the content, organization, punctuation, and capitalization. The presence of teacher-student conferences impressed the students. They felt a new spirit when the teacher was involved in the process of reformulating the texts. Despite, this activity left a deep impression through the teacher's comments and corrections. The teacher persuasively embraced the students' characters.

### **The Effects of the Portfolio to Develop Students Learning Autonomy**

Portfolio activity could affect the development of learner autonomy. However, some students claimed that they were autonomous learners even before applying portfolio in the classroom. The students with high achievement in English subjects had this experience. So, they only needed to sharpen their creativity in writing text process. The second reason was that they already had excellent English background knowledge.

The development of students' learning autonomy could be seen through the learning autonomy development criteria. It consisted of five criteria of autonomous leaning levels, such as awareness stage, involvement stage, intervention stage, creation stage and transcendence stage. In this stage, the students learning autonomy increased through the self-assessment activity. According to the students' opinion, the self-assessment made them autonomous. They used the given instruction on the form and applied it to revise their texts without any assistances from either their friends or teacher.

This research applied three assessment methods, such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher-student conferences. The finding showed that self-assessment activity could develop the students' learning autonomy. It

successfully developed learning autonomy. This finding supported Berry (2008). He found the evidence of autonomous learning in the self-assessment activity in which students had to understand at what level they were. They had to deal with it to enhance their learning by setting learning goals and learning plans. The students were also concerned with the instruction very much because it facilitated them to assess the text. The form played important roles in the autonomous learning situation.

Learning autonomy in the learning process and teaching is a longitudinal phenomenon and needs efforts. It would appear from a repetitive learning process, so it fostered a habit. It also influenced learners' learning habits or called as learning autonomy. It would appear automatically in their mindset. Here there were twelve students with high ability in English. The students admitted they had applied a task-controlling learning system and arranged the priority scale. However, in this research, they obtained a new experience by using this portfolio and assessment activities. They were challenged in serial tasks so they could train their creativity in English lessons.

In this discussion, autonomous learning is also known as pro-active and reactive autonomies. Pro-active students had responsibility for designing their learning objectives and evaluating their work autonomously; while, reactive students were controlled by the teacher. In this research, we found twelve students as pro-active learners. They were able to be a leader, problem-solver and negotiator.

Twelve students were included in the pro-active category. They could actively change a difficult situation in a friendly situation. They could also assist their friends to actively help the students solving academic problems. The previous study from McTigue and Liew (2011) also found that proactive learners had higher levels of perceived self-efficacy. The study showed both contributions in every activity during the research. On the other hand, eleven reactive autonomy learners needed assistance from the teachers or their learning partners.

## CONCLUSION

Self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher-student conference could enhance the students' writing skills and make them obtain better scores. They had excellent teamwork so that the writing process could be improved. The portfolio also made learners autonomous. It was proven by high achievement of English students that sharpened their creativities of writing the text. These students also had a good background of knowledge about English. Then, by the assistance of self-assessment activity, they could be more autonomous.

Therefore, it is suggested for the next studies to apply portfolio to check the students' progresses in the classroom. In this case, the researcher also has roles as a teacher. Future researchers are expected to dig out the relationship among teacher-student conference activity, the students' writing skills, and learners' autonomy development. It is also important for other skills, such as reading, speaking, and listening.

This study was only conducted in a short time so that the students might have required longer time to write more text. Several hindrances were also engaged by the teachers in controlling students who were absent, sick, or having certain tasks from other teachers. Thus, they missed their chance to join this portfolio activity. During the research, there were no distinctive rules for anyone who did not complete the tasks. This research also did not provide reward or punishment to support the portfolio activity.

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