

PORTFOLIO ASSESMENT AS A CATALYST OF PROCESS-ORIENTED SKILL TO PROMOTE STUDENTS IN WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to improve the writing skill of the Management students at Faculty of Economics and Business Universitas Muhammadiyah Pontianak. A classroom action research was employed to conduct a portfolio assessment as a process-oriented skill. Students are expected to be able to write various kinds of business letters to fulfill the needs of their future career. The ability of how to write well cannot be obtained through a product-oriented approach particularly to students with low level English skill. Therefore, this study aimed at improving students' writing skill in terms of writing business letters namely letter of offer. The samples consisted of 37 students of Business English subject in the academic year 2018/2019. The findings of the study proved significant improvement on students' writing with portfolio assessment in terms of sub-skills in writing namely text harmony, vocabulary selection, grammar option, vocabulary writing, and writing tidiness from the first cycle to the second cycle. Subsequently, the students can orderly produce piece of writing since the underlying purpose of this study was to encourage writing as process-oriented skill.

Keywords: Portfolio assessment, writing skill, process-oriented skill, business letter

BACKGROUND

Writing is not merely acquired skill when it seeks only for the product-oriented skill; thus it might be obtained through consistent, continuous and persistent practice. The ability of writing can be activated with a set of coherent activity which allows the writers to undergo the process of writing especially for students who learn English as a foreign language. Students of Management Program at Faculty of Economics and Business Universitas Muhammadiyah Pontianak are required to write business letters as one of the requirements to pass Business English subject. As a matter of fact, they often experiences problems in writing skill due to lack of exposure of the techniques of writing, lack of vocabulary, and lack of writing habits. Therefore, the students need to be situated in learning activity where they are guided to write coherently and cohesively. Portfolio assessment is relevant to enable the students to obtain a process-oriented writing skill especially for students with low level of English skill. Portfolio assessment allows the students to keep revising continuously, to get feed backs consistently, and to produce writing relevantly. Portfolio assessment can

observe the progress of students' writing skill in the sustained period of time as in line with Wortham, Barbour & Desjean-Perrotta (1998) cited in (Sundem, 2006, p.70), portfolio assessment is the process of collecting students work over a period of time and using it to make conclusion about overall performance.

This study was conducted based on empirical evidences that the students possess poor writing skill, and confront with passive teaching technique. The students experienced less exposure of writing activities and led to inactive writing habit. Based on the field of study, Management students must be able to write business letters to meet the expectancy of business world. Therefore, the teaching and learning activity should be able to facilitate the students to experience a process-oriented skill. The core of the improvement of writing skill in this study was focused on the sub-skills of writing so that it can encourage the students possess an understanding on their writing. They are accustomed to using technical skills needed in writing such as how to focus, to elaborate, to organize ideas, and to use certain vocabulary. Moreover, the students can recognize their deficiency in writing and find the solution to cope with their problem. As a result, it will raise their awareness that writing is not a naturally acquired skill; it must be practiced and learned through experience.

The students were situated in two cycles of teaching and learning writing with portfolio assessment. They were assessed based on the writing rubrics by Kern (2000) which cover the sub-skills in writing namely text harmony, vocabulary selection, grammar option, vocabulary writing, and writing tidiness. The rubric was adapted to meet the characteristics of students' writing skill. In applying portfolio assessment, the lecturer asked the students to write business letter specifically letter of offer based on the explanation and learning activity occur in the classroom. Firstly, the lecturer required the students to prepare notebook with two columns; one for the original work and one for the revised work. In the revised work, the lecturer completed with feedbacks and comments in terms of content, grammar, and vocabulary. As a result, the students were able to revise their piece of writing. After two cycles of portfolio assessment, the students showed a better progress of writing and well-presented writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Portfolio Assessment

It is important to assess writing skill by applying portfolio assessment as it is compatible with the intended learning outcomes expected in the writing skill. Portfolio assessment can observe the progress of students' writing skill in the sustained period of time as in line with Wortham, Barbour & Desjean-Perrotta (1998) cited in (Sundem, 2006, p.70), portfolio assessment is the process of collecting students work over a period of time and using it to make conclusion about overall performance.

In the book "Improving Student Writing Skill, Sundem (2006) states that portfolio assessment has the advantage of making it easier to spot trends because there is an assignment-to-assignment basis. He emphasizes that portfolio will be more obvious for improvement. The importance of portfolio assessment is also supported by (Topping & Ehly, 2009, p. 271) that portfolio assessment provides an assessment of a student's work over a period of time in a content area. It exhibits the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in one or, more areas.

By using portfolio as an assessment tool, it will give benefits for both teachers and students. From the students' point of view, the use of portfolio assessment leads to the participation of the students in the decision process (Cameron, 2007, p.238) cited in (Schlopphege, 2010, p.8) while Bailey (1998, p.216) cited in (Schlopphege, 2010, p.8) points out the fact that through the use of portfolios, students will recognize "all the positive growth which is taking place during the learning process". Additionally, Cohen and Spencer (1998, p.172) cited in (Schlopphege, 2010, p.8) underline the benefit for students of having ongoing feedback about their works while experiencing that "growth and progress are more important than the test result". Meanwhile, from the teacher's point of view, the use of portfolio assessment does not only enhance the teacher's professionalism through meaningful and active involvement in student assessment (McKay, 2006, p.160) cited in (Schlopphege, 2010, p.8); it also helps him to understand the students' learning process and where to proceed with continuing instruction (Bailey, 1998, p.216) cited in (Schlopphege, 2010, p.8).

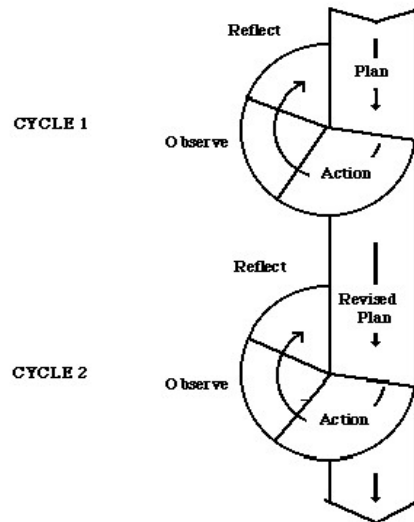
Furthermore, portfolio assessment is also useful to provide authentic feedbacks to the students based on the actual progress of their writing skill. In portfolio assessment, peer assessment is also integrated. As additional feature, the students will be enriched with abundant feedbacks and corrections. They will be more prepared to revise their writing. A variety of studies have demonstrated the benefits of peer involvement in the development of writing skills, in both school and higher education settings (Brufee, 1984; George, 1984; Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1992; Lynch & Golen, 1992; O'Donnell, Larson, Dansereau, & Rocklin, 1986) cited in (Topping & Ehly, 2009, p. 267). Hyland & Hyland (2006, p.142), state that feedback in various forms is an essential form of learning opportunity of each student, and when portfolio assessment is combined with a process approach to writing instruction, windows of possibility are opened for teachers (and portfolio judges) to look closely into students' portfolios and learn about the effectiveness of those learner opportunities. In addition, peers can also be used to support many aspects of the writing process, including planning (Higgins, Flowers & Petraglia, 1992), editing (Bissland, 1980), revision (Benson, 1979), and cowriting (O' Donnell et al., 1985) as cited in (Topping & Ehly, 2009, p. 271), as well as through task-based language teaching (Prastiwi, Salam, & Sutapa, 2016).

Finally, the use of portfolio assessment is urgently required to improve students' writing skill. For many EFL students, writing is still unhabitual activity due to lack of technical skills and practices. That is why the use of portfolio can enhance the writing habit of the students. By using portfolio assessment, the students do not only produce a good writing but also develop their writing skill comprehensively.

The Nature of Writing Skill

Writing is a productive skill which can be acquired by a series of practices. Good writing skills are essential for university students for academic purposes and future careers. As a matter of fact, writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously (Rao and Darga, 2018). It is needed to teach writing skill to students with a proper teaching technique such as portfolio assessment. According to Aryadoust (2010), writing assessment has been largely carried out in two forms: impressionistic (holistic) and analytical. In the setting of this study, the students' writing were assessed based on some features, and were not rated based a single criterion. The assessments were

scoped in the sentence level covering content, format, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation. It is strengthened by Spratt et al (2015, p.16) that state writing involves several sub skills. They involve spelling correctly, forming letters correctly, writing legibly, punctuating correctly, using correct layouts, choosing the right vocabulary, using correct grammar correctly, and using paragraphs correctly. It is in line with the criteria assessed in this study that were text harmony, vocabulary selection, grammar option, vocabulary writing, and writing tidiness.



Picture 1 Spiral Process of Classroom Action Research

Process-Oriented Approach

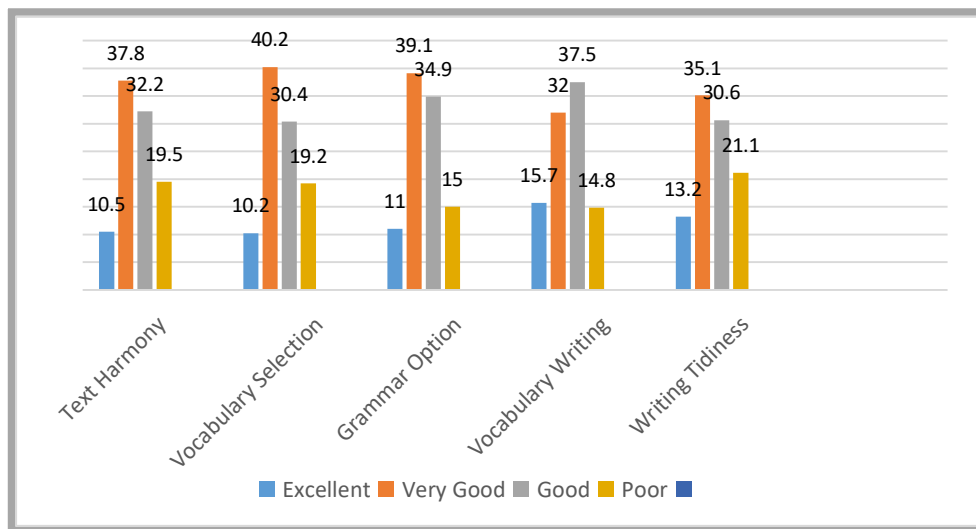
The underlying technique underpinned in this study was writing as a process-oriented approach. The study focuses on the process and progress of how the students develop ideas, formulate them, and revise writing into better writing. The activities are intended to enable the students to be language creators. As stated by Brown (2004, p.335) that a process-oriented approach: a) focus on the process of writing that leads to the final written products, b) help student writers to understand their own composing process, c) help them to build repertoires of strategies for prewriting, drafting, and rewriting, d) give students time to write and rewrite, e) let students discover what they want to say as they write, f) give students feedback throughout the composing process (not just on the final product) as they attempt to bring their expression closer and closer to intention, g) include individual conferences between teacher and student during the process of composition.

METHODOLOGY

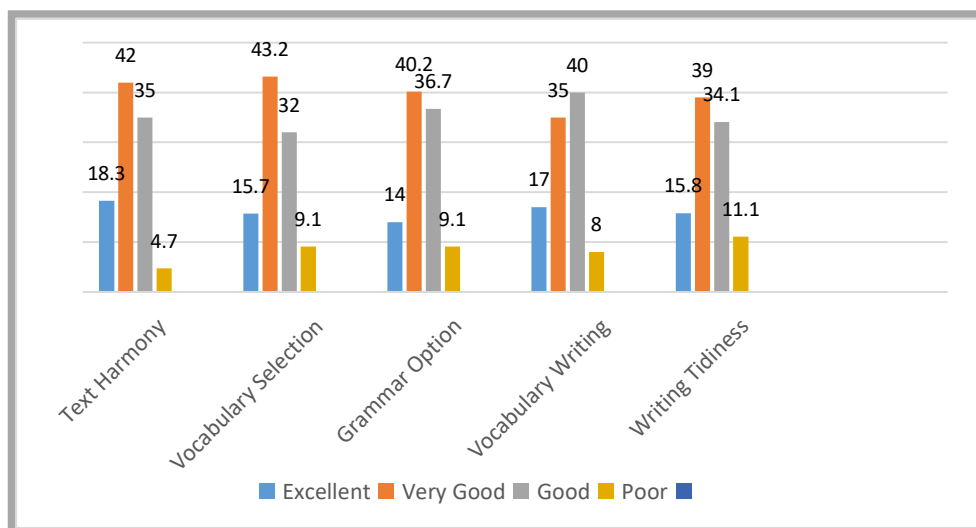
The method of study employed was a classroom action research with two-cycles where each cycle consists of planning (revised planning), acting, observing, and reflecting. Classroom action research is a reflective process which examines the process of teaching and learning as in the setting of this study was to reflect the process of teaching and learning writing skill and try to overcome the existing problems. Classroom Action Research is a method of finding out what works best in the classroom so that the instructor or teacher can improve student learning (Mettetal,

2001). To figure the systematic way of this study, the implemented model of classroom action research as described as spiral phase by Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns (2010:9) can be seen in Picture 1 above.

The subject of this study was the second semester students of Management Program Faculty of Economics and Business Universitas Muhammadiyah Pontianak Class 06 which consisted of 37 students. As the core of classroom action research is the process; the instruments of data collecting must be suited to the needs of describing the process in the classroom. The tools of data collection were portfolio assessment based on sub-skills writing rubrics, direct observation, and field notes.



Picture 1. Percentage of Sub-Skills of Writing in the first cycle



Picture 2. Percentage of Sub-Skills of Writing in the second cycle

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented based on the research question raised on this study. Specifically, this study addressed how the use of portfolio assessment can be used as a catalyst of a process-oriented skill to promote students in writing business letter; how the use of this assessment can improve students' writing. The results of the study were analyzed based on the sub-skills of writing skills namely text harmony, vocabulary selection, grammar option, vocabulary writing and writing tidiness. The qualifications of writing rubrics in the first cycle revealed the percentage of each sub-skill as in text harmony that there were 10.5 % of students categorized excellent, 37.8% were very good, 32.2 % were good, and 19.5% were poor. For vocabulary selection, there were 10.2 % categorized excellent, 40.2 % were very good, 30.4% were good, and 19.2% were food. In grammar option skill, there were 11% categorized excellent, 39.1% were very good, 34,9% were good, and 15% were poor. Subsequently, for vocabulary writing and writing tidiness both for excellent percentages were ranging from 13-16% as seen from the graph below while poor percentages were from 14-21%. The percentages of the qualification of each item identified that the scores were slightly different because of the students' homogeneous skills.

The findings addressed in the second cycle of the study showed significant results on the improvement of sub-skills of students' writing. As shown in the graph, the improvement of the first category as in text harmony proved an improvement on 'excellent' from 10.5% to 18.3% while on vocabulary selections, the 'very good' criterion was improved from 40.2% to 43.2%. Similarly, the following categories such as grammar option, vocabulary writing, and writing tidiness demonstrated the improvement for 'excellent', 'very good', 'and 'good' criteria. From the findings of the study of the first and second cycle revealed that the use of portfolio assessment can trigger the students to promote a writing habit since the use of this assessment gives feedbacks and helps them revising and correcting for better final writing. When the students undergo the process of writing continuously, they are exposed with a conducive learning environment.

Other important findings found in the study were that the use of portfolio assessment which focuses on the sub-skills of writing had encouraged the students possess an understanding on their writing. They are accustomed to using technical skills needed in writing such as how to focus, to elaborate, to organize ideas, and to use certain vocabulary. Moreover, the students can recognize their deficiency in writing and find the solution to cope with their problem. As a result, it will raise their awareness that writing is not a naturally acquired skill; it must be practiced and learned through experience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The application of portfolio assessment does not only allow the students to have good writing skill but also to get feedbacks to process-oriented skill. The implemented assessment encouraged the students to undergo continuous and well-directed writing through each phase of writing. The implicit idea is that writing should be perceived a process-oriented skill and it can be possessed by a series of persistent practices. After two cycles of the study, there were significant improvements of students' sub-skills in writing in the aspects of text harmony, vocabulary selection, grammar option, vocabulary writing, and writing tidiness. As this study has improved students' writing skill, it is recommended for the next study to focus on the needs analysis of students' writing skills comprehensively covering macro and micro skills of writing. The need

analysis is useful for designing adaptive, relevant and representative materials for the students.

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