An Investigation into the Efficiency of Writing Portfolios and Students' Perceptions in Academic Context

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Abstract

Evaluating students' achievement in regard to their writing skills in-progress has been a challenging issue for L2 English teachers. As one of the leading formative assessment techniques, portfolio writing has been used by language teachers for a long time. However, the efficiency of this technique still remains controversial for both language teachers and L2 researchers in terms of students' improvement in writing in addition to their reflections upon this formative assessment tool. Thus, this research aimed to measure the effectiveness of writing portfolio for the L2 learners of English in relation to their reviews on its usefulness. Accordingly, as an outcome of purposive sampling, I examined 24 students of English Preparatory School in a foundation university in Turkey, studying a variety of subjects, in relevance to their level of English proficiency and in-progress competence in terms of subject-verb agreement rule throughout one semester. Since writing portfolios are constructed as a means of assessing the process instead of evaluating the final performance, the data from students was collected every week. I also conduct an interview with the students, regarding their reflections and attitudes towards the efficiency of portfolio assessment. Therefore, this research used a mixture of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. In order to analyse the data, I will utilize Microsoft Excel. The results indicated that the overall performances of students who performed better than others coincide with their perceptions based on their answers to the survey interview. Students made substantial progress in regard to their implementation of SV Agreement rule. Hence, writing portfolios are perceived as useful tools by learners and their perceptions are parallel with their improvement.

Keywords: formative assessment, portfolio, process-based learning,

Yazma Portfolyosu Uygulamasının Etkililiğinin ve Öğrenciler Tarafından Algılanma Biçimlerinin Akademik Bağlamda İncelenmesi

Öz

Öğrenci gelişimlerinin yazma becerilerinin sürece dayalı gelişimini değerlendirmek İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğretenler için zorlayıcı bir mesele olmuştur. Önde gelen biçimlendirici değerlendirme tekniklerinden biri olarak, yazma portfolyosu hatırı sayılır bir süreden beri kullanılagelmiştir. Ancak bu tekniğin verimliliği günümüzde bile hem yabancı dil öğretmenleri hem de ikinci dil araştırmacıları için, öğrencilerin yazma becerilerine olan katkısı ve öğrencilerin bu araca karşı tutumları bakımından tartışmaya yol açan bir konu olarak kalmıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, öğrencilerin portfolyo değerlendirmesi konusundaki algıları ile ilişkendirilerek, yazma portfolyosunun etkililiğini ölçmeyi hedeflemiştir. Buna göre maksatlı örneklemenin bir sonucu olarak, Türkiye'deki bir vakıf üniversitesinde, İngilizce yeterlilik seviyeleri ve sürece dayalı Özne-Yüklem Eşleşmesi kuralındaki öğrenme gelişimlerine dayalı olarak 24 İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu öğrencisini bir sömestr süresince inceledim. Yazma portfolyosu, sonuçtan ziyade sürece dayalı gelişmeyi ölçen bir değerlendirme aracı olarak yapılandırıldığı için veriler öğrencilerden hafta bazlı olarak toplandı. Ayrıca dönem sonunda öğrencilerin yazma portfolyosuna ve onun verimliliğine yönelik algılarına istinaden bir röportaj gerçekleştirdim. Yine bu nedenle de nitel ve nicel araştırma yöntemlerinin bir birleşiminden yararlandım ve verileri analiz etmek için Microsoft Excel Programını kullandım. Sonuçlar ropörtaj sorularına verdikleri yanıtları baz alarak, daha çok gelişim gösteren öğrencilerin yazma portfolyosu konusundaki algıları ile paralel olduğunu ve öğrencilerin Özne-Yüklem Eşleşmesi kuralı bakımından kayda değer bir gelişme gösterdiğini işaret etti. Sonuç olarak yazma portfolyosunun öğrenci gelişimine olan katkısının algılanma şekliyle paralel olduğu sonucuna varıldı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Biçimlendirici değerlendirme, yazma portfolyosu, sürece dayalı öğrenme

1. INTRODUCTION

This research aims to investigate the genuine fruitfulness of portfolio writing as a formative assessment strategy at the university level for English learners. In order to understand the concept of this method, a broader definition and implication of the writing portfolio method is necessary.

From a historical perspective, writing assessment in an EFL context has been an evolving series of methods, starting with objective tests in the 1960s and advancing through the 1980s and onwards with essay testing and portfolio assessment (Lam, 2015). The development of cognitivist theories in the 1960s resulted in a more product or output-based learning approach. Afterwards, as the general mainframe switched to more socio-constructivist learning methods, a similar shift was necessary for assessment types as well. Accordingly, when this paradigm shift started to take place, portfolio writing was seen as an outcome of process-based writing approach.

The distinction between process-based writing and product-based writing has been a matter of discussion among both language researchers and language teachers. Process-based writing promotes the development of skilled language use for learners, whereas product-based writing is a product-oriented approach which focuses on the end result (Nunan, 1991). Owing to the incapacity of process-based writing in terms of classroom sizes and impracticality on a large scale population, product-based writing has been the favoured approach in an EFL context even today. Considering the difficulties of developing writing skills for a language learner, the process naturally emerges as the reflection of learner needs e.g. critical thinking skills.

The criticism for process-based writing, however, has largely drawn from the implementation procedures. The writing class should take into account the learners' purposes for writing which transcend that of producing texts for teacher evaluation (Zamel, 1987). From this perspective, one can argue that the learning outcomes are subjected to teacher evaluation rather than the improvement itself.

Despite its controversial outcomes, writing portfolios, thus, has been the main method for assessing learner improvement since the 1980s. In order to comprehend and expand various types of writing portfolios in EFL classes, a number of language researchers have investigated the method in different contexts. One relative research was conducted by Qinghua to determine the impact of portfolio-based writing assessment for Chinese university students. In his study, Qinghua examined the efficiency of portfolio-based writing assessment (PBWA) in terms of accuracy, complexity, fluency and coherence throughout a quasi-experimental semester. Subsequently, accuracy and coherence as a focus point during the assessment period were found to be more vital when the performances were compared to the non-experimental group's. In addition, the rating scales for all the measurement criteria showed significance for both groups (Qinghua, 2010).

Another study was conducted regarding the efficiency of portfolio keeping on pre-service teachers at Balikesir University, examining the contributions in regard of existing potential problems encountered. The creative skills were viewed as a hinder for the majority of pre-service teacher (Aydin, 2010).

An additional experimental study was undertaken to identify Iranian EFL learners' attitudes and achievements throughout one semester. In his study, Farahian tested the recurrent attainments of the learners by comparing the performances of the experimental and non- experimental group. As a result, meta-cognitive awareness among learners was viewed as a paramount factor in order to feel engaged in the reflective writing process for learners.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the methodology of this study. First, it will give a description of the research design. Afterwards, the participants and the instruments will be presented. Finally, the procedures of the research will be introduced respectively. Accordingly, this study has aimed to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the students' views about the benefits and disadvantages of keeping portfolios in writing classes?

2. What are the impacts of performance-based writing portfolios on university students' Subject-Verb agreement rule acquirement?

The Design of the Study

The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in writing in a certain manner and the students' perceptions of how portfolio assessment influences their learning. Therefore, this research will probably contribute to teacher knowledge of how this particular formative assessment tool actually works. If students find portfolio assessment ineffective, this research will explore the possible factors influencing student learning.

In the act of recent formative assessment trends, process-based assessment has recently gained in popularity and has become very effective in assessing students in recent years. Due to such a comprehensive utility of portfolio assessment, it is necessary to determine the genuine benefits and how learners perceive portfolio assessment, respectively their correlation with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods (Jack C. Richards, 2011)**.**

Considering the data that is required to have an understanding of the usefulness of a formative assessment tool, examining the process of learning which is affected by that tool will be of great use. Therefore, in order to determine the correlation between student learning and the assessment tool, quantitative research methods will be more useful for this study. In natural and social sciences, and sometimes in other fields, quantitative research is the systematic and empirical investigation of observable phenomena via statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Given, 2008). Collecting the data that includes the errors students make in the portfolios that occur over time will be more suitable for the purpose of this research. According to Goertzen (2017), the advantages of quantitative research can be listed as follows:

- Findings can be generalised to a specific population.

- Data sets are large, and findings are representative of a population.

- Documentation regarding the research framework and methods can be shared and replicated.

- Standardized approaches permit the study to be replicated over time.

Another purpose of this study is to identify how students perceive the portfolio assessment system. To achieve this goal, an interview will be conducted and the data which are related to the perceptions of participants will probably be gathered by the respondents themselves. Cropley (2015) discusses "Qualitative research examines the way people make sense out of their own concrete real-life experiences in their own minds and in their own words. Qualitative methods are no longer regarded as mainly useful because they make it possible to deal with data that (regrettably) is unsuitable for statistical analysis, but is regarded by many researchers nowadays as offering a legitimate method for gaining information about and understanding how human beings function." (p. 36)

As a result of this necessity for understanding the intangible elements, an interview that focuses on how students feel and perceive the whole process of portfolio assessment was conducted. The interview is designed to serve the elicitation of personal beliefs and opinions of the students themselves. Aiming to identify learners' perceptions of portfolio assessment, the interview was

developed by Fahim and Jalili (2013) and it was modified according to student level. An analysis of subject-verb-agreement in students' papers in their use of portfolios will be the priority of this study and the interview will also lean into their performances and serve to provide their contrastive analysis.

Participants

The research was carried out at the School of Foreign Languages, Kadir Has University, and a foundation university located in Istanbul. Students have to take a proficiency test to exempt from preparatory school upon their entrance. If unsuccessful, they have to do a compulsory English course as it is an English-medium university. As part of its policy, they are placement tested and grouped according to their level of English. However, such factors as gender, socio-cultural background and language learning history are not considered at all.

Sampling

Students who participate in this study are selected from the population in a non-random way. Convenience sampling, which is defined as choosing samples who are readily available to participate in a study (Henry, 1990), offers researchers some advantages:

- Convenience sampling is more time-saving than other sampling techniques since there is no time allocated for preparation.

- The accuracy of representation is not the paramount factor in data collection.

- The samples are readily available and this eases meeting the quota, resulting in practicality for the researcher.

- Funding the research becomes a much less issue because a quick selection of population leads the funds to be distributed to other areas (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Data Collection Tools

To carry out this research on portfolio assessment, two different types of research methods were used. A semi-structured interview, a qualitative research method, was employed as a method of research as well as numerical research on students' portfolio assessments as a quantitative research method. An interview developed by (Fahim & Jalili, 2013) to conduct in a study on Iranian EFL university students was adopted at tertiary level. To collect data, students were asked for an interview and their portfolios were analysed. The interview questions developed by Fahim and Jalili (2013) were adopted in a way that students can also be compared in terms of their performance in their use of Subject-Verb Agreement rule. The questions on the interview were structured in a more facilitative manner to so that the students don't feel confused or biased.

The Student Interview on their Perception of Portfolio Assessment

The adopted interview from the study on Iranian EFL learners included 10 questions with an added question on students' performances on Subject-Verb Agreement Rule. The first 9 questions were structured to observe a number of different elements. Question 1 examines

whether or not portfolio topics are related to their personal interests. Question 2 is aimed at evaluating students' strengths and weaknesses. Question 3 is related to the reflection of learning on the portfolio assessment results. Question 4 examines how students perceive portfolio in terms of time-consumption. Question 5 is a general question for the opinions of students in regard to their self-assessment or whether they find it manageable. Question 6 is a deep-structured question that serves as a pedagogical purpose of multi-learning achievement. Question 7 tries to obtain information on students' views on self-assessment, whereas the next question tries to create a contrast, if any, between their perception of self- assessment and traditional pencil-paper assessment. Question 9 is a generalized question for the usefulness of portfolio regarding its place in the assessment system. Question 10 is designed to determine the reflection of students on their performances in terms of correct application of Subject-Verb Agreement rule.

Interview Questions

1. Did portfolio allow you to choose what you liked to write according to your personal interest?

2. Did portfolio help you understand your strengths and weaknesses?

3. Do you feel portfolio can present your learning results?

4. Did it take you a lot of time to compile the portfolio?

5. Is compiling a portfolio a simple task?

6. Does portfolio provide a multi-dimensional perspective about learning?

7. Do you like to assess your own progress?

8. Do you like to be evaluated by pencil and paper tests?

9. Is portfolio a good tool to evaluate students' performance?

10. Do you think portfolio has made any positive or negative impact on your correct use of Subject-Verb Agreement Rule?

The Learner Portfolios

The learning portfolio is a part of the Kadir Has University assessment system and constitutes 5% of students' general average for their semester. Due to its formative and process-based nature, students are not evaluated by judging their end-product but how they have performed in terms of submission of the tasks and their overall improvement throughout the semester. For one semester, LP includes 16 tasks, some of which are homework tasks completed at home and evaluated for a second draft to be completed at home again. However, mostly the tasks are done in-class that are designed based on the topics in the curriculum. These tasks are also evaluated on a first and second draft basis. At the end of each semester, students submit their portfolios for a general assessment to determine their scores based on their submission and improvement.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will present the findings and the discussion of the data which were acquired from the interviews with the students and their learning portfolios. To be able to answer the research questions, the analysis of this research's findings will be carried out under these titles:

- Students' perceptions of writing portfolios in regard to their usefulness at Kadir Has University School of Foreign Languages English Preparatory Programme

- The impact of writing portfolios on students' correct use of the Subject-Verb Agreement patterns

- Their improvement based on their performance on portfolios compared to their perceptions of learning of Subject-Verb Agreement Rule

The researcher conducted one interview with his students in relation to their beliefs and opinions of the effectiveness of writing portfolios. The interview consisted of 10 questions that were also utilized in another research on the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners of writing portfolios. Every interview with the students included the same questions and aimed to investigate how students perceive different factors that influence their learning through the use of writing portfolios.

The second part of data collection was conducted through the writing portfolios that were constituted for the same students. The researcher collected the portfolios at the end of the semester and composed a pool of errors that were made by the students throughout the semester.

Students' Perceptions of Writing Portfolio

In order to answer the research question "What are the students' views about the benefits and disadvantages of keeping portfolios in writing classes?" an interview with students of the School of Foreign Language at Kadir Has University was conducted. The interview questions have aimed to elicit students' opinions of a number of issues which make up the portfolio assessment.

Question 1

The first question of the interview has aimed to find out whether portfolio assessment offers them an opportunity to write on the topics which are related to their personal areas of interest. The statements from only 3 students clearly were towards a positive perception while the majority of students gave their negative feedback on the selection of topics. Among these students who gave negative answers, 5 students acknowledged that the topics were selected according to the units that were covered during the lesson hours. Additionally, these students also stated that these units include many areas of interest related to faculty needs such as engineering and psychology, etc.

Question 2

Question 2 is related to their opinions on whether portfolio has helped them notice their strengths and weaknesses. This question was directed to elicit what kind of language skills or elements they needed in order to be proficient in university context. The results were in favour of positive outcomes; 19 students clearly pointed out that writing portfolios helped them realize

the mistakes that they did not know of. Among all the students, 2 of them specifically mentioned how it assisted in terms of explicit grammar, writing organizational skills and the use of cohesive devices.

Question 3

Question 3 is related to their opinions on whether portfolio can produce feedback on their learning outcomes. The answers from the students were perplexing since they gave somewhat neutral answers. On the other hand, 5 students distinctly stated that portfolio assessment helped them with their deficiencies of certain writing skills such as organizing a paragraph or using basic linkers.

Question 4

Question 4 aims to investigate how students feel about the time-consumption issue. While 16 of all participants stated that completing a portfolio task does not take much of their time and it takes a maximum of 30 minutes, 3 students voiced their concerns about spending almost 2 hours. These students also articulated the variance of time spent on tasks due to the changes in topics across the units. According to these students, the familiarity of the topic is closely related to how much time they spend on a task.

Question 5

This question is directed to see what students think about compiling a portfolio. They were asked whether it was a challenging activity to create a portfolio regarding the linguistic and academic outcomes. While 16 students responded negatively, 5 students expressed their opinions in the positive direction. One of these students said it was difficult due to time restriction, which was also linked to the issue in question 4. 2 students stated it depended on the topic of writing and 1student specifically mentioned the psychological impact and shared his concern about achieving the learning outcome at the end of the semester.

Question 6

Whether portfolio provides a diverse perspective to learning is the issue of Question 6. Nearly all students responded positively, claiming that portfolio offered them an opportunity that they had never encountered until they started their university life. Accordingly, the process-based learning was something very new to their learning experience and they were able to observe their learning in an unprecedented manner. Only 2 students stated portfolio assessment did not respond to their learning styles.

Question 7

Question 7 is directed to find out whether students find it entertaining to evaluate and reflect on their own learning. 20 students out of 24 responded positively, claiming that portfolio is a learner-centered approach to assessment. 5 of these students explicitly mentioned their satisfaction to be able to observe and analyse how assessment procedures worked in real sense. According to these students, writing portfolios need to be a part of not only language learning at universities but also of every faculty subject.

Question 8

This is a contradictory question as it is related to conventional assessment methods and has aimed to capture an insight into students' views of testing. 10 students said they did not have any negative attitudes towards the traditional testing tools. In contrast, the majority expressed their discontent, mentioning the summative aspect of these tests and also pointed out the stress factor due to the non-repetitive nature of these tests.

Question 9

Question 9 is directed on the issue of portfolio assessment's summative nature. Students have been asked whether portfolio is an efficient instrument to reflect their performances. Except for only 3 students answering negatively, the majority of students said portfolio assessment is a great opportunity for institutions to evaluate students' performances. 8 students stated they don't have any opinions on the issue, indicating their exclusion from the performance evaluation process.

Question 10

This question was specifically designed to learn about students' beliefs and opinions about the usefulness of writing portfolio regarding their improvement on the Subject-Verb Agreement rule. The reason for integrating this question into the interview was to compare their individual performance of this rule and whether writing portfolio made an actual difference to their learning.

None of the students responded that writing portfolio made a negative impact on their learning of Subject-Verb Agreement rule. On the other hand, 5 students stated that they didn't observe any progress in this structure thanks to writing portfolio among these students, 1 of them said: *"I was already proficient on 3rd person –s rule and writing portfolio made no difference".* This student claimed it is not a structure that pre-intermediate level students should have an issue with. 2 of these students mentioned the ineffectiveness of portfolio and said*: Even if I made an improvement, it was not due to the writing portfolio".*

The remaining 19 students stated that writing portfolio definitely caused positive outcomes in terms of Subject-Verb Agreement Rule. Among these, one student specifically pointed out that while speaking, and 3rd person –s is a very problematic rule to apply since they use it implicitly. However, thanks to the feedback from the first draft of the portfolio tasks, they will correct their errors and will not repeat them in the following assignments.

7 students stated that even if portfolio helped them with this issue, it could still be problematic because the rule does not exist in their L1. The concern was raised due to the linguistic and morphological disassociation of the Turkish language from English.

Among the 19 students who responded positively, 3 students gave their opinions regarding the reflective nature of writing portfolio assessment. They stated that without the presence of a portfolio, it would be impossible to get enough feedback on their errors.

The Impact of Writing Portfolios on Students' Improvement

Every semester students at Kadir Has University compile one writing portfolio which consists of 16 tasks, including one first and one second draft for each task. The progress they make over time is assessed based on the feedback they get. Being a part of the accuracy criteria, the Subject-Verb Agreement errors are marked with a correction symbol and if the error remains uncorrected, the instructor provides direct feedback by correcting the error on paper and giving oral feedback.

The number of each error on every task has been collected and accumulated on a Microsoft Excel sheet. The periodical occurrence or frequency of errors of Subject-Verb Agreement rule for each task is given below for all 24 students.

Contrastive representation of the draft-based performance

The average difference between the number of errors on the first draft and on the second draft can be seen in Table 1 in addition to their standard deviation.

Table 1: Contrastive Analysis of error numbers of SV Agreement and Standart Deviations

	First Draft	**Second Draft**	**STD-FD**	**STD-SD**
Task 1	2.5	0.67	1.06510	0.41667
Task 2	2.208333333	0.5	0.77344	0.25000
Task 3	1.875	0.333333333	0.44010	0.08333
Task 4	1.5	0.125	0.06510	-0.12500
Task 5	1.5	0.125	0.06510	-0.12500
Task 6	1.75	0.291666667	0.31510	0.04167
Task 7	1.75	0.375	0.31510	0.12500
Task 8	1.5	0.375	0.06510	0.12500
Task 9	1.583333333	0.291666667	0.14844	0.04167
Task 10	1.208333333	0.166666667	-0.22656	-0.08333
Task 11	1.583333333	0.125	0.14844	-0.12500
Task 12	1.291666667	0.291666667	-0.14323	0.04167
Task 13	0.958333333	0.125	-0.47656	-0.12500
Task 14	0.791666667	0.041666667	-0.64323	-0.20833
Task 15	0.5	0.125	-0.93490	-0.12500
Task 16	0.458333333	0.041666667	-0.97656	-0.20833

As the statistics above suggest, the average error frequency for all 24 students is given separately for the first and second drafts. The average for the first and second drafts of *Task 1* shows that the error occurrence fell from 2.5 to 0.67, which indicates the impact of portfolio writing and draft-based system on students' performance in terms of the correct adoption of SV agreement rule. Furthermore, the standard deviation of the number of errors for the first draft is bigger than 1, yet the standard deviation of the second draft is smaller. Accordingly, it can be interpreted as the positive impact of drafting on the error distribution. In Task 2, the average

for the first draft decreased to 2.208 and even lower for the second draft with an average of 0.5. The standard deviations for both drafts are lower than 1.

There was a relative consistency of reducing the number of errors for both first and second drafts for Task 3, Task 4 and Task 5, with a range of 1.875 to 1.5 for the FD and 0.3 to 0.125 for SD. The students here performed better in every single phase for all 5 weeks with no exception. However, the number of errors in Task 6 and Task 7 suddenly increased to 1.75 for the FD, showing an inconsistency regarding students' performance. This collective deterioration of performance can be linked to the error distribution as well. The standard deviation of both tasks is higher than previous tasks. This possible negative washback effect yet seemed to stop in week 8. Starting with Task 8, the average of errors decreased steadily from 1.5 to 0.45 for the FD and from 0.375 to 0.041 *(see figure 1)* with an exception of Task 10.
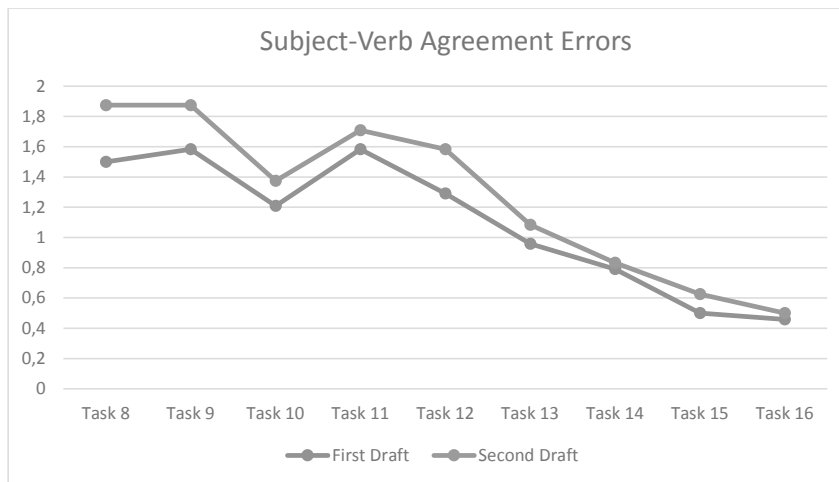

Figure 1:Error Difference on first and second drafts between week 8-16

The standard deviations for both tasks share a similar consistency. The range difference between the number of students who made the smallest number of errors and the biggest showed a similarity from the beginning until Task 16. This similarity persisted for both FD and SD, implying a bilateral regularity between the error occurrences on FD and SD.
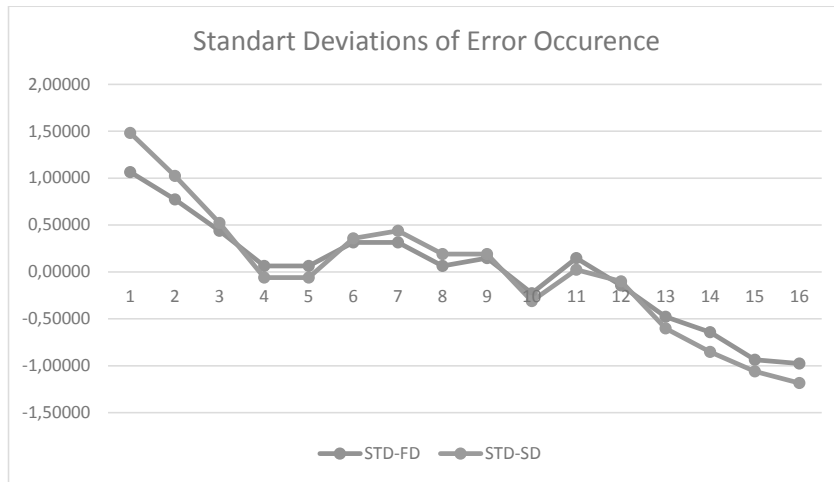
Figure 2: Standart Deviations of Error Occurrence

It can also be inferred from the standard deviations of error occurrence that the range of errors showed a gradual decrease, and that the performances among all students gradually became similar.

The comparison of Writing Portfolio Impact on Students' Performances and improvement

When the comments from the answers of the student interview are compared to the actual improvement, if any, a correlation between them might appear. To do so, the statistical data from the error analysis was correlated with the students' expressions. The similarities and juxtapositions between two sets of data are presented through levels of improvement based on student performances.

Contrastive Analysis of Group 1

Having the greatest number of errors in Task 1, these students are marked as the low achieving group according to the standard deviations of both drafts. The gradual improvement of these students is as follows:

All 5 five students showed improvement throughout the 16-week period, however they still made errors although not as frequent as they used to. Their answers to Question 10 were as follows:

Student 4:" I don't believe writing portfolio has made any effect on this issue. I still make errors when I use the 3rd person singular in present simple tense. Nevertheless, my errors are less frequent, I guess."

Student 4's improvement correlates with his answer, mentioning the decreasing number of errors with the impact of portfolio.

Student 6:" I think portfolio was mostly ineffective in that sense."

Student 6 showed inconsistent improvement to the answers given, with an error difference of 5 to 1 throughout the semester.

Student 13 and 22 made similar remarks, claiming that writing portfolio assessment made no positive impact on their improvement. Their answers were again inconsistent with their performance with a 50% decrease error number in Task 16.

Student 24:" *I was already proficient in 3rd person –s rule and writing portfolio made no difference"*

This student's answer to question 10 proves that there was an inconsistency between their remarks and performance. With 4 errors on task and a gradual decrease, finishing the semester with no errors, this student didn't recognize their learning or didn't perceive portfolio assessment as a factor of this improvement.

Contrastive Analysis of Group 2

Students whose improvement correlated with their statements are Student 1, Student 2, Student 10, Student 11, Student 14 and Student 20. These students show a relatively better improvement compared to Group 1 students. The decrease in the number of errors made showed that the majority of students lowered their error number to 0. Some of the statements from these students from the interview are as follows:

Student 1:"Portfolio made a significant impact on my learning, especially basic grammar rules such as SV agreement rule."

Student 10:"The reason why I don't make any mistakes of SV agreement is most probably due to portfolio writing."

Student 14:"Portfolio offered me a chance to observe my errors again and again. Hence, at some point I realized that I was making the same ones repeatedly. It is definitely the portfolio that developed my grammatical competence."

When the opinions of students are compared to their improvement, it was observed that students were aware of their improvement and the rationale behind it. Writing portfolio assessment proved to be clearly beneficial to these students.

Contrastive Analysis of Group 3

Among those who showed an improvement, the students with a significant decrease in their errors of Subject-Verb Agreement are categorized as Group 3.

Starting the semester with a lower percentage of correction for the first and second drafts, these students, as can be seen on their performance from Week 13 to Week 16, made 0 error on their second drafts. The interview answers of these students are as follows:

Student7:"I wasn't even aware of my problem with this rule. Even though I kept making mistakes, towards the end of our semester, I was able to get better."

Student 17:"Subject-Verb Agreement was probably my best area of improvement this semester. I didn't know what to do about it first, but with the feedback from our teacher, I don't make these mistakes now."

Student 19:"Writing portfolio was very useful for getting regular and constant feedback from my teacher and I believe I have made some significant progress in terms of SV Agreement rule."

Student 20:"The reason I don't repeat the same mistakes in terms of vocabulary and grammar is definitely writing portfolio. By observing and participating in our own assessment, we had the chance to reflect on our own progress and SV Agreement rule is surely one of them."

The comments from these students clearly show that what they have perceived in terms of their improvement of the rule matches with their performance based on their errors they have made throughout the semester.

4. CONCLUSION

This section discusses the major findings and the conclusions that have been drawn through the data collection process. The findings of the study will be discussed in three sub-sections: the students' views on the effectiveness of writing portfolio assessment, the impact of writing portfolio assessment on the correct implementation of SV Agreement rule and the comparison between students' perceptions and their SV Agreement rule application performances.

The Students' Views on the Effectiveness of Writing Portfolio Assessment

The analysis of the answers to the interview questions has revealed that students perceive writing portfolio assessment as a useful tool for their learning and an opportunity to reflect on their own learning. Although a small number of students have given negative comments about the selection of the task topics, in general students feel that portfolio writing offers them the chance to write on topics that are related to their personal interests. In the earlier studies, EFL learners have seemed to consider writing to be difficult since they have to go through plan, draft, re-draft, edit, re-edit, re-plan, (Rahmatunisa, 2014). When compared to the findings of this study, the answers from the majority of students reveal a consistency in terms of the difficulty of compiling a portfolio with a draft-based system.

Ballard (1993) has claimed that portfolio enables learners to reflect on their own learning in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, Gillespie (1996) has noted that portfolios grant students with a higher self-esteem. According to students' comments, portfolio writing helps them evaluate themselves, understand their weaknesses and strengths in terms of language learning and it provides feedback on their learning outcomes. The views of students go in parallel with the findings of these studies.

In relation to its nature, portfolio assessment is very innovative and non-traditional when compared to paper-pen type of assessment that learners are accustomed to throughout their school life. Focusing on the process itself and disregarding the final scores of their writings, students have expressed their willingness to participate in their own learning and receive feedback constantly from their teachers. Fahim and Jalili, (2013) have found that when the participants are asked if they would prefer traditional assessment tools, only 20% put their preferences in traditional pencil-paper format examination methods. The results have indicated that most learners of English as a foreign language favour the portfolio assessment over

conventional tools and that the usage of multiple assessment tools will be more beneficial than being dominated by either. Accordingly, students' views are consistent with the findings of this study, putting emphasis on the formative assessment tool, which has gained in popularity among learners.

Additionally, the majority of participants have stated that portfolio writing is a great tool for assessing students' performances and it is a valid method for observing the overall improvement of students.

The Impact of Writing Portfolio Assessment on the Correct Implementation of SV Agreement Rule

The analysis has been carried out to identify the overall improvement of applying the SV Agreement rule based on the errors made by students in their portfolio tasks. The results indicate that the students who have participated in the process show a significant improvement by decreasing their errors with a classroom average of 0.45 on the first drafts at the end of the semester. The initial number is 2.5 and the difference clearly indicates that writing portfolios have influenced their writing accuracy. The results from the study conducted by Fahim & Jalili (2013) have also shown that with the help of writing portfolio assessment, all the students have made progress in writing to a certain extent. Therefore, both studies share the same conclusions.

Another aspect of the impact of writing portfolio assessment is the usefulness of draft-based system. For all 16 weeks the number of errors which all the students have made has fallen dramatically. Therefore, the results serve as evidence and writing the first draft and editing it have a positive influence on error occurrence. Hence, writing portfolio assessment has made a significant impact on students' learning.

The Comparison between Student Perceptions and Their SV Agreement Rule Application Performances

By combining the qualitative data from survey interview and the quantitative data from the error analysis, it is possible to reach an understanding of how students' perceptions can be compared with the progress they have made in terms of SV Agreement rule. The students who have performed better throughout the semester give consistent comments on the effectiveness of writing portfolios; therefore, it can be said that their perceptions of portfolio assessment match their performances.

Fahim & Jalili, (2013) have found that writing portfolio encourages students to review their own work, provides them with the chance to lean on their own points of strengths and weaknesses, helps them become active evaluators of their own needs, progress, achievement, and efforts, works as an instructional tool to assist the subjects to become independent learners, develops the teacher/student relationships, enables the teachers to provide individualized instruction, raises the learners' awareness of their own process of learning, engages them in critical thinking, makes them aware of learning strategies, facilitates students' learning process, and enhances their self-directed learning. With the results of the interview and error analysis of SV Agreement rule of this study compared, it can be concluded that students who improve themselves find portfolio more useful than those who marginally improve less. The high achievers have shown parallel improvement with their perceptions while low-achievers have

also mentioned the relative ineffective nature of writing portfolios. Hence, it can be concluded that the perceptions of students are consistent with their performances.

Implications of Portfolio Assessment and Using Writing Portfolio in University Context

Portfolio is becoming a common part of EFL assessment systems. Portfolio can be used for both creating a positive impact on student learning and increasing learner autonomy:

- Writing portfolios has proved to be viewed as a learner-oriented tool for assessment. Giving constant feedback to students is desirable for creating an overall impression of their learning

- Focusing on individual features of language learning such as grammar, vocabulary, cohesion etc. might be more effective for a more student-centred assessment model.

- Collecting data from students with different backgrounds and competencies might be beneficial for understanding different aspects of portfolio assessment and language learning.

- In order to adapt to learner needs, feedback from students might become a part of portfolio assessment.

Writing portfolios are a special tool to increase learner self-esteem, critical thinking and self-reflection as well as the sense of responsibility. They enable both learners and teachers to obtain a broader perspective as an alternative to standard and traditional testing, which do not involve students in the assessment and evaluation process. Therefore, writing portfolios must be integrated into more educational settings with caution.

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