Portfolio Keeping Ends to a Good Product: The Cases of Reading and Motivation

Azadeh Nemati
Jahrom branch, Islamic Azad University, Jahrom, Iran
Email: azadehnemattiar@yahoo.com

Abstract:
Portfolio has been in use from the past in other disciplines. But there are growing bodies of research which document its importance in foreign language teaching. The current study was implemented on selecting 91 undergraduate students passing their general English course in Iran. Traditional reading program was administered for control group whereas; portfolio keeping was integrated into experimental group. The result of ANCOVA showed that portfolio keeping has a positive effect on reading ability of the students in experimental group. The better reading result is explained by this argument that a good product is justified by a good process. Furthermore, portfolio keeping increased their attitude/motivation towards learning English; especially it increased integrative motivation of the students more than instrumental and attitude.

Keywords: portfolio keeping, reading skill, attitude, integrative motivation, instrumental motivation
1. Introduction

In the realm of education, testing is not an end in itself; rather, it is an aid to teaching and learning. In other words, teaching without testing is meaningless. They are so closely interrelated that it is impossible to work in either field without taking the other into account (Farhady et al., 2007). While in teaching there is a shift from traditional learning settings to students’ centered learning settings there must also be a shift from traditional ways of testing which normally happens at the end of a course of teaching.

Since the primary purpose of students’ assessment is to support learning, assessment should be done in the best possible way. One alternative to formative evaluation of the end can be portfolio assessment (Boud, 1995).

The word portfolio is not a new concept and in the literature it is defined in the same way. Portfolio means a collection of works; historically it refers to the collection (the canvases) of an artist (Marhaeni, 2007). It shows the growth of an artist. Thus, it can also be adopted in education as well to indicate the growth of learners based on their collection of works over time. Hence, with a more educational based definition it is a purposeful collection of students’ work that demonstrate to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). On the other hand, the notion of portfolio assessment came into vogue in the mid-1980s as a result of dissatisfaction on objective tests in assessments.

Although portfolio is not a new concept regarding the second language education portfolio becomes popular particularly in recent years (Erisin, 2005; Saglam, 2005; Yang, 2003). Portfolio assessment in language instruction was first applied in writing activities. Since it match with the nature of writing which is a dynamic, complex process involving both cognitive and creative process (Marhaeni, 2007). As the related literate indicates there has been a growing body of research on the positive effects of portfolio keeping and EFL writing skills (Audin, 2010; Taki, 2011; Ozturk & Cecen S2007). Therefore, there is comprehensive literature on the knowledge of portfolio and other skills especially writing in Iran but little attention has been paid to the impact of portfolio keeping on other skills such as reading, this paper aimed at investigating firstly the effect of portfolio keeping on reading.

The use of portfolio as a means of recording and assessing progress (called documentation portfolio or process portfolio) offers a number of advantages to language learners and teachers (Schmitt, 2010). It can provide a way of relating assessment closely to instruction and motivating learners (Fulcher, 1997).

Intelligence and aptitude play a primary role in formal language situations. Though, attitude and motivation are the most important determinant factors in learning or acquisition of second languages. For most psycholinguists the importance of the learner’s attitude and motivation plays a major role. Some theories of language acquisition such as Krashen’s monitor model (1981), Carroll’s conscious reinforcement model (1981) and Lambert’s social psychological model (1974) will suffice to demonstrate the importance of motivation in learning.
However, the simple and easy word motivation might appear in its face difficult to define (Abisamra, 2012). In Webster’s dictionary to motive means a need or desire that causes a person to act. It is important in learning because it determines the extent of the learner’s active involvement and attitude toward L2 learning (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). There are different sources for motivation based on which motivation can be categorized. While, within the field of language learning Gardner (1985) made a distinction between attitude, integrative and instrumental motivation. Attitude shows an evaluative reaction to some referent such as teacher, the EFL classroom, the textbook (Saglam, 2005). Integrative motivation means to integrate oneself within a culture to become part of society where as, instrumental motivation refers to the motivation to acquire as means of achieving goals such as promoting a career or job or reading technical text in case of ESP students.

Roohani and Taheri (2015) work on the effect of portfolio assessment on expository writing. As they stated they employed a quasi-experimental research design; two writing classes, including 44 undergraduate EFL students in two universities, constituted the control and experimental groups and expository writing tasks were administered as the pretests and posttests. The control group was instructed through the traditional approach of learning and assessment whereas the experimental group was provided with a portfolio assessment practice. The results of covariance analysis and t-tests indicated that the participants in the experimental group outperformed the ones in the control group in terms of their expository writing ability, in general, and the subskills of focus, support, and organization in particular. But, the performance of the two groups in the subskills of vocabulary and convention in writing was not significantly different.

Recently in another work also Pourverdi (2016) and her colleagues investigated portfolio assessment and process writing. In other words their study aimed at investigating the effect of portfolio assessment on Iranian EFL learners’ L2 writing proficiency. They also study followed a quasi-experimental design. First, a total number of 30 female EFL learners who were learning English at a language institute in Rasht, Iran served as sampling. They used Oxford Placement Test to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Then they were randomly divided into two groups: one experimental group (N=15) and one control group (N=15). Portfolio assessment was used to check the students' writing in the experimental group while the control group followed a traditional assessment. After 22 sessions of treatment, two IELTS writing tasks adapted from samples of IELTS writing tests as pre-and post-tests were given to the both groups. The mean scores were compared by running both independent and paired samples t-tests to investigate the possible difference between the two groups in terms of their writing proficiency. The results indicated that while the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their writing proficiency before the treatment phase, the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-writing test.

The impact of portfolio keeping on motivation is another question to be answered in this study.
Considering the constrained information about portfolio keeping, reading skill and motivation, the aim of this study will be investigated through the following research questions:

1) What is the influence of portfolio keeping on reading ability?
2) What is the influence of portfolio keeping on attitude/motivation?
3) Portfolio keeping was more effective on attitude, integrative or instrumental motivation?

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

This study was conducted with 91 male and female undergraduate students having their general English course from different disciplines (such as biology, physical education and nursing). Then they were divided into control and experimental groups randomly. They age ranged from 20 to 45 with the mean of 23.

2.2 Instruments

To collect the data two instruments were used in this research. The first one was Gardner’s AMTB (1985). This Attitude/Motivation Test Battery questionnaire are made of 12 scales. For the purpose of this research, three scales of attitude towards learning English, integrative and instrumental motivation were selected. The researcher used 12, 5 and 5 questions in each scale respectively. Gardner’s AMTB was in the form of 6-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire have been supported (Gardner, 2005). The researcher translated the questions to avoid misunderstandings. Also one open ended question was constructed to elicit qualitative information regarding portfolio keeping from the students. This Attitude/Motivation questionnaire was used as pre and post tests to control and experimental groups.

The second instrument was a book named ‘Active skills for reading: intro’ by Anderson. The book consisted of 12 units and there were 2 chapters in each unit. Some other parts such as reading skill, vocabulary skill and real life skill were followed by each chapter (reading text). There were also review parts every three units. This part was in the form of reading and comprehension tests which the researcher used for pre and post tests.

2.3 Procedure and Portfolio Rubrics

This study was an experimental study including pre and post test with control group. The model of portfolio keeping for experimental group was shown in Figure 1. As it is clear from the figure the portfolio keeping model used in this study was based on ‘classroom portfolio model’ and its purpose was mainly for learning rather than assessment (Hirvela & Sweetland, 2005). For this reason pre and post tests were conducted by the researcher.
Treatment was carried out as planned and shown above for one whole semester (12 weeks). In the first section pre test was conducted for both groups. The next two sections provided some introductory information about reading and purpose of portfolio keeping. The students were asked to prepare a file to keep all documents and papers covered during the term. Teaching started from the third section and lasted for 8 sections of 3 hours (General English was a 3 credit course compulsory for all students). The last section was post test which was again common for both groups.

While control group received traditional method of teaching and there were not asked to do homework. As a result, there were not revision and reflection for them.

3. Findings

This study utilized a quasi-experimental research design with pre-test, post-test on nonequivalent group. The following parts will show the results of each research question.
3.1 What is the influence of portfolio keeping on reading ability?

To answer this question reading scores used as dependent variable. Firstly, to assure the equivalence of two groups’ means in pre-test, the t-independent test was used.

Table 1. The t-independent test for comparing score means in two groups in pre-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>statistics groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Mean Diff.</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>1.893</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>1.768</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of t-test for comparing scores between two groups in the pre-test is shown in Table 2. Since the obtained p (0.891) is greater than 0.05, the test is not significant at 0.05 level and it indicates that there was no significant difference of the scores between the experimental and control groups.

The effect of portfolio keeping, taking into account the pre-test individual differences was analyzed based on the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The necessary condition for the ANCOVA is the homogeneity of two groups which can be tested by the Levene’s test.

Table 2. The Levene's test of homogeneity of two groups in post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result in table 3 shows that the Levene’s test was not significant (P=0.820>0.05). This means that two groups had equal error variances and were homogenous. Therefore, ANCOVA can be applied.

Table 3. ANCOVA for the effect of keeping portfolio on scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>161.018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>151.018</td>
<td>19.196</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>1789.960</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1689.960</td>
<td>213.396</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>478.115</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>7.388</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20996.000</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of ANCOVA in table 4 indicated that there was a significant (p<0.01) linear relationship between the pre-test and the post-test scores. On the other hand, the main effect of the group was significant on the scores in the post-test after controlling for the effect of the pre-test (p<0.01). This implies that scores differed significantly between the experimental and control groups (controlling for the pre-test effect). Consequently, it can be inferred that teaching reading through the
portfolio keeping leads to increasing of the vocabulary test scores in the students of experimental group.

3.2 What is the influence of portfolio keeping on attitude/motivation?

Data analysis began with pre-test to be sure that the control and experimental groups were homogeneous enough to start the study. First, an independent t-test was run to see if the two groups performed significantly different on pre-test or not. Then, after having treatment t-test was again utilized to see the possible differences between the control and experimental groups. The results are shown in the next table.

Table 4. T-test for the effect of keeping portfolio on attitude/motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre</td>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>52.386</td>
<td>8.051</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>53.641</td>
<td>10.033</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post</td>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>96.594</td>
<td>10.085</td>
<td>3.680</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>105.717</td>
<td>12.970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on table (4), the pre-test mean score of the control and experimental group was near and there was no significant differences between the groups ($t = .284, P = .835$) while in post-test, based on the result of t-test the change in performance was highly significant ($t = 5.35, P = .000$).

3.3 Portfolio keeping was more effective on attitude, integrative or instrumental motivation?

To find which type of motivation and attitude improved more as a result of portfolio keeping in the experimental group ANOVA was employed.

Table 5. ANOVA to compare attitude, integrative and instrumental motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig (Two-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>54852.052</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27426.026</td>
<td>1386.610</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups total</td>
<td>5281.044</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>19.779</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>60133.096</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the within-group data, the result was significant with $F = 3059, P = .000$. Therefore, Tukey test was used as a post hoc test to find out the source of differences.
Table 6. Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>(I) attitude</th>
<th>(J) attitude</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude/motivation</td>
<td>attitude</td>
<td>integrative</td>
<td>-30.74444*</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>-1.04444</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>integrative</td>
<td>attitude</td>
<td>30.74444*</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>29.70000*</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>attitude</td>
<td>1.04444</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>integrative</td>
<td>-29.70000*</td>
<td>.66298</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

As illustrated in Table 6, the source of differences lies between attitude (Mean = 19.30) and integrative motivation (Mean= 0.044) as well as instrumental (Mean=20.344) and integrative motivation in favor of integrative motivation with the highest mean of 50.044

4. Discussions

The aim of the present study was to investigate the contribution of portfolio keeping (as a mean of assessment for learning) to reading and motivation of EFL students. Some main results were obtained from the study. The first one is that portfolio keeping has some significant contributions to the reading skills. Research demonstrates that portfolio has been used mainly for two purposes in education, namely alternative assessment and self-growth (Ozturk & Cecen, 2007). The purpose of using portfolio in this study was not for the sake of alternative assessment rather it was use as a process to product. The better reading result in experimental group is explained by this argument that a good product is justified by a good process (Marhaeni, 2007). Portfolio keeping provides a richer picture of the students and portfolio activities involves students in the leaning process (Bowie, 2000).

The second research question of this study dealt with portfolio keeping and attitude/motivation towards leaning a foreign language. Some researchers claim that high motivation and positive attitude toward a second language and its community help second language learning (De Bot, et al., 2005).

To ensure methodological triangulation the answers of the students of the experimental group to the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire were considered. Some sample statements of the students will be explained below. The question was read “are you more or less motivated by portfolio keeping?” Though some student did not like this method, most of them believed that it was a new and good way to learn reading skill and their motivation was increased in this way.
One of the anonymous students stated that:

Last term I had the same course with another instructor, but I was not motivated at all. I failed with low score. At the beginning of this term I just studied to pass the course while step by step I was more motivated and liked to learn English. Hopefully I will continue in future.

Another 22 female participant wrote:

I hated English before but now I am more interested.

Other students explained:

I think [the] language is [need] for me and future work.

It was not effective on learning while it increased my motivation since I was thinking to continue my studies abroad this made my decision stronger to attend some English class to improve my English.

Yes, I like [read] English.

5. Conclusions

The result of this investigation is in line with Orland-Barak (2005) who found out that portfolio keeping improves reading and research skills. Other researches also examined the impact of the portfolio on learning in terms of student’s motivation, ownership and responsibility (Davies & LeMahieu, 2003). Portfolio impacts positively on learning in terms of increased students motivation, ownership and responsibility (Howard & LeMahieu, 1995). It can be said that a successful leaner is the one who possess positive attitudes towards the target language. It was illustrated that portfolio keeping has positive effect on attitude/motivation of learners. Also, Krashen (1985, p. 4) stated that:

Everybody needs motivation; everybody needs to have a reason for action. It is a sad fact that most people in this world underachieve because they don’t believe they are capable of fulfilling their dreams. We teachers need to be committed offering students the opportunity to believe in themselves and achieve great things.

There is also a strong link between portfolio and constructivism which has gained importance since the second half of the 20th century as teaching and learning orientation (Ozturk & Cecen, 2007). Based on the constructivist theories the learning has to be constructed by the leaner’s themselves, rather than being imparted by the teacher. In other words, the core of constructivism is authentic learning (Ozturk & Cecen, 2007). Portfolio keeping has positive influence on leaning, encourage students to self-reflect and self-evaluated (Yurdabakan & Erdogan, 2009).
Krashen (1985) proposed theory of second language acquisition with five hypotheses. The affective filter hypothesis is related to the second question of this study. This hypothesis stipulates that a number of affective variables including motivation play a facilitative role in second language acquisition. In other words, learners with high motivation are better equipped for success. Low motivation raises the affective filter and forms a mental block that prevents comprehensible input. When the filter is up it impedes language acquisition.

Furthermore, it was also found that integrative motivation of the students increased more than attitude or instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is defined as the desire to learn second language to communicate with the member of that society and find out about its culture. Of course it does not necessarily refer to direct contact with L2 group; rather students wish to lose themselves in the target language (Chalak, 2010).

In conclusion, it was intended to offer a new insight into positive effects of portfolio keeping on foreign language learning. As stated by Ozturk & Cecen (2007) portfolio keeping as instrumental practice far away from being traditional and punitive creates the melting pot in which the affective variables such as anxiety will melt. It is promising to change product-oriented teaching practices since it can offer authentic information about the progress of students.

References


About Author:
Azadeh Nemati, PhD in ELT
Department of English Language Teaching, Jahrom branch, Islamic Azad University, Jahrom, Iran
Azadeh Nemati is an assistant Professor in Iran. She is the editor in chief of some international journals and has already published books and articles nationally and internationally. In 2010, 2012 and 2014 she was selected as distinguished researcher in the University.
Email: azadehnematiar@yahoo.com