



## Rethinking Portfolio-Based Assessment in Writing Courses: An Investigation of Students' Perspective

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### Abstract

Compared to standard assessment, alternative assessment as a performance-based attempt to evaluate students' performance has been regarded to have considerable relevance for English Language Teaching (ELT, hereafter), yet all scholars have not received it with equanimity due to its limitations regarding the need to design authentic tasks, time requirements, field-tested practices, to list but a few. These limitations necessitate more academic attempts to investigate the issue deeper, and of central relevance to this issue is the analysis of students' perspectives as one of the most important education parties. Thus, the main rationale underlying the current study is to draw a holistic picture of portfolio-based writing assessment the current study was designed to investigate the perspectives of 50 prep class students enrolled in English Language and Literature Department of Karadeniz Technical University during spring semester in the 2016-2017 academic year with a mixed-method research design. A 19-item- questionnaire was followed by an in-depth individual interviews conducted with 5 participants. Results reveal that although most of the participants welcome alternative assessment in their writing classes, this application is not without blemish, as is detailed in through the text.

**Key Words:** portfolio, assessment, alternative assessment, writing, ELT

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### Introduction

Evaluating students' knowledge and achievement is strongly emphasized in teaching process as it is the basic tool for getting more information on learners' development, monitoring their development closely, and helping them observe their own drawbacks in learning process (Caner, 2010). Recent changes in education and science in the last decade have affected teaching and learning process in that traditional teacher-centered methods have been replaced with student-centered approaches, and the assessment of skills based on practicability in real world context such as students' active participation, sense of responsibility, and control on their own learning process. Although there is a tendency to incorporate these into classroom teaching, their evaluation via standard assessment methods is not realistic, and may have

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misleading results (Çakır, 2013), thereby requiring the employment of alternative assessment applications including self-assessments, role-play tests, checklists, logs, portfolios, conferences, diaries, self-assessments, peer assessments and so forth (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Writing is one of the language skills that requires not only teachers to observe students' progress over time but also students to see their development and reflect on their experimental performances. Portfolio-based assessment encourages students to compile their written products including the drafts to see which stages they have gone through and their own growth process (Coombe, Folse & Hubley, 2007). Yet, as is the case with every classroom application, portfolio-based writing assessment is not without blemish due to several challenges such as much time requirements (Lirola & Rubio, 2009), challenging and time-consuming nature for teacher revision (Birgin & Baki, 2007), student tendency to see them as burden and waste of time (Caner, 2010), to list but a few. Still, the practitioners' understanding of writing portfolio needs to be enriched for much more satisfying classroom applications (Lam, 2016). Thus, as this application needs to be evaluated with caution regarding its educational benefits, the finding of the current study from students' perspective are believed to be of relevance beyond this small sample and limited context in that the study will contribute to the body of the research, provide empirical field-tested data both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and provide ideas for practitioners to remedy its weaknesses.

## Review of Literature

### *Traditional versus Alternative Assessment*

Assessment is a misunderstood concept in education real in that it is used synonymously with the educational term *test* (Brown, 2004). As clearly distinguished by brown (2004, p. 4) while tests are used for “administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners muster all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their responses are being measures and evaluated”, assessment should be understood as “an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain”. That is, he regards test as a subset of assessment. A teacher always assesses student when they, for instance, answer a question, try to use a new structure, etc (Brown, 2004).

A very common dichotomy in the related literature is traditional versus alternative assessment. The following table provides some overgeneralisations about these two kinds of assessment:

**Table 1.** Traditional and Alternative Assessment (Brown, 2004, p.13)

<b>Traditional Assessment</b>	<b>Alternative Assessment</b>
One-shot, standardised exams	Continuous long-term assessment
Timed, multiple-choice format	Untimed, free-response format
Decontextualised test items	Contextualised communicative tasks
Scores suffice for feedback	Individualised feedback and washback
Norm-referenced scores	Criterion-referenced scores
Focus on the “right” answer	Open-ended, creative answers
Summative	Formative
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive performance	Interactive performance
Fosters extrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation

Traditional assessment refers to the use of tools such as multiple-choice tests allowing objective and easy scoring, true/false tests which are easy to score and administer, short answers, and essays assessing higher thinking skills (Dikli, 2003). On the other hand, alternative assessment refers to more process-oriented tasks that are continuous and require individualised feedback (Brown, 2004). However, still Brown (2004) cautions that it sometimes it is not possible to draw a certain line between them as some assessment types may fall into both categories.

Still, the popularity of alternative assessment is recently well-documented in the related literature. Combining the lists of its characteristics listed by three scholars, Brown and Hudson (1998) create a long list of the good features of alternative assessment, key to understand its nature:

1. require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
2. use real-world contexts or simulations;
3. are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
4. allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day;
5. use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
6. focus on processes as well as products;
7. tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills;
8. provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students;
9. are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered;
10. ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment;
11. encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and
12. call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles. (p. 654-655)

Although alternative assessment seems to be quite advantages, as Brown (2004, p. 13) rightly puts, “one should not be misled into thinking that everything on the left-hand side is tainted while the list on the right-hand side offers salvation to the field of language assessment!” This bias is dangerous as every of them could be constructively used in different education contexts and may serve for different functions.

### ***Portfolio-based Assessment***

Portfolio-based assessment has been quite popular with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (Brown, 2004). It has been conceptualised in a wide variety of ways. For instance, Hyland (2003) defines portfolios as “multiple writing samples, written over time, and purposefully selected from various genres to best represent a student’s abilities, progress, and most successful texts in a particular context” (p. 233). Similarly, Elango, Jutti and Lee (2005) portray portfolio as “a collection of written accounts of events and activities experienced by individual, kept in the form of a journal (p. 511)”. As listed by Brown (2004), they include materials such as:

- essays and compositions in draft and final forms;
- reports, project outlines;
- poetry and creative prose;
- artwork, photos, newspaper or magazine clippings;
- audio and /or video recordings of presentations, demonstrations, etc.;
- journals, diaries, and other personal reflections;
- tests, test scores, and written homework exercises;
- notes on lectures; and
- self- and peer-assessments-comments, evaluations, and checklists. (p. 256)

Portfolio-based assessment is an ongoing process that shows students' efforts and language growth when compared to traditional test that are conducted in a limited time and setting (Caner, 2010). Within the borders of the current study, portfolio assessment should be understood as “purposeful collections of any aspects of students' work that tell the story of their achievements, skills, efforts, abilities, and contributions to a particular class, in which teachers “encourage their students to select, compile, and display their work” (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p. 664). As listed by Fahim and Jalili (2013), in writing courses in EFL classes portfolios could be used as follows:

1. We might wish to show the progress in learning being made over a period of time by an individual student.
2. Samples of work can illuminate special features of learning which we may wish to highlight. They could show a particular strength in the student's work, or a particular difficulty which needs to be overcome. Presenting an example is often quicker and more meaningful than talking or writing about it, and a portfolio can be used as a substitute for or complementary to report about the students' learning.
3. A gathering of recent or current examples of the pupils work can ensure to show precisely the pupils current attainment and range of skills.
4. Where teachers are required to make high-stake judgments about individual pupils standards or levels, which may affect the pupils overall grade or his access to future opportunities, they may use examples of work to support and underpin an individual judgment.

Brown and Hudson (1998) list three strength categories: strengthening students' learning, enhancing the teacher's role, and improving testing processes. First, students' learning is supposed to be strengthened in that they focus on more learning process, meaningful and interesting tasks increase their motivation, help them practice and revise, which are vital for language learning, encourage not only student-teacher but also student-student collaboration patterns, and teach students the meta-language they will need while talking about their language growth with their teachers. Second, portfolio assessment enhances the teacher's role in that they can easily monitor their students' language growth, adopt the role of a coach, and empower students by giving ideas to them at individual level about their progress. Lastly, it is assumed to improve testing practices, for it involves both parties, i.e., teachers and students, into testing, enables the teacher to monitor the students' use of meaningful language in authentic tasks, covers the assessment of several dimensions, namely processes, responses, and activities, and ends in systematic assessment.

Along the same line of argument, Brown (2004) a synthesis of the advantages of asking student to compile a portfolio, documented in several sources in the related literature:

- fosters intrinsic motivation, responsibility, and ownership,
- promote student-teacher interaction with the teacher as facilitator,
- individualise learning and celebrate the uniqueness of each student,
- provide tangible evidence of a student's work,
- facilitate critical thinking, self-assessment, and revision processes,
- offer opportunities for collaborative work with peers, and
- permit assessment of multiple dimensions of language learning

However, several weaknesses related to portfolio assessment are documented in the related literature. Brown and Hudson (1998) summarise these challenges with five categories: design decisions, logistics, interpretation, reliability, and validity. Design decisions refer to

several questions about who will design the criteria and the portfolio content how much of classroom activities will be integrated into it. On the other hand, logistical issues cover required time and resources, teacher training and abilities to assess students with portfolios, and time required for teachers to revise all these portfolios. Besides, interpretation issues include fair portfolio interpretation and understandable portfolio assessment reports by all parties including students, parents, and administrators. Lastly, reliability and validity issues need to be understood as the assurance of total objectivity, avoidance of mechanical errors, using a standardised grading scheme, the assurance of portfolio adequacy to exemplify students' products, growth, and skills.

Therefore, for a successful portfolio development, Brown (2004, pp.257-259) provides a long list of steps and guidelines as follows:

1. State objectives clearly
2. Give guidelines on what materials to include
3. Communicate assessment criteria to students
4. Designate time within the curriculum for portfolio development
5. Establish periodic schedules for review and conferencing
6. Designate an accessible place to keep portfolios
7. Provide positive washback-giving final assessments

According to these steps and guidelines, it is vital to inform student about what the teacher attempts to do and how this process is related to curricular goals. Also, all the works and their types should be clarified, and clear directions about how to compile their portfolios should be given. Brown (2004) also cautions that the process should involve not only teacher assessment but also student one. He also provides readers with peer assessment. Teachers should also regularly have meetings with student to monitor the process to avoid procrastination. Besides, as it is inconvenient for student to carry all these heavy portfolios with them every time, teachers are suggested to designate a storage place for them in their classrooms. In addition, teachers should determine beforehand the final summation i.e., scoring: numerical scores, holistic scoring, etc.

### ***Assessing Writing***

Writing has been listed as one of the challenging language skills as it is described as “multifaceted and complex” not only in first language but also in first/second language (Eckes, Müller-Karabil, & Zimmermann, 2016, p. 147), and the development of this ability is regarded vital for not only personal and social development but also economic success. Besides, it is necessary for employment and literary cultures (Brown, 2004). Similarly, Chastain (1988) entitles writing as “a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language” (p. 244). Nunan (1999) states how challenging writing skill is when he notes:

In terms of skills, producing coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language. It is something most native speakers never master. For second language learners the challenges are enormous, particularly for those who go on to a university and study in a language that is not their own. (p. 271)

Similarly, Cummins (2006) documents the context of writing as follows:

Writing is at once a profoundly complex ability, a highly conventionalised mode of communication, and a uniquely personal form of individual expression. Helping students to improve their writing requires an approach to teaching that attends to each of these elements

judiciously. At the same times, teachers need to foster students' capacities to regulate their own writing performance autonomously, purposefully, and effectively. (p. 473).

One of the dichotomies in writing instruction is product versus process approaches. As the name speaks for itself, what is important for the former is the final product free from errors. However, process approach to writing instruction as opposed to product-oriented approach started to be popular in the mid-1970s. It focuses on how the text is created rather than what the end product is (Raimes, 1993, as cited in Nunan, 1999, p. 271). In other words, it “focus (es) on the steps involved in drafting and redrafting a piece of work” as it is not possible to create a perfect text, yet “one can get closer to perfection through producing, reflecting on, discussing, and reworking successive drafts of a text” (Nunan, 1999, p. 272).

The assessment of this complex skill is not easy as it has several genres such as academic writing job-related writing, and personal writing, and various types of writing performance, including imitative, intensive (controlled), responsive, and extensive tasks (Brown, 2004). There are three types of scoring methods for responsive and extensive writing, namely holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, and analytical scoring as listed by Brown can be used. As Brown(2004, p. 241) identifies:

In the first method, a single score is assigned to an essay, which represents a reader's general overall assessment. Primary trait scoring is a variation of the holistic method in that the achievement of the primary purpose, or trait, of an essay is the only factor rated. Analytic scoring breaks a test-taker's written text down into a number of subcategories (organisation, grammar, etc.) and gives a separate rating for each. (p. 241)

One of these writing performance types that is relevant for the current study is responsive and extensive one. In the current study, the participants were asked to put their paragraphs and essays, as responsive and extensive tasks, into their portfolios. They were asked to write topic sentences, develop their topics within a paragraph, develop main and supporting ideas in a paragraph and write well-organised five-paragraph argumentative essays. To assess their written products, whether paragraph or essays, the clarity of their ideas, the sequence and connection of idea, unity, overall impact, use of relevant supporting details, accuracy and fluency, to name but a few (Brown, 2004) were taken into account. Both holistic and analytic scorings were used to score their products. Beyond this scoring, the teachers responded to their written products, i.e., assessed the initial stages (student drafts), following the initial stage assessment of the process of composing listed by Brown (2004, p. 247):

**Table 2.** Assessment of Initial Stages in Composing by Brown (2004, p. 247)

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1. Focus your efforts primarily on meaning, main idea, and organisation.
  2. Comment on the introductory paragraph.
  3. Make general comments about the clarity of the main idea and logic or appropriateness of the organisation.
  4. As a rule of thumb, ignore minor (local) grammatical and lexical errors.
  5. Indicate what appear to be a major (global) errors (e.g., by underlining the text in question), but allow the writer to make corrections.
  6. Do not rewrite questionable, ungrammatical, or awkward sentences; rather, probe with a question about meaning.
  7. Comment on features that appear to be irrelevant to the topic.
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The related literature has documented several studies on assessing writing skill with portfolio-assessment in various education contexts. For instance, one related experimental study belongs to Saad and Noor (2007), who aimed at investigating Malaysian University students' opinions on the use of portfolio in Malaysia with semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The findings showed that the participants benefitted benefit most while getting feedback, writing drafts, and reviewing. Moreover, it was also observed that students' active participation in classroom discussions with their classmates was empowered. In another parallel study, Lirola and Rubio (2009) aimed at investigating the possible benefits of portfolio-based assessment and students' views on it with a survey in two universities in Spain through the integration of portfolio into English Grammar III and English Didactics, and Applied Linguistics. The participants' effort and daily regular work were reported as the biggest advantages of it. In another study, Chung (2012) aimed at exploring ESL graduate students' perceptions of portfolio assessment in an advanced academic writing course in the USA, in which the students were supposed to keep assignment and make revisions. The data gathered via the analysis of the student questionnaires related to their experiences and student assignments showed that portfolio helped them learn their strengths, weaknesses, and language growth in English. In order to investigate the possible effect of writing portfolio assessment on the editing ability of students, Fahim and Jalili (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 38 Iranian students. Students' self-assessment of their writing regarding issues such as content, organisation, grammar, mechanics, spelling, cohesion, sentence structure and so forth provided several benefits such as reviewing their own work, realising their own points of strengths and weaknesses, becoming independent learners, improving their relationship with their teacher, getting individual instruction, thinking critically, and increasing awareness about learning strategies. Barrot (2016) investigated the effect of e-portfolio assessment via social networking sites, i.e., the use of Facebook as an e-portfolio platform on 171 students in Philippines. The researcher found that Facebook has a positive impact on students' writing development as they had chance "to reflect on their work, showcase their best work, manage their output electronically, monitor their progress, and recognise the gaps in their current knowledge and skills among others" (Barrot, 2016, p. 295). Yet, they encountered problems such as format and readability, technology anxiety, Internet connection, typing and compilation, readership, peer feedback, clarity of instructions, and appropriateness of Facebook as an educational platform.

Turkish scholars have not shut their eyes to the issue. To investigate the effect of portfolio on students' writing anxiety, Öztürk and Çeçen (2007) conducted an action research with 15 preparatory programme students in Istanbul. The results show that they benefitted from the process such as developing learning ownership, expanding vocabulary, thinking critically, overcoming writing anxiety, improving writing skills, and increasing creativity. Similarly, in another action research study conducted with 140 students by Caner (2010) at the School of Foreign Languages of Anadolu University, it was reported that most of students found portfolio beneficial in their English learning process. Yet, a number of students voiced their negative attitudes as they did not believe the positive effects of portfolio in their writing skill. Rather, they preferred to be evaluated with paper-and-pencil tests. In order to investigate the effect of electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) use on the development of writing skills, Erice and Ertaş (2011) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 47 university students. The more time passed, the more the importance and enjoyment levels of the participants decreased in the experimental group, i.e., the ones using e-portfolio as an educational must. However, the researchers argued that this might not result solely from the computer environment. Rather

some other variables such as computer use experience, Internet availability, extra time required to complete tasks and so forth. Still, they conclude that e-portfolio could be used as a tool to promote English language learning due to “easiness to carry, share and save; instant access; immediate feedback; reader and reviewer variety and so forth” (Erice & Ertaş, 2011, p. 91). Similarly, in his qualitative research, Ok (2012) also investigated the perceptions of 34 freshmen at ELT department of Pamukkale University via reflective essays written both in fall and spring terms. It was found that portfolio-based assessment resulted in decrease in writing anxiety and increase in student motivation. Lastly, in another study, Eskici (2015) investigated student opinions based on a number of variables such as gender, class, and type of education with 189 university students from Faculty of Arts and Sciences Department of Philosophy. It was concluded that students’ opinions on portfolio assessment were also positive, yet there were no significant difference between gender, class, and type of education. Özer and Tanrıseven (2016) conducted a mixed-method study with 32 university students in Adana to investigate the effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the development of writing skill in a Academic Writing class. The increase in students’ grades showed that this assessment improved students’ writing proficiency in time. In addition, thanks to this educational practice, the participants become self-aware of their improvement in writing. This sense of progress increased their self-efficacy in writing.

## **Methodology**

The current study sets out to the perceptions of preparatory programme students regarding the portfolio-based assessment in their writing classes. The current study falls into the category of descriptive research, among other three types, namely correlational research, explanatory research, and exploratory research. A descriptive study is the one that “attempts to describe a systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, or provides information about, say, the living conditions of a community, or describes attitudes towards an issue” (Kumar, 1996, p. 9). It uses a non-experimental study, i.e., survey, which is suitable for descriptive research and “characterised by the collection of data using standard questionnaire forms administered by telephone or face to face, by postal pencil-and-paper questionnaires or increasingly by using web-based and e-mail forms” (Muijs, 2004, p. 34)

## **Setting and Participants**

This mixed-method study was conducted with 50 preparatory programme students (F=34; M=16) enrolled in English Language and Literature Department of Karadeniz Technical University during spring semester in 2016-2017 academic year. After having been accepted to the department with a university entrance exam, the newcomers are supposed to sit for an English proficiency exam including four English skills, namely reading, writing, listening, and grammar in the department. While the newcomers taking at least 70 and over from the exam have the chance to start first grade, the ones below this grade have to take a one-year preparatory education in the department. In the programme, they take several skill-based classes including writing, reading, listening, speaking plus coursebook (general English).

The participants were chosen via convenience sampling, which should be understood as an attempt to choose the respondents based on proximity, availability, accessibility, and some certain participant characteristics (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Convenience/accidental sampling as one of the common non-probability sampling designs was employed in the current study. Convenience in accessing the participants is the most important element here, and this sampling type is regarded advantageous as it is not expensive, there is no need for any



information in sample selection such as frame, total number, location, and so on, and the researchers can ensure that they include the type of the participants they need (Kumar, 1996). Practicality is a basic reason for this sampling choice as both researchers are at the same institution. However, the researchers are aware that non-representativeness of the sampling as one of the limitations of the current discourages them to overgeneralise the findings to other settings (Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

### ***Data Gathering and Analysis***

During the process, for one year the participants were supposed to take a 4-hour-writing class in which they were supposed to complete common types of rhetorical in-class and out-of-class assignments focusing on narration, description, process, classification, comparison/contrast, and argumentation/opinion (Hinkel, 2004). While they learned how to write a well-organised paragraph in the first term, they mostly focused on how to write an argumentative/opinion essay.

In order to investigate student perceptions of this one-year-practice, a mixed method research design that refers to “different combinations of qualitative and quantitative research either at the data collection or at the analysis levels” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 24) was employed as the research design of the current study. The study could be identified as a quantitative study as a questionnaire consisting of 19 items in the form of five point likert-type adapted from Yang (2003) and Eskici (2013) was used to investigate the participants' perception. The study is also a qualitative one in that the study employed individual in-depth interviews as the aim is also to have richer insider meaning by investigating the participants' feelings and experiences (Dörnyei, 2007).

Questionnaire was preferred as one research gathering tool, for these economical research tools save researchers time, effort, and financial resources and they help them gather data from various people in different contexts simultaneously (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010: 6). However, to overcome their possible disadvantages such as simple and shallow answers, biased responses, unmotivated respondents, misunderstandings, the tendency to overgeneralise, to list but a few, an interview was used to support the quantitative findings. An interview as a common method of data gathering was also employed “in an ancillary role (...) to triangulate data gathered from other sources” (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 181). As defined by Kumar (1996), “any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called an interview” (p. 109). Interview was preferred so as to triangulate the quantitative findings as it has several advantages such as being appropriate for complex situations, the potential to collect in-depth information, the potential to supplement data gathered via other techniques, the chance to explain possibly misunderstood items, and its wider application, i.e., being able to use it with any type of population (Kumar, 1996). Unstructured interview was employed for the current study in which the researchers having prepared a set of questions beforehand, an interview schedule, asked their questions to the individual participants in a person-to-person interaction. This type of interviewing is regarded advantageous as uniform information that allows the researcher compare and contrast their data could be gathered (Kumar, 1996). 5 more voluntary participants were asked open-ended questions at their convenience: (1) Are you happy having been assessed by portfolio during one year in your writing course?, (2) Did you observe any positive effects through the process?, (3) Were there any disadvantages of this education practice?, and (4) Do you think that keeping a writing portfolio has any effect on the improvement of your writing skill?

The quantitative data gathered via questionnaires were analysed with Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, and some descriptive statistics including percentage, frequency, mean, standard error, and standard deviation were calculated. On the other hand, the qualitative data gathered via interviews were processed with content analysis. After the audio data were transcribed verbatim, it was revised several times to identify the codes, which were quantified and categorised later. The researchers interpreted the findings based on these categories and supported them with extracts taken from the dialogues (Mayring, 2011).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

While collecting both the quantitative and qualitative data, ethical issues were considered. In order not to make the participants feel that there are wasting their time, the researchers explained the importance of the study and how their feedback could improve the situation in the department. Also, oral consent was taken from the participants in that they were informed about what the researchers aimed at doing, how they would provide data, and whether it would affect them or not. In addition, sensitive information was not asked for, and they were not made to feel upset or embarrassed. Furthermore, the participants were not harmed physically or psychologically. Lastly, confidentiality was maintained in that the researchers ensured the participants that the data would be kept anonymous, and nobody would not know its source as the researchers did not ask them to provide their name and used number codes while contextualising the crude data with quotations from the participants. Besides these issues concerning research participants, the researchers avoided all biases in that they did not did not hide what they found in the study (Kumar, 1996).

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### ***Quantitative Results: Attitude Survey***

The main purpose of the current study was to investigate the attitudes of EFL learners towards portfolio-based assessment in their writing courses, and the participants rated the items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The quantitative results are tabulated below in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Quantitative Results regarding Learner Attitudes towards Portfolio

<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean (M)</i>		<i>Standard Deviation (SD)</i>
	<i>Statistics</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	
1 taking much time	3,16	,163	1,149
2 a good tool to help student learning	3,72	,137	,970
3 enhancing student learning	3,48	,149	1,054
4 increasing work load	3,54	,160	1,129
5 encouraging active participation into classes	2,84	,141	,997
6 preferring to be assessed with portfolio	3,18	,166	1,173
7 helping learn things wholeheartedly/not forgetting	3,28	,157	1,107
8 preferring to be assessed with paper-and-pen exams	2,98	,163	1,152
9 discovering their strengths and weaknesses in English	3,70	,170	1,199
10 encouraging them to continue learning out of class	3,06	,177	1,252

11	not understanding why they need to prepare a portfolio	2,42	,188	1,326
12	increasing one's interest in the course	2,84	,165	1,167
13	thinking that it is useless for student learning	2,78	,186	1,314
14	developing the habit of regular writing in English	3,66	,168	1,189
15	reflecting all that have been learned with portfolio	3,52	,146	1,035
16	helping them come prepared to the class	3,28	,154	1,089
17	increasing the sense of responsibility	3,72	,137	,970
18	having idea about one's development/growth in English	4,02	,141	1,000
19	helping one use time efficiently	2,98	,150	1,059

As is seen in the table above while there are fourteen positive items (Item 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19), five of them show negative attitudes towards portfolio assessment in writing classes (Item 1, 4, 8, 11, and 13). Among these positive items the one with the highest mean is Item 18 that states that portfolio assessment helps one have idea about their growth in English ( $M=4,02$ ,  $SE=,141$ ,  $SD=1,00$ ). The other items rated highly with  $M=3,72$  are Item 2 and Item 17. This quantitative result shows that most of the participants agreed with the statements that writing portfolio is a good tool to help student learning, and this compilation attempt increases their sense of responsibility. Similarly, most of them reported that it helps them discover their strengths and weaknesses in English ( $M=3,70$ ,  $SE=,170$ , and  $SD=1,19$ ), and it helps them develop the habit of regular writing in English (with a mean rate  $M=3,66$ ). The other positively stated items above  $M=3$  are about the following advantages of portfolio assessment: reflecting all that have been learned with portfolio ( $M=3,52$ ), enhancing student learning ( $M=3,48$ ), learning things wholeheartedly/not forgetting them ( $M=3,28$ ), helping them come prepared to the class ( $M=3,28$ ), and encouraging them to continue learning outside the classroom/school borders ( $M=3,6$ ).

The mean value of other positively stated items are below 3: helping them use their time efficiently ( $M=2,98$ ), encouraging active participation into the classes ( $M=2,84$ ), and increasing their interest in writing course ( $M=2,48$ ). The results show that the ones who preferred to be assessed with this alternative assessment method ( $M=1,18$ ) are higher than the ones who prefer traditional pen-and-pencil writing exams ( $M=2,98$ ).

Among the items showing negative attitudes towards writing portfolio assessment, Item 4 about how it increases student work load ( $M=3,54$ ) has the highest rate, which should be read as student unhappiness about how this requirement makes them really busy. In a parallel way, Item 1 on how it takes much time got a really high mean rate ( $M=3,16$ ). Both items show that keeping a portfolio requires much work and takes much time, which tire them a lot. In Item 13, it was seen that there are several participants who find this practice useless ( $M=2,78$ ), and in Item 11, several complained about the fact that they still cannot understand why they need to keep a portfolio for their writing classes ( $M=2,42$ ).

Overall, the quantitative results tabulated and explained above show that most of the participants hold positive attitudes towards this alternative assessment as it gives them idea about their own language growth, helps their learning, increases sense of responsibility, enables them to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, helps them develop the habit of regular writing, enables them to reflect classroom learning to their writing, encourages them to continue

learning outside the classroom borders, and so forth. Yet, they complained about the fact that this practice takes much time and increases the burden on their shoulder, and thus some preferred traditional pen-and-pencil exams as in the study of Caner (2012). Overall findings are in line with those of Öztürk and Çeçen (2007), who found that the participants benefitted from the process such as developing learning ownership, expanding vocabulary, thinking critically, overcoming writing anxiety, improving writing skills, and increasing creativity. Similarly, Ok (2012) and Fahim and Jalili (2013) found that portfolio brought them motivation in spite of overload both in time and work load and diminished their writing anxiety. As in the study of Özer and Tanrıseven (2016), thanks to this educational practice, the participants become self-aware of their improvement in writing, which in turn could play a vital role in increasing their self-efficacy in writing.

### **Qualitative Results: Individual Interviews**

The quantitative data were triangulated with an individual semi-structured in-depth interview conducted with 5 voluntary participants. The findings gathered by reading, revising, coding, and categorising the transcribed audio data were tabulated under two broad categories as advantages and disadvantages of this alternative assessment as tabulated below.

**Table 4.** Encoded Advantages and Challenges of Portfolio in Retrospective Interviews

Main Theme	Codes	Total	
		f	%
<b>Advantages of portfolio assessment</b>	giving information about personal progress	5	79,4
	learning by discovering	4	
	learning from their own mistakes	4	
	improving writing skill	4	
	decreasing writing anxiety	3	
	expanding vocabulary knowledge	2	
	encouraging research	2	
	improving sentence structure	2	
	creating time	2	
	increasing responsibility	2	
	increasing motivation	1	
<b>Challenges of portfolio assessment</b>	taking up a lot of time	4	20,5
	increasing burden of study	3	
	being tiring	1	
		<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>

As is seen in the table above, the interviewees reported several advantages of the practice 31 times. Parallel with the quantitative findings, here all reported that this alternative assessment enabled them to learn about their own growth/development in English (N=5). Similarly, a high number of participants touched on the importance of learning by discovering, learning from one's own mistakes, and improving writing skill (N=4, for each). Half of them also told that compiling a portfolio rather than having a traditional pen-and-pencil exam

decreased their writing anxiety. As rightly put by Öztürk and Çeçen (2007, p. 229), portfolio could be used to overcome writing anxiety:

Portfolio keeping creates more instances of writing practice and it is a well-known fact that practice makes things better. Thus, it is not misleading to conclude that keeping portfolio improves writing skills as it makes the students practice writing in the target language. The more they practice, the more they feel themselves as better writers. It is highly possible that feeling a better writer reduces writing anxiety. In this respect one of the reasons of writing anxiety mentioned in the literature i.e. poor writing skills successfully loses its strength.

They also associate this decrease with the potential of portfolio to create a dynamic learning environment as follow:

[P]ortfolios create a dynamic educational environment and accordingly another source of writing anxiety that is the degree of preparation to complete the writing task diminishes. The time allocated in the process of portfolio gives them a chance to get prepared and accumulate their ideas and arguments while reflecting on their accurate use of L2. Similarly, writing anxiety stemming from the fear of being assessed and judged on the basis of writing tasks decreases. Since portfolios are not primarily used as a means of practicing grammar, more importance is given to the expression of ideas both by the teachers and students. With the support of portfolios, the pressure of accuracy is minimized if not completely released.

In addition to these codes, the analysis showed that they benefitted from this practice as it encouraged them to do research (N=2), improved the sentence structures of their written products (N=2), created extra time for themselves (N=2), increase their sense of responsibility (N=2), and increased their motivation (N=1). The following extracts taken from the transcripts illustrate some of these these benefits, namely personal progress, feedback, and learning by discovering:

I am happy having been evaluated by portfolio. This was my first experience with portfolio and that was very beneficial. You can learn by discovering. It also helps you with the establishment of feedback. But the most important part is that you can observe your personal progress (A female participant, 9th May, 2017).

I can compare my final drafts to the first ones. I can easily go back my previous mistakes and make revisions. I can also see how far I have developed (A male participant, 10th May, 2017).

Firstly I could observe my mistakes. Then at the end, I could also realize the difference between my first and final paper. The most important part of it is to make you feel like you have improved (A female participant, 10th May, 2017).

No educational practice is without limitation, and writing portfolio is no exception. Out of 39 codes, 8 negative one were identified. Most of the participants complained about the fact that this compilation took much of their time (N=4). Similarly, half of them reported that keeping a portfolio increased the burden of study in the preparatory programme, which is normally a challenging period for newcomers. And only one participant said that it was tiring. As in the study of Özer and Tanrıseven (2016), the participants complained about the busy schedule, which resulted in student exhaustion.

### **Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

The aim of the current study is to investigate students' perspective regarding the use of writing portfolio. The results show that the participants benefitted from the process as the practice gives them idea about their own language growth, helps their learning, increases sense

of responsibility, enables them to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, helps them develop the habit of regular writing, enables them to reflect classroom learning to their writing, encourages them to continue learning outside the classroom borders, decreases their writing anxiety, increasing their motivation, and so forth, yet some were negative about the practice due to its tiring nature, time requirements, and hectic schedule. The reasons behind these negative opinions may be the possible mismatch between their learning style and portfolio assessment process. Therefore, teachers should inform students about the necessities of this process in advance, and their awareness about alternative assessment strategies should also be increased. Besides, students may complain about their some unfair scores, which could be overcome by establishing clear, measurable criteria, and regulations before the actual process begins.

For a successful portfolio management, teachers can use the checklist documented by Hyland (2003):

**Table 5.** A checklist for managing a writing portfolio (Hyland, 2003, p. 237)

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1. Determine what the portfolio is to include based on course objectives and student needs analysis.
  2. Ask students to buy a ring binder for the portfolio. They should paste a sheet in the front with the submission texts and due dates and divide the binder with labelled tabs.
  3. Discuss the purposes and procedures of the portfolio with students throughout the course.
  4. Agree on assessment decisions and scoring criteria with other teachers and communicate these, both formally and informally, through feedback comments to students throughout the course.
  5. Set aside days to conduct checks to monitor progress and help learners reorganise their portfolios.
  6. Provide opportunities for students to display their work through portfolio presentations, design competitions, readings, and so on.
  7. Encourage reflection on entries by asking students to write an introduction to their portfolios and diary entries or letters to readers on its content.
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Finally, the current study might inspire interested researchers to examine the effectiveness of portfolio assessment for decreasing writing apprehension as anxiety is a crucial factor in the development of writing skill with control and experimental groups over a certain time period. In addition, future studies could choose a quasi-experimental study design to identify the effects of this practice on students' writing performance and anxiety level.

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