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## The Use Of Portfolio In English Language Teaching And Its Effects On Achievement And Attitude

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### Abstract

This study focuses on determining the effects of portfolio on learning products on eighth grade students in foreign language learning. The pre test-post test experimental design with a control group has been used in the research. Two groups were randomly formed as an experiment and control group in this experimental study which lasted twelve weeks. The teacher handbook activities were used with the control group. But in the experiment group, portfolio activities were also used. At the beginning and at the end of the study, both groups were given an achievement test and a scale to measure attitudes towards English. Thus, the effects of portfolio on success and attitudes towards English were investigated. An achievement test which consisted of 20 multiple choice questions concerning grammar and vocabulary, listening test with 15 questions, reading test with 15 questions, speaking test with 15 questions and writing test with 15 points were developed. The attitude scale towards English consisted of 34 items. Also, students in the experiment group were given five open-ended questions to find out what they thought about portfolio. At the end of the research, it revealed that portfolio had positive effects on students' achievement, but it had no effect on attitudes towards English. Additionally, it had positive effects on writing, listening and reading skills but no effect on speaking skills. The analysis of the open-ended questions revealed that students liked the portfolio application and they had positive attitudes towards learning English in general. On the other hand, the interview with the students made it clear that students like portfolio activities.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the importance of teaching English increases with the speed of information exchange. The understanding of traditional language teaching has been replaced to communicative approach. It is aimed the students to use the language not only to learn the grammatical structures but also to communicate with foreign people functionally. The innovations in language teaching have also affected evaluation process in the same way. It is seen that process based evaluation has been important in language teaching. And we see that the importance is given to process rather than the product in last approaches in language teaching. Considering the transition from teacher-centered approaches to student and learning- centered approaches, it can be said that process-based approaches should be adopted in curriculum drafts. The basic hypothesis in process-based approaches is that certain skills and strategies used for understanding or producing the speech exist on the base of each language behavior. Learning environment is important because the students become aware of their abilities and potentials in learning environments. (MONE, 2006: 2). One of the process-based evaluation techniques is certainly portfolios. Constructivist approach is presented on the basis of portfolio studies. Because the student needs a construction in his/her mind for each study and activity to be placed in the portfolio. He/she reflects his/her learning to his/her studies. From this perspective, it can be said that portfolio application contributes to constructivist learning theory (Mıhladı, 2007: 22). Portfolio which can be used easily in all fields at elementary and secondary level may be entitled as personal progress file, portfolio or student's portfolio in Turkish literature (Bahar, 2006: 74). It will be useful to mention about the definitions briefly in order to understand its contributions to language teaching.

Portfolio;

- is the organized form of students' termly or yearly studies according to certain standards (Bahar, 2006: 74).
- is the files that is come together the documents that inform about students' progress. This information is formed by considering the students' responses to the questions like "What did I learn in this part of teaching?" "How much could I put into practice the information that I learned?" (Berberoğlu, 2006: 138).
- is the student's collection which reflects student's individual studies, effort, process
- is the student's collection which reflects student's studies in one or a few fields, effort, stages that passed through and success. In defining the content of this collection, the student should also be active
- Kemp and Toperoff (1998) define the portfolio as "purposively collection of the student's effort, progress and success in one or more fields" (Kan, 2007:133).
- Portfolios are the purposive, organized and systematic accumulation of the products that tells the story of students' efforts, progresses and successes in certain areas" (Arter, J., Spandel, V. ve Culham, R., 1995; Tedick ve Lee, 1998, Akt. Erdoğan, 2006: 19).
- French (1992) defines the portfolio as "purposive and chronological accumulation of student's studies that reflect his/her progress in one or a few fields during certain process or student's results indicated in one or a few fields" (Mıhladı, 2007: 21).
- Portfolio is the collection of students' studies that display their efforts, progress and successes within the educational programs accordingly certain aims (Güngör,2005: 17)

The common point in the definitions above is the purposive collection of students' studies. It shows that students' studies should be collected in a systematic and organized way rather than randomly. It is understood that every product cannot be placed in the portfolio. The studies that will be placed in the portfolio should represent, within the objectives stated in the curriculum, the prominent studies that reflect student's performance best and the documents that prove the student's progress and development towards these objectives (Kan, 2007: 134)

The positive aspects of portfolio application;

- It provides students to see their strengths and weaknesses (Bahar, 2006: 80)
- It provides the students to evaluate their learning in more unique way (Calfee ve Perfumo, 1993; Valencia, 1990; Valencia ve Calfee, 1991, akt. Mıhladı, 2007:43)
- Portfolio not only shows the student's finished studies but also shows his/her learning process. Student's studies collected in various periods constitute the student's learning process and a document of the progresses in this process. It shows the time spent within the learning process, student's studies, performance, deficiencies and corrections in a detailed way (Fenwick ve Parson,2000,akt. Güven, 2007: 26)

- It provides flexibility in measuring the students' success about the attainment of objectives
  - It gives opportunity to the students and teachers in defining the objectives together and evaluation
  - It helps the development of lifelong learning skills (Bahar,2006: 80)
  - It provides the continuous observation of student's progress needed for determining teaching strategies (Barotchi ve Ketzawardz, 2002: 281)
  - As it provides more information about student's progress, it increases the feeling of responsibility in the student and strengthen the feeling in taking more role in learning-evaluation process (Bahar, 2006: 80)
  - Portfolios can be used to measure students' knowledge related to almost all observable abilities, process or content. As long as pre-determined rating criteria exist, students' products in a very large framework can be included in portfolio evaluation." (Kan,2007: 134)
- Advantages of portfolio in terms of language learning are listed as below: (Chen, 1993; Fenwick ve Parsons, 1999; Singer, 1993; Wolf, 1989, akt. Erdoğan: 35):
- It helps the students to find which language learning contents are best for them,
  - It defines the objectives for the students' future learning,
  - It gives opportunity to the students for taking responsibility of their own learning and provides evidence about whether learners have reached their aims or not,
  - It helps the teacher to determine effective language learning strategies or make reflections about current curriculum,
  - It provides information to the students' language learning processes and enables teachers to impersonate the teaching,
  - It gives opportunity to the students for showing their good studies,
  - It serves as a means for critical self-analysis,
  - It shows foreign language proficiency.

### *1.1 Purpose of the Research*

Multilingualism is being encouraged at present and the importance given to language learning is increasing so as to provide contemporary nations to keep up with the rapidly growing knowledge. The new approaches in the field of education direct both the teachers and the students to take active part in education. Therefore, traditional methods had to be replaced by the new ones. The system which was totally teacher-centered and in which there was only a restricted place for the students whose role was to take part as a passive receiver lost its validity. Language teaching can only be fulfilled as a task that focuses majorly on the process rather than the product, aims at teaching communication skills and provides lifelike environments to use the language. Certainly, all these put forward how much a student learns in the evaluation process. As an alternative evaluation technique, portfolio, has emerged as a result of these tendencies, however, the ideas about the functionality of its outcomes remained restricted. Although there are several studies made abroad, the number of studies about this subject in our country is limited. Especially, the researches on the efficacy of portfolio practice in English Language Teaching are not adequate in number. It is thought that this study will contribute to the evaluation process in language teaching. The aim of this study is to determine the effects of using portfolio in English Language Teaching in the 8th grade on students' achievement and attitudes.

## **2. Method**

In this study, experimental design pretest-posttest with a control group has been used. The independent variables in this study are the activities for preparing a portfolio, and the dependent variables are the academic achievement levels of students and their attitudes towards English courses.

## 2.1. Participants

The study was conducted with 31 students studying in the 8th grade in a state school in Ankara city center. There were 16 students in the experimental group and 15 students in the control group. In order to determine whether the groups were equal, the students' grades were compared and there could not be found a significant difference between these two groups.

## 2.2. Instruments

To collect data, an achievement test was prepared by the researcher and it included questions from the levels of knowledge, comprehension and application, and aimed at assessing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The attitudes of the students towards English were determined by using the scale developed by Şahinel (2002). The Cronbach alpha reliability co-efficient of the 34 item has been found 0.895. The multiple choice test is composed of 20 questions in the knowledge level and it aims assessing grammar and vocabulary. To assess reading skills, 15 questions were asked about a reading text. Eight of these questions were true-false questions and seven were multiple choice questions. In relation to the writing skills, empty forms were delivered to the students and the students were asked to write about an event they had experienced by using at least 15 sentences. For listening skills, after listening to a track appropriate for their their level, students were wanted to choose the correct picture among three they were shown. In terms of speaking skills, 15 questions - each having only one correct answer - were prepared. For each question, picture cards were prepared and they were shown to the students while they were answering the questions. The achievement pretest was given to the students and item-test correlations, discrimination index of items, and item difficulty index were identified. The KR-20 reliability co-efficient was found 0.951.

## 2.3. Experimental Process

The achievement test and the attitude scale were each practiced twice – at the beginning and end of the term. During the study which took 12 weeks, both groups were given activities proper to the objectives in the curriculum. The students in the experiment group prepared portfolios and activities developing their four language skills, and presented their works in the class in addition to the activities stated above. It was aimed at developing their speaking and listening skills. These presentations included activities like debates, pair work and dialogue practice. The activities were designed to be completed outside the class and at the end of each activity students were given feedback and their mistakes were corrected. The portfolio was formed with these activities: adapting a fairy tale or a story to the modern day; being aware of their strengths and weaknesses and being able to express these in English; making an interview with a member of the family, putting it into a dialogue and acting it out in the classroom with a friend; making a list of ten things that he wanted to achieve most in life; writing about a person who influenced him most stating several reasons; making an imaginary interview with a celebrity or a character that he acted by asking questions about what he did or which places he visited; preparing a jigsaw puzzle by using the new vocabulary; preparing an advert or a leaflet about a famous tourist destination or a holiday resort etc.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. *The Effect of Portfolio on Achievement*

The difference between the means of the pretest points of the groups related to the grammar-vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills were analyzed with Mann-Whitney U test and there was not found a significant difference between the means of group scores. In this part, tables related to the academic achievement and means of the attitude scale posttest scores are presented. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of the achievement scores of the experiment and control groups are given in Table 1.

Table 1. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of grammar-vocabulary scores of experiment and

Group	N	control groups		U	P
		Mean Rank	Rank Sum		
Experiment	16	10,62	295,0	34,0	0,01
Control	15	21,07	170,0		

As seen in Table 1 there is a meaningful significance between means of the grammar-vocabulary scores of the groups in favour of the experimental group ( $U=34,0$ ,  $p<,05$ ). The achievement scores of the students in the group in which evaluation based on portfolio is used are higher.

The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of reading skill scores of the experimental and control groups are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of reading skill scores of experiment and control groups

Group	N	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	P
Experiment	16	18,96	265,50	63,50	0,040
Control	15	12,47	199,50		

As seen in Table 2 there is a meaningful significance between means of the reading skill scores of the groups in favour of the experiment group ( $U=63,500$ ;  $p<,05$ ). The reading skill scores of the students in the group in which evaluation based on portfolio is used are higher.

The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of writing skill scores of the experiment and control groups are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of writing skill scores of experiment and control

Group	N	groups		U	P
		Mean Rank	Rank Sum		
Experiment	16	18,93	265,00	64,000	,045
Control	15	12,50	200,00		

As seen in Table 3 there is a meaningful significance between means of the writing skill scores of the groups in favour of the experiment group ( $U=64,000$ ;  $p<,05$ ). The writing skill scores of the students in the group in which portfolio is used are higher. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of listening skill scores of the experiment and control groups are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of listening skill scores of experiment and control

Group	N	groups		U	P
		Mean Rank	Rank Sum		
Experiment	16	21,57	302,00	27,000	,000
Control	15	10,19	163,00		

As seen in Table 4 there is a meaningful significance between means of the listening skill scores of the groups in favour of the experiment group ( $U=27,000$ ;  $p<,05$ ). The listening skill scores of the students in the group in which portfolio is used are higher.

The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of speaking skill scores of the experiment and control groups are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of speaking skill scores of experiment and control

Group	N	groups		U	P
		Mean Rank	Rank Sum		
Experiment	16	14,75	206,50	101,500	,661
Control	15	16,16	218,50		

As seen in Table 5 there is not a meaningful significance between means of the speaking skill scores of the experiment and control groups ( $U=27,000$ ;  $p<,05$ ).

### 3.2. The Effect of Profolio on Attitude

The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of attitude scale scores of the experiment and control groups are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The Mann-Whitney U test results related to the difference between the means of attitude scale scores of experiment and control

Group	N	groups		U	P
		Mean Rank	Rank Sum		
Experiment	16	14.46	274.5	69.5	0.77
Control	15	18.16	290.5		

As seen in Table 6 there is not a meaningful significance between means of the attitude scale scores of the experiment and control groups ( $U = 69.5$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

Finally, according to the answers given by the students to the open ended questions, it was seen that they were affected positively from the practice and they believed they benefited from that practice. In addition, it was understood the students spoke English more in the class and developed their vocabulary skills. Students also stated they gained regular study habits and in this way increased their scores in English exams with the portfolio practice. On the other hand, students explained that they had some problems related to time due to that practice as they were anxious about the exam they would take at the end of that term so they could not focus enough on the process.

## 4. Conclusion and Discussion

When the means of scores related to the four basic skills were compared, it was seen that the portfolio practice had positive effects on reading, writing and listening skills of students however it had no effects on the speaking skills. These findings are similar to the ones obtained with several studies concerning the effects of portfolio on four basic skills.(Fourie and Niekerk, 2001). Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) also reached the conclusion the portfolio technique had positive effect on student achievement. As Yueh (1997) stated portfolio practice affects student performance in a positive way. In addition, Bowwman and Sue (1997) emphasized the potential efficacy of portfolio in their study. The study related to writing skills conducted by Spencer (1999) supports the findings of this research.

In this study, it is seen that the portfolio had positive effects students. Köse (2006) found out portfolio had positive effects on reading skills and it increased students' level of awareness related to reading skills. As Belanoff and Dickson (1991) stated the portfolio technique is a form of bringing skills together by the students purposefully. Portfolio is much more about developing the writing skills of students. Portfolio has not made difference on speaking skills. Ponte (2000), in his study related to portfolio, mentions the difficulties of giving homework about speaking skills. According to him, very little speaking practice can be made in the classroom and it is very difficult to develop such a skill being used a little or very little outside the class. Portfolio practice did not create a meaningful significance between the groups in terms of attitudes towards English. This finding coincides with the ones Starck (1999) and Erdoğan (2006) also had.

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