Tesl Trainee Teachers' Perspectives In Using Portfolio As A Performance Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on investigating TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) trainee teachers' perspectives on using portfolio as an performance assessment in learning literature in Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS). Portfolio assessment is used as a core mode of assessment. The study examined trainee teachers' perspectives of this particular assessment practices as their learning approach. The participants were drawn to eight TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) by simple random sampling. The students are assigned with a lecturer who was going to observe, guide and give marks to them based on their performance in using portfolios. The students were taking this course during short semester which equalled to only 7-week basis. Based on the schedule that was given by the researcher, the lecturer had to evaluate and observe the students' portfolio in at least once every two weeks within seven-week period. The results indicated that trainee teachers prefer portfolio assessment rather than the traditional assignment. This is due to the nature of portfolio that provides a chance of intrinsic motives in learning literature. Time consuming is one of the problems that had been felt by the participants.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, he stated that improving teacher quality is top priority which is quoted from The Star dated 19 September 2012. He also mentioned that improving and empowering teacher and school leadership will be given top priority under the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2012-2025. Other than that, teachers would be equipped with higher-order thinking skills to enable them to produce students with higher level of thinking. According to Ng (2012), The Malaysian Education Blueprint is the step in the right direction to revamp the education landscape by re-looking holistically on the teaching profession and education system as a whole. One of the skills that should be cultivated among trainee teachers is the capability to adapt to new challenges especially in dealing with a few dozen students of different races, backgrounds, characters, and religious beliefs since it is a routine to everyday of teachers' life.

Since during practicum session, trainee teachers work independently, it is best to train them to do so before undergo practicum session on how to build portfolio effectively since the benefits of portfolio is definitely visible in the eye of beholder. Building portfolio is a wholesome assessment where it promoted independent and autonomous learning and at the same time the capability to think reflectively. However, these skills needed in order to build portfolio is something that need to be nurtured. Reflection enables trainee teacher to construct knowledge through asking questions, critiquing, evaluating, helping them bridge the gap between imagined views and the realities of teaching (Lee, 2008).

This study is to find out that the perspectives of trainee teachers when portfolio is functioned as a performance assessment. Portfolio assessment and reflective practice contribute among higher

marks percentage during practicum session. However, this skill is not cultivated during the years before the trainee teachers are sent to schools for practicum session. The trainee teachers only perform reflective practice and building portfolio upon the day that they need to face with challenges for the first time ever teaching in schools. In some ways, it defeats the purpose of portfolio where the students are not skilful in building it. That is the reason why it needs to be introduced during the years before the trainee teachers start to enrol for practicum session.

Performance assessment requires the students to demonstrate that they already mastered certain skills by producing something. Educators nowadays are in search on how exactly the performance assessment that can challenge the students to their maximum capability. In tertiary level, to be specific, undergraduate level, traditional knowledge reproduction test and new modes of assessment are introduced so learners can manipulate their skills. Segers, Gijbels and et. al. (2007) mentioned that assessment drives learning. It leads to the question, 'Are the assessment represented by the educators challenge the students?' Assessment in learning should be able to mould students to prepare them for future undertakings. Reputation of an assessment should be viewed again in order to see whether it is coherence of what exactly that the educators would like to achieve in learning objectives.

Portfolio had been utilized especially in cultivating more independent learning among the learners. Job readiness and career preparation are the reasons for portfolio assessment utilization in business and teacher education disciplines. It is an enhancement to a writing, speech, business, leadership, or computer-information-systems teacher's comprehensive assessment of a student's growth during a particular course or at the end of an enrichment program, an academic major, or a general education core with goals, objectives and competencies in writing and other areas (Zubizaretta, 2009). Portfolio provides stimulating process of learning and creates a product of utilitarian properties. Thus, further discussion is made on the review of the related theories and conceptual framework discussion.

RELATED THEORIES

Three theories are proposed in order to support the basis of this research such as below.
Kolb's Learning Theory.
Learning from the actual experience (experiential learning) requires students to participate in real-life activities as they efficiently transform the knowledge learnt from the educators or textbooks. This concept is cultivated in tertiary level in ensuring their readiness for the job prospect. Traditional classroom-based learning may not always create deep impressions in students because of its didactic, passive and standardised nature, yet the active and practical nature of experiential learning tends to facilitate deep understanding (Chan, 2012). The following is the cycle of Kolb's experiential learning:

Figure 1.0: Theory Model of Kolb's Experiential Learning.
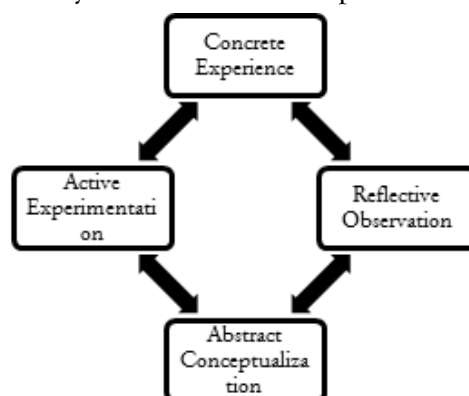
In *concrete experience*, students are expected to feel and experience the activities conducted. During *reflective observation,* students have the opportunity to watch, reflect and observe the learning process that they are going through. After several observations, the students undergo *abstract conceptualization* – the process of thinking, generalizing and conceptualizing. When the students start to build up ideas on learning process, the action of acting, do, apply, plan take place where *active experimentation* is done. Lastly, through this experiential learning students will build up *concrete experience* on tasks.

Through learning experiences, students will undergo positive and negative learning experiences which have powerful impacts on student learning. Plus, reflection process makes the effects long-lasting. Consequently, the nature of experience is continuous and the experiential learning process is of fundamental importance to education and adult development (Dewey, 1938).

VYGOTSKY'S THEORY OF SOCIOCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

In educational discipline, learners need a device to help the students to respond to classroom lesson. This claims that learners should be supported by a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) to perform a linguistic feature that they are not yet able to handle independently. MKO is anyone who has a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept and it can be teacher, coach, and also peers, a younger person or even computer.

Vygotsky (1978) coined the concept named zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is the zone in which learners are capable of doing something at a level slightly higher with the support from an interlocutor than what they can achieve on their own (p.47). With support from the interlocutor, therefore learners are able to continuously co-construct their knowledge and gradually develop their language. There are three elements that are crucial to be cultivated based on this theory which are: instruction, assessment and reflections.

Interlocutor (teacher) provides guidance to students in helping them to be independent in learning. Then, the teacher gives an assessment which is in the students' ZPD in order to allow them to explore the knowledge. Next, the students reflect on the assessed items. Through the assessment given, scaffolding is given to the students to help them to understand the subject matter better. When teachers correct errors and give feedback, teachers act as the 'more knowledgeable other' by helping students to acquire language that they would not yet be able to do on their own.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

In this research, two hypotheses from Krashen are highlighted which are input and affective filter hypotheses. Input hypothesis mentioned that learners acquire only when we understand language that contains structure that is a little beyond our schemata. The input must contain meaningful speech and the learner must try to understand it (Cook, 1993). Input is an important factor that enables the process of second language acquisition to occur. This hypothesis makes the following claim: i+1. If the input contains forms and structures just beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language ('i + 1') then both comprehension and acquisition will occur.

The second hypothesis is affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis is concerned on how affective factors influence second language acquisition. As human, motivation, self-confidence and anxiety can give attribute or deter us from learning it. These are imaginary barriers that determine our learning ability. If the learner is tense, angry, anxious, or bored, it might 'filter out' input, making it unavailable for acquisition. The filter will be 'up' (blocking input) when the learner is

stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated (Tok, 2006). As a teacher, to be able to cater individual differences in delivering information and knowledge will be beneficial in order to cultivate a successful learning process.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Through the conceptual framework, the relationship of different constructs that is investigated throughout the research is shown:
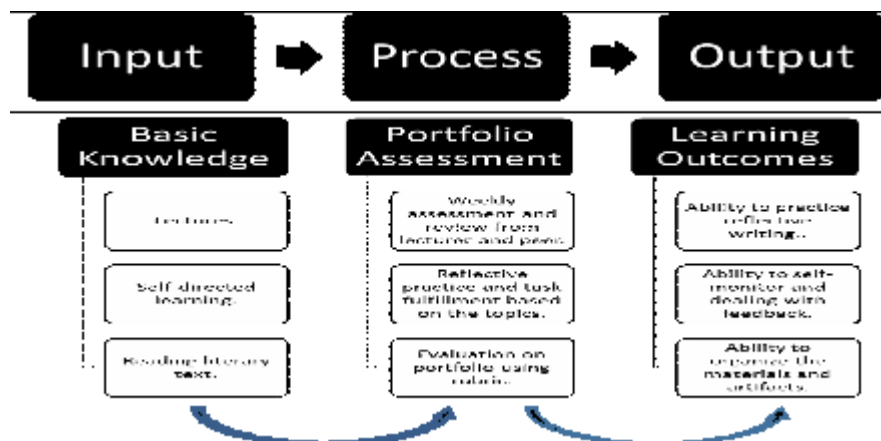
This framework is created to see how the portfolio is used as an assessment in literature learning. Three process are involved which are input, process and output. During input stage, the students are given literary text to be read weekly. They also listen to lectures on the subject matter concerned by the lecturer. There is also slot for the students to direct their own learning - finding vocabulary and artefacts related to the course outline or completing the tasks given. Next, the process stage allows the lecturer to assist the students in building their portfolio. Comments are given so the students will improve their portfolio. Consecutively, peer review is also done as an element of information-sharing and ideas-exchanging process. Students are also given tasks that allow them to be reflective towards the literary text. Most of the task fulfilments test the students to think critically and allow them to be judgemental towards the elements in literature. By the end semester, the portfolio is evaluated based on portfolio assessment rubric.

It is expected that the students will acquire knowledge on writing reflective practice, able to self-correct and deal with feedbacks and gain exposure on how to organize materials and artefacts effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature with the aim of examining students' opinion on the use of portfolio as a form of assessment. The site was a private learning institution located at Bandar Seri Putra, Bangi. The participants in this research were eight students who were undertaking diploma in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language). All of the students were Malay with variety level of proficiency due to the status of the institution which was regarded as a private institution. The samples were chosen by simple random sampling. All of the students were in their final year where they needed to complete Literature subject. The portfolio served as an individual assessment for their course.

The instrument used in this research in order to collect data is interview. The students were interviewed at the end of the term in group in order to cultivate more vary responses. The students were

briefed about the format of the portfolio during the first week of lecture. The title of the portfolio is 'Metaphorically Myself'. They needed to be reflective and used the portfolio to symbolize themselves as a person. There were nine subtopics that the students needed to fill in their portfolio which were: personal details, course outline information, topics, mini research, project-based learning, feedback, written examinations, artefacts collected and lastly vocabulary factory.

The students were given tasks related to the topics taught every week and the number varied every week. Since this research was conducted during short semester which equal to seven-week basis, the lecturer gave written feedback to students' portfolio once every two weeks to keep track of their progress. All of the subjects were interviewed during the last week of the semester in order to investigate and examine the students' experience in using portfolios. The students were being grouped in two teams and unstructured interview was conducted. Other than that, the portfolio that had been submitted by the students were analysed by using rubric.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were twelve interview questions that were being asked by the researcher in order to understand and discover the perspectives of TESL trainee teachers in using portfolio as an assessment in literature learning course. Based on the result given, it was clearly showed that majority of the trainee teacher mentioned that they had some experience in building up portfolio during secondary and primary level. However, it cannot been said that the previous skill that they had assisted them in producing the portfolio for literature course. Perhaps, the subject matter is definitely different in nature.

The trainee teachers feel excited to build a portfolio for literature learning. This indicates a good sign of motivation where urgency to perform the assessment is actually driven by intrinsic motives. Nonetheless, at the beginning it can be seen that the trainee teachers were struggling in understanding on what exactly the task they need to perform. Time limitation seems like a deal breaker here. Many claimed that there were many things to do despite the tasks given were interesting, fun and explore the side of creativity of the students. Some of the students worried the fact that they were not as creative as they were expected to be.

Other than that, one trainee teacher stated that, it is a long time she did not compose a written assignment since by hand. Only one trainee teacher claimed that she did not understand what to do first. At the end of the research also she was not able to catch up much. Producing portfolio is time consuming but the benefits could be felt among all of the respondents. The capability of the students to be creative, responsive and expressive is among the traits that the respondents had been mentioned during the interview. Other than that, portfolio assessment is being opted as a choice of assessment rather than the traditional assignment. This is due to portfolio assessment influences autonomous learning among the students.

Based on the study, the potential of using portfolio as an assessment is definitely visible since the positive perspectives were given throughout this research. This is probably could bring assessment in higher learning to be much autonomous where at some points leading to experiential learning in the classroom. Through this research also the possibility of using portfolio could be seen much clearer. Using portfolio as an assessment is good exercise for the trainee teachers before undergoing practicum session. During practicum session, portfolio is seen as a major task that contributes enormous marks. By giving exposure to the trainee teacher, it is definitely

going to ease their burden since what they need to do is developed and polished the skills in building up portfolio. The understanding of the concept and exposure is already on the fingertips of the trainee teachers.

Based on past studies, literature learning had received a bad light even though learning it could contribute to improvement on certain skills. However, by using portfolio, at least the trainee teachers were being a little bit closer to cultivate the interest to learning this subject matter. The most important thing is that, the educators should try their hardest to find the right instructional method that can enhance students' motivation and interests.

CONCLUSION

This research determines the TESL trainee teachers' perspective on portfolio assessment through learning literature. The research results show that overall the students have a positive perspective on portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment helps the students to improve and build a lot of skills which will be helpful for them in their learning. The result of this study shows that the students prefer the portfolio assessment instead of traditional assignment in the classroom. This should motivate the lecturers to continually use portfolio assessment in the classroom. The university could continue by encouraging active learning techniques especially to enhance teaching and learning process. Portfolio assessment could help the university to produce graduates who are relevant in today's highly competitive world. Last but not least, students have indicated that they enjoy their classes more when portfolio assessment is used in the classroom.

The limitation of this study was the small size of sample. Additional research should be conducted to examine whether these results are positive in a large sample in all forms, all disciplines, in urban, in rural, in suburban schools, and for high, average, and low achievers. Other than that, portfolio assessment could be used by for different discipline, not only for teacher education programme. Last but not least, comparative studies could be done to identify the difference between the portfolio assessment and other traditional assessment in terms of discovering its effectiveness as a content based learning or content based learning. Further research is recommended to verify the findings of the current study in order to strengthen this contribution towards the development of a sound research data, based on cooperative learning strategy.

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