

Portfolios as a Student-Assessment Tool: A Study Based on HNDE Students at Advanced Technological Institute, Anuradhapura

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Abstract— *The current research was conducted to measure the impacts of the Portfolio Assessment on HNDE learners in using it as a continuous assessment method for the module, Language Structure Usage and Linguistics. The sample group included 120 HNDE students from the 1st year batch. This research involved planning and implementation of the portfolio assessment and collecting feedback from the participants. Data collected indicated that the HNDE followers are assessed through different assessment methods. As far as the experiences of the participants are concerned, this is a great assessment method since it helps them in many ways: memorization, exam preparation, displaying creativity, developing organizing skills and expanding their knowledge. As the evaluating experience revealed, the lecturer found it time-consuming hard work to mark 100+ individual portfolios. According to the conclusions, the portfolio assessment is really beneficial for learners since it engages them in a continuous learning process. Plus, they are led to self-error-correction, discovering new knowledge and independent learning. In conclusion, it was found that Portfolio Assessment is beneficial for both learner and lecturer in assessing language structure competency. However, this should be implemented with some other methods for large classes since it is time-consuming both to compile the book and to evaluate it.*

Keywords— **Assessment, Creativity, Critical thinking, Portfolio, Reflection**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of formal education, and knowledge is disseminated in different stages namely primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Irrespective of these different stages, assessment is carried out to evaluate the performance of the learners.

The traditional evaluation methods utilized by teachers are paper and pencil exams. They are not skill-oriented. Hence, they do not evaluate learners' critical thinking ability and creativity.

As Gattullo (2000) indicates, formative assessment serves as “(a) an ongoing multi-phase process that is carried out

on a daily basis through teacher–pupil interaction, (b) it provides feedback for immediate action, and (c) it aims at modifying teaching activities in order to improve learning processes and results.” (p. 279). Unlike the summative assessment that takes place at the end of a term, year, or program, formative assessment has its own merits since it provides immediate benefits for both learner and teacher. Also, it should provide feedback for the learner to come to an understanding of his/her strengths and weaknesses. Simultaneously, it should help the teacher to reflect on her/his own instructional methods, materials and level of success. A portfolio, thus, has its significance as a formative assessment method.

B. Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment (PA) is a recent addition to the Sri Lankan education system. It is a purposeful collection of student work (Arter and Spandel, 1991: 60). Grace (1992: 1) mentions that a “portfolio is a record of the child’s process of learning”. In fact, it is an interesting task for many learners since they are able to add some creative designs to it. More importantly, the learners are not expected to take the trouble of cramming some traditional knowledge like in traditional tests. Instead, they are engaged in some practical tasks of accumulating magazine articles, pictures, book chapters, taking photocopies etc. It is clear that this new assessment method directs the learners to independent learning and learner autonomy enhancing their creativity and critical thinking. More importantly, portfolios allow learners, teachers, administrative officers and parents to reflect on the gradual development of the learners. In other words, all these parties can witness what is really going on inside the classroom and the results of the teaching-learning process that takes place inside the classroom.

HND in English (HNDE) is one of the most popular courses offered by the Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE), a leading higher education institute in Sri Lanka. This is a two-year full time and two-and-a-half-year part time teacher qualification course. In each semester, assessments for each subject are done both summatively and formatively. 40% of the formative assessment marks are added to the

marks of the summative assessment. Regarding the continuous formative assessments of SLIATE, the lecturers tend to utilize traditional testing methods to evaluate the learners' knowledge. Two or more assessments are conducted within the 15-week semester for one module. Although the present education system of the higher education sector places much emphasis on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindset of the students, assessment methods seem to have been limited to traditional knowledge testing methods. SLIATE is no exception. Therefore, this study was done with the intention of finding out the impacts of portfolio assessment on HNDE learners in ATI Anuradhapura based on the module Language Structure, Usage and Linguistics (LSUL).

II. METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

I. Sampling Methods

In this study, a purposive sampling method was used. When using this method, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Ilker, 2016: p.2). Since the present research sought to find out an effective assessment method to evaluate HNDE student performance, the most appropriate participants had to be selected from the HNDE followers. The sample was restricted to ATI Anuradhapura.

II. Sample

The sample was made up of 120 HNDE followers.

A. Students

The sample consisted of 120 students of HNDE full time course at ATI Anuradhapura. All these students were following this higher national diploma expecting to become future English language teachers. Their entry qualifications included G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L) and a credit pass (C) for English subject at G.C.E. Ordinary Level (O/L).

The target group consisted of 120 students from the 2019 full time batch. All the students were from North Central Province, and their age ranged between 19 to 25 years. The members chosen from the 2019 batch were involved in the 1st year first and second semester portfolio making.

III. The module

The module under research was Language Structure Usage and Linguistics (LSUL). This module was chosen due to the expertise and experience of the researcher who has been teaching this module for five consecutive years.

This module covers grammar and linguistics. However, in the present study, only grammar topics were considered. This is a four credit subject with six hour lectures per week.

In the first year the first semester, eleven topics will be covered. Out of them, five topics deal with grammar: word

classes, simple sentence I, simple sentence II, noun and noun phrase.

In the first year second semester, the students are expected to learn four grammar topics: verbs and verb phrase; active and passive voice; adjectives; adverbs and adverbials. In the second year first semester, the students are expected to learn four grammar topics: expanding the sentence: coordination; Expanding the sentence: subordination; If clauses and cleft sentences.

The portfolio covered all the grammar topics for the given semesters were covered.

IV. Data Collection Methods

• Implementation of the Portfolio

The entire process of planning the portfolio was based on the PROVEE.IT (see figure 01) model that supports Collegial Quality Learning Environment (CQLE) (see figure 02) (Bryant & Timmins, 2002) According to CQLE, the teachers "should learn to work together to improve their practice, while helping students develop moral responsibility, ethical responsibility, become humanistic, open-minded, and are able to use authentic assessment" (p.13). Here authentic assessment refers to assessments like portfolios. The PROVEE.IT model describes the responsibilities of the teacher and the student. According to the model, a professional team including the teacher which is called Instructional Team (IT) Plan the purpose, product and process; Reflect on the evidence needed; discusses the Opinion on criteria; set Value for and develops rubrics; Evaluate the portfolios; and Evaluate the process. The students' responsibility is to work together to develop their own portfolios, and to work in class on other projects as well (Bryant & Timmins, 2002, p.18).

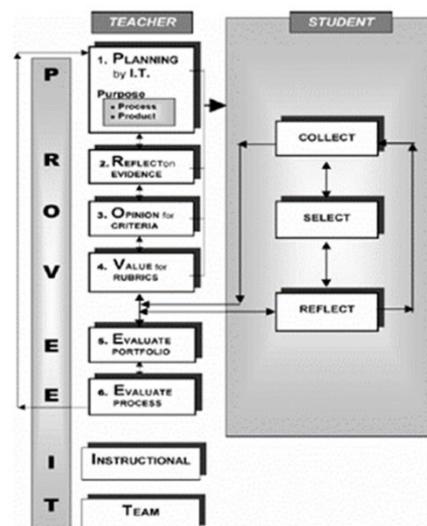


Figure 1: PROVEE IT Model

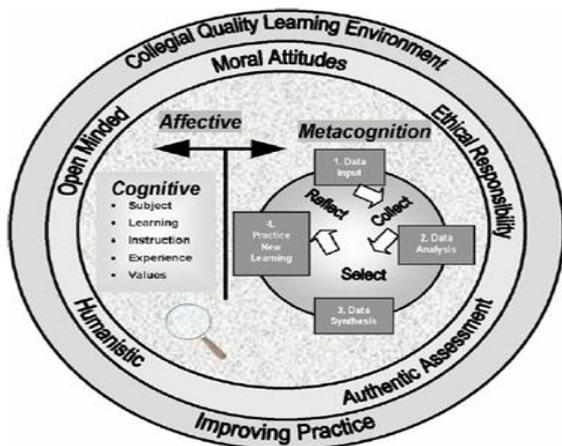


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Implementing a Collegial Quality Learning Environment

In the current research, the researcher became the only member of IT since it was an individual project. However, PROVEE.IT model was utilized in the process of portfolio planning, implementation and evaluation. The PROVEE.IT model was used in this study due to its clearness in the stages, reliability and practicality. Moreover, the evaluation rubrics were created to evaluate the learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes and creativity. Basically, their self-learning and dedication were also evaluated.

• Questionnaire

Apart from the implementation of the PA, a questionnaire was used to collect qualitative data-. The questionnaire aimed at obtaining the attitudes, opinions and feelings of the participants towards the PA.

The questionnaire included 22 questions. The closed questions were used to obtain some exact information and the open ended questions were used to provide the participants with opportunities to express their views.

V. Data Collection Procedure

After completion of the portfolios, questionnaires were distributed among all the participants. Both closed and open ended questions were utilized. Simultaneously, twenty randomly selected participants were interviewed for further clarification.

VI. Scope of the research

The current research was based on 1st year students who are following Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) at ATI section, Anuradhapura. The module under research was Language Structure Usage and Linguistics I &II of HNDE course. All the grammar topics of this module except for linguistics topics were covered in the intended portfolio assessment.

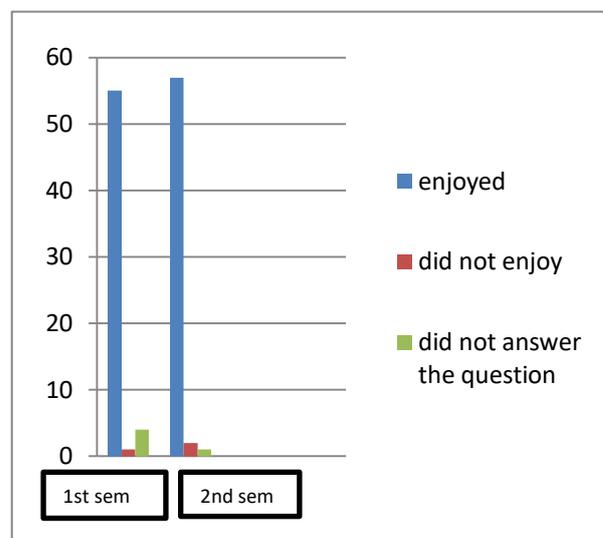
III. RESULTS

I. Questionnaire

After the implementation of portfolio assignments, as the next step of the research, the attitudes of the participants were to be identified and analyzed. For that, a well-designed questionnaire that included 22 questions was distributed among the participants.

The charts given below display the level of satisfaction they enjoyed after doing the assignment.

Chart I : Willingness towards the Portfolio Assignment: the number of participants



The chart given above indicates the level of willingness towards PA semester wise. In the first semester, two participants said that they did not enjoy doing the portfolio assignment. One participant did not answer this question. 57 said they enjoyed the activity. Some said, they enjoyed it a lot. In the 2nd semester, four participants did not answer this question. One participant did not like doing the portfolio. 55 participants said that they enjoyed doing portfolios.

Chart II: Percentages of willingness towards doing PA



The chart II given above indicates the overall percentages of the level of willingness towards PA. According to the chart, only 3% of the population dislikes doing the portfolio assignment and only 4% did not answer this question. 93% of the population enjoyed doing portfolios.

According to the statistics mentioned in the charts given above, it is absolutely clear that the participants are satisfied with the Portfolio Assessments.

Moreover, the data reveal that the lecturers in SLIATE use different methods to assess the learners: Creative activities, presentations, pair work, individual activities, group activities, portfolios, conversations, examination papers, worksheets, speeches, writing short notes, making booklets, oral tests, discussions, dramas, speeches, using pdfs, PowerPoint presentations, class tests and English fair. It was also apparent that the participants were aware of the PA even before the researcher introduced them to this assignment. However, the process of PA was complex for both the researcher and the participants. Nevertheless, the interest and usefulness of the assessment have remained in a higher level .

II. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Impacts of PA on the participants

I. Uses of the PA

As the participants mentioned, to be able to make the portfolio, they should cover reading the entire syllabus, and thus it becomes a booklet that includes all the notes for their entire syllabus. As a result, they can use their portfolio as a study guide especially when they prepare themselves for the semester-end examination.

As a few participants mentioned, this task improved their organizing skills. A few more participants highlighted that learning word classes thoroughly through portfolio was extremely important for them.

II. Extra information

In making the portfolio, they referred to their lecture notes; they read short notes; and they took a great effort to find extra notes from many books, internet etc. So, while making the portfolio, the participants were able to learn many things related to language structure usage and linguistics. As a result of their search, they could find new things that they did not mean to find. This new knowledge was very useful for them. They found many examples for each lesson from various sources.

As many participants emphasized, they might not read extra information unless the portfolio comes as an assignment.

III. Doing exercises

Also, they found many exercises for each lesson from books and internet, which really helped them to correct their mistakes and improve their subject knowledge. Doing exercises was not a habit of some students, but they were compelled to do many exercises relevant to each topic, which was greatly helpful for them at the examination.

IV. Doing Past papers

They also discussed about the past papers that they had to do for the portfolio. In fact they were asked to do two recent past papers and attach them to the portfolio. As they mentioned, the past papers provided them with an understanding about the structure of the oncoming paper of the examination as well as the structure of the questions too.

V. Memorization

As almost all of them agreed, making portfolio becomes an opportunity for the participants to go back to their lessons and re-read their notes, and this act helps them memorize their lessons. As one participant mentioned, memorizing was a problem in the past, however making the portfolio has become the best solution for this problem. This process of re-reading is called a second chance of learning the lesson by a participant. This deep study brings back the memories of their past knowledge.

VI. Correction of grammar errors

Also, the assignment has helped them to find new methods of correcting their grammatical errors. Sometimes, this work reminded them of certain structures that they had already forgotten. Furthermore, the assignment has helped them find out the rules of writing proper sentences.

VII. Creativity

Since they try to beautify their book by painting, pasting pictures, and etc. this activity provides the participant to improve his/her creative abilities. Especially, they try to present the cover page very creatively. As one participant mentioned, s/he is into working hard and involves in this activity seriously. The portfolio is a memorable object for this participant especially because of the creativity added to it. This work also becomes a way of displaying the participant's talents.

VIII. Examination preparation

Also, this task of making the portfolio has helped the participants prepare for the examination. Basically, it is because of the fact that they write down extra notes, short notes, examples, do past papers and re-write lecture notes that they felt they are fully prepared for the examination. They commented on the short notes which they attached to the portfolio. These short notes really helped them for the examination.

B. PROVEE I.T. Model

I. Instructional Team (I.T.)

Following the guideline of the PROVEE IT model, first the IT was decided, which was limited to the researcher herself. She decided on the nature of assessment and the implementation of it conforming to the assessment rules laid by SLIATE. Since she was the lecturer who taught the subject, Language Structure, Usage and Linguistics (LSUL), she was aware of the content and the time allocation for each topic, she decided that she would have the portfolio assessment as the continuous assessment for the LSUL subject.

II. Planning

As she planned, she would do class activities to do inside the classroom and the students will have to attach them to the portfolio. Also, her main purpose was to direct students to self-learning and reflection. Accordingly, she assigned them to do exercises for each sub topic of every topic. Also, she assigned her students to collect as many extra materials as possible from books, newspapers, the internet etc. She did not limit them to any number in terms of pages since her purpose was to direct them for hard work through self-learning. Moreover, she directed them for exam preparation by asking them to do two recent past papers on their own.

III. Reflection

As it was mentioned in the previous section, reflection was aimed at this PA. Reflection occurred in three levels. Their huge portfolios enabled the learner to become aware of what he/she had learned; how he/she had learned; if he/she is ready for the end-semester examination. Most of the learners expressed in their questionnaires that they were really satisfied with the load of work they had completed. They could go back to what they had learned and it really gave them a good organization. All these jobs helped them a great deal in exam preparation.

Next, the researcher, being the teacher (lecturer), could reflect on what she has done at the end of the semester. As the only member of the IT, she could identify how much effort the learners had taken to accomplish this task while really engaging in the task. She realized that the learners had the opportunity to plagiarize, yet according to her instructions, the learners had to finish the work by hand. In this manner, at least while writing, the learner had been able to become knowledgeable about the subject matter.

Finally, the parents could reflect on what their children were doing in HNDE classrooms. In the questionnaires, some participants mentioned that their parents were really happy with their massive work. They could have a look at the book and see if their children were really learning too.

IV. Opinion on criteria and value for rubrics

This was decided by the IT, based on the content of the syllabus. The distribution of the marks is included in the tables given below.

Table 1.
Marking Rubrics for the Portfolio Assignment

	Cont ent /50	Langu age /30	Creativ ity /10	Struct ure /10
Excellent	44-50	28-30	9-10	9-10
Very good	38-43	24-27	8-9	8-9
Good	25-37	17-23	5-7	5-7
Satisfactory	18-24	10-16	3-4	3-4
Weak	0-17	0-9	0-2	0-2

Table 2.
Marking rubrics for the content of the Portfolio Assessment

	Classroom activities (Submission Marks) /5	Lecture Notes (submission Marks) /5	Extra Notes /10	Past Paper (done by the learner) /10	Past Paper Submission Marks 05	Exercises (selected 20 questions) /10	Exercises (other exercises) Submission Marks /05
Excellent	5	5	9-10	9-10	05	9-10	5
Very good	4	4	8-9	8-9		8-9	4
Good	3	3	5-7	5-7		5-7	3
Satisfactory	2	2	3-4	3-4		3-4	2
Weak	0-1	0-1	0-2	0-2		0-2	0-1

As table 01 given above displays, IT has decided to provide 50 marks for the content; 30 marks for language; 10 marks for creativity; and 10 marks for the structure. Marking ranges have also been clearly mentioned in the tables given above.

V. Evaluation and evaluation process

Evaluation of the portfolio was the main responsibility of the IT. This was done conforming to the marking criteria and rubrics presented in Table 01 and Table 02. In the evaluation, knowledge, language competency, reflection, self-learning, hard work and creativity were taken into account.

As it is clearly shown, the content is allocated the highest number of marks, for it is very crucial in the assessment. As it is mentioned in the previous sections, the content includes classroom activities, lecture notes, past papers, exercises, and extra notes. Table 2 given above describes how marks have been allocated to each section. Under content, marks were given based on two levels. The first layer included reflection and self-learning and the next layer covered a grammar and knowledge check. Based on these levels, some items were selected for marking and the rest was given marks for the extent of self-learning they had done. For the marking purpose, 20 randomly selected questions from the exercises section and the past paper done by the student alone were marked and provided the deserved marks. In the next level, submission marks were given for classroom activities, lecture notes and the past paper done inside the classroom while extra-note collection and exercises were given marks based on their hard work and self-learning. In the case of the latter, the IT had to become subjective to a certain extent, for it was difficult to measure their hard work. However, if the learner had proven of sufficient hard work and self-learning, he scored full marks, while careless work done with less attention was given low marks.

In addition to content, 30 marks were allocated for language, 10 marks for creativity, and 10 for structure. In the case of language, accuracy, spelling, lexical resource and use of cohesive devices were taken into consideration. Also, the language use of written pieces done by the student was considered in this regard. The structure included the layout of the work. This checked on the arrangement of the entire documents in order, binding and handwriting. The creativity was the next section. This is a really subjective aspect. Therefore, it was looked at in different angles. This was basically marked on the overall presentation of the book: how creatively it is presented; how neatly it is presented; or overall personality presented through the work. In this case, the IT was in the understanding that the creativity is a part of the personality of a learner and it could differ from one learner to the other. Therefore, in giving marks, the uniqueness of each learner in presenting his work was fairly rewarded.

VI. Implementation of the PA

The PA is a huge task. It needs planning on the part of both the teacher and learner. The participants had to spend much

time day and night in collecting the materials, organizing them and compiling them as a huge book. This task was a combination of cognitive skills and physical energy. The participants had to collect different materials and think about how to present it creatively to the lecturer in order to gain marks. They had to make sure they had every lecture note that the lecturer provided them. Plus, they had to organize extra material collection while finding exercises for each topic. The entire task required planning organizing and implementing skills from the learner. This could be named as learner autonomy. The participants had the opportunity to do everything on their own thus providing them opportunity to test their ability to taking responsibilities and carrying them out successfully.

VII. Advantages of the PA

According to the experience of the participants in the implementation of the PA, an English language learner can be benefitted from this method. Familiarity with the content of the subject is a great advantage that the learners enjoyed after completing the portfolio. This enabled them to face the exam confidently. Also doing the past paper helped them to a great deal in exam preparation. In this manner, it is clear that this is an ideal method of getting learners prepared for the oncoming examination. Furthermore, collecting extra notes was a good idea since the learners are able to expand their knowledge on one topic. In the same manner doing extra exercises could help the learner correct their own mistakes. The next advantage is the memorization. Through the PA, the learners are able to memorize the content of the lessons since they re-read and re-write the information. Another advantage is that the learners are able to find new ways of grammar correction. This assessment also assist learners go back to their school days and remind them of what they have already learnt. Plus, the learners are provided opportunity to present their creativity or their talents to the lecturer. Also, this enhances critical thinking, independent thinking and organization skills of the learner.

Moreover, through this assessment the learner, the teacher and the parent is able to reflect on what the learner has done throughout a semester. A learner is able to understand how much he/she has learnt while the parent is able to watch continuously what is going on with his child. Plus, the teacher is able to come to an understanding about the progress of her/his learner. Or he/she is able to check her/his own success or weaknesses and adjust herself/himself accordingly.

VIII. Disadvantages of the PA

The main disadvantage of this assessment is the time constraint. It is a time-consuming task. Since the learner is doing the task on his/her own, they are able to cheat the lecturer to a certain extent.

On the part of the lecturer, it is a time-consuming hard work to mark the final product. Since the collection of materials come as a huge book, the lecturer needs to spend much time on marking one portfolio. This is a huge Overall the PA is beneficial for the learner although there are practical issues in implementing it in the classroom level.

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disadvantage for the teacher. Also, in HNDE classrooms, there are 100+ students. In such large-sized classes, the lecturer finds it difficult to spend so much time on marking individual assignments. That takes much valuable time of the lecturer.

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