The Importance of Portfolio Assessment in Enhancing EFL Students’ Writing Performance

Case Study: First Year Master Students of English At Biskra University

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages as partial fulfilment for the Master Degree in Sciences of Languages

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Dedication

This work is dedicated:

To my beloved parents, my adorable sister and my brothers whose love, support and encouragement have sustained me throughout life.

To my friends and relatives;

And finally to all those who prayed for me and besought God to help me.
Acknowledgment

First and foremost, praise be to our God, Allah, for his blessings throughout my research work.

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Abstract

Writing has always been one of the most complex and challenging tasks for language learners. It is a difficult skill which requires considerable effort and practice to reach an acceptable level. Therefore, most Algerian students find it difficult to master all the aspects of writing and to produce an adequate piece of writing. This research work attempted to investigate the importance of using portfolio assessment as a technique in teaching writing to master one students of English in the Department of Foreign languages at Biskra University. It aimed to show that portfolio assessment can improve students’ writings. In order to confirm or refute the hypothesis that portfolio assessment has a positive impact in enhancing students’ writing performance, two research instruments were used. First, two questionnaires, one for teachers of written expression (N=10) and the other one for a sample of master one students (N=150). Second, a semi-structured interview consisting of five questions was conducted with two teachers of written expression. The two questionnaires revealed that portfolio assessment would be helpful in identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses in their writing. In addition, the qualitative data gathered from interviews showed that teachers endorse portfolio assessment as a technique worthy of future consideration. In short, the findings obtained in this investigation revealed that both teachers and students have developed positive attitudes towards portfolio assessment and they found that such a technique can help students develop their writing abilities and prepares them to become autonomous writers able to convey appropriate messages.
List of Abbreviations

**CPM**: Collaborative Portfolio Model

**EFL**: English as a Foreign Language

**ESL**: English as a Second Language

**EAP**: English for Academic Purposes
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1. Statement of the Problem

Learning to be a proficient writer is a challenging task for EFL learners as it is considered to be one of the main ways used to assess progress. Students are required to demonstrate what they have learned and understood through different forms of academic writing, including paragraphs, essays, exams, dissertations and theses. Hence, using this skill effectively requires from the writer linguistic, cognitive, and social knowledge. In other words, in order to be a proficient writer, the learner should develop not only linguistic competence as in traditional approaches, but also social and strategic competences.

Although the teaching of writing in EFL classes has been shifting from the traditional way of the end product to the process of creating writing, some students at the university level and mainly those of Biskra are still unable to write correct sentences or express themselves in a clear way, and therefore, produce an adequate piece of writing. This is due partly to the fact that students’ compositions are still assessed through traditional assessment techniques which do not fit the new methods of writing. After the paradigm shift from the traditional assessment of writing to the alternative form, the portfolio assessment technique is viewed as a perfect pedagogical tool for EFL students that can closely tie assessment, teaching, and learning all together. Despite these potential benefits, it is not used in Algerian EFL settings and timed writing test with all its shortcomings, is still the only form of assessment.

Therefore, the focus of this study is to highlight the importance of portfolio assessment, and to explore and explain its underlying principles to prove that such technique has the potential to trigger EFL learners’ motivation to write, improve their strategy and eventually foster their writing growth to become competent and autonomous writers.

2. Significance of the Study

This study is intended to be informative in scope so that teachers and students can benefit from its findings. First, it is a significant endeavour in prompting students to use portfolios as assessment tools in order to evaluate their development, growth, and progress in writing and to reflect upon it. Also, it is expected to provide insights into students’
perceptions about the use of portfolios as assessment tools. Second, through this study, the teacher may consider the use of portfolios to analyze students’ writing development and use the information for decision making regarding future instruction.

3. Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the role of portfolio assessment technique in enhancing EFL students’ writing performance. Besides, it is an attempt to attract the teacher’s attention to the philosophy and techniques of portfolio assessment.

4. Research Questions:

This investigation was carried out to answer the following research questions:

1. What is portfolio assessment?
2. What are the benefits of portfolio assessment?
3. What are students’ and teachers’ perceptions about portfolio use?
4. Does using portfolio assessment in EFL writing classes improve learners’ writing ability?

5. Hypothesis

This study intends to test the following hypothesis:
The portfolio assessment has a positive impact in enhancing EFL learners’ writing performance.

6. Methodology

The very nature of the investigation sets the choice of the descriptive method. It intends to describe two variables: the portfolio assessment as the presumed independent variable and foreign language writing as the presumed dependent variable and to identify the relationship between them.

7. Population/ Sample

The research population was limited to master one EFL students and written expression teachers of different levels at the Department of Foreign Languages of
Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. A sample of ten teachers was chosen for this study. As for students, a representative sample of 150 master one students were chosen randomly from a population of 230 since it is impractical to conduct a census (include everyone in the population) because of time and resource constraints. This population was chosen because they have already studied three years at university and they would be familiar with portfolio assessment. Thus, they would have certain perceptions and attitudes towards it.

8. Data Gathering Tools

In order to test the hypothesis and obtain the information required from the subjects and to fit the objectives of the present research, two main tools were used:

- First, a formal questionnaire was administered to teachers to probe their perceptions and attitudes about the role of portfolio assessment in the process of writing English, particularly teachers of the written expression module. The second one was directed to master one English student at Biskra University to know their points of view about portfolio assessment and writing performance.

- Second, if the information obtained through the use of questionnaires is of value, it is nevertheless not sufficient. Therefore, a semi-structured interview with two teachers of written expression was organized and conducted to supplement the responses obtained through the first tools.

9. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is presented in three chapters. The first two chapters are devoted to the literature review while the third one to the analysis of both questionnaires and interviews and ending with the evaluation of results and some implications and suggestions.

The first chapter is a review of literature on portfolio assessment. The chapter includes the definitions of portfolio and portfolio assessment, its types and characteristics and the rationale for its use. This is followed by descriptions of the different models of portfolio assessment and the potential benefits and drawbacks that this technique can have.

The second chapter is a review of literature concerning writing. The chapter begins with various definitions of writing, its nature and its relationship with speaking and
reading. This is followed by descriptions of current approaches used to teach writing with focus on those that can be used with portfolio assessment.

The third chapter deals with the analysis of students’ questionnaires and teachers’ questionnaires and interviews. In addition, it provides a summary and discussions of the main and supplementary findings.

Finally, a general conclusion, some implications and suggestions for further research are provided.
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Portfolio Assessment

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Introduction

There has been a paradigm shift from traditional learning settings and evaluating the end product toward the student-centered learning settings and testing learning process and performance. This change gives rise to a number of assessment techniques, among them the portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment has been around for a long time; however, its worldwide use in the language classroom is relatively new. Its emergence has been received positively by many. Therefore, this chapter attempts to examine what the literature says about portfolio assessment, its types, characteristics, the rationale for its use and the possible benefits and drawbacks that it can have. But first, a discussion relating to how authors define portfolio and portfolio assessment will be presented.

1.1. Definition of Portfolio and Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio and portfolio assessment are usually used interchangeably according to the needs of users in different contexts and conditions. However, they are not synonymous. This point is highlighted in this section for the purpose of clarifying the terms used in this research.

1.1.1. Definition of Portfolio

A portfolio, most found in a folder form, is used to keep the collection of work produced and related materials gathered by a student. According to several authors, the portfolio is not merely an example of the student’s effort but rather “a systematic collection of information about each student. This information consists of evidence of students’ accomplishments and skills” (Farrell & Jakobs, 2010, p. 101). Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991 p. 60) gave an extensive definition of portfolio as “a purposeful collection of students’ work exhibiting not only students’ effort, progress and achievement but also demonstrating students’ participation in selecting contents and selecting the criteria for assessment and evidence of students’ self-reflection”. Another definition suggested by Genesee and Upshur (1996, p. 99) states that “a portfolio is a purposeful collection of students’ work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress and achievement in given areas”. In other words, a portfolio is a collection of students’ “work, experiences, exhibitions, and self-ratings (i.e., data)” (Moya & O’Malley, 1994, p. 14). It follows that more specifically in terms of writing assessment, according to Weigle (2002, p. 198), “a portfolio is a collection of written texts written for different purposes over a
period of time”. This means that since then the portfolio becomes popular in writing classes because of its ability to record the written texts produced by students during the semester or school year.

The above definitions that describe what is and what constitutes a portfolio seem extensive. This demonstrates that the concept of portfolio in educational assessment is still growing. Despite the lack of a working definition, the numerous descriptions stated above show what a portfolio represents – a folder of information that reflects what the learner has accomplished in the learning process and how he/she goes through it.

1.1.2. Definition of Portfolio Assessment

The definitions of ‘portfolio assessment’ vary considerably according to researchers’ different needs and perspectives. For example, Moya and O’Malley (1994, p. 14) define it as a procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio. This definition restricts itself to describing portfolio assessment as a procedure to assess the contents of the portfolio. Airasian (1991, cited in Herman et al., 1996, p. 28) describe portfolio assessment as ‘a process of collecting, synthesizing and interpreting information to aid decision making’. In this definition, the phrase ‘decision making’ indicates the exploitation of the gathered information. Decision making, in this regard, implies making provisions for planning to meet the future needs of the learner both by the teacher and the learner.

A portfolio becomes an assessment when someone weighs its contents against criteria in order to reach judgments about the value or quality of performance, and, more specifically, to aid decisions about individual students, programs, schools, or other entities. Rea (2001, cited in Farrell & Jacobs, 2010) described portfolio assessment as a complementary procedure of examining students’ writing processes. This definition suggests the role of portfolio assessment as supplementary to other forms of assessment in use as reflected by the word ‘complementary’. Other definitions which characterize portfolio assessment as a tool used to enhance and monitor learner performance can be found in Tierney et al. (1991), and Fisher and King (1995).

The definitions of portfolio assessment vary in terms of depth and range of the purpose and function for which portfolio assessment is supposed to serve and also the role it is intended to take in the area of educational assessment. In addition to this, the variations may also depend on the growth of our understanding of portfolio assessment potential in improving learners’ writing performance as well as the development of
portfolio assessment especially when it has to be compared with traditional forms of assessment.

1.2. Rationale for Using Portfolio Assessment

The increasing popularity of portfolio assessment can be traced back to two major factors: firstly, portfolio assessment is congruent with the current ESL classroom practices (Sharifi & Hassaskhah, 2011). Secondly, it has the ability to provide teachers and students with valuable feedback especially about the latter’s potentials and capacities (Weigle, 2002).

The following sub-sections explain these two factors further.

1.2.1. Congruence with ESL Practices

As stated above, the increasing popularity of portfolio assessment partially stems from its compatibility with the current ESL classroom practices. The basic assumption here is that when an assessment tool complies with ESL practices, that is, how language is processed and produced, then the inferences we make become more valid and reliable (Sharifi & Hassaskhah, 2011).

Proponents of process-oriented curricula and instruction concur that traditional assessment techniques are often incongruent with current ESL classroom practices. Standardized testing is seen as particularly antithetical to process learning and has been attacked vigorously not only in ESL, but throughout the field of education (Rothman, 1990; Shepard, 1989). Because of the incompatibility of process learning and product assessment and the discrepancy between the information needed and the information derived through standardized testing, educators have begun to explore alternative forms of student assessment techniques, one of which is portfolio assessment. It is increasingly cited as a viable alternative to standardized testing (Wolf, 1989).

Shohamy (1998) claims that language knowledge (ability) is a complex phenomenon and that there is a need for multiple assessment devices that are capable of tapping this phenomenon. The examples of devices suggested by him include portfolios, peer assessment, observations, and self-assessment. However, the one which adheres to educators’ expectation of being able to tap the complex phenomenon of language ability and the one which appears to be highly contextualized (Belanoff, 1996) seems to be portfolio assessment. This means that portfolio is seen as the most suitable assessment tool that can help writing teachers obtain more valid measures of their students writing abilities than can possibly be obtained with multiple-choice or timed essay testing.
1.2.2. The Portfolio: Source of Feedback and Self-reflection

Portfolios offer a number of advantages for students, and teachers. The major advantage is that it encourages students to reflect on the pieces they write and on the processes they use to write them (Murphy, 1994). Students’ reflection on their writing allows them to actively participate in the evaluation process. In addition to this, Kemp and Toperoff (1998, pp. 3-4 cited in Nunan, 2004, p. 160) list the following advantages of a portfolio which include its ability to:

1- Set clear goals: these are decided on at the beginning of instruction and are clear to teacher and students alike.
2- Give a profile of learner abilities.
3- Enable students to show quality work, which is done without pressure and time constraints, and with the help of resources, reference materials and collaboration with others.
4- Demonstrate a wide range of skills
5- Show efforts to improve, develop and demonstrate progress over time.
6- Assess a variety of skills: written as well as oral and graphic products can easily be included.
7- Develop awareness of own learning: students have to reflect on their own progress and the quality of their work in relation to known goals.
8- Cater to individual differences and enhance independent learning: since it is open-ended, students can show work on their own level. Since there is a choice, it caters to different learning styles and allows expression of different strengths.
9- Develop social skills: students are also assessed on work done together, in pairs or groups, on projects and assignments.
10- Develop independent and active learners: students must select and justify portfolio choices; monitor progress and set learning goals.

Kemp and Toperoff’s list encompasses a wide range of advantages brought about by the increasing widespread use of portfolios as assessment tools. This list indicates that the function of portfolio assessment goes beyond being merely an assessment or evaluation tool, and thus a great deal is still unknown about the nature of portfolios and what they can do in the context of second and foreign language teaching and learning.

1.3. Characteristics of Portfolios

Because portfolio assessment is used in so many settings, there is a wide variation in terms of how portfolios are assembled, evaluated, and used. However, certain common characteristics in these points can be found in many, if not most, portfolio assessment programs.
The nine characteristics that are present to a greater or lesser degree in portfolios, according to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000, pp. 32-37), include collection, range, context richness, delayed evaluation, selection, student-centered control, reflection and self-assessment, growth along specific parameters, and development over time. These nine characteristics are discussed as follows:

A portfolio, by its nature, is a collection of written works, rather than a single written sample. Because the principle reason of using portfolios is to enable teachers to survey a wide range of students’ performances under usual circumstances, portfolios must include more than one product, in addition to a reflective piece or self-assessment about each product. Portfolios generally invite students to display different genres, written for different purposes, and on different occasions (ibid., p. 32). Therefore, portfolio assessment allows teachers to draw conclusions about not only the writing productions, but also the students as writers. Collection, then, is an important component of the portfolio which represents the student as a writer more fully than other forms of assessment.

The portfolio enables the student to display and the teacher to assess a range of writing performances. That range stems from the fact that a course of study should represent frequent opportunities to write in different genres and for different audiences and purposes. Students can select samples from a range of writing performances to demonstrate their accomplishments, both in terms of the kinds of task the curriculum requires and the quality of performance they can achieve (ibid., p. 33). Thus, a portfolio of high face validity depends on the range of tasks and performances carried out by students.

Portfolios possess context richness insofar as they reflect closely the learning situation and display students’ accomplishment within that context (Weigle, 2002, p. 199). Portfolio assessment assumes that students bring their experiences, in the form of their writings, with them into the assessment, and that the portfolio encompasses these writings (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p. 33). This characteristic means that the context in which learning takes place determines the contents of the portfolio.

Another important characteristic of most portfolio programs, and which teachers and students find very useful is delayed evaluation. This latter gives students both the opportunity and the motivation to revise their written products before a final evaluation is given, and consequently, assuming responsibility for their own learning. On the other hand, the timing prompts teachers to reevaluate course assignments, teaching methods, and sequencing of topics (ibid., p. 34). So, portfolio assessment allows teachers to make
judgments about not only students’ writings, but also the effectiveness of the course as a whole.

Portfolios generally involve selections of the student’s work. In most cases, this selection is guided by the instructor’s requirements. However, there is an opportunity for the student to present his or her best work. The act of making the selection leads students to make decisions about quality (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000, p. 35). Thus, Selection gives the student some kind of control over self-representation because he or she chooses which pieces to submit for judgment. In addition selection promotes self-assessment among students and gives them a sense of control over their portfolios.

Some characteristics, such as collection, range, and context, are usually controlled by the teacher and the writing program. However, delayed evaluation and selection offer opportunities for student-centered control, in that students can select which pieces best fulfill the established evaluation criteria and can revise them before putting them into their portfolios (Weigle, 2002, p. 199). When students can choose, even in limited ways, what to include in the portfolio, then they gain some kind of control over the portfolio content, and the greater the freedom to select, the more control the student can practice.

The spread of collaborative learning pedagogies and process approaches to writing has led writing teachers to realize that the most effective way for students to learn how to write better is by revising their pieces of writing (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000, p. 36). Writing teachers want students not only to produce good writing, but also to develop the writing habits that good writers use. In order to accomplish these goals, portfolio designs usually involve reflection and self-assessment, in that students must reflect of their work in deciding how to arrange the portfolio, and are frequently asked to write a reflective essay about their development as writers and how the pieces in the portfolio represent that development (Weigle, 2002, p. 199). Emphasizing reflection and self-assessment helps students to control their learning. Therefore, when the learning environment promotes learner’s involvement in the learning process, the learner will be more conscious of his or her progress.

Portfolios can provide a means for measuring growth along specific parameters, such as linguistic accuracy or the ability to organize or develop an argument (ibid.). The assessment criteria embody these parameters, and the extent to which students exhibit the strengths or needs specified in the criteria allow both teachers and students to measure progress along these parameters (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, pp. 36-37). Therefore,
portfolios should be designed appropriately to ascertain that students have made progress towards exhibiting those criteria.

Finally, portfolios provide a means for measuring development over time. As long as the portfolio contains drafts of the finished products, then both teachers and students can trace the development of each piece. In addition, thinking about development over time as separate from growth along specific parameters provides ways that neither the teacher nor the student may have anticipated (Hamp-Lyond and Condon, 2000, p. 37). In other words, measuring the learner’s development over time exhibits his or her development in ways or areas that the teacher may not have specified.

These nine characteristics form the basis for portfolio assessment because they explain how it acts. However, according to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000, p. 118), of these nine characteristics, the most essential components of a portfolio are collection, reflection, and selection. However, teachers, can determine how many of these characteristics will employ, decide which characteristic will be central and decide what role each characteristic will play within the course (ibid., p. 37). This means that students’ needs will determine which characteristics should be emphasized.

Since the goal of portfolio assessment is to provide more evidence of students’ writing abilities, the portfolio must include a collection of writing samples, rather than a single piece of writing. The collection can vary along a number of parameters – it can include finished products only, or earlier drafts of finished products to reflect the writer’s process of writing and revision (Weigle, 2002, p. 200). This means that one of the essential requirements of the portfolio is that it contains more than one piece of writing.

Nevertheless, to make the portfolio useful for evaluation, simply collecting writing samples is not sufficient. Reflection and selection are necessary as well for portfolio assessment. As Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) state “everything that we have read about how and why portfolios work successfully, as pedagogical tools, teacher development tools, and as assessment tools, teaches that without selection and reflection all we have is simply a pile, or a large folder” (p. 119). In other words, what makes the portfolio a valuable assessment tool is the selection of specific contents through a process of reflection. This latter is included in the portfolio in the form of a reflective essay in which the student describes the contents and why they were chosen, and discusses how the writing pieces reflect his/her strengths and progress in writing (Weigle, 2002). The aforementioned characteristics are displayed in the figure below:
The figure shows the relationship between collection, selection, and reflection in addition to the other characteristics of portfolio as mentioned above, with a continuous process of feedback at every stage of the process, and a final evaluation that is delayed until the portfolio is submitted. Without delayed evaluation, in which students are given opportunities to reflect on, revise, and select their writing, according to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), there is little motivation for the student to collect a portfolio and it becomes a meaningless task.

1.4. Types of Portfolios

While the characteristics of a portfolio collection differ widely among teachers, portfolio collections generally fall into three categories: the showcase (presentation) portfolio, the working portfolio, and the cumulative (progress) portfolio as presented below (Herman et al. 1996, p.30)

1- The showcase (presentation) portfolio includes samples selected by both the student and the teacher. The collection consists of a student’s best pieces, collected for the purpose of making presentations.

2- The working portfolio is an ongoing collection of self-selected samples of work that are used to highlight the students’ efforts, progress, achievement and reflections (writing samples, photographs, and self-assessment).

3- The progress (cumulative) portfolio is a collection of selected samples of student learning that is taken from either a working or a presentation portfolio and is passed on to the next
year’s teachers. A cumulative portfolio may also include student progress reports and become part of the student’s permanent school record. The cumulative portfolio may be compiled collaboratively by the student and the teacher with final approval made by the teacher.

These types of portfolio have been categorized according to the purpose of assessment. For example, if the purpose is to evaluate individual student progress, clearly a progress portfolio would be most appropriate. However, all three portfolio types can be useful in motivating student performance: a progress portfolio can document how far a student has come, a working portfolio can exhibit the range of writing assignments that the student has completed, and a showcase portfolio can demonstrate the student’s best work. Therefore, in deciding which type of portfolio to use, teachers need first to determine the goals of their assessment and teaching process.

For Applebee and Langer (1990, p.30), it is the kind of evidence that one may find in a student’s portfolio that determines the type of portfolio. Accordingly, they identify five types of portfolio which are the following:

1. A traditional “writing folder” in which students keep their work.
2. A bound notebook with separate sections kept for work in progress and final drafts.
3. A loose-leaf notebook in which students keep their drafts and revisions
4. A combination folder and big brown envelope where students’ writings – exercises, tests, compositions, drafts, and so on – are kept.
5. A notebook divided into two sections: one for drafts and the other for final copies (traditionally called original and rewritten compositions back in the late 1950s and 1960s).

So, it is not because portfolios are folders that enfold collected samples that they are all similar. Portfolios can be either process or product. Process portfolios involve all the stages learners go through from the beginning of the term or semester to the end, giving the opportunity to both the teacher and the student to assess how much the latter’s writing has progressed. Whereas, product portfolios enclose only finished products which the student has chosen to be evaluated to show his overall performance.

In order to meet the goals of literacy assessment, according to Farr and Lowe (1991 p.79), portfolios must be developed as follows:

1- Teachers and students both add materials to the portfolio.
2- Students are viewed as the owners of the portfolios.
3- Conferencing between students and the teacher in an inherent activity in portfolio-assessment.
4- Conference notes and reflections of both the teacher and the student are kept in the portfolio.
5- Portfolios need to reflect a wide range of student work and not only that which the teacher or student decides is the best.
6- Samples of the student’s reading and writing activities are collected in the portfolios, including unfinished projects.

The most important component of portfolio assessment, according to Farr and Lowe (1991), is conferencing. They believe that students, through conferencing and keeping a portfolio, experience making real-life decisions as well as decisions about schoolwork. Another important consideration is to view students as the owners of the portfolios in order to encourage them take responsibility for their learning and their lives (ibid.). This latter represents a step toward learner autonomy because in the past, ownership of learning was looked upon as the responsibility of the teacher not of the learner. But, through active participation of students in the selection and discussion of their work, they gain a true sense of ownership which increases their feelings of self-worth and personal satisfaction.

### 1.5. Purposes of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment involves making decisions both about the tasks (what will be evaluated) and the scoring method (how the evaluation will be done). These decisions must be made in light of the purpose of the assessment. However, these decisions can be complicated with portfolio assessment because it is often used for many various purposes that may conflict with each other (Weigle, 2002). Herman et al. (1996, p. 29) provide a list of six potential purposes for portfolio assessment. These are discussed individually as follows:

The first concerns programme accountability. The main aim here is to evaluate curriculum effectiveness through the use of portfolios which is essential particularly to stakeholders outside the classroom such as administrators and educational authorities (ibid.). Therefore, students’ and teachers’ role can be perceived as more motivated to satisfy these authorities.

The second most common purpose is to evaluate individual student progress. Evaluation of performance covers a number of activities that include, grading, and certifying accomplishment achieved by students (ibid.). The scope of evaluation that takes place for this particular purpose is different from the one that is undertaken for the purpose of programme accountability. While the latter is meant to serve the needs of stakeholders
outside the classroom, the former is meant to serve the needs of both the teacher and the student.

The third purpose is to use the data gathered in the portfolios to diagnose students’ needs, informing classroom instructional planning and improving instructional effectiveness (Herman et al., 1996). Instructional intervention, as a result of assessment, is usually expected in order to improve teaching and learning process.

The fourth purpose is to help students become better learners, that is, to help students manage their learning. Activities introduced to the students are student-centered and aim to motivate them and consequently enhance their performance (ibid.). Such activities require an extensive learner involvement, such as keeping their portfolios, and participating in self-assessment and conferences. This aspect is concerned with encouraging students’ efficacy and empowering them in their process of learning. That is helping them become autonomous learners.

The fifth purpose is to help teachers become more effective by encouraging reflective practice at the school and classroom levels (ibid.). In reflective practice, teachers engage in a continuous process in which they critically analyze and evaluate their own practices, taking the opportunity to become professional practitioners since reflection on practice is at the core of professional development.

In addition to the five major purposes of portfolio assessment, there is also another less common purpose that caters to specific needs of educators and researchers to improve communication with parents (ibid.). The six categories of purposes discussed above can be seen as general applications of portfolios to serve the different requirements of not only the students and the teacher but also the stakeholders within and outside the school.

Although these purposes of portfolio assessment are represented as individual entities, in actual practice, they are not regarded as independent from one another. These different purposes are connected and considered as “mutually complementary” (ibid., p. 30). But, it is also possible, in actual practice, that one particular purpose may appear to take precedence over another because, logically, it is not feasible to give priority to all the purposes especially if the scope of implementation is limited (ibid.).

The complementary attributes of purposes in practice are not always plain sailing, conflicts do arise (ibid.). In other words, the different purposes of portfolio assessment may contradict each other in practice, particularly between the purposes of classroom assessment and those of large-scale assessment. For example, if the fundamental purpose
of the assessment is for accountability within a school district, the portfolio contents may need to be standardized so that portfolios are comparable across different schools. This in turn may limit the amount of student control and thus student investment in the portfolios and may conflict with the purpose of encouraging student efficacy (Weigle, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary that assessment designers identify the primary purposes and the secondary ones to ensure the success of teaching and assessment.

1.6. Models of Portfolio Assessment

There are three models of portfolio assessment described by Jenkins (1996, p. 14): the showcase, the collaborative, and the benchmark. She indicates that each model is based on theoretical assumptions which have instructional implications. As the three models are placed in a continuum (see Fig. 1.2) below, the theoretical assumptions clearly indicate the degree of portfolio ownership. In other words, “who assumes responsibility for the child’s learning?” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 10). These models are displayed in the figure below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Showcase Portfolio</th>
<th>Collaborative Portfolio</th>
<th>Benchmark Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v------------------</td>
<td>v-----------------------</td>
<td>v-------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.2: Continuum of Portfolio Models (Jenkins, 1996, p. 14)**

On one end of the continuum lies the showcase model. This model “essentially begins and ends with the students” (ibid.). It is used to demonstrate the best works of the students. In other words, students take full charge of their portfolios and include anything they want and that best illustrates their strengths and progress (ibid.). Hence, the showcase model is student-oriented.

With this model, students’ self-assessment, goal setting and advancement of their learning are the main priorities and consequently the teachers’ instructional decision-making comes later. However, the issue of breadth and depth of students’ ability to self-assess their learning remains a big question because the process of assessing and selecting what best demonstrates their ability is solely the responsibility of the students (ibid. p. 13). This means that the showcase model may not fully represent students’ progress.

At the other end of the continuum lies the benchmark portfolio model. It is the most teacher-centered of the portfolio models which means that the teacher is the authority,
and the portfolio will be assessed by the teacher. Assessment checklists are usually used to establish progress. The fundamental aim of this model is to inform instruction; that is, the teachers assess the portfolio so that they know what to teach. This means that with this model, the learners have no involvement in the assessment and evaluation process.

The collaborative portfolio model lies in the middle of the continuum and “attempts to merge what is best about the benchmark and the showcase portfolio” (Jenkins, 1996, 17). In other words, this model has the best points of both the benchmark and the showcase portfolio. As a result, the collaborative portfolio model represents a balanced approach to teacher and student participation in the assessment process. This model necessitates that each student has two portfolios, one as showcase and the other as collaborative. Each student is responsible of the contents of the former, while the latter is the responsibility of the teacher (ibid.). Thus, the collaborative portfolio model represents a more balanced perspective towards teacher control and student autonomy. The following section provides a detailed description of this model especially in terms of its principles and components.

1.6.1 The Collaborative Portfolio Model

The Collaborative portfolio model recommends the use of the showcase and the collaborative portfolios. While students are responsible for the showcase portfolio, the collaborative portfolio represents the efforts of both the teacher and the students. According to Jenkins (1996), the student is the responsible for preparing and reflecting on the contents of the showcase portfolio. However, the collaborative portfolio is the responsibility of the teacher and they move with the students as they progress throughout their semester. The students decide which writing samples will be included in their showcase portfolios. Then, each student should write a reflective piece justifying each selection. The teacher may also select samples of the student’s writing especially those that demonstrate growth. In addition to the teacher’s own selection, copies of the student’s selection with their reflective pieces are also incorporated into the collaborative model (ibid.). This means that both teachers and students collaborate to build the portfolio.

During portfolio conference, students share their selections, and rationales. On the other hand, teachers also share their judgments about which writing samples show the student’s growth over the course of the school term. The teacher is also required to assess students’ writing goals for the next term, provide feedback, and discuss additional or alternative goals when necessary (ibid.). This record of agreed upon goals is then included in the collaborative portfolio.
Jenkins (1996) stresses the importance of maintaining a profile of the student in the collaborative portfolio since it essentially exhibits the student’s progress and ability as a writer. The profile which is largely prepared by the teacher includes the statements of goals and assessment of meeting these goals done by the student, a record of the student’s abilities across different genres of writing, and a retrospective summarizing the student’s writing performance and achievement.

The content of the collaborative portfolio is not restricted only to writing samples and the student’s profile. Jenkins (1996) asserts that documents such as students’ baseline data, checklists and/or rating scales, and results of internal writing survey conducted by the teacher may also be included in the collaborative portfolio. Thereby, all documents or pieces of evidence that contribute to the student’s profile as a writer and mark progress, according to Jenkins, should be included.

According to Jenkins (1996), collaborative portfolio model incorporates the strengths of both the showcase and the benchmark portfolios which are meant to increase the functions of portfolio assessment in learning and teaching. The strengths that the collaborative portfolio incorporates include (Jenkins, 1996, pp. 21-22):

a) It is grounded in genuine literacy endeavors and in a variety of social contexts.
b) It is an integral part of instruction, occurring continuously for the purposes of monitoring and acknowledging the learner’s development.
c) It taps the student’s affective, cognitive, and metacognitive understandings of texts.
d) It encourages self-evaluation of both the learner and the teacher.
e) It is process-oriented.
f) It values the professional judgment of ‘informed’ teachers.

In addition to the above, collaborative portfolio model expects students to reflect on their progress and achievement. According to her (p.22), these reflections are expected to range from insightful to developmentally predictable.

The goals of using the Collaborative Portfolio Model, according to Jenkins (1996, p. 17), include the following:

1- Engage students in self-assessment and literacy goal-setting.
2- Assess students’ progress as well as their self-assessments and goals.
3- Pool this database of information for the purpose of guiding instructional interactions.
These goals reflect the collaborative portfolio model fundamental principles which are to promote the assessment of the learner progress, to engage learner participation in the evaluation process, and to incorporate the assessment data into the teaching process.

As a conclusion, the collaborative model recommends the use of two portfolios: the showcase and collaborative portfolios. The showcase portfolio content includes students’ writing pieces which are selected and analysed by the students themselves. During the selection process, each student should write a reflective piece about each selection. During the portfolio conference, students discuss their showcase contents with their teachers. Moreover, the collaborative portfolio contains, in addition to copies of writing samples selected by the student and the teacher, the student’s writing profile as well as other relevant documents. Thereby, data provided by both portfolios are used for further instructional interactions and planning.

1.7 Reflection and Portfolio Assessment

Reflection plays a fundamental role in portfolio assessment. Without reflection, according to Farr and Tone (1994), and Yancey (1998), the function of portfolios becomes limited only as folders to keep heaps of students’ work. Far and Tone (1994) claim that through the process of reflecting, students are transformed into thoughtful and resolute learners who are able to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

The process of reflection is usually manifested in the form of a reflective text. The text is meant to perform several tasks. Yancey (1998, p. 80) identified these tasks as:

1- To give a description of the processes used by the student in creating the texts.
2- To provide explanations about the student’s goals and how these goals were accomplished.
3- To create a context for the writing texts so that the teacher can understand how they were created.
4- To explain the curricular goals and how well they were accomplished.

According to Yancey (1998), the reflective text used in portfolios comes in two varieties. The first acts as an independent reflective text to represent an overview of the collection of the writing pieces; however, the second is designed to accompany individual writing texts kept in the portfolio.

When students reflect on their writing, they are supposed to make judgments about their own writing ability and achievement. Therefore, to make sure that reflection is
taking place to effectively articulate and elaborate the occurrence of learning, Yancey (1998, p. 82) provides a number of indicators for unsuccessful reflection which include the following:

a- A text that is too short
b- A text that is uninformed about the composer’s work or learning: the student does not seem to know his or her texts, his or her own knowledge, and understanding.
c- A text where the author cannot think rhetorically or synthetically, can read neither links nor gaps.
d- A text that parrots the context of the class or the teacher without demonstrating the influence of either.

The role of reflection in portfolio assessment is understood to be of great significance. However, it should be noted that not all portfolio procedures adopt a similar approach towards the notion of reflection because the contexts in which portfolios occur are different. Even those who claim to employ reflective practices in their use of the portfolios can have a different perspective on how the processes of reflection should be manifested.

1.8 Self-assessment and Portfolios

Self-assessment can be defined as a process in which learners evaluate their own performance, and portfolios are one of the tools which include the self-assessment process. A study in the literature makes it evident that self-assessment and portfolios are intertwined (Farr & Tone, 1994). It is impossible to find an article that mentions self-assessment that does not do it in the context of portfolio assessment.

Portfolio assessment is the only methodology that responds directly to the goal of training students to assess their own success (ibid.). It incorporates collecting and reviewing artifacts, understanding progress through record keeping, documenting interests and preferences, and conferencing with teachers and peers. It also combines instruction with assessment that allows for self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Students can become better language learners when they engage in deliberate thought about what they are learning and how they are learning it. In this kind of reflection, McMullan (2006) states that students step back from the learning process to think about their language learning strategies and their progress as language learners.
Such self-assessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation.

Crooks (2001) also maintains that students involved with self-assessment are better able to work with other students, exchange ideas, get assistance when needed, and be more involved in cooperative and collaborative language-learning activities. As these students go about learning, they begin to construct meaning, revise their understanding, and share meanings with others.

In their commitment to develop students’ ability in the assessment of writing, teachers have posed a number of questions (Graham, 1996, p.18):

a. What general and specific criteria should students use for assessment of their writing
b. What instruction is reflective in improving students’ understanding and application of specific criteria.
c. How do we develop effective assessment forms and procedures for students writing in all subjects.
d. How to connect student assessment activities to other aspects of instruction-conferences, marking and use of a compute-in a programme.
e. How does student self-assessment of writing connect to other assessment initiatives, peer editing, portfolios, and performance assessment among them.

This calls for the creation of rubrics or checklists that give students the ideal, standards, and goals that need to be followed. Recognition of these criteria contributes to learners’ feeling of safety and well-organization. In order to self-assess the portfolio, Burch (1999, p. 45) designed a rubric including:

- Writing mechanics
- Portfolio layout
- Self-reflection
- Documents

Reckase (2002, cited in Babee & Tikoduadua, 2013, p. 53) proposed another rubric including the following:

- The extent to which learners grasp the subject matter
- Portfolio contents
- Reflective thinking
- The content richness and difficulty
- Organization and presentation

Creating such rubrics can give students the opportunity to assess their written productions included in the portfolio and to develop critical thinking which can allow
them to be lifelong autonomous learners able to develop the necessary writing competencies.

1.9 Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

Looking through the lens of Bachman and Palmer’s (1996) model of test usefulness, Weigle (2002) argues that portfolio assessment have advantages over timed writing tests, particularly for academic writing, in terms of construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness and impact. According to her, the most important benefit of portfolio assessment is its potential for demonstrating the validity of inferences about a broader construct or definition of writing than is possible with timed writing tests. The construct of writing that is tapped in portfolio assessments can potentially be broadened in two ways. First, including a variety of writing samples in different genres, written for different purposes, and addressing different audiences allows making generalizations to a broader domain of writing. Second, the inclusion of multi-draft essays in a portfolio allows making inferences about students’ ability to apply aspects of the writing process, such as revising, organizing, and editing for errors and mechanics (ibid.).

Another aspect of construct validity has to do with the advantages that additional time gives to second language writers (Weigle, 2002). Timed writing examinations usually put non-native writers at a disadvantage (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000), and allowing extra time for students to revise and edit their writings before submitting them for evaluation can give a truer picture of students’ writing ability.

Therefore, portfolio assessment clearly has the potential for greater construct validity for school-based writing assessment at all levels of education, where learning to write is a central goal. Like construct validity, portfolios are clearly superior to timed writing tests in terms of authenticity since they are designed to include writing samples that are written for authentic purposes other than the evaluation of writing. For instance, papers that are written for other academic courses (Weigle, 2002).

Bachman and Palmer (1996) define interactiveness as ‘the extent and type of involvement of the test taker’s individual characteristics in accomplishing a test task’ (p. 25). By this definition, any writing task that involves generating and organizing content is interactive including timed writing tests; however, portfolio assessment is ‘on the high end of interactiveness’ (Weigle, 2002, p.204). The act of collecting, selecting, and arranging
the portfolio contents engages the metacognitive strategies to a considerable extent, and ideally, involves the student’s personal investment. This level of interactivity can have many benefits, as the process of building up portfolios can help students learn about the writing process and can serve as a motivating factor for students. (Weigle, 2002)

Apart from construct validity, the most frequently cited benefit of portfolio assessment is the impact that it has on students, teachers, and programs. According to Murphy and Camp (1996), portfolios have three principle benefits for students. First, they provide opportunities for reflection and the development of self-awareness which play significant roles in learning. According to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), well-run portfolio program offers opportunities for reflection and feedback, so that students who are struggling to learn the language and understand the academic writing’ demands will be more successful as they return and reflect on their own writing. Second, according to Murphy and Camp (1996) ‘in the process of creating portfolios, students learn to exercise judgment about their own work, monitor their own progress, and set goals for themselves’ (pp. 113-114). Therefore, students develop a sense of ownership of their writing through having some control over the conditions for writing and the selection of portfolio contents which leads to a sense of responsibility. Finally, students can use portfolios as a basis for self-assessment and development of standards. In addition to these benefits, Weigle (2002) argues that portfolios can also promote the process of revision. If students have the opportunity to address weaknesses in their writing before the portfolio is turned in, they might be more willing to revise their writing than they may otherwise be.

Portfolio assessment has benefits for teachers and for writing programs as well. Murphy and Camp (1996) mention two significant benefits of portfolios to teachers. The main benefit is that portfolio assessment becomes an integral part of the teaching process rather than a separate activity. Teachers can set goals for their students and design parameters for their students’ portfolios to promote these goals. Portfolios can also give teachers more information about their students’ writing than do scores on essay tests (Weigle, 2002). In other words, the variety of texts within a portfolio allows teachers to get more insights into students’ strengths and weaknesses and identify those students who have strengths in one area and weaknesses in others. Furthermore, including a reflective essay helps teachers understand the processes that students use in writing. In this respect, Murphy and Camp (1996, p.122) note that:
Because portfolios contain multiple pieces of writing, they invite teachers to help students take a closer look at how texts differ from one another and to compare and contrast rhetorical strategies used in different language and situations... in this respect, they offer a unique teaching opportunity.

Concerning the impact at the program level, portfolio assessment can have positive effects. The process of implementing portfolio assessment invites teachers to share their understandings of the role of writing in the curriculum, think of common grading criteria as well as making decisions about the kind and number of writing samples that should be included in the portfolio, and how portfolios will be graded. This kind of discussion has the advantage of making the program more cohesive and unified. Furthermore, discussions of portfolios can stimulate teachers’ thinking about the types of activities that lead to successful portfolios, and thus be instrumental in driving curricular improvements (Murphy & Camp, 1996). Finally, it should be emphasized that empirical research documenting the benefits of portfolio assessment is limited; as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000, pp. 166-175) note, proponents of portfolio assessment are convinced through their own experience that portfolios are preferable to other forms of assessment, but lack the empirical research base to support their convictions. Therefore, more research is needed to prove the effectiveness of portfolio assessment.

1.10 Drawbacks of Portfolio Assessment

Despite the aforementioned benefits, portfolios are not short of drawbacks. There exists the potential for negative aspects, principally in the area of the demands of both time and energy on students and teachers (Herman et al. 1996). As an attempt to address this issue, Gillespie et al. (1996, p. 483) identified a number of weaknesses attributed to portfolio assessment. These are:

a. Portfolios may interfere with teaching and learning by decreasing instructional time (for example, too much class time spent on management tasks such as decisions about selections, documentation), by negatively affecting student originality and student attitudes due to the increase in the teachers workload, and by not achieving closure on assignments.

b. Portfolios may lend themselves to inappropriate teacher behaviours such as not holding conferences, not allowing student choice in materials to be included, not making efforts to
focus on students strengths, not providing continuous feedback, and providing too much teacher direction.

c. Portfolios may lend themselves to grading controversies.

d. Portfolios require a high level of pre-service, in-service, or consultant support to acquaint teachers with data gathering as well as logical ways of interpreting data.

e. Portfolios present unique data that may be ignored or criticized by school related constituencies.

f. Portfolios may encourage teachers toward “one assessment tool fits all” “a portfolio and portfolio assessment fit all purposes” mentalities.

g. Portfolios may spawn controversy over issues such as reliability of data collected as well as the standardization of portfolio content.

Gillespie’s (1996) list of weaknesses appears to be ambiguous. Some of the points raised tend not to be explained as weaknesses of portfolio assessment but rather drawbacks resulting from its misuse. For instance, points a, b, and f above that describe mismanagement of time, inappropriate behavior of the teacher, and misinformation concepts of portfolio assessment procedure, are not necessarily weaknesses of portfolio assessment, but rather the teacher’s lack of understanding of the requirements of portfolio assessment procedure.

The greatest weakness attributed to portfolio assessment, according to Gillespie et al. (1996), is the increased workload for the teacher. It is time and labor intensive. Weigle (2002) states that teachers who have worked with portfolios, and believe that the time and effort involved in implementing portfolios are well worth the benefits received, are often the first to admit that portfolio assessment is extremely time-consuming. Herman et al. (1996, p. 54) also state that reports on nearly every portfolio project include a discussion of:

the intense and pervasive demands on teachers’ time … to learn new assessment practices, to understand what should be included in portfolios, and how to help students compile them, to develop portfolio tasks, to discern and apply criteria for assessing students’ work, to reflect on and fine-tune their instructional and assessment practices, and to work out and manage the logistics.
The points related to controversies over grading (as in point c) and the issue of reliability (as in point g) may rightly be considered as apparent weaknesses of portfolio assessment. Certain aspects of portfolios make reliability scoring somewhat problematic especially for large-scale use. Results from large-scale portfolio assessments have frequently been shown to be less reliable than timed writing tests (Weigle, 2002). In his influential evaluation of the measurement quality of portfolio assessment in the US, Koretz (1998) states that the reliability of inferences which resulted from the analysis of measurement data obtained from portfolios are still questionable. There are inconsistencies in scoring attributed to variations in such aspects as inter-rater judgements, the scoring criteria used, the interpretations of average scores, and the selection of tasks given to students.

There are several obstacles to overcome in scoring portfolios reliably. As Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000, p. 134) note, since portfolios by their very nature contain varied kinds of writing sample, it is often difficult for portfolios to be truly representative of particular score levels. As a result, the more varied and open the portfolio is, the more difficult it is to score reliably. Another danger stated by Weigle (2002, p. 209) is that the teacher’s reaction as a rater to the first text in a portfolio may influence how he or she responds to other texts, either positively or negatively, and thus may unfairly bias the score given. However, this can be mitigated by raising teachers’ awareness in rater training, and allowing them sufficient time to consider each writing sample on its own merits rather than rushing through the portfolio.

**Conclusion**

Portfolio assessment is perceived as a powerful assessment tool. Its use is becoming more and more popular because its role goes beyond being merely an evaluation tool. It can provide valuable information regarding the ability and progress of students. In addition, it can promote autonomy and self-reflection. This assessment tool has different models, but the one which appears to be more beneficial for both teaching and learning is the collaborative portfolio model. This model appears to have a balanced stance towards the notion of portfolio ownership and the participation of teachers and students in the assessment process. Despite these potentials, the use of portfolios raises a number of doubts that concern its ability to produce valid and reliable test results. These doubts derive from two conflicting views which assume the function of portfolios to replace standardized
testing. However, it should be noted that portfolios and formal tests serve two different functions, and thus one approach does not necessarily have to replace the other, but rather mutually supplement each other.
Chapter two

Writing

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Introduction

In our globalized world, communication across languages becomes ever more essential. As a result, the ability to write effectively in a second or foreign language is becoming widely recognized as an important skill for success. This chapter is a review of the literature concerning the writing skill. It begins with a discussion on the various definitions of writing, its nature and its relationship with speaking and reading. This is followed by descriptions of the current approaches that have been used in teaching writing with a focus on those that can be used with portfolio assessment.

2.1. Definition of Writing

Writing can be the ticket to better college grades and greater academic achievement. Therefore, to assess this skill providing a definition first is a critical starting point. The definitions of writing depend on second language writers, the type of writing that they are likely to engage in and their purposes for writing. For Widdowson (2001), writing is “the use of the visual medium to manifest the graphological and grammatical system of the language. That is to say, writing is the production of sentences as instances of usage” (p. 62). Widdowson, in this definition, considers writing as just a mechanical task in which writers use graphic symbols to reproduce what they have read or heard in a written mode.

While Widdowson (2001) sees writing as the act of making up correct sentences and transmitting them through the visual medium as marks on paper, Lado (2000) considers writing in a foreign language as “the ability to use structures, the lexical items, and their conventional representation in ordinary matter-of-fact writing” (p. 248). Differently stated, writing is the ability to use language and its graphic representation productively in an ordinary writing situation. Therefore, students have to master the graphic system of the language, its structure, grammar and the appropriate vocabulary related to the subject matter.

On the other hand, Crystal (1991, p. 214) stated that “writing is not a merely mechanical task, a simple matter of putting speech down on a paper, it is an exploration in the use of the graphic potential of the language –a creative process- an act of discovery.” Taking into consideration the fact that writing is an act of discovery makes teachers encourage their students to write about their personal experiences and opinions to produce new and fresh writing. This latter leads teachers to respond to the ideas that learners produce, rather than focusing on formal errors.
Writing can also be defined as much more than a creative act as it is reported by Miller (cited in Richards & Renanya, 2003, p. 25) “even though the writing production is an expression of one’s individuality and personality, it is also important to remember that writing is also a social endeavor, an act of communicating with people”. In other words, writing is a way of communication which enables students to communicate their ideas, feelings and various attitudes in a written form. Thus, students need to understand how words, sentences and larger discourse structures can express and shape the messages or meanings they want to convey.

However, as it is reported by Kate and Guy (2003, p. 148), writing is not merely limited to express thoughts and feelings via written symbols but “a process of exploring one’s thoughts and learning from the act of writing itself from what thoughts are”. While Hedge (2000) stated that:

Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process…. It involves a number of activities: setting goals, generating information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing. It is a complex process. (p. 302).

Supporting the idea that writing is a complex and difficult skill to be mastered by EFL students, Nunan (1989, p. 36) pointed out that “writing is an extremely complex, cognitive activity for all which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously”. In other words, the writer has to take into consideration many features such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling to produce coherent and meaningful paragraphs and essays. This definition explains the fact that writing is a difficult task that demands the care and attention of writing teachers. Accordingly, Brookes and Grundy (2009) report that “it must be worth asking precisely what is difficult about writing and, especially, about writing in a second language” (p. 11).

In conclusion, writing has taken on different definitions depending on the different needs and purposes of the writers through history; however, they all conclude that writing is a vital skill that must be learnt and mastered by EFL students to enable them demonstrate the knowledge they have into a meaningful and purposeful text that is appropriate with English writing conventions.
2.2. The nature of Writing

In the process of language learning, there are four language skills that must be acquired by students – namely, writing, speaking, reading and listening. These skills are categorized into two main categories: the receptive skills (reading and listening) and the productive skills (writing and speaking). Writing is categorized as one of the productive skills since it involves producing language rather than receiving it (Spratt et al., 2005, p.26). However, the nature of writing is not relevant to this division, but rather depends on different perspectives.

According to Nunan (2003), “the nature of writing can be defined as both mental and physical activity that is aimed to both express and impress” (p.88). It is categorized as a mental activity because the activities of writing focus more on the act of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express and organize them into clear paragraphs that enable the reader to understand the ideas of the written work. Writing is also categorized as a physical activity because the writer is required to be able to do the act of committing words or ideas.

To support what is proposed by Nunan (2003), Brown (2001, p.335) states that writing is the written products of thinking, drafting and revising that require specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions coherently into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning and how to edit text for appropriate grammar and how to produce final products. In short, these text composition stages proposed by Brown (2001) involve mental and physical activities.

Writing is also seen as a cognitive activity. Hayes (cited in Weigle, 2002) states that writing includes three main cognitive processes which are text interpretation, reflection and text production. First, text interpretation, which includes listening, reading and scanning graphics, is the process of creating internal representations derived from linguistics and graphic input. Reflection, on the other hand, is the process of creating new representation ideas from the existing representation in the process of text interpretation. Finally, in text production, new written linguistics forms are produced from internal representations (ibid.). These three processes are not only applied in the drafting process but also in the revising one.

Bell and Burnaby (cited in Nunan, 1989) also state that writing is a complex cognitive process which requires the writer to assume control of a number of variables simultaneously both in the sentence level and beyond the sentence level. Concerning the
sentence level, content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, letter formation are the variables that must be controlled by the writer. While beyond the sentence level, the writer must organize and integrate the ideas into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and essays. As a result, to write successfully, students must be able to maximize the cognitive aspects in writing to produce and deliver the intended message to the readers in a clear way.

Besides its complexity, writing is a dynamic process in which writers follow a series of steps to produce texts. These steps are taught as somewhat rigid sequence; however, writing teachers emphasize recursive writing. This idea is supported by Zamel (1992, p. 473) who described the nature of writing as a “recursive, meaning-making, purposeful, evolving, dialogic, tentative, fluid, exploratory process”. A failure to satisfy the teacher might lead the student all the way back to the idea-development or organizing steps, and begin reorganizing and developing new drafts (ibid.). This means that writing is a forward-and-backward process in which writers tend to switch frequently among the different steps of writing as they work to produce a piece of writing that will appeal to the audience.

White and Arndt (1991) had the same point of view as Zamel (1992), but they also draw attention to the fact that “writing is also a problem-solving activity developing in progress” (p. 11). This means that writing does not come naturally or automatically, but through cognitive efforts, instruction, and training. In addition, as students write their ideas, they may discover new ways to express them (Raimes, 1994). This leads us to say that one of the educational purposes of getting students to write is to make them think. In other words, new ideas can be revealed during the act of writing itself.

2.3. Writing and Speaking Relationships

Both writing and speaking are categorized as productive skills. Yet, they have been considered separately for a long time. Grabe and Kaplan (1996, cited in Weigle, 2002, p.15) report that contradictory attitudes separate linguists and educational researchers, as far as the distinction between writing and speaking is concerned. Linguists state that ‘speech is primary and written language is merely a reflection of spoken language’. Educational linguists, on the other hand, regard the written form of the language as more ‘correct’, which is why it has to be more highly valued than the oral form. However, in recent years, neither written nor oral language is considered superior to the other, but they
do vary across a number of dimensions including, textual features, sociocultural norms and patterns of use, and the cognitive processes involved (ibid.).

In her book ‘Techniques in Teaching Writing’, Raimes (1983, pp. 4-5) summarized the key differences between writing and speaking as follows:

a) Speech is universal; everyone acquires a native language in the first few years of life. Not everyone learns to read and write.

b) The spoken language has dialect variations. The written language generally demands standards forms of grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

c) Speakers use their voices (pitch, stress, and rhythm) and bodies (gestures and facial expressions) to help convey their ideas. Writers have to rely on the words on the page to express their meaning.

d) Speakers use pauses and intonation. Writers use punctuation.

e) Speakers pronounce. Writers spell.

f) Speaking is usually spontaneous and unplanned. Most writing takes time. It is planned. We can go back and change what we have written.

g) A speaker speaks to a listener who is right there, nodding or frowning, interrupting or questioning. For the writer, the reader’s response is either delayed or nonexistent. The writer has only that one chance to convey information and be interesting and accurate enough to hold the reader’s attention.

h) Speech is usually informal and repetitive. We say things like, “what I mean is …” or “let me start again”. Writing, on the other hand, is more formal and compact. It progresses logically with fewer digressions and explanations.

i) Speakers use simple sentences connected by a lot of and’s and but’s. Writers use more complex sentences, with connecting words like however, who, and in addition.

In the above list of differences between writing and speaking, Raimes focuses on the apparent distinctions between these two modes of expression, and neglects the mental and social processes involved. She limited the differences between writing and speech to the way of production, i.e., how the two forms are generated. Her point of view is similar to that of Brown (1994, cited in Weigle, 2002, p.15) who summarized the differences between speaking and writing in terms of permanence, production time, distance, orthography, complexity and formality. Permanence refers to the lasting nature of writing. In other words, writing leaves a trace that can be read and reread whenever one wants to. However, the oral language is non-permanent and has to be processed in real-time. Production time relates to the fact that in speech, the flow of conversation is spontaneous with no enough time to totally monitor what is being said. On the other hand, writers go through a whole process of planning, drafting, and revising. Thus, they have much more production time. Distance involves the absence of a shared knowledge between the writer and the reader which is present between the speaker and the listener in ordinary face-to-
To talk of written and spoken language differences is to consider the range of communicative purposes to which either writing or speaking is put. In this sense, broader characteristics—such as what gets said and what remains implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, and what is stated by whom and under what circumstances—face contact (ibid.). Therefore, the text should be as clear and intelligible as possible because there is no immediate feedback.

Concerning orthography, it ‘carries a limited amount of information compared to the richness of devices available to speakers’. Speed, pitch, stress and pausing can be given as examples of such devices. Aside from orthography, writing tends to be complex. This is apparent from the use of long clauses and subordinators, which is not the case for speaking. This latter is characterized by short clauses connected by coordinators and redundancy. Finally, the different cultural and social uses of writing make it a more formal medium of communication in comparison to speech (ibid.).

Brown’s list (1994) of the characteristics that differentiate written language from spoken language is somewhat oversimplified. The difference between writing and speaking goes far beyond these surface textual features. In an extensive review of the literature on writing and speaking connections, Sperling (1996, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 56) concludes that:

To talk of written and spoken language differences is to consider the range of communicative purposes to which either writing or speaking is put. In this sense, broader characteristics—such as what gets said and what remains implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, and what is stated by whom and under what circumstances.

In other words, although textual features such as vocabulary and formality differ across writing and speaking, it is also important to consider the wider social and cultural contexts in which speaking and writing are used (Weigle, 2002, p. 17). This means that differences between writing and speaking are not confined to textual features but extend to the social and cultural ones.

In addition to the social influences on writing as opposed to speaking, it is also significant to consider the cognitive differences. Grabowski (1996, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 18) concludes that the absence of the addressee have the most important cognitive implications. On the one hand, unlike speakers, the absence of the addressee presents a challenge to writers. While speakers receive immediate feedback from the addressee, writers must construct a message that attempts to take into consideration the existing shared knowledge, and interests of the listener (Raimes, 1983). On the other hand, a writer needs to spend a considerable amount of time and energy on cognitive activities like planning, and information retrieval as there is less pressure to produce utterances.
continually as opposed to the speaker who must devote his cognitive resources to strategies in order to maintain the flow of conversation (Grabowski, 1996, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 18). Thus, in the absence of a conversation, the writer is obliged to devote more time in anticipating the audience to construct an appropriate message.

However, Bachman and Palmer (1996) point out that instead of considering writing and speaking as separate skills, it is more correct to see them as different areas of language abilities and task characteristics. In other words, it is the nature of the activity that determines which skill, either writing or speaking, to be used and serves the task more adequately. Bachman and Palmer’s perspective is useful in the sense that they draw attention to the fact that writing and speaking are not seen as different abilities, but rather as different types of language use-tasks. In this regard, Brown and Yule (1983) conclude that written language is transactional or message oriented and its goal is to convey information accurately, effectively and appropriately; whereas, spoken language is primarily listener-oriented and is used to promote social interaction.

Finally, it should be noted that the discussion about speaking and writing distinctions is somewhat oversimplified. In the real world; however, Weigle (2002) mentioned that there are various examples of written language that exhibit the features of speech such as, e-mails, communication, informal notes or screenplays, and at the same time, there are plenty of examples of speech that resemble written language like sermons and lectures. Therefore, in a corpus-based study, Biber (1988) concludes the following:

a) No absolute differences between speech and writing in English.
b) There are dimensions of variation for different kinds of texts (i.e. genres).
c) Considerable variation may occur even within particular genres.

Based on this list, McCarthy (2001) argues for a continuum view rather than simple, one dimensional difference between writing and speaking. According to him, differences are viewed as being on a scale or continuum from some texts like casual conversation that are more involved interpersonally to other texts as written public notices that are more separated. Consequently, by considering a continuum of differences, this prevents people from constructing simplified views towards the differences between these two modes of communication.
2.4. Writing and Reading Relationships

Writing and reading are basic skills which are usually treated as separate subjects under the belief that these two skills are totally different; however, they are interrelated processes that are beneficial to each other. Writing involves the encoding of ideas and thoughts into a language, and reading has to do with the decoding or the interpretation of these ideas. Therefore, writing and reading are similar processes of meaning construction that involve the use of cognitive strategies (Nelson, 1998). In the writing classroom, reading is considered as the appropriate input for the acquisition of writing skills because it is assumed that reading texts provide models from which writing skills can be acquired, or at least inferred (Eisterhold, 1990). Therefore, students must be selective in their readings because their writings will reflect the genres to which they are exposed.

Although the nature of the connection between writing and reading is not well defined, it is usually thought to be like Krashen’s notions about second language acquisition. Krashen (1984) states that the development of writing ability and of second language proficiency occur in the same way; therefore, he theorizes that large amounts of self-motivated reading, whether for pleasure or interest, builds the knowledge of written texts and helps L2 learners to acquire necessary language constructs. “it is reading that gives the writer the ‘feel’ for the look and texture of reader-based prose” (p. 20). This leads to the emergence of a number of studies that explore the relationship between writing and reading.

Stotsky (1983, cited in Eisterhold, 1990, p.88) surveyed correlational studies and found the following:

1- There are correlations between reading achievement and writing ability. Better writers tend to be better readers.
2- There are correlations between writing quality and reading experience as reported through questionnaires. Better writers read more than poorer writers.
3- There seem to be correlations between reading ability and measures of syntactic complexity in writing. Better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers.

These results are also mentioned by Eisterhold (1990) who indicates the same idea, but further explains that writing activities can be useful for improving reading comprehension and retention of information in particular. This means that writing and reading are interactional and thus influence each other. In addition, lack of familiarity with reading texts would limit knowledge of text structures and poor reading could limit
revision of the written texts produced by students. Thus, familiarity with reading makes students acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or rhetoric features of texts. And recently, Dr. Kinsella (2009) summarized the writing-reading connection as follows:

a) Reading widely and regularly contributes to the development of writing ability.

b) Good writers were read to as children.

c) Increasing reading frequency has a stronger influence on improving writing than does solely increasing writing frequency.

d) Developmental writers must see and analyze multiple effective examples of the various kinds of writing they are being asked to produce (as well as ineffective examples); they cannot, for example, be expected to write successful expository essays if they are primarily reading narrative texts.

The above list indicates that reading is an integral part of writing. Thus, it is worth developing strategies which help students make the best of their reading. To conclude, writing and reading are complementary skills and the improvement of one skill will inevitably lead to the improvement of the other; that is, learners become better writers by strengthening their reading skill and vice versa. While Reading provides the language input that supports and shapes foreign learners writing, writing, on the other hand, is relating our background knowledge and experience to the text by putting meaning on a paper. Therefore, teaching reading and writing strategies concurrently certainly does enhance students’ facility in both disciplines.

2.5. Current Approaches to Teaching Writing

The teaching of writing in EFL classes has evolved in the last twenty years, and it has witnessed important changes. However, there is no single answer to the question of how to teach writing. There are as many answers as there are teachers and teaching styles, or learners and learning styles (Raimes, 1983). The following diagram displays what writers need to deal with as they produce a piece of writing:
The above diagram includes different features such as, syntax, content, writer’s process, audience, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics and grammar which are necessary and required in producing any piece of writing. Based on their knowledge about theory and their students’ needs, teachers have stressed different features of the diagram, and thus developed a variety of approaches to the teaching of writing.

2.5.1. The Controlled-to-Free Approach

The Audio-lingual approach dominated second language learning in the 1950s and early 1960s, and emphasized speech in that it was primary, while writing was only used to reinforce it. Therefore, it stressed the mastery of grammatical and syntactic forms (Raimes, 1983, p. 6). This approach stresses the importance of three features mentioned in figure (2.1) which are: grammar, syntax and mechanics. It is a sequential approach in which students are given sentence exercises and then paragraph manipulations. Students’ writing is strictly controlled by having them change words or clauses or combine sentences. With these controlled compositions, students have a limited opportunity to make mistakes, and thus marking papers becomes a quick and easy job for the teachers. When students reach an advanced level of proficiency, they are allowed to write free composition (ibid.). To conclude, in this approach, students are given sentence exercises and paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically, then these controlled compositions are followed by correction of errors and finally to free composition. In short, this approach focuses on accuracy rather than fluency.
2.5.2. The Free-Writing Approach

This approach emphasized quantity of writing rather than quality with minimal correction of errors. It stresses content and fluency over accuracy. It is based on the idea that once ideas are on paper, grammatical accuracy, organization and the rest will gradually follow. To promote fluency even more, it is believed that students should write freely on any topic of their interest. Therefore, students are encouraged to focus on content and fluency without worrying about the form. Contrary to the Controlled-to-Free Approach, the teacher’s role is limited to reading the students’ pieces of writing and making comments on their ideas. Since the free writings revolve around subjects that the students are interested in, elements like audience and content are seen as important in this approach (Raimes, 1983, p. 7). In short, as opposed to the Controlled-to-Free Approach, this approach is more student-centered and emphasizes fluency over accuracy.

2.5.3. The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

Unlike the aforementioned approaches, this approach stresses another feature which is organization. It tries to determine the structure of writing, i.e., paragraph and essay structures. Students are given exercises in which they copy and analyze the form of model paragraphs, and imitate model passages. Moreover, they are asked to put scrambled sentences into paragraph order, to choose or invent an appropriate topic sentence, or to insert or delete sentences (ibid., p. 8). Overall, the Paragraph-Pattern Approach is basically concerned with organization or fitting sentences and paragraphs into specific patterns.

2.5.4. The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach

This approach emphasizes the simultaneous work on more than one feature in the composition diagram. Proponents of this approach maintain that writing cannot be seen as composed of separate skills which are learnt sequentially. Therefore, students should be trained to pay attention to the necessary grammar and syntax while they also work on the organization by giving them words such as first, then, and finally to organize their text. This approach links the purpose of writing to the forms that are needed to convey a message (ibid.). To conclude, the Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach is a purpose-based approach to writing that requires students to focus on the different aspects of writing at the same time to bring about a good result.
2.5.5. The Communicative Approach

The purpose of a piece of writing and the audience are stressed in this approach. Therefore, students are encouraged to act like writers in real-life situations. When writing is truly a communicative act, writers do their best. Thus, in this approach, the writing exercises are created so that the teacher, students or other people outside the classroom can be the audience. Moreover, context plays a central role in communicative writing exercises where students are given a chance to level the formality and content appropriately according to whom they are writing and the type of writing they are doing (Raimes, 1983, p. 9). So, the basic idea here is that writing is used for communication; therefore, students should benefit from doing exercises and practices which has the goal of communicative event.

2.5.6. The Product-Oriented Approach

Broadly speaking, the product-oriented approach is concerned with the end result of the writing process. It favours classroom activities in which the learner is engaged in imitating, copying and transforming model texts (Nunan, 1991). That is, it focuses its study on model texts in order to make students aware of the text features and become familiarized with the conventions of writing before they get their final draft. A model for such approach is outlined below:

**Stage 1:** model texts are read, and then features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if studying a formal letter, students’ attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make formal requests. If studying a story, the focus may be on the techniques used to make the story interesting, and students focus on where and how the writer employs these techniques.

**Stage 2:** this consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation. So if students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practice the language used to make formal requests, practicing the ‘I would be grateful if you would…’ structure.

**Stage 3:** organization of ideas. This stage is very important. Those who favour this approach believe that the organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language.

**Stage 4:** it is the final stage. Students choose from a choice of comparable writing tasks. Individually, they use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product; to show what they can do as fluent and competent users of the language (Steel, 2009, p. 9).
White (1988) pointed out that “such a model-based approach remains popular in EAP for one very good reason –much EAP writing is very product-oriented, since the conventions governing the organization and expression of ideas are very tight” (p.6). Therefore, there is a possibility that this approach may include a list of the forms such as letters and essays, and the functions such as narrative and description of written texts as well as the practice of different features and organization of these different written texts (Hedge, 1988). Thus, learners need to become thoroughly familiarized with these conventions in order to operate within them. So, when teaching students such conventions, it would be appropriate to adopt a model-based tradition.

The interest of this approach is in the correct use of form. In this context, Pincas (1982) sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices. She further clarifies that learning how to write has four stages: familiarization, controlled writing, the guided writing and the free writing. The familiarization stage aims to make learners aware of certain features of a particular text. In the controlled and guided writing sections, the learners practice the skills with increasing freedom until they are ready for the free writing stage in which they use the writing skill as part of a genuine activity such as, writing a letter, story or essay.

2.5.6.1 Criticism of the Product-Oriented Approach

In spite of the acceptance of this approach among writing teachers because it recognizes and satisfies the learners’ needs in terms of grammar rules and structures, and gives a clear idea about the organization of words and sentences, this approach has been criticized specially for the concept of imitation. Hyland (2003) indicated that this approach contends that writing is a logical and well-organized placement of words, clauses and sentences according to the rules of the language. However, he pointed out that this view may give students the impression that writing is merely a mastery of grammar rules and vocabulary. This encourages students to imitate the form and ignore the content. Thus, the learners’ abilities are decreased and learners are not encouraged to write with their own style. In the same context, Tickoo (2003) also maintained that the product approach gives attention to the product of a student’s writing without helping the learner to know the processes that successful writers use. White (1988) puts more emphasis on such a model by saying:
Zamel (1992, p. 32) also argues that writing by imitating can be appropriate at the sentence level, where the structure is somewhat relevant. However, imitation does not match with the current view of language and learning at the discourse level. Another criticism is that, in this approach, the teacher escapes from the learners’ problems in writing and this affects their motivation to write. Tickoo (2003) said that “in most cases such classroom writing denies the learner an opportunity for self-expression” (p.63). In other words, in this approach, the student is not given the chance to think about a topic and say what he wishes to say. Thus, he is not recognized as an individual. Therefore, Growing dissatisfaction with the product approach led to a paradigm shift to the process movement.

2.5.7. The Process Approach

“The introduction of the process approach to ESL writing seems to have been motivated by dissatisfaction with controlled composition and the current traditional approach” (Kroll, 2001, p.15). Many teachers and researchers felt that neither approach adequately fostered writing. The controlled composition was largely irrelevant and the linearity and prescriptivism of the Current Traditional Approach discouraged creative thinking and writing (ibid.). Accordingly, the process approach to writing has been considered as a positive innovation that will contribute to the teaching of writing in ESL classes.

Hyland (2003) indicated that process theories have strongly influenced the development of L2 writing instruction. He further clarified that the proponents of the process approach have taken and used “the techniques and theories of cognitive psychology and L1 composition” (p.17) in response to the formal views of writing to improve the ways of understanding and teaching writing. The writing process was seen as “a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning (Zamel, 1983, p.165). This means that this approach is a learner-centered approach which aims to make the student aware of, and gain control over the cognitive strategies involved in writing. With the rise of the process approach, the central focus is no longer on the finished text, but on the steps
that make up the act of writing. In other words, the process approach places more emphasis on the stages of the writing process than on the final product. The different stages that most writers go through are displayed in the figure below:

Figure 2.2: A process model of writing instruction (Hyland, 2003, p. 11)

As students go through the writing process, first, they gather information from different sources then they organize them. They ask what others (i.e., teacher, peers) think, and revise making changes to clarify the meaning. After that, they edit for grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization. Finally, they publish their work. However, as figure (2.2) shows, planning, drafting, revising and editing do not occur in a linear sequence. They are recursive, interactive and potentially simultaneous and all work can be reviewed, evaluated, and revised even before any text has been produced (Hyland, 2003, p.11). This means that the writer can go backward or forward to any of these stages to make the necessary changes. According to Flower (1994, cited in Hyland, 2003, p.11), this basic model of writing has been elaborated to further describe what goes on at each stage of the process. In short, the process approach aims to develop the students’ writing skills through the practice of these composing processes.

Process approaches to writing tend to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. Here are some ideas for classroom activities related to the stages above (Stanley, 2003, pp. 2-3):
Pre-writing
- Brainstorming: getting started can be difficult, so students divided into groups, quickly produce words and ideas about the writing.
- Planning: students make a plan of the writing before they start. These plans can be compared and discussed in groups before writing takes place.
- Generating ideas: discovery tasks such as cubing (students write quickly about the subject in six different ways – they describe it, compare it, associate it, analyze it, apply it, argue for or against it.)
- Questioning: in groups, the idea is to generate lots of questions about the topic. This helps students focus upon audience as they consider what the reader needs to know. The answers to these questions will form the basis to the composition.
- Discussion and debate: the teacher helps students with topics, helping them develop ideas in a positive and encouraging way.

Focusing ideas
- Fast writing: the students write quickly on a topic for five to ten minutes without worrying about correct language or punctuation. Writing as quickly as possible. If they cannot think of a word, they leave a space or write it in their own language. The important thing is to keep writing. Later, this text is revised.
- Group compositions: working together in groups, sharing ideas.
- Changing viewpoints: a good writing activity to follow a role play or story-telling activity. Students choose different points of view and discuss what this character would write in a diary, etc.

Evaluating, Structuring and Editing
- Ordering students take the notes written in one of the pre-writing activities and organize them.
- Self-editing: here students learn how to evaluate their own language through checking their own text looking for errors, structure/
- Peer editing and proofreading: here texts are interchanged and the evaluation is done by other students to check texts for spelling.

Based on the above list, the role of the teacher is then to guide students through the writing process by avoiding the emphasis on form to help them develop strategies for generating, drafting, and refining ideas. In this respect, Hyland (2003, p.12) pointed out that one of the teacher’s priorities in the process approach is to develop his students metacognitive awareness of their processes, that is, their ability to reflect on the strategies they use to write. In addition to composing and revising strategies, the process approach to writing places great emphasis on feedback including teacher-student conferences, peer-response, audio taped response and reformulation. Hyland (2003, p.13) believes that response is potentially one of the most influential texts in a process writing class because it does not only play an important role in motivating students, but it is also the point at which overt correction and explicit language teaching are most likely to occur.
2.5.7.1 Models of the Writing Process

A number of models to writing have been proposed by researchers in the field. Among these models, we can cite Flower and Hayes model (1980), Breiter and Scardamalia (1987) and Hayes (1996).

2.5.7.1.1 Flower and Hayes Model

While a number of researchers have proposed models of writing since the 1980’s, probably the model of writing process most widely accepted by L2 writing teachers is Flower and Hayes model (1980) that is shown in the figure below:

![Figure 2.3: The Hayes-Flower (1980) writing model (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 24)](image)

Flower and Hayes (1980) were the first to study and develop the application of the composing processes. They tried to identify the organization of the cognitive processes in writing through their theory –the cognitive process theory of writing. This model consists of three important elements: the task environment which includes the writing assignment and the text produced so far, the writer’s long-term memory, including knowledge of topic, knowledge of audience and stored writing plans, the writing process which involves three main processes, namely, planning, translating and reviewing controlled by a monitor. The basic insight that is brought out in the Hayes-Flower model is the fact that writing is a
recursive and not a linear process as the strict structured writing models previously theorized (Weigle, 2002, p.23). By this model, Flower and Hayes attempt to further clarify the cognitive processes that occur throughout the writing process to help improve learners’ writing skills. However, this diagram give the impression that writing is a simple activity but this is not true because writing is a complex process that cannot be easily displayed.

2.5.7.1.2 Bereiter and Scardamalia Model

Another influential model of writing is that of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987). Bereiter and Scardamalia proposed a two-model process that focused on writing development from knowledge telling to knowledge transforming.

![Figure 2.4: Structure of the knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming model (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 33-34)]
In this two-model process, Bereiter and Scardamalia summarized the differences between novice and skilled writers as the difference between a knowledge-telling model of writing and a knowledge-transforming model of writing. In a knowledge-telling model, the writer focuses its effort on the process of retrieving and organizing. However, in a knowledge-transforming model, writing is a recursive process of knowledge development and knowledge expression (Deane et al., 2008, p.9). Novice writers are assumed to use a knowledge-telling strategy in which they directly retrieve content from long-term memory and just organize it. By contrast, expert writers employ a knowledge-transforming strategy in which they focus their effort and attention on planning and revising the development of content, and they employ a variety of self-regulatory strategies (Galbraith, 2009, p.9). Bereiter and Scardamalia’s model is then significant because understanding the cognitive differences that distinguish novice from expert writers helps identify the changes that teachers must induce in their students to improve their writing skill.

2.5.7.1.3 Hayes’ model

Another model was presented introducing working memory as a component in the writing process (Hayes, 1996) as shown in the figure below:

![Hayes' Model](image)

Figure 2.5: The Hayes (1996) model (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 26)
Hayes’ model is an updated version of the Hayes-Flower model. It sees writing as composed of two main parts: the task environment and the individual. The task environment is divided into the social environment and the physical environment. However, the central focus of Hayes’ model is the individual which consists of four interactive components: working memory, motivation and affect, cognitive processes and long-term memory (Weigle, 2002, p. 25). In this model, Hayes removed the external distinctions based upon task in favour of an analysis that assumes three basic cognitive processes: text interpretation, reflection, and text production (Dean et al., 2008, p.5). These processes are involved not only in drafting a piece of writing, but in revising one’s writing as well (Weigle, 2002, p.26). Therefore, this model is also significant because of its thoroughness in describing the different factors that influence writing, particularly in terms of cognitive processes, motivation/affect, and long-term memory.

2.5.7.2 Limitations of the Process Approach

Despite the considerable usefulness of the process approach to teaching writing, it does not provide solutions to all the issues involved in developing students’ writing competence. Therefore, criticisms have been raised about its efficiency in preparing EFL students for such a complicated activity as writing.

Writing is a complex process; therefore, encouraging students to make their own meanings and find their own text forms does not provide them with clear guidelines on how to construct the different kinds of texts they have to write (Hyland, 2003, p.13). Process approaches overemphasize “the cognitive relationship between the writer and the writer’s internal world” (Swales, 1990, cited in Hyland, 2003, p.13), and as a result they fail to offer any clear perspective on the social nature of writing or on the role of language and text structure in effective written communication (Hyland, 2003, p.14). Polio (2001, cited in Hyland, 2003, p. 14) also argued that equipping novice writers with the strategies of good writers does not necessarily lead to improvement. In addition, as Horowitz (1986, cited in Onozawa, 2010, p.10) asserted, some people think that the process approach is unrealistic because it stresses the multiple use of drafts which may cause EFL learners to fail the academic exams with their single draft restrictions.
These criticisms should not be neglected; nevertheless, they can be resolved by ESL teachers and researchers’ flexibility and creativity. Therefore, the process approach is still a useful process that can be used as a teaching technique even though there is still a place for improvement.

2.6 Compatibility of Portfolio Assessment and Process Approach

After having given an overview of the different approaches used in teaching writing, the main goal, now, is to show which of them can be applied with the portfolio-based assessment of writing. In other words, this section tries to show which one serves and fits well the use of portfolio assessment to support the teaching and learning of writing in EFL classes.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, portfolios are becoming an accepted tool for demonstrating students’ writing abilities and performances. At the same time, the process approach to the teaching and learning of writing remains convincing and popular. According to Hamp-Lyons (2006, p. 140), writing courses that use a portfolio-based approach to assessment appear to provide a fertile environment in which teachers and learners can engage in feedback on writing and thus mesh well with process approaches. This means that writing teachers who use process approach to writing are encouraged to incorporate portfolio assessment in their classrooms for better results.

Portfolio assessment is the best-known and now most popular form of alternative writing assessment (Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). It is a collection of the student’s written texts over a semester or a school year. Typically, a student’s portfolio includes some elements of the processes the learner goes through during writing to arrive at a final text. These process elements become visible and can be evaluated in a portfolio assessment (Hamp-Lyons, 2006, p. 141). This means that portfolios give evidence of the different stages that students go through starting with pre-writing which includes brainstorming and planning, then drafting and finally revising and editing. In this way, it becomes easier for the teacher to identify strengths and weaknesses in students’ writings in order to give them a constructive feedback.

The opportunities for feedback are largely widened in teaching with portfolios. Hamp-Lyons (2006, p.141) summarized these opportunities in three points: first, there is the opportunity for several drafts of each piece of writing during the process writing
approach that is so fruitful for feedback, and enhanced by the possibility of revisiting and revising the paper further during the semester using the portfolio. Second, constructing a portfolio provides students with a ‘cyclical learning process’ that represents a semester or a school year of work and progress. Third, there is the opportunity for accessible evidence, that is, the portfolio gives evidence of the different processes that students go through and makes them visible to teachers for the evaluation. In short, most teachers are aware of the importance of feedback in teaching writing. Therefore, by implementing portfolios in writing classes there will be more opportunities to give feedback that will be effective in helping learners to improve their writing.

Although, portfolio-based writing assessment can be used with any of the theories and models of writing instruction (Hamp-Lyons & Concon, 2000), the greatest strength and power of portfolios in teaching and learning writing comes when “the potential for a focus on process is capitalized on in learners’ development of their portfolios” (Roehmer et al., 1991, cited in Hamp-Lyons, 2006, p.141). The writing and the collection of a portfolio must be done over time, and with developing writers’ time and practice mean change. Therefore, it is not surprising that portfolios are usually found in process writing classrooms; the development of portfolios, over time, allows students to incorporate and revise their drafts based on teacher and peers’ feedback (Hamp-Lyons, 2006, p. 142). In addition, feedback in various forms is an essential part of the learning opportunity of each student, and when portfolio-based writing assessment is combined with a process approach to writing instruction, “windows of possibility are opened for teachers to look closely into students’ portfolios and learn about the effectiveness of those learning opportunities” (Hamp-Lyons, 2006, p.143).

To conclude, portfolio assessment is compatible with the process approach to writing and their combination creates plenty of opportunities for feedback. This latter has an effective role in helping students to improve their writing and bring about better and closer relationships between the teacher and each student and between students, and consequently the classroom will be positively affected.
Conclusion

The ability to communicate ideas and information effectively is crucially dependent on good writing skills. It is thus important for students in academic, second and foreign language learning to have a good command of writing skills. Therefore, teachers need to consider seriously the way they teach this skill by selecting the most appropriate approach. In this chapter, we attempted to give an overview of the current approaches to teaching writing with the intention to discover the approach most compatible with portfolio assessment. After the description of the approaches used in teaching writing, we conclude that the process approach is the one which suits the use of portfolio-based writing assessment because it encourages students to improve their cognitive skills as they construct their portfolios for the evaluation of their pieces of writing. These skills are essential for problem-solving and decision making. In addition, feedback possibilities are increased between the teacher and students and this will bring about closer relationships between them. All of this will contribute to develop autonomous writers able to express themselves appropriately.
Chapter Three

Data Analysis

Introduction

3.1 Aim of the Questionnaires

3.1 Description of the Questionnaires

3.1.1 Students’ Questionnaire

3.1.2 Teachers’ Questionnaire

3.2 Piloting Questionnaires

3.3 Students’ Perceptions of Writing and Portfolio Use Questionnaire

3.3.1 The Population

3.3.2 The Sample

3.3.3 Administration of The Questionnaire

3.3.4 Questionnaire Analysis

3.4 Teachers’ Perception of Writing and Portfolio Assessment Questionnaire

3.4.1 The Population

3.4.2 The Sample

3.4.3 Administration of The Questionnaire

3.4.4 Questionnaire Analysis

3.5 Teachers’ Interview

3.5.1 Interview Analysis

3.6 Discussion of the Findings

3.6.1 Students’ Questionnaire

3.6.2 Teachers’ Questionnaire and Interview

Conclusion
Introduction

This study relies on the collection of data from master one students and teachers of written expression in the department of Foreign Languages at Biskra University. This chapter is then intended to give a description and analysis of both students and teachers’ questionnaires, in addition to teachers’ interviews.

3.1 Aim of the Questionnaires:

The use of questionnaires will help determine the following:

- Students’ writing proficiency, their difficulties in writing and also their perceptions and attitudes towards portfolio assessment.
- Teachers’ experience, their students writing proficiency and also their perceptions towards portfolio assessment.

3.2 Description of the Questionnaires

Students and teachers’ questionnaires are described as follows

3.2.1 Students’ Questionnaire

The students’ questionnaire used in this research is semi-structured, simple and straightforward to be understood by everyone. The most frequent questions used in this questionnaire are closed-ended questions, only few questions are open-ended because such questions are usually left unanswered especially by weak students. This tool is composed of seventeen (17) questions grouped under three (3) sections. The first section contains two questions. In the first question, the participants were asked whether they like studying the English language and the second question is about their major purpose in learning English. The second section contains five questions. It investigates students’ perceptions of writing, their level and the difficulties encountered by them during writing, in addition to their suggestions to overcome these difficulties. Finally, the last section contains ten questions. It is the most important part of the questionnaire which investigates students’ opinions and perceptions regarding portfolio use, and whether such technique can bring improvements in their written productions.
3.2.2 Teachers’ Questionnaire

Teachers’ questionnaire used in this research is semi-structured, simple and straightforward to be understood by everyone. The most frequent questions used in this questionnaire are closed-ended questions, only few questions are open-ended because such questions take more time to be answered. This instrument is composed of twenty (20) questions grouped under three (3) sections. The first section contains three questions intended to identify teachers’ experience and qualification. The second section contains eight questions. It investigates teacher’ perceptions of writing, their classroom practices, the difficulties encountered by their students during writing, in addition to their suggestions to overcome these difficulties. However, the last section contains nine questions. This section is the most important part of the questionnaire which investigates teachers’ opinions and perceptions regarding portfolio assessment, and whether such technique can help students to improve their writing performance.

3.3 Piloting Questionnaires

Before administering the questionnaires, it is very important to pilot or pretest it on a group of people similar to the intended subjects. The goal of a pilot survey is to highlight problems like inappropriate questions or ambiguity before starting the real survey. Therefore, the two questionnaires were piloted using a sample of ten (10) students among Master one population and three (3) teachers of written expression. Only few questions have been reformulated, particularly those dealing with portfolio assessment, based on the feedback that was given by the three (3) teachers and some of master one students.

3.4 Students’ Perceptions of Writing and Portfolio Use Questionnaire

Before analyzing the data collected, it is necessary to present the population, the sample and the way this questionnaire has been administered.

3.4.1 The population

The population used in this questionnaire consisted of master one students at the department of Foreign Languages, Section of English at Biskra University. The total number of students’ population was about 325. This population was selected for the
reason that master one students have already studied three years at university and they would be familiar with portfolio assessment. Thus, they would have certain perceptions and attitudes towards it.

3.4.2 The sample

As it is impossible to deal with the whole population, 150 students out of the total number of students participated in this questionnaire. These informants have been selected randomly to be used in this survey. They are from different socio-economic background and from different geographical regions in Algeria, but have the same educational background.

3.4.3 Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to (150) master one informants in a friendly and relaxed environment with the presence of the teacher who assisted them after the teaching course. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within half an hour. As a result, all questionnaires were returned answered.

3.4.4 Questionnaire Analysis

Section one : General Information

Question one : do you like studying the English language? Why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. Students’ Satisfaction on Studying English
The students’ attitude towards studying the English language can generally be described as positive. The feedback in the questionnaire revealed that 92% of students showed interest in studying the English language as opposed to 8% who did not. This positive attitude is due to the fact that these informants consider the English language as essential in the era of globalization because it is needed in any field, either academic or in order to communicate.

**Question two: What is your major purpose in learning English?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with people</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a job</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To go for further studies</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.2. Students’ Major Purpose in Learning English**
The majority of students (48%) have opted for learning English in order to communicate with people, while 26% of students’ responses revealed that they have chosen to learn English because it increases their chances to get a job and 26% to go for further studies. From these answers, we conclude that most students are more interested in learning the language itself than in learning about the language. This tendency is due the fact that their major purpose is to become proficient in English to comfortably be able to communicate with people all around the world.

Section two: Students’ Perceptions of Writing

Question one: Do you believe that writing is important as a language skill? Why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table .3.3. Importance of Writing
Figure 3.3. Importance of Writing

The results show that the majority of the informants (98%) believes that writing is an important language skill. Only two students answered that writing is not really important in comparison with the speaking skill. Most students commented that writing is important because it allows them to freely express their thoughts and ideas, in addition to the fact that most job requirements involve having good writing skills. While, some of them mentioned that they are asked to write essays, a report, a research proposal or even a dissertation and these pieces of work are often very long and need careful structuring and good writing skills. According to these comments, we can deduce that students are much aware of the importance of writing as a vital skill needed in any field.

Question two: Do you believe that writing is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4. Evaluation of Writing
The majority of the informants, or 68% answered saying that writing is a difficult skill to be acquired. When asked to state the reasons, they answered that writing is a complex process that demands time, concentration and patience. Besides, they complained that they have to remember a large amount of vocabulary items and rules of grammar which are quite different from their own language. Others stated that they have not been trained adequately to write and blamed their teachers for not providing them with the appropriate feedback. Without feedback, students cannot recognize their mistakes which can be repeated and become serious problems hard to be adjusted. However, it should be mentioned that teachers do not have sufficient time to correct for all students if there are more than ten. Therefore, as collegiate students, they have to do more efforts to improve their writing performance.

Figure 3.4. Evaluation of Writing
Question three: How would you rate your level in writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly proficient</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5. Students’ Level in Writing

Figure 3.5. Students’ Level in Writing

The way students rated their level in writing correlates with the data they have provided in the previous question. As most of them have found that writing accurately and effectively is difficult, it is obvious that a large number of students (66%) consider their level in writing as adequate. They expressed a deep disappointment particularly because they still have problems at the end of their studies. Only 6% thought that they are highly proficient in English writing. This shows that students at this level are still facing difficulties in writing and waiting for their teachers to find a way to reach improvement.
Question four: indicate the difficulties you face in writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6. Students’ Difficulties in Writing

Most of students find themselves unable to write accurately. As table shows, the majority of master one students (48%) have difficulties in the first place in grammar because they do not master the grammatical rules. Other informants, or (28%) reported that they also have difficulties in vocabulary which means that they cannot find the appropriate words to express themselves in a given topic because their linguistic background is not rich. This is the result of a number of factors including the lack of reading on their parts because writing and reading are complementary skills and the growth in one skill inevitably leads to growth in the other; that is students become better writers by strengthening their reading skill and vice versa. In addition, through reading students acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures and the rhetorical features of texts. They also reported that the lack of
practice of such a complex skill leads them to make a lot of spelling mistakes and produce inaccurate sentences. We can deduce then that students are conscious of their difficulties in writing and the reasons behind them. Therefore, they expressed their willingness to improve their level in writing.

**Question five: what do you suggest to overcome these difficulties?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking teacher's help</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional sessions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing more practice</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of them</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table.3.7. Solutions to Students’ Writing Difficulties

![Figure 3.7. Solutions to Students’ Writing Difficulties](image)

When the informants have been asked to indicate the appropriate ways that can solve their problems in writing, most of them (58%) believed that they can develop their writing performance through doing more practice either in or outside the classroom as homework. This shows that students are conscious of the fact that no one can produce a perfect piece of writing from the first time and that it is through practice that they can develop such a complex skill as writing. Only 2% suggested additional sessions because they find that the time allotted to the written expression module is not sufficient to reach noticeable improvements. Others (6%) answered that they would seek the teacher’s help to correct their mistakes during the writing process because the majority claimed that their pieces are usually left uncorrected. When asked to suggest
other solutions, some proposed to change the methodology used by teachers in writing. While those who complained about their poor vocabulary knowledge, they stated that reading is the optimal solution that would enable them to enrich their vocabulary and develop their writing styles. Therefore, teachers should encourage their students to read, but at the same time they have to guide them through conducting teacher-student conferences. This will provide students with feedback about their writing and will give them the opportunity to improve their writings.

Section three: Students’ Perceptions of Portfolio Use

Question one: Do you know what a portfolio is? If yes, do you use it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8. Students’ Knowledge of Portfolio

Figure 3.8. Students’ Knowledge of Portfolio

Most of the informants (92%) answered positively when asked whether they know the portfolio. However, when asked whether they have used it in their writing classes they answered negatively. These data confirm that teaching writing remained as it was years ago and no change has been made to improve students’ writing skill. This
encourages us as a researcher seeking to prove that the use of portfolio assessment in teaching and assessing writing will help students develop this important skill.

**Question two: Did your teacher encourage you to keep a portfolio?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.9. Teachers’ Support for Portfolios**

This question was asked in order to check whether teachers in the tertiary level encourage their students to keep a portfolio of their written works, but the majority (60%) of informants answered negatively and only (40%) answered positively. This data reveal that teachers do not give any importance to this technique. In addition, this reflects the continuous use of traditional methods in teaching writing instead of relying on the new techniques like the portfolio assessment which is advocated by the contemporary approaches in teaching and assessing writing.
Question Three: Do you like having a portfolio?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10. Students’ Desire to have a Portfolio

The idea of having the portfolios is well received by the students in that 80% of them indicate their pleasure of having them. Also, they showed their willingness to work with portfolios as long as they help them improve their writing skills. This finding suggests that students have no inhibitions in adopting this procedure. Therefore, in order to sustain their interest in keeping portfolios of their compositions, it is necessary that teachers encourage such practice and instill the sense of ownership of the portfolio among students.

When asked to state the reasons behind their positive attitude towards having a portfolio, most of the informants reported that they enjoy using the portfolio because it allows them to review material and seek the correct answers to questions they had previously answered incorrectly. They also indicated that the portfolio can help them
become autonomous students capable to write on their own pace. However, of those who reported that they do not support the idea of having a portfolio, some explained that they do not understand the relevance of such technique. Others disliked the portfolio process because they felt that it would have no positive effects on their writing skills.

**Question Four: What do you think the purpose of keeping a portfolio is?**

The percentage of those who knew the purpose of keeping the portfolio is not satisfying in that only (40%) claimed that it is meant to keep the best writing pieces after a long process of evaluation. However, the majority (60%) did not seem to understand any of the portfolio assessment objectives in that they still opted to use the portfolios for other purposes such as exam preparation. Others even reversed the question, asking the researcher to explain what the main objectives or purposes of portfolio assessment are.

**Question Five: What do you include in your portfolio?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draft</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best compositions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.11. Portfolio Components

![Figure 3.11. Portfolio Components](image)
Concerning the types of writing pieces included in the portfolio, the majority (60%) of those who use the portfolio preferred to include both their drafts and best compositions, that is, every piece of writing they have produced. (14%) suggested that the portfolios should include only the best compositions and (18%) preferred to keep only their drafts. However, (8%) have not answered this question since they are not familiar with or do not use the portfolio. These different answers can be linked to students’ different purposes in keeping portfolios. For example those who wanted to keep all the writing pieces seem to be more concerned about exam preparation. Therefore, teachers should emphasize the importance of keeping only the best compositions after a process of reviewing and sharing the contents. This latter encourages students to value their achievement as well as to keep track of their progress.

Question six: How often do you read the compositions in your portfolio?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times a week</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One week</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times a month</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.12. Frequency of Reviewing the Portfolio

Figure 3.12. Frequency of Reviewing the Portfolio
The frequency of portfolio reviewing among students varied in that 26% reviewed their portfolio once a month, (16%) few times a month, (20%) once a week and (24%) few times a week. Only (6%) reported that they review their portfolios every day. However, those who do not use the portfolio, or (8%) did not provide any answers. Most students commented that reviewing the portfolio everyday is both challenging and exhausting. Others indicated that such practice is so time consuming and conflicted with their obligations.

Question seven: Do you think that the use of portfolios will motivate you to write? If yes, How?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.13. Portfolios as a Way of Motivation to Write

Figure 3.13. Portfolios as a Way of Motivation to Write
The majority of the informants, or (74%) revealed that portfolio assessment can motivate them to write as opposed to (26%) who answered negatively. Most of students indicated that portfolio assessment allows them to revisit their early and interim drafts to make the necessary changes throughout the course of writing. Hence, they become able to develop their ability to self-assess their writing and thus understand their strengths and weaknesses. They stated that self-assessment through portfolios permits them to fix the errors more carefully, and motivates them to improve their drafts. Others reported that through the process of collecting and assessing the portfolio, they can witness their accomplishments and progress which makes them more motivated to write. The rest of the informants, or (20%) among those who answered ‘yes’ did not justified their answers for unknown reasons.

**Question eight:** Do you think that portfolio assessment would help you improve your writing ability? If yes, how?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table. 3.14. The Role of Portfolios in Improving Writing*

*Figure 3.14. The Role of Portfolios in Improving Writing*
The informants were also asked whether portfolio assessment would help them improve their writing ability, most of them (70%) answered with ‘yes’. They explained that portfolio assessment can raise their linguistic awareness when revising their writing pieces, and helps them monitor the strategies that they were taught by their teachers during the writing process. A student remarked that “somehow, I think that portfolio assessment can make me much more conscious of the language I used in my drafts”. Others mentioned that portfolio assessment is a useful practice which can help improve the accuracy of their writings, but it may not help with generating ideas.

As for those who answered with ‘no’, or 30% see that portfolio assessment is not a successful technique and can be a source of anxiety. Others claimed that using portfolios is a waste of time because they have no positive role in improving their writings. The rest of the informants (only 10%) answered with ‘I do not know’, this category of students represent those who were not using the portfolio assessment, but in spite of this they expressed their will to try this technique as long as it would help them improve their writing performance.

**Question nine: Do you believe that portfolio assessment contribute to your:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of them</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table.3.15. Areas of Improvements
When the informants were asked about which aspects of their writing that portfolio assessment can further improve, the majority of them (50%) indicated that the different writing skills including grammar, vocabulary and organization can be improved. However, (30%) respond in favor of organization and only a handful of students mentioned grammar and vocabulary. From these findings, we can deduce that portfolio assessment can help students fix both the surface-level errors such as grammar and vocabulary, and the global errors such as organization. This means that portfolio assessment maximizes students’ opportunities to write correctly and effectively.

**Question ten: If you want to add any comments or suggestions, please do.**

The informants are usually not accustomed with voicing their opinions publicly. Therefore, only (20%) made some additional comments in response to this question. Some of them asked for novelty and variety of topics because they felt that the curriculum used repeats the same materials that were provided the previous years and that any new material is superficial, only consisting of new examples or exercises. Others highlighted the importance of the teacher’s role. They believe that the teacher is the main or key factor in the success of the portfolio assessment method. According to them, the teacher should explain the portfolio’s requirements thoroughly and provide regular feedback during portfolio conferencing to help them overcome their
difficulties in writing. This shows that the informants are conscious learners willing to work and waiting for their teachers to help and guide them during the process of writing for better achievements.

3.5 Teachers’ Perceptions of Writing and Portfolio Assessment Questionnaire

Before analyzing the data collected, it is necessary to present the population, the sample and the way this questionnaire has been administered.

3.5.1 The population

The population used in this questionnaire consisted of teachers of written expression at the department of English at Biskra University. The total number of teachers’ population is about 20. This population was selected for the reason that these teachers have a long experience in the field of teaching writing which can help the researcher obtain useful and appropriate information for the study.

3.5.2 The sample

The sample used in this questionnaire consisted of ten teachers of written expression. The teachers’ experience in teaching written expression is between three to twelve years. Two of them are teachers holding a doctorate degree in applied linguistics and the rest hold a ‘magister’ degree and are preparing a doctorate. All of them participated positively and provide the researcher with useful information for the study.

3.5.3 Administration of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was run by the researcher within a week. The participants were given two weeks to give back the questionnaire according to their requests because of work pressure. All of them showed readiness to participate in this research. As a result all questionnaires were returned answered.
3.5.4 Questionnaire Analysis

Section one: general information

Item one: teachers’ experience and qualification

A list of questions (1, 2 and 3) was asked to identify teachers’ experience and qualification. Teachers’ experience in teaching written expression varies from two to ten years as it is displayed in table 3.16. However, the experience of those teaching written expression to master one students varies from one to six years. Two of them hold a doctorate degree in applied linguistics, while the rest hold a ‘magister’ degree and are preparing a doctorate in applied linguistics. These data presume that all the participants can provide the researcher with the necessary information required in this research work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>informants</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Experience in teaching written expression</th>
<th>Experience in teaching master one students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table.3.16: Teachers’ Experience and Qualifications
Section two:

Question one: how would you rate master one students’ level in writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table.3.17: Students’ Level in Writing

Figure.3.16: Students’ Level in Writing

The large majority of the informants (90%) indicated that master one students’ level in writing is average in general and that most of them are still unable to write accurately. Others added that the majority of students do not master all the skills needed to express themselves in an acceptable way. They tend to make errors in grammar and in the choice of appropriate vocabulary. Some even stated that students often produce ambiguous sentences difficult to understand. This means that master one students still have difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.
This information confirms that no changes have been made to bring improvements to students’ writings.

**Question two: what are the reasons behind students’ weaknesses?**

As stated above, students’ writings did not reach adequate level of proficiency. When asked about the reasons of their students’ weaknesses, 90% of the informants complained about over-crowded classes. They explained that over-crowded classes hinder practice. They added that they cannot correct all students’ productions in such atmosphere, and thus feedback is nearly impossible and even if it is performed, it is rarely done. This obliges the teacher to make a lot of effort to create an appropriate atmosphere in which students can work in a collaborative way and benefit from the teacher’s feedback.

10% also indicated that the time allotted for teaching the written expression module is not sufficient. They stated that such complex skill needs a lot of time and training under the teacher’s guidance. Therefore, they suggested additional sessions in which students are given the opportunity to revise their pieces of writing and receive the necessary feedback.

Another point also stressed is the lack of reading. All the informants found that the lack of reading on the part of their students contribute to their difficulties in writing. They indicated that reading and writing are interrelated and that through reading, learners can acquire the necessary skills that facilitate the process of writing. However, only few students are interested in reading. This situation calls for the integration of reading activities in the writing classes in order to motivate students to read more.

**Question three: which approach are you using to teach writing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product approach</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process approach</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.18. Approaches Used to Teach Writing
Figure 3.17. Approaches Used to Teach Writing

The answers given by the informants revealed that the majority, or 70% are using the process approach in which they emphasize the linguistic skills of planning and drafting. However, they complained that the over-crowded classes hindered them from implementing this approach appropriately. 20% claimed that no single approach can meet all the teaching and learning needs. Thus, they tend to be eclectic by using different techniques and activities. Only one teacher claimed that she was using the process-genre approach to teach writing. She explained that after conducting a research on the process-genre approach, she implemented it in her class because she found it very useful and workable. Accordingly, we came to the conclusion that teachers lack a unified way to teach writing. Each one of them is using a different approach. This can be due to the different conditions and needs of their students.

Question four: how do your students write? which one do you prefer most and why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individually</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a partner</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In groups</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.19. The Way Students Write
According to the informants’ answers, the majority of teachers (70%) are used to ask their students to write individually. Only 10% of them were used to give their students the opportunity to work in groups. According to the majority, writing individually is the most effective way because this allows them to evaluate their students’ real potentials and progress. In addition, writing individually gives students the chance to discover their own abilities and helps them become independent learners. This revealed that cooperative and collaborative learning were not really practiced which also shows the continuity in using the traditional methods in teaching writing.

Question five: Do you encourage your students to talk about their writings or read them to the class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.20. Encouraging Students to Talk about their Writing
When asked whether they encourage their students to talk about their writings or read them to the class, almost all teachers (90%) answered with ‘sometimes’. This result revealed that teachers still lack the initiative to encourage their students to share and discuss their writings either with their peers or their teachers. In this case, students are only confined to write on their own without benefiting from their teachers and peers’ feedback. As we know, feedback can support students’ writing development and nurture their confidence as writers. Therefore, more interactions should be made with students mainly during the drafting stages of writing. Only in this way, students can be more inclined to use feedback to revise and edit their drafts.

**Question six: how do you respond to your students’ writing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make Corrections</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give marks</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.21. Teachers’ Reactions to Students’ Writing**
Figure 3.20. Teachers’ Reactions to Students’ Writing

When asked about the way they respond to their students’ writings, 60% of the informants reported that they make corrections and then they give marks. This means that the emphasis remained on a single product which was evaluated and given a mark, neglecting all the various methods and techniques that can be used to assess students’ writing abilities including portfolio assessment. These data confirm that the teaching and assessment of writing remained as it was, and that no change was undertaken to develop students’ writing abilities. Therefore, new techniques are required in the field of teaching and assessment of writing in order to maximize students’ opportunities to practice writing without being afraid or worried about grades.

Question seven: what do you think of the current method used in teaching and assessing writing?

Almost all teachers (90%) are generally not satisfied with their current methods in teaching and assessing writing. They confirm that no significant improvements are highlighted in students’ productions. Some commented that the only used method is to ask students to write an essay which is then corrected without taking into consideration the stages in the writing process. This means that teachers are still using
the traditional methods in which they rely on students’ final written productions to evaluate their students’ writing abilities. Others reported that the assessment methods used in writing classes are designed not to diagnose students’ writing weaknesses, but to globally judge students’ compositions. This means that teachers cannot provide a comprehensive outline of their students’ strengths and weaknesses and this hinder them from giving the necessary instruction to meet the needs of their students.

**Question eight: what suggestions can you make to improve students’ writing ability?**

All teachers stressed the need to incorporate reading activities in the writing process. They indicated that writing and reading are interrelated skills and the growth in one skill will lead to growth in the other. In addition, through reading students can improve and reinforce their vocabulary development as they are exposed to multiple text types and models. Therefore, it is the teacher’s responsibility to encourage and motivate students to read more often to acquire the necessary skills that facilitate the process of writing.

Another point was also suggested is the increase in the time allotted for teaching the written expression module. On the one hand, this will allow students to practice writing as much as they can and benefit from the necessary feedback that is provided either by the teacher or their peers. On the other hand, teachers are allowed more time to evaluate their students’ strengths and weaknesses, and accordingly they can tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their students.

Finally, they highlighted the importance for exploring and using new forms of writing assessment including peer assessment and self-assessment. According to them, when students are involved in the evaluation process, they can identify their strengths and the areas needing improvement. This not only improves their writing abilities, but also motivates them to write regularly. Moreover, students’ reflection on their own writing processes and performances is a way to generate knowledge about writing, and thus increases their ability to write successfully.

**Section two: teachers’ perceptions of portfolio assessment**

**Question one: what is your attitude towards portfolio assessment?**

Almost all the informants (90%) had positive attitude towards portfolio assessment. Only one teacher reported that he was developing a negative attitude
since he had some concerns as to whether students would be committed to such practice. The majority found that portfolio assessment is a useful tool that should be used by all learners because it can motivate them to practice writing more frequently. Others reported that the use of portfolios plays the role of encouraging students to reflect on their written productions as well as helping them to become independent writers able to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, through portfolios, students are encouraged to take responsibility over their texts and therefore over their learning.

**Question two: did you use this technique before? why?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.22. Teachers’ Use of Portfolio Assessment*

When asked whether they have used portfolio assessment in their classes, only 20% of the informants reported that they have used portfolios in their classes. They commented that portfolio assessment allows them the opportunity to obtain more accurate information about students’ writing progress as well as feedback of what each student has achieved. However, the majority of the informants, or 80% revealed that they have never used it and that they have little familiarity with it. This shows that most teachers had superficial understanding and knowledge about portfolio
assessment. We can assume that teachers’ unfamiliarity with portfolio assessment was partly due to limitations in their own education. Traditional teacher education did not emphasize such student-centered techniques.

Question three: how do you find the use of portfolios in writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Beneficial</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.23. Teachers’ Opinions about Portfolio Assessment

![Bar chart showing teachers' opinions about portfolio assessment](image)

Figure 3.22. Teachers’ Opinions about Portfolio Assessment

When asked about their opinions concerning the use of portfolios in writing, almost all the informants (90%) reported that it would be beneficial to incorporate portfolio assessment in writing classes. This revealed that teachers recognized the benefits of portfolio assessment although they were not well-acquainted with such technique. Therefore, they believe that the implementation of portfolio assessment would bring improvements to students’ writings even if they do not know to what extent.
Question four: do you think that portfolio assessment can improve students’ writing abilities? If yes, in which areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.24. The ability of Portfolio Assessment to improve Writing

The informants were also asked whether portfolio assessment can improve students’ writing abilities, most of them (90%) answered with ‘yes’. Some teachers reported that collecting a portfolio permits students to write multiple drafts and this gave them the opportunity to express themselves better, expand their vocabulary and become more attentive in grammar and spelling. Others indicated that portfolio assessment can raise students’ linguistic awareness when revising their writing pieces and helps them monitor the strategies that they were taught. One of the informants also indicated that portfolio assessment allows students the opportunity to understand why writing is emphasized as process and a revision progress during which ideas become refined and developed. This means that portfolio assessment helps teachers to teach revision, and makes students think of writing as work in progress.
Question five: do you think that the use of portfolios can change the way students perceive writing? If yes, explain how?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.25. The Ability of Portfolio Assessment to Change Students’ Perceptions of Writing

When asked whether the use of portfolios can change the way students perceive writing, the majority of the informants (90%) answered positively. Some indicated that portfolio assessment allows students to recognize that writing is a process during which they are willing to make mistakes, looking for patterns and taking advantage of all practice opportunities. However, other informants stressed the idea that having students to keep and submit their drafts in portfolios can encourage them to see their writing as their own. In other words, keeping and assessing portfolios makes students responsible over their writing products and helps them perceive themselves as real writers.
Question six: in your opinion, can portfolio assessment encourage students to write and self-assess their writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.26. The Ability of Portfolio Assessment to enhance Self-assessment

Nearly all the informants (90%) found that portfolio assessment can encourage students to write and self-assess their writings. Therefore, teachers should consider adopting the practice of portfolio assessment in their classes so that students become more motivated to write and monitor their own work in an effective way. In addition, they should provide students with adequate training in the use of portfolios in order to better use them when evaluating their progress.
Question seven: what other improvements, if any, can portfolio assessment provide?

All the informants reported that portfolio assessment helps students to develop independent learning and increases their feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence. In addition, they stressed the fact that portfolio assessment not only encourages students to enhance their reflective skills, but also helps them become aware of their strengths and weaknesses which can then develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning. Other informants indicated that portfolio assessment increases communication between teachers and students. Through portfolio conferences, students can discuss with the teacher their achievements and progress, ask questions and receive suggestions and solutions to improve their work. Some teachers also found that students’ portfolios can serve a medium through which teachers can understand the problems that students encounter during writing. Thus, teachers can provide students with the necessary feedback by giving some alternatives in the form of remedial activities.

Question eight: do you think that portfolio assessment is a practical solution? Say why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table.3.27. Practicality of Portfolio Assessment
When asked whether portfolio assessment is a practical solution, all the informants answered negatively. They reported that portfolio assessment is a time consuming method for the teacher due to the need to view each portfolio separately and then to make judgement. They added that marking a portfolio can vary from 15 minutes to one hour. However, it should be noted that marking a portfolio can be easier by using marking guides and by assisting students to structure the portfolio in a way that can easily be assessed.

**Question nine: if you want to add anything concerning portfolio assessment, please do.**

Some informants stressed the need to provide an environment where students could share their writing process, thoughts and learning styles in order to become independent writers. A supportive environment with sufficient amount of guidance from the teacher is necessary to develop students’ self-assessment and self-reflection which are key factors in portfolio assessment. Therefore, it is important to create an encouraging learning environment to ensure the success of portfolio assessment.

Other informants indicated that it is important to make the purpose of the portfolio clear to the students and make the whole process engaging and meaningful. In other words, teachers should introduce the real meaning of portfolio assessment to learners and explain its importance for all skills and mainly the writing one. This can assist students to learn the skills necessary to compile portfolios that they can use for
future career development. Therefore, learners should be aware of the importance of portfolio assessment otherwise they will not use it.

3.6 Teachers’ interview

In this study, the researcher has opted for a semi-structured interview. The advantage of using semi-structured interview is that it will help the researcher to stay alert to the focus of the study and at the same time be open minded to encounter spontaneous and new ideas that will emerge during the interview (Silverman, 2006). Two teachers of written expression were interviewed by the researcher during the period from 18 to 19th march, 2015 in the teachers’ room at Biskra University. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes and was conducted in English. Five topics were addressed during the interview: whether teachers had knowledge of portfolio assessment; what benefits portfolio assessment can provide; who would benefit the most from portfolio assessment; whether teachers would apply portfolio assessment in their classes and what suggestions teachers can make for improving students’ writing ability.

3.6.1 Interview Analysis

Question one: what do you know about portfolio assessment?

Both teachers reported that they had little or no familiarity with portfolio assessment. Teacher A seemed not to have been exposed to portfolio assessment. However, teacher B had been exposed to portfolio assessment but never used it in the classroom.

Teacher A: portfolio assessment is a type of assessment like peer assessment and self-assessment…..this type of assessment is not used in our context.

Teacher B: I heard of it……….portfolio is a folder, file or collection of information. We never applied it.

The interviewees’ responses revealed that they have little familiarity with portfolio assessment and that they have never used it in their classes. These data revealed that teachers do not give any importance to this technique and that they are still relying on traditional methods in teaching writing.
Question two: what are the benefits of using portfolio assessment in writing?

The interviewees’ responses were approximately the same; both think that the use of portfolio assessment in writing classes has many benefits. Each one expresses these benefits differently.

Teacher A: portfolio assessment gives students a certain self-confidence which helps them to write without any hindrance.

Teacher B: portfolio assessment incites students to write more because they have very few opportunities to write inside and outside classroom.

The interviewees’ responses revealed that they are aware of the benefits of portfolio assessment and how much this technique can help students to improve their writings. However, it was not given any importance; therefore, we should consider the idea of implementing portfolio assessment in writing in order to bring on better results.

Question three: who would benefit the most from portfolio assessment?

When asked who would benefit the most from portfolio assessment, the interviewees gave two different answers.

Teacher A: portfolio assessment can work better with weak students since the student may know his or her points of weakness and strength.

Teacher B: portfolio assessment can be beneficial to both teachers and students. They can discover how successful the learning process has been and what changes are needed.

While teacher A reported that portfolio assessment can enhance students’ achievement to an even greater degree when they are weak and have difficulties that can be identified, teacher B indicated that portfolio assessment can provide benefits to both teachers and students. These different viewpoints can be due to their different experiences and acquaintance with portfolio assessment.
Question four: would you like to implement portfolio assessment in your class?

Both teachers showed their willingness and readiness to implement portfolio assessment in their classes. However, they expressed some concerns.

**Teacher A:** we would have to train students in using portfolio assessment. When the picture is clear to them, the implementation will succeed.

**Teacher B:** we need an assessment plan such as a proposal to understand the objectives of the portfolio assessment process.

Teacher A indicated that teachers should train students how to use portfolio assessment so that the implementation will succeed. However, teacher B stressed the need to more thoroughly examine the objectives of portfolio assessment before its implementation. This means that teachers should make crucial decisions with regard to their objectives and their students’ needs to ensure the success of portfolio assessment implementation.

Question five: what suggestions do you have for improving students’ writing?

They suggested that teachers should keep looking for new methods of assessment to motivate their students because they believed that once students’ motivation is increased, their writing will be improved. In addition, they stress the need that teachers should participate in professional development seminars and conferences because these kinds of meetings can update them with the latest progress and issues in the field of writing. Furthermore, both teachers pointed out that any implementation of portfolio assessment would have to include corresponding curriculum adjustments so that it would allow them the time they need to guide students in the process of portfolio assessment. Finally, they emphasized that all teachers should cooperate and work together to reflect on their teaching and to prepare remedial activities that can strengthen students’ writing abilities.
3.7 Discussion of the Findings

This research work ensured that portfolio assessment is important to improve students’ writing abilities and reflective skills needed for professional development. This is based on the data collected from students’ questionnaire and teachers’ questionnaire and interviews. Now, an attempt is made to discuss these findings more closely.

3.7.1 Students’ Questionnaire

Results of students’ questionnaire revealed that students found writing a difficult skill that demands time, concentration and patience. They reported that they have difficulties in the first place in grammar and vocabulary. This result can be attributed to a number of factors including lack of reading on their parts. Writing and reading are complementary skills and the growth in one skill inevitably leads to growth in the other; that is students become better writers by strengthening their reading skill and vice versa. In addition, through reading students acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures and the rhetorical features of texts. Moreover, the lack of practice of such a complex skill leads them to make a lot of spelling mistakes and produce inaccurate sentences. Therefore, students should take advantage of every opportunity to read and write so that they can improve their writing performance.

Concerning portfolio assessment, the majority of master one students had positive perceptions about it. This finding suggests that students have no inhibitions in adopting this procedure. Likewise, Chang, Wu and Ku (2005) found in their study that there existed an overwhelming positive reaction among the students towards portfolio use. Moreover, in this study, students reported that they enjoy using the portfolio because it allows them to review material and seek the correct answers to questions they had previously answered incorrectly. They also indicated that the portfolio can help them become autonomous students capable to write on their own pace. However, of those who reported that they do not support the idea of having a portfolio, some explained that the process of portfolio keeping is tiring as they need to review the portfolio every day. In addition they indicated that such technique is time consuming and prevents creative writing. In a similar vein, Pollari (2000) noted that some
students disliked the portfolio course and found it uninspiring, difficult and unsuitable for them.

Through the process of portfolio assessment, students are allowed to revisit their early and interim drafts to make the necessary changes throughout the course of writing. Hence, they become able to develop their ability to self-assess their writing and thus understand their strengths and weaknesses. They stated that self-assessment through portfolios permits them to fix the errors more carefully, and motivates them to improve their drafts. Others reported that through the process of collecting and assessing the portfolio, they can witness their accomplishments and progress which makes them more motivated to write.

3.7.2 Teachers’ Questionnaire and Interview

Results derived from teachers’ questionnaire revealed that they lack a unified way to teach writing. Each one of them is using a different approach. 70% of teachers reported that they were using the process approach in which they emphasized the linguistic skills of planning and drafting. However, they complained that the over-crowded classes hindered them from implementing this approach appropriately. 20% claimed that no single approach can meet all the teaching and learning needs. Thus, they tend to be eclectic by using different techniques and activities. Only one teacher claimed that she was using the process-genre approach to teach writing. The use of the distinct approaches to teach writing may most likely lead to different attitudes developed by students towards the process of writing.

Regarding teachers’ classroom practices, the results indicated that teachers still lack the initiative to encourage increased involvement by students to share and discuss their writing productions either with the teacher or their peers. Most of the time, students appear to write silently and individually. In this respect, the lack of opportunity to interact may negatively affect students’ resourcefulness in acquiring additional information for their writing. In addition, the assessment method applied by most teachers appeared to be rigid. Students’ writing was accomplished simply by highlighting and marking their mistakes. Thus, teachers’ interaction with students regarding their writing performance as a result of this assessment method is certainly limited. Therefore, new techniques are required in the field of teaching and
assessment of writing in order to maximize students’ opportunities for interaction and feedback.

The feedback given by teachers of written expression in the questionnaire and interview regarding portfolio assessment is also positive although they have little familiarity with it. They indicated that portfolio assessment can help students become more confident, more aware of their writing and could generate more ideas. In addition, they reported that the different writing skills including grammar, vocabulary and organization can be improved through the process of portfolio assessment. These results are consistent with that of Paesani (2006) who demonstrated that portfolio assessment helps learners integrate the development of proficiency skills, content knowledge, grammatical competence, vocabulary and organization. From these findings, we can deduce that portfolio assessment can help students fix both the surface-level errors such as grammar and vocabulary, and the global errors such as organization and content. This means that portfolio assessment maximizes students’ opportunities to write correctly and effectively.

A portfolio can provide individual attention to students’ needs. Looking at students’ writings can help teachers improve their lessons and include more targeted instruction after analyzing students’ strengths and weaknesses. Since all the writing pieces that are produced by students are included in the portfolio, both students and teachers can go back to their efforts for reflection and further analysis. These findings were similar to the work of Kaur and Singh (2013) who revealed that the use of portfolio assessment instead of the traditional tests may help teachers to make better judgment and record student learning and at the same time teachers can be able to improve their teaching practices.

The portfolio assessment can be used to boost students’ motivation to write. This latter plays an important role in language learning. Many teachers are used to measure students’ productions once at the end of the course. This method can be very stressful and discouraging to students. However, if portfolio assessment is well used, students can see the course of their own growth throughout the process of writing rather than being compared to others and clearly see their strengths as well as their weaknesses. In this way, students become less intimidated by the process of writing which encourages them to write more frequently.
The majority of teachers (90%) perceived the portfolio assessment as a good way to help students develop abilities to self-assess their own work and allow them the opportunity to voice their opinions about their productions. Others indicated that portfolio assessment can raise students’ linguistic awareness when revising their writing pieces and helps them monitor the strategies that they were taught. One of the informants also indicated that portfolio assessment allows students the opportunity to understand why writing is emphasized as process and a revision progress during which ideas become refined and developed. This means that portfolio assessment helps teachers to teach revision, and makes students think of writing as work in progress.

To conclude the discussion, findings of this study are in agreement with the existing studies in the literature which revealed that portfolio assessment methods can enhance students’ writing achievements. It is also in line with all the findings showing the usefulness of involving students in the process of their own assessment. However, there were some points of divergence since these findings are considered within the realm of the selected population in a given time and period, as well as the methods used.

Conclusion

The data gathered from students’ questionnaire, teachers’ questionnaire and interview reveal that students’ writing proficiency has not been developed. These findings show that students still have difficulties in writing mainly in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and the organization of ideas. Furthermore, the results also support the importance of portfolio assessment in enhancing the writing performance of master one students in this department. Both students and teachers have positive perceptions and attitudes towards portfolio assessment. Students reported that portfolio assessment can improve their writing by enhancing their linguistic awareness and helping them better monitor their writing strategies. On the other hand, teachers indicated that portfolio assessment allows students to self-assess and reflect upon their productions and helps them become autonomous writers. Consequently, the aforementioned confirmed the hypothesis and provided answers to the research questions stated earlier in this dissertation.
General Conclusion

The ability to write effectively in a second or foreign language is considered as an important skill for success. However, most students at the department of foreign languages at Biskra University still have difficulties to write a good essay without mistakes. Therefore, we found this issue worth investigating and we aimed to prove that the use of portfolio assessment would bring about improvements in students’ writings.

Thus, the first step in doing so was to review the literature. This latter provided details on the emergence of portfolio assessment particularly in writing classes. In addition, it provided better understanding of this technique and its underlying principles. It was indicated that portfolio assessment can be an effective tool that not only improves students’ writing abilities, but also makes them autonomous learners able to take charge of their own work. However, to get the most out of this technique, it should be combined with the process approach to teaching writing because this latter encourages students to improve their cognitive skills as they construct their portfolios for evaluation. These skills are essential for problem-solving and decision making. In addition, feedback possibilities are increased between the teacher and students and this can improve students’ writing performance.

Driven by such beliefs, this study investigated students and teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards portfolio assessment through the use of two research instruments, questionnaires and interviews. The obtained results indicated that both students and teachers showed positive perceptions and attitudes towards the use of portfolios in writing. In addition, the findings indicated that portfolio assessment can help students develop skills in analyzing their abilities and remediating their writing performance mainly in terms of grammar, vocabulary and organization. This means that such technique can offer teachers the ability to prepare a generation capable of self-assessment and critical thinking. These results confirm to some extent the hypothesis formulated in this research that portfolio assessment has a positive impact in enhancing students’ writing performance.
This study attempted to give new insights to teachers and students about the importance of portfolio assessment and its effectiveness in developing the writing skill. Nevertheless, it is undisputable that any research runs the risk of incorrect generalizations and of some biases and this research is no exception since it is limited to specific sample of teachers and students in the Department of Foreign Languages at Biskra University. Finally, the accumulated results do not stop the researcher’s drive to explore new areas of concern. Therefore, this research work is still far from being all-embracing and needs to be enriched in further researches.

**Implications of the Study**

The aforementioned findings and discussions have several important implications. First, portfolio assessment plays a significant role in incorporating students’ opinions and suggestions into decision making. Therefore, syllabus designers can obtain some insights in designing appropriate syllabus. In addition, given that portfolio assessment can motivate students to examine their writing more carefully resulting in improved writing abilities, teachers need to consider making portfolio assessment a part of their teaching process in order to facilitate better learning of writing.

Second, students need help to become autonomous learners able to take responsibility over their work. Therefore, portfolio assessment can be used to teach students how to learn for themselves. Additionally, the data of the study revealed that students need help and training for accurate self-assessment and self-reflection because they were not accustomed to set their own learning goals. Therefore, training sessions on the use of portfolio assessment should be provided, and the steps of selecting, reflecting, revising and evaluating the products should be emphasized during these sessions.

Third, portfolio assessment raises students’ consciousness and awareness of their own learning strategies and helps them develop some kind of criticality and reflectivity towards what and how they are taught and how they learn. Therefore, this technique can pave the way for teachers to help their students proceed towards meaningful learning away from memorization which is an inadequate technique. According to Puckett and Black (2000), one of the most important goals of portfolio assessment is to guide students towards meaningful, challenging and progressive learning experience.
Fourth, successful introduction of portfolio assessment depends also on teachers training. In order for this form of assessment to be effective, teachers need to be trained on the various aspects of this method. Just as teachers were trained in their specific discipline, they need also some training about the process of portfolio assessment. If teachers are simply given directions to implement portfolio assessment and obliged to do so without proper preparation, there would be great difficulties and the whole process will be doomed to failure.

Fifth, reading and writing are complementary skills. Therefore, there is a need to integrate the reading skill in the writing course. This can be done by incorporating reading activities that can help students extend their knowledge and support them while writing their drafts. In addition, teachers should enlighten their students that without reading, they will not be able to develop their writing abilities. In this way, students may realize the importance of reading for writing and become more willing to read.

Finally, the large number of students in the same class hinders teachers from providing the necessary feedback for all the students or making conferences with them. This is shown in the teachers’ responses in the questionnaire in which they complained about the overcrowded classes. Therefore, the number of students should be decreased to thirty in each group so that students would have more opportunities for interaction and feedback either from the teacher or their peers.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has some limitations. The first limitation is time constraints. This study was conducted over a space of one semester. This did not allow the researcher to use different tools or deal with larger sample of students and teachers. The second limitation resides in the fact that this study is confined to students of English at Biskra University. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalized to all students of Algeria or elsewhere.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The following suggestions are presented for those who are willing to contribute to the present study.
- First, this study was conducted to university level students. It can be fruitful if other research on the same issue is extended to pre-university level students such as high school students.
- This study was conducted to investigate the role of portfolio assessment in improving students’ writing. It can be a good idea for the interested researchers to investigate the effect of using portfolio assessment on other language skills such as listening, reading and speaking.
- A further area for research can be to investigate the relationship between gender and portfolio assessment to check the possible difference between male and female students’ performances.
Appendices

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Appendix 1

Students’ perceptions of writing and portfolio use questionnaire

Dear student,

This questionnaire serves as a data collection tool for a master degree in applied linguistics. It investigates the importance of portfolio assessment in enhancing master one students’ writing ability. Your answers will be of great help for us. Therefore, would you please tick the appropriate answer or give your own as sincerely as possible as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation.

Thank you for your cooperation.

1. General information

1. Do you like studying the English language?
   a. Yes □
   b. No □
   Say why? .........................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................

3. What is your major purpose in learning English?
   a. To communicate with people □
   b. To get a job □
   c. To go for further studies □
II. Students’ perceptions of writing

1. Do you believe that writing is important as a language skill?
   a. Yes
   b. Of course
   c. Not really
   d. No

   Say why? ...........................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................

2. Do you believe that writing is
   a. Very easy
   b. Easy
   c. Difficult
   d. Very difficult

3. How would rate your level in writing?
   a. Highly proficient
   b. Proficient
   c. Adequate
   d. weak

4. Please, indicate the difficulties you face in writing
   a. Grammar
   b. Vocabulary
   c. Organization
   d. Flow of ideas
   e. Nature of the topic

5. What do you suggest to overcome these difficulties?
   a. seeking teacher’s help
   b. additional sessions
   c. doing more practice
   d. All of them

   Other? ...........................................................................................................................
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II. Students’ Perceptions of Portfolio Use

1. Do you know what a portfolio is?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   If yes, do you use it? ........................................

2. Did your teacher encourage you to keep a portfolio?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Do you like having a portfolio?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   Say why? ......................................................................................................................

   ..............................................................................................................................

4. What do you think the purpose of keeping a portfolio is?

   ..............................................................................................................................

   ..............................................................................................................................

5. What do you include in your portfolio?
   a. Drafts
   b. Best compositions
   c. Both

6. How often do you read the compositions in your portfolio?
   a. Everyday
   b. A few times a week
   c. Once a week
   d. Few times a month
   e. Once a month

7. Do you think that the use of portfolios will motivate you to write?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   Say why? ......................................................................................................................

   ..............................................................................................................................

   ..............................................................................................................................
8. Do you think that assessing a portfolio would help you improve your writing ability?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐

   If yes, please explain how? .................................................................
   ...........................................................................................................

9. Do you believe that portfolio assessment contribute to your
   a. Grammar ☐
   b. Vocabulary ☐
   c. Organization ☐
   d. All of them ☐

   Others? ........................................................................................................
   ...........................................................................................................

10. If you want to add anything concerning portfolio assessment, please do (comments, suggestions…).
    ...........................................................................................................
    ...........................................................................................................
    ...........................................................................................................
    ...........................................................................................................

    Thank you for your cooperation
Appendix 2

Teachers’ perceptions of writing and portfolio assessment questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire serves as a data collection tool for a master degree in applied linguistics. It investigates the importance of portfolio assessment in enhancing master one students’ writing ability. Your answers will be of great help for us. Would you please tick the appropriate answer or give your own whenever it is necessary.

Thank you for your cooperation

Herihiri Wafa

I. General information
1. Degree:      
2. Experience in teaching written expression module            
3. Experience in teaching written expression module to master one students

II. Teachers’ Perceptions of Writing
1. How would you rate master one students’ level in writing?
   a. very good
   b. good
   c. average
   d. weak

   why ? ............................................................................................................................
   ............................................................................................................................

2. what are the reasons behind students’ weaknesses?
   ............................................................................................................................
   ............................................................................................................................

3. which approach are you using to teach writing?
   a. product approach
   b. process approach
   c. others.
4. How do your students write?
   a. Individually
   b. With a partner
   c. In groups

Which do you prefer most and why? .................................................................
.................................................................................................................
.................................................................................................................

5. Do you encourage your students to talk about their writing or read it to the class?
   a. Always
   b. Sometimes
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

6. How do you respond to your students’ writing?
   a. Make corrections
   b. Respond verbally
   c. Give marks

7. What do you think of the current method used in teaching and assessing writing?
.................................................................................................................
.................................................................................................................
.................................................................................................................

8. What suggestions can you make to improve students’ writing ability?
.................................................................................................................
.................................................................................................................

IV. teachers’ Perceptions of Portfolio Assessment

1. What is your attitude towards portfolio assessment?
.................................................................................................................
.................................................................................................................
2. Did you use this technique before?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐
      Why?...........................................................................................................
      ...........................................................................................................
      ...........................................................................................................

3. How do you find the use of portfolios in writing?
   a. Beneficial ☐
   b. Not beneficial ☐
   c. Don’t know ☐

4. Do you think that portfolio assessment can improve students’ writing abilities?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐
      If yes, in which areas? .............................................................................
      ...........................................................................................................
      ...........................................................................................................
      ...........................................................................................................

5. Do you think that the use of portfolios in writing can change the way students perceive writing?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐
      If yes, explain how?
      ...........................................................................................................

6. In your opinion, can portfolio assessment encourage students to write and self-assess their writing?
   a. Yes ☐
   b. No ☐

7. What other improvements, if any, can portfolio assessment have on students’ writing?..............................................................
   ...........................................................................................................
   ...........................................................................................................
   ...........................................................................................................

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8. Do you think that portfolio assessment is a practical solution?
   a. Yes □
   b. No □
      Say why?........................................................................................................
      ........................................................................................................
      ........................................................................................................

9. If you want to add anything concerning portfolio assessment, please do
   (comments, suggestions…).
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................

   Thank you very much for your help
Appendix 3

Teachers’ Interview

1- What do you know about portfolio assessment?

2- What are the benefits of using portfolio assessment?

3- Who would benefit the most from portfolio assessment?

4- Would you like to implement portfolio assessment in your class?

5- What suggestions do you have for improving students’ writing?
ملخص

تعتبر الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية من المهام الأكثر تعقيداً وتحدياً لتعلم اللغة لما تتطلبه من ممارسة وجهد.

ذلك يعاني معظم الطلبة الجزائريين من صعوبات في التمكن من الكتابة بها من جميع النواحي. سعت هذه الدراسة للتحقق من أهمية استخدام تقنية (الحافظة) لتحسين مستوى الكتابة للطلبة سنة أولى ماستر قسم اللغات الأجنبية بجامعة بسكرة. لكي تثبت أو ترفض الفرضية أن تقنية (الحافظة) لها أثر إيجابي في تحسين كتابات الطلاب.

استعمل نموذجان استطلاعيان. الأول لأساتذة التعبير الكتابي (10 أساتذة) والثاني لمجموعة من طلبة السنة أولى ماستر متكونة من 150 طالباً. كما أجريت مقابلتين مع أساتذتين من نفس المجموعة التي شاركت في الاستطلاع. التدفق النتائج المحصلة عليها في النموذجين الاستطلاعيين إن استعمال تقنية (الحافظة) مفيد في تحسين كتابات الطلبة. إضافة إلى ذلك فإن نتائج المقابليتين أكدت مصداقية النتائج المحصل عليها سابقاً وأثبتت مدى تأييد الأساتذة لهذه التقنية. باختصار كل من الأساتذة و الطلبة أكدوا أهمية استعمال (الحافظة) ومدى فعاليتها في تطوير قدرات الطلبة الكتابية وبالتالي تمكنهم من استعمال اللغة و نقل الرسائل المناسبة.