

STUDENTS VIEWS ON USING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN EFL WRITING COURSES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore views of prep-school students towards portfolio assessment in their writing courses. It has also intended to find out exam preference of the participants. The participants of the study are 140 Turkish EFL students enrolled in the intermediate and upper intermediate prep classes at the School of Foreign Languages of Anadolu University. A portfolio attitude survey, semi-structured interviews with the participants and their instructors, and two open ended questions form the basis of the study. The results indicated that the subjects of this study generally prefer to be evaluated by the traditional paper and pencil tests; however, most of the subjects believe that portfolio assessment also contributes to their English learning processes. It was also found out that a number of the subjects have negative attitudes towards portfolio assessment in their writing courses.

Keywords: *Portfolio assessment, portfolio, student views*

ÖĞRENCİLERİN İNGİLİZCE YAZMA DERSLERİNDE KULLANILAN ÇALIŞMA DOSYASI DEĞERLENDİRME İLE İLGİLİ GÖRÜŞLERİ

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce hazırlık sınıflarında okuyan öğrencilerin yazma derslerinde çalışma dosyası (portfolyo) değerlendirmesi ile ilgili görüşlerini araştırmaktır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda çalışmaya katılan öğrencilerin sınav tercihlerini de belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın evreni, Anadolu Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu Hazırlık sınıflarının orta (intermediate) ve orta üzeri (upper-intermediate) düzeylerde okuyan 140 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Çalışmanın verileri, bir Çalışma Dosyası tutum sorması, katılımcı ve onların öğretmenleri ile yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve katılımcıların iki açık uçlu soruya verdikleri cevaplardan elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, bu çalışmaya katılan öğrencilerin çoğunun çalışma dosyası ile yapılan değerlendirmenin onların İngilizce öğrenme süreçlerine katkı sağladığına inandıklarını ancak genellikle alışlagelmiş kağıt-kalem türü sınav tiplerini tercih ettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bir başka deyişle, katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu genel eğilim olarak yazma derslerinde çalışma dosyası ile değerlendirmeye karşı olumsuz tutum sergiledikleri görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çalışma Dosyası Değerlendirme, Çalışma Dosyası, Öğrenci Görüşü*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Evaluating student achievement and current knowledge during or after teaching and learning process has a great role in education. Basically, evaluation supplies useful data both for teachers and learners to adopt an appropriate way to follow in order to get positive output in teaching. What is more, by assessing student performance, teachers can evaluate the weak or strong points of the method or materials that they use in the learning-teaching process, reconsider their way of teaching and make necessary adjustments. As Bachman (1990) asserts "language tests can be valuable sources of information about the effectiveness of learning and teaching". He additionally notes that "language tests are also frequently used as sources of information in evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches to language teaching" (Bachman, 1990; 3)., Assessment procedures, be they formal or informal, help teachers identify program strengths and weaknesses, monitor students' performance and progress, provide grading, and generally motivate students positively.

Nowadays, teaching strategies in language classrooms are shifting from the traditional way of enlightening unacquainted learners solely by transmitting knowledge to what students will need to succeed in the real world. The emphasis of current language teaching strategies includes thinking critically, learning to solve problems, and working and communicating with others. Given this fact, educators take them into consideration and insert them into their curriculum. However, they have realized that it is rather difficult to assess these skills through traditional assessment devices. Therefore, new forms of student assessment are developed in order to demonstrate what students are learning and what they can do with their knowledge. These new forms of assessment, known variously as alternative or authentic measures, require students to perform in some ways such as writing, demonstrating, explaining, or constructing a project or experiment.

One of the alternative assessment procedures is portfolio assessment, an ongoing process, which has gained interest in the field of language teaching. Since portfolio assessment procedure does not evaluate student performance via traditional timed paper and pencil test, or enable teachers to assess their students' performances within a very limited period of time, it is regarded as an ongoing assessment procedure. Gosselin (1998) defines ongoing assessment as "examining and documenting learner progress at certain intervals in the learning process". The aim of portfolio assessment procedure is involving students in making decisions about which pieces of their work should be evaluated and make them independent thinkers or produce individual solutions to problems they face. Unlike the traditional assessment processes, portfolio assessments enable learners to participate in the evaluation of their own works because students can decide the content of the portfolio through the given directions of the instructor. Therefore, Shohamy and Walton (1992: p.14) express that the portfolio assessment in language teaching "is a device used to assess various language samples that the learner compiles".

Portfolio is defined as a regular and well-conducted collection of a student's works that can be considered as the direct evidence of a student's efforts, accomplishments and advancement throughout a period of time. In the broader definition of portfolio, it is considered to be "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits student's efforts, progress, and achievements" (Snively and Wright, 2003; p.3) as well as a teaching tool which helps the development of language skills of the student. As a benefit of keeping portfolio, students represent how well they have learned subjects as well as what they haven't learned yet and what they still need to improve.

It is evident that different assessment forms underline different cognitive abilities and skills. Therefore, different types of assessment procedures play a very significant role in compiling efficient information,

which hints the recent knowledge of learners. The fundamental question to ask when choosing a test is whether it is appropriate for the intended purposes of the course, as well as the learners'. What is more, having an idea about students' attitudes towards measurement type will be a very valuable source in deciding the type of the measurement and in utilizing the measurement instrument.

The literature on language teaching has plenty of studies which inquire attitudes of students on various topics. However, there is little research which has investigated student attitudes towards assessment tools utilized in the measurement process of their performance. Gathering information about EFL students' attitudes on portfolio use might help instructors, administrators and students in terms of an effective teaching and evaluation procedure.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature of language teaching, a number of studies have been conducted to determine the attitudes or opinions of language students. However, a review of the literature illustrates that there is little research conducted to investigate the use of portfolio with EFL students. As Song and August (2002) underline, the literature is rich in the discussion of the important issues raised by portfolio assessment and the development of portfolio assessment programs, however, it has not been much enlarged by quantitative research. As for the screening of articles in portfolio literature published in the last decade, Herman and Winters (1994: 48) argue that few articles "report technical data or employ accepted research methods".

One of the recent experimental studies dealing with portfolio assessment by Barootchi and Keshavaraz (2002) examined whether portfolio assessment contributes to EFL learners' achievement or not. Regarding this purpose, they conducted a research and compared two EFL classes' writing assessment scores. In one of the classes, students' writing skills were evaluated through "teacher-made tests" and through portfolio assessment in the other. The findings of their work indicate that portfolio assessment contributed to Iranian EFL learners' achievement positively. In this study, while both groups of subjects were taught using the same methods of instruction, the group that was provided with the portfolio assessment (the experimental group) not only benefited from their teacher's reflections and comments on their learning, but also gave the teacher a clearer picture of their learning status which positively affected the whole instruction. The researchers found out that portfolio assessment is a promising testing and teaching tool for teachers which can be used in conjunction with teacher made tests to provide continuous, ongoing measurement of students' growth needed for formative evaluation and for planning instructional programs.

Similar results were also seen in Caner's (2002) study, in which he aimed to provide an alternative assessment instrument for young EFL learners. Caner (2002) compares two 4th grade classes in a state primary school in terms of language learning and performance evaluation. In one of the classes, portfolio was used both as an assessment instrument and a language development file, and traditional assessment instruments in the other class. When the student achievements were compared, it was found that the subjects in the portfolio class were more successful than the other class. These findings revealed that portfolio is a proper assessment instrument and an effective teaching tool for young learners in terms of their developmental stages in language learning.

Another experimental research on portfolio assessment is Song and August's (2002) longitudinal study, which compares the performance of two groups of advanced ESL students' composition course. In their

research, one of the groups' performances was measured by using CUNNY Writing Assessment Test (CUNNY WAT) and the other groups' performance was measured by using portfolio assessment. Their findings were noteworthy in terms of the long-term benefits of using portfolio assessment on students' writing courses. For instance, the success rate of the experiment group, whose performances were examined through portfolio assessment, were higher than that of the control group, whose performance were examined through CUNNY WAT. Moreover, in terms of the long term outcomes of the assessment procedure, students who used portfolio as an assessment instrument in their writing course were more successful in the college exit exam than the other group.

Another recent study on portfolio assessment was conducted by Yang (2003). In Yang's study, students' attitudes towards using portfolio were examined by means of an attitude survey. In this research, the researcher attempted to explore students' attitudes towards the use of portfolio and examined the contributions of portfolio to students' learning. Yang first conducted a pilot study with a class of 42 students and then carried a formal study with a class of 45 college students. Information about students' beliefs and attitudes on portfolio use was collected both by an open ended and a Likert type survey. The findings show that the majority of the students found portfolio assessment as a useful instrument both in learning English and measuring their performance.

Generally, studies and articles related to portfolio assessment have revealed that portfolio assessment is a dependable method for determining readiness to advance to a higher level of instruction. Particularly in the case of EFL and ESL students, portfolio assessment has been established as a reliable basis for important decisions about placement and progress. Nevertheless, due to the fact that students take part in every phase of portfolio assessment such as making decision on what to include in portfolio, generally institutions do not ask students whether they would prefer this time consuming and costly assessment to the traditional timed paper and pencil tests. Therefore, this study intends to inquire students' attitudes towards portfolio assessment in their writing courses.

3. METHODOLOGY

Since little research has been done concerning university students' attitudes towards using portfolio assessment in English as a foreign language environment, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of integrating portfolio as a measurement instrument from the student's perspective. Regarding this aim, the study posed two research questions:

1. What do university students think about the use of portfolios in their EFL class?
2. Which assessment instrument-portfolios or pen and paper tests-do EFL students prefer in their language classes?

3.1. Subjects

The subjects of the research were 140 intermediate level students with different majors enrolled in the prep classes of Anadolu University. Since the gender was not a variable in this study, the subjects were not classified or grouped in terms of gender; however, equal number of students from both genders were selected. The proficiency levels of the students is not considered as a variable either; however, only intermediate and upper intermediate classes were selected since such a great number of students were enrolled only in those classes.

3.2. Instrument for Data Collection

As in the study by Yang (2003), the present study employs a portfolio use attitude survey. The portfolio survey included 32 statements that students rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5), and two open-ended questions to gather additional opinions from the students. The items in the survey inquired students' attitudes related to the use of portfolio in four areas; actual practice in preparing portfolios (4 items), advantages and disadvantages of portfolios (16 items), portfolio sharing activities (5 items) and perception or understanding of the portfolio (9 items).

Since the survey was adopted from a study by Yang (2003), its internal consistency reliability was recomputed and its Cronbach's alpha value was computed as 0.82. This value was the same as in the original study conducted by Yang. The obtained Cronbach's alpha value revealed that the adopted version of the survey also has greater internal consistency reliability.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data were obtained through a portfolio attitude survey, two open-ended questions accompanied by the portfolio attitude survey and interviews with participants and their instructors. Upon obtaining a written permission from the school administration, the survey was administered to all of the 140 subjects in the same school. The total administration time was estimated to be approximately 20 minutes. The subjects were given the survey forms by the researcher and the course instructors during their regular Writing Skills class hour. In addition to the portfolio attitude survey, 10 % of the participants and their instructors were interviewed in order to scrutinize the participants' responses to the survey.

In the data analysis procedure, in order to answer the first research question, the frequencies of each statement were computed by using frequency calculation unit of SPSS 11 software program. Regarding the second research question, students' responses to the open ended questions were categorized as positive and negative towards the use of portfolio and then the frequency of the responds was calculated. The analysis is carried out indicating the five points on the scale. However, to see the positive and negative tendencies of the subjects, the end points were merged for the interpretation. Accordingly, the analysis is interpreted using 'strongly disagree' (SD) and 'disagree' (D) as well as 'agree' (A) and 'strongly agree' together. The obtained results and analyzed data were also examined by another expert in order to provide inter-rater reliability.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to figure out a profile of EFL students' attitudes towards the use of Portfolio in their EFL writing classes. Although some of the items which investigate subjects' perception or understanding of the portfolio reveal students' negative attitudes, in general, it seems that subjects have a clear understanding of what portfolio assessment is. The following table (Table I), which is excerpted from the Survey, sums up the participants' awareness of the portfolio assessment.

Table I. Participants' awareness about the portfolio

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
1. Compiling a portfolio requires a clear organizing concept.	0	10	33.6	38.6	17.9
4. I feel the appearance of the portfolio (including its cover and design) is important	4.3	26.4	25.7	31.4	12.1
7. I have a clear concept about how to compile a portfolio.	0	15	28.6	45.7	10.7
13. I feel the content of the portfolio (including its organization and details) is important	2.1	20	30.7	37.9	9.3
17. Preparing a portfolio requires good computer skills and artistic talent.	18.6	37.1	19.3	14.3	10.7
19. I think reflection and self-evaluation is the most important part of the portfolio	6.4	24.3	40.7	24.3	4.3
20. The handout's introduction to the portfolio was not clear enough	2.9	28.6	52.1	7.9	8.6
24. Looking at previous student's portfolio samples gave me a better idea about portfolios	12.9	25.7	30.7	23.6	7.1
29. I still don't understand why we need to compile a portfolio.	15.7	31.4	21.4	18.6	12.9

* *S D: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

For instance, in the first item of the survey, 56.5 % (total of A + SA) of the subjects emphasize that compiling a portfolio requires a clear organizing concept, and item 7 shows that 56.4 % of the subjects know how to compile a portfolio. Moreover, in item 29 a great number of students (47.1 % ; total of SD + DA) claim that they understand why they need to compile a portfolio, and only 31.5 % of the subjects state that they still don't know why they need to compile a portfolio. Nevertheless, when the subjects' responses to the open-ended questions are considered, where students state that they find compiling portfolio an extra burden on their shoulder, it might be claimed that the subjects reflect their negative feelings towards portfolio by stating that they do not understand why they need to compile a portfolio.

According to the portfolio survey, among the 140 students who answered the survey anonymously, the majority of the subjects felt that portfolio sharing activities contribute to their English learning process. The following table (Table II) figures out the participants' opinions related to the portfolio sharing activities.

Table II. Participants' opinions related to portfolio sharing activities

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
1. The portfolio sharing activities offered me chances to learn good English learning methods from other classmates	7.9	22.1	28.6	30.7	10.7
6. During the portfolio sharing activities, I was able to share useful English learning resources with my classmates.	10	31.4	27.9	20	10.7
14. Portfolio sharing can increase classmates' cooperative learning and mutual growth in English	3.6	24.3	40.7	20.7	10.7
21. The portfolio sharing activities were helpful to my understanding of the portfolio.	1.4	22.1	35.7	37.9	2.9

* *S D: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

For instance, the responses to item 2 demonstrate that 41.4 % of the subjects believe that portfolio sharing activities offered them chances to learn good English learning strategies than other classmates and 30 % of the subjects state that such activities do not contribute to their understanding of English learning strategies. On the other hand, 28.6 % of the subjects say that they have no idea about the pros or cons of portfolio sharing activities in the classroom. Similarly, in item 6, some subjects (41.4 %) express that they were unable to share useful English learning resources with their friends. Item 14 illustrates that 31.4 % of the subjects believe that portfolio sharing activities enhance cooperative learning as well as mutual growth in English, conversely, approximately the same number of the subjects (27.9 %) think that such activities do not promote cooperative learning in the classroom. When students were asked whether portfolio sharing activities were helpful in their understanding of the portfolio preparation procedure, 40.8 % of the subjects affirm that sharing activities contribute to their understanding of the portfolio, and 23.5 % of them find such activities as an unaccommodating process for understanding portfolio preparation procedures. In general, students’ responses to the items related to portfolio sharing activities depict that sharing activities offered them chances to develop useful English learning methods from other classmates; and interaction among the students augmented the understanding of the portfolio. Further analysis of these items through informal interviews with the students and instructors was done, and it was found out that in two of the classes, the subjects do not wholly find chances to share their portfolios with their classmates because of the time limitations (about 56 students which is 40 % of total subjects). This clearly shows why a great deal of subjects state their belief that they have no idea about portfolio sharing activities (Item 2: 28.6%; item 6: 27.9%; item 14: 40.7% and item 21: 35.7%).

Students’ attitudes towards the actual practice in preparing portfolio (Items 5, 9, 15, and 25 in Survey) illustrate that they have positive attitudes towards implementing portfolio into their English learning processes. Table III-a below depicts participants’ attitudes related to the actual practice in preparing portfolio.

Table III-a. Participants’ attitudes related to actual practice in preparing portfolio

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
5. I reflected on and evaluated my learning in each aspect when compiling the portfolio.	7.9	27.1	38.6	18.6	7.9
9. I have completed most of the learning goals I set up in my portfolio.	6.4	24.3	35.7	24.3	9.3
15. The goal I originally set up in the portfolio was too difficult and I couldn’t reach it.	8.6	25.7	43.6	12.9	9.3
25. I added appropriate explanations to the samples or records, which I included in the portfolio.	10	14.3	37.1	26.4	12.1

* *S D: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N:Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

As it is seen in Table III-a, students’ responses to item 9 in the survey show that almost 34 % of the subjects have completed most of the learning goals they set up in their portfolio, and 36 % of them state that they have no idea whether they have completed or not. Additionally, item 15 confirms that 34.3 % of the subjects reach the goal that they originally set up in the portfolio. However, students’ responses to item 5 in the survey show that 35 % of the subjects disagree with the idea that compiling a portfolio reflects and evaluates their learning outcome, and 38 % of them have no idea whether compiling portfolio reflects and evaluates their learning. A similar finding was also obtained through the interviews with students that intend to crosscheck the students’ attitudes towards portfolio assessment. The statements in Table III-b below, which are excerpted from the interviews with students, depict participants’ attitudes related to actual practice in preparing portfolio.

Table III-b. Participants' attitudes related to actual practice in preparing portfolio

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
• Using portfolio in this course contribute my learning experience	12.6	26.3	31.1	24.7	5.3
• The use portfolio for teaching and evaluation was successful.	3.7	22.6	34.7	30	8.9
• I prefer to be evaluated by portfolios.	17.4	34.2	26.3	13.2	8.9

* *SD: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N:Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

In the first statement, most of the interviewees (38.9 %) state that the use of portfolio did not contribute to their experience of learning, however, almost the same number of the interviewees (38.9 %) state that using portfolios in teaching and evaluating was successful in their course. Moreover, 51.6 % of the interviewees state that they do not prefer to be evaluated by portfolios.

The survey items that investigate the advantages and disadvantages of portfolio assessment (Items 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, and 32) give a clear picture. Most of the subjects find portfolio assessment as a favorable instrument in both assessment and teaching. Table IV-a depicts the participants' perceptions related to the advantages and disadvantages of using portfolio both in evaluating student performances in writing courses and as a learning tool in language classes.

Table IV-a. Participants' attitudes related advantages and disadvantages of portfolio

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
3. It takes me a lot of time to compile a portfolio.	2.1	19.3	22.9	34.3	21.4
8. The portfolio helped me organize and arrange my English Learning	6.4	16.4	34.3	32.1	10.7
10. The portfolio increased the burden of my study.	2.1	22.9	37.1	20.7	17.1
11. The portfolio allowed me to choose what I like to read or listen to according to my personal interest.	17.1	28.6	32.1	20.7	1.4
12. The portfolio increased my willingness to learn actively.	13.6	27.1	31.4	22.1	5.7
16. The portfolio allowed me to choose how to plan and learn my Learning style	3.6	25.7	42.1	20	8.6
18. The portfolio helped me understand my strengths and weakness in English	10.7	27.1	15	31.4	15.7
22. The portfolio will be of great help to my future independent learning.	14.3	22.9	38.6	17.9	6.4
23. I feel some practices (like listening or speaking) could not be easily presented in the portfolio	19.3	4.3	26.4	40.7	9.3
26. I feel the portfolio can present my learning results.	10.7	15	42.9	18.6	12.9
27. The portfolio made me realize that I can learn anytime and anywhere	13	23	35	22	7
28. Portfolios can show my efforts in learning English outside of the classroom	6.4	19.3	30.7	29.3	14.3
30. When compiling the portfolio, I had a chance to reflect my English learning of this semester	6.4	13.6	43	28	9
31. I feel the portfolio is not helpful to my learning.	20	34.3	15.7	17	13
32. The portfolio helps me to keep the habit of listening to, reading, or writing English regularly	13.6	38.6	21.4	20	6.4

* *S D: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N:Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

For instance, in item 31 of the survey, 54.3 % (total of SD + DA) of the subjects believe that portfolio is helpful to their learning. Similar results are also seen in other items. For instance, item 26 shows that 40.5 % of the subjects feel that portfolio can represent their learning results. Additionally, students' responses to item 18 reveal that 47.1 % of the subjects believe that portfolio helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses in English. Moreover, in item 8, 42.8 % (total of A+SA) of the subjects reflect that portfolio helped them organize and arrange their English learning. However, item 10 shows that some of the subjects, (37.8 %), think that portfolio is a burden and feel that portfolio increased the burden of their study. This result shows similarities with the open-ended questions where some students claim that compiling portfolio is a burden. The reason behind it might be hidden in the learning styles of the students. As a consequence of their mismatching learning styles or lack of autonomous learning strategies, students might find portfolio preparation process as a burden. A further study may investigate the relationship between students' learning styles and portfolio preparation procedures.

According to students' answers to the open ended questions accompanied by the survey as well as some items in the survey, students' comments on the disadvantages can be noted as follows; *“It takes a lot of time”*, *“It is too much trouble, a burden to prepare”*, and *“Portfolios have a big percentage in evaluation procedures of our writing skills”*. Additionally, approximately 18 % of the participants (26 of 140 subjects) stated that there are no advantages of portfolio to their English learning process. Similar attitudes are also predicated in the survey in items 22, 27, 32 (Table IV-a. above); and 6, 11, 12, 14 and 17 (Table IV-b. below).

Table IV-b. Participants' attitudes related advantages and disadvantages of portfolio

Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA*
6. The portfolio is a good tool to help students learn.	11.6	28.9	33.7	16.8	8.9
11. The portfolio helps my future independent learning.	20	31.6	26.8	19.5	2.1
12. My experience of learning through a portfolio in this course has been successful.	12.6	26.3	31.1	24.7	5.3
14. I will use portfolios in my future learning.	7.4	25.3	39.5	19.5	8.4
17. I prefer to be evaluated by portfolios.	17.4	34.2	26.3	13.2	8.9
18. I prefer to be evaluated by paper-and-pencil tests.	11.6	27.9	15.8	31.6	13.2

** S D: Strongly Disagree; DA: Disagree; N:Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree*

When students were asked to compare portfolios as an assessment tool to traditional pen and paper tests (items 17, 18 in Table IV-b.), it is found that only 22, 1 % of the subjects prefer to be evaluated by portfolio and 44.8 % of the subjects prefer to be evaluated by paper and pencil tests. The reason behind it might be that the students are not fully aware of the advantages of portfolio assessment.

In the interview with some of the students about the problems and/or difficulties they encountered when preparing portfolio, they listed several personal or instructional difficulties. For instance, they accused their writing teacher of not paying attention to their good sides in their writings. Furthermore, some

students claim that their instructors do not give them clear explanations before they start to prepare their portfolios. Additionally, the students' responses to the survey items also revealed that either the instructors do not pay enough attention to clarification of the aim and procedure of the portfolio in the writing courses or students do not grasp what they will do in this process. However, when this claim was asked to the writing coordinators of the intermediate and upper-intermediate prep classes, they showed the supplementary book which very explicitly states the goals and preparation procedures of the portfolio. The most striking difficulty may be sharing portfolios with other classmates which might have some positive contributions to other students. The students claim that they had no chance to see a portfolio previously prepared and they generally did not see other people's portfolios. It is because in some classes, portfolios were not presented in front of the other classmates but evaluated by their portfolio advisor. When the reason was asked to the instructors, they said that time constraint might have caused such problems, since there were other instructional and institutional issues needed to be overcome before the semester ends.

Although the nature of portfolio assessment allows students to choose what they like to read or listen to according to their personal interests, which is clearly stated in their supplementary book prepared by prep school writing team, subjects expressed their negative ideas on the use of portfolio in the writing classes in the survey. Students' reaction to item 9 in the survey is also remarkable. Even though students claim that they have completed most of the learning goals they set up in the portfolio, they do not prefer to implement portfolio in their writing classes. Participants' preference in not implementing portfolio in their writing classes was also confirmed by their responses to open-ended questions in the survey, which ask students' beliefs about portfolio. Analysis of the open-ended questions reveals that almost 30 % of the subjects find portfolio assessment as a burden and waste of time. For instance, a student stated, "*I don't want to write the same paper three times and I get really bored while I am writing portfolio*". On the other hand, some of the subjects (41 %) affirmed that the portfolio experience helped them to extend their learning approach and explore new learning materials from the Internet, newspapers, or magazines, instead of just limiting themselves to learning in the classroom or from textbooks. In terms of the advantages of portfolio, a repeat student's answer to the open-ended question is also worth mentioning:

"I am at the second year in the prep school. Last year there we did not have portfolios here, but this year thanks to portfolios, there is much knowledge I have learned about writing definitely". Although this unique student's belief does not reflect all of the subjects' opinions, it shows that over half of the subjects (51.6 %) are aware of advantages of the implementation of portfolio in their writing courses and therefore, prefer to be evaluated by portfolios (Item 17 in the Survey).

In general, the analyses of the interview data revealed that almost half of the students are aware of advantages of the implementation of portfolio in their writing courses in prep classes, and they believe its effectiveness in the evaluation process.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The aim of this paper was to find out the attitudes of EFL prep class students of Anadolu University towards portfolio assessment. In connection with this aim, the first research question inquired "What do university students think about the use of portfolios in their EFL classes?" The results of the survey

confirm that the subjects of this study generally have positive attitudes towards portfolio assessment. For instance, in terms of understanding the portfolio process, more than half of the subjects (56.4 %) state that they know how and why to compile a portfolio in their writing courses. Additionally, 40.8 % of the subjects assert that portfolio sharing activities were beneficial to their understanding of portfolio preparation process. Such activities contribute to their understanding of portfolio preparation process, whereas, 23.5 % of them state that such activities do not contribute to their understanding of portfolio preparation process. In terms of students' beliefs on and reactions to actual practice in preparing portfolio, only 38.9% of them find portfolio's actual practice as an unsuccessful teaching and evaluation procedure. The reason behind this belief might be a misconception that they find portfolio preparation processes a burden for their studies.

The second research question of this study inquired "which assessment instrument -portfolios or pen and paper tests- do EFL students prefer in their language classes?" The analysis of the survey and open ended questions revealed that slightly over half of the subjects (51.6 %) do not prefer to be evaluated by portfolios, and most of them (44.8 %) prefer to be assessed by traditional paper and pencil tests. Only 3.6 % of the subjects state that they have no idea about the type of the assessment instrument that they prefer in their language classes.

In terms of its advantages and disadvantages of portfolio assessment, 54.3 % of the subjects find it a supportive instrument to their learning process. This belief is also confirmed by responses to the open-ended questions about which 114 of the 140 subjects expressed their positive attitudes towards the advantages of portfolio use in their writing courses.

Under the light of the analysis of the present data, it is observed that the subjects of this study are aware of the advantages and benefits of portfolio assessment in their language classes; however, they find it as an extra duty or burden for their studies. Therefore, almost half of the subjects stated that they do not prefer to be assessed by portfolio assessment. Regarding the fact that students find portfolio assessment as a burden for their studies, the institution or the instructors should provide extra time for the students' portfolio preparation processes. Additionally, the students do not recognize that portfolio is a "creation" (Cook-Benjamin, 2001) and needs extra attention in every phase of it. Therefore, students should be instructed about portfolio preparation process. Moreover, instructors should display some sample portfolios during this portfolio preparation instruction process. Additionally, students should be encouraged to present their portfolios to their teachers in front of the other classmates and instructors should provide adequate time for this sharing activity.

The present study reflects Turkish EFL students' attitudes and beliefs on portfolio assessment. The results have shown that participants find portfolio as a supportive instrument that load them extra duties while compiling it. However, portfolio either as an assessment technique or as a writing task in EFL classes requires students to re-examine their work over and over again and think critically about their products. The responses of the subjects in this study reveal that students believe the benefits of compiling a portfolio in their writing courses. However, they believe that portfolio assessment load them extra duties and responsibilities which they are not as familiar with as they are with traditional paper and pencil tests. Therefore, students should be informed in advance about its benefits and advantages as well as its possible disadvantages. Furthermore, students should be instructed on autonomous learning strategies which might help them to understand the process of portfolio



preparation. It is because students' learning styles and their being autonomous learner play considerable role in the implementation of portfolio into the teaching-learning process.

The integration of portfolio into learning and student assessment process needs careful planning. It needs time to prepare for evaluation, presentation, peer evaluation and completing the final evaluation by the instructor. In order to integrate portfolios into English courses, instructors and/or institutions should give students the concept of autonomous learning. Additionally, instructors should encourage students to implement portfolio in order to show their achievement throughout the learning process. Moreover, maybe the most important aspect is that instructors or institutions should clearly explain to students the advantages of preparing portfolio both as a learning tool and as an alternative assessment instrument.

As with the implementation of most new methods about which students' experience is unknown, the initial level of disappointment is predictable. However, it is commonly agreed by testing experts that portfolio assessment is one of the good assessment tools that reflects students' performances over a period of time. Additionally, the relevant literature shows that portfolio is a good tool that helps raise students' awareness on learning strategies which facilitate their learning process and enhances their self-directed learning. Therefore, a further study which investigates the relationship between students' learning styles and portfolio procedure should also be conducted and portfolio preparation process should be accommodating its results.

As a final suggestion for the further studies, it can be claimed that portfolio assessment in EFL contexts requires further studies that compare the usefulness and benefits of this assessment tool with control and experimental groups. For instance, students' achievements can be compared with their students' accomplishments using both portfolio assessment and traditional assessment and concerning the findings of further studies portfolio assessment can be offered as an exit exam for EFL students for their prep classes.

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