Portfolio Assessment Strategy as Authentic Evidence of Writing Skills Performance in Grade 8 English

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ABSTRACT: Writing is an important part of communication. It allows one to communicate with a wider audience with greater understanding and simplicity. However, poor writing skills have a significant impact on a student's ability to communicate with others. The writing process itself interferes with learning for a student who is struggling with a writing problem. The purpose of the study was to find out if using the portfolio assessment strategy in terms of reflective journal writing and picture series will be an effective writing strategy in improving writing skills performance in Grade 8 English. Specifically, it was geared towards answering the following questions: 1. What is the frequency and percent distribution of the students' scores in English Writing? 2. What is the mean pretest score of the respondents before utilizing the portfolio assessment strategy in writing? 3. What is the mean posttest score of the respondents after using the portfolio assessment strategy in writing? and 4. Is there a significant difference in the pretest and posttest of the students in writing before and after using the portfolio assessment strategy in writing? Results revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean pretest and posttest scores of the respondents in writing activities using the portfolio assessment strategy.

KEYWORDS: reflective journal, portfolio assessment strategy, picture series, writing skills

INTRODUCTION

Writing is important part of communication skill. It is one of the competencies on which students should have a solid foundation. The students' writing skills are equally important as other macro skills such reading, listening, speaking, and viewing. Students must be competent at using the structure of language and vocabulary in writing activities. Moreover, writing is a vital aspect of communication. As compared to face-to-face interaction, skillful writing skills enable one to connect with better clarity and ease to an even larger audience. Correspondingly, writing skills should be practiced over time.

In addition, writing entails more than simply being able to write literally. Writing requires someone to develop and improve their writing skills, which include mastery of vocabulary and grammar skills, as they will be the foundation of their ability to communicate in both written and spoken English.

Poor writing skill extremely affects the student's way of communicating with someone. For a student who is struggling with a writing problem, the writing process itself interferes with learning. The proper use of capitalization and punctuation has also been considered when evaluating writing ability. The inability to comprehend the meaning of words, phrases, and paragraphs leads to writing issues. Additionally, the complexity of the writing is increased the students arrange their ideas. One must demonstrate their capacity for clear, concise communication of their ideas to the reader. As the researchers Hikmah, Akmal, and Buffe (2019) [1] stated, writing is a complex process that allows authors to communicate their thoughts and ideas.

To address today's writing problems among students, a well-planned writing instruction plan should be developed, and various strategies, such as the use of verb tenses and subject-verb agreement, as well as writing mechanics, which deal with capitalization and punctuation, must be used, and exposed to grammar correctness. The organization and content of ideas, including how thoughts are distributed in the introduction, body, and conclusion, as well as how students express their ideas,

The teacher must consider every component of writing skill. Furthermore, writing technique is one of the factors to be considered in evaluating the student's writing ability. Through portfolio assessment strategy, the student can become acquainted with the weak points that they should master and place more emphasis on. Thus, the study on the use of portfolio assessment strategy was conducted to support the hypothesis.

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite the Department of Education's strong commitment to improve the quality of education through years, data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019, the Philippines showed dismal results in writing literacy, with 45 percent of students having limited ability to present their ideas in writing and only 1% being able to write cohesive texts with detailed ideas and a good range of vocabulary.

Moreover, since writing is a complex process, it requires thorough review of the writing activities of the students. According to Adas and Bakir (2013) [2], students do not write very often, and the majority of what they do write is for class. The most important aspect of writing exercises is that students must be personally involved for the learning experience to be valuable. Encourage student participation in the exercise while also refining and expanding writing skills.

It is undeniably true that the past two years had a significant impact on the students' ability to grasp what was expected of them. The Bitin Integrated National High School, in Bitin, Bay, and Laguna, has six sections of Grade 8. The researcher found out that students find it difficult to construct their own sentences, especially when doing so necessarily involves sentence construction. Additionally, it was discovered that some students did not know how to use proper punctuation and that they incorrectly capitalized some proper nouns, such as "Laguna," which they wrote with lowercase letters, which is "laguna." Their sentences also do not follow the conventions of English sentence structure. They have trouble using many of the verb tenses when writing grammatically. Many of them have difficulty with verb tenses and subject-verb agreement. For example, Mary (work, works) at a convenience store. They chose "work" as the answer. These are just some observable instances that prove that they need more focus to develop their writing skills.

Furthermore, students are encouraged to submit written outputs and reflections, teachers can track their progress using portfolio assessment strategy. This portfolio strategy is believed to be effective in improving the writing skills of the students through exposure to varied writing exercises in the class. Moreover, consistent monitoring and checking of the students output that are compiled with all the feedbacks given by the teacher encourage students to write and improve their sentences and paragraphs. It is for this reason the researcher conducted the study to find out if the student's writing skills will improve using portfolio assessment strategy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to find out the effect of portfolio assessment strategy in enhancing the English writing skill of Grade 8 students of Bitin Integrated National High School, School Year 2022-2023.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

One group pretest-posttest experimental research design was utilized in this study.

Two writing techniques, specifically reflective journal writing, and picture series were used to measure how well the grade 8 students' writing skills performance in terms of grammar consistency, content, organization of ideas, and writing mechanics.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study belong to one section with thirty (30) students in Grade 8 at Bitin Integrated National High School, District of Bay, Division of Laguna, School Year 2022-2023. Total enumeration technique was employed in determining the number of respondents for the purpose of the study.

Research Instrument

An adapted-modified questionnaire was used as the main tool in gathering the necessary information. The adapted-modified questionnaire highlights the writing skills namely: grammar consistency, content, organization of ideas, and writing mechanics. And used as the constructed as the pre-test. The same instrument was used as posttest only with some modification to avoid familiarity with the questions given. The instruments have undergone the pilot testing and item analysis to check the internal validity and reliability of the tests. Moreover, it was validated by the experts in the field of teaching language and reading composed of one Teacher III, and Learning Area Coordinator, and two Teachers II, all from the respondents' school.

Research Procedure

Before the conduct of the study, the researcher prepared the lesson exemplars as a guide in the process of the experiment. These lesson exemplars served as a guide for the researcher on what to instruct the students. The lessons were taken from the Department of Education's Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). It was followed by the preparation of the instrument that was used in the conduct of the pretest before and the posttest after the teaching of the lessons, where the two activities were used under the portfolio assessment strategy.

For the external validity and reliability of the instrument used, it was validated by the experts and has undergone pilot testing and item analysis for the refinement of the instrument.

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After the said validation, a letter was sent to the school principal seeking permission to conduct this study. Upon approval of the request, the researcher also asked permission from the learning coordinator of the English Department to allow her to give pre-test to the Grade 8 students. During the utilization of the portfolio assessment strategy, the teacher instructed the students for four weeks: two weeks on reflective journal writing and two weeks on the picture series. There are three sets of writing activities for each portfolio assessment strategy. These writing activities were given alternately. For the picture series, the students constructed one or two sentences based on how they interpreted each picture. From that constructed sentence, they also composed meaningful paragraphs. In addition, for the reflective journal writing, they also composed paragraphs that also discussed their individual experiences based on the topics assigned to them. The students are encouraged to finish their writing activities within the school. The teacher also provided feedback following the submission of the writing activities.

Posttest was given to the respondents after the execution of the lesson and the scores obtained were recorded, tabulated, and compared, to determine if there is significant difference in the skills performance of the students before and after utilizing the portfolio assessment strategy. It was then submitted to the statistician for statistical analysis and interpretation of the data.

Statistical Treatment of Data

To determine the writing skills levels of Grade 8 students before and after exposure to portfolio assessment strategy, the researcher used t-test of difference for one sample t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writing Skills Performance of the Students

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Pretest Scores of the Students in Writing Before Using the Portfolio Assessment Strategy

Scores	Grammar Consistency		Organization of Ideas		Content		Writing Mechanics		Verbal Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
9 – 10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 – 8	-	-	5	16.7	4	13.4	6	20.0	Good
5 – 6	19	63.3	15	50.0	16	53.3	18	60.0	Good
3 – 4	11	36.7	10	33.3	10	33.3	6	20.0	Good
0 – 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**30**	**100**	**30**	**100**	**30**	**100**	**30**	**100**	

Legend: 8.00-10.00-Excellent, 6.00-7.99-Very Good, 4.00-5.99 – Good, 2.00-3.99 – Fair, 0.00-1.99 – Poor

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of student's pretest scores in writing before using the portfolio assessment strategy in journal writing and picture series of activities. Based on the data above, in terms of grammar consistency, 19 students or 63.3% fall under "good" level of writing skills. This is followed by 11 students or 36.6% of the total population with a "fair" level of writing skill.

In terms of organization of ideas, five students or 16.7% got a "very good" rating level of wring skills indicating that students have the skill in writing. This is followed by 15 students or 50% are under the "good" level of writing suggesting that majority or half of the total population are just having a good level in organizing ideas where it focuses in organizing the ideas or events in the story logically, clearly, and easily. While 20 or 33.3% of the students also got "good" level of writing in terms of writing good sentences and forming main ideas to create an effective paragraph.

As to content, 16 or 53.3% of the students got a "good" rating in writing in terms of constructing ideas and supporting sentences to create a well-organized and effective sentences and paragraphs. This is followed by ten or 33.3% students who have a "fair" level of writing indicating that they have a little difficulty in constructing good sentences turning into effective paragraphs or essays. Lastly, only four or 13.4% of the students got the "very good" performance rating in writing indicating that even before the conduct of the study these four students have better skill in writing content. They can construct sentences with promising ideas and express it into effective paragraphs.

Next indicator of writing skill is the writing mechanics. Based on the results of the pretest above, 18 or 60% of the students have "good" level of performance in writing mechanics. It means that they can use the punctuations, proper indentions and sentence breaks only with certain errors in the written output but still can write a good paragraph. This is followed by six or 20% for "very good" level indicating that the students can write a little better compared to students at good level. However, six or 20% of the respondents got only a "fair" rating in writing which indicates that students still have problems with grammar rules. They still need to be guided by the teacher. Wasilewsky (2022) [3], stated that writing mechanics are important because they assure writers to be understood by their readers. Understanding the mechanics of writing in English allows writers to write with care and to express themselves with accuracy.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Posttest Scores of the Students in Writing After Using the Portfolio Assessment Strategy

Scores	Grammar Consistency		Organization of Ideas		Content		Writing Mechanics		Verbal Interpretation
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
9 – 10	-	-	-	-	1	3.3	6	20.0	Very Good
7 – 8	11	36.7	12	40.0	15	50.0	16	53.3	Very Good
5 – 6	17	56.6	16	53.3	12	40.0	7	23.4	Very Good
3 – 4	2	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	1	3.3	Very Good
0 – 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	30	100	30	100	30	100	30	100	

Legend: 8.00-10.00-Excellent, 6.00-7.99-Very Good, 4.00-5.99 – Good, 2.00-3.99 – Fair, 0.00-1.99 – Poor

Table 2 reveals the frequency distribution of the students' posttest scores in writing after using the portfolio assessment strategy. Based on the figures above, an increase or improvement in the writing skill of the students is very apparent. In terms of grammar consistency, 11 0r 36.7% are in "very good" level of writing from none (0) student during the pretest. After using the portfolio assessment strategy, an increase in number of students in the incredibly good level of writing is evident. It indicates that students have the knowledge of using correct tenses and verb-subject agreement into effective sentences turn into paragraphs. Errors are very minimal. This is followed by 17 or 56.6% who are under the "good" level of writing. Compared to the pretest result, an increase in number shows improvement in the writing skill of the students due to activities and exposure to writing that made them understand how to use grammar in writing effective paragraphs. Rogers (2022) [4] emphasized the importance of grammar consistency in writing. Consistency in writing refers to the way words and ideas are presented in an orderly manner that is logical. Only two or 6.7%still have the "fair" level of writing due to the complication of process in writing. But the results are still remarkable compared to that of the pretest results.

In terms of organization of ideas, the results are also remarkable compared to the results during pretest. Out of 30 students, 12 or 40.0% have reached the "very good" level of writing skills indicating that after exposure to several activities in writing, they have improved in organizing ideas such as expressing thoughts and ideas in paragraphs plus writing the introduction, body and conclusion is easier for them. This implies that the use of portfolio assessment strategy has improved student's writing skills. This is supported by Durga (2018) [5] who emphasized the importance of process approach which focuses on writing exercises from the generation of ideas to writing and gathering of ideas to a finished text or paragraphs. Thus, exposure of students to different writing activities matters.

As to the results of the content indicator, an astounding performance or improvement of the students in writing or expressing their ideas using English is very evident. One student or 3.3% is in "excellent" level of writing compared to none in the pretest. This indicates that the student can write his/her thoughts effectively in English. This is followed by 15 or 50% students under the "very good" level of writing skill performance. This indicates that the students can write sentences into paragraphs without difficulty. Twelve (12) of 40% of students obtained a "good" level of writing indicating that there are still students who have a little difficulty in expressing their thoughts and ideas in good English. But still they can write sentences turning into paragraphs compared to their pretest. Despite the increase or improvement of most of the students in content writing, there are still 2 or 6.7% of students who got a "fair" level of writing skills. This is due to several written activities that sometimes students find it a bit stressful to think ideas to write or could not think much of what topics to express in to sentences which is expected sometimes to students. However, they are still able to get a fair written outputs in the calls activity It is believed that forming main ideas and supporting sentences to turn into effective paragraphs, sometimes hard to some students but easier for others (Sulistyo, 2020) [6].

Lastly, writing mechanics indicator is found to have significant improvement. Based on the results, six or 20% of the students under the "excellent" level of writing indicating that these students made a remarkable improvement in writing. This is followed by 16 or 53.3% of the students who are in the "very good" level of writing skills. This indicates that in terms of writing, they rarely got an error in suing the punctuations when writing a sentence or a paragraph. Thus, improvement is very apparent. Only seven or 24.3% are in the "good" level of writing skill after the exposure to pre-writing activities but the improvement can be deduced from the results of the posttest and pretest scores despite being in the range of good level of writing skills. Out of 30 respondents, one or 3.3% student belongs to "fair" level of writing. This indicates that this student has really a difficulty in using punctuations. But after thorough writing exercises this student may improve after his/her performance of several writing activities.

These results show that portfolio assessment improves writing skills of the students Hoxta and Tahani (2015) [7], since it has significant positive effect on the overall writing ability of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) learners as well as the sub-skills of focus, elaboration, organization, and vocabulary.

Table 3

Test of Difference in the Mean Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Students in Writing

Indicators	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test Standard deviation	Post-test Mean	Post-test Standard deviation	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Grammar Consistency	4.90	1.47	6.53	1.35	1.63	-7.18	29	.000
Organization of Ideas	5.33	1.83	6.60	1.38	1.27	-5.19	29	.000
Content	5.27	1.76	6.93	1.53	1.66	-7.71	29	.000
Writing Mechanics	5.80	1.63	7.77	1.61	1.97	-7.55	29	.000

Legend: *8.00-10.00-Excellent, 6.00-7.99-Very Good, 4.00-5.99 – Good, 2.00-3.99 – Fair, 0.00-1.99 – Poor*

Table 3 shows the results of the test of difference in the mean pretest and posttest scores of the students. Based on the results, there is significant difference between the mean pretest and posttest scores of the students assessed at 0.05 level of significance.

It can be seen from the figures above, that in terms of grammar consistency significant difference is very evident with a p-value of .000 at 0.05 level of significance. This is highly significant indicating that the students can write sentences and paragraphs with proper usage of words, correct verb-subject agreement throughout the paragraphs or essays. This implies that exposure to different pre-writing activities such as reflective journal writing, and picture series can really improve the writing skills of the students based on the results of their pretest and posttest. According to Tabatabei & Assefi (2012) [8], who claimed that portfolio assessment technique or strategy has significant positive effect on the overall writing ability of the learners specially if they are good in grammar. Grammar consistency is important in academic writing since it promotes harmony and clarity within the content by creating a logical flow of the material that is understandable from the reader's perspective. The keys to successfully getting an idea across to readers is ensuring the consistency within the materials in writing (Rogers, 2022) [9]. Moreover, journal writing can help students to become accustomed to writing and writing and can be a constant source of inspiration for writing exercise (Lagan, 2000) [10].

In terms of organization of ideas, it is also found to be highly significant based on the p-value of .000 at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that a significant improvement from the posttest scores can be seen. Thus, the use of portfolio assessment strategy is effective in enhancing their writing skills in terms of organizing ideas. They can write their thoughts and ideas well into an effective paragraph containing introduction, body, and conclusion. According to Pablo and Lasaten (2018) [11], writing is a complex process since it requires a wide range of skills and one of these is organizing ideas. Therefore, reflective writing and journal writing helped them improve their writing skills since they were given opportunity to think about and reflect on what they learned (Fararah, 2012) [12]. Moreover, reflective journals helped students make critical reflections and self-discovery responses to writing topics. Students learned to focus on writing components such as order, unity, coherence, cohesiveness, content, and idea organization through reflective journal writing (Sudirman, Gemilang, and Kristanto's ,2021) [13].

As to content, it can be seen from the figures that significant difference is very evident based on the p-value of .000 at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that students now can express ideas and thoughts in an organized manner with correct sentences into effective paragraphs written in English. The use of portfolio assessment strategy helped them to improve their writing competence. Based on Phothogsunan (2020) [14], who states that portfolio assessment is a collection of students' work that highlights the students' efforts, development, and accomplishments. Furthermore, according to Efendi, Usman, & Muslem, (2017) [15] portfolio assessment is an innovative alternative strategy for assessment that enables you to assess not just the writing outputs but also the writing processes that preceded them. This implies that exposing students to writing activities helped them learn the art of writing. Tyas (2020) [16] revealed how portfolio assessments can support students' independent learning by encouraging them to engage in self-evaluation and reflection, participate actively in peer review sessions, and become more aware of their areas for improvement. Thus, portfolio assessment strategy is an effective means to improve the writing competence of the students.

Lastly, writing mechanics also found to have significant difference with p-value of .000 assessed at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the figures above, an improved written outputs in the posttest were submitted with correct punctuations, proper indentions, and a well-organized sentences/paragraph with correct grammar too. Wasilewsky (2022) [17] argues that the use of writing mechanics is essential for ensuring that readers can understand writers. Understanding the mechanics of writing in English allows writers to write with care and to express themselves with accuracy. When used properly, these mechanics give your sentences the meaning they should have (wiki.ubc.ca.,2022) [18].

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The results of the test of significant difference in the mean pretest and posttest scores of the students only support the claim of the researchers and other authors that using portfolio assessment strategy in the form of reflective journal writing and picture series can improve the writing competence of the students.

According to Singh, et al. (2017) [19], students had a positive attitude toward the use of picture series in guided writing instruction. When teachers integrated pictures as teaching aids into classroom activities to keep teaching and learning from becoming monotonous, the use of picture series in ESL classrooms increased students' motivation and interest.

Ramadhanti, et al. (2020) [20], reflective journal writing is the most effective technique in the writing process because it improves students' motivation, creativity, and critical thinking skills. So far, the reflective journal has taken the form of concise questions designed to identify students' strengths and weaknesses as they progress through the learning process. Thus, this strategy may be used in any writing activities, particularly in English.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
CONCLUSION
Based on the above findings, the following conclusion was drawn:
There is a significant difference in the mean pretest and posttest scores of the students in writing activities using the portfolio assessment strategy, thus the hypothesis is rejected.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Established from the summary of findings and the conclusion previously discussed, the following recommendations are hereby presented.
1. The use of portfolio assessment strategy is found to be effective in improving student's writing competence, thus, teachers may continue using this in their English writing activities.
2. The portfolio assessment strategy may be used by teachers of other discipline in constructing effective paragraphs using the English language.
3. Researchers may find other variables to use in improving other macro skills in language not only in writing skill but also in other macro skills on a wider scale.

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