



## Enhancing EFL students' writing skills through portfolio assessment: Evidence from a remote learning context

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### Abstract

Writing is one of the most complex language skills that EFL learners need to master because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and organizational abilities. In remote learning environments, monitoring students' writing development and providing continuous feedback become increasingly challenging for teachers. Therefore, effective assessment strategies are needed to support students' writing progress. This study aimed to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment on students' writing skills in a remote learning context. The study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants consisted of 32 seventh-grade students from a private junior high school in Singaraja, Bali. Data were collected through writing tests administered before and after the implementation of portfolio assessment. Students were required to write descriptive texts, which were evaluated using a holistic scoring rubric covering content, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that the mean score increased from 73.90 in the pretest to 76.75 in the posttest. Furthermore, the paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two tests ( $p = .001 < .05$ ), indicating that portfolio assessment had a significant positive effect on students' writing skills. The effect size analysis yielded a moderate effect ( $d = 0.373$ ), suggesting that portfolio assessment contributed meaningfully to students' writing development, although other factors also influenced their achievement. The findings highlight the potential of portfolio assessment as an effective assessment strategy for supporting writing instruction and monitoring students' learning progress in remote learning environments.

**Keywords:** portfolio assessment, writing skills, EFL learners, remote learning, authentic assessment

### Introduction

English proficiency has become an essential competence in the era of globalization, where communication across national and cultural boundaries is increasingly common. As an international language, English plays a significant role in education, employment, business, and professional networking. The ability to communicate effectively in English enables individuals to compete in the global workforce, access broader educational opportunities, and establish international connections (Ahmad, 2014). In addition, English proficiency is often considered a valuable asset in the labor market, as many employers prioritize candidates who possess strong communication skills in English. Recognizing the importance of English, the Indonesian government has incorporated English into the national curriculum and introduced it as a subject at various levels of education.

English language learning encompasses four fundamental skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected and contribute to learners' overall communicative competence. Among these skills, writing is often regarded as the most complex and challenging to master because it requires learners to simultaneously employ linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and organizational skills. Unlike speaking, which allows immediate interaction and clarification, writing demands careful planning, drafting, revising, and editing before a final product is produced. Marhaeni and Dantes (2014) argue that writing is a complex language skill involving multiple cognitive and linguistic processes. Similarly, Nunan (2000) defines writing as a process of generating ideas, organizing thoughts, and transforming them into coherent statements and paragraphs. Writing serves as a medium through which language is represented in visual form and enables learners to communicate ideas effectively in academic and professional contexts. Furthermore, writing provides opportunities for learners to develop vocabulary, spelling, and sentence construction skills, making it an important component of language learning (Bishop & Starkey, 2006).

Given the complexity of writing, teachers need to employ appropriate instructional approaches to facilitate students' writing development. Two major approaches commonly used in writing instruction are the



product-based approach and the process-based approach. The product approach primarily emphasizes the final written product and focuses on linguistic accuracy, grammatical correctness, and adherence to specific writing conventions (Palpanadan et al., 2014). In contrast, the process approach views writing as a recursive and developmental activity that involves several stages, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Sun & Feng, 2009). Brown (2004) explains that writing should be understood as a cognitive process in which learners gradually develop and refine their ideas before producing a final text. Therefore, the process approach encourages students to view writing not merely as the production of a final text but as an ongoing learning process that requires reflection, revision, and continuous improvement.

For EFL learners, particularly novice writers, the process approach is considered highly beneficial because writing in a foreign language presents numerous challenges. Students often struggle to generate ideas, organize arguments, and express their thoughts appropriately due to limited linguistic resources. In many cases, learners possess ideas that they wish to communicate but lack sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to express them effectively in written form. Consequently, they require continuous guidance, feedback, and support throughout the writing process. Within the process approach, assessment is not limited to evaluating the final product; instead, it focuses on monitoring students' development and providing feedback throughout the learning process. Latif (2008) argues that process assessment enables teachers to identify students' writing difficulties and learning needs while fostering awareness of effective writing strategies. Moreover, providing direct feedback is essential because it helps learners recognize their strengths and weaknesses and motivates them to improve their writing performance. Guasch and Espasa (2015) further emphasize that constructive feedback plays a significant role in encouraging students to revise and refine their written work.

One assessment method that aligns closely with the principles of the process approach is portfolio assessment. A portfolio is generally defined as a systematic collection of students' written works that demonstrates their learning progress, achievements, and development over time (Fahim & Jalili, 2013). Unlike traditional tests that assess students' performance at a single point in time, portfolios provide comprehensive evidence of learning processes and outcomes. Mahayukti et al. (2018) argue that portfolio assessment offers a more accurate representation of students' writing ability because it captures both the quality of written products and the progress achieved throughout the learning process. Similarly, Eridafithri (2015) highlights that portfolio assessment encourages active participation from both teachers and students by promoting continuous reflection, monitoring, and evaluation. Through portfolio assessment, teachers can track students' writing development, identify areas requiring improvement, and provide timely feedback to support learning.

The relevance of portfolio assessment became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when educational institutions around the world shifted from face-to-face instruction to online learning environments (Ogbonnaya et al., 2020). In Indonesia, teaching and learning activities were conducted through various digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, and SPADA. Although these technologies enabled educational activities to continue, online learning also introduced numerous challenges. Limited interaction between teachers and students, technological constraints, and difficulties in monitoring students' learning progress often reduced the effectiveness of instruction (Agustina et al., 2020). In writing classes, these challenges were particularly significant because effective writing instruction requires continuous feedback, consultation, and revision.

In this context, portfolio assessment emerged as a promising alternative for supporting writing instruction in online learning environments. By collecting and reviewing students' writing products over time, teachers can monitor learning progress despite limited face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, portfolio assessment provides opportunities for students to receive ongoing feedback and engage in reflective learning practices. Domene-Martos et al. (2021) argue that portfolio assessment can effectively bridge the communication gap between teachers and students in online settings by facilitating continuous monitoring and evaluation of learning progress. Therefore, portfolio assessment may serve not only as an assessment tool but also as a pedagogical strategy that supports students' writing development in online learning contexts.

Considering the importance of writing skills, the need for effective assessment practices, and the challenges posed by online learning, further investigation into the use of portfolio assessment is warranted. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the effect of portfolio assessment on students' writing skills in an

online learning environment. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether the implementation of portfolio assessment could contribute to students' writing development and provide meaningful support for writing instruction during online learning.

## Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The design was selected to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment on students' writing skills by comparing their writing performance before and after the implementation of the treatment. In this design, students were administered a pretest prior to the treatment and a posttest after the treatment, allowing the researcher to measure any improvement in students' writing achievement attributable to the use of portfolio assessment.

The study was conducted at a private junior high school in Singaraja, Bali. The participants consisted of 32 seventh-grade students who were selected as the research sample. All students participated in the entire research process, including the pretest, treatment sessions, and posttest. During the treatment period, portfolio assessment was integrated into the writing instruction. Students were required to complete a series of writing tasks, compile their written works in a portfolio, revise their drafts based on feedback, and monitor their own writing progress throughout the learning process.

Data were collected through a writing test administered before and after the treatment. In both the pretest and posttest, students were asked to write a descriptive text based on the given topic. The writing products were then assessed using a holistic scoring rubric consisting of four components: content, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Each component was rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating better writing performance. The rubric was used to evaluate the overall quality of students' writing and ensure consistency in the scoring process.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the mean scores and standard deviations of the pretest and posttest results, providing an overview of students' writing performance before and after the treatment. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity tests were performed to examine whether the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. Subsequently, a paired-samples t-test was employed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores. The hypothesis of the study stated that portfolio assessment has a significant effect on students' writing skills.

## Findings and Discussion

The descriptive statistics of students' writing performance before and after the implementation of portfolio assessment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

| Test     | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|----------|-------|--------------------|
| Pretest  | 73.90 | 7.751              |
| Posttest | 76.75 | 7.509              |

As shown in Table 1, the mean score of students' writing performance increased from 73.90 in the pretest to 76.75 in the posttest, indicating an improvement of 2.85 points following the implementation of portfolio assessment. This finding suggests that students demonstrated better writing performance after participating in portfolio-based learning activities. In addition to the increase in the mean score, the standard deviation slightly decreased from 7.751 in the pretest to 7.509 in the posttest. This decrease indicates that students' posttest scores were relatively more consistent and less dispersed than their pretest scores. Overall, the descriptive statistics provide preliminary evidence that portfolio assessment contributed positively to students' writing development.

To determine whether the observed improvement was statistically significant, inferential analyses were conducted. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity tests were performed to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for parametric analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Inferential Analysis

| Test     | Normality | Homogeneity | t test | Effect Size Test |
|----------|-----------|-------------|--------|------------------|
| Pretest  | .080      | .882        | .001   | .3734            |
| Posttest | .200      |             |        |                  |

The results of the normality test revealed significance values of .080 for the pretest and .200 for the posttest. Since both values exceeded the significance level of .05, the data were considered normally distributed. Furthermore, the homogeneity test produced a significance value of .882, which was substantially higher than .05, indicating that the data met the assumption of homogeneity. These findings confirmed that the dataset was suitable for further analysis using parametric statistical procedures.

Following the prerequisite tests, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between students' writing performance before and after the implementation of portfolio assessment. The analysis yielded a significance value of .001, which was lower than the established alpha level of .05. This result indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, suggesting that portfolio assessment had a significant effect on students' writing skills.

To determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, an effect size analysis was conducted. The result showed an effect size value of 0.373, which falls within the medium category. This finding indicates that portfolio assessment had a meaningful contribution to students' writing improvement. However, the moderate magnitude of the effect also suggests that writing achievement is influenced by multiple factors beyond assessment practices alone. Factors such as students' language proficiency, motivation, writing experience, learning strategies, and teacher feedback may have also contributed to the improvement observed in the posttest scores. Nevertheless, the results provide empirical evidence that portfolio assessment can be an effective approach for supporting students' writing development and monitoring their learning progress over time.

The findings of the present study demonstrated that portfolio assessment significantly improved students' writing skills. The improvement in students' posttest scores indicates that portfolio assessment can serve as an effective assessment strategy for supporting writing development in EFL contexts. One possible explanation for this finding is that portfolio assessment allows students to engage in a continuous cycle of drafting, receiving feedback, revising, and improving their written work. Unlike conventional assessments that focus primarily on the final product, portfolio assessment emphasizes the learning process and encourages students to reflect on their progress over time. As a result, students are given multiple opportunities to identify and correct their weaknesses while gradually developing their writing competence.

The findings are consistent with those reported by Sulistyono et al. (2020), who found that portfolio assessment helped students improve their writing skills through the feedback provided by teachers. Feedback is a crucial component of writing instruction because it enables learners to recognize weaknesses in their written work and make necessary revisions. Through portfolio assessment, students do not merely submit a final piece of writing; instead, they engage in an ongoing process of revision and improvement. The feedback received from teachers serves as guidance that helps students develop better organization, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and content development. Consequently, portfolio assessment creates a learning environment in which writing is viewed as a developmental process rather than a one-time performance.

The positive impact of feedback within portfolio assessment is further supported by the findings of Muin and Hafidah (2021), who reported that students perceived portfolio assessment positively because the comments and suggestions provided by teachers helped them improve their writing performance. In addition to improving writing quality, continuous feedback may also enhance students' confidence as writers. When students receive constructive feedback and observe improvements in their work over time, they become more aware of their



progress and develop greater confidence in their ability to write effectively. This increased confidence may contribute to higher levels of motivation and engagement during writing activities, which ultimately support writing achievement.

Another important explanation for the effectiveness of portfolio assessment is its alignment with the principles of authentic assessment. Unlike traditional assessments that often measure learning outcomes at a single point in time, authentic assessment seeks to evaluate students' abilities through meaningful and real-world tasks. Portfolio assessment allows students to demonstrate their writing development through a collection of written works that reflect actual learning processes and achievements. This characteristic is particularly relevant to the implementation of the Indonesian Curriculum 2013, which emphasizes student-centered learning, authentic assessment, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. As highlighted by Rizavega (2018), the curriculum encourages teachers to employ innovative instructional strategies and authentic forms of assessment to achieve learning objectives and support students' holistic development.

The findings of this study also support the argument that authentic assessment can contribute to more meaningful language learning experiences. Moria et al. (2017) argue that authentic assessment enables students to apply language skills in contexts that resemble real-life situations rather than simply demonstrating knowledge through conventional tests. In writing instruction, portfolio assessment provides opportunities for students to engage in authentic writing tasks, revise their work based on feedback, and document their learning progress. Such experiences may facilitate deeper learning because students are actively involved in the assessment process rather than serving merely as recipients of evaluation. Therefore, portfolio assessment not only measures learning outcomes but also functions as a tool for promoting learning itself.

The effectiveness of portfolio assessment becomes even more significant in remote learning environments, where teachers often face challenges in monitoring students' learning progress. One of the major limitations of remote learning is the reduced opportunity for direct observation and interaction between teachers and students (Gao & Zhang, 2020). In conventional classrooms, teachers can monitor students' writing processes, provide immediate assistance, and observe learners' difficulties directly. However, these opportunities are often limited in online or remote learning settings. Consequently, teachers may find it difficult to determine whether students genuinely complete assignments independently or rely excessively on external sources.

This concern has been widely discussed in the literature on online learning. Reynolds et al. (2020) note that remote learning environments may increase the risk of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, excessive reliance on internet sources, and inappropriate collaboration. In such situations, portfolio assessment provides a valuable alternative because it enables teachers to monitor students' work across multiple stages rather than evaluating only a single final product. By examining successive drafts and revisions, teachers can gain a clearer understanding of students' learning processes and writing development. As a result, portfolio assessment offers greater transparency and accountability compared to conventional assessment methods.

Furthermore, portfolio assessment aligns closely with the nature of writing itself. Writing is widely recognized as a recursive process that requires planning, drafting, revising, editing, and rewriting before a final text is produced. Because writing development occurs gradually, assessment methods should also capture this developmental process. Portfolio assessment addresses this need by documenting students' progress over time and providing evidence of growth across multiple writing tasks. Sutadji et al. (2021) argue that portfolio assessment is particularly suitable for monitoring students' learning processes because it provides comprehensive information regarding their development and achievements. Therefore, the use of portfolio assessment in the present study may have contributed to the observed improvement in students' writing performance by encouraging continuous practice, reflection, and revision.

Although the findings indicate that portfolio assessment had a significant positive effect on students' writing skills, the effect size obtained in this study was categorized as moderate. This suggests that writing achievement is influenced by various factors beyond assessment practices alone. Students' language proficiency, vocabulary mastery, motivation, learning strategies, and access to learning resources may also contribute to their writing development. Nevertheless, the findings provide empirical evidence that portfolio assessment represents a valuable assessment strategy for supporting writing instruction, particularly in remote learning environments



where continuous monitoring and feedback are essential. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to integrate portfolio assessment into their instructional practices to promote students' writing development and foster more meaningful learning experiences.

## Conclusions

The present study investigated the effect of portfolio assessment on students' writing skills in a remote learning environment. The findings revealed that the implementation of portfolio assessment significantly improved students' writing performance, as evidenced by the significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. These results indicate that portfolio assessment can serve as an effective assessment strategy for supporting writing development among EFL learners. By allowing students to collect, revise, and reflect on their written work over time, portfolio assessment provides opportunities for continuous learning and improvement rather than focusing solely on the final product.

The positive findings suggest that portfolio assessment contributes to writing development by facilitating ongoing feedback, encouraging revision, and promoting learner reflection. Through the portfolio process, students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing and are provided with opportunities to improve their work based on teacher feedback. Furthermore, portfolio assessment appears to be particularly beneficial in remote learning settings, where continuous monitoring of students' progress is often more challenging than in traditional face-to-face classrooms. Therefore, portfolio assessment may function not only as an assessment tool but also as a pedagogical strategy that supports meaningful learning and writing development.

Despite the significant improvement observed in students' writing performance, the effect size analysis indicated a moderate effect. This finding suggests that portfolio assessment is only one of several factors contributing to students' writing achievement. Writing performance is a complex construct that may also be influenced by learners' language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, motivation, self-regulation, learning strategies, teacher support, and access to learning resources. Consequently, improvements in writing ability cannot be attributed solely to the assessment method employed.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on alternative assessment in EFL contexts by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in supporting students' writing development during remote learning. From a pedagogical perspective, English teachers are encouraged to incorporate portfolio assessment into writing instruction as a means of monitoring students' progress, providing meaningful feedback, and fostering reflective learning practices. Future studies are recommended to examine additional variables that may influence students' writing achievement and to investigate the relative contribution of those factors alongside portfolio assessment. Such studies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how writing skills can be effectively developed in contemporary learning environments.

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