

Challenges and Needs of ESL Teachers in Implementing Portfolio Assessment as Alternative Assessment in Teaching English

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Abstract: Traditional assessment does not confirm and result in learning. Assessment in Malaysia is now shifting from assessment of learning and for learning to assessment as learning to prepare students to face life beyond classroom to meet global challenges. This study intends to identify the challenges and needs of ESL teachers in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language. Qualitative study specifically online classroom observation and interviews with five ESL teachers were carried in the district of Perak. Findings revealed that the teachers still faced challenges in implementing alternative assessment in teaching English language. These challenges include selecting the content and learning standards to determine assessment activities, selection of authentic assessment, assessing student work based on learning objectives, providing feedback and educating students on using feedback to improve learning. Finally, the findings on teachers' need for portfolio assessment showed that teachers preferred a range of authentic assessments with proper instructions and rubrics to guide them. Teachers expressed the need for training to expose them on the 'what' and 'how' to implement alternative assessment in classrooms.

Keywords: Alternative Assessment, Challenges, Needs, Portfolio Assessment, Teaching English

1. Introduction

One cannot deny that assessment is an integral aspect of the instruction process. This is supported by Davies (2000) who regarded assessment as an instructional tool for fostering learning rather than an event designed only for evaluation and assigning grades (Tajularipin et al., 2021; Giraldo,

2019). According to Stiggins (2006); Pantiwati, and Husamah (2017), assessment is carried out to find out the success of learning, and it gives information regarding students' mixed abilities that can be used as a guide to improve learning for achieving teaching and learning goals. Teachers must constantly create opportunities for students to ask questions and, in response, teachers can provide appropriate feedback to fulfil student needs to make learning more engaging (Ma and Bui, 2022; Boud & Molloy, 2013).

Assessment assists teachers in discovering their students' strengths, weaknesses, multiple intelligences, skills, competencies and learning outcomes so that students are motivated to improve learning. Assessment for learning implies using assessment for providing helpful feedback to learners and teachers for more effective learning outcomes. For today, the focus is more on assessment for learning rather than of learning. Assessment for learning involves two phases. First, teachers can carry out a diagnostic assessment (Singh et al., 2017; Mohtar, 2010). After the diagnostic assessment, teachers can implement formative assessment. Students with poor performance can then be given remedial lessons to enable them to interact and achieve the same as their peers in the class. Teachers can monitor student progress closely. Assessment for learning happens during the learning until the time for summative assessment. Besides that, assessment for learning encourages teachers to give corrective feedback. The key is the teacher delivery method and how learners internalise corrective feedback on performance aimed at future continuation (or formation) of learning (Rahmawati & Yunus, 2021; Box, Skoog, & Dabbs, 2015; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

The ultimate aim of classroom assessment is not just limited to regulating students' strengths and weaknesses but also to suggest and find ways of refining the quality of student learning (Ashraf, & Zolfaghari, 2018; Birenbaum, Kimron, & Shilton, 2011). Teachers can use the evidence gathered based on students' knowledge and learning skills to improve the teaching and learning process. Students need the exposure to how they can take charge and monitor their own learning; in fact, students can be guided to become their own assessors that would lead to autonomous language learning (Sidhu & Lee, 2018). According to Burke (2010), teachers can educate students to set learning goals collectively and collaboratively. Students can share their experiences by monitoring their own learning, explain and provide reasons for what they know, how they learn and how they can use the assessment details to improve their own learning.

In Malaysia, examination is used to test student achievement (Sidhu et al., 2018). No alternative type of evaluation other than examination exists. The examination is only for summative evaluation (Ashipala et al., 2022; Udoukpong & Okon, 2012) to verify that learners truly comprehend and can apply concepts learned in daily life. The centralised examinations force teachers to restrict the curriculum by giving students past tests or teach unnaturally by focusing on more examination-oriented teaching (Bazvand & Rasooli, 2022; Herman & Golan, 1991). Indirectly, students are motivated to take examinations rather than undertake real learning. Since tests are the sole type of evaluation, they should mirror what learners know and can perform (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al, 2021; Mohtar, 2010). Instead, learners make getting A's to be their targets (Arumugham, 2019; Hsu, 2010). They regard academic performance as being straight A students and prioritise excelling in exams instead of learning for knowledge. Purpose of learning is diverted and they memorise and reproduce information without higher order thinking in the examinations. The learning process is lacking and it does not truly reflect achievement since it turned into competition for scores (Phakiti & Isaacs, 2021; Singh et al., 2015; Black & Wiliam, 1998). Analysis of past studies showed that most of the studies were mainly focused on (a) summative assessment, (b) negative washback effect, (c) teacher instructional activities to prepare students for examination and (d) rote-learning. Less attention was given to other forms of evaluation such as portfolio that can assist the students in preparing for life skills that will help them demonstrate the depth and scope of knowledge acquired. Therefore, this study is required to assist teachers in terms of upgrading their teaching by improving their teaching techniques, teaching materials, and assessment techniques in attaining learning outcomes. Portfolio use benefits students as well since it allows them to do quality work as there is no pressure or time constraint for them to complete the work.

1.1 Alternative Assessment

The alternative assessment appropriate for classroom use is one which is formative in nature. Hamayan (1995) defines alternative assessment as comprising techniques used in teaching and assessment embedded into daily learning activities. The term 'alternative' raises the question 'alternative to what?' It is an alternative to traditional examinations. Unlike formative assessment, summative assessment differs through how teachers can use the information about the assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Teachers can refer to several forms of alternative assessment namely portfolios, self-assessments, peer-assessments, performance assessments and diaries. Elliot et al. (1992) identified four characteristics of alternative assessment which are:

- i) enquire students to create, produce or do something
- ii) provide questions that will probe into high-level thinking and problem-solving skills
- iii) apply tasks/activities that represent meaningful teaching and learning activities
- iv) invoke real-world applications

Assessment is formative when the teachers ask or inform the students how they have performed and what their mistakes are and the students act and perform on the information received by making corrections and improvements (Zainuddin et al., 2021). Black and Wiliam (1998) divulge that in formative assessment learners comprehend and act on the information obtained. Evidence of formative assessment producing effects on learning is viewed in some studies conducted. According to Box (2015) who investigated effects of secondary science teachers' formative assessment practices on student achievement and motivation, students showed a high degree of control over their own learning. Formative assessment offers information about how a student is learning, which instruction techniques are effective and matches with the student's learning style.

Bigge et al. (1999) and Pierangelo and Giuliani (2006) assert that teachers can use this information to modify the instructional process or content. For example, teachers can use a portfolio either as a formative or a summative assessment, depending on the purpose of the assessment. Formative portfolios refer to portfolios that show on-going work which is in-progress (Carmean & Christie, 2006), where teachers use this portfolio to evaluate content and student progress; in other words, students' portfolio development process allows teachers to observe students' growth simultaneously while monitoring the learning process (Beck, Livne, & Bear, 2005; Carmean & Christie, 2006). In an authentic assessment context, students are evaluated on how well they achieve in real-world applications or simulations.

Singh and Samad (2013) investigated the portfolio as an assessment tool among lower and upper secondary school students. Their findings showed that teachers improved their teaching and learning strategies through students' self-reflection and self-assessment activities. Teachers also expressed the need to be clear in terms of preparing the portfolio assessment purpose, content and structure which were viewed important to ensure effective student learning. These findings are further supported by Singh and Samad (2013) who reported that students are more engaged when they were given tasks to do in portfolio assessment. Students depend less on rote-learning and showed more efforts to be accountable for their learning. Both teachers and students benefit in the instructional process when portfolio assessment is implemented because students can chart and monitor their own learning with teacher help. Li Bing-rong (2018) employed formative assessment in oral English lessons at a university in China. The researcher taught two classes in which one was exposed to formative assessment mode and the other class was taught using traditional mode. Findings showed that students in subjected to formative assessment became more autonomous and could plan their own learning goals.

Constructivism is a theory that centres on knowledge and learning that focuses real experiences, understanding, discourse, collaboration, and reflection; in other words, it seeks to provide a framework for portfolio as an assessment tool. The central underlying emphasis of constructivist philosophy is that of refining learning by providing environments in which students continuously pursue for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and make investigations reliably (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The constructivist model supports learners to convert information through the construction of novel understandings that result from developing new cognitive reasoning and structures (Gardner, 1991; Jackson, 1986). This

alteration can be neither authorised nor dissatisfied. Teachers have a special role in the constructivist model. The teacher's role is exceptional in the sense that they can inspire students to acquire knowledge by solving problems, constructing learning around key notions. Teachers appreciate students' effort when they share ideas. Learners on the hand must find ways to transfer knowledge to profound understanding by reconsidering past cognitive structures and philosophies. Assessment in the constructivist model is real and takes part naturally when it is in a meaningful context and relative to concerns and problems faced by students (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Authentic assessment is associated to a precise and detailed body of knowledge, as opposed to the traditional tests; it inspires students to exhibit what has been internalised personally through application. Portfolios serves as a vehicle for reliable, meaningful and authentic assessment in a constructivist paradigm. Students' accomplished work are collected over a period of time and can be utilised to demonstrate the amount of learning that has taken place. The tasks of instructing and assessing are inseparable and reciprocally underpinning in constructivism. In other words, assessment through learning and teaching between teachers and students' communications informs assessment. Thus, learning is monitored throughout the process.

1.1.1 Portfolios

The portfolio is selected as an alternative form of assessment in view of the shortcomings of standardised examinations. Tabatabaei (2012) supports portfolio assessment use as a leading alternative assessment approach. Portfolios show students' development progress in phases, self-reflection, achievement in one or more areas (Paulson & Paulson & Meyer, 1991). Portfolios refer to an on-going process that comprise a systematic procedure used by teachers to plan and strategise, gather and analyse a collection of student work. Portfolio assessment allows students to be more autonomous, educates and guides them to be independent learners responsible and accountable for their own learning, make decisions, take part in peer-assessment and self-assessment, reflect on their own work and become dynamic and active learners (Tabatabaei, 2012). The rationale behind portfolio assessment is based on considerations such as the limitation of standardised tests, the complexity of constructs to be measured and the need to have assessment techniques which can be adapted in the ESL classroom to measure higher cognitive skills (Mohtar, 2010). The form of alternative assessment presented here is the portfolio. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the challenges and needs of ESL teachers in implementing portfolio assessment as alternative assessment in teaching English language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The main aim of this study was to find the challenges and needs of the ESL teachers in implementing portfolio assessment as alternative assessment in teaching English language; the situated context, classroom-based assessment practices and in-depth responses of the ESL teachers were required. The researchers selected qualitative research method as it best fits the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2003; Guest et al., 2011). The interviews were scheduled after the classroom observations as a way of exploring and confirming earlier observations and statements in the interview.

3.1.1 Classroom Observations

For the purpose of this study, all the five ESL teachers were observed via online to obtain the data and gain insights into implementing portfolio as alternative assessment. Each teacher was observed twice and each period comprised thirty minutes. The classroom observation took about one to two periods of each teacher depending on their timetable. Through this observation, the researchers were able to understand how the participants implemented portfolio assessment in the way they did and what challenges they faced while implementing portfolio assessment and how these data assisted the researchers to attain a conclusion. The processes involved in implementing portfolio assessment for

teaching English language were carefully observed and the observation data were collected and used to triangulate with the interviews carried for further understanding of this study.

3.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews are viewed as significant source of data in this study as the researchers collected information associated with the thought processes of the ESL teachers' deeper views such as the challenges, experiences and ideas related to implementing alternative assessment in portfolio form. The main aim of an interview is to seek how people view an incident or object. In this study, the researchers interviewed five ESL teachers to collect data on implementing alternative assessment in the form portfolio and to identify their perceived challenges. The ESL teachers were interviewed to understand the emerging pattern of their perceived views for convergence of multiple source data. During the interviews, the researchers used an interview protocol as guiding questions which were less structured to encourage the interviewees to express with greater feelings and thoughts. The interview protocol was piloted to five teachers from a different school before the actual study was conducted to ensure feasibility.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Participant Selection for Classroom Observations and Semi-structured Interviews

Sampling for this study was based on snowball sampling as the researchers had identified individuals familiar with the processes involved in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment that were useful to develop an in-depth study designed for understanding the phenomenon. Five ESL teachers aged from thirty-five to forty-five took part in this study. All these five teachers selected had taught Form 1 for more than ten years. The teachers were contacted via email to get their permission to observe them online. The teachers were also briefed on the nature and purpose of the study which is to look at how they implement alternative assessment in the classroom. After the classroom observation session, the researcher sought permission from the teachers to interview them. The interview sessions regarding implementation of alternative assessment took place after the classroom observation session. Prior arrangement was made with the teachers and they agreed to be interviewed via online.

We wanted to find out how teachers go about implementing portfolio as alternative assessment. All the interviews with the five ESL teachers were recorded and transcribed before analysis. Codes were assigned to all the five teachers (A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5). Data gathered from the study were re-read many times and we made extra notes and reflections while reading the verbatim data of the classroom observations and interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and the initial preliminary readings generated an overall idea. Next, the emergence of explicit segments or units of evidence were chronicled and condensed to themes pertinent to the research questions. The themes were developed as categories and subtopics through analytic coding.

4. Results and Discussions

This study intended to answer the following question:

- 1) What are the challenges and needs of ESL teachers in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

To answer this research question, we have identified the challenges and needs in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment, and thus, narrowed the direction of the study to these sub-questions:

- a) What are the challenges of ESL teachers in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

- b) What are the processes involved in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?
- c) What are the needs of ESL teachers in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

4.1 What are the challenges of ESL teachers in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

Selecting content standard and learning standard to determine assessment activities

One of the challenges teachers faced was to embed appropriate classroom-based assessments and activities based on the content standard and learning standard stipulated in the English language syllabus. The teachers disclosed that the learning standards are further divided into basic content, additional content and complete standard. As for the content standard, they are divided for all the four language skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills.

The use of portfolio assessment to me, I mean even in teacher training is not new. (A4)

I introduced portfolio because I wanted my students to compile classroom-bases [based] activities that I have given to them in a folder so that they know these are the documents of work accomplished for this form, what I mean is that the activities given to them for class. (A2)

I always wanted to differentiate between exam and alternative assessments. This is apparent in School-based Assessment where the focus is no longer on assessment of learning but more of assessment for learning and also assessment as learning. I find [it] very difficult to find extra classroom-based assessment that are align [aligned] with the content standard and also learning standards. (A3)

I am having problems in setting and preparing activities that are aligned with the content standard and learning standards. I have to follow the English syllabus so that I can follow the Scheme of Work based on the learning standard. This will also help us specially the teachers to prepare activities based on individual student's ability. (A5)

Participant A1 seemed to have same concerns as Participant A3 and A5.

The recurring words and phrases such as ‘classroom-based assessment’ (Excerpt – A2, A3), ‘assessment for learning’ (Excerpt – A3), ‘assessment as learning’ (Excerpt – A3), ‘content standard’ (Excerpt – A3), ‘not new’ (Excerpt – A4), ‘portfolio assessment’ (Excerpt – A4), ‘learning standard’ (Excerpt – A3) and ‘activities’ (Excerpt- A5) are all an indication of the teachers’ understanding and knowledge on alternative assessment. One of the major challenges faced by these teachers is in terms of aligning the content standards and learning standards to select the appropriate classroom-based assessment. Participant A1 adds:

I feel that, developing the right type of classroom-based assessment can be a major problem because we also use English text book to teach. Students get confuse [confused] when I give them extra activities that they have to include in the portfolio. I have to remind my students that the tasks that I gave them to include [in] the portfolio are additional tasks that I wanted them to compile for my own recording purpose to monitor individual student's performance.

Selection of authentic assessment

The participants in this study had agreed that proper planning of implementing the alternative assessment especially portfolio assessment entails selection of authentic assessment, proper schedule

of work to include the lesson units and the types of assessment task or activity based on the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Some of my students are smart but some of them are really really weak. My main concern is to come up with authentic assessment with different level of difficulties. I have students who can read very well but I also have students who cannot write. I have to make sure the learning outcomes are achieved with the given portfolio assessment tasks. I still have to follow my lesson plan to ensure that students do all the tasks given in the text book plus also complete tasks given to them based on the portfolio assessment requirement. (A1)

As for me, I have issue with preparing authentic assessment. Some of the authentic assessment have rubric to be given together with the assessment task. Students cannot understand suddenly they are given the rubric and why not score their work and [give] them an A or B or even a C. (A3)

I know that the assessment task must be authentic. For example, when I give my students a speaking task to accomplish, they really dread and will ask for time, I will also guide them step-by-step to understand the task, explain the meaning of all the difficult words, make them take notes and also compile this in the portfolio. (A5)

My style of implementing portfolio is just in a very small scale. I have to or I need to understand what portfolio assessment is only then I can have a smooth flow of carrying out this assessment. So, I have my own portfolio, or you can call it 'teacher's portfolio' and I also make sure my students have their own portfolio 'student portfolio'. Each section in the student's portfolio will require them to compile and do tasks based on the activities given. I have the lesson units that I follow based on the text book and I give my students the assessment task or activity which are based on the learning standard and learning outcomes to be achieved. My greatest challenge is in terms of planning the content based on the learning standards and then designing the authentic tasks for my students. (A4)

Participant A2 seemed to have same concerns as Participant A1, A3, A4 and A5.

Assessing student work based on the learning objectives

There was a clear understanding among all the five teachers in terms of the challenges they faced in assessing student work based on the learning objectives. The heart of portfolio assessment lies in the teachers' explanation whereby students need to be informed on the learning objectives of each task given and the task submitted will be assessed using a rubric. One apparent problem teachers faced based on the classroom observations and also the interviews conducted was students' request to award their work based on grades. The tasks given also require students to interact and discuss with their peers so that students can also go through a process whereby they have to understand the learning process that will indirectly promote individual student academic growth. Participant A4 in fact had requested her students to write reflections based on the activity given and compiled in the portfolio. The close alignment of teaching and learning and assessment as learning in the context of alternative learning is real and effective in demonstrating what each student is capable of doing and performing.

So, every activity must be assessed based on the learning objectives where the students must achieve this, the objectives must be achieved and at the end of the lesson, the students must be able to do this so we follow that same method. (A2)

Most of the time when I assess my students based on the activities submitted, all the [they] want to see is the grade (laughs). So, it really takes time to make the students understand that it is

not always about the grades like A, B or C that confirms their understanding to show that they are good. Sometimes, I have to explain that they have to use rubric to see their levels as well. (A5)

I distributed whatever it is they needed and I explained to them briefly [what] this portfolio assessment is. Students will be assessed based on a rubric. I have to demonstrate this to them and you know so that they understand what they are you know heading towards. It is difficult to assess the students when I give them an authentic task. (A1)

Sometimes students will ask me why I didn't give them marks for reflection (laughs). It can [be] very challenging to make student understand that they have a task to do and sometimes the task requires them to interact with their friends in order for me to give the scores based on the rubric given. (A4)

I started off by giving simple activities you know like just reading you know poems so that you know they will at least know what they are expecting and after that I implemented it fully with all the assessment. (A3)

Providing feedback and educating students on using feedback to improve learning

Teachers in this study agreed that they were able to provide feedback to students through the portfolio assessment assigned. Teachers explained that portfolio assessment indicates what and how much students have learned and understood what is taught. It actually provides opportunity for student-teacher interaction, to enhance and sustain teaching and learning as shown in the interview data:

This type of assessment the portfolio assessment is different from the paper and pencil examination. They want feedback to be in the form of percentage or grade. It takes some time to give feedback. Students are very young as young as thirteen years old. They also said that the parents asked them for percentage in numbers. So, students also have problems explaining to their parents on the tasks given to them to do and the [to] explain why only written report is given in exchange of [for] grades. (A1)

I always have to remind my students that sometime I will write short comments to show that they still need improvement in developing good sentence. Wrong use of tenses. Please refer to the example given. Ask your friends to guide you. It is well written essay and you can improve and write better next time. The next you can see students emailing and sometimes they send WhatsApp text to ask why I did not give them a score like 12/20. (A2)

It can take some time to explain to students that sometimes feedback is good for them. Grades are not everything. (A3)

What I'm doing with my students is I give them writing. I would like to assess them in writing. So, each time I give them a piece of writing, they will do the work and then after that they will put in a portfolio and then I will assess, I give feedback, I write my feedback what is this, I give the feedback to them, and then after that I ask my students to do reflection, I will call them and then I will tell them what are the mistakes that they are doing, and then this will help them to improve in their next writing. (A4)

Sometimes I feel that students struggle to understand why I just write some notes in their written work. Even after presentation I will give them some feedback for improvements but you can still hear students asking for marks (laughs). (A5)

4.2 What are the processes involved in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

Assessment tasks and rubrics for the portfolio

Based on the classroom observations and interview conducted with participant A1, she shared her experience in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio in her class. According to participant A1, she instructs her students to finish at least one assessment task for each unit given in the textbook. The units are all taken from the English text book. The themes include People and Culture, Health, Social Issues, Environment and Science and Technology to be taught in a year. After Participant A1 has taught the unit, students were instructed to do an assessment with two tasks in that selected particular unit. Students are free to design the assessment in different forms namely essay writing, creating a song, brochure and advertisement. Teachers assigned this assessment separately from exercises and worksheets given in the class. After the students have completed the task, the teacher usually provides them with written feedback and grades their work according to the rubrics. Students with the best work and grades get an opportunity to display their work in the classroom. Teachers are the main facilitators who can confirm and ensure the assessment process is performed smoothly and accordingly in class (Chan et al., 2018). Teachers' skills, knowledge, commitment and competency are the main elements for ensuring success in any kind of assessment.

Authentic materials for the portfolio

All the students have to bring their textbook so that they can complete the listening tasks. Participant A2 used the audio from British Council websites to conduct the listening activity because the website covers many topics. She also shared that she ensures the topics selected from the British Council align with the text book unit plans. Participant A2 preferred selecting materials from British Council because they are authentic; she also downloads reading materials from websites such as National Geographic. As for writing skill evaluation, Teacher A5 instructs students to write essays based on books or book review.

Providing grades and feedback for the portfolio

Participant A3 from the classroom observation data and interview shared that she usually prepares lots of worksheets for her students. She noticed that they always request to give them grades even when they are using the offline system. Participant A4 divulged that her students love to get her feedback on their submissions. The students know that this is the teacher's strategy to help them improve in areas of weakness. Participant A4 mentioned that she has a role to play to assess her students not just using the summative method but also formative method so that the students can attain the required competency levels. She also claimed that the current English language syllabus requires teachers to keep abreast with the competence level based on CEFR descriptors. Participant A3 mentioned that she gives lot of tasks and activities based on reading and writing because it is easier to teach and instruct the students to do the tasks, as she explained:

Normally I give my student lot of exercises and worksheets especially for the reading and writing task. (A3)

Different techniques employed for engaging students

Participant A4 also mentioned that for the listening skills, she usually shares the listening module so that the students can try out the activities given during their free time or on weekends. As for the speaking skills, participant A4 assigns students work in groups to do role-play and also instruct

the students to come up with dialogue in pairs so that they can have discussion on the topic assigned and exchange ideas on the topic.

Issues in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment

According to participant A5, although she has already implemented alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment, she still expresses her concerns because she has limited understanding of the rationale behind portfolio assessment. Participant A5 shares that her lack of knowledge affects her confidence in conducting the alternative assessment. Moreover, she faced time constraints in implementing portfolio assessment. The alternative assessment and its implementation process is very complex as it involves much clerical work such as documentation and filing. Participant A5 shares that her students are passive. They used to copy their friends' work and claimed they have tried the assigned tasks. She divulged those students have negative attitude toward the classroom tasks. She also said each worksheet might not cater to the individual's proficiency. According to participant A5, she sometimes feels lost in implementing this new evaluation system. Even though guidelines exist, not all can be applied in the classroom setting. Teachers would usually adopt and adapt the best approach to achieve their targets. Speaking lessons are particularly challenging as most students are quite reluctant to participate.

4.3 What are the ESL teacher needs in implementing alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment in teaching English language?

All the five participants (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5) agree that it can be time consuming to implement alternative assessment in the form of portfolio and the system needs to match with the individual teacher's instructional purposes. Teachers still have to make adjustments and improvement to it which has to be based on the content areas taught. Another great challenge is when the teachers have to integrate all the four language skills in implementing portfolio assessment. The purpose of integrating all the four language skills is to assist the students in understanding meaning in a variety of familiar contexts. For example, students need to be exposed to deliver and communicate ideas and form opinions based on familiar topics in the unit plan. Exposure to reading activities will give them opportunity to expand and explore ideas for personal development. Teachers must prepare the activities to allow learners to appreciate and teach values and patriotism through language activities. All these aspects can be achieved through the tasks and activities planned for teaching and learning. Only then can the curriculum be able to develop the students to fulfil future workplace demands. The teachers expressed the need for proper planning and training especially for implementing portfolio assessment. Another important need is for more time to understand how to integrate portfolios in the classroom. Teachers also need some sort of training in specifying the criteria needed to evaluate student work. Teachers' decision to introduce and implement portfolios requires not just theoretical knowledge but also the main purpose fundamental to their decision such as transformative and responsive instruction, explicit marking criteria and ways to promote more informative feedback so that students can take the necessary actions to improve their work.

5. Discussion and Implications

Findings obtained showed that ESL teachers to some extents do implement alternative assessment in the form of portfolio assessment and this is strongly supported by Barnhardt (2003), Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) as well as Moya O'Malley (1994), who found that when the assessment process and procedure are consistent, it attracts student attention and learning does takes place. Teachers in this study clearly have an understanding of what portfolio assessment is because they did not merely ask students to compile collected work but they instructed them to use the portfolio as an assessment instrument (Kakkar & Zitkute, 2001). Teachers in this study are aware and know exactly what to do with the submitted student work. This is apparent when the teachers mentioned that they use rubrics to assess student work and this is supported by similar findings obtained by Robinson (2010)

who reported that students benefited from the portfolio assessment and experience, and assess their own learning at their own pace. In summary, the findings from this study confirm previous studies indicating that teachers are drawn to portfolio assessment and that they can keep abreast with the latest development in assessment that could facilitate students in both academic and personal goals (Gottlieb, 2000). Teachers are also aware that portfolio assessment provides students with the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt and achieved through the learning objectives.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, although teachers in this study have shown some good mastery of portfolio assessment, they still need assistance for a proper planning and training especially for implementing portfolio assessment for instruction. Teachers also expressed some concerns related to the portfolio assessment but these problems are not insurmountable. Teachers mentioned that students are aware and have noticed the potential of employing portfolios as this could help elevate their learning so that it will enable them to think critically and independently. Portfolio assessment gives students the opportunity to be actively engaged in their work and they understand the purpose of doing it. Further research could be carried out with teachers who have been teaching for more than twenty years with different levels and Forms namely Form two, three, four and five. These findings can contribute to future classroom-based assessment, teacher-based assessment and student-based assessment in Malaysian ESL classrooms. Teachers can use the portfolio assessment for formative purpose and for improving classroom learning. Portfolio assessment can be used simultaneously with examinations in which teachers can assign certain marks for the portfolios. Students will learn to collect evidence of their own learning and will be able to chart the progress they make in learning instead of just focusing on the examinations. The findings of the study suggest that teacher implementation of portfolio assessment should be used as an additional tool even if traditional assessment tools are mandatory in Malaysia. Portfolio as an alternative assessment tool is believed to be able to cultivate critical thinking and creativity that allows the students to learn through the process of acquiring knowledge independently with some teacher assistance. Portfolio assessment is beneficial and should be recommended as an effective instructional tool for learning, teaching and assessment.

7. Co-author Contribution

Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh: Writing, Introduction - Original draft preparation, data collection; Mazura Mastura Muhammad: Writing, Literature Review; Nor Azmi Mostafa: Writing, Methodology; Nooreen Noordin: Writing, Methodology; Ramiaida Darmi: Writing – Data analysis; Melor Md Yunus: Data analysis; Tee Tze Kiong: Writing, Reviewing and Editing; Tarsame Singh Masa Singh: Writing, Conclusion.

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Appendix 1

Assessment Scale

Scale	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Produces a text that communicates straightforward ideas using the conventions of the communicative task reasonably well.	Uses simple connectors and a limited number of cohesive devices appropriately.	Uses basic vocabulary appropriately. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
4	Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5			
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Produces a text that communicates simple ideas in simple ways.	Text is connected using basic, high frequency connectors.	Uses basic vocabulary reasonably. Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control. Errors may impede meaning at times.
2	Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3			
1	Irrelevances and/or misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Produces isolated short units about simple and concrete matters, not always communicating successfully.	Production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e. and) may be used on occasion.	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.