Portfolio Assessment Among Thai EFL First-Year University Students: Perceptions and Progress

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Article information	Abstract
	This research study investigated students' perceptions toward the use of portfolios as well as documenting the progress of a portfolio assessment in a classroom-based setting of Thai EFL undergraduate students. The 25 first-year students who had enrolled in an English foundation course offered at a public university were the participants. These participants completed two types of essays, which comprised eight drafts in total for compiling the portfolios. Reflective journals, a perception questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a portfolio self-assessment form were utilized to collect data so that the perceptions toward the use of portfolios could be examined. The quantitative data from the perception questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviation). The qualitative data from the reflective journals, semi-structured interview, and portfolio self-assessment form were analyzed by means of content analysis. Moreover, the progress of the eight drafts of two types of essays was analyzed by repeated measure ANOVA. It was found that the participants had positive perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment, and they wrote significantly better essays. In sum, portfolio assessment can be an effective alternative choice in a classroom-based setting.

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that first-year students entering universities must learn new academic literacies. Some of the new academic literacies are related to writing skills, such as academic writing. Academic writing is fundamental to undergraduate students, yet at the same time, it is the most challenging skill to master since it requires both knowledge of the subject matter and knowledge of appropriate language use. Moreover, non-native undergraduate students of English are required to take a few compulsory courses of writing as an essential component of degree study. (Al-Badwawi, 2011).

For the majority of EFL students, the ability to write in a foreign language is challenging because it is considered as the most difficult academic skill to acquire (Salma, 2015). Moreover, learning to write in English is difficult because there are many differences between students' first

language and English as students' foreign language in terms of linguistic features, rhetorical patterns, writing styles, and other cultural factors (Seensongworn & Chaya, 2017). Many research studies have been conducted on English writing problems among EFL students. Afrin (2016) investigated the English writing problems of non-English major undergraduate students at a private university in Bangladesh. The results showed that the EFL students had many problems in writing skills, such as grammatical weakness, insufficient practice, and lack of motivation. He also found that students need proper guidelines and teachers should increase students' confidence in writing.

Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) investigated Thai students' English language writing difficulties at a private university. The results showed that the students had difficulty in learning, especially regarding how to write proper English. It was also found that the students' perceived that they were more comfortable with getting the teacher's assistance than self-directed learning. It was emphasized that the teachers were still needed in the language learning process. Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn (2017) examined the language errors in the writing of English major students at a Thai university and explored the sources of the errors. The results showed that there were four sources of the different types of student errors, namely interlingual interference, intralingual interference, limited knowledge of English grammar and carelessness with vocabulary. From these results, it could be seen that limited knowledge of the target language may have been the major source of errors, leading to other sources of errors, since having limited knowledge of English meant that the students tended to rely on their first language. Accordingly, this could result in errors that may cause written miscommunication leading to communication breakdown.

Writing assessment has been considered a significant part of writing instruction (Weigle, 2011). There are many theoretical and practical models for writing assessment. Yancey (1999) identifies three overlapping paradigms of writing assessment, namely objective testing, holistic scoring, and performance assessment. The first paradigm, objective testing, is a writing assessment or writing examination which consists of answering selected-response questions in either standardized or locally developed tests. The second paradigm, holistic scoring, is a writing assessment which has been developed because it is more direct than multiple-choice tests. This paradigm is centered around criterion-referenced tests, such as essay writing. The third paradigm, performance assessment, means that writing should be assessed through many writing samples produced at different times and without any pressure on students. Thus, portfolio assessment as an alternative assessment is another possible option.

Turkkorur (2005) states that writing assessment can be categorized into two broad types, which are traditional assessment and alternative assessment. According to Brown and Hudson (1998), traditional assessment refers to selected-response assessment, including test items such as true-false, matching, and multiple-choice questions. For alternative assessment, Tedick and Klee (1988) state that this type of assessment is different from traditional assessment both in structure and scoring. The students are expected to perform meaningful tasks showing what they can do. Learning is viewed as a process with performance evaluated according to specific criteria, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and portfolio assessment.

Portfolio assessment has become a popular option as an alternative assessment since it offers several advantages to students and teachers. According to Nunes (2004), portfolio assessment allows students to monitor their own progress and take responsibility for their learning. Regarding teachers, they not only discover the students' skill and competence levels, but they also diagnose students' learning styles and strategies so that the teachers can adopt a more student-centered practice. Some teachers consider portfolio assessment as one which includes students' achievement records and assignments as well as documentation of students' learning processes, which mirrors students' reflections when writing.

In conclusion, academic writing ability is considered as an important component of the degree for undergraduate students. Several research studies have been conducted on writing assessment to suggest appropriate means of assessing writing ability. Portfolio assessment is one of the alternative assessments that is considered a beneficial means of assessing writing ability. Further benefits of portfolio assessment can be seen in the following section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of portfolio assessment

Portfolio assessment has been implemented in educational contexts for many years. There are several experts who have defined its definitions. In the present study, the following definitions of portfolio assessment were mainly adopted.

Camp and Levine (1991) define portfolio assessment as a method of showing evidence of the processes and strategies used to generate writing, the writers' awareness of those processes and strategies, and the writers' development over a period of time. Portfolio assessment is defined as a collection of multiple samples of writing that have been gathered over several occasions. As such, the multiple samples of writing represent various kinds of writing or writing purposes. Besides the multiple samples of writing, evidence of the processes used in the creation of writing pieces should be included. Finally, the portfolio should contain a reflection on each individual piece of writing and/or on changes observable over time.

In contrast, Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) propose the characteristics of a portfolio. To begin with, a portfolio is a collection of written works which displays a range of writing performances in different genres and for different purposes. The portfolio can reflect the learning situation and demonstrate what the writer, or portfolio owner, has accomplished. Another important characteristic is the delayed evaluation, which is an opportunity for the writer to revise the written product before the final evaluation is done. In addition, selection of writing pieces to be included in a portfolio is also significant. The writer can select the writing pieces with some guidance from the teacher. Thus, the delayed evaluation and selection of writing pieces offer opportunities for student-centered control. That means the students can select their best writing pieces and can revise them before putting them into their portfolios. Moreover, students must reflect on their work with regard to their writing development and how the selected writing pieces represent that writing development. This is called reflection and self-assessment.

Finally, a portfolio can provide a means of measuring growth in aspects such as linguistic accuracy and writing organization.

In conclusion, these mentioned scholars (Camp & Levine, 1991; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000) share some similarities and differences in terms of characteristics of portfolio assessment. The first similarity is that they both view a portfolio as a collection of writing pieces which differ in genre and purpose. The second similarity is regarding the reflection. Both perceive that the writer must reflect on their writing pieces with regard to their writing development. However, there are other aspects of a portfolio that Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) view differently from Camp and Levine (1991). The first difference is the delayed evaluation, proposed by Hamp-Lyons and Condon. They propose this characteristic because it is an opportunity for the writer to revise their writing pieces before the final grade is given. That means the writers can self-monitor their writing. The final difference is that Hamp-Lyons and Condon also consider a portfolio as a means of measuring growth and development in aspects of writing skills such as linguistic accuracy and writing organization.

From the mentioned characteristics, the most important components of a portfolio are collection, reflection, and selection (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). "The average portfolio procedures" according to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), as cited in Lam (2018), can be seen in Figure 1.
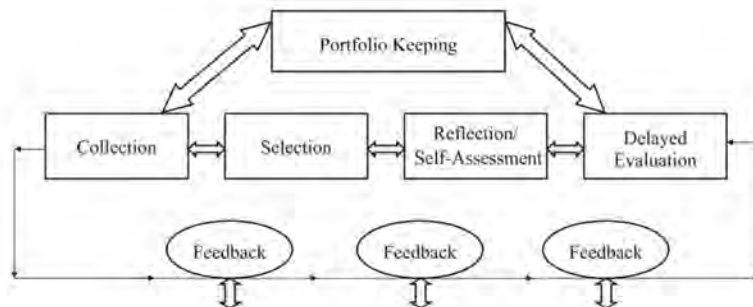
Figure 1 The average portfolio procedures (Lam, 2018)

In this figure, Lam (2018) explains that the three feedback loops at the bottom represent the feedback sources generated by self-, peer, and/or teacher assessment during the portfolio assessment process. The use of double-edged arrows in the loops suggests that students keep utilizing multiple feedback sources to make informed decisions when collecting their portfolio pieces for grading. While these portfolio procedures appear to be linear and in perspective, they are not meant to be a one-size-fits all approach by design. Instead, teachers are advised to apply them flexibly and strategically to accommodate their pedagogical/assessment needs.

When combining the key concepts of portfolio assessment (Lam, 2018) and the most important portfolio components (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000), the delayed evaluation is added. The delayed evaluation means that a grade is assigned to a final draft using summative assessment until it is satisfactorily revised according to the teacher's formative feedback, which can be seen in Figure 2.
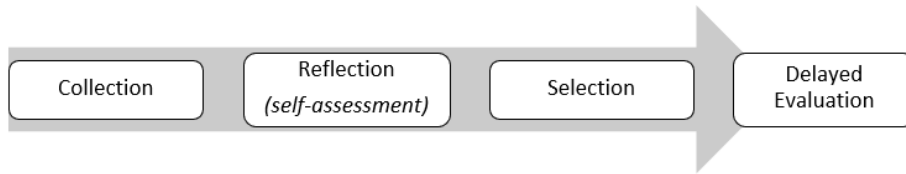
Figure 2 Key concept of portfolio assessment (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Lam, 2018)

In Figure 2, collection refers to the record of multiple writing pieces of one student. Multiple writing pieces can indicate the students' writing progress rather than only the quality of their writing products. Reflection is an opportunity for students to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their writing pieces. That means the students can develop their strengths and improve their weaknesses in writing. After the reflection, the students select their writing pieces with a reasonable explanation. The selected writing pieces are used as evidence in the assessment. The final step is the delayed evaluation, which is when the final draft is graded using summative assessment before the students satisfactorily revise their essays using formative feedback.

Lam (2018) also summarizes the three types of writing portfolios, including the purpose, rationale, design, and content of each, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Three types of writing portfolios (Lam, 2018)

	Working portfolios (efforts)	Showcase portfolios (achievement)	Progress portfolio (growth)
Purpose	Mainly formative; partially summative	Mainly summative; partially formative	Mainly diagnostic; partially formative; minimally summative
Rationale	Celebrate student efforts in writing; assist students in achieving learning goals; and foster ownership in learning	Demonstrate students' best writing ability via representative work; showcase learning achievements	Keep track of student writing development; nurture growth in learning writing; promote student agency
Design	Developmental; reflective; workshop-like	Autonomous; metacognitive; emphasize student choice in writing	Longitudinal; sustainable; process-based or product-based
Content	Embrace a wide range of learning evidence, including unfinished work; work-in-progress; journal entries	Mainly final products of best entries; reflective pieces	Flexible; open-ended; including activities such as pop quizzes, examinations, and writing interim drafts

In sum, portfolio in the present study refers to a collection of four drafts of persuasive essays and four drafts of problem-solving essays which were collected in an English foundation course. This portfolio was used as a tool to document the progress of students' writing ability from the beginning through the end of the course, which lasted for 17 weeks. The procedures of

collecting writing essays started with preparing the students to understand the writing tasks, criteria for evaluation, and the characteristics of the portfolio. After that, the students were asked to write essays, attend the student-teacher conferences, reflect on their essays, and compile the essays in their portfolios.

Portfolio assessment research studies in Thailand

Portfolio assessment has been studied in Thailand in order to see its effectiveness in the Thai context. Several studies have been conducted on portfolio assessment, which are as follows.

Wanchid and Charoensuk (2015) investigated the effects of the use of paper-based and weblog-based electronic portfolios on the writing achievement of limited English proficiency students. The 60 participants, who were majoring in hotel and tourism, had enrolled in the Writing for the Service Industry course. The results revealed that the effects of the use of paper-based portfolios and those of weblog-based electronic portfolios on writing achievement were not significantly different. This means that two different portfolio assessments, namely paper-based portfolios and weblog-based portfolios, affected the students' writing ability in similar ways. Teachers can choose the appropriate types of portfolios to assess students' writing ability depending on the contexts and the purpose of the course.

Kalra, Sundrarajun, and Komintarachat (2017) studied the effects of portfolios on the development of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' writing ability. The 26 participants were majoring in business English at an international university. The experiment was carried out over eight weeks. The results revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in terms of writing ability.

So far, portfolio assessment has mainly been used to assess writing ability in writing courses with English-related majors. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there might not have been sufficient portfolio assessment studies conducted with non-English-related major students, especially with Thai first-year EFL students who have just entered the university and enrolled in an English foundation course.

Research objectives

This research study aimed to

1. investigate students' perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment in assessing English writing ability, and.
2. document the writing progress of a portfolio assessment in a classroom-based setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Context of the study

This study was conducted in an English foundation course at a public university in Bangkok. The course focused on four skills, which were listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Regarding writing skills, the students were required to complete four writing assignments which comprised two types of essays, namely persuasive essays, and problem-solving essays.

According to the course description, the definition of persuasive essay in this course is an essay in which a writer introduces a topic, presents a particular point of view on the topic and convinces the readers to accept that viewpoint by using reasons and supporting details. Regarding the problem-solving essay, it refers to an essay in which a writer presents a problem and then suggests solutions to that problem which can convince readers to consider the problem and take the suggested course of action.

Population and participants

The population of this study was the first-year Thai EFL undergraduate students at a public university. They had enrolled in an English foundation course, in the 2018 academic year. The population was divided into several groups called "sections" according to the faculties they were in. Each section comprised both males and females aged between 18 and 20 years old. The population possessed different levels of English proficiency.

The participants of this study were the students in the section that was assigned to the researcher. There were 25 students in this section. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. The majority of the participants had been placed at the intermediate level according to the scores of the English proficiency test of the university.

Research design

Since the participants were an intact group, a single-group design using both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed to investigate the use of portfolio assessment. The participants were asked to sign consent forms as evidence of willing participation in the present study. The participants wrote two types of essays, which were persuasive and problem-solving essays based on the course objectives. These essays were assigned at the end of the learning units. After that, their essays were marked by using the rubrics that were created by the researchers and the participants.

The scores from all drafts of the essays were calculated using repeated measures ANOVA to document the progress of English writing ability. The results of calculated scores were triangulated with qualitative data obtained from 1) student-teacher conferences, and 2) reflective journals (self-assessment). The questionnaire on perceptions toward portfolio assessment was utilized to measure the students' perceptions toward the use of portfolios in assessing English writing ability. The results from the questionnaire were triangulated with the qualitative data obtained from 1) the semi-structured interviews, and 2) the self-assessment forms in the portfolios.

Research instruments

1. Scoring Rubric for Individual Writing Pieces (SRIWP)

This instrument was used as criteria in assessing the individual writing pieces. This rubric was specifically created for the present study so that the scores obtained from the essays would not affect the course evaluation. This instrument was developed based on the rubric development framework proposed by Steven and Levi (2005).

2. Student-teacher conference

This instrument was a discussion between an individual participant and the researcher. The conferences were conducted after the researcher and one inter-rater graded the first three drafts of each type of essay. That means there were six conferences in total. The form of this discussion was a semi-structured interview. This discussion allowed participants to make arguments, explain, and ask about their writing piece.

3. Reflective journal

This instrument was aimed at being a self-reflection or self-assessment of each participant. This instrument was developed based on the reflective cycle model proposed by Gibbs (1988). The participants completed one reflective journal after they finished each student-teacher conference. That means there were six reflective journals in total. There were 11 guiding questions for participants to describe their reflections. The 11 guiding questions were as follows;

> 1. What is the topic of the writing assignment?
> 2. What are the components in the writing assignment?
> 3. How did you feel while you were doing the writing assignment?
> 4. How did you feel about the writing assignment after the student-teacher conference?
> 5. What are your strengths in the writing assignment?
> 6. What are your weaknesses in the writing assignment?
> 7. Which part in the writing assignment did you do best? Why?
> 8. Which part in the writing assignment did you do worst? Why?
> 9. How can you develop your strengths?
> 10. How can you improve your weaknesses?
> 11. What will you do in the next writing assignment?

4. Questionnaire on perceptions toward portfolio assessment

This instrument was aimed at examining the participants' perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment. The instrument was developed based on the perception questionnaires of the portfolio assessment process proposed by Davis, Ponnamperuma and Ker. (2009). The questionnaire items were designed to be a four-point Likert scale in order to avoid neutral perceptions.

5. Semi-structured interview

This instrument was aimed at examining the participants' perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment in order to triangulate them with the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The instrument was developed based on the key features of a semi-structured interview proposed by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006).

6. Portfolio self-assessment form

This instrument was aimed at examining the participants' perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment in order to triangulate them with the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The instrument was developed based on the set of guiding questions of the portfolio self-assessment form proposed by Lam (2018).

Data collection

Before conducting this study, the researcher explained the whole process of the research procedure and then asked all participants to sign a consent form to show their willing participation in this study throughout the whole process.

The data collection was conducted over a period of 17 weeks, which was divided into two halves. The process of collecting data, which was the same in both halves, was divided into three phases as follows.

Phase I: Before portfolio assessment implementation

The researcher reviewed the procedures used in the created research instruments mentioned above and then asked three experts for instrument validation. Based on the experts' recommendations, the researcher revised the instruments. After that, the researcher introduced portfolio assessment to the participants in class. In the same class, the criteria of portfolio assessment were discussed in detail. One week later, the researcher administered the pre-essay writing test, assessed it, and asked the inter-rater to grade the test by using the writing rubric of the English foundation course.

Phase II: During portfolio assessment implementation

The researcher taught essay writing content from the coursebook and assigned the writing of the first draft of an essay to the participants in class. After the first draft submission, the researcher and one inter-rater graded the first draft using the Scoring Rubric for Individual Writing Pieces (SRIWP) and returned the draft to the participants the following week. After that, the first student-teacher conference was conducted, and then each participant completed the reflective journal for the first draft and submitted it to the researcher with their first draft.

One week later, the researcher assigned the second draft to the participants. After the participants submitted it in class, the second draft was graded by the researcher and the

inter-rater using the SRIWP and returned to the participants the following week. Then, each participant attended the second student-teacher conference and completed the reflective journal. After that, the participants submitted the reflective journal and the second draft.

One week later, the third draft was assigned to the participants. After the submission, it was graded by the researcher and the inter-rater using the SRIWP. When the third draft was returned, the third student-teacher conference was conducted and each participant attended. Then, the participants completed the reflective journal and submitted it with the third draft.

One week later, the researcher assigned the final draft to the participants. After the submission, the final draft was also graded by the researcher and the inter-rater using the SRIWP.

The mentioned procedures were repeated one more time for the second type of essay (problem-solving essay). After grading the final draft of the problem-solving essay, each participant completed the portfolio self-assessment form and compiled all eight drafts and the six reflective journals in their portfolios.

Phase III: After portfolio assessment implementation

After compiling all the drafts, reflective journals, and the portfolio self-assessment form, the participants submitted their complete portfolios. One week later, the researcher administered the post-essay writing test. After that, both the researcher and the inter-rater graded the test using the writing rubric of the English foundation course. Then, the semi-structured interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis.

Data analysis

To achieve Research Objective 1, the questionnaire on perceptions toward portfolio assessment was used for students to describe their perceptions toward the use of portfolios in assessing English writing ability. The descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviation) were reported as quantitative results. Moreover, the qualitative results from the semi-structured interview and the portfolio self-assessment form were triangulated with the quantitative results. Thus, the content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data.

To meet Research Objective 2, the quantitative data from all drafts of both types of essays were analyzed by means of repeated measures ANOVA. The descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviation) were also reported.

However, there were some issues to be addressed. First, the writing essays which were given to the participants were compulsory, so the researcher was obliged to follow the course description. Second, there were many instructors teaching this English foundation course. Thus, the researcher could not redesign and adjust the course contents. Last, the participants in this study were an intact group. They were randomly assigned to study with the researcher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research objective 1: To investigate students' perceptions toward the use of portfolios in assessing English writing ability

The students' perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment in assessing English writing ability were positive, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean scores and standard deviations of the questionnaire on perceptions toward portfolio assessment

Category of items	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Meaning
Potentially contentious issues	25	3.60	0.27	Strongly positive
Portfolio content	25	3.65	0.47	Strongly positive
Achievement of curriculum outcomes	25	3.37	0.60	Strongly positive
Building the portfolio	25	3.54	0.56	Strongly positive
Portfolio assessment process	25	3.70	0.34	Strongly positive
Overall perceptions		**3.57**	**0.37**	**Strongly positive**

Table 2 shows the students' perceptions, based on a four-point Likert scale, toward the use of portfolio assessment in assessing English writing ability. The category that gained the highest mean score was portfolio assessment process (M=3.70, SD=0.34). This means that the students understood the portfolio assessment process. Then, portfolio content was the category that gained the second highest mean score (M=3.65, SD=0.47). This category refers to the students' understanding of the portfolio content. Next, the category that gained the third highest mean score was potentially contentious issues (M=3.60, SD=0.27). It can be interpreted that the students thought there could be some potential arguments against portfolio assessment. For example, some may have thought the number of drafts was too high. After that, building the portfolio was the category that gained the fourth highest mean score (M=3.54, SD=0.56). It can be stated that the students had opportunities to build and create their portfolios. Finally, the category that gained the lowest mean score was achievement of curriculum outcome (M=3.37, SD=0.60). It can be concluded that students view portfolio assessment as an assistance in improving their writing ability. However, due to the differences between the rubrics of writing (i.e., the rubric of the course and SRIWP), some students were confused about which rubric was being used to grade their essays in each stage of the process.

The overall mean score of perceptions toward portfolio assessment from the questionnaire meant that students strongly agreed (M=3.57, SD=0.37). It could be concluded that the participants had positive perceptions toward the use of portfolio assessment in assessing English writing ability.

Besides the quantitative results from the questionnaire, the qualitative results from the semi-structured interview and the portfolio self-assessment form were also triangulated to support the quantitative results. There were answers about the participants' most favorite aspects, which can be categorized as follows.

Drafting

Most of the participants stated that drafting was their most favorite aspect. It was because they could prepare themselves before writing the final draft.

> "What I liked was drafting before writing the final draft because it made me prepared." (Student A12)
> "I liked drafting because it let me know what I must develop or improve." (Student A21)

Reflective journals

Most of the participants also mentioned that they liked completing reflective journals. It was because they could reflect on what they had done in the previous draft as well as planning what they would do in the following draft.

> "I liked reflection because I could revise [the writing pieces] again." (Student A03)
> "[I] could use the reflection for improving [the next draft]." (Student A04)

Moreover, the participants' responses from the portfolio self-assessment form were analyzed to assess the perceptions of the participants toward the use of portfolios in assessing English writing ability. Therefore, the qualitative results could be categorized as follows.

Portfolios help the participants in developing their English writing ability

The participants agreed that they had developed their English writing ability. Nine participants out of 25 believed that they had developed their writing ability in terms of grammar and vocabulary. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> "I can use various vocabulary more than I used to be." (Student A03)
> "I write more accurately in grammar." (Student A14)

Moreover, the participants felt that they had also learned the essay structures of two different types of essays. Five participants stated that they had learned and developed their knowledge of essay structures. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> "I understand what essay structure is and learn how to write [it] proficiently." (Student A08)
> "I have grown familiar with different structures of different types of essays." (Student A10)

Additionally, the participants accepted that they had developed their writing ability, but they did not specify which aspects of writing ability. They only mentioned English writing ability in general. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> "I notice that my writing skill improve a little bit." (Student A17)
> "I think that I have improved my writing skill and I can arrange the essay much better." (Student A18)

Criteria of portfolio assessment help participants pay attention when writing

The participants believed that they had considered the criteria of portfolio assessment of work which they had created by themselves. Therefore, it can be said that they paid attention when they wrote the essays. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> *"I always consider what the criteria of portfolio are and that makes me pay attention to every writing."* (Student A08)
> *"It's the criteria that we created. So, we need to check our portfolio with criteria that we complete or not."* (Student A25)

A portfolio is a tool that reflects the participants' strengths and weaknesses through certain types of essays

The participants realized that while they were building their portfolios, they could notice their strengths and weaknesses in their writing ability. Consequently, they could use that information to improve their following drafts. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> *"I know my weakness and strength of my writing. I know how well I am doing and what I should do for the better writing skill."* (Student A17)
> *"I can check my drafts and what my error is [so] that I can improve my next draft or writing tasks to get better."* (Student A25)

Portfolio assessment encourages the participants to become more careful writers

The participants were confident enough to state that they had become more careful writers. This is evident because they claimed that they were more careful when they wrote academic essays. This can be supported by the participants' statements below.

> *"I have learned to be careful to choose words or contents to write on my essay and to make my essay is more impressive."* (Student A19)
> *"I think a lot before I write. [Be] more careful about the structure, grammar, cohesion and coherence, and contents."* (Student A21)

Portfolio assessment encourages the participants to have positive perceptions toward English language learning

The participants stated that their perceptions toward English language learning had been positive after the implementation of portfolio assessment. This can be supported by the participant's statement below.

> *"I feel no more fear about English."* (Student A13)

In conclusion, the qualitative results from the portfolio self-assessment form illustrated that the participants mostly agreed that they had developed their English writing ability. They had

also paid attention when writing their essays in order to relate them to the criteria of portfolio assessment. Portfolios were also tools that reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the students' English writing ability so that they could improve their writing ability in the following drafts. Moreover, portfolio assessment encouraged the participants to become more careful writers and have positive perceptions toward English language learning as well.

Research objective 2: To document the writing progress of a portfolio assessment in a classroom-based setting

The writing progress of portfolio assessment in a classroom-based setting was documented according to the quantitative results analysis.

Table 3
Mean differences among drafts of persuasive essays

(I) Draft	(J) Draft	Mean Difference (J-I)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	1.02	.13	.000*
2	3	0.90	.22	.000*
3	Final draft	1.30	.23	.000*

*p < .05

The results from Table 3 demonstrated the differences in mean scores between pairs of drafts. To illustrate, the mean difference between draft 1 and 2 was 1.02; the mean difference between draft 2 and 3 was 0.90; and the mean difference between draft 3 and the final draft was 1.30. The mean differences of all three pairs were statistically significant at the .05 level. The differences between the drafts of the persuasive essay showed positive development. It could be concluded that the use of portfolios resulted in positive progress in the participants' persuasive essay writing ability.

In conclusion, the differences between the mean scores of pairs of persuasive essay drafts showed positive development. Therefore, the use of portfolios had helped students significantly improve their writing ability (in persuasive essays) from draft to draft.

Table 4
Mean differences among drafts of problem-solving essays

(I) Draft	(J) Draft	Mean Difference (J-I)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	1.28	.41	.004*
2	3	0.78	.36	.042*
3	Final draft	1.76	.51	.002*

*p < .05

The results in Table 4 demonstrate the differences between the mean scores of three pairs of drafts. To elaborate, the mean difference of the first pair, draft 1 and draft 2, was 1.28; the mean difference of the second pair, draft 2 and draft 3, was 0.78, which was lower than that of the first pair; and the mean difference of the third pair, draft 3 and the final draft, was the highest at 1.76. The mean differences of all three pairs were statistically significant at the

.05 level. The mean score differences between drafts of the problem-solving essays showed positive progress. It could be summarized that the use of portfolios resulted in positive development of the participants' problem-solving essay writing ability.

In conclusion, the differences between the mean scores of pairs of problem-solving essays showed positive development. Therefore, the use of portfolios had helped students significantly improve their writing ability (in problem-solving essays) from draft to draft.

In both types of essays, the students' writing ability improved significantly. The quantitative data demonstrated that the mean differences in all pairs of drafts had increased. The students had learned to develop their strengths and improve their weaknesses through the procedures of portfolio assessment, which were drafting, and writing reflective journals.

In the process of drafting, the students had more than one opportunity to write. These opportunities were not only to develop their strengths and improve their weaknesses in writing, but also to give them another chance to improve other skills that make their writing better. For example, the students developed their research skills in order to gain sufficient information to support their essays.

Moreover, for the reflective journals, students needed to reflect on what they had learned from student-teacher conferences, which were discussions about the drafts between the student and teacher on a one-on-one basis. Moreover, the students needed to plan what they would do to show that they had developed their strengths as well as improving their weaknesses. Therefore, the reflective journals were a tool for students to analyze their writing problems.

CONCLUSION

Writing is a difficult skill for students because of many factors. From the researcher's experience, students are not proficient in grammar. They often make grammatical errors. They also have small vocabulary size, which means the vocabulary they can use when they write is limited. This difficulty is also supported by Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017), who explains that English writing is difficult for Thai EFL students because of those two reasons. The students are anxious while they are writing due to the inadequacy of grammatical rules and vocabulary. Thus, the students think that writing is difficult because they do not know the correct grammar and word choice.

Feedback and comments are also important for students because the students can improve their weaknesses according to feedback and comments. However, writing pieces are often graded only once without teachers giving any suggestions. The students might not understand how good their essays are because they do not receive any feedback. Therefore, portfolio assessment, which is one type of alternative assessment, is implemented in classroom-based settings to help students improve their writing because the student-teacher conference, one of the processes in portfolio assessment, is an opportunity for students to elaborate their ideas in the essays as well as receiving feedback and comments.

In addition, most students do not know and understand the scoring rubric. There are many reasons for this issue. It can be that there is no scoring rubric; the teacher only grades the students' essays according to the correctness of grammar. Alternatively, it might be because the teacher does not introduce and explain the scoring rubric to the students. For portfolio assessment, a scoring rubric is compulsory because it helps the students to know what criteria will be used to grade the essays and to be able to think of how to write the essay well. Also, the teacher has a guideline to use when grading the essays. However, the scoring rubric is only beneficial and functional when teacher and students understand it in the same way.

Portfolio assessment is one type of alternative assessment. It has been proven to be effective among Thai EFL first-year university students because analysis of the participants' perceptions toward the use of portfolios in assessing English writing ability revealed that they had positive perceptions. The participants mentioned that writing drafts could help them prepare for the final drafts. They also mentioned that the reflective journals could help them monitor their strengths and weaknesses in their writing pieces. Moreover, portfolio assessment encouraged the participants to become better writers and have positive perceptions toward English language learning. This statement is supported by the conclusion from Chung (2012), who also claimed that portfolio assessment is a tool which can boost students' motivation in learning a language.

Moreover, significant improvement in writing ability has been observed with the assistance of portfolio assessment. The results of the present study seem to be aligned with those of Kalra, Sundrarajunm and Komintarachat (2017). They stated that the participants developed their English writing ability due to portfolio assessment implementation. This was because portfolios were tools that could reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their English writing. Therefore, the participants could develop their strengths as well as improving their weaknesses in the following drafts.

In sum, portfolio assessment can be an alternative assessment in a classroom-based setting. This is because the students can learn something and improve their writing ability from the discussions during the student-teacher conferences and the answers in the reflective journals. Moreover, portfolio assessment supports formative assessment because the scores from the previous drafts help students to develop what is good and improve what is incorrect in the following drafts.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study leads to pedagogical implication in two aspects.

1. The use of portfolio assessment in English writing courses

The study employed the use of portfolio assessment in an English foundation course which focused on all four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is highly recommended that portfolio assessment is also utilized in English writing courses because teachers can notice the students' writing progress when they put their writing pieces into their

portfolios. The teachers can compare drafts and see the development and improvement of the students' writing ability from the reflective journals.

2. The student-teacher conference and the reflective journal in developing English writing ability

The highlights of the portfolio assessment in the present study were the student-teacher conference and the reflective journal. The student-teacher conference was an opportunity for participants to clarify what they had written and receive comments from the researcher. The reflective journals also helped the participants to plan for development and improvement in the following drafts. Moreover, student-teacher conferences and reflective journals also assisted the researcher in monitoring the participants' progress in English writing and adjusting their instructions to be more appropriate for the participants.

It is significant to note that one challenge of portfolio assessment is workload (Lam, 2018). Portfolio assessment gave both the researcher and participants more assignments to work on. It was also crucial to carefully plan the lessons as there were many steps in developing and implementing portfolio assessment. Teachers must understand their courses as well as their contexts so that they can develop and implement portfolio assessment well in their lesson plans and avoid becoming overloaded with work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

1. Studies with other topics, types of essays, and genres of writing should be conducted to prove the effectiveness of the use of portfolio assessment because only persuasive essay and problem-solving essays were investigated in the present study.

2. Further studies should be carried out in courses of other language skills, such as reading courses, or in courses of integrated skills, such as reading – writing courses, because the present study mainly focused on writing as a separate skill.

3. The design of portfolio assessment procedures can be adjusted to be appropriate for the context of the study. For example, the number of drafts can be increased if there is only one type of writing or decreased if there are many types of writing. This is because the participants mentioned that three drafts before the final draft is too many.

4. It is also recommended that there should be a variety of tasks in the portfolio. The portfolio in a further study could include various types of writing tasks, such as report, term paper and/ or tasks of other language skills, depending on the course objectives and course descriptions.

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