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AN INDISPENSABLE EVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATES**

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EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Ly Gia Huy¹, Tran Quoc Thao²

¹Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance

²HUTECH University, Vietnam

Tq.thao@hutech.edu.vn

Abstract

Portfolio-based learning (PoBL) is an innovative approach that enables students to actively participate in the writing process and take responsibility for their language development. Understanding how EFL students perceive the use of portfolios as a means to enhance their writing skills and their level of engagement in the learning process is crucial. However, there is limited research available on the attitudes and learning investment of EFL students in portfolio-based English writing learning. This paper presents relevant theories concerning the attitudes and learning investment of EFL students in portfolio-based English writing learning. It begins by exploring the definitions and types of portfolios and writing, followed by discussing the importance of portfolio-based writing learning. Furthermore, the paper presents contemporary theories regarding attitudes and learning investment. It also suggests pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: attitudes, learning investment, portfolio, portfolio-based learning, writing

1. Introduction

The early years of the twenty-first century witnessed a significant shift in language teaching methodologies, with students becoming more active and creative participants in their own learning process (Mynbayeva et al., 2018; Lu & Wu, 2018). Traditional teacher-centered approaches gave way to student-centered learning methods, and one such promising innovation is portfolio-based learning (PoBL) (Kennedy et al., 2006; Barrett, 2000), which is an assessment approach that emphasizes the development of a portfolio showcasing a student's progress over time. It allows students to reflect on their learning, receive feedback, and plan their own learning trajectory (Burkaitienė & Teresevičienė, 2008). This student-centered approach promotes ownership of learning, fosters reflection, and facilitates complex and challenging assignments (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018). Moreover, PoBL offers teachers a holistic view of students' learning and enables targeted feedback (Jisc, 2019). By encouraging students to revise, brainstorm, and apply their knowledge in practice, PoBL enhances the effectiveness of the learning process (Mynbayeva et al., 2018). In addition to innovative teaching approaches, learners' attitudes play a significant role in language proficiency. Positive attitudes towards learning positively impact learning outcomes, while unfavorable behaviors can hinder progress (Zhao, 2015; Tella et al., 2010). Students' attitudes, motivation, interest, and self-efficacy are important predictors of learning investment (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). To be specific, the concept of investment in language learning suggests that learners invest in the target language to acquire symbolic and material resources, thus increasing their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2013). Investment in language practices, such as active participation and listening to the teacher, is crucial

for future success in language learning. Without students' investment, the application of PoBL may prove ineffective, as students may view it as a waste of time (Mynbayeva et al., 2018). Moreover, to attain English proficiency, it is crucial to develop productive (writing and speaking) and receptive (listening and reading) skills. Among the four skills, EFL writing is regarded as the most difficult and last to learn because it requires students to be proficient in lexical resource, coherence, and cohesion, grammar, as well as the generation of ideas, composition, and edition of a piece of writing in a correct format (Ahmed, 2010). In the context of Vietnam, it is common to observe that the majority of EFL teachers find writing skills difficult to teach, and no matter how many years students have studied writing skills, a lot of them cannot even write a paragraph without any errors (Nguyen, 2020). Fortunately, the research conducted by Tran and Le (2018) reveals that utilizing Facebook-based e-portfolios offers several benefits in terms of enhancing vocabulary and grammar, improving writing skills, facilitating feedback exchanges, promoting interactions, and bolstering motivation and confidence in writing. Additionally, the research by Tran and Duong (2020) revealed that there were a few participants who were not in favor of using portfolios in writing courses and were skeptical of their usefulness because of their shortcomings, which was similar to the findings by Aliweh (2011). Though there has been some research implemented recently on PoBL, just a little of it focuses on the students' attitudes towards it. Another study by Duong (2021) examined the perceptions of English majors regarding their autonomous learning skills and determined if their writing skills improved after a 15-week writing course that incorporated the use of an e-portfolio as a learning tool. The findings revealed a significant enhancement in the writing skills of the English majors, with positive attitudes towards autonomous learning skills such as setting learning goals, selecting learning materials, creating study plans, writing reflections, and engaging in peer assessment. Nevertheless, research related to learning investment was scarce in Vietnam, let alone the relationship between attitudes and learning investment in portfolio-based writing learning. In conclusion, the shift towards student-centered learning methods has led to the emergence of portfolio-based learning as an effective approach in language teaching. By promoting student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, PoBL facilitates learning progress; however, the success of PoBL implementation relies on students' attitudes and investment in language practices. This paper aims to provide relevant theories of attitudes and learning investment and suggest pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the EFL classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of student work that represents their best performance in both the process and final products (Burke et al., 1994). It is a purposeful, interrelated collection of student work that shows the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in one or more areas (Paulson, 1991; Barret, 2007). There are various types of portfolios, each with its own specific purpose and content. Paulson (1991) defines a showcase portfolio as an assessment portfolio, which is a deliberate compilation of student work that demonstrates the student's endeavors, advancement, and accomplishments in one or multiple domains. According to Cambridge et al. (2009), a learning portfolio is an organized gathering of student work that serves as evidence of learning within a specific subject area or across various disciplines. Another type is a reflective portfolio, which enables students to reflect on their learning journey, exhibit their comprehension, and showcase their metacognitive abilities (Moon, 2013). Lastly, an electronic portfolio, or e-portfolio, as described by Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005), refers to a digital assemblage of artifacts that represents an individual, group, or institution, leveraging digital technologies to showcase and document learning experiences and achievements. In terms of recording media, portfolios can be either paper-based (content is recorded on paper) or electronic (e-portfolio), where contents are recorded digitally using computerized

tools. Each type serves a distinct purpose, focusing on assessment, learning progression, demonstrating understanding, reflection, or leveraging digital technologies for presentation.

2.2 Writing

Writing can be defined as the process of creating written communication through the use of language and symbols. It is a complex cognitive and linguistic task that involves a wide range of skills, including planning, organizing, generating, and structuring ideas and communicating them effectively to the reader. There are several definitions of writing that have been put forward by researchers and scholars. According to Tynjälä et al. (2012), writing is a cognitive process that involves the construction and transformation of ideas through the use of language. They argue that writing is a recursive and iterative process in which writers continuously generate and revise their ideas as they write. Another definition of writing comes from Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013), who view writing as a knowledge-transforming process. They suggest that writing involves the use of language to create new knowledge, restructure existing knowledge, and communicate that knowledge effectively to the reader. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) define writing as a complex and multifaceted activity that involves the development and organization of ideas, the generation of appropriate language and vocabulary, and the use of various writing conventions and formats. Overall, these definitions of writing highlight its complexity and multifaceted nature, emphasizing the importance of cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural factors in the writing process.

Several scholars have identified key components that contribute to the process and quality of writing. One crucial component is vocabulary. A robust vocabulary allows writers to select appropriate words and phrases to convey their intended meaning accurately (Milton, 2010). Another vital component is grammar, which involves understanding and applying the rules of sentence structure, punctuation, and syntax (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Additionally, organization plays a significant role in effective writing. Writers must organize their ideas coherently and logically to ensure clarity and comprehension (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2021). Moreover, the inclusion of supporting evidence and examples strengthens the credibility and persuasiveness of the writing (Graff et al., 2014). Critical thinking holds a significant role, as it empowers authors to dissect information, assess propositions, and formulate well-justified stances (Lai, 2011). Equally vital is the composition process itself, which encompasses preliminary stages like idea generation and structuring, followed by composing and refining (Bayat, 2014). The act of writing is characterized by a dynamic and non-linear progression, frequently entailing iterative rounds of revision and enhancement aimed at augmenting lucidity, logical interconnection, and holistic excellence. Finally, feedback and revision are essential components for enhancing writing skills (Nystrand, 2006). Receiving feedback from peers, instructors, or editors allows writers to identify areas for improvement and make necessary revisions to their work.

2.3 Portfolio-based writing learning

The use of portfolio-based writing learning involves the collection of texts produced by the writer over a specific period, tailored to the requirements of a particular context (Kunnan & Hamp-Lyons, 1993). This approach offers a shift from exam-centered, high-stakes assessments to a learner-centered pedagogical approach that has demonstrated success in improving writing skills (Weigle, 1999, 2007). By implementing portfolio-based writing learning, teachers can guide students toward enhancing their writing abilities throughout the course while providing constructive feedback and advice (Lam, 2018). This process allows students to actively engage in their writing development by reflecting on their progress, revising their work, and setting goals for improvement. Through the use of portfolios, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, fostering autonomy and self-directedness. Additionally, portfolios provide opportunities for students to showcase their growth and development as writers, encouraging motivation and a sense of

accomplishment. Overall, the use of portfolio-based writing learning offers a learner-centered and pedagogically effective approach to supporting students in their journey to improve their writing skills.

To implement portfolio-based writing learning effectively, several procedures are commonly employed. One key procedure is the selection of diverse writing samples to include in the portfolio. This selection should encompass a range of genres, styles, and topics to showcase students' growth and mastery of different writing skills (Paulson, 1991). Another important procedure involves providing clear criteria or rubrics for assessing the writing samples in the portfolio. These criteria outline the specific expectations and standards for evaluating the quality of the writing, helping students understand the areas of focus and improvement (Wolf, 1989). Additionally, ongoing feedback and self-reflection are integral to the portfolio-based writing learning process. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their writing, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improvement (Lee, 2016). Regular conferences and discussions with teachers or peers constitute another procedure in portfolio-based writing learning. These conferences allow for individualized guidance and support, enabling students to receive feedback, ask questions, and engage in meaningful discussions about their writing (Tierney et al., 1991). Moreover, the process of revising and editing plays a significant role in portfolio-based writing learning. Students should be encouraged to revise their writing based on feedback received, demonstrate growth over time, and showcase their ability to refine and enhance their written work. These procedures foster a comprehensive approach to writing development, empowering students to reflect on their progress, set goals, and refine their writing skills.

2.4 Attitudes

Attitudes have been extensively explored by researchers to understand their impact on learning acquisition and to delve into this topic. Guido (2013) defines attitude as the inclination of individuals to organize their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors towards a psychological object. According to Eagly and Chaiken (2010), attitudes can be described as a psychological tendency manifested through the evaluation of a specific entity with varying degrees of favor or disfavor. These definitions highlight the cognitive and affective dimensions of attitudes, indicating that attitudes involve a complex interplay of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors towards an object or entity. Attitudes play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and subsequent actions, influencing their approach to learning and the outcomes they achieve. Understanding learners' attitudes is essential for educators, as it provides insights into their motivations, engagement levels, and willingness to learn. In the context of attitudes, three main components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral ones, are studied. According to Jain (2014), the emotional response (like/dislike) to an object with an attitude is explained as an affective component, whose significance is highlighted in most of the research. Because emotion interacts with the cognitive process concerning an attitude object at the same time, one cannot simply infer an individual's attitude toward an object by recognizing their ideas about it. Agarwal and Malhotra (2005) propose an integrated model of attitude and choice by combining the affect (feelings and emotions) and attitude (evaluative judgment based on brand beliefs) research streams. The cognitive component of attitudes refers to the beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge that an individual holds about a particular object, person, issue, or situation. This component involves the person's evaluation and understanding of the subject matter and it is one of the three main components of attitudes, alongside the affective (emotional) and behavioral components (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005). Regarding the behavioral element, it consists of how an individual reacts to attitude objects. It involves a person's response or reaction to do anything associated with an attitude object, as stated by Albarracin and Johnson (2018). The behavioral component tries to describe how people participate in the task and how they behave towards attitude objects. It has a great influence on how people react and behave.

In the realm of portfolio-based writing learning, attitudes shape the very fabric of one's creative journey. A writer's attitudes, encompassing elements such as openness to feedback, resilience in the face of challenges, and a willingness to embrace growth, are the intangible forces that guide the selection, crafting, and presentation of pieces within their portfolio. Moreover, a positive attitude towards learning and adaptation fuels the incorporation of diverse styles, genres, and perspectives, resulting in a multifaceted and rich compilation (Zhao, 2015). Learners' attitudes, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, play a pivotal role in driving their motivation to engage with the learning process. As attitudes influence the depth of motivation, they set the stage for learners to invest themselves wholeheartedly in their educational endeavors. This investment is further nurtured through the concept of portfolio-based writing learning, where students actively curate and reflect upon their evolving written works.

2.5 Learning investment

Drawing upon the work of Dauzón-Ledesma and Izquierdo (2023), investment in this study encompasses four dimensions: motivation, necessity or personal needs, engagement, and agency. Motivation, within the realm of studying learning investment, can be characterized as an inner condition that facilitates the act of learning and encompasses comprehension of the factors influencing this state (Darvin & Norton, 2023). It refers to the underlying reasons that drive an individual's actions and behaviors in pursuit of a specific objective. Motivation provides purpose and guidance for intentions and activities. Individuals engage in learning investment as they anticipate gaining a broader spectrum of intangible and tangible assets, consequently enhancing the worth of their cultural knowledge and social influence. As attitudes can be seen as a component of motivation (Lightbown & Spada, 2021), research on language learning investment frequently employs these terms interchangeably (Artamonova, 2020) or examines attitudes and motivation in conjunction (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). The motivation of learners can lead to outcomes that bring about a sense of fulfillment and recognize the advantages gained during the learning journey (Norton, 2013). When learners are driven by motivation to engage in language learning, their investment yields favorable results, serving as a form of positive reinforcement.

The second factor often associated with investment in language learning is the learners' necessity to utilize the language (Harrison et al., 2013; Łacka-Badura, 2021). The specific learning needs can vary based on individual differences and linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds (Ali, 2021), as well as the learners' expectations and anticipated personal benefits derived from acquiring a second language. These needs can encompass personal, professional, heritage, or economic considerations, all of which can impact learning investment (Ali, 2021; Lu & Shen, 2020; Amorati, 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2021). The motivations for different groups of learners to acquire a second language differ depending on the particular context and factors involved. For example, individuals immersed in a second language context, such as immigrants in English-speaking communities, require the target language for communication, work, social integration, and establishing relationships (Norton, 2013). Other learners who are not immersed in the target language context may still need the language for professional or vocational purposes (Łacka-Badura, 2021). Furthermore, in the context of foreign language learning, learners' needs may revolve around recognition and potential financial gain (Yang et al., 2021).

Engagement and agency are two factors closely associated with investment when learners demonstrate interest, take initiative, and set goals for their own learning (Harrison et al., 2013). Norton argues that engagement in language learning investment is tied to taking action (Norton et al., 2020). While Hiver et al. (2021) suggest that engagement comprises multiple dimensions, Norton's concept of investment appears more aligned with Hiver's behavioral dimension of engagement, which emphasizes voluntary and active involvement in tasks (Hiver et al., 2021). According to Hiver et al. (2021), engagement refers to the extent

and quality of learners' active participation and involvement in language learning activities (Hiver et al., 2021). Other authors also recognize the behavioral aspect of engagement. Mercer (2019), for instance, refers to Skinner et al. (2009), who describe engagement as "energized, directed, and sustained actions". Angelovska et al. (2021) further emphasize that engagement involves behaviors that demonstrate effort and action in achieving goals. From this perspective, without engagement during the learning process, goals cannot be achieved, and learners' competencies will not develop. While motivation is limited to the intention of doing something, engagement entails the realization of action.

Agency is another concept that is closely linked to investment. According to Harrison et al. (2013), agency refers to the actions taken by students to actively shape their own learning, thereby enhancing their investment in the process. It is closely connected to investment because learners anticipate receiving positive outcomes in return for the effort and time they invest in specific activities aimed at achieving their goals. Agency is demonstrated through the willpower of learners, but more importantly, through their determination and perseverance to attain desired outcomes throughout the learning process (Harrison et al., 2013). Essentially, learners take the initiative to make decisions regarding their learning journey and regulate their progress by autonomously selecting learning activities and organizing their time (Little, 2020). As Naderpour (2022) explains, engagement can be seen as the initial step of agency, while taking action and displaying perseverance represent its final stages. During language learning investment, motivation, necessity, engagement, and agency are interconnected and mutually support the learning process and the achievement of goals. However, agency involves even greater effort as it is mediated by initiative, determination, and perseverance.

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to study language learners' investment decisions within the context of the EFL classroom. Motivation fuels an individual's drive to learn and contributes to the richness of their portfolio. Necessity, arising from personal, professional, or economic considerations, guides the selection of learning assets to include. Engagement and agency, marked by active participation, initiative, and determination, shape the portfolio by dictating the depth and quality of its contents. As learners invest their efforts, time, and intentions into language acquisition, their portfolio becomes a dynamic reflection of their motivations, needs, and commitment. This symbiotic relationship between learning investment and portfolio-writing learning underscores the transformative journey of learners as they curate a diverse collection of linguistic and cultural assets, ultimately showcasing the depth of their engagement, competence, and personal growth.

3. Pedagogical Implications

Portfolio-based writing learning has the potential to serve as an alternative model within the context of language education, and it may offer a fresh approach for both educators and students to use in the process of educating and learning in the twenty-first century. There are significant implications that can be presented for pedagogy.

Firstly, the shift towards student-centered learning methods, such as portfolio-based learning (PoBL), has shown promise in language teaching (Kennedy et al., 2006; Barrett, 2000). Implementing PoBL in the classroom can promote student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, leading to enhanced learning progress (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018; Jisc, 2019; Mynbayeva et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers should consider integrating PoBL into their language teaching practices to foster a student-centered and effective learning environment.

Secondly, the success of PoBL implementation depends on students' attitudes and investments in language practices. Positive attitudes towards learning and high levels of investment are crucial for language

proficiency (Zhao, 2015; Tella et al., 2010). Therefore, teachers should strive to cultivate positive attitudes and motivation in students by addressing their personal needs, interests, and goals. They should also provide engaging learning activities that encourage active participation, self-reflection, and goal setting.

Furthermore, the teaching of writing skills, which is often considered challenging (Ahmed, 2010), can benefit from portfolio-based learning. Through the use of portfolios, students can actively engage in their writing development, reflect on their progress, and receive targeted feedback. Teachers should incorporate diverse writing samples in the portfolio, provide clear assessment criteria, and offer ongoing support and guidance to students. They should also emphasize the importance of the writing process, including prewriting activities, revising, editing, and receiving feedback.

In addition to addressing writing skills, teachers should pay attention to the various components that contribute to effective writing, such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, critical thinking, and the inclusion of supporting evidence (Milton, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Barroga & Matanguihan, 2021; Graff et al., 2014; Lai, 2011). By focusing on these components and providing appropriate instruction, teachers can enhance students' writing proficiency and overall language development.

Lastly, teachers should recognize the interconnectedness of attitudes and investment in language learning. By understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitudes, ELT educators and practitioners can design a curriculum that provides a supportive learning environment that fosters motivation, meets students' personal needs, encourages active engagement, and promotes learner agency (Tomlinson, 2021; Mercer & Williams, 2014). These factors collectively contribute to students' investment in language learning and their overall success.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the shift towards student-centered learning methods has given rise to portfolio-based learning (PoBL) as an effective approach in language teaching. PoBL promotes student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, which facilitate learning progress and enhance the effectiveness of the learning process. However, the success of PoBL implementation relies on students' attitudes and investment in language practices. Positive attitudes and high levels of investment are important predictors of learning outcomes and success in language learning. To implement PoBL effectively, teachers should consider the diverse types of portfolios, provide clear assessment criteria, encourage ongoing feedback and self-reflection, engage in regular conferences and discussions, and emphasize the importance of revision and editing. Furthermore, understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitudes and the dimensions of learning investment, including motivation, necessity, engagement, and agency, can inform pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. By incorporating these strategies, educators can foster a learner-centered environment that promotes active student engagement, self-directedness, and growth in writing skills.

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Website: uef.edu.vn - Hotline: (028) 5422 6666 * (028) 5422 5555