



PORTFOLIO AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL IN SELECTED MALAYSIAN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

By

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This study investigated the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool for learning in selected Malaysian ESL (English as a Second Language) secondary classrooms. It was also conducted with the intention of constructing a model of portfolio assessment for ESL teachers to integrate assessment with teaching. It also investigated students' response towards the use of portfolio as an assessment tool on learning and factors that influenced ESL teachers to use portfolio as an assessment tool.

Qualitative approach specifically, a case study was employed so that a detailed information could be obtained from the teachers' experiences in the natural context of implementing portfolio as an assessment tool. Data collected through interviews, observations and documents were analysed inductively using the data analysis approach expounded by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data from interviews, observations and documents were analysed inductively for dominant issues and categories. The portfolio assessment was implemented at the beginning of the year in January, in two different schools in an ESL class of 35-40 students in Perak and Selangor. The participants consisted of nine ESL teachers and forty-five ESL students, who come from a variety of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, in a Malaysian classroom setting. The nine ESL teachers were interviewed. The students were also interviewed in groups to ascertain their response towards the use of portfolio as an assessment tool. Each interview lasted between an hour to about two hours, were taped



recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed manually. Observations were made to investigate the teachers' implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool. The model was developed based on the teachers' pedagogical practices. Triangulation method was used to interpret the data and the findings showed that the overall content of the portfolios can be used to validate and document both process and product of learning and formation of language.

The findings showed that the teachers followed a general procedure for implementing portfolio as an assessment tool which included: explaining the assessment purpose, evaluating the portfolio and preparing the teaching and learning activities. The findings also revealed that there were five major considerations in implementing portfolio as an assessment tool, namely assessment purpose, collection of evidence, evaluation of evidence, reflecting on learning and assessment decision. Teachers adhered to these stages to ensure the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool work smoothly. It was also found that the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom has allowed the teachers to evaluate their students' potential in tracking the ability to master the topics taught and enable students to know how they progress in their lessons. The findings also indicated that the students noticed the potential of using portfolios that could improve their learning because it enabled students to think critically and independently.

Four major conclusions were drawn from this study. First, teachers, who implemented portfolio as an assessment tool, sustain their teaching to ensure accuracy of the assessment techniques, improve their satisfaction in evaluation, and ultimately benefit the ESL students. Second, portfolio assessment model allows the teachers to see new developments and directions in teaching and learning if it is implemented appropriately. Third, addressing the issue that students study merely for the examination can reduce the stress for the stakeholders involved and integrate portfolio and traditional assessment complementarily can make evaluation practical. Finally, portfolio assessment processes are in line with the social constructivist view of learning which promotes learners to create their personal meaning from any learning situation or social context without relying too much on the teachers.

The study has provided several pedagogical implications for adopting portfolio as an assessment tool in the ESL classrooms for instruction, assessment and curriculum to ESL teachers, policy makers and educational researchers in the Malaysian and other similar contexts. Recommendations have also been made for the benefits of ESL teachers and future researchers more broadly.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi
keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PORTFOLIO SEBAGAI ALAT PENILAIAN DALAM BILIK DARJAH TERPILIH BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI MALAYSIA

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Kajian ini meninjau pelaksanaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian untuk pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) di dalam bilik darjah di sekolah menengah yang terpilih di Malaysia. Ia turut dijalankan dengan tujuan membina satu model penilaian portfolio bagi guru-guru ESL supaya penilaian dapat diintegrasikan dalam pengajaran. Ia turut meninjau respons pelajar terhadap penggunaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian ke atas pembelajaran dan juga faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi guru-guru ESL menggunakan portfolio sebagai satu alat penilaian.

Rekabentuk kajian kualitatif menggunakan kaedah kajian kes telah digunapakai untuk memperolehi maklumat terperinci daripada pengalaman guru-guru dalam konteks semulajadi dalam melaksanakan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian. Data dikumpul melalui temubual, pemerhatian, dan dokumen dianalisis secara induktif dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis data oleh Miles dan Huberman (1994). Data daripada temubual, pemerhatian dan dokumen dianalisis secara induktif bagi isu-isu dan kategori yang dominan. Penilaian portfolio telah dilaksanakan pada awal tahun dalam bulan Januari, di dua buah sekolah yang berlainan di dalam bilik darjah ESL yang mengandungi 35-40 orang pelajar di negeri Perak dan Selangor. Responden terdiri daripada sembilan guru ESL dan empat puluh lima orang pelajar ESL, yang datang dari pelbagai jenis latarbelakang linguistik dan budaya, di dalam persekitaran bilik darjah Malaysia. Sembilan orang guru ESL telah ditemubual. Pelajar turut ditemubual di dalam kumpulan untuk menentukan respons mereka terhadap penggunaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian. Setiap temubual mengambil masa di antara sejam hingga dua jam, telah dirakamkan, ditranskrip secara verbatim and dianalisis secara manual. Pemerhatian juga dibuat bagi meninjau pelaksanaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian oleh guru-guru.

Sebuah model telah dibentuk berdasarkan amalan pedagogi guru. Kaedah pengesahan digunakan untuk menerangkan data dan dapatan kajian menunjukkan keseluruhan kandungan portfolio boleh digunakan untuk mengesahkan dan mendokumentasikan proses dan produk pembelajaran dan juga pembentukan bahasa.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru mengikuti satu prosedur am dalam melaksanakan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian yang merangkumi: menerangkan tujuan penilaian, menaksir portfolio dan menyediakan aktiviti-aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Dapatan kajian turut menunjukkan terdapat lima pertimbangan utama dalam pelaksanaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian yang terdiri daripada tujuan penilaian, pengutipan bukti, petaksiran bukti, refleksi terhadap pembelajaran dan keputusan penilaian. Guru-guru mematuhi setiap peringkat bagi memastikan pelaksanaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian dapat dijalankan dengan lancar. Turut didapati bahawa pelaksanaan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian di dalam bilik darjah telah membolehkan guru-guru menaksir potensi pelajar-pelajar dalam mengesan kebolehan mereka untuk memahami topik yang diajar dan membolehkan pelajar-pelajar mengetahui pencapaian mereka dalam pelajaran. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan pelajar-pelajar telah menyedari potensi menggunakan portfolio dapat meningkatkan pembelajaran mereka kerana ia membolehkan pelajar-pelajar berfikir secara kritis dan secara berdikari.

Empat kesimpulan telah dirumuskan dari kajian ini. Pertama, guru-guru, yang telah melaksanakan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian, kekalkan pengajaran mereka untuk memastikan ketepatan teknik-teknik penilaian, meningkatkan kepuasan mereka dalam pentaksiran di mana akhirnya memanfaatkan pelajar-pelajar ESL. Kedua, model penilaian portfolio membolehkan guru-guru melihat perkembangan dan arah baru dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran jika ia dilaksanakan dengan tepat. Ketiga, menangani isu pelajar-pelajar yang belajar semata-mata untuk peperiksaan boleh mengurangkan tekanan pemegangtaruh yang terlibat dan mengintegrasikan portfolio sebagai pelengkap kepada peperiksaan tradisional akan menjadikan pentaksiran lebih praktikal. Akhirnya, proses penilaian portfolio adalah sejajar dengan pandangan pembelajaran social konstruktivist yang menggalakkan pelajar-pelajar mencipta makna peribadi dari mana-mana situasi pembelajaran atau konteks sosial tanpa terlalu bergantung kepada guru-guru.

Kajian turut menyumbang beberapa implikasi pedagogi menggunakan portfolio sebagai alat penilaian di dalam bilik darjah untuk pengajaran, penilaian dan kurikulum bagi guru-guru ESL, pembuat-pembuat dasar dan para penyelidik pendidikan di Malaysia dan bagi konteks lain yang sama. Cadangan juga telah dikemukakan bagi faedah guru-guru ESL dan juga penyelidik-penyelidik masa depan secara umum.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SBA	School-based Assessment
MOE	Minister of Education
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah
PBS	Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah
PKBS	Penilaian Kendalian Berasaskan Sekolah
KBSM	Curriculum for Secondary Schools

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Assessment and Portfolio Assessment

The concern for students' achievement in English has received a lot of attention. The problem of mastering English does not involve students alone. The English language teachers are also affected. The nature of assessment plays a crucial role in English language curriculum in the schools. Teachers use assessment to assist students to attain the aims of English language curriculum by comprehensively accounting students' learning over a period of time. As such, teachers use assessment to diagnose students' weaknesses to improve their own teaching strategies so that they can evaluate the students' styles and strategies to scaffold those who need assistance (Hosseini & Ghabanchi, 2014).

Teachers have realized that the current design of evaluation procedures does not truly reflect students' capabilities in the English language. The fact is that evaluation has been generally in the traditional approach, which holds the philosophy that one test will represent all students despite individual differences (Mohtar, 2010). The stakeholders including school board, parents, staff and students are highly concerned about the examinations scores as they use them to show how diligent students are and how well teachers perform. Consequently, teachers have great anxiety preparing students for examination rather than focusing on the curriculum and needs of the students under these circumstances. Thus, teachers are on the lookout for an alternative form of evaluation which allows for effective teaching and learning. Teachers have resorted to alternative assessment as a means to modify their teaching and make learning more meaningful in the classroom.

Teachers of English as a second language (ESL) use portfolios, a non-traditional form of assessment as a means of gathering information on their students to examine achievement, effort, improvement and the process of self-assessment. While many proposals have been made on how portfolios can be implemented, there is a need to seek teachers' views on the use of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classrooms. Teachers use portfolios to complement the traditional examination in order to assist students to improve their learning.

1.1 Background of the Study

Although the term 'assessment' is familiar, much of what we understand and read in magazines, newspapers and online resources is about its nature either summative or formative or its importance in the process of teaching and learning. There is little information about how it promotes students' multiple knowledge, and operation at higher cognitive skills.

In Malaysia, examination is the method used to assess student's performances. In fact, there is no other form of assessment apart from examination. In reality, the purpose of examination is for summative evaluation (Udoukpong & Okon, 2012). These evaluations are to see if the students understand and could apply the concepts that they have learned throughout the year. As a result, the centralized examinations influenced teachers to narrow the curriculum by giving students previous tests or teach unnaturally which focused on more examination kind

of teaching (Herman & Golan, 1991). This indirectly motivates students to prepare solely for the examinations. With examination being the only form of assessment, therefore, it is essential that the examination must be able to reflect the student's knowledge and performances (Mohtar, 2010). Students create a culture of scoring A's as their goals (Hsu, 2010). Students believe that being academically successful is when they are able to score straight A's. Students give priority and emphasis on scoring for examinations and not to learn. The purpose of learning is not given priority because students have no choice other than memorizing and regurgitating information in the examinations. Therefore, the process of learning is lacking and it is not a true evaluation on their performance as it has become a process of scoring (Black & William, 1998).

Students are comfortable memorizing every single fact that they read and this has become a common phenomenon in Malaysia. Notable here is that any student with excellent memory is able to score high marks. The question of administering the right assessment strategy to the students and the need to know how reliable these results are in reflecting the students' understandings are of great concern (Mohtar, 2010).

On the contrary, the National Philosophy of Education emphasizes on "developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious" (National Education Philosophy, 1998). Stiggins (2005), for example, suggests that one strategy teachers can explore in assessment for learning is to provide students with a clear vision of the learning target from the beginning of the learning. It is crucial for teachers to provide students with continuous access to descriptive feedback which can give students an idea on how to improve the quality of their work. As a result, students will learn to generate their own descriptive feedback in their learning and take the responsibility in monitoring their own success (Stiggins, 2005). Thus, some researchers suggest that the use of portfolios will benefit and assist English as a Second language/English as a Foreign Language ESL/EFL students to monitor their own learning (Hamp-Lyons, 1995; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Delett, Barnhardt & Kevorkian, 2001; Song & August, 2002).

Malaysian students come from different backgrounds with diverse cultures, and they have different needs based on their abilities. The Humanistic philosophies believe that in order for students to perform well, all basic needs must be provided (Huitt, 2009). This would mean looking at the students' background as well as teacher's pedagogies (Oran, 2009). Therefore, the results of a single form of examination do not indicate the multiple intelligences that students have and do not reveal the students' real abilities (Mohtar, 2010).

With the above, clearly examination being the only assessment itself is not a good way of evaluating students. Assessment itself should be a continuous process, and not just through one process of examination. The recent move by the Ministry of Education to make the education system less examination oriented with the introduction of a new alternative system of assessment, School-based assessment, is a positive move forward (Omar & Sinnasamy, 2009). School-based assessment made its entry into Malaysian classrooms at the beginning of 2000. Centralized examinations generally have been summative in nature and also norm-referenced (Mohtar, 2010). They show the products of learning and produce no feedback to

improve student learning. Hence, both policymakers and educators are now looking at School-based assessment (SBA) as a catalyst for education reform (Chan & Sidhu, 2010). It is viewed as a vehicle that will provide new instructional and assessment roles for teachers to track what and how students learn in the classroom.

According to the former Minister of Education, Tan Sri Musa Mohamed, there would be greater reliance on SBA in the future. According to him, such a method of assessment would be in line with current practices in other countries such as the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, Finland and New Zealand (Karim, 2002; Musa, 2003). Thus, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia has looked into ways of expanding this approach to all levels of education. Furthermore, with greater reliance on SBA in the future, some major examinations may be abolished while some would have less bearing on students' overall grades (Chan & Sidhu, 2010).

The Malaysian Examinations Syndicate (MES) holds the view that SBA is any form of assessment that is planned, developed, conducted, examined and reported by teachers in schools involving students, parents and other authorities (Adi Badiozaman, 2007). These kinds of school assessment can be formative in nature, enable students to know how they are progressing and enabling teachers to inform students how they have performed. This move will assist teachers in working on students' strengths and weaknesses in learning.

In line with the changing trends in assessment, SBA or PKBS (*Penilaian Kendalian Berasaskan Sekolah*) has been introduced into Malaysian schools under the New Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools. It has introduced 'coursework' for a few subjects in secondary schools such as History, Geography, Living Skills and Islamic Education for the lower secondary classes and Biology, Chemistry and Physics for the upper secondary classes. The Ministry of Education introduced the school-based oral assessment for both *Bahasa Malaysia* and English Language in 2003. It is a compulsory component for Secondary Five candidates taking the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) Examination. It gives all educational stakeholders, namely educators, parents, students and the community-at-large, the power to improve teaching and learning practices. By transferring SBA decisions to schools, teachers are now empowered to help students perform better in learning (Chan & Sidhu, 2010).

In this study, the significance of alternative assessment is discussed in the light of the present demands of education. It explains the need to use alternative assessment in the context of education today. The form of alternative assessment that is presented here is the portfolio.

The implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool helps teachers to take a step forward toward making learning more meaningful for students instead of merely studying for the examinations (Pal et al., 2012). Today, classroom assessment is no longer teacher oriented because one of the core features in portfolio assessment requires students to self-assess their work and it is known as *self-assessment*. Self-assessment allows students to view learning within their own control (Hansen, 1992). Therefore, students no longer depend on their teachers for detailed information but they develop a sense of ownership of their own learning and progress through preferences and responsibility. Thus, this diverts students' attention to focus more on their production of work rather than just memorizing and regurgitating

information in the examinations (Davies, 2000). Standardized tests produce students who study for examination but do not educate students to set and complete appropriate goals of learning (Wolf, 1989, Valencia, 1990).

The introduction and implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool will create paths and ways for students to set their own goals of learning, which will indirectly facilitate teachers to focus on their teaching, on the individual student's needs and interests specifically relating to learning (Burke, 2005). The idea is that assessment is inseparable from the teaching and learning and it has to be a part of their classroom context (Berimani & Mohammadi, 2013). Assessment then becomes collaboration between teachers and students. Portfolio tracks the students' performance in class where examinations do not always tell teachers about what students have learned but rather what students have learned to pass the tests or to achieve certain grades (Mohtar, 2010). However, there are some reservations pertaining to self-assessment. Many teachers are not comfortable with the idea of students assessing themselves because this involves relinquishing too much control to the students (Joyce et al., 2009).

Therefore, teachers as well as students must understand the motivation behind employing portfolio if they want to make use of it. For teachers to implement portfolio as an assessment tool in their classroom, they have to understand the criteria involved. Portfolio assessment demands the following: clarity of goals, explicit criteria for evaluation, work samples tied to those goals, student participation in selection of entries, teacher and student involvement in the assessment process, and self-reflections that demonstrate students' metacognitive ability, that is, their understanding of what worked for them in the learning process, what did not, and why (Fernsten, 2005). In other words, there are models for portfolio assessment that ESL teachers in Malaysia can use as a guideline. These models are significant in the sense that they offer certain criteria teachers may take into considerations while implementing the portfolio as an assessment tool although at present ESL teachers in Malaysia do not have a specific model or technique to conduct the portfolio assessment process because portfolio is heard of but not widely used (Mohtar, 2010). The techniques ESL teachers used in implementing portfolio as an assessment tool for the teaching and learning in this study enabled the researcher to propose a model for portfolio assessment.

In Malaysia, much emphasis is given to the centralized public summative examination which focuses on students studying only for examination purposes rather than learning for the sake of exploring and gaining knowledge. The standardized examinations reveal that assessment in the Malaysian context is very much examination oriented, resulting in students being passive recipients in the classroom (Chan & Sidhu, 2010). Providing guidelines on how to implement the portfolio in the Malaysian classroom is an important task that teachers and educators should not ignore because assessment is an integral aspect to sustain teaching and learning.

Portfolios have been around for a long time, either as collections of artifacts in artist's portfolios or teaching or professional portfolios (Guard, Richter & Waller, 2003). There is also a wide body of theoretical research that recommends the use of portfolios in ESL and EFL classrooms (Hedge, 2000; Rea, 2001). The portfolio is selected as an alternative form of assessment in view of the shortcomings of standardised examinations (Mohtar, 2010). According to Paulson, Paulson & Meyer (1991), a key value associated with student portfolios and a rationale for using them is that: portfolios permit instruction and assessment to be woven together. The use of portfolio as an assessment tool requires students to collect and reflect on examples of their work, providing both an instructional component to the curriculum and offering the opportunity for authentic assessment (Leung, 2007). A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the students' efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas (Carr & Harris, 2001; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Paulson et al., 1991). The collection include work samples made by students over a period of time, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merits, and evidence of self-reflection (Paulson et al., 1991). The use of portfolio as an assessment tool becomes more meaningful when teachers encourage students to select the items, write self-reflection and provide criteria for success (Burke, 2005). The most common types of portfolios are process-oriented portfolios and product-oriented portfolios. Process-oriented portfolios document the process of learning and creating, including earlier drafts, reflections on the process, and obstacles encountered along the way (Epstein, 2000c). Product-oriented portfolios are a collection of work a student considers his or her best which aims to document and reflect on the quality and range of accomplishments rather than the process that produced them (Epstein, 2000c).

It is believed that educational portfolios allows students to think critically, and also become active, independent and self-regulated learners (Bergman, 1994). However, Sweet (1993) argued that portfolios, across diverse curricular settings, student populations, and administrative contexts are significant because they engage students in their own learning so that they are responsible of their personal collection of work, reflect on what their strengths and weaknesses, and use this information to improve their performance. In other words, portfolios are a commonly used technique for formative assessment to promote assessment for learning.

The use of portfolio as an assessment tool is capable of enhancing student learning (Biggs, 1999; Smith & Yancey, 2000). Portfolio assessment entails the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyse the various types of products kept in the portfolio (Mohtar, 2010). Hanson & Gilkerson (1999: 81-82), suggested that there are several criteria portfolio assessment must meet. The portfolio must be clearly linked with an instruction objective, be an ongoing assessment system, avoid becoming a teacher-manufactured document, and be performance based and emphasize purposeful learning. Portfolio assessment requires students to provide selected evidence to show that learning relevant to the course objectives has taken place (Tiwari & Tang, 2003). Portfolio assessment can be used as an integral part of learning as it provides students with opportunities to overcome their weaknesses (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002). In short, portfolio assessment is not about a final exam, but it emphasizes on the students' learning experience that is part of the ongoing and serves as a

guide to the student as well as the teacher. Such assessment informs students and their teachers how well they are developing their skills and knowledge and what they need to do to develop them further. This process is based on reflections provided by assessment to both students and teachers. Thus, portfolio assessment serves as a diagnostic tool which provides students with profiles of their emerging skills to help them become increasingly independent learners.

Borowski et. al (2001) reported that the current assessment methods which were more examination based were inadequate for measuring student learning as they focused on memorization than acquisition of knowledge, and a considerable amount of research on portfolio assessment proved they can be valuable tools for individualizing the learning process and documenting student progress over time. For example, studies on the implementation of portfolio for examining learning processes and pedagogical tools (Chen, 2006; Gonzalez, 2009); the studies of portfolio providing criteria for identifying students' language level reported by Karababa and Suzer (2010) showed that significant learning took place within the school context as both the teachers and students were satisfied with the positive outcomes of the integration of portfolio assessment in the ESL classroom (Chan et al., 2010). At the same time, it was found by studies that many students who have been exposed to portfolio assessment say that they managed to learn English in a better manner, in a meaningful and fun way (Chan et al., 2010). The students appreciated the portfolio assessment process and when they were able to learn from their mistakes, know their strengths and correct the errors, this made them regard portfolio assessment was a fair and fun way to help them evaluate their performance in ESL classes (Chan et al., 2010). However, the teachers' experiences in implementing the portfolio assessment in teaching ESL in the classroom are seldom if ever used in research. Previous studies have not been specifically focusing on teachers implementing the portfolio as an assessment tool whereby their experience in implementing the portfolio is viewed as an important factor in the teaching and learning process of ESL students in the classroom.

It would seem that teachers' experience in implementing the portfolio assessment is due to the demand for more meaningful assessments that involve students in reflecting on their own learning and the need to satisfy the different learning styles that will enable students to evaluate what they learn in and outside of their classrooms. Within the context of a secondary school, ESL teachers search for alternative types of assessments as test scores often did not correspond to the teacher's and parents' perceptions of the student's achievement. In addition to such processes, ESL teachers also find that alternative assessment is suitable for classroom use in view of the shortcomings of standardized examinations (Chan & Sidhu, 2010). Coombe (2004) supports the use of portfolio assessment as a leading alternative assessment approach. The rationale for using portfolio as an assessment tool is based on considerations such as the limitation of standardized tests, the complexity of the constructs (language competencies) to be measured and the need to have assessment techniques which can be adapted in the ESL classroom to measure higher cognitive skill. A single form of assessment is incapable of assessing a diversity of skills, knowledge and strategies to determine student progress. Unfortunately, research shows that such effects are yet to be substantiated by credible research studies.

1.3 Statement of Problem

English had been used extensively as the medium of instruction at secondary schools for decades before the Malay language replaced it in 1981. The decline in the students' proficiency in English was gradual but by the later part of 1990s, the results became obvious. In 2011, more than 40,000 Malaysian graduates from public Universities could not get jobs in the private sector because they were not proficient in English (The Star Online, January 7, 2014). Some did very well in the written examination but failed to communicate in English during job interviews (Rodrighes, 2006). According to the former Malaysia Director of Education, Tan Sri Murad Mohd Noor, "The attitude of being obsessed to too many standardized examinations in the national education system is the factors to not being able to achieve maximum level of creativity and innovation. Too many examinations at primary, secondary and university levels cause students to not having time to develop their talents, ability and potentials in an area of interest" (Utusan Malaysia, 29th September 2005). The rote learning over life-long learning and too examination-oriented system may lead to students not demonstrating real capacities (Mohtar, 2010). One way of assisting weak learners improve their proficiency is to provide assistance to the teachers who are teaching and assessing them (Mohtar, 2010). In order to do that, an investigation of the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool by the ESL teachers will need to be conducted to establish the type of assistance they require.

So, how has portfolio assessment been implemented in the teaching and learning of ESL in Malaysian classrooms? How did the implementation of portfolio assessment within the ESL classroom facilitate students' learning? Amidst the changes that took place, the fact is that there is a significant lack in understanding the implementation of portfolio assessment by the teachers in the classroom and the factors which contribute to student learning. Hence, a primary concern of this study is to have in-depth understanding about the nature of the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool and the processes involved in assessing students' learning.

In short, the current literature on use of portfolio as an assessment tool in this specific setting is insufficient (Pillay, 2006; Kemboja, 2006; Sidhu, Chan & Hazadiah, 2008; Mohd Rashid & Mohd Asri; Mohtar, 2010; Chan & Sidhu, 2010). Missing from the portfolio in second language learning literature is research that describes the implementation process of portfolio as an assessment tool among ESL teachers in the classroom and the learning that takes place. Moreover, surveys of literature published on portfolios reveal that most of the studies on portfolio assessment have been conducted within the first language context, and document perceptions, reflections and experiences of teachers teaching within the context (Udoukpong & Okon, 2012; Berimani & Mohammadi, 2013; Czura, 2013; Sliogerine, 2012; Lynch & Shaw, 2005; Brady, 2001; Klenowski, 2000).

The study will address both these gaps and provide valuable information on the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool and the learning that will take place which is the interest of the field of second language learning. It is timely to address issues that lie within those ESL teachers who have implemented portfolio as an assessment tool in their classroom to improve students' learning. Thus, ESL teachers' experiences in implementing

the portfolio as an assessment tool to record students' learning acquire a unique viewpoint. Their experiences in implementing portfolio as an assessment tool need to be confronted and students' learning should serve as a platform of the world between ESL teachers and ESL students.

As this research intends to explore the implementation of portfolio assessment as an assessment tool, at selected lower and upper secondary schools in Malaysia, it attempts to investigate how teachers carry out the portfolio assessment to monitor student progress in learning. Such investigation is deemed important as according to Starck (1996) literature and studies show that not much has been done in "evaluating, awareness, reactions, and feelings of teachers who use, implement, or may plan to use portfolios" (p.2).

Furthermore, this research explores a group of teachers' implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool. Understanding the appropriate implementation of portfolio assessment is crucial as it will help both the teachers and students make relevant educational decisions to guide instruction and to demonstrate growth of individual students in the English language (Myford & Mislevy, 1995).

There is therefore a need to investigate how ESL teachers implement the portfolio as an assessment tool and how they use the assessment to monitor progress students make in learning. In order to achieve this, the researcher has observed and interviewed the teachers involved in the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom to determine the factors that influences the effective implementation of the portfolio assessment to examine the effects of portfolio as an assessment tool on student learning and to identify the models ESL teachers used for portfolio assessment in the classrooms.

Currently, the majority of available research related to ESL or EFL in the Malaysian context is focused on the teaching methods and how these methods can be transformed into effective tools that can be used to assist the teaching and learning process (Pillay, 1995). Consequently, less attention has been given to issues pertaining to classroom assessment that form a central part of the teaching and learning process. For example, a study on how implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool has been used to document student learning in the classroom, identify the models involved in the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool and how teachers employ portfolio as an assessment tool to gauge the effectiveness, level and pace of their instruction and use this as a tool to differentiate the degrees of understanding that their learners possess (Barnhardt et al., 1998) will be innovative in the sense that it gives the teacher fresh and invigorating perspectives of teaching.

1. 4 Purpose of the Study

Fundamentally, the purpose of this study is:

- investigate teachers implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in classroom and process involved
- examine students' response towards the use of portfolio as an assessment tool

- identity factors influence ESL teachers to implement portfolio assessment
- propose an appropriate model of portfolio assessment for ESL teachers in the Malaysian ESL classroom context.

The overall goal of this study is to gain insights into the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool, which can further inform teacher training programs so that they can assist and expose teacher trainees to alternative assessment in the form of portfolio to improve teaching and learning. This knowledge and understanding can also better inform teacher educators on how to prepare teacher trainees to identify student needs so they can better match instruction to needs and assessment to instruction.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the four principal areas that serve as the foundation of the research questions, the study seeks to investigate the following:

- implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool;
- examine students' response towards the use of portfolio as an assessment tool;
- factors that influence the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in Malaysia schools; and
- propose an appropriate model of portfolio assessment for ESL teachers in the Malaysian ESL classroom context.

More specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How has portfolio assessment been implemented in the teaching and learning of ESL in Malaysian classrooms?
2. How do ESL students respond to portfolio assessment that is being used in the classroom?
3. What are the factors that influence the ESL teachers to use portfolio assessment for the teaching and learning of ESL in Malaysian classrooms?
4. What portfolio assessment models would be appropriate in implementing portfolio assessment for ESL teaching and learning in Malaysian classrooms?

The first question hopes to study the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool and the processes involved by the ESL teachers in the classroom. The second question looks at ESL students' response towards the use of portfolio assessment on their learning. The third question is aimed at understanding the factors that influence teachers' successful implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom. As many portfolio assessment models exist, the fourth question is aimed at examining the appropriateness of various models to the Malaysian classroom context.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing knowledge in educational research by drawing on teachers' personal experiences in carrying out the portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom as Cohen (1998) and Macaro (2001) said teachers' personal experiences are rich sources of research problem. This study is a quest to understand as well as investigate the factors influencing the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom by the ESL teachers. The interpretive paradigm of this study ensures that the teachers' voice is heard through their practices that they employ in implementing of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom. By understanding the factors that influence teachers' implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom, this study hopes to see how this area can contribute to the assessment process particularly in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

Thus, this study can illuminate certain issues pertaining to how teacher training programs can:

- help teacher trainees to understand the implementation of portfolio as an assessment tool and how this can help them make crucial instructional decisions inside the classroom
- hear voices of teachers in terms of the benefits and/or obstacles they encounter as they experiment with the implementation of portfolios and help find ways of better understanding those issues.
- reach to teachers who are not well-verse in assessment, to rectify the problem, knowledge and the rationale for using portfolio as an assessment tool has to be imparted in the teacher training.
- create awareness among teacher trainees to employ alternative assessment to collect information about students; achievement (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007)

This study hopes to give insights to teacher trainees in managing the complexity of assessment in second language learning. The outcome of this study will help to inform induction programs or in-service courses to better suit the needs of the second language teachers and learners. This study also hopes to provide teacher training colleges/higher learning institutions with realistic views of assessment so that they can employ different types of assessment in the classroom.

Subsequently, it will help policy makers and curriculum developers to better understand the teachers' and learners' challenges where portfolio assessment is concerned. This study will shed some light on stakeholders including students, teachers, administrators, and parents as portfolio assessment will be the yardstick which will provide accurate information about the achievement of students' learning (O'Malley & Valdez-Pierce, 1996) and also contribute some positive impact on teacher and student learning.

Portfolios could improve motivation and communication among students which are important in learning. At the same time, teachers can guide students while diagnosing their performance in class as they progress. Portfolios provide the means to use for classroom assessment to support summative assessment. This will encourage the collection of data on

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student progress over time and provide a fuller picture of student achievement; its principal importance is how residing this information can contribute to formative assessment and support the formative assessment.

Findings and results from this study are aimed at providing suggestions and insights on how teachers can implement portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom. In addition to the arguments in connection to teacher training programs, this study will make a significant contribution to educational research in Malaysia in terms of the use of case study approach in classroom research.

1.7 Definition of terms

a. Portfolio

Barton and Collins (1993) and Bird (1990) share a common definition, saying that “A portfolio is a container of documents that provide evidence of someone’s knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions.” More specifically, a language portfolio is ‘a selection of examples of work that provides concrete evidence of a learner’s progress in learning English” (Pettis, 2010). Paulson et al. (1991) define portfolio as “a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s effort, progress and achievement in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit and evidence of student self-reflection” (p. 60).

In the context of this study, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of upper and lower secondary school student work that shows the students’ effort, progress and achievement specifically for English language. The portfolio consists of student selection of activities, student self-reflection, worksheets graded by the teachers and the criteria for judging the merit.

b. Portfolio Assessment

A portfolio used for educational must offer more than a showcase for student products; it must be the product of a complete assessment procedure that has been systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated. According to Pierce and O’Malley (1992), portfolio assessment:

- is the use of records of students’ work over time and in a variety of modes to show the depth, breadth, and development of the student’s abilities
- is the purposeful and systematic collection of student work that reflects accomplishments relative to specific instructional goals or objectives
- can be used as an approach for combining the information from both alternative and standardized assessments
- has as key elements student reflection and self-monitoring

This definition emphasizes some indispensable elements in portfolio assessment, which are portfolio objectives, evidence of student work, and alternative as well as standardized assessment. Student-reflection and self-monitoring are also important elements that any